

Grangetown Local History Society



Fact Sheet No. 6

Lower Grangetown's Schools

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Introduction

Lower Grangetown, the area south of Penarth Road, could eventually boast two schools, their construction separated by almost two decades.

The National School, which shared land with the police station, was completed on the east side of Clive Street in 1864. It was situated on the corner of Bromsgrove Street and Clive Street, with Hewell Street at its back. It was one of the earliest public buildings in Grangetown. It underwent two expansions.

Grangetown Council School, near Grange Gardens, was completed in 1884 under new legislation which saw the construction and management of so-called Board Schools by a board of administrators. It was initially named the Grangetown Board School.

Although very different in size, their architecture was similar, echoing the gothic ecclesiastical style. Constructed sturdily in stone, with heavy roof structures, they appear to have been designed to give the impression of solidity, respectability and longevity.

The Board School was on a grand scale, a veritable cathedral of learning, complete with a spire. Its construction was a near disaster due to the wet condition of the marshy ground and the sheer weight of the heavy stone building. As though this were not difficult enough, flooding due to the bursting of flood defences made the construction extremely challenging and expensive. It too underwent a significant expansion before the century was out.

This fact sheet tells the story of the construction of the two schools and identifies some of the issues that arose once they were built.

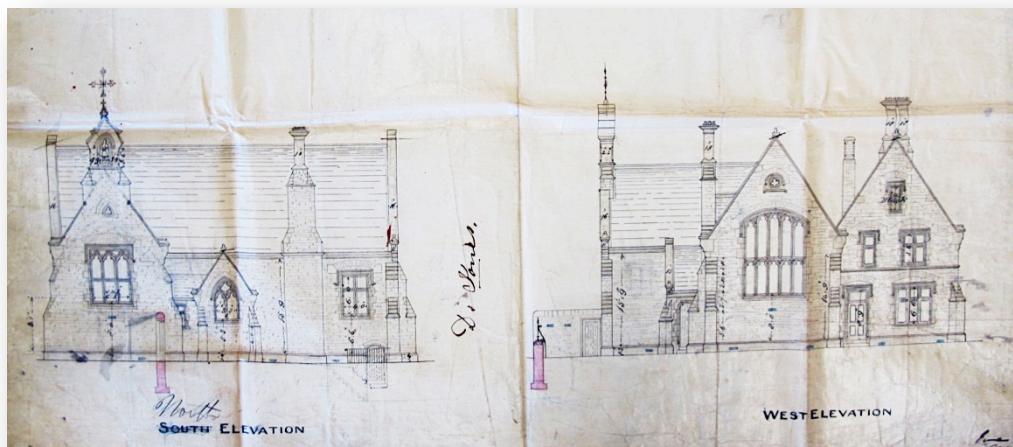
We should note that the area south of Penarth Road is correctly named as Lower Grangetown (with capitals). In this fact sheet, as in others, we refer to lower Grangetown (one capital) as the area that was constructed earliest, comprising streets such as Oakley, Hewell, Worcester and Earl, etc.

Most of the illustrations in this and other fact sheets come from documents in the Glamorgan Archives, to whom we are most grateful.

The National School

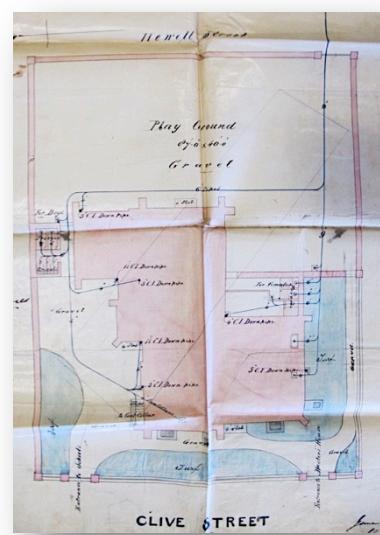
This was one of the earliest public buildings to be constructed in lower Grangetown. Henry Snell (the Windsor's Penarth architect) completed its design in 1862 and construction took place in 1863/4. It was part of the Windsors' "Combined Schools of Penarth and Grangetown". Initially, therefore, the school was considered very much part of Penarth. It opened in 1864, which is rather late considering that several streets had already been built in the area, families occupying many of the houses there.

Although much smaller than the later Grangetown Board School, it was nevertheless an impressive building. With a large quasi-ecclesiastical window that faced Clive Street, together with gothic stone-arched windows and doorways, large buttressed stone walls and a belfry surmounted by a crucifix: one could be forgiven for believing it was a chapel or church.

