

Kibble - A Lasting Legacy

Oral History



1859 - 2009



Kibble

www.kibble.org

Introduction

Supported by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, Kibble's Lasting Legacy history project has used a range of methods to explore the school's history and development since its establishment in 1859. Research of our archive records and other written sources has been complemented by oral history research. This is an important strand of the project for a number of reasons:

- It expands on the often rather 'dry' factual information found in written records
- It allows the human stories of those who have had contact with Kibble to be preserved and re-told
- The stories provide different perspectives on similar issues over a lengthy time period
- These stories provide warmth, pathos and humour, often absent from written records

Interviewees:

We have recorded the stories of people associated with Kibble from as far back as the late 1940s. Interviewees have included:

- Retired and long-serving Kibble staff (Education, Instructors, Care, Domestic)
- Retired and long-serving professionals from the wider Approved Schools system
- Former pupils
- Family member of former headmasters



Elaine and Bob Burniston

The Stories/Themes:

Living, Accommodation – from dorms:

'The dorms were just horrible places – fluorescent lights up...Och it was horrible and I couldn't understand anybody thinking that was a way to live.'

(David Speirs, Electrical Instructor from 1984, Principal Teacher, Science and Technology until 2008)

'...in my time here you were a' in the wan dormitory. The dormitory stretched fae wan side of the building tae the other side...em...but good time an' a'. We used to sit up at night and in the summer time the windows were open and all the young girls used tae run by and shout up...'C'mon, c'mon doon! C'mon oot! We're hae'in a good time here!'

(William Anderson, Kibble pupil 1948-1951)

...to 'des res' units:

'...and it was he, Peter, who had the foresight to think in terms of units...he was instrumental in having that built (the first residential unit), with the idea of adding to it and eventually of course, the old school got demolished and was replaced by housing.'

(Robin Hall, Assistant Governor of Polmont Borstal 1965-1968, Deputy Headmaster of Kibble 1968-1971, Headmaster of Thornly Park Approved School 1971-1981, speaking of Peter Gardner, Headmaster of Kibble, 1952-1982, who instigated a shift from institutionalised living to small, residential units)

'I was stunned, absolutely stunned. I just couldnae believe it was the same place.'

(William Anderson, Kibble pupil 1948-1951, speaking of seeing the new campus and accommodation for the first time)

The Stories/Themes:

Morag McLean worked at Kibble between 1974 and 1999 and had a dual role, divided between teaching and caring duties. She recalls that when she worked night shift in her unit she was the only member of staff on duty to look after twenty-four boys but this was rarely problematic:

'There was no night man. Stuart Connell lived in the wee cottage at the end of Mossedge, which is now used as a unit, near the education building, and if anything happened the boys would just go and knock on his door. The night men were up at the main school and were supposed to come and take a walk down during the night... but the boys were wonderful, they were brilliant. There was a line and they knew that they couldn't cross that line and they treated you with respect.'

'It could be anything up to sixty boys with only two (night) staff. My name was David Copperfield at that time – we worked miracles (Laughter).'

(Michael Smith, Night Care Officer, 1973 – 2005)

This is in stark contrast to today's very high staff to boys ratios at Kibble. Jean Lang's father George Gardner was Headmaster at Kibble from 1928-1952. She grew up in the Headmaster's house, which was attached to the school, from the age of five, so has a different perspective on living at Kibble:

'I just remember that we were so integrated into it in a way because there was just that door that separated the family from the school. Just an ordinary door. And then you went down the passage; Dad's office on the left and the Board's Room was on the right... Well, it was cramped. I mean there were four of us (children). I wouldn't say it was ideal because everybody could easily stride in, and that went on for ages. And I felt definitely for...looking back, my mother must have had an awful feeling of no privacy. You know, but that's the way it was.'

Catering – nowadays, the boys are offered (and, indeed, often request) a more balanced and healthy diet but this wasn't always the case:

'...a thing the boys used to call 'cat pie'; it was made up wi' luncheon meat, a wee drop o' milk, eggs and onions...and you lined the puff pastry and put this gooey mess over it. It actually tasted lovely.'

(Linda McDade, Domestic Staff 1976-present, speaking of school meals in her early days of working at Kibble)

Learning

In Kibble's earliest days and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the educational emphasis was on 'The Three Rs': Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Our first Kibble admissions register (1859-1880) records high levels of illiteracy and the school attempted to address this issue. However, the main focus for most of the twentieth century was on vocational skills training.

