

**THE HISTORY  
OF  
MEAD ROAD SCHOOL  
CHISLEHURST  
(PREVIOUSLY PENNTHORPE)**



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*Una White and Joanna Friel, members of the Chislehurst Society History Group have researched the history of Pennthorpe, undertaken research through census and other available information, and were privileged to study the log books of the newly formed Mead Road School. The post-war stories presented here have been gleaned from the meticulous jottings of the various head teachers. The photographs are taken from the school's collection of old images of Pennthorpe.*



*Pennthorpe School (centre, right) and playing fields - an aerial view*

## **The Early Years**

Research indicates that originally the school in Mead Road was a house called Pennthorpe, designed by Ernest George c 1890. It is clearly shown on the 1895 map of Chislehurst West standing proud as one of only six houses in the road. What we can't establish is the reason for the name; it doesn't appear to be a place name or a family name of the first occupiers.

George was a nationally renowned architect, with a variety of styles, who worked with a succession of partners, Thomas Vaughan, Harold Peto and finally Alfred Yeates. He lived in Streatham. His work nationally includes the interior of Claridges Hotel, The Royal Academy of Music, Royal Exchange Buildings, and the crematorium at Golders Green Cemetery, where fittingly he was buried when he died in 1922 at the age of 83. He is also well known as an artist, mainly of street scenes in towns and cities across Europe.

Among his works in Chislehurst are Morley Cottages, a group of three, among the earliest Arts & Crafts houses in Chislehurst, and another house in Mead Road, Golden Mead.

It seems that the house was always used for educational purposes though the interior even today would suggest that George designed it with a family in mind, with its attractive entrance hall, staircase and drawing rooms.

In the 1891 census the house was occupied by Florence and Augusta Pearce, sisters from Richmond in Surrey. Both are listed as 'Schoolmistresses' and indeed Augusta, four years younger than Florence went on to run a school in another Victorian house, Westburton in Sidcup. Florence moved to become the Matron of the Manning and Anderdon Almshouses in Chislehurst, a stone's throw from Mead Road

The school was a boarding facility managed by a cook, doubling as a domestic servant and a housemaid. Three pupils are listed, eighteen year old Ethel Bailey from Peckham and then astonishingly fourteen year old Ethel Rowland from the Transvaal in South Africa and thirteen year old Elsie Young from Melbourne, Australia.

In 1901 Augusta was in charge along with teacher Sarah Fowler. Again there were three resident pupils, this time 19 year old Henrietta Davey from Worcester, twenty year old Mildred Munster from Streatham and thirteen year old Winifred Dod from St John's Wood. The age of the boarders begs the question, were the Pearce sisters running some kind of finishing school or domestic training establishment? Not an unlikely hypotheses given that Florence was now matron

at the Almshouses.

By 1911 Pennthorpe was still an educational establishment but now in the hands of Miss Albinia Arnstein from Birkenhead and Miss Louise Von Heinrig a German national from West Prussia. Albinia was 60 years old and described as the 'Head of Home School for Girls', Louise was 63 and an Assistant in school. An English teacher is also on the census, 31 year old Mary Wooler from Batley in Yorkshire. There were five female pupils ranging from 9 to 17 years of age. Two of the pupils were British nationals born overseas, namely India and Queensland, Australia. The house was managed by a cook and two housemaids; Pennthorpe was described as having 16 rooms.

The Strong's Street Directories continue to list Pennthorpe in Mead Road; in 1916 Miss Arnstein is still in residence. She would, by then, have been 67. By 1924 there is a change of name to Mr and Mrs Montague Eagle. According to a Ralph Hedderwick, a former resident of Chislehurst, he and his older sister were sent to the Eagles, with their cousin Patricia they were the only pupils until they were joined by Charlotte and David Moor-Allen who lived opposite the school. The pupils were taught in the first room to the left of the front door, where there was a table covered in a thick brown cloth and a number of chairs around it. Ralph describes Mrs Eagle as a tall, kindly woman with a pronounced stoop while Monty was nearly a head shorter, bald and wore prince-nez attached to his person by a thin chain to a hook behind his ear! He was a fussy man who often popped into lessons to speak to his wife.