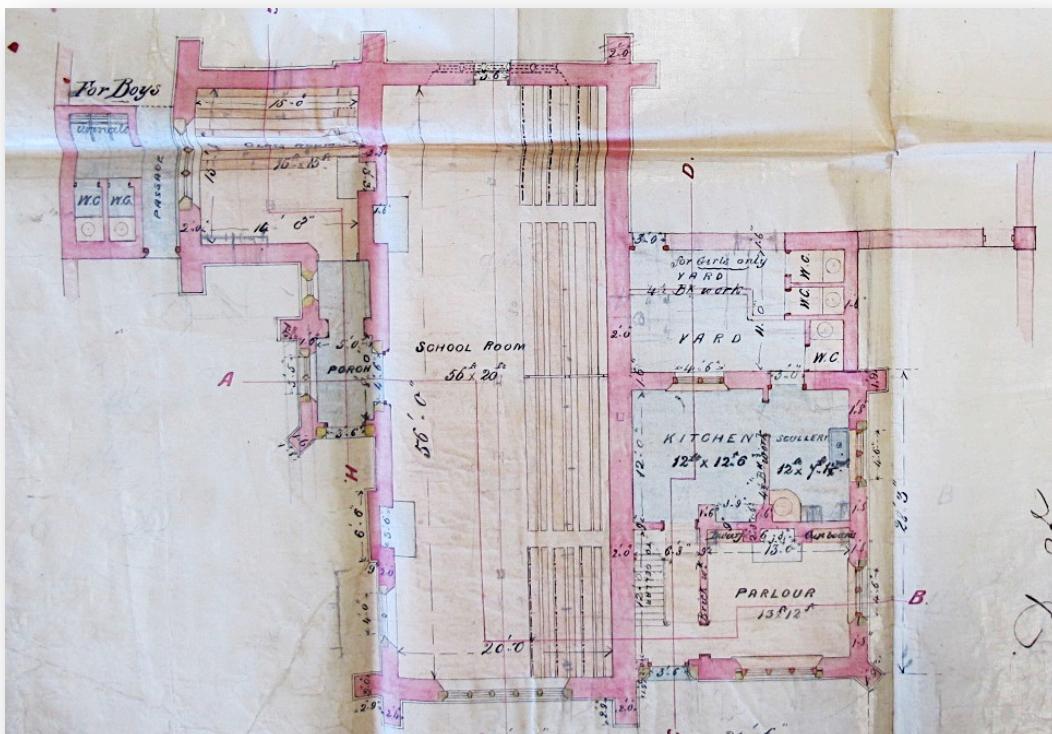


We see above one of the plans for the school, showing clearly its gothic style, which although impressive, because of its small size, resembles a village school, complete with headmaster's house integral to the design. The drawing above shows on the left the north elevation (Bromsgrove Street side) and the west elevation from Clive Street. The belfry is an elaborate structure, supported by double-buttressed piers. This element of the building is a peninsular to the school hall and housed a small classroom. The porchway in the centre is the children's entrance. All walls were two feet thick and of limestone.

As with most Victorian buildings of this kind, it boasts tall, substantial chimneys. The one seen here is above the main fireplace in the main hall of the school.



The foundation plan on the right above, shows clearly the layout of the school including the adjacent house with its own yard, and the playground. The house is almost as wide as the main hall. Of greater interest is the detailed ground floor plan of the buildings shown below, which provides the school with only two rooms: one a large hall (56 feet long and 20 feet wide), and the other a smaller classroom (fifteen feet square). The age groups using the two rooms is not indicated, but their capacity can be estimated by the number of bench-type desks in each.



The main hall had four blocks of desks, three deep, each block accommodating at least six children. The capacity would therefore be in the region of 80 children. In fact, this is a gross underestimate, since records show that the

school accommodated no fewer than 165 children - an enormous number. As we shall see when we investigate the Grangetown Board School, this was not an unusual design density. In the Board School, single classrooms were designed for 90 children!



The small classroom in the drawing had three double rows of bench desks, each double row accommodating up to eight children. In this photograph we see single rows of bench desks, each seating six

children. There was also a bench seat in the front with space for six more. This small room could therefore contain up to 30 children.

Compared with the hall, which had a thirty-three feet ceiling, the smaller classroom with its coal fire would have been much cosier in winter. On the other hand, in the summer, especially if the children suffered from poor personal hygiene, which they did, it would be stifling. It had only one window and that looked out onto the boys' latrines block.

The photograph shows the typical construction of bench desks. Many were without backs to them so as to deter slouching; most had a simple shelf beneath and a working surface that, for juniors, as here, had a hole in it to accommodate a porcelain ink well; they also had a groove for pens. All such desks had a heavy, cast iron frame, so that in most schools they were not often moved about.

The infants used hand-held slates on which to chalk their answers to exercises, rather than using a pen and ink:



Having lots of air to circulate the photograph here shows the same arrangement of desks shown on the layout drawing previously.

The heavy timber roof structure is typical of the era and marries up well with the drawings we have. The National School's hall at 1120 square feet was huge. How a teacher could instruct so many at a time in such a large hall is difficult



a practice that has been resurrected today by using iPads or small wipeable whiteboards. Each pupil had to bring to school a cloth with which to wipe his or her slate clean, but coat sleeves were often a handy substitute for boys. (The notion of 'wiping the slate clean' came from this action of cleaning one's slate, ready for the answer to the next problem to be written on it.)

We have noted that the school had very high ceilings and this was to be repeated in the Board School. In fact this was very common, not only in schools, but in all public buildings where numbers of (quite smelly) people would assemble. The



to imagine. Repeatedly walking the fifty-six feet from one end to the other all day would in itself be taxing, although assistants were employed to keep discipline. On the plus side, it was light: both end walls having large gothic windows, the larger west one catching the afternoon sun. Just two fireplaces heated the room: with its towering ceiling this may have not been entirely adequate.

As far as lavatories were concerned, the boys had theirs in a small brick building on the north side adjacent to the small entrance and separated from the smaller classroom by a passageway. The girls, however, used facilities in the back yard of the house - not a satisfactory arrangement for the occupants of the house.

The house is interesting. Although the ground floor was basic, it had three bedrooms, an attic and a cellar. Off the entrance passageway was a parlour 13 feet square, behind which was a kitchen of decent size (12' by 12' 6") and off that a scullery (12' x 8'). The small back yard (13' x 12') and its outside WC were accessed via the scullery and a wall from the girl's WC partitioned it.

Upstairs were two bedrooms and a box room or third small bedroom. The cellar was accessed via outside steps in the back yard and provided storage for coal: perhaps for the school fires as well as the house fires, because no other storage appears on the plans. The house was superior in both its size and in the number of rooms to most houses in lower Grangetown at that time. It also had a garden that was turfed over initially.

