



40 years of Brown Rigg School

Many of the early teachers at Brown Rigg had seen military service, including John 'Dixie' Dixon, an 8th Army Officer who was a navy Chief Petty Officer, Bill Robson, who had been in India with the RAF, and Alan Barker an interesting character. Ex-navy, he arrived at Brown Rigg - a school situated some 58 miles from the coast! - and promptly started up night classes in "Seamanship". Known as 'The Commander', he used to drive around in an old ex-GPO van which one day he managed to crash, the rumour then spread around the school that he had been 'Torpedoed'.



If John McKernan was volatile, he was certainly matched by the wild antics of the sometime art teacher John 'Whacker' Weldon, a man for whom violent rages were an everyday normal occurrence. Others were much milder-mannered such as Charlie Chapman and Harry Tait, who married Hadrian's Miss Mary Bell and went off to be a Church of England minister.

The privations of Brown Rigg, where staff had only a tiny room for their quarters and were forced to walk over to the ablution blocks for washing facilities, must have been particularly hard for the female members of staff. However they put up with the primitive conditions with great stoicism.



Notable in the early years were Miss K. E. Craigs who served Brown Rigg for quite a number of years ably supporting Mr Wash. Mrs Isobel Robson, who with her husband Frank, was a doyen of Brown Rigg's early years and taught large numbers of young girls household skills such as sewing, dressmaking and cookery. Cookery of course was the forte of the delightful Miss Mary Mansbridge. Well-remembered by legions of Pennine girls, her domestic science skills were passed on not only to the girls but also to a number of lads who signed up for a course in the kitchen.

Hadrian Dormitory was for many years under the watchful eye of the wonderfully titled Miss Winifred Ruby Raine who was a lady not to be trifled with and who missed very little going on around her. She was a fixture of Brown Rigg life for many years until romance in the shape of Tyne Dorm's John Dixon beckoned and they moved on to a school at Lowick.

Given the close proximity of the working conditions at Brown Rigg it is not surprising that many marriages sprung out of people's stay at the school. Amongst those to find their life's partner within the school's precincts were Frank and Isobel Robson, Winifred Raine and John Dixon, Harry Tait and Mary Bell, Charlie and Marjorie Bradbury, Derek Parker and Pat Tweddle, Dave Heseldine and Pat Bamforth, Doug Lawrence and Chris Booth, and Stuart Raine and Jeannie Brown, quite a list. It must have been something they put in the porridge!

There will have been numerous other teachers who contributed to the Brown Rigg story and whom space does not permit us to mention here. They all played a part in the rich tapestry that was Brown Rigg life, a unique experience for both pupils and teachers alike.