'...when a kid first came in, he spent six weeks in the schoolroom...there was only one teacher in the Kibble at that time.'

(Sam Hill, Carpentry Teacher at Kibble 1963 – 1995)

'Mr Leggatt was the joiner shop master who taught me a considerable amount. He was a very exacting woodworker who did everything properly and with patience. Something which I am doing now, having just renovated a complete house after gutting it completely...I watched Mr Leggatt over quite a lengthy time, work on a teak garden gate and of course it turned out to be gorgeous. That taught me quite a lot.'

(Bob Burniston, Kibble pupil 1956-1958. Now living in Canada, retired Toronto Police Fitness Co-ordinator and champion amateur athlete)

'Cause things were heavily, heavily work orientated. And then it started getting gradually less like that and they started taking on more academic teachers.'

(Boyd McNicol, Art Teacher at Kibble 1979-1999)

Boyd refers (above) to a major change that began in the 1980s, leading to the introduction of Standard Grade courses in the early 1990s. These changes signalled the beginning of a shift away from a traditionally vocational emphasis:

'There wasn't the education system in the school when I first started and this has built up gradually with more education for the boys. That really began to change around 1980, you could really see a difference then – the focus changed towards education. However they still had their vocational training with Sam Hill, David Speirs, and the plumber.'

(Morag Mclean, Teaching and Care Staff 1974-1999)

Learning

'I couldn't believe the change; I hardly recognised any of it. I was blown away with the changes - even the trees have grown. It's great that the boys can study towards achieving their Standard Grades now as well. I think that is brilliant.'

(Richard Mussenden, Kibble pupil mid-1980s)

In more recent years, renewed recognition of the value and benefits to young people of skills training means that it has again become a focus. Kibble has once more been innovative in its approach, with its KibbleWorks programme of a range of training and employment opportunities within a diverse selection of small social enterprises:

'And now we've taken a step back, and everything that's happening in KibbleWorks, again, as I said before it's not new; we've done it all before, it's just that we chose to walk away from that and leave it. And we did ourselves a great disservice there and I'm glad to see there's some kind of resurgence in this hands-on work experience... And I think that's...is it Tom Farmer and Tom Hunter are both putting grants down for young folk to go and do their Skills for Work? It's a huge big 'buzz' now; we did it years ago - ahead of the times once again.'

(David Speirs, Electrical Instructor from 1984, Principal Teacher, Science and Technology until 2008)

Enterprise

Early sources of vocational training and enterprise included shoemaking, tailoring, farming and market gardening – perhaps ironic since so many of our earliest residents were sent here for stealing shoes, clothing and/or food! These activities allowed a measure of self-sufficiency for the school, as well as training for boys and enterprising sources of income.

'And then the Kibble was virtually self-sufficient, as far as food was concerned. We had the farm...they had huge greenhouses that grew all the tomatoes and peppers...everything...we had two huge henhouses and a herd of dairy cattle. And we also rented a field down at Beith where we kept beef cattle.

And every Friday, they used to sell the produce and you would have folk fae all over the Short Roods, Springbank Road, Greenock Road area. They were down there wi' prams, bogeys – everything. And they used to go in there and they used to get cabbage, turnip, carrots, big bag of tatties, you know? £2 or somethin', you know, a pound, two pound... pure fresh, I mean it was just pulled out the ground. It was only probably cut that morning or the morning, you know, the day before. But och it was amazin'...whit they made off it paid for whit they didnae have, you know for food within the school.'

(Sam Hill, Carpentry Teacher at Kibble 1963-1995)

Enterprising activities were not limited to sale of produce; services were also provided to the community. This was particularly true with regard to farming, with boys going out to work on neighbouring farms:

'But I took every opportunity that was going in thae days; I took a' the workin' opportunities. I took...I was workin' on a farm. I went and done the tattie pickin' and I managed tae get the job on the farm.'

(Matt McCartney, Kibble pupil 1974-1976, Kibble staff member 2000 -2008, firstly as a Classroom Assistant and subsequently Mechanics Instructor)

1859 - 2009

Recreation and Sport

Recreational and sporting activities were fairly limited in Kibble's past, largely due to financial constraints, so staff had to be creative in planning these:

'Physical Education was non-existent, but the School had an excellent football team, even with those huge clod hoppers we were issued with in the beginning.'

(Bob Burniston, Kibble pupil, 1956-1958. Now living in Canada, retired Toronto Police Fitness Co-ordinator and champion amateur athlete)

'...you'd probably finish up with maybe about twenty-five, thirty kids every weekend in the school, you know? And we had five/six staff to occupy these thirty kids over the weekend and that's when, you know, taking them sailing, hill-walking, football, billiards – we had a big billiard room.'