The school was a very heavy stone building and the pillar foundations were very deep: eleven feet deep in places. They were brick pillars constructed on concrete slabs, which were themselves five feet square for the main walls and four feet square for the dividing walls. These are really substantial elements. It seems that the architect, who would have already heard of the difficulties encountered building elsewhere in Grangetown, wanted to make sure that the marsh did not claim *his* building! These foundations are particularly impressive when one realises that the coal cellar under the house does not reach beneath the entire school. In effect, the architect has created piled foundations in all but name.

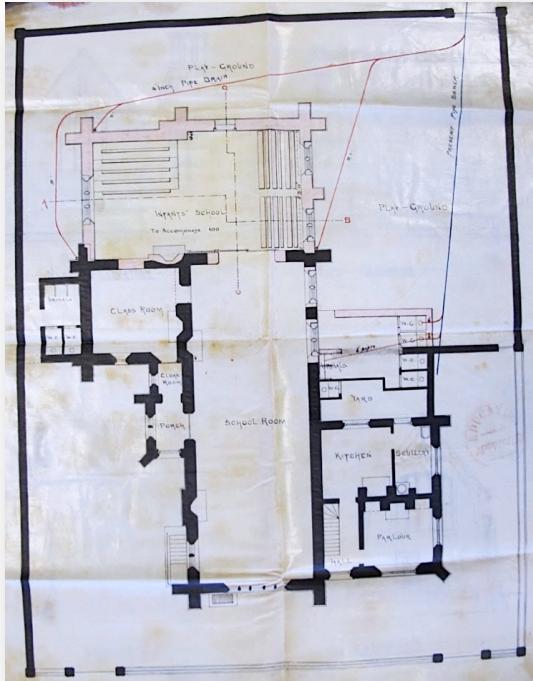
The National School Expansion

Unfortunately, there is little archived material from the school (such as the headmistress' log book) except for its construction drawings and some minor communications. But we do know that the growth of lower Grangetown, the major part of which took place between 1859 and, say, 1876 would have provided many customers for the school.

Although fee-paying (2½ d a week for juniors and 1¾ d for infants) and in spite of the area suffering periods of severe unemployment and epidemic diseases, the number of children nevertheless grew.

The initial design capacity of the school, of at least 120 children, was certainly exceeded by the mid 1870s and in 1877 an extension to the rear of the building was proposed and completed in 1879 - the building work being done whilst the children were occupying it. (It seems that having both an external wall removed and part of the roof was not seen as an excuse for not attending school.)

The extension is shown faintly in pink in the following drawing. The expansion had two objectives: the prime one was to provide a new, larger area for infants; the secondary one was to provide a number of separate lavatories for girls. Whether this meant that infants were not catered for at all previously is very doubtful, but the new single small classroom shown at the rear of the extension would appear to offer the sort of accommodation infants would have required.



reduced in area by the new extension and toilets, must have prohibited much running around and classes may have taken it in turns to use it.

Outside, the building retained its uncompromising, rich gothic style, which can be seen from the east elevation (from Hewell Street) which is shown here. Although the original large window has been removed, a similarly impressive one has replaced it. No expense has been spared.

This apparent (and exceptional) profligacy was doubly surprising when one realises how elaborate had to be the new foundations. Although the extension would be mated with the existing one, it had, nevertheless, to take its own weight and not exert any forces on the old building. Its foundations, therefore, were just as extensive and

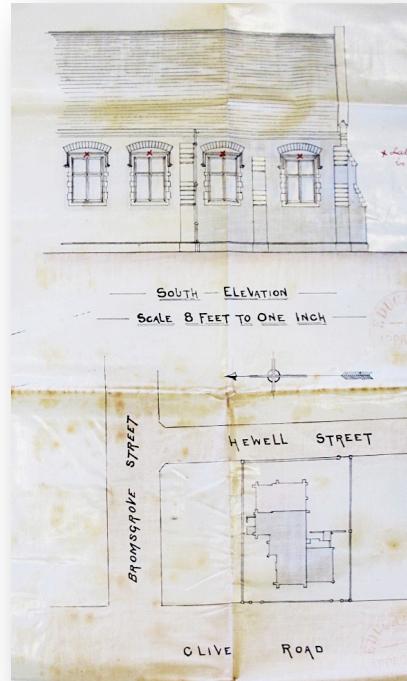
The interior floor plan shows that the proposed extension, measuring approximately 40 feet by 18 feet (720 square feet), was to be accessible via double doors from the school hall. Within it, it had five rows of benches (without desks) and at right angles to them six groups of benched desks each accommodating up to a maximum of four children. This time we do not need to estimate its capacity because the drawing of the extension is clearly marked with a note: '*INFANTS - to accommodate 100 children*' which is very high (7.2 square feet per child). If we apply this same density across the whole school, the population of the entire building would be 266 - in fact, from records we know that the figure was actually 279. The playground, by then having been



just as profound as the original building. Such things come at a very high price.

The north elevation (Bromsgrove Street) in the plan on the previous page, shows the additional ‘wing’ to the left of the existing building, drawn faintly. Although the new infant’s section would be relatively modest in floor area, the architect provided the room with the full height of the neighbouring school hall. Although this made the mating of the roof of the new building with the old one relatively simple, one has to wonder how comfortable it was for infants in winter.

The drawing here, shows how the roof of the hall was continued over the extension at the same height. A heavy buttress was added to each corner of the new extension to match those on the rest of the building. Those, together with deep foundations, would have made it a very strong but expensive building. The block plan in the lower part of the drawing shows just how little playground was left once the extension was built, bearing in mind that the area to the left in the drawing was occupied by the police station.



