**The history of elementary and secondary education in Westmorland 1870-1914**

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**Abstract**

Westmorland was an agricultural county, with isolated villages and only one town (Kendal). It had a distinctive character and social structure. It was predominantly Conservative and Anglican. The county had a strong educational tradition. The Schools Inquiry Commission reported that it had more grammar schools per head than any other county. By 1870, most of them had become elementary schools in practice. Their decline had been hastened by changes in the social structure. This still left Westmorland well-provided with grammar schools, but the best secondary education went to boarders, not mainly Westmorland children. Westmorland was also well-provided with elementary schools in 1870. Few parishes were without a school and attendance was relatively high. Except in East Ward, there were enough school places but the standard of the schools was poor. Few of them were under government inspection. Nearly all were Anglican. During the period 1870 - 1903, the grammar schools were re-organised by the Endowed School (later Charity) Commissioners. They classified the schools into grades, reformed the governing bodies, widened the curriculum, insisted that the schools charge fees, and tried to introduce a scholarship system. These changes had varied effects on the individual schools. In some cases, they caused controversies, of which the most acute arose from the decision to close the Kendal Blue Coat School and to amalgamate its endowments with those of Kendal Grammar School. This case has already been discussed by Simon (Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870) and Owen (English Philanthropy, 1660-1960), but neither has looked at all the evidence, and both their views need qualification. The principal immediate effect of the 1870 Act was to stimulate the building of voluntary schools. There were soon enough school places, but the attendance problem was difficult to solve. Improvements in buildings and in staffing were slow to come, and the curriculum remained narrow. Anglican control was as strong as ever. Only a few School Boards were formed, mainly in East Ward where Nonconformity was strong. Kendal had a School Board, but it only concerned itself with enforcing attendance. As a result of the 1902 Act, Westmorland County Council became a Local Education Authority, with Kendal as a Part III Authority. By 1914 there was an efficient grammar school in every part of the county, and there had been a great extension of secondary education for girls. These changes occasioned little controversy, except at Lowther. The improvements in elementary education were steady rather than dramatic. In general, throughout the period, the provision for education in Westmorland was among the best in the country.

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