

THE BEGINNINGS OF INTERMEDIATE TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR BOYS IN LLANELLI

By Anthony H. Ward

At the end of the Nineteenth century, for the vast majority of the people of Wales who were unable to afford expensive school fees, education consisted of a few years at an elementary school studying a course of reading, writing and arithmetic. For the child who has the inclination, the ability and a family who did not demand a wage packet as soon as he was old enough to work, there was a higher grade school at which the pupil could continue his education mainly in the three basic subjects. While some higher grade schools such as Coleshill at Llanelli had, what were termed "organised science departments" which taught the rudiments of science, the education provided at these schools was of a limited standard and based on a very narrow curriculum, being inadequate when the needs of the day are considered.

Two factors had risen which demanded a change in the educational system of Wales. The 1880s had seen a great expansion in university education in Wales; in addition to the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, founded in 1872, two more university colleges had been set up, at Bangor in 1881, and at Cardiff in 1883. There were now opportunities for a far greater number to receive an university education providing they were of a sufficiently high academic calibre to obtain a place and to benefit from the opportunity. Since the higher grade schools were unable to educate their pupils to a sufficiently high standard for this, a new type of school was required. Coupled with this need for higher academic standards, the demand for greater facilities in the field of technical education were growing. Parts of Wales were undergoing a period of industrial expansion and to control and run new industries and to withstand increasing foreign competition men were needed trained in technical, scientific and managerial skills.

The difference in standard and syllabus between the higher grade school and the requirements of university and industry were recognised in 1889 when the "Welsh Intermediate Education Act" was passed. The Act defined intermediate schooling as "a course of education which does not consist chiefly of elementary education in reading, writing and arithmetic" but which concentrated "generally in the higher branches of knowledge".

Under the Intermediate Education Act the Charity Commissioners were charged with the responsibility of establishing the organisation by which new schools would be set up. In March 1894 the Charity Commissioners published their proposals for "The Intermediate and Technical Education of the Inhabitants of the County of Carmarthen". People prominent in public affairs in the County were appointed to a County Education Committee which would ensure that "in each district there shall, as soon as conveniently may be after the date of this scheme, be established and maintained County Schools of Intermediate and Technical Education."

This Committee selected School Managers who would superintend the establishment of the Schools on a local level., These, the Charity Commissioners recommended, should be drawn from the County Council, local school and education boards, and from the Guardians of the Poor. There were thirteen School Managers for Llanelli; Jane Maclaran of Cilfig, Llanelli; Ellen Evans of the Park, Llangennech;

Elizabeth Thomas of Plissa, Llangennech; Bessie Thomas of New Road, Llanelli; Gwilym Evans of Pencastell, Llanelli; Ernest Trubshaw of Aelybryn ; Thomas Hughes of Richard Street, Llanelli; Thomas Leymour of Pontyberem; Henry Wilkins of New Road, Llanelli; H.G.Howell of Coleshill Terrace, Llanelli; John Innes of New oad, Llanelli; R.C. Jenkins of Stepney Street Llanelli and Roger Williams of Llanedy Two further members of the committee were co-opted; David Williams of Box House, Llanelli and Evan Evans of Goodwinstown, Burry Port. The Managers held their first meeting on the 5th of June 1894, in Llanelli Town Hall. As they were responsible for providing for the intermediate education of both boys and girls, their first decision was that they should be segregated into two separate schools. Their most important consideration was to find temporary accommodation for the schools so that intermediate education in Llanelli could be under way while a purpose built school was being constructed. Financial matters too, were of prime importance at this time. The Managers were fortunate that an “ Intermediate Education Preliminary Committee for Llanelli” under the chairmanship of Mr. Trubshaw had raised £2,959.3s.1d., mainly from the donations of industrial companies , to help finance the project. In September 1894 came the news that the County Governing Body had made a grant of £2,800 towards the official Building Fund for the new School. [Sir Arthur Stepney](#) had also made a gift of two acres of land for the site of the school.