Was it worth it?

One has to wonder if, in view of the evidently high cost of what has to be considered (in view of the increasing population) a marginal increase in lower Grangetown’s school capacity, if the cost were justified. To aid our considerations, we should remember that the extension was begun in the autumn of 1878 and completed in the early spring of 1879 (whilst the children were in still school).

Only two years earlier, in 1877, Baroness Windsor began constructing the area we have named later Grangetown, following Paget Street. It was a major expansion of the new town. Surely she and her advisors were not assuming that this small school, even with its extension, could accommodate the children of the whole of the new area she was about to construct, as well as existing lower Grangetown?

The timing of the increased investment in this small school is therefore puzzling. Especially so, since the Education Act of 1870 (which we shall look at later) created school boards to oversee such things, to plan strategically for school places and to build new schools as demand required. If we add to that, that the Grangetown Board School, to be built by the Cardiff Board at the other end of the very same street (Bromsgrove Street), was designed barely three years after this extension was built, it seems possible that the extension was a stop-gap measure (albeit a very expensive one) until the much larger Board school could

accommodate everyone - which it eventually did. If this was so, then why spend so much on the extension? Solid stone buildings are *not* stop-gap measures!

There is, however, another theory that may stand up: and that is that the National School, being part of the Penarth Schools Programme, was only ever meant to serve early lower Grangetown. Although it has not been possible to obtain figures for the number of children living uniquely in that area (however defined), one can imagine that the expanded school would probably serve its limited and very local population reasonably adequately. The new Board School down the road could then look after the influx of children from later Grangetown.

Elaborate, high quality stone buildings such as the National School, came at a very high price, the actual value of which, unfortunately, has not been found. But we do have access to the very limited correspondence between the Windsors' agents and the builder, who was a Mr Harold A Jones. He was paid in tranches, from the foundations upwards, the final tranche being the interior furnishing of the new classrooms. He had the good fortune to learn from the experience of the original builder as to how to overcome the difficult soil conditions and to copy, basically, the same foundations used previously.

As often happens in such projects, the design evolves as it comes before new eyes; and this project was no exception. Although the simple extension went ahead, it may be surprising for us to learn that yet another one was proposed before the end of the century, even after the later Grangetown Board School had been built and was fully functioning.

Yet More Alterations

In 1899, new plans for a second extension were laid before the Cardiff School Board, who had by then taken responsibility for all Cardiff schools - Grangetown having by then been incorporated into the borough of Cardiff. The board laid down new standards for schools, not only for their architecture and capacity but also their facilities and curriculum.

Notable amongst these changes were new standards as to how children of different ages should be educated. The use of new techniques required a more refined segregation of children according to their abilities rather than their age.

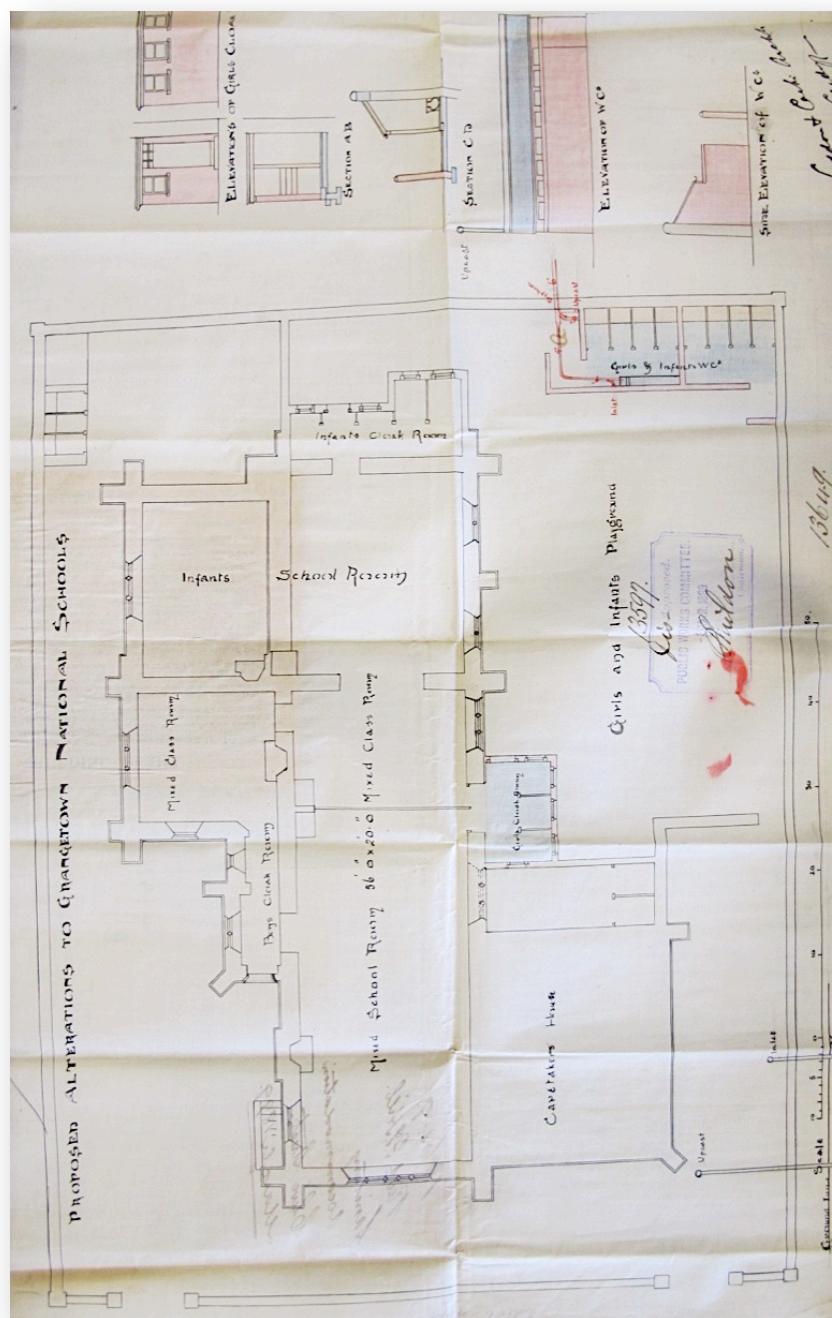
The net result was to convert the expanded National School, which had only two classrooms, into one that had five. The long hall was split into two mixed gender classrooms by using a sliding wooden partition. The first extension (by 1899 it was already 22 years old) would similarly become two rooms. A new mixed classroom would be built alongside the entry porch, the porch itself becoming a boy's cloakroom. The infants would have their own cloakroom too, as would the girls.

