A Study of Britain's Free Schools, 1970-1977.

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FREE SCHOOLS 1970-1977

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SUMMARY

This is a study of Britain's free schools. It covers the period between 1970 and 1977, during which time most of the schools were started and closed.

The Introduction to the study introduces the schools and describes, very briefly, the "movement" that grew for a short period, in Britain.

The Review of the Literature summarizes the major publications about free schools, referring primarily to both those books that were critical of state education systems in the U.S.A. and included among their chapters references to free schools in that country; and the few books that have been written that deal exclusively with free schools.

Part I of the study provides a detailed history of each of Britain's major free schools.

Part II provides an evaluation of free schools, under the following chapter headings: What Do Free Schools Teach?; Evaluating the Free Schools, included under which heading are brief assessments of each school, and summaries of the roles played by the Department of Education and Science, local education authorities, and the press.

Part III describes the various attempts that have been made to co-ordinate free school activities.

In Volume II, Appendix I is a diary kept by the author while he visited and worked in various free schools. Appendix II contains all the supporting materials (letters, newspaper articles, unpublished essays, etc.) collected by the author while compiling the study.

Introduction

A study of schools is a study of the ways by which we attempt to mould the minds of our children. Schools are the instruments with which we shape children in our own image. Organized in such a way as to ensure that certain values and behaviours will be taught -- by force if necessary -- schools condition children.

Britain's education system, like those of many other countries, was established by an Act of Parliament little more than a century ago, having haphazardly emerged prior to that time from a variety of religious, political, and economic origins: the Court of Queen Elizabeth I, Oxford and Cambridge, anti-monasticism, the Guilds, the Poor Laws, The Royal Society, the S.P.C.K., Sunday schools and factories. The system that eventually emerged from the singular activities of these various agencies has not precluded the occasional appearance of what are currently referred to as "alternative schools" -- small, independent schools run on shoestring budgets by individual teachers, preachers, social workers and aspiring politicians, who seek, like their predecessors of earlier centuries, to make better provision for specific groups of children, and in doing so, to either supplement the established system, separate from it, or radically change it. They have had, over the past two decades, their heroes and philosophers; they have produced their pamphlets and bulletins; on occasion they have been subjected to the scrutiny of the state school system with which most are in constant conflict. In much the same way that earlier independent elements influenced the total practice of education,

alternative schools have made their mark - by no means startling, and almost certainly less than their proponents had hoped for, but a mark nonetheless, revealing some of the shortcomings of the established state school system and providing models for the education and nurturing of deprived and upset inner-city children; and also indicating by their own demise within a decade, their frailty and vulnerability when confronting a publicly supported point of view about education that took five-hundred years to evolve.

Some of these alternative schools took upon themselves the title "free" - a label defiantly clung-to in those heady, early days of the late-1960's when they openly flaunted the state school system, but hurriedly dropped a decade later when they were humbled by their own collective inability to live up to it. Preceded by Summerhill in their own country, and by a multitude of far more relevant street schools and community schools in North America, this handful of British free schools took on the state education system, and, in terms of their own expectations, lost.

This is a study of those ten schools: how and why they ever began, how they functioned, what was thought and said and written about them, and how, in most cases, they eventually disappeared.

A Review of the Literature

The literature about free schools falls into four categories: books that in criticising American public education, refer to free schools; books - few in number - specifically about free schools; books that in discussing de-schooling refer to free schools; and various magazine and journal articles that comment upon either free schools in general or the current problems of one particular school. A detailed analysis of these latter journal, magazine and news articles has been incorporated into Chapter 3 of Part 11 of this study, so this review is concerned only with relevant books.

Almost everything written about free schools is set within the context of a problem. With titles like Death at an Early Age, How Children Fail, School Is Dead, and Free the Children, each one of which reads like a protest-march slogan, the American books that provided British free school advocates with their models, address one overwhelming problem: the inadequacy and inequality of the American public school system. Dramatic and accusing, often bitter, these books have been best-sellers in the United States. One author, Everett Reimer, became director of the alternative schools project at Ivan Illich's Centre for Intercultural Documentation in Cuernavaca, Mexico; another, Dr. Paul Goodman, was one of the country's most respected educators.

The appeal of these writers to aspiring British free school teachers and to critics of state education, was simple enough: their descriptions of their own monolithic, puritanical public education system as a cumbersome and often insensitive machine in which, as John

Holt put it, "children learn to be stupid", was vibrant, rebellious reinforcement of A.S. Neill's Summerhill. And, at a time in the history of Britain's largest cities when economic hardship and unemployment added coals to the smouldering fires of truancy and disillusionment with the promises that suburban security was an inevitable result of schooling, there were enough young and angry students, teachers and parents, for the free schools to begin appearing.

The radical educators' Bible in the early 1960's was Paul Goodman's Compulsory Miseducation. Describing public assumptions about the necessity for twelve years of schooling as "mass superstition", Goodman systematically analyzed primary, secondary and college education from the students' point of view, questioning the logic that assumed that all children should be in school; describing junior high-schools as "sexless", and calling compulsory education "a universal trap". In recommending reforms he suggested that it "might be worthwhile to give the Little Red Schoolhouse a spin under modern conditions";[1] and that class attendance be voluntary "in the manner of A.S. Neill's Summerhill".[2] He described "authentic progressive education" as having "moved into new territory - the territory being Summerhill";[3] and he referred to an emerging alternative school in New York as "a Summerhill in the slums". Wondering what is important to Youth, he suggested that

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[1]Goodman, Paul. Compulsory Miseducation. (New York, Vintage, 1962), p.33.

