

THE HANSEN BAY ERA

When Hansen Bay took over the numbers rose almost immediately to nearly one hundred boys and girls on roll, no doubt attracted in part by scholarships, by the excellent new buildings and by the visible energy of the new head and his powerful wife. There is an inspectors' report for 1910 which praises the work of the head and the standards of the school. There had clearly been massive improvement.

Rev Lauritz Hansen Bay was head from 1907-1929. Born on an island in Denmark in 1866, he came as a child to Hull, where his father worked in a mission for seamen. HB was 40 on appointment, having previously taught maths and science at Deacon's School, Peterborough. His daughter reports 'He was a wonderful teacher and there were many scholarships.' You can see still on the honours board in Gell block the outstanding achievement of Joe Talbot who won an open scholarship to Worcester College, Oxford, soon after HB arrived. I wonder if Joe was son of the owner of the buses and taxis which served the town. Although HB suffered with a bad leg, 'kicked on the hip in a football match at 18 and lamed for life', he walked very fast and having been a 'fine athlete' he was both active and keen in many sports, including tennis and golf. I note that he was a vice chairman of the cricket club at one point and encouraged a close club/school link and school results survive of games in 1926 and 1927. I guess that, with his family coming from a remote Danish island, Lauritz passed the feeling for adventure and love of the sea to his family.

He was supported, some have said to me dominated, in his work by his no less active and energetic wife. She was born Alice Rebecca Spurling (Pancras, London 1875), but known as Celia and studied art, unusual for girl at that time, in South Kensington, the artistic quarter of London, until her marriage in 1900. An early portrait of her husband survives, skilful and passionate. Celia was a cultivated woman; painter, musician and writer. She produced several books and pamphlets on both religious subjects, including Religion in Art, and on local history while she was in Wirksworth and produced many school plays, famed for the exotic scenery, which she designed and for the music which she composed. Did they really perform on tables in the hall of Gell block? She was a woman not easily discouraged of 'strongly independent mind and judgement.' Lauritz and Celia were married in 1900 and had five children and a donkey called Tabitha – see the tree below. Her grandson, Dr Peter Andrews says that the HB family were strongly independent; my knowledge of them in three generations confirms that judgement. The letter written to me by their daughter Rosemary in 1976, herself in her seventies, is energetic, adventurous and literate (as I have come to expect from the family) and vividly evokes a distant past in Wirksworth.

The HBs were devoted to their school. I think the possessive is justified. With only three other full time teachers Celia was the senior mistress and their influence was all-pervasive. They brought two of the teachers with them from Peterborough. Lesley Northrop, who arrived as a young teacher in 1925 and stayed till 1967, (42 years of dedicated service) described it as a warm family school with the HBs and their children living on site, though when they were older the children moved to board at more academic or artistic establishments. I have met a number of former students from those post war days and they spoke with warm affection of the happy atmosphere and without exception of the inspirational contribution of the head and the creative impetus of his wife in art music and drama.

This section will not be a full historical analysis of the HB years, because we do not have sufficient evidence (there is, for example, no information about the curriculum), but I attach some notes, slightly amended, which I sent to the grandchildren of the HBs in 2012. They give a picture of the HBs and the school during their period of service. It must have been a good time.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE HBs

Notes by Roy Pearce, Head of Anthony Gell School, 1971-1991 to the family.

I lived with my family in school house. These are snippets of memory from a variety of sources.

As HB left the school over eighty years ago the only pupils who now would remember his period of headship would be in their nineties. One, whom I knew well, died recently aged 97! She spoke of your grandparents with warm affection. Amazingly in the last week a friend produced two school magazines 1926, edited by CHB and 1927. We have, sadly, no other documentary evidence of LHB's headship at school. I shall look in county records when my current work on the history of Wirksworth Cricket Club has slowed down. We have been searching and found the portrait of LHB by CHB, stored safely.

A number of former pupils have spoken to me over the years and I have built up the picture of a tremendously enthusiastic and active man who took no notice of his disability. He was remembered as a keen sportsman, more I think as a footballer, though I have notes of his involvement with the cricket club. He and his wife were at the heart of everything. Some suggested to me that she was the 'boss'. They were certainly a much loved pair. I have lived in Wirksworth for more than forty years and I have gathered some impressions which I record below. My strongest memory is of the notable portrait of HB painted by Mrs HB, which hung for many years in the school library and is now in the safe keeping of the headteacher.

Here are some items from my collection.

1. George Eric Repton, who has lived in Wirksworth near the school all his life, one day recently stopped me in the street and told me that he remembered seeing Mr Hansen Bay when he was a child in the 1920s. He was impressed that although HB was limping he was moving very fast over the Hannages from the old school building in the churchyard towards the new school (opened 1908). His gown was flying behind him and he was wearing his mortar board. I was amazed that this vision had stuck in his mind for more than eighty years.

2. Jack Marsden was a keen cricketer (1920s) and was encouraged by HB. When the cricket club had a special all day match and one of the teams was short of a player the club captain would contact the Head and Jack would be sent off to play cricket.

3. In contrast one of the old cricketers told me that once the school cricket team went to Derby to play with HB in charge. HB disappeared, saw nothing of the game and only returned at the end to escort the team home back to Wirksworth. I am not sure how they were travelling. It could have been by train.