Further WCs for girls and infants would be built in the corner of the yard against the Hewell Street wall - taking up yet more of the playground. What was left of the playground on the south side would be given over to girls and infants.

All in all, better facilities were to be provided. The major loser in all this appeared to have been the so-called headmaster's house: which became very clearly the caretaker's house. Little would remain of his garden, but at least he would have

the use of his own lavatory in his now private back yard. The planned changes are shown in the following plan, dated 1899. It shows the full extent of both extensions and the re-arrangement of classrooms. It also makes us aware of the severe reduction in the size of the playground.

By this time, the National School's big neighbour, the Grangetown Board School was up and running, as we shall see.



Grangetown Board School

The photograph dates from 1882 and shows the first phase of the impressive building. It was then known as the Lower Grangetown Board School, constructed on behalf of the Cardiff Borough Schools Board.



Education Act 1870

Under this act, School Boards were established to provide education in areas where no secular provision existed. School Boards were elected bodies empowered to levy rates and to set up and maintain schools in areas where voluntary provision was inadequate. They could also frame byelaws for the compulsory attendance of children aged between 5 and 13 and for setting the school leaving age. After the later Education Act of 1902, the Boards passed their responsibility for elementary education to the Local Education Authorities within county councils and county boroughs, including Cardiff County Borough. In Cardiff, this transfer of responsibility took place in 1903.

The Building

The black and white photograph shows an interesting feature: a spire. This was once atop the end of the initial building and was removed when a large expansion took place, adding wings to the building at the Holmesdale Street end and on the St Fagans Street side. Several of the Board Schools in Cardiff had spires of this kind, giving them a grandeur that was perhaps intended to ensure that pupils and parents alike recognised that such establishments were important, even inspiring institutions. The



modifications and additions is therefore clear, but these modern changes are as nothing compared with what was undertaken in 1899.

But firstly, a look at the process by which the land was purchased and the original building constructed is instructive.

How Many Children Will Come?

Before embarking on the design of the school, or even determining where it should be, a census of children in lower Grangetown was carried out in November 1881 to determine the capacity of the building. The document is shown here.

Of course this census was valid only for lower Grangetown because the new ‘later Grangetown’ was only then being built. But they took a shot at estimating the number - which was to prove insufficient. The population included the National School and St Patrick’s, since plans were initially mooted to group all children in all of Grangetown into this one grand building.

Mr D Rees, Clerk of the Board, produced the above estimate, but we can see that he was concerned at the deductions that had been assumed (written in red). It is also notable that up to one in eight children (12.5%) was assumed to be absent at any one time.

This was a time when the Schools Board was flexing its newfound legislative muscles and having to develop a strategy to cope with the rapidly growing town of Cardiff, notably in its working class areas. A number of schools were being considered for construction. It required 11/4 acres, which was offered by the Plymouth estate for £2,322 (£983,000 today) plus a private supplement for some work (not specified) that was to be done on the land by the Earl of Plymouth.

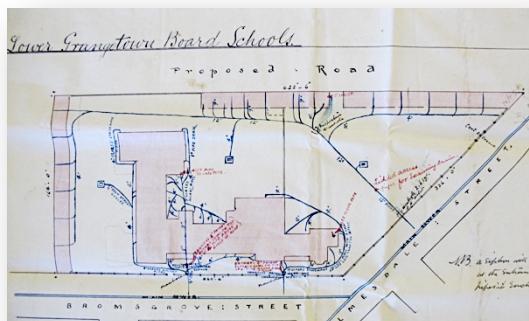
school was to be a cathedral of learning, which is a pretty accurate description, as we shall see when looking at its design.

Most noticeable when comparing the original black and white photograph with a photo of today’s building, is the current absence of arched windows in the centre portion and the furthest wing of the school. There is also a flat-roofed projection. That the buildings have undergone

Cardiff School Board		
Census of children between 3 and 13 in the Grangetown District Nov. 1881.		
Total children then & return	1940	
Debutt in children classes not requiring accommodation say	100	
The remainder are either exclusively working people, their deduction is tentatively leant		1840
Debutt of children university about 3		230
Total children requiring accommodation		1610
less existing accommodation		
Grangetown National - 279		519
" St Patricks RC. 240		
Debating		1091
In addition to this number the population to be added in the course of a few months is to be considered about 1000. In view of certain facilities being built for the poor children and 1000 allow this number as leant		300
Total to be used for		1391
<i>Done and signed 3 Nov 1881</i>		

The surveyor, W P James, acting on behalf of the Board, recommended acceptance of the deal, but warned that the ground was “*wet and remains soft, unable to withstand a heavy building without significant foundations*”.