[2]Goodman, op.cit., p.33

[3]Ibid., p.45.

technology is probably best learned by apprenticeship as a new subject, "the humanity of science", and that a new model for secondary and tertiary education could be found in the Danish Folk Schools.[4] It was observations such as these and references to Summerhill and the Danish Folk Schools, which are also known as "friskoler", or "free schools", that made Compulsory Miseducation popular among dissatisfied parents, teachers and students in Britain.

During the years 1964 and 1965, two years after Compulsory Mis-Education was published, an untrained, inexperienced substitute teacher named Jonathan Kozol, found himself teaching in a segregated classroom in Boston, Massachussetts. Kozol's description of the part of those two years that he spent teaching for the Boston School Board was published in 1967 under the title Death At An Early Age. A passionate indictment of an intensely racist school system, the book had a particular appeal to the British. Kozol wrote in the Preface to the Penguin edition.:

> Many of us in America viewed with interest and alarm the recent developments in Great Britain occasioned by the words of Enoch Powell.
>
> Up to this time I think that a majority of my fellow citizens felt pretty much convinced that our own nation held something of a monopoly on racism....Now we make our way through the thin-paper airmail editions of The Times and The Guardian and The Observer, and suddenly we understand that we are not alone....
>
> If the people of the British Isles are going to have a chance to spare themselves this demonstration (of racial tragedy) they are going to have to move with speed and act with wisdom.[5]

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[5]Kozol, J. Death At An Early Age. (Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 13-14.

In Death At An Early Age, Kozol spent little time reflecting or speculating on what could be. Instead, he simply described what it was like for black children in Boston's public school system. His graphic descriptions of confused children and tight-lipped, nervous teachers, portrayed a school system far worse than anything in Britain. However, the book appeared in Britain at a time when radical tensions were growing. If radical and disenchanted urban educators could not at that time identify similar schools in their own cities, they could speculate about the violence and mistrust that could develop. Thus Death At An Early Age identified for many concerned teachers and parents a world to be avoided at all costs, and peripherally, added to speculation about the value of state schools, especially for deprived children.

John Holt's book How Children Fail was published in the same year that Jonathan Kozol first entered the teaching profession, and launched its author on a personal journey through education that has made him one of the most widely read critics of American Schools, and next to A.S. Neill, the most populat writer among radical educators against state schools: that most children fail in school either because they drop out, or because they learn little for all the time they put in. Holt's condemnation of the American public school system was absolute, and in his intitial statement as to why

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children fail in school his words were, to some people, as easily applied in Britain as they were in the United States: "They fail because they are afraid, bored and confused."[6]

The significance of How Children Fail to those few people in Britain who would, within a year or two, start free schools, was that it was a very personal book. Devoid of supporting references and footnotes, it read like the diary of a young teacher looking at the education process from his pupils' point of view, and finding it sadly wanting in quality. It was a book full of questions: for example:

> Intelligence is a mystery. We hear it said that most people never develop more than a small part of their latent intellectual capacity. Probably not; but why not? Most of us have our engines running at about ten percent of their power. Why no more?
>
> What turns the power off, or keeps it from ever being turned on?[7]

Holt's thesis is that living depends upon a different set of behaviours from those assumed by a school. Children who drop out of school may do so because they cannot live with the opposing demands that school and life seem to make upon them. Children who stay in school and adapt to its ways learn a set of inappropriate behaviours. Thus children fail: some living with the stigma and social disadvantage of having dropped out; and while others youthful energies were dissipated in useless learning.

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[6]Holt, John. How Children Fail. (New York: Dell, 1964), p. 15.

[7]Ibid., p. 25.

Holt is particularly interested in the strategies children use to learn or to get through a day in school:

> Children are often quite frank about the strategies they use to get answers out of a teacher. I once observed a class in which the teacher was testing her class on the parts of speech. On the blackboard she had three columns headed Noun, Adjective and Verb. As she gave each word she called on a child and asked in which column the word belonged.
>
> Like most teachers, she hadn't thought enough about what she was doing to realize, first, that many of the words given could fit into more than one column; and secondly, that it is often the way a word is used that determines what part of speech it is.
>
> There was a good deal of the tried and true strategy of 'guess and look', in which you start to say a word, all the time scrutinizing the teacher's face to see whether you are on the right track or not. With most teachers no further strategies are needed. This one was more poker-faced than most, so 'guess and look' wasn't working very well. Still the percentage of hits was remarkably high, especially since it was clear to me from the way the children were talking and acting that they hadn't a notion what Nouns, Adjectives and Verbs were. Finally one child said "Miss, you shouldn't point to the answer each time." The teacher was surprised and asked what she meant. The child said, "Well, you don't exactly point, but you kind of stand next to the answer." This was no clearer since the teacher had been standing still. But after a while as the class went on I thought I saw what the girl meant. Since the teacher wrote each word down in its proper column, she was in a way getting herself ready to write, pointing herself at the place where she would soon be writing. From the angle of her body to the blackboard, the child picked up a subtle clue to the correct answer.[8]

What Holt demonstrated with such observations, was that children do not view school in the same way that teachers do.

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[8]Holt, op.cit., p. 37.