During July 1894 the School Managers approached the Local Board of Health with a view to renting temporary accommodation for the School at the [Athenaeum](#) in the centre of Llanelli. A reply was received the – “The Local Board of Health offer the use during the day of the following rooms at the Nevill Memorial-Club room , school Board Office and Museum subject the a payment of £2.2s. per annum, the Committee to provide for the cleaning, lighting and heating of the rooms and also undertaking to make good any damage”.

This offer was accepted and the Managers moved onto the next task – the appointment of a headmaster. The responsibility as to who should actually be chosen for this post was that of the County Governing Body through the Management Committee urged “upon the County Governing Body the absolute necessity and importance that the headmaster.....of this College should be specially qualified in Technical and Scientific subjects. “ The very strong emphasis on technical education expressed in this recommendation reflects the particular wish on this point of many of the industrial subscribers to the Intermediate School Fund who were looking to the future when Pupils of the School would be seeking work in the industries of Llanelli. The post was advertised at a salary of £150 per annum plus capitation fees which would raise the sum to not less than £250 per annum. During the November of that year a certain Mr. William Lewis, an assistant master at Lewis School, Gelligaer we appointed as Headmaster of Llanelli Boys’ Intermediate School.

With the advice of the Headmaster, desks, workbenches, stationery, books and even a “slide lantern” were selected and ordered for the School, some £237 being spent on pupils whom the Managers did not envisage as numbering more than forty in the early months.

The pupils coming to the School would have to be fee paying. Free education at the level provided by the intermediate schools did not exist and the money was very necessary for their running. The fee was fixed at 30s. A terms and, as it was realised that , although he fees were far from being excessive, many boys who would benefit from an intermediate education would fail to receive such an advantage owing to the inability of their parents to find the money, the Managers decided to

award twenty scholarships to boys of proven ability. The scholarships were of the value of £4.10s., a sum sufficient to pay one year's fees.

Examination day for the scholarship hopefuls was the 17th January, 1895, five days before the date set for the opening of the School, the 22nd of January. Over sixty candidates competed for the twenty scholarships which the winners then held through their stay in school. The intense competition for these scholarships places is more clearly revealed by the examination which took place the next year, in the February of 1896 – there were eighty three prospective pupils wanting to come to the School only sixty three pupils actually were attending the School at this time. The award of a scholarship was of vital importance as for most it was a case of no scholarship, no school.

The School Managers also foresaw that travelling expenses might be prohibitive to the parents of boys who lived far out of town. In view of this they decided to award twenty bursaries to the value of £3 year to pupils who lived more than three miles away.

The opening of the School on the 22nd of January was seen as an opportunity for parents to come along to the Athenaeum to meet the staff and hear of the aims of the new School. Two meetings were held, in the Athenaeum, one at 3 p.m., the other at 7 p.m., at which guest speakers addressed the audience and the names of the scholarship winners were announced. The Llanelli Guardian of the 24th of January, 1896, reported on the speech of Principal Viramu Jones of the University College of Cardiff who stressed that –

“The people of Llanelli were taking part in a great movement in Wales He regarded this movement as one fraught with the greatest consequences to Wales, but it also went beyond Wales..... Better education would fit us to discharge our duty to our country better, and to do that, we ought to take advantage of every opportunity of intellectual cultivation”

At a Managers' meeting on 7th of March, 1895, it was decided to invite architects to submit designs for a purpose built school which was to be constructed on the site donated by Sir Arthur Stepney at the top of Marble Hall Road opposite [Llanelli General Hospital](#). The boys' and girls' schools would again be kept separate though they were to be housed within the same basic structure. The specification for the boys' school were-

“ An Assembly Room 50 x 25 ft, 2 classrooms, Workshops (wood and metal), Chemistry Laboratory, Preparation and balance room. Physics laboratory (20 boys), Gym, Headmaster's and Committee Room, Master's Common Room, cloakroom, lavatory”

The school would accommodate one hundred and twenty boys and it was stipulated that the plans should allow for extensions to be added easily. The whole building, the Committee felt, should cost in the region of £5,000.

