

LADY FRANCES ANNE ALWAYS TOOK AN INTEREST IN SEAHAM SCHOOLS

A FASCINATING picture was reproduced last week of the old coast road, intersected by a footbridge close to the area known, I believe, as "Bessie's Hole" and the buildings which, after all, were the first public baths. I found that these were mentioned about 1856 by Fordyce and so there is no doubt that they were used for bathing and not merely for washing linen, as has been suggested. We are now in the vicinity of the North and South Terraces, according to the plan drawn by John Dobson and William Chapman. The South Terrace project, however, hung fire and in 1831 William Chapman produced another plan to show the extent of the township's progress to date.

I am obliged to a pupil, David Reed of Bede Boys' Grammar School for a skilful reproduction of the whole setting. The area teems with interest which will, without doubt, be increased by numerous pictures of the old docks, steam and sail, buildings, long since vanished, former street scenes, the Londonderry Volunteers, railroads, collieries and their sad disasters, sporting events and many other items belonging to Seaham's eventful history. For these our gratitude to Mr J. C. Currie is profound.

Soon after the Crimean War, of which we shall hear more later of its bearing on Seaham, there were at least two boarding schools for young ladies, as well as a number of day schools

kept privately for boys and girls. The "National" School was in Church Street, opened, I believe, in 1848 and was under Government inspection. Perhaps we might profitably digress here awhile for a very brief summary of the types of education which prevailed before the advent of the board schools of 1870. Most children in the 18th Century did not go to school at all for there was no comprehensive (horrible word!) system of education in England. A number of charity

By
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schools, supervised by the S.P.C.K., taught the "three R's" and vocational interests to poor and orphan children with partial success but they soon ceased to flourish.

The grammar schools catered for the middle classes only, the main item in their curricula being classics. Public schools did the same for the upper classes. By the end of the 18th Century the grammar schools were declining and in the early 19th Century were often very sparsely attended. However, the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 opened the way to better progress and, thanks to the evangelical movement, a far greater interest in education arose, and in 1869 the Endowed Schools Act was passed whereby dor-

mant charitable funds helped to revive such moribund institutions and their curricula.

Soon the public schools found new life and fees from the wealth forthcoming from those enriched by the Industrial Revolution. Great headmasters such as Arnold, Butler, and Thring, left a trail of light behind them (post tenebras lux); but there was still no progressive system of education laid down for the children of the poor. When the charity schools ceased to function or were on their last legs, the Sunday schools, founded by Robert Raikes in 1780, performed yeoman service. Side by side with these were the Dame schools kept by old women who taught the "three R's" for a meagre profit in basements or garrets, as did the Common Day schools in certain large towns.

Here we come to the so-called "National" School, opened in 1848 in Church Street, Seaham. This type of school was a great step forward; in fact, those run by the National Society for those of the Anglican persuasion and those run by the British and Foreign Society for nonconformists were the only really effective schools for the education of the poor in the early 19th Century. Their system was the Lancaster or Bell method of a master aided by monitors, the master being responsible for the main teaching, the Monitors assisting in spelling and learning by rota.

Cramming

By the time the Seaham school was in operation, Government grants were available for education though religious differences were a barrier to the proposed maintenance of schools out of the rates. The Newcastle Commission had in 1858 already advised the setting up of Local Boards of Education, with powers to obtain finance for the rates—but all in vain. In fact, in 1860 a proposal was adopted to the effect that "teachers should be paid by examination results," a most iniquitous practice which often led to a mere cramming for examination set by the school inspectors.

One has only to read the old log books to realize the upset caused by the visit of an overbearing inspector. It was not until the Foster Education Act of 1870 that elementary education was controlled by local school boards, financed from the rates at first, but soon to be a "free for all" and with a religious teaching which was no longer denominational. So far as we are concerned here, the last step came in 1902, when under the Balfour Act the school boards relinquished their control for better or for worse—in favour of local education authorities.

Bleak Report

But to revert to the National School at Seaham, an inspection was held in 1853, when 139 boys and 186 girls took the examination. Incidentally, 38 boys and 34 girls had already left school before June 6 when the examination began! The report was bleak and, as usual, consisted of general observations. We read that the boys' department contained a good-sized room, but no classroom. Furniture, books, discipline and instruction were classed as "fair" only. The apparatus consisted of four blackboards and easels and two card stands.