> The conscientious teacher thinks of himself as taking his students on a journey to some glorious destination, well worth the pains of the trip....
>
> For children the central business at school is not learning, whatever this vague word means; it is getting daily tasks done, or at least out of the way with a minimum of effort and unpleasantness.[9]

Holt accused schools and teachers of making children stupid:

> What happens as we get older to (our) extraordinary capacity for learning and intellectual growth?
>
> What happens is that it is destroyed and more than by any other thing, by the process that we misname education.[10]

John Holt has had an interesting career in education since 1960. He began as a teacher, then became a critic of the education system, then an advocate of and spokesman for free schools, and finally, after working with Ivan Illich, a passionate deschooler in which capacity he is currently as suspicious and condemning of free schools as he once was of public education. In the late 1960's, when his book was being widely read in Colleges of Education across Britain, he was considered to have identified in his American pupils the same confusions and sufferings that some educators felt Britain's schoolchildren were going through.

In 1971, Everett Reimer published School Is Dead, a book whose mood is similar to Holt's, but whose references are broader than North American schools. Reimer, an associate of Ivan Illich, pushed the

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[9] Ibid., p. 47.

[10] Ibid., p. 208.

growing attack on schools all over the world, almost to its limit, at approximately the same time that Illich was completing his proposals for a different approach to the definitions of schooling, Deschooling Society. School Is Dead is a good supplement to How Children Fail. Global statistics showing how few children attend school, and Latin American examples in the same vein as Holt's memoirs, conclude that "A little schooling can induce a lot of dissatisfaction." Beginning his attack with a "Case Against Schools", and following that with a description of what schools, in his opinion, do to children - i.e., indoctrinate them, having "a pernicious effect upon cognitive learning" - Reimer gradually unveils his arguments in support of a search for alternatives to schools. He searches into the past for the origins of schooling; and compares them with religious institutions and governments as examples of broken promises.[11] He asks if it is in fact possible for us to have democratic institutions, pointing out that "The history of institutions is the history of domination".[12]

In suggesting alternatives, Reimer presents free school supporters with a problem. All that he writes about state schools would be acceptable to an aspiring free school teacher; but for Reimer the free school is essentially just another school.[13] Reimer is more interested in freedom from schools than in freedom within schools. Citing Friere as an example of a teacher whose starting point was his pupils' actual

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[11]Reimer, E. School Is Dead, (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 69.

[12]Ibid., p. 81.

[13]See also, Lister, I. Deschooling, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

needs rather than his own assumptions about those needs, Reimer attempts to assess what it is that people actually need to know. He concludes that a useful education system would be one that was instrumental in the development of a just world, allowing people to discover how human values are created and how others live:

> Basic educational policy needs to be concerned with providing universal access to only this much learning....basic educational policy must guarantee not only freedom of access but an adequate supply of the resources required for everyone to learn how society really works.[14]

School is Dead bridged a gap over which many free school apologists were straddled. It unequivocally propounded the death of school in a society crying out for something more meaningful, moving beyond Holt's complaints, and providing a more clearly-defined context for free schools. It was Reimer and Illich who proposed the alternative to free schools, thereby placing them in the same defensive position relative to de-schooling in which they had sought to place state schools relative to themselves.

By the time Holt and Reimer had published their books, free schools had sprung up all over the United States, and the first books describing individual schools emerged. The best-known, providing a model for urban alternatives, in Britain, was The First Street School, by George Dennison, a reflective description of the daily life of a New York street school.[15] How To Start Your Own School, written by a group of free-school supporters calling themselves "Rasberry" was the next to be published, and this was

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[14] Reimer, op.cit., p. 103.

[15] This book is dealt with extensively in various parts of the study, particularly in Part II, Chapter 1, "What Do Free Schools Teach?"

followed by Jonathan Kozol's Free School in which he describes the growth and day-to-day life of the New School in Boston - an alternative school for the same children whose fate he had so graphically described in Death At An Early Age. Shortly after this Alan Graubard's Free The Children was published. This book, like the one produced by "Rasberry", is primarily a reference book of American free schools. It is a somewhat flamboyant book, particularly in terms of some of its dramatic assertions, such as "The American system of public education is in very big trouble".[16] True, perhaps, but a hackneyed observation by that time - and a chapter titled "Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom", heralding a description of many free schools, and more than a little naive in its unconditional support for them. Graubard's book has never been as popular or useful to British free school supporters, as have those by Holt and Goodman and Dennison. The same may be said of "Rasberry's" guide to free schools. An accusation which seems to hold water is that some free schools have been created essentially to meet the temporary personal needs of their creators, whose stunted growth has somehow emerged from the dark, and been temporarily awakened by a first reading of Summerhill. Almost like games - personal releases for born-again radicals - these are the schools that flickered on and off in major American cities, or in exclusive rural retreats. Kozol describes them as possibly having "some pedagogic value or some therapeutic function....for the heartsick or disoriented son of a rich man", but not in the least corresponding to his idea of "struggle and survival in the streets and cities".[17] Graubard's book

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[16]Graubard, A. Free The Children, (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p. vii.

[17]Kozol, op. cit., p. 59

reminds one of those particular schools, which have no more relevance to the children of Islington or Barrowfield than they do to Jonathan Kozol.

