

The Royal Commercial Travellers School, Hatch End

THE ROYAL COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS SCHOOLS

An extract from the book by Ron Edwards

Travellers acting as intermediary between supplier and consumer of goods and services are as old as human society, but the phenomenal growth of industry, commerce and population during the 19th century greatly increased the numbers engaging in the profession. It was a competitive and hard life with the lure of great rewards if successful. In the words of George Moore, merchant and philanthropist who had started life as a commercial traveller

"They were the companions of my early struggles. I have always sympathised with them, I know the risks which they - v run, the temptations to which they are exposed, and the sufferings which they have to undergo. They spend most of their time away from their homes and families. They are exposed to every change in the weather from the heat of the summer to the storms of the winter. They are liable to be cut off by bronchitis and lung diseases.

Four years after Victoria became Queen another traveller, John Robert Cufficy from Ipswich, was involved in the inauguration of the 'Merchants & Travellers Insurance Association' and negotiated that 1/16th of any profits made should be set aside for founding a school for children whose fathers had died or were severely handicapped as a result of their work as commercial travellers. Again in the words of George Moore,

"When they [the Travellers] die in the service of their employers, what is to become of their children? They have been able to save but little money, for they are for the most part badly paid."

The method of entry to the Schools was by election at the Court of the Board of Governors, whereby prospective pupils nominated by sponsors were required to have collected sufficient votes from individual and association members, a system which continued in principle throughout the Schools' existence. The first Court in December 1846 saw twenty children elected for admission in 1847. The premises were formally opened on August 2nd 1847 with fourteen boys and six girls. Fifteen more children were elected in 1847 and a further thirty in 1848. By June 1849 there were eighty-six children resident, increasing to one hundred by 15

By 1852 there were 123 children on the roll and new premises were urgently required. George Moore and the Board thought a rarer house should be purchased for modification and expansion to allow for the increase in numbers.

 Opening of the School by Prince Albert 1855 However, suitable properties, were not available and instead twenty-four acres of surplus land were purchased from the London and North Western Railway Company adjacent to their line and station at Pinner (now Hatch End). The new building was planned for residential education purposes and was designed by G. Ousley Lane and Frederick W. Ordish of Birmingham following a national competition which attracted forty-nine entries. The foundation stone was laid on July 20th 1853 with an official opening on October 27th 1855 by the Prince Consort. According to contemporary reports this was a major social occasion in the district as it was attended by the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of the City of London and a further "fashionable assemblage" of friends and patrons of the institution. The occasion was initially marred by the late arrival of Prince Albert "owing to the mismanagement of the railways". The building, which no longer exists, must have appeared rather striking in the comparatively flat open landscape of the time, although the Woodridings Estate was being developed on the far side of the railway following the opening of the station in 1844. The building stood to the west of the present Elliott Hall, facing the railway and was demolished in 1967. Described by Thorne in his 'Handbook to the Environs of London (1876) as a "pleasing and commodious collegiate Gothic structure" and by Pevsner in his 'The Buildings of England: Middlesex' (1951) as "tall and bulky with Franco-Flemish gables and dormers" it could house three hundred children and staff and cost £25,447. The four-storey building had a ground measurement of about 400 by 40 feet and contained a hall on two floors, approximately 80 by 38 feet which main teaching areas and domestic quarters. Cellars accommodated kitchens, Matron's Room, staff dining room and storage facilities. The Building also contained a Board room, and manager's Dining Room. The hall, situated in the centre, divided the two Schools. The ground floor of the hall was used as dining rooms and was partitioned. The upper floor was known as the 'Great Hall' and had a high open-timbered roof. One wall had six two-floor-high arched windows with a large open-end fireplace opposite. The Great Hall was used as an Assembly

Room and main teaching area for the boys, and by the girls for prayer and scripture readings only. The girls' teaching room was on the ground floor at one end of the building. Relatively isolated as it was, the new school aimed at self-sufficiency. Water initially came from a 32-foot well from which could be pumped 20,000 gallons daily. There was a gasometer holding enough gas to light 100 lamps and a steam engine for cooking and water heating. Space heating was by open coal fires in all day rooms.  Main Building Interior 1855  George Moore Memorial Building & Infirmary 1878

New buildings and extensions began to be associated with named people. The dormitory extension of 1878 was named after James Hughes, President of Appeal in 1878, the infirmary block became known as the *'George Moore Memorial Building'* and the 1884 wing was named the *'Manchester Wing'*, the money having been raised in that city. 1890 saw the erection of a free-standing art and science block. 18 additional acres of ground had been purchased since the move from Wanstead which enabled the farm to be extended to the shape previously mentioned and also made provision for future playing fields. By 1886 the Schools were proud to report that there were 325 children on the roll, their buildings could accommodate 350, they owned 42 acres of freehold ground free of debt, and their annual income averaged £12-13,000. Great progress had been made in 40 years. The next building to be added was an additional wing for girls named after Henry Jones, whose wife laid the foundation stone in July 1908. The new wing was opened in 1909 and provided modern and much-needed separate facilities. The *'Henry Jones Gymnasium'* lying south of the Elliott Hall was opened in 1912.  Henry Jones Wing 1909  The New Dorms 1919A further major extension came when the *'Little Children's Dorms'* or *'New Dorms'* were opened in 1916. This building was alongside the Uxbridge Road and west of the Henry Juries Wing to which it was connected by a covered way. The building was in a pleasing semi-timbered style quite different in appearance to any of the earlier buildings. The foundation stone had been laid . T.G. Blackwell in memory of his father. Strangely, this building never became named *'Blackwell'*. Regrettably, the New Dorms and the Henry Jones Wing, which formed the basis of St. Theresa's R.C. School from 1967 were demolished at the end of 1990. Another extension to the main buildings of the Schools occurred after the First World War. In 1919 B.G. Elliott was largely instrumental in securing the Prince of Wales as President of Appeal and the consequent consent of King George V to use *'Royal'* as a prefix to the Schools' title. A tablet on the inner wall of the Elliott Hall reminds us that during this Festival Presidency of the Prince of Wales, as it became known, the sum of £35,000 was raised and used for the erection of a kindergarten block to the east of the Elliott Hall, a manual training workshop and the reconstruction of the Schools' kitchens. In 1929 the *'Fred CoyshSwimming Bath'* was opened, named after the President of Appeal for 1927.



Henry James Gymnasium 1912

Further extensions of buildings were to come before 1914. The first of these remains today as the main centre, since 1987, of the Harrow Arts Council. Bignell George Elliott had entered the Schools as a pupil in 1867 at the age of ten. His father was a traveller for a firm of timber merchants but had died at the age of 38. Bignell George left the Schools in 1872 and after working for a short period in the drapery and dry salting trades entered the timber trade, like his father before him. After three years he started his own business. He retained his interest in the Schools, becoming a Life Governor in 1881 and joining the Board of Management in 1894. He undertook to be President of appeal in 1901 and raised £14,000 for new buildings. This resulted in a hall with additional classrooms on two floors. It was designed by H.O. Cresswell and oriented east-west with the major part devoted to the assembly hall, which had an impressive open timber roof in a neo-Tudor style. The classrooms were at the east end. Timber was supplied by Elliott, the builder being J. Parnell & Sons. A commemorative stone was incorporated in the north wall with Masonic ceremony by Lord George Hamilton. 'the new building was officially opened at the 1905 Speech Day by T.E Blackwell, member of the well known family of Harrow Weald and Hatch End, and partner in the preserves company, Crosse and Blackwell. He was President of the Schools from 1898 to 1907.

