



# How education used to be



STINKY



## Nonsense in education

The discovery in 1993 of the Bookman Diaries revolutionised the study of English educational history. Leonard Bookman's glimpses of school life from 1898 to 1914 put into perspective the experiences of teachers a century later. As the 20th century was giving way to the 21st, teachers were feeling that they were in a maelstrom of change for which the past gave no guidance.

Bookman Studies, an instantly popular and amazingly widespread branch of Education History, changed all that. Teachers felt that their ancestors had marched this road before. There might be an end to the seemingly meaningless raids on common sense.

They were not, after all, on a journey without maps. There were, evidently, understandable reasons for the reforms of a previous era. The same reasons might lie behind the very similar educational policies that were falling upon them a century later. If the nonsense had stopped in Bookman's time, it might stop in ours. But had nonsense in education ever stopped?

## Free spending

It was clear that by the late 1890s, schools enjoyed the use of delegated budgets. Bookman rejoiced in Summer 1898 that three of his equipment suppliers had simultaneously gone bankrupt before they could issue him with invoices. This would enable him to use his unspent money to hire a bathing machine for the staff summer outing.

The delegation of budgets, we found, prevailed in all parts of government service. This heart-rending entry appears in January 1899:

*I admitted a new pupil and heard a tale of woe from her father. Commander Ironside had made full use of his freedom under the Admiralty's Grant-Maintained Ships policy, and had so reordered his budget that he could afford to send his daughter to a famous prep school. His crew, however, mutinied at Gibraltar while the ship was awaiting a full inspection by Nafsted (Naval Forces Standards Dept). The insurgents cunningly demanded that the CO disgorge some of his budgeted salary, not only for them, but also for such Nafsted hotspots as ropes, lifejackets and ammunition. What could he do? Only lower his ensign, 'take his daughter out of school', as he tactfully put it, and entrust her to us.*

## Just testing

The use of diagnostic tests was discovered in another instance of traffic between the private and state-provided sectors of schooling. Cecil Smoothman-Delight, a pupil at Scantlebury Prep School, and nephew of the curate at the parish church, was presented to Bookman in the hope that he might find the curriculum



at St Cryptosporidium's more stimulating for his prodigious intelligence. Bookman records (September 1906):

*We administered to Cecil a Fortescue-Clarke Binary Test 7 with an age-related percentage gradient adjustment to the matrix grid. The result read 'thick as two planks'. We sent this to Cecil's parents with a letter saying that Cecil was a boy of such extraordinary gifting that his performance did not register accurately on conventional and rather trendy state school tests. And, unfortunately, we did not expect a place at St Crypto's to fall vacant in the foreseeable future.*

## Meeting national requirements

The National Curriculum was subject to repeated tweaking to rectify educational shortcomings in the population, or to prepare for the economic future. One change for the latter reason was also to promote self-reliance and social mobility. This was the introduction of Lottery Studies. Previously, the school had drawn on those skills to enhance its chances [*sic*] of securing targeted funding grants; Mystic Meg was co-opted to the governing body.

School curricula were buffeted by volleys of change immediately after 10–15 December 1899, the Boer War's infamous 'Black Week', when the British Army was defeated three times in five days. Special orders brought into schools such skills as trench-digging, map-reading, and patriotic musical stimulants in response to reverses at Colenso, Magersfontein and Stormberg.

The tenth anniversary of Jack the Ripper's last murder brought a panic about the moral health of young people. Remedy was sought in the testing system, it being widely believed the answer to every problem was proper education. Girls who

failed to attain Level 2 at KS2 were made wards of court, while boys who failed at this level had to spend the summer holidays in a secure unit.

The Ripper's shadow had already fallen upon Bookman's welcome mat. On 3 April 1898 he recorded:

*Interview of a prospective supply teacher, a Mr Ripper, had to be aborted when it was discovered he was on List 99. I feel he very much needs the support of his local church.*

Under a later order, children were instructed in shallow breathing to reduce their carbon emissions.

Mr Jack Store, MP for Burnblack, was critical of the new Anglo-Saxon dress code for female teaching staff.



Gentlemen, in view of the effect that war would have on food movement, I give you... the self-delivering pig.



## The salt of the earth

Bookman's staff played a distinguished role in the education of the village community, none more than the Deputy Head, Ms Victoria Oakenstaff. Ms Oakenstaff was a militant suffragette, who insisted on being described as a 'woperson'. She caused brief unrest in the village by teaching *The March of the Women* in a music lesson, but this was a rare lapse. Her pedagogy was superb and her care for the children was beyond praise. One instance of her vigilance was when she confiscated twenty-four shot-gun cartridges from a boy's satchel, having noticed a warning on the box that traces of nut might have been present during manufacture.

Jasper Peel was a keen field sportsman who, at interview, was proud of his 'stable relationship'. An Old Etonian, he excelled at all outdoor pursuits. He was writing a dissertation for his MEd on teaching blood sports at KS1, later to be published as *View Halloo*. Peel was so utterly non-PC that he was just the man to co-ordinate the Multicultural Dimension.

Melinda Cartwright, Media Studies and Multi-sensory Communications Co-ordinator, was full of new bright ideas. But one of her first challenges was to rebut charges that she had hoisted test results by making her class drink Red Bull. She once had to have time off to attend an Extraverts Anonymous clinic to meet her INSET requirement. Pupils of the ever-continuous professional self-developer Nigella Bounder did not enjoy class success to match her training achievements. However, her short time as Acting Principal of Collegio d'Inferno in Naples wrought such a transformation in that mafia-ridden school that the government of Italy formed a pact with Great Britain that probably saved our empire in the Great War. Others who made briefer but honourable appearances were Miss Primforth and the school secretary Mrs Lamplady.



discovered in 1993 in a locked box in the Rectory attic, where they had evidently been overlooked by Thunderton-Armstrong's successors. I recently took an opportunity to retire on pension from the Royal Bank of Scotland, and will spend the rest of my life as curator of the priceless Bookman Diaries. I am the late Canon's great-great-grandson. The Rector evidently took custody of the diaries after Leonard Bookman's last entry, for 18 September 1914. This tailed off in an unfinished sentence describing his receipt of a white feather, about which the Canon advised him to ...

We shall never know what the Canon advised. We know only that Bookman was not in church on Sunday 20 September, and did not arrive at school on the Monday. He was never seen again.

■ Frederick Crabbitt-Thunderton-Armstrong  
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St Cryptosporidium's attracted many distinguished visitors, of whom the most academically notable was Professor Cloth, who held Oxford's Gordon Bennett Chair of Educational Ideas. A more frequent visitor was the school's lead Ofsted Inspector, Dr McSpreader, Professor of Applied Scatology at the University of Loamshire. St Crypto's was in the diocese of American Episcopalian Bishop Potsmoker, who paid regular pastoral visits with his chaplain the Revd Marion Morrison. Collective worship at the school was once led by ice-skating champion Miss Tricity Bendix.

The school was well served by its governor responsible for financial management, Colonel George Crabbitt. It is with the Chair of Governors, the Revd Canon Thunderton-Armstrong, Rector of the Parish of St Cryptosporidium, Slimepond, that I close this review. The Bookman diaries were