It is interesting to note that by the time Britain's first three or four free schools had been started, several hundred were operating in America. Books by Holt, Reimer, Illich, Goodman and Kozol had been in print for several years. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that literature about Britain's free schools is very sparse, and involves only five writers, three of whom have only peripherally dealt with free schools. One of these three writers is Leila Berg, one of the founders of Children's Rights magazine. Berg has written two books about education, one of which tells the extraordinary story of Michael Duane, ex-Headmaster of Risinghill Comprehensive School in London, who was dismissed by the London County Council after attempting to relax what he considered to be the oppressive discipline of the school. Duane, long a follower of A.S. Neill, has spent much of his time since his dismissal promoting the cause of free schooling through the A.S. Neill Trust.[18] Risinghill, Death of a Comprehensive School is to London what How Children Fail and Compulsory Miseducation were to the United States: an indictment of a sterile and archaic education system under whose authority many of the children of Islington were no happier than those described by Jonathan Kozol in Boston.

With five collaborators, two of whom were A.S. Neill and Michael Duane, Leila Berg produced a book entitled Children's Rights in 1971.

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18 A description of the founding and operation of the A.S. Neill Trust is included in Part III of this study.

It is an edited collection of essays about the rights - or lack of them - of children, and the purpose of education. In the book Berg confines herself to an essay briefly sketching the personal histories of fighters for children's rights, included among whom are Dennison, Goodman, Neill, and Duane. In other essays Neill and Duane discuss in fairly general terms the ways in which freedom worked at Summerhill, and the relationship between freedom in education and the established state school system - a subject close to Duane's heart.

Together, Risinghill and Children's Rights are repetitive, with Berg writing about Duane and Neill, and Duane writing about himself, and Neill writing about Summerhill, with none of the three actually elaborating very much on anything that had not been said before by either themselves or by their American predecessors. After Neill's death, Michael Duane became, in many ways, the champion of and spokesman for the free schools. One may suppose that his great love and respect for children as described in Risinghill did much to promote him to that position of leadership. His essay in Children's Rights, well-researched and perceptive, provides those who would follow him with a good sense of the problems within the state school system.

Another writer peripherally concerned with free schools is Eric Midwinter, whose book Priority Education was published in 1972.[19] This book is not about free schools, but it is about the schools in a part of Liverpool that saw the birth of Britain's first urban free school, Scotland Road. In his capacity as Director of the Liverpool E.P.A. project,

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[19]Midwinter's relationship with the founders of The Scotland Road Free School is described in Part 1 of this study.

Midwinter made a thorough study of the Scotland Road area and produced pages of statistics to back up his contention that the citizens of that depressing part of the city had been badly served on many counts. Since his purpose in the book is to describe an attempt to improve schooling in the area, his analysis of the social and economic problems provides excellent background information to the formation of the Scotland Road Free School. The E.P.A. project developed beside, and dominated the free school, clashing with it on some occasions, cooperating with it on others. Midwinter knew Bill Murphy, one of the free school's founders. Priority Education is, therefore, a mine of information about a society from which one of Britain's best-known and controversial schools emerged.

The only two books dealing exclusively with alternative and free schooling were produced in 1973 and 1974 by W.K. Richmond and David Head respectively. Richmond's The Free School combines two things: a general, and by 1973 out-dated scathing of the world's school systems, liberally coated with quotes from Reimer and Illich, and surveys of what Richmond believed to be examples of de-schooling in action, among which he includes the Open University, Scotland Road Free School and the Parkway Project. Richmond's book is a somewhat belated poor cousin to the well-documented works of the writers he so liberally quotes. The book confuses free schooling and de-schooling. Several analysts of de-schooling, including Lister, Illich and Reimer, have taken considerable pains to differentiate between these two alternative ways of looking at schooling, and have implied in their writings that free schools are primarily schools, and not examples of de-schooling. Lister, for example, writes about Holt having seen "some of the dangers of free schools."[20]

20Lister, op.cit., p. 2.

One might question, therefore, Richmond's inclusion of a description of a free school in a chapter of his book about de-schooling, or indeed, of a chapter about de-schooling in a book entitled The Free School.

Head's Freeway to Learning, another edited collection of essays about alternative schools, is the only other book published in Britain that exclusively addresses alternatives in education. This slim volume (167 pages) contains eight accounts of Britain's educational alternatives, included among which are two free schools, White Lion Street and Parkfield Street.[21] Head begins the book himself with a "Letter to an Educational Quisling" in which the bewildering world of state education is criticized. Few pages pass before the old, familiar references appear: Tolstoy, Dewey, Risinghill, Reimer, Illich, Friere and Scotland Road. Various free school philosophies are briefly described; deschooling is touched upon; and the essay concludes with references to Jonathan Kozol. Head sets a scenario whose frame of reference is almost exclusively American. Into it he places Britain's alternative schools. Lucia Beckett's description of the trials of Parkfield Street Free School is the highlight of this book: as poignant and illuminating as anything ever written by Holt or Kozol. The somewhat clinical, but very exact description of White Lion Free School, much of it excerpted directly from that school's bulletins, provides useful insights into the mechanics of running a free school - something that few people have described in such detail.

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[21]Both of these schools are described in Part 1 of this study.

As the only available account of Britain's alternative education projects, Free Way to Learning has become a widely-used reference book in the small and diminishing world of the free schools.

The literature about free schools is therefore, sparse; less in fact than that which criticizes the state school system on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. As with the free schools themselves, the books that have been written reflect the journey between, primarily, two countries, of an idea. What began with Summerhill was taken up in the United States, and found its way, almost a decade later, back to Britain: not to the relative comfort of the private progressive schools, but to the slums of the large cities.

