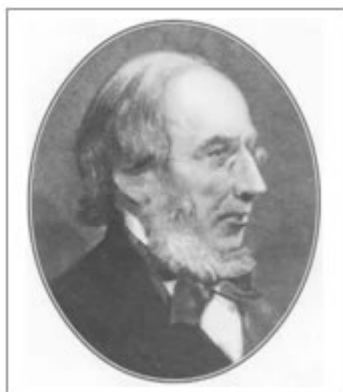


BFSS Archives Info sheet No. 4

Saffron Walden College

The British and Foreign School Society opened its last college in Saffron Walden in Essex in 1884. The movement to do so began in 1880 when a letter was presented to the BFSS Committee on 15th Oct 1880, from an “anonymous friend”, asking whether the Society would like to have another training college. The Secretary wrote back saying that the suggestion had been favourably received. The matter was referred to the Education Dept, which initially stated that no further provision was required for the training of teachers, but within a few months it was resolved that a training college specifically for training mistresses for Infant Schools would be a great gain. The BFSS agreed to maintain a new college with the help of a Government grant and any provision that the “friend” may make.



“Anonymous friend”

The benefactor was revealed to be Mr George Stacey Gibson of Saffron Walden, who agreed to give £10 000 plus 2 acres of land. Gibson, a Quaker, was the owner of the Saffron Walden and North Essex Bank, which later merged with other banks to become Barclays Bank.

The acceptance of Gibson’s very generous gift was approved at the BFSS General Meeting on April 25th 1882.

The College Building

The new college building was constructed of red brick and timber, and as in the case of Darlington College, in the shape of a letter H. It stood in 2 ¼ acres of grounds on the outskirts of Saffron Walden. On the ground floor were classrooms, a lecture hall, common rooms, a dining room and a kitchen. On the first floor was the Principal’s lodgings and the students’ dormitories. It was initially built to accommodate 50 students. The total cost of the building was estimated at about £15 000.



Source: *Educational Record*,

Oct 1884, p7

The first 40 students arrived in Jan 1884 and the public opening took place on May 17th 1884. Unfortunately George Stacey Gibson had died before the buildings were completed. Sir T. Fowell Buxton presided at the opening.

“New Wing” was opened in 1912, by which time numbers had risen to 62. Above its gym was much improved sleeping accommodation, popularly known as “Paradise”. Regulations limited the hours when students could go to their dorms. They had very little spare time, as on top of their studies they had domestic chores and compulsory afternoon walks. In 1932 the Memorial Library was opened (in memory of Miss Dunlop). There were many other extensions over the years.

Staff

The new college’s first principal was Alfred Bourne. Miss Steele and Miss Stoker were transferred from Stockwell College, the former to be Vice-Principal. The college was managed by a special committee appointed by the general committee of the BFSS.

Students

It was decided to admit three classes of students:

1. Queen’s Scholars who were to be received for a two years’ course of training.
2. Certificated acting teachers eligible for admission under Article 118b of the Code which read “The authorities of a College may propose to the Dept for admission without examination any certificated teacher who has not previously been trained during two years, and who wishes to enter the college for a year’s training, in the course prescribed for students of the second year”.
3. Private students, who were prepared to pay a fee of 40 guineas.

At the time of the inspection of the College in 1884 there were 35 students in residence; 27 were Queens’ Scholars taking the two year course, and 8 students taking the work of the 2nd year, 4 of whom were private students. By 1965 student numbers reached 285, and by 1968 the approved figure was 350.

Froebelian methods

The original purpose of the college was to train kindergarten teachers in Froebelian methods. By transferring Miss Steele from Stockwell College the BFSS hoped to extend the work she had already started there. Succeeding principals ensured that the reputation of the College in its work with young children was maintained. In 1889 a portfolio of kindergarten work from the college was sent to the Paris Exhibition., and from 1927 – 1948 the final examination was conducted in association with the National Froebel Foundation. In 1894 the training was extended to include work with juniors. From 1961 students could train for the 9 – 13 age range and in 1972 training for the nursery age was added.

Practical teaching was very important. Attached to the College was a small practising kindergarten. From 1901 the new South Road School acted as the practising school. Other schools in the neighbourhood were also used for practice and observation. Strong links were made with children and the townspeople. In 1912 Miss Frodsham established a play centre in College, and during WW2 expectant mothers and their children were evacuated there.

Closure

Changes in the national provision of teacher training sadly led to the closure of Saffron Walden College in June 1977. The site was leased to the Bell Educational Trust until August 2007, and was subsequently sold.