



How were we taught

What was school like 100 years ago?

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Introduction

Life at school in the Edwardian era was very different to how it is now. These photographs can tell us a lot about how children were taught at the beginning of this century. These children were in fact quite lucky, as they were at school and not working. A generation earlier, in the 1860s, one third of children in England and Wales did not attend school at all and right up until 1881 children were not required to go.

Only in the 20th century were young children no longer regularly expected to work alongside adults. By 1918 school attendance was not only compulsory but the school leaving age was raised from 12 to 14 years old.

Edwardian schools were similar in a lot of ways to modern ones. Classes were taken in the 'three R's' (reading, writing and arithmetic) and there were also physical education lessons ('drill'). Girls were generally taught sewing and needlework.

In addition to their normal lessons, young people also usually attended Sunday School for religious education.

Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. This is a photograph taken at Boys Home Industrial School in 1910. Can you find:
 - a) the master's desk
 - b) a framed photograph
 - c) any evidence of heating and lighting

Look at Source 2

2. This is a photograph of boys from the Boys Home Industrial School studying and playing dominoes. Can you explain:
 - a) what the classroom might have been like in the winter.
 - b) how what is on the wall is different from your classroom.
 - c) why the windows are so large

Look at Source 3

3. This is a photograph of a physical exercise display. It was taken on Founders Day at the Boys Home Industrial School in about 1910. Can you describe:
 - a) the uniform the boys are wearing
 - b) the equipment they are using
4. How different is this school to the school you are at today? Make a list of the things that are different and the things that are the same:

Do you think that school teachers in Edwardian times would normally sit with the children? Or do you think these teachers posed for the photographs?

Background

The Boys Home Industrial School, which is featured in these photographs, was based in Regents Park Road, Primrose Hill, London. The school was founded to provide 'for the maintenance and training of destitute boys not convicted of crime'. Boys who attended the school were trained in a number of disciplines, including baking, printing and shoemaking, and some boys went on to work for the William Morris Company once they had left the school.

Industrial Schools were different in a number of ways from local board or church schools. Children were likely to board at the school because the intention was for them to be separated from bad influences at home. You can see in Sources 1 and 2 that the children wore uniforms, unusual in British schools of the period.

One thing that the school would have shared with others of the period would have been the use of corporal punishment, usually the cane (although Scottish schools used a thick leather strap called a 'tawse'). Corporal punishment in state schools was outlawed in 1987.

The early 20th century saw the true start of mass of education in Britain in the way we would recognise it today. In 1902, the Conservative government of Arthur Balfour passed an Education Act which brought state primary schools and local secondary schools under the control of local councils for the first time.

The Act was needed because the provision of some schools for older children had actually been challenged in court. However Balfour also considered an educated workforce vital to maintaining Britain's position at the forefront of world trade and technical achievement.

In 1906 the election of the new Liberal government led to considerable social reform. With the growth of the new Labour Party, Liberals were keen to show that they were the real party of working people. The Education (Provision of Meals) Act of 1906 introduced 'school dinners' and was followed by a further Act in 1907 which gave local authorities powers to authorise medical examinations in schools. It was hoped these would help diagnose childhood diseases early.

Teachers Notes

This lesson provides material for examining photographs as evidence. It can also be used as stimulus material for looking at the history of education.

For extension work, pupils could investigate the history of their own school, particularly if it is Victorian. Alternatively pupils could interview their parents/guardians or an older generation to find out if schooling has changed from when they were younger.

Sources

Illustration : Boys Home Industrial School - Boxing Class 1910 MH 1201/2692 f79

Source 1 : Boys Home Industrial School Classroom 1910 MH102/2691

Source 2 : Boys Home Industrial School - Boys at work and play MH102/2691 f12

Source 3 : Physical exercise display on Founders Day at the Boys Home Industrial School c1910 MH 201/2692 f26

Schemes of Work

What was it like for children living in Victorian Britain

Key Stage 1 & 2 Unit 11

How did life change in our locality in Victorian times?

Key Stage 1 & 2 Unit 12

Source 1 : Boys Home Industrial School Classroom 1910 (MH102/2691 f.11)



Source 2 : Boys Home Industrial School - Boys at work and play (MH102/2691 f12)



Source 3 : Physical exercise display on Founders Day at the Boys Home Industrial School c1910 (MH 201/2692 f26)