In the September of that year the School Managers adopted the plans of a Mr Caple of Cardiff subject to the approval of the Charity Commissioners. Mr. Caple had designed several secondary schools in Wales and sub-committee of the Managers had examined his work before finally deciding to accept his proposals which, his estimated would cost around “5000 which fell within the £6,176 available in the building fund at that time.

The approval of the Charity Commissioners was not received until the beginning of April 1896. There was already a shortage of space at the Athenaeum and the Managers put out the school contract for tender at once⁴. The tender of Mr. Edward G. Groom of Marble Hall Road - £4906- was accepted and was instructed to begin building as soon as possible. A foundation stone was laid on the 26th of October, 1896, by the High Sheriff for the County, David Evans, husband of Ellen Evans, one of the Managers.

The building which was described "as a real architectural addition to the town" was ready for use by the late summer of 1897. The opening ceremony on September the 21st was attended by Viscount Emlyn, Sir Lewis Morris, H.M. Inspector of Schools, Mr. Thomas Jones and Mr. David Randall, M.P. The actual opening was performed by a School Manager, Mrs. Maclaren who was given this honour as she would soon be moving from Llanelli.

Thirty-one pupils entered the School on the day of its opening. Their ages varied from nine to seventeen and they came mainly from either the Higher Grade School at Coleshill or from the various elementary schools of the district. However, one boy came from Penriwceiber, Glamorganshire, and since he was unable to travel to school and back home daily, he had to take lodgings in Llanelli, returning home only at weekends. Pupils could attend the School no matter how far away they lived and the taking of lodgings for the academic week – which for the first few years of the School's existence included Saturday morning with Wednesday afternoon free – became common practice. Boys from the outlying districts of Llanelli came to School by train each day providing they were not too remote from a railway station to render this impracticable when again they would have to take lodgings in town. Pupils travelling to and fro by train to the Intermediate School placed such a burden on the railways that by 1901 the Great Western had to put an extra coach to their trains to cater for them.

The first pupils came from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Of the successful scholarship entrants two were the sons of fathers who were engaged in a profession, seven had parents who were traders in the town, whilst the rest, over half of the total, were the sons of plate layers, engine drivers, colliers and farm workers. The benefits presented by intermediate education effectively cut across social distinctions, presenting equal opportunities to all those who had a genuine desire to improve their education,

The teaching staff in January 1895 consisted of William Lewis who specialised in Latin, French and the technical subjects, and two assistants whom he had appointed a week prior to the opening; a Mr. Oliver, an M.A. in classics, who taught arts subjects generally, and Mr. Morgan, B.Sc., in Chemistry, who taught the mathematical and scientific subjects. During the February, two part time masters were appointed, a Mr. Cue who taught Shorthand and a Mr. Korth, who taught book-keeping. These were important subjects that it was necessary to teach, since ten of the first thirty-one pupils went to work in offices when leaving School.

William Lewis was the pioneer of Llanelli Intermediate Technical School. He was a man of vision, who possessed great powers of leadership and was widely respected as an educationalist throughout Wales. Born at Merthyr Tydfil in 1865, he was among the first students to enter the University College, South Wales in 1883. He saw education as being the great hope for the future of Wales, a hope he expressed by these lines in a poem he wrote in 1901

“By learning’s might, by Gwalia’s old renown

You yet may win your classic crown”

The headmaster was a man of very military appearance; his movements were controlled and precise; his bearing was upright and stern and he cultivated a waxed and very black moustache. His very appearance demanded respect and awe from both pupils and staff and his driving personality ensured that no one could fail but be caught up by his energy and enthusiasm.