The Building's Plans



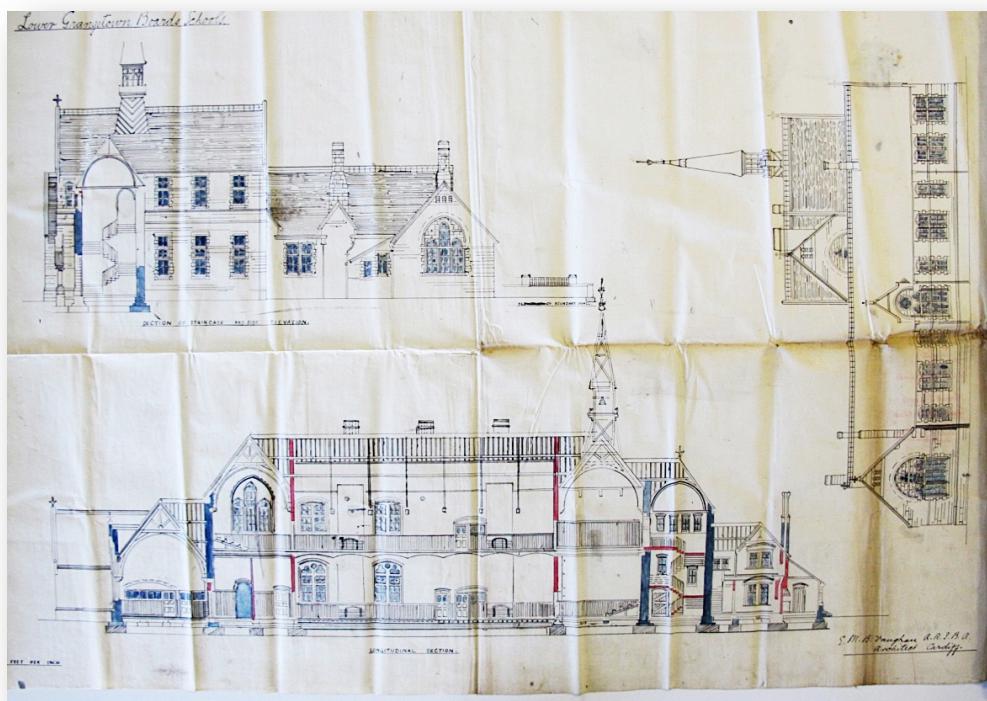
provided at that end and ‘latrines’ would line the St Fagans Street and Bromsgrove Street walls.

It was to be an impressive building and the structure of the spire and supporting roof were to be very expensive. The spire’s structure was complex and elaborate, requiring substantial cross bracing. The underlying roof design was therefore also heavy and complex. It was a cathedral-like roof structure. The architect was a Mr E M Vaughan, of 21 Dumfries Place.

Most structural roof members were to be apparent; that is to say that the upper

The building was to be essentially L-shaped, as the block plan shows; it would house infants on the Bromsgrove Street side, whilst housing juniors on the Holmesdale Street side.

It was to be mostly of two storeys and all openings were to be in dressed stone with rough-cut stone in-fill; it would have a large, impressive tower or spire facing out to Holmesdale Street. A caretaker’s house would be



floor classrooms did not have suspended ceilings, but, as in a church, soared to the underside of the roof itself, all beams being apparent to the pupils below, perhaps instilling a sense of awe - whilst they shivered in the winter.

Approval and Tenders

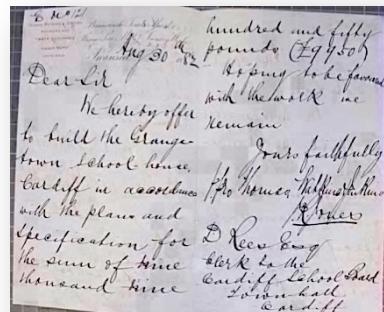
The Board gave its formal approval to the building's design, and gave permission for its construction, on 6th July 1882. It foresaw a building that would house 309 boys, 309 girls, and 426 infants, a total of 1044; fewer than the 1091 predicted by the census and ignoring completely any later requirements from later Grangetown: something that would cause problems before many years had passed. All this design work (and heavy expenditure) was predicated on the feasibility of erecting such a heavy building on a marsh. Some builders reckoned it could not be done. Two surveyors wrote to the Board making clear their belief that the marsh would not support such a huge building.

Altogether twelve builders submitted tenders for the work. Some were local, small-scale builders who submitted, literally, a scrap of paper with a single figure, the total cost, on it; whilst others, which were obviously larger and more professional firms from further away (one from Bristol), submitted more detailed proposals on typed, headed paper.

One of them, written on a piece of paper torn roughly from an arithmetic book, reads simply:

Dear Sir

I offer to build your school at Grangetown according to Plans and Specifications for the sum £10,100 -0 -0.



I am Dear Sir, Yours Obediently,

David Davies

The offers varied from £9,121 to £11,531, a spread of 26%. Some gave their prices to the nearest penny. The winner of the exercise was Mr D J Davies, of Cathays, who usefully pointed out that he was the cousin of Councillor Davies, and offered to do the job for £9,650 - equivalent to £13.5 million today.

But now the wrangling began as to how much the Board could really afford, because until they had received tenders, they were unable to borrow the money. A special fund was available for the construction of public buildings of this kind, offering loans at preferential rates. It appears that the Board did not like the outlay involved and as construction began, in 1883, immediately began chipping away at the design. They were especially concerned about the height of the upstairs ceilings and began wondering if they could be lowered, not only to save construction costs but also later heating costs. Large fireplaces had been allowed for in the design, but with very large classroom sizes and very high ceilings, the children furthest away from a fireplace would not feel the benefit of it.