PART I

THE FREE SCHOOLS

There are ten privately-operated schools in Britain that are often described as the free schools. Five of them are in London, and there are others in Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, and Glasgow. There are several other private schools in Britain which are seen as alternatives to the state-run schools system. These are the independent progressive schools. For convenient identification, H.A.T. Child has labelled these: Friends Schools, marginal progressive schools, moderate progressive schools and radical progressive schools.[22] The radical progressive schools and the free schools appear to have some common characteristics, and many differences. There was a time, some twenty-five years ago when all fourteen progressive schools in Child's list would have been considered radical. However, a quarter-century of increasing socialism and decreasing funds have brough modifications in the style of many of them. Three-quarters of them are now considered by Child to be fee-paying public schools, four of which are currently listed in the Public Schools Yearbook.

There were never more free schools in the country than there were between 1973 and 1975. Several that were started in the late 1960's, notably at Parkfield Street in Manchester and Scotland Road in Liverpool, incorporated themselves into local community associations; others started in the early 1970's, disappeared slowly; still others never grew

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[22] Child, H.A.T. The Independent Progressive School, (London: Hutchinson, 1962).

beyond a dream and perhaps a letter of intent to one of the country's radical education newsletters. All of the free schools in operation between 1970 and 1977 were privately operated. While some local education authorities operate alternative programmes in or near to schools suffering a high incidence of truancy, no local authority operated a free school. The Inner London Education Authority, and various members of the Educational Priority Area administrations in Birmingham and Liverpool have, from time to time, given various kinds of support to the free schools in those two cities. And in the recent past some local education authorities provided eligible free school students (i.e., those who have been referred to the school by some agency associated with or part of the authority) with an amount of money equivalent to the cost of school meals. Apart from this, little else is done.

Attempts to define free schools have traditionally met with little success. The problem seems to lie within the frame of reference, which is the established school systems and the established alternatives. Alan Graubard[23] and George Dennison[24] in the United States, and W.K. Richmond[25] in Britain have attempted definitions which in retrospect seem little more than general descriptions of loosely associated principles about the individual growth of children (supposedly unhindered by the traditional structures of formal schooling). The A.S. Neill Trust[26] has attempted

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[23]Graubard, A., op. cit.

[24]Dennison, G., op. cit.

[25]Richmond, W. K., op.cit.

[26]The A.S. Neill Trust was formed in 1973 to support any endeavours conducted in the spirit of A.S. Neill.

to bring together progressive and free schools in a common memoriam to the founder of Summerhill - an act which has clarified the many differences and few similarities between the schools. Obviously there are meeting points, circumstances in which a concept that grew in a different time or place may have proven itself relevant to current experiences. Certainly there are instances when the thoughts, writings and practices of the father-figures of humanistic education such as Pestalozzi, Dewey and Steiner, seem relevant today. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence linking the philosophies and activities of British free schools with both earlier and contemporary experiences in North America and Denmark. However, the significance of these links and traditions should not be exaggerated. It could be argued that Pestalozzi and Dewey, if not Steiner, influence state education far more than they influence free schooling; student populations in the radical progressive schools, and staff members of several free schools are not infrequently Americans, which might suggest that the actual number of British students and teachers who start, attend or work in free schools and radical progressive schools, is smaller than is sometimes thought, and that several free schools in the country are largely the offspring of American parents. Only within the past decade has there been any real attempt to define the progressive schools, whose origins go back fifty years or more. Robert Skidelsky,[27] Maurice Punch[28]

[27]Skidelsky, R. English Progressive Schools, (London: Pelican, 1969), p. 13.

[28]Punch, M. "Tyrannies of the Free Schools," Manchester Guardian, May 18, 1973, see Appendix 11, Item 1.

and H.A.T. Child[29] have done much to explain these schools. And the few attempts to define free schools that have been made thus far, frequently confuse them with expensive middle-class American institutions, or with equally expensive British progressive schools.[30]

Many attempts to explain free schools originate from individuals who compare what actually happens each day in a free school with what happens in American, Danish or progressive schools: in this way some similarities emerge. Major problems develop, however, when those who feel that definition is necessary (and many of these have been free school teachers), compare philosophies and educational objectives rather than daily activities. Currently it is popular to call forth the names of A.S. Neill, John Holt, and Ivan Illich. Neill's Summerhill[31] has been, for a decade, the bible of free schooling; and ever since Illich wrote De-schooling society[32] and Holt wrote How Children Fail,[33] these two men have been closely linked with the free school movement. However, the link is an inappropriate one since both these men are not free-schoolers but de-schoolers. Criticisms of global economic structures and the American public school system, produced from Illich and Holt calls

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[29] Child, op. cit.

[30] The A.S. Neill Trust, established in the name of a radical progressive, financially assists several free schools, and has spent much time at General meetings over the past few years, attempting to describe the similarities and differences between progressive and free schools.

[31] Neill, op.cit.

[32] Illich, I., op. cit.

[33] Holt, J., op. cit.

or the abolition of institutional education. To those whose concern is de-schooling, a free school is just another institution, and not an alternative to institutionalized learning. Progressive schools, including Summerhill, are expensive and exclusive, however radical they may be. The modification in recent years of many progressive schools towards the forms of traditional public schooling, is an indication of what radical schools must do to survive in hard economic times. The concern of de-schoolers about free schools is that they also, being essentially institutions, will dissolve into the state school system before they will de-school themselves.[34] Free school apologists who freely quote Illich and Holt in their attempts to define schools, are using these writers' observations out of context.