He was a member of many examining boards and educational committees and in 1901 he was elected President of the Association of Headmasters and Headmistresses for Wales and Monmouthshire. He was re-elected to this post in 1902. In 1912 he gained his M.A. for his thesis on education at Aberystwyth.

The School Managers had recommended the the headmaster if the School should be particularly qualified in technical subjects. William Lewis was indeed especially interested in this branch of education and in 1896, he was granted five weeks leave of absence to travel to the Continent with a Gilchrist Travelling Scholarship studying various forms of technical education. The University of Wales published his findings in a book, “Manual Instruction in France and Switzerland”. H realised that only very few of the pupils in his charge would have the opportunity of studying at University but was sure that the School could make a vital contribution to the future well being of every pupil.

The system of education he developed at Llanelli County School in the first decade of its existence reflected this. The Llanelly Guardian reported one of his speeches which enlarged upon this theme –

“He trusted that the majority of boys in this school would soon be entering the workshops and factories of Llanelly, and they must be well equipped for this work. Provision was not made for the exceptional genius, or the exceptional duffer, but for the average boy of average means. He might put it down as a declaration if educational policy of the school that the basis of the education would be practical”.

Education was to be practical in both scientific and technical subjects but this was not to be to the exclusion of other branches of learning. In the same speech he stressed –“it was hopeless to confine a boy to a small range of subjects because education to be effective, must be complete, and not one sided. The heart and the tongues must be cultivated, as well as the eye and the hand. Let them steer a middle course, avoiding the dangers on either hand, and then they would be fulfilling their function in the educational economy of the country”.

To these ends the academic running of the School was carefully organised by Lewis, age being the decisive factor in governing the level to which pupils were taught. The School was divided into two- the lower school for those aged nine to fifteen and an upper school for those aged fifteen to nineteen.

Form 1, which contained all pupils up to the age of thirteen, continued their education in reading, writing and arithmetic from where they had left off in their elementary school and, in addition, started to study French and shorthand.

The boys of form two, the thirteen to fourteen year olds broadened their field of education considerably, beginning the study of Latin, Euclid, Chemistry and Physics.

Form 3, the highest form in the lower school, continued this course of study if they intended to embark upon a commercial carrier they could take Geography instead of Latin. Technical education was taken at all levels throughout the School, specialised workshops being equipped for metal work and wood work.

As soon as the pupil entered the upper school, he started to prepare for a series of public examinations.

Form 4 boys took either the Central Welsh Examining Board's Junior Certificate or the Junior Commercial Certificate. Sixteen and seventeen year olds in Form 5 sat either the Senior Welsh Certificate, the Civil Service Exam for second grade clerkships or the London Matriculation Exam. Boys in Form 6, very few in number, worked for the Welsh Honours Certificate and for County and other scholarships with the aim of gaining a place at University.

South Kensington Exams for Science and Arts along with the Cambridge local examinations were held in the School prior to the formation of the Central Welsh Examining Board, and for some time afterwards until the early nineteen hundreds when the Central Welsh examinations became universally recognised. In 1901, the Junior Welsh Certificate qualified the possessor to become a pupil teacher in elementary schools while the Senior Certificate enabled its holder to become an assistant master in an elementary school and also gained exemption from preliminary examinations for various professions.

Very few boys, however, had great academic aspirations. Perhaps only two or three pupils each year would try to gain a place at university. The majority wished merely to become sufficiently educated to set themselves on the road to a good career in offices and industry. Llanelli did not expect anything more than this from the Intermediate School. This was the type of education Llanelli, an expanding industrial and commercial centre, wanted for its sons.

The motivating spirit behind the Intermediate School in Llanelli is summed up by an editorial written in the Llanelli Guardian at the time of the opening of the new school building in 1897-

"Education is not supposed to make gentlemen in the sense of abstinence from manual labour; but it should dignify and improve the labour of the workshop, the counting house, manufacturing, the warehouse and all other departments of trade and labour in which the nations of the world are now competing with us so earnestly for supremacy"