The Board then began juggling with ‘desk densities’, to see if classrooms could accommodate more than the original design. They looked into the number of toilets, which they thought excessive. They began reducing the number of coat pegs in the cloakrooms, looked for cheaper door hinges and door handles, cheaper bricks, cutting the size of the caretaker’s kitchen and importing Spanish slate rather than use Welsh slate. The Board even wanted to replace the playground surface of (relatively soft) tarmac, with concrete.

Eventually, the architect became so outraged at the amateur cost-cutting exercise by unqualified members of the Board, that he threatened to pull out and refused to accept any further changes. He pointed out that his main concern was not the number of coat hangers but the unknown cost of the difficult foundations.

The architect’s and the surveyors’ warnings about building such a heavy, stone building on the marsh were, unfortunately, well founded. Lacking structural material such as reinforced concrete with which to create a strong raft foundation, separate linear foundations were constructed for each wall and numerous piers were then built to support the wooden ground floor. Correspondence shows graphically the serious difficulties encountered, as the hand-dug holes and trenches dug out of sticky clay immediately filled with water. Such work was arduous and slow, so much so that it created a crisis in terms of both construction time and cost. One building firm claimed that the foundations were sinking as fast as it built them. Three firms of builders eventually pulled out, claiming the work was impossible for them.

The School is Sinking!

The increased cost was thrown into stark relief when a review of the foundations construction methods had to be undertaken. It was found that an *extra £1,180 (£1.65 million)* would be needed to complete the foundations - adding 13.5% to the cost of the building. The Board may have shaved a few hundreds off the original estimated cost by limiting the number of children’s coat hangers, but the extra cost of foundations would swamp those savings.

Reluctantly, the Board agreed to apply for extra finance for the work (they had no other option) and extra labour and materials were thrown into the job. Initially, all went as well as could be expected. After some nine months of work and several setbacks - due mainly to the collapse of trenches, inundations as pumps failed, and some foundations refusing to dry out - the walls were up.

It was in October 1883, a year later that disaster then struck. A dyke embankment situated at the end of Kent Street to keep out the river and the sea, collapsed. Stormy weather and high tides breached it, flooding the whole of Grangetown to a depth of some five feet, including the school. Some pier foundations (for floors) were weakened by immersion in deep water and had to be renewed. The whole of the wooden floor at ground level was saturated and had to be replaced due to warping. Nevertheless, work at the upper level continued as the building slowly dried out - but it delayed work on the ground floor and especially the playground.

In spite of this, the roof was on and the inside of the school, notably on the upper floor, proceeded well. The Board had set a target for completion of November 1883, and this was understandably missed, but only by a few weeks - although the playground would take longer because it stubbornly refused to dry out for several months. Whenever it eventually dried out, the architect, Mr Vaughan, was still not

comfortable with the proposed use of concrete on the children's playground. He wrote to the Board suggesting that what he called 'tar paving' (Tarmac) be used instead.

The school was opened on 7th January 1884 under Miss Alice Gowing as headmistress.

The School's Growing Pains

The very first school summer holiday began on 23rd June 1884 for three weeks. But at the end of this period, the classes were much depleted. The headmistress of the Infants' School wrote:

"Few children returned after the summer vacation. There is a rumour that the children are to be vaccinated and the parents are refusing to send them on this account."

Similar absences occurred at other times of the year, such as during winter:

"The little ones have left for the winter. Being it is wet, dark, roads are so bad, parents will not send their children. Due to the stormy weather, only one third of pupils are present, most brought in the arms of their parents."

Many fathers of such children were dependent upon work in Cardiff or Penarth Docks, both of which underwent a temporary decline between 1884 and 1888, due to a drop in ship-building there. Layoffs were numerous, imposing crushing poverty on many Grangetown families. The headmistress notes in her log:

June 1884: there is much poverty due to unemployment.

Feb 1885: much poverty - so difficult to get school fees paid. Parents come with tales of woe.

Feb 1886: Many fathers out of work, no fees coming in. Many suffering from colds, chilblains, etc. The children here are so poor. Many of them not clothed or fed properly owing to their fathers having no employment.

Aug 1886: Had several applications from parents for their children to come to school free. The distress in Grangetown is now very bad.

Board schools were fee paying¹, albeit at very low rates (3d for infants and 4d for juniors). Under some circumstances the Board could waive fees. Some parents were too proud to apply for a waiver and kept their children at home.

Sep 1886: Sent out for absentees. Majority absent through poverty, they have no fees, no food, no boots, etc.

Oct 1886: Work is very bad and parents seem to think it is a disgrace to apply for remission of fees.

¹ There was a private school run by a Mr Buck in a house in Holmesdale St. Some of the admissions to the Board School came from there because the fees were less.

In 1898, coal handlers called a strike in both Penarth and Cardiff docks. Coal exports, the docks' lifeblood, came to a halt. The headmistress records:

"The children look very poor and sad. Many are ill and fall asleep. About 70 free tickets given out every day for soup or tea. The parents are much affected by the Coal Strike. Several of the better class parents have sent money and old clothes and boots for the little ones."

May 27th: Distress very great. Children very ill and it makes a difference to their work. They are very good, bless them. We are all at a loss as to what to do."