Mrs A K Mason is listed as in residence in 1928 and Pennthorpe is clearly labelled as a school; however, here is a gear change, in 1929 Mrs Mason is the



*Common Room,  
Pennthorpe*

**Extract from the School's Prospectus issued by Herbert and Sydney Braby**

**Situation.**

*Pennthorpe School stands on high ground in a healthy situation, close to the Common, 1½ miles from Chislehurst Station (Southern Railway). The House is modern and on gravel soil. The Classrooms and Dormitories are bright and airy. There is a large garden with several lawns and an extensive playing field. There is also a large gymnasium for games, etc., in wet weather.*

**Aim.**

*The aim of the School is to combine as far as possible the customs of a good home with the discipline of School life. Boys are received from the age of 6 and are prepared for entrance to the Public Schools. The classes are small, thus enabling the teacher to give the boys the individual attention so necessary in their early years.*

**Curriculum.**

*The lessons include Scripture, English, Mathematics, Latin, French, History, Geography and Drawing. Class singing is taught by a visiting master. Lantern lectures are given during the autumn and winter terms.*

**School Hours, etc.**

*The morning hours are from 9.00 to 12/50, which includes a break of 20 minutes for Physical Drill and recreation. The afternoon hours are from 2.30 to 4.30. Games are played until 3.45. This is followed by a period of school work. Tea is at 4.30, followed by preparation from 5 to 6 in the senior forms. It is very desirable that the senior preparation be done at school under supervision. In the event of a boy being unable to stay to tea he is expected to do one hour's preparation at home. Boys in the junior forms will do half-an-hour's preparation according to their position in the school. This may be done at home if desired.*

**Games.**

*Games are played every day. Almost adjoining the School is a large playing field. All boys are expected to take part in games, which include Association football in autumn and winter terms, and cricket in the summer term. Boxing is taught by a competent instructor. There is swimming in the summer term and the use of a tennis court. Athletic sports are held in the summer term.*

**Boarders.**

*There is accommodation for about 20 boarders. Particular attention is paid to the health and feeding of the boys, which is under the supervision of the principals and the School matron. There is a plentiful supply of fresh vegetables and fruit from the garden. Entire charge taken of boys whose parents are abroad.*

**Attendance.**

*Boys are expected to attend School regularly. In case of absence a boy must, on his return, bring a note signed by a parent or guardian stating the cause of his absence. In the case of infectious illness a medical certificate must be sent to the School before the return of the boy. A Health Certificate is sent out at the end of every term and this must be returned, signed by a parent or guardian, on first day of term.*

**School Uniform.**

*Grey flannel Suits, Royal blue caps with School monogram in grey. Grey stockings with Royal blue tops. Royal blue blazers with School monogram in grey. The uniform is obtainable from Messrs. Daniel Neal and Sons, Ltd., 126 Kensington High Street, W.8., or can be ordered through the School. Grey flannel suits with trousers must be worn from the commencement of the term in which a boy's twelfth birthday occurs.*

Principal of a Preparatory School for Boys and the Eagles sold the emerging business.

A new school was founded in 1930 by the Braby brothers and Post Office Directories certainly confirm that Herbert Wilson Braby and his brother Sidney Gerald were in residence in Mead Road in 1930. The Braby brothers were the second and third of four brothers, the sons of a zinc merchant from Hampstead. Herbert was born in 1888 and Sidney in 1891. The brothers all served from the earliest days of The Great War with the Royal Army Medical Corps, perhaps they were ambulance orderlies as there is no evidence that they were medically trained. They all survived and lived into their eighties, Herbert dying in 1964.

The Braby brothers were reputed to be business men rather than academics and very soon a large building went up in the garden with a smooth wooden floor on which Ralph's younger brother was allowed to roller skate in the holidays!

We can see the accommodation from the Pennthorpe days; the accommodation is certainly not spartan and looks to be somewhat floral and feminine in style, a hangover from the girls' establishment perhaps.

The beauty of the story is that the educational legacy prevails to this day. It was the second war that wrought significant change to Pennthorpe. The Braby brothers evacuated the boys to Gibbons Mill near Rudgewick at the outbreak of war in 1939 and Pennthorpe was sold to the Local Authority to continue its educational tradition. Pennthorpe School still exists to this day, an independent prep school in Rudgewick Village, West Sussex and the motto continues *Non Nobis Solum Nati* – Born not for ourselves alone.



