

## Pishiobury School

### *The school for 'naughty boys' which helped many children find a future*

What was to become Pishiobury School began life in North London. On 10 May 1884, the North London Truant Industrial School opened its doors at 115 High Street, Walthamstow. This residential school was designated for boys aged between 10 and 13 years old who were deemed to be persistent truants. Initially, the school had places for 56 boys, but just a month after opening in June 1884, the numbers of boys at the school had been increased to 120.

Boys were supposedly detained at the school for a period of three years, or until their 14th birthday, whichever was the sooner. (It has to be remembered that schooling finished at the age of 14 in those days. Indeed, this writer is one of that older generation who could have left at the age of 15. It is only in recent years that secondary and further education has become what we see today.) Generally, boys detained at the school would be released after three months on license. However, they could be recalled if they re-offended. Parents of the children detained were required to contribute a sum of two shillings (10p) a week towards upkeep and maintenance.

Life at the school was harsh. Playtime was limited to 45 minutes a day, except on Saturdays, when it was extended to two hours. There was also military-style drill and physical education for 75 minutes a day. Corporal punishment, in the form of beatings with the cane, was common. The boys were supposed to be given 'industrial training'. However, this consisted mainly of chopping wood and gardening. The 'lucky' ones found themselves working in the laundry, repairing clothing and darning socks.



*What was formerly Northcotts School, Walthamstow, pictured in 1964*

On 18 August 1909, the school became an 'Ordinary Industrial School'. Nothing much changed though, except that the period of possible detention was increased to up to four years. In 1933, the school became an 'Approved School' under the 1933 (Children and Young Persons) Act. At this time, the name was also changed once again, becoming Northcotts (North London) School. This differentiated it from other Northcotts Schools which existed elsewhere. Also, under the provisions of the 1933 Act, the number of boys at the school was reduced in 1934 to 85.

In 1939 it was intended to move the school's premises to Pishiobury House. However, a delay meant that this relocation did not take place until 1941, at which point there was a final name change to Pishiobury School. In 1941, it was noted that there were 81 resident boys.



*Pishiobury House, formerly Pishiobury School*

Life at the school following its relocation to Pishiobury was still quite strict, but the regime became much more enlightened, especially as time progressed, to the benefit of all concerned. Indeed, following the end of World War 2, the ethos of the school changed to that of helping the boys, rather than punishing them. This engendered a spirit of camaraderie which persisted throughout the life of the school and into present times.



*Inside Pishiobury School. Note the trophies above the fireplace.*

All the boys were allocated individual numbers, which were even engraved on their toothbrushes. However, lessons became much more meaningful and enjoyable, with subject matter of relevance for future life. Points were awarded for good behaviour and achievement. These points could be exchanged to buy sweets, or other small luxuries.

Parts of the building were considered off limits for the boys. For example, the main grand staircase in the hall could only be used by the boys during fire drill. At all other times, the boys had to use the back stairs.



*The grand staircase of the school*

Annual camping trips were organised and proved popular with the boys. Sadly, though, on one trip to Mundsley in Norfolk in the late 1950s, one pupil from Walthamstow was struck by lightning and died.



*Early 1960s camping trip. The figure standing lower left was the headmaster, Mr. Littlejohns.*

Subjects taught at the school included the usual physical education, which was nationally a compulsory lesson. P.E. teachers included Mr. West up to 1961, and Mr. Shelton. Music was taught by Mr. Meanwell, who also taught pottery and baking in recreation times. The boys would often help in his garden, where his wife would supply drinks and cakes. Woodwork was taught by Mr. Webb, who was at the school from 1947 until 1963. He was also the 'Bootmaster'. William 'Bill' Bishop was not a teacher, but a maintenance man from 1947 until 1981. However, he also taught the boys boxing. Mr. Brabbins was with the school from 1947 until 1963, becoming deputy headmaster. Another known deputy headmaster was Mr. Osbourne.

Mr. Suter was a housemaster, who taught photography in his spare time. The boy in the centre of the photograph below was one of his pupils (note the camera case).



*Pupils at leisure in Pishiobury.*

The school had an active choir, once winning a competition at Bishop's Stortford in 1963 with the song 'You'll never walk alone' from *Carousel*.

Known headmasters, to whom much of the credit for the school is due, are Mr. Bennel, who was headmaster up to 1959. Mr Littlejohns was the headmaster from 1959 until 1963. Mr. Bentley was headmaster from 1970 until 1975. The last headmaster was Mr. White from 1975 until 1983.

In 1973, Pishiobury School became a 'Community Home with Education', under the auspices of Hertfordshire County Council. The school finally closed in 1983. The last headmaster, Mr. Peter White and his wife Alexandra, who was the last Matron, continued to live in their house in Rowney Gardens, Sawbridgeworth, and were still there as late as 2008.

The old boys seem generally to have had a good overall experience whilst at the school. As late as 2008, small groups would still meet annually, usually on the second weekend of September for a reunion. The old boys would also often visit surviving members of the old staff, who were, according to their words, 'great people'. Perhaps the best testimony comes from one of the boys themselves, who is on record as stating, 'Pishiobury helped put the boys on a better road in their future lives'.

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