The "three R's" were taught, with some geography, grammar and scripture. There was one master and two pupil teachers

or monitors. The master was responsible for five classes in all subjects. For the girls the report was similar except that they did possess a classroom but only one blackboard and easel. A perusal of this and other similar reports would seem to indicate that the Inspector set out to apportion blame rather than praise; possibly to conceal his own inadequacy for such commitments as well as to keep the salaries down.

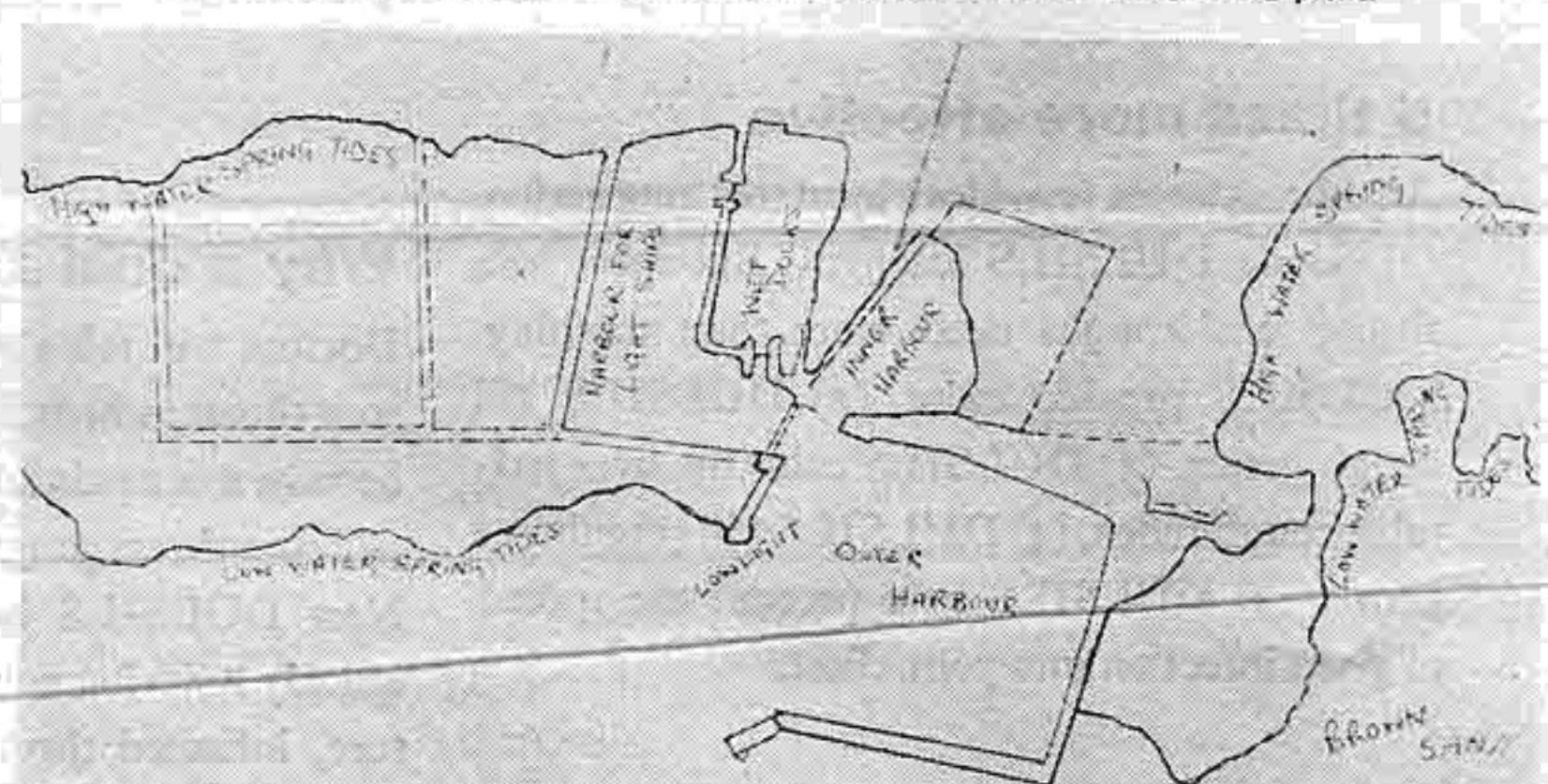
Here is a picture of the old school premises in Church Street as they were long ago. Compare it with a recent picture of the new Technical Grammar School, built just 116 years later and think of the present-day total of more than 5,000 children attending the 21 schools in this township under