*The Large  
Classroom at  
Pennthorpe*

*The Study at  
Pennthorpe*



### **All Change Post War**

The local Chislehurst children attended the Annunciation School at Prickend, boys and girls being taught separately but on the same site, behind St Mary's Hall where Sainsbury's stands today. On August 4th 1944 the school suffered extensive war damage and a temporary infant school was set up at Pennthorpe which was to become Mead Road Infant School.

School life continued at Mead Road after the war. Unfortunately one teacher had been killed during the war years by enemy action and another teacher was given leave of absence when her husband returned from a German POW camp. The school closed for the VE Day celebrations.

In the following years there were a number of changes to school life. The government introduced the school milk scheme with each pupil receiving 1/3rd of a pint of milk each day. Medical checks became the norm for pupils. The school nurse frequently checked teeth, hearing, sight and heads! Even in those days there was quite an emphasis on safety and the local Fire Officer regularly attended the school to check all was well and the Village 'Bobby' also came to give talks to the children on how to safely cross roads and to never talk to strangers.

January and February 1947 brought severe weather lasting for a number of weeks and the school suffered flooding from the burst pipes. There was no central heating in those days, just individual heaters in each classroom.

School life had got itself into a good routine and some of the activities still exist today. In the summer term there were always the Open Days for prospective parents and pupils and the classrooms were thrown open so the pupils could also meet the children already there. Sports Day was always a popular highlight and being in July it also heralded the end of the school year.

Autumn term was notable for the Harvest Festival. The children were encouraged to bring items of food to make a lovely display. The fruits, vegetables and flowers were placed in baskets and eventually presented personally by the children to local deserving older residents within the community. This started as being about half a dozen baskets but each year the number of baskets grew.

A new temporary Head Teacher, Miss Bartholomew, came to Pennthorpe in June 1949. After that there was a re-structuring of the school with the parents being consulted regarding proposals to reorganise Junior and Primary Schools in Chislehurst. The meeting was held at Pennthorpe and by December 1950 Miss Bartholomew was appointed as permanent Head Teacher of the newly named Mead Road School which catered for infants.

### **The 1950s**

The new school term started in January 1951 with a massive drop in attendance due to a Flu epidemic which affected teachers and pupils alike. However, there were new proposals afoot and the year was notable by the introduction of school dinners. These were very popular and after just a couple of years in 1953 it became necessary to employ more staff.

The Coronation of our present Queen saw a joint production with Red Hill School of a Royal Coronation Pageant to be held at Red Hill School and this was followed by a Coronation tree-planting ceremony at Mead Road School, and there was then a hugely successful Coronation Party.

By January 1955 the new Edgebury School that was being built in the area was preparing to open its doors and admit local pupils. Unfortunately the opening



*The Pennthorpe  
Gymnasium*

was delayed by a few weeks, causing some overcrowding for three weeks at Mead Road. The pupils and teachers who were meant to leave Mead Road all had to be patient but eventually they moved to Edgebury.

During the years that followed there were all the usual activities such as Christmas Carol Concerts, Nativity Plays, Bring and Buy Sales, visits to local farms to see the animals, exhibitions at the Library etc. There were also a couple of minor break-ins at Mead Road, the target seeming to be the biscuits in the kitchen cupboard but on one occasion vandals damaged the climbing frame and scrambling nets in the school grounds.

Miss Bartholomew the Head Teacher resigned her post in July 1958 and in the September the new school year saw Miss Chapman appointed as the temporary Head, and she became the permanent Head in January 1959.

During the following years there were many notable events. A TV set was presented to the school - the first school in the area to have one. There was a new teacher from Australia on the staff. There was a joint venture with Red Hill School again, this time it was an Artwork & Handicrafts Exhibition and a boy from Mead Road won 3rd prize for his entry. Princess Margaret's marriage was celebrated not only by a day off, but there was Maypole Dancing on the Common too.

## **The 1960s**

By 1961 a constant flow of trainee teachers was given the opportunity to see how a small, traditional but well-run and forward-thinking school was still thriving amongst all the new comprehensive style schools that were becoming commonplace. By now there was a PTA. This was welcomed by all concerned and they were most successful in organising events such as running a School Fete in the school grounds. This event alone raised enough money to buy new curtains and all the necessary chairs for the school dining room.