Not only were the children suffering as a result of their fathers' lack of work, but also from disease as they became weak. Large numbers were laid low by Measles, Whooping Cough and Chicken Pox sometimes suffering permanent damage to their hearing and eyesight. Deformed limbs from Rickets, due to vitamin D deficiency, were common. Some children died at home and were simply not seen again. In 1889, four infants died in an epidemic of Measles. Scarlet Fever, Diphtheria and Mumps were also frequent visitors to the homes of the poor.

In an attempt at combatting such illnesses, medical inspections of school children were eventually set up, but many parents refused to allow their children to be seen. In 1908 the headmistress noted:

"Nov 1908: The medical examination of the children has extended over several days. A large number of children have apparently been kept at home in order to avoid it. A considerable number were sent home by the doctor as 'unfit to attend school'. Parents are too ashamed to allow the doctor to see their children."

With the grinding poverty under which the children lived, it is not surprising to find that the school's first inspection was not a satisfactory one. The inspector wrote in his report:

"Have examined the first Standard and find that thirty do not know the letters of the alphabet, indeed they can do nothing, most of them never having been to school before and some having been only a few weeks at Mr Buck's private school.

Thirty know words of only two letters; so sixty in all cannot read at all.

Their position is desperate."

His comments were of great concern; they also give us a clear clue to the size of the class: but learning their lessons was but one obstacle to the teachers: discipline was also extremely poor. The head teacher's logbooks are full of admonishments given to children not to deface and cut desks, break windows or having to answer complaints by the police for rudeness in the streets, especially by senior girls. In an attempt to combat poor discipline an ex-army drill sergeant was appointed to the school in 1886 to impose discipline and drill the children in the playground.

Life was tough for both staff and children at the Board School, not made easier by the National School occasionally poaching children to go and join it. Poaching of students was apparently a general problem in the town. Sometimes, teachers never really knew which children were supposed to be theirs. Notwithstanding poaching, the

numbers of children attending school gradually grew and their attendance improved, notably when later Grangetown with its middle class parents moved in. By 1894, the school was becoming very overcrowded.

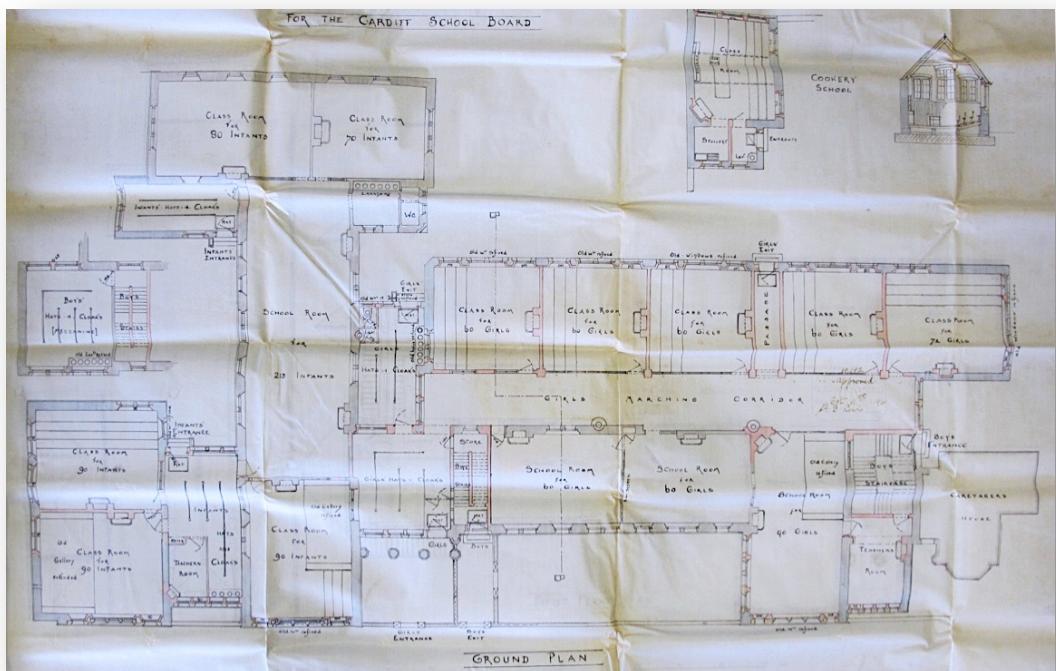
The School Expands

The original building was to last only 17 years before plans for a significant enlargement were drawn up. This time the (expensive) spire would have to go, to make way for new wings and larger facilities. The ground plan here shows in red the proposed additions.

The proposals included extensions to the west into the Infants Playground and a significant enlargement along the north side (St Fagans Street side) for a new senior girls' school. A girls' cookery 'school' would be provided in the yard. The detailed plan here shows the extent of the work required to provide additional classrooms and facilities.

The capacity of each classroom is written on the plan and all are very high: the central classroom in the Infants' School is claimed to accommodate 213 infants! Throughout the building, classrooms housed enormous numbers of children: up to 90 in each. In the new Secondary Girls' extension, five new classrooms on the ground floor were to be built, four of them for 60 girls and the fifth for 72.

Three existing ground floor classrooms, initially used by junior pupils, would be given over to senior girls and the junior pupils would be moved upstairs to an expanded first floor, which is shown here. This first floor also had classrooms designed for large numbers: 60, 70 or 90 children per room. In terms of 'desk density' the Board had done a magnificent job!



The senior girl's extension and first floor junior classrooms are clear to see in this recent photograph taken from St Fagans Street.



For completeness, this second photograph is of the eastern end of the 1899 extension, where the spire once stood, and shows the pine end of the two-storey extension.

The school's construction may well have caused many a headache - both financial and practical - for its constructors, but it has stood the test of time, celebrating its centenary decades ago.