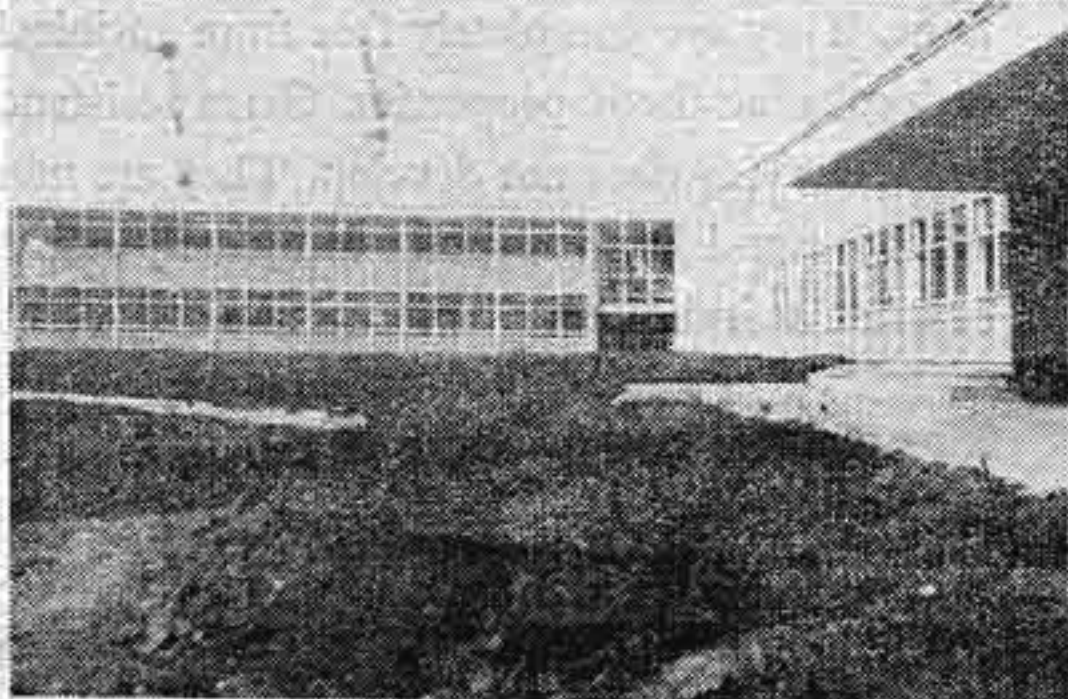
Church Street, Seaham Harbour, as it looked many years ago.



The old National School, Seaham Harbour, is seen on the left in this old print.



The modified plan for Seaham Harbour, produced in 1831 by William Chapman.



The new technical-grammar school at Seaham.



Along the North Terrace by the Masonic Hall.

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Church Street, Seaham Harbour, on a Sunday afternoon.

PLUMBER'S BEQUESTS

Mr Robert Gillon Adam, of Village Stores, East Murrton, retired plumber, who died on May 8 last, left £5,406 2s gross, £5,283 17s net value. (Duty paid £52). After family legacies, he left a fourth of the remainder each to Dr Barnado's Homes, St Dunstons, and the British Deaf and Dumb Association, and a fourth to the Marie Curie Memorial Foundation, for the general purposes of the new Cancer Home, Bentinck Terrace, Newcastle.

WATCH ASHORE

The Friendship concert party entertained the members of Sunderland Watch Ashore in the Y.M.C.A., Toward Road, last night. Mrs Hunt presided and special prizes were won by Mrs Hunt and Mrs Aitchison.

CHILD HURT

Joseph Moralee (8) received face injuries when he was struck by a car near his home in Portsmouth Road, Sunderland, yesterday. He was discharged after treatment at Sunderland Children's Hospital.

with pictures, old and new. Meanwhile, have you heard the true story of the Seaham woman who fell dead while she was making a cake for her husband, who all his life preserved a piece of the cake as a memorial of her? When he died in January, 1851, he left instructions that he should be buried beside her in his wedding suit, with the piece of cake in his pocket, in the cemetery of St John's Church. Seaham wives obviously knew the best way to a man's heart!

(To be continued)

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