The catchment area changed in 1964 and there was a rumour that Mead Road School was going to be closed down by the Local Authority. There was much confusion, and eventually the Council denied this was going to happen and wrote a letter to all parents to confirm this.

In the same year there was a massive measles epidemic and memorably the school Sports Day was 30% down, but the remaining pupils and parents still enjoyed the day.

A big improvement to the comfort of the pupils and staff was the installation of central heating.

## **The 1970s**

In July 1972 Miss Chapman resigned from her post and Mrs Pearson became the new Headmistress in January 1973. Many improvements needed to be made to the premises and facilities and the Local Authority's surveyors and architects were called upon to make an inspection and report back.

The usual round of school visits was diversified by the addition of trips to Crystal Palace Zoo, Lee Green Fire Station and the Woolwich Ferry.

The Christmas term reopened with 75 pupils as some families had moved away during the holidays. The Headmistress attended an educational course in London entitled "Five Infant Schools" of which Mead Road would be one, and this entailed the school being visited by 60 teachers. The School Roll increased to 78 pupils in January 1974. February brought very heavy snowfalls and extensive damage from trees having fallen in the high winds. The pupils and teachers struggled in as best they could.

The summer term brought a further increase in the Roll and there were then 85 pupils. The school, as part of its interaction with the local community loaned their Maypole to the Carnival Committee for the May Queen celebrations.

Following the inspection by the architects and surveyors in 1973 various



*The Hall and staircase*

improvements were made over the following years to the layout of the school with the upgrading of the electrical system, replacement carpets and curtains plus modern equipment. Computers were also introduced as teaching aids.

Before this work was begun there was another scare regarding the school's future, however, this time the parents were united in their efforts and apart from the petition that was handed in to the Council, they enlisted the help of their local Councillors with great effect. There was also much local support because Mead Road was recognised as being part of the community. It had been announced in June 1980 that Willow

Grove School was amalgamating with Red Hill School in September and Mead Road was determined to fight all the way to keep their school open.

### **The 1980s to date**

As part of the forward thinking of the school, there were various talks given by senior members of non-Christian faiths to the children and there was also a visit to the Indian Cultural Centre.

As another addition to extracurricular activities the PTA decided to organise a football club for boys and girls in 1981. In March there was a delivery of some new Science equipment. School outings continued to a wider selection of places such as the Natural History Museum, The Tower of London, Dover Castle and even a talk on Egypt and the Pyramids. The PTA was also active on the home front with work parties that cleaned and painted some of the classrooms as the school budget had been reduced by the cutbacks.

In 1985 Mrs Pearson set about improving facilities. She asked for permission to use one of the two flats at the top of the building for school purposes with a view to using the second flat similarly when it became vacant. An inspection was made by the Local Authority and the Headmistress got the permission she sought. The PTA fund was used for the purchase of a VCR with tapes and a rack system. There was still enough money to purchase some much needed gym equipment and landing mats. There was a great deal of internal work to be done when the second flat was available and Mrs Pearson visited the Civic Centre to discuss the format and usage of this extra flat.

Meanwhile there was also good co-operation with other schools in the locality.

*One of the dormitories  
at Pennthorpe*



Dorset Road School in Mottingham shared maths information and Midfield Primary and Edgebury collaborated on an Arts Festival which comprised various bands, soloists, choirs and ballet. It was all a great success.

In March 1986 the Queen visited Bromley and some children from Mead Road School were chosen to go to the Civic Centre to see her. During the same term there were many outings to places such as Greenwich to see the Cutty Sark, and there were still the old favourites such as Book Week when various authors came to talk to the children, a visit to Bromley Library and a talk from a book publisher.

Sponsored walks were always great fun and the Open Days for the new parents and pupils were always well attended. A Ballet Club was started. In October some of the older girls in the VI Form at Beaverwood School came to help for a half-day attachment for the remainder of the Term.

Headmistress, Miss Chapman, said after the redecoration of the interior in 1964/65 “The result of this was most delightful; bringing a sense of well-being to this house, placed so fortunately in such beautiful surroundings”, and in 1967 a Schools Inspector remarked that “it was the best Infant’s School he had ever seen, with its lovely setting”.

Our journey through the log books finishes as a new head is appointed, Mrs Wilkinson was Head from Sept 1988 and the current Headmaster is Mr Freese.



*Image from the school in 2014*