In fact "out of context" describes very well the problem of defining free schools. There is little context. The complex of political radicalism, transcience, and economic dependence upon the continued existence of the state school system, makes it very difficult for the advocates of free schools to specify what it is that they do. This is not to suggest that what free schools do is not significant. It does, however, mean that many serious observers of British free schools are obliged to place the claims of joyful, meaningful child-centredness within the greater, observable context of confused association with progressives and de-schooling, economic dependence upon

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[34]The Inner London Education Authority insists that any local free school requesting financial assistance agree to six conditions, the first of which is that the main objective of the free school will be to help pupils return to state schools at the earliest possible date. The six conditions, as laid down by ILEA are in Appendix 11, item 2 in a letter written to the author by J.A. Hart of ILEA, November 10, 1976.

who became its students, was shockingly different; in short, it was a radical alternative. It may, therefore, be very useful to describe free-schooling as a concept of rebellion, rather than try to define an institution. Such a description may legitimately encompass the ten free schools most recently in operation in Britain; it may be embellished with reference to the radical progressive schools, to free schools in other countries; it may be perceived through the eyes of both those who advocate or have worked in the free schools, and those who do not. Free-schooling is social, not just educational; it has a history, a mythology; it is an attempt to direct human behaviour, through manipulation of children, away from one set of values, into another. Free-schooling is manipulative. It is a strong form with a weak structure. To understand it, the strengths and weaknesses of each school need to be examined.

A common title for the late A.S. Neill is "the father of free schools",[37] though whether or not he would have considered that appropriate will never be known. The North American flavour of many British free schools; the storefront style of survival techniques for the poor; and the rejection of traditional academic pursuits, are more reminiscent of John Dewey's arguments for an education system designed to resolve practical problems, than of the thoughts of that whimsical progressive who scorned the education system itself for fifty years.[38] One spokesman for British free schools has offered a description of them which isolates them from

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[37] Moorhsam, S. "Free Schools", Where, 80, 1973, p. 148. See Appendix 11, Item 4.

[38] Neill, op. cit.

both the progressive movement and "the majority of free schools elsewhere in the world."[39] Under the general heading of 'alternative schools' he lists three that call themselves "community schools"; two fee-paying suburban institutions, one of which has at times been linked with the progressive schools; four that specifically call themselves "free schools"; and one that avoids all labels, but whose programme is similar to that of the community schools.

Matters such as the identification of a father-figure and association with words such as "free" or "community" raise a problem that has bothered observers of alternative schools a good deal more than it has bothered the people involved with the schools, namely,'when is a school a free school and when is it not?', a question to which many of the hundred or so individuals working in these shabbier, less couth private schools, often reply, 'Who cares?'[40]

Summerhill cannot be considered to be a very exact model for today's urban free schools, though Neill's writings have been a powerful influence. Set in its almost rural environment, and with a student population made up of largely visiting American and Swedish students, it is, as a school, far removed from the slums of Glasgow, and the back-streets of Manchester.

The urban nature of the free schools separates them, in terms of day-to-day activities, from Summerhill and other middle-class ventures, including the more radical of the progressive schools, While Neill has influenced the personal lives and educational practicesof many people who run free schools, none of the schools is like Summerhill. Many are, however,

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[39]Mann, A. Children's Rights Workshop Newsletter, (London: Dec., 1974), p. 3. The article from which this was taken is in Appendix 11, Item 53.

[40]A reply received on several occasions by the author when posing the question. One is reminded of Neill writing in A Dominie's Five (1923): "I attach little importance to facts as facts. Whether tigers obtain in Brazil or not is a matter of no great moment. If there are no lions in Thibet, well, there ought to be."

like the American storefront schools. It is by identifying them with the ghetto schools of Oakland, California and Newark, New Jersey, that it becomes possible to formulate a response to the question 'Who cares?'

There are differences between city free schools and suburban free schools. While the latter attempted the relatively luxurious concept of individual personality growth, the city free school was more concerned with inner-city survival skills, basic communication, literacy and job training. The first published description of the New Community School of Oakland, California described the school's function as being based on "Julius Nyerere's dictum that the educational system must emphasize cooperative endeavour, not individual advancement."[41] Eric Mann, describing the Newark Community School, wrote:

> We differ from A.S. Neill where he declares his primary job is to bring happiness to some few children....The Newark Community School is a Movement School....Our ultimate success must be measured in terms of building a movement to take over and change the public education system of Newark.[42]

Both of these statements could have been made by workers in a London, Glasgow, Liverpool, or Birmingham free school.[43]

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[41] "The New Community School", brochure, Oakland, California, 1970.

[42] Mann, E. "The Newark Community School", The New England Free Press, (Newton: Mass., 1967), see Appendix 11, Item 6.

[43] In "An Alternative School", an article by Carol Dix in The Manchester Guardian of June 18, 1971, Liverpool free school teacher, John Ord is described as believing "the state system of education makes no attempt to give local kids an education that suits their needs, and is quoted: "We get letters from young teachers saying how fed-up they are with the education system and that they would leave if they could come and join us. What we should say to them is 'Stop complaining and go and start your own free school." See appendix 11, Item 7.