(Sam Hill, Carpentry Teacher at Kibble 1963-1995)

'.. that was quite difficult 'cause there was no money about...we had free passes to get into the swimming, but that was like the top 'thing', if they went swimming. ...or you went on a van run, that was the next most popular, just out, touring about in the van. Just anywhere you wanted to go just to get these kids out. We would provide badminton for them or, at that time we had computers, if you'd like to call them computers – it was the old BBC computers and the only thing I can remember, it was 'Chucky Egg', that was the game, and it was the only game we had in the school. So, that was their activities in the evening and they weren't allowed to not take part.'

(Jean Logan, Residential Social Worker at Kibble from 1986, currently Online Assessor at Kibble's Learning Zone)

Recreation and Sport

Michael Smith worked at Kibble as a Night Care Officer from 1973 – 2005. He told us about recreational trips to Inverbeg with boys and also recalls the lack of money for activities:

'There are smashing rock pools there- big, deep rock pools - and there are big, lovely cliffs. And the pastime was to go up there and find the highest part and we all had this jump, and we (staff) had to do it as well. I must admit, I wisnae enamoured at doing it but I did it. We took them up there and was reminded that there was to be no jumping off the rock face into the pool. So we got there and I said, "Now remember, you've no' tae jump aff the rock face". And the boys said, "Aye, that'll be joking", in their inimitable fashion. It was just at that transitionary period when people we thought were interfering with the fun. But you never had a lot of money, you just went for a day out and you thought, "How do we occupy them?" You cannae go along the fields, picking daisies or throwing stones in the water. These are boys who need a lot to be doing. These were the things that were done, and it was hard to break away fae that. Although we did discourage them...me, I took a dim view of curtailing a lot of activities, like building fires on the beach and things like that, 'cause that's what boys dae – even in my seventies, even old boys (Laughter)



Recreation and Sport

Although nowadays, many such activities would be ruled out due to Health and Safety regulations, there is a wide range of recreational and sporting activities on offer to pupils, as well as greater recognition and acknowledgement of the learning opportunities that these can provide:

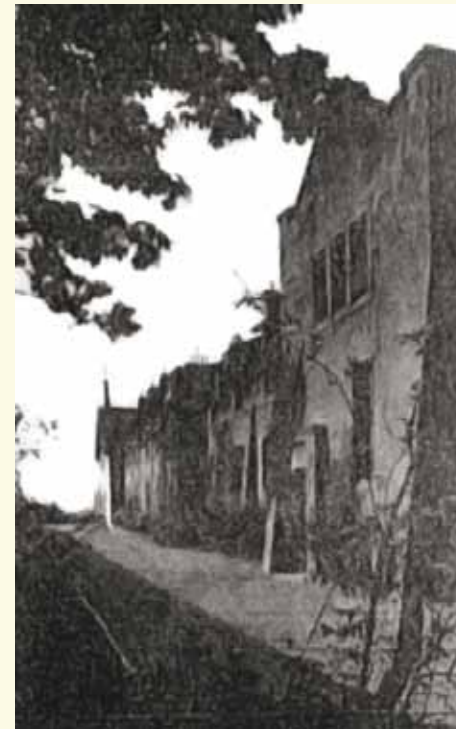
'...it's absolutely fabulous because it brings in all sorts of things like their fitness, the skill of actually negotiating some of these trails in the forest, reading a map... eh...taking a shot at the responsibility of being the leader. I always say the slowest guy is actually the guy who determines the pace, not the fastest guy, so they have to take responsibility for setting a suitable pace. And then again, they're out in the wilds and they're looking at things, and they'll often stop and say, "Check it out – there's an eagle sitting on that post over there". Yes, and... say we stop for lunch and maybe somebody throws a crisp packet away and you get somebody who has been with us before and you just say to them, "Okay, what's the message to that person?"
"Pick it up. The only thing we leave around here is footprints."

(David Speirs, Electrical Instructor from 1984, Principal Teacher, Science and Technology until 2008, discussing mountain biking in Queen Elizabeth Forest Park)



Conclusion

These are just a few examples of oral history stories about Kibble. Many more will be available on the Lasting Legacy website www.kibble.org/history.



Old school building



Current school building



1859 - 2009

If you are interested in finding out more about the oral history of Kibble, or perhaps you would like to contribute to it by telling your own story, please contact:

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