4. The mother of a friend, as a young girl, came from North Wingfield, near Chesterfield, with her sister to work as a residential domestic servant in School House (date about 1920). The two girls, who were only in their teens, were away from home for the first time and were very unhappy. After three weeks they ran away home, leaving quietly early one spring morning. I can imagine the confusion! Amazingly a detailed account of this adventure survives as part of the girl's biography by her grandson.

5. Based on press report. In 1912 at the funeral of Charles Wright Rev Lauritz Hansen Bey said the opening sentences. Wright was a school governor, a wealthy local businessman and a generous donor towards the building of the new school. The school was closed for the afternoon of his funeral with places reserved for some of the pupils.

6. From Wirksworth Cricket Club minutes, December 1908 at a committee meeting. 'L Hansen Bay, (vice president) in the chair.'

7. Miss Lesley Northrop came to Wirksworth to teach History in 1925, She stayed for 42 years. When she retired in 1967 she wrote, 'I think the most abiding first memory I have of Anthony Gell's Grammar School is of its family nature. This was partly due to the fact that the Rev L Hansen Bay was Headmaster, his wife Senior Mistress, and the various members of their family had been or were pupils in the school. Everybody knew everybody else.'

Miss Northrop spoke to me in her old age with strong approval of your grandparents. She took the girls' hockey teams in her young days with great success and was a notable teacher, retiring as senior mistress in 1967.

8. From 1926 magazine: R.C.S. Hansen Bay has come down from Oxford (Lady Margaret Hall). The result of her 'finals' in the History honours School is not yet known. She has played Hockey and Lacrosse for her college, acted in many plays, won a sailing prize, sung in the Bach choir, and, in general, enjoyed the many and varied opportunities afforded by four years at Oxford.

9. From 1926 school magazine:

Extract from London letter from K.M.H.H.B. during the General Strike.

'Ticket collectors say, 'Thank you very much.... one guard of a train due to depart - an immaculate youth in plus fours, waved an absurd green flag; nothing happened. He waved again and blew a whistle; still nothing happened. Then he said to the driver in injured tones, 'I say, you might GO!'

Buses have things written on them, as;

Bricks this way please.

Stones through here.

Try our fresh air cure. (If the glass is smashed).

None but the brave deserve the Threepenny Fare.

A brick in hand is worth two at the bus.

Practically all the men I know are 'Specials'. ...some have their beat from ten to two a.m. and some from ten to six (a.m.) and appear next morning as usual.

10. From 1927 magazine:

On December 18th 1926 Katherine Margaret Henriette Hansen Bay, the youngest daughter of the Headmaster and Mrs Hansen Bay was quietly married to Mr John Emanuel at the Parish Church.

The husband of the Headmaster's eldest daughter, Mrs.W.H.G.Milnes, is now appointed Housemaster of Clifton Grove at St. Peter's School, York, which has just kept its thirteenth centenary with great rejoicings.

The Historic Pageant Procession, the programme for which was drawn up by for the town by Mrs Hansen Bay – a new feature of Well Dressing Day – included a school group showing Anthony Gell the Founder.....

In addition.

11. In 1924 the Brooks Press of Wirksworth published A Little Book About Wirksworth by CHB. CHB was Celia Hansen Bay, wife of the headmaster of Wirksworth Grammar School (1907-1929) and herself a considerable artist. I have recently re-read this little gem and found the following snippet.

'Religion and sport are the two pre-occupations of Wirksworth. There is little doubt that there is a strong love of beauty in the inhabitants of picturesque little Wirksworth, and that it would be all to the good if it could be developed to a far greater extent than it is now; in which case Wirksworth may produce great things in the way of creative art; at present her recent fame may be said to rest mainly on the excellent cricketers and footballers, and hockey players she has bred.'

THE WARS.

The whole country was affected by both wars and the Wirksworth school, as many others, lost some pupils. I was told by an old man of the sad gatherings at morning assembly when a death in action was announced. The daily assembly was held in the long corridor, (now a passageway) from 1907 to 1938 when the hall/gym, now the library, was built. You can imagine the feelings of the older boys, who were destined soon to be in service. as they learnt of the death of their young friends. Names are recorded on the two memorial tablets in the library. The HBs died in the 1930s, so they did not see the death of a beloved son in the desert war: John Spurling Hansen Bay, killed in the Libyan Desert aged 26, is buried in the war cemetery at Acroma in North Africa. As a former pupil his name appears on the 1939-45 war memorial.

I write nearly a hundred years after the first war, but I still feel a jarring sadness when I see the names of the Taylor brothers, both gifted cricketers, who with two other brothers played for Wirksworth Cricket Club in its pre-war 'golden age': talented young men taken from us. As club historian I researched the Taylor family and felt their loss. The family lived on Cromford Road.

When the HBs retired in 1929 there was great regret in the town, sincerely felt, I believe – they had run the school for twenty two years and had become important contributors to the community life of this small, underprivileged town.

The school magazine in 1929 commented: 'None of us at present can imagine what school will be like without them, for ever since the present buildings were erected - all the time that our school has been a mixed one it has known only one headmaster.

Mr Bay's interest in his pupils never ended.he has always been our guide, counsellor and friend.'

AFTER WIRKSWORTH

Lauritz and Celia left Wirksworth in 1929 and Lauritz served as vicar of Stow with Quy, a small village just north of Cambridge. He died there in 1932 and Celia went to Brancaster Staithe, where the family had connections. She died in 1934 'in very poor circumstances'. I suspect she had been unwell in her final years in Wirksworth. They are buried together in Quy churchyard.