The urban schools of Oakland, Newark, Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester and London have had a common view of their students as either literally or metaphorically "niggers" - victims of a society whose implied aspirations kept them at the lower end of the social ladder, or off it altogether. Their teachers were at war with society, and in a perpetual state of negotiation with its generals, the local politicians. The battleground was the lives of children - at least, those children who had become sufficiently adept at hiding themselves during the annual September scourings, to have been overlooked by the system's lieutenants, and those whose poverty and desparation caused them to be ignored or soon ejected. For men like John Ord, Eric Mann, Brian Addison, George Dennison, the objective was social change towards egalitarianism, which meant redistribution. As the state education system is a mechanism for preserving the status-quo, so the free schools proposed themselves as a mechanism for redistribution.

The children of Britain's poor, or at least those living in Liverpool, Denaby, Deptford, Balsall Heath and Dundee, have not been ignored by the Department of Education. In 1968, before any free schools existed, the National E.P.A. Steering Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Michael Young, was attempting to identify "those developments in Educational Priority Areas (which) have the more constructive effects, so as to assist in planning the longer term programme to follow" - a project which arose from observations about "the ingrained dirt of generations" in some underprivileged areas of the country.[44] Eric Midwinter listed the four-

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[44]Central Advisory Council for Education (England), Children and Their Primary Schools (The Plowden Report), 1967, Vol. 1, Chapter 5, para's 131-133.

fold aims of the project as: "to raise educational standards, to lift teacher morale to solder home and school links and to assist in giving communities a sense of responsibility."[45] These aims were decided upon in the light of the misery and inadequacy of the lives of children living in very poor parts of some larger cities.

There can be few people more cognizant of the horrors of life in an urban slum than Eric Midwinter. Reflecting upon the four aims, he wrote:

> Each of the aims also begged the question: were the standards low and were the right standards being applied; were the teachers demoralised, or at least more so than their suburban counterparts; were all home-school links so desirable and were they to be teacher or parent-oriented; to which community should responsibility be engendered, and for what purpose.[46]

He queries the possibility that the four aims may be inappropriate in that they do not touch the problems of a society whose ills are bound up in "two hundred years' social history (which) had dealt these children a crippling hand".[47] And in the expression of these sentiments, he found support from at least five groups in the country who had decided, in a similar fashion, that methods for solving social inequities proposed by the Department of Education, were probably not only inadequate, but, if history was any guide, would always be so. Thus the E.P.A.'s and the free schools shared a common concern. They parted company however, at the point of deciding upon the best process to begin the remedy, Midwinter and his colleagues electing to work within the established school system, and the free schools to work outside of it.

As an organized attempt at finding a means of improving the lot of the children of the poor, the E.P.A. experiments are far more comprehensive

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[45] Midwinter, E., op.cit., p. 11

[46] Ibid., p. 12

[47] Midwinter, E. op. cit.,p. 45.

than anything attempted by free schools. It has been a weakness of the free schools that they have never collaborated enough to ascertain precisely who it is they were fighting in this war against the problems of slum children. Some free schools were intensely political in their philosophy and practices; others were not. By contrast, the E.P.A. experiments do not have to consider themselves as combating an outside enemy; they were established by a system to iron out inequities within it. The free schools began, in the early 1970's what was almost like a guerrila war against the established political and educational system in Britain. They were the weapons of a liberation front- unconnected outposts of an unannounced movement, volunteers armed with little more than a few selected passages from "Summerhill" which they aimed like army-surplus bazookas at the main arteries of the education system.

In the seven or eight years that passed since the Department of Education, through E.P.A.'s, and certain private individuals, through free schools, began the assault on the problems of children in the slums, the E.P.A.'s grew stronger, and the free schools weaker. While still seemingly inadequate, D.E.S. and l.e.a. attempts to cope with truanting and problematic students have become established features in some parts of the country. Free schools have not. There was a free school in in Liverpool, not far from the E.P.A. offices, but it has closed now; there is a community school in Balsall Heath Birmingham, independent of the E.P.A. There have never been free schools in Denaby, Deptford or Dundee.

The Ark

The first established private school that bridged the gulf between progressive education and free schools, was conceived in 1967 and opened two years later in Oxford. It is called The Ark. It bears little resemblance

to schools like Barrowfield, Community School, White Lion, Street Free School, or The Bermondsey Lamp Post, all of which are set deep in the heart of large cities; but neither is it anything like Summerhill, or Kilquhanity, or Monkton Wylde. Admitting to being influenced by the writings of Donald Winnicott and Rudolph Steiner, Elizabeth Hibbert, who developed The Ark, brings into the physical setting of the progressive school, child-rearing philosophies and day-to-day activities that reflect upon the needs of all children, and, especially concerning Winnicott, with children and families in distress.

Elizabeth Hibbert recounts her first few days in a manner that may well be familiar to many others who have started private schools. "We began," she writes "with one child."[48] Her description of The Ark contains accounts of various creatures and activities often found in free schools: rabbits, the occasional sheep, cats, guitars and the baking of bread. Obviously, anyone who keeps a sheep has a reason for doing so, and the significance of Elizabeth Hibbert's reasons are that they reflect a determination to provide a quite specific environment within which her children (the one became twelve within six months) may grow. She refers constantly to "the whole child", and acknowledges a debt for the structure of The Ark to Steiner and Winnicott. The Ark's programme, that is what happens in the school each day, reflects Steiner's concerns about the richness of learning experiences. The influence of Donald Winnicott can be seen in the school's perception of itself as a family, with the staff modelling their roles upon those of parents.

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[48]Head, D. op. cit., p. 96.

The Ark began in a small cottage in Oxford as an idea in 1967, and as a school in 1969. People attempting to operate alternative schools have been dogged by problems. Many of this country's free schools are housed in rented, borrowed or squatted buildings, and have had to move as much as three or four times in a year. It appears that possession of a building is a major factor in the survival of alternative schools, so Elizabeth Hibbert and her colleagues had a head-start in 1969 when, with a lot of help from friends, they were able to purchase their cottage.

Concerning furniture and equipment, alternative schools seem to fall into three groups: those with no permanent home, but a lot of equipment; those with a permanent home but very little equipment; and those with neither. Official goodwill, in the form of l.e.a. funding, church and local college support and foundation hand-outs, sparse though they were, seemed somewhat more easily acquired by those schools whose tenure was not in doubt. The New School, for example, had at one time, a considerable amount of equipment, the promise of a Variety Artists' bus, and assurances of financial help from two foundations, while housed temporarily in a basement flat; White Lion Street School had, within a few months of opening, forty children and applications from two hundred teachers. For Elizabeth Hibbert, however, and later for Gwen Lambert in Huddersfield, both of whom began by owning their premises, equipment and furnishings were initially hard to come by.

> At first we had very sketchy furniture and equipment. Tables were made of wood scraps from different sources.... We had a white rabbit, and we borrowed a sheep and two lambs from a local farmer....We were given a cat which produced kittens. From the start we had a small piano and we were given a guitar and other musical instruments.[49]

The environment that was built with these meagre items was one of "love and encouragement".[50]

> The environment is simple....but with opportunites for quite challenging experience. Superficially it could be called a fairly free, home-like background-cooking, gardening, painting, singing, acting and, at mealtimes particularly, sharing in conversation. The aim is for simplicity yet a richness of approach.[51]

How is this delicate combination of simplicity and richness obtained with so little? It seems that Rudolf Steiner's writings provided some direction. Hibbert's stated aim is "to see that a child can go out into the world minimally equipped with the practical skills of his society... but beyond that there must be a sense of his own livingness and value".[52] Steiner wrote, about a child as a "being of sense", and of life around a child as a "surrounding impression" that "ripples, echoes and sounds through the whole organism".[53]

The style of a Waldorf school is such that virtually everyone in it has to accept Steiner's view of education in order to function satisfactorily.

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[49] Head, D., op. cit., pp. 96-97.

[50] Ibid., p. 99.

[51] Ibid., p. 100.

[52] Ibid., p. 100.

[53] Steiner, R. The Essentials of Education. (London: Steiner Press, 1968), p. 52.

And that would be one of its strengths also. The same would be true of a progressive school, particularly one like Dartington Hall, or Summerhill. It has been less true of the free schools, whose teacher turn-over has been very high, and this may be a weakness born of economic instability and uncertainty about programmes. The Ark, which it was mentioned earlier, seems to bridge the gulf between Summerhill and Barrowfield, seems to have had, in its early years, a close-knit, strong staff. One staff member anonymously wrote about the children sending "startlingly clear" messages about their needs to adults. Someone else wrote about listening to children as part of the staff responsibility-listening but not responding by being too overwhelming.[54] Rudolph Steiner wrote: "Week by week, month by month we must lead the child into the true activity demanded by the organic forces developing within him."[55] Donald Winnicott writes of the relationship between a child's personal growth within a secure environment, and a mother's gradual withdrawal of influence as she sees the child develop self-control.[56] The method of doing this at The Ark, comes about by what one staff member describes as "space and freedom", modified for the sake of the child, to a routine that begins every morning with the baking of bread, and continues throughout the day with new activities linked by familiar projects in the

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[54]Head, D., op. cit., pp. 94-95.

[55]Steiner, R., op. cit., p. 65.

[56]Winnicott, D. W. The Family and Individual Development. (London: Tavistock, 1965), p. 32.

garden, dances and singing.

> Even if his world does seem a bit shaky without mum around, at least things still seem to be going on as usual in a familiar, unstartling way.[57]

The words "family" and "mum" are very important in The Ark, and they reflect upon the writings of Winnicott. Winnicott is a psychoanalyst, with the mannerism of a family doctor, and a seemingly great faith in the strength of the family. He writes about the basic relationship between a mother and child, and suggests that teachers learn their jobs by observing mothers.

> As I see it, the infant at the start needs a degree of active adaptation to needs which cannot be provided unless a devoted parent is doing everything. It is obvious that it is the infant's own mother to whom such devotion comes naturally.[58]

Winnicott's view of the average teacher is that of a fairly rare bird with a need to learn about children that outweighs the relatively simple task of teaching.[59] The Ark would please him in this in that its staff acknowledge that "we stand poised to learn as much as, probably a good bit more than, we teach", and places considerable importance upon relationships with children's parents, on the grounds that staff know better than parents "less often than we like to think".

Observers of free schools have spent much time searching for predecessors of a currently popular philosophy - the "grand old men" of free-schooling, the influential figures whose thoughts and experiences

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[57] Head, D., op. cit., p. 95.

[58] Winnicott, D. W., op. cit., p. 23.

[59] Winnicott acknowledges also that many teachers are "neurotic or near insane." op. cit., p. 24.

may have caused some modern discipline to follow. But perhaps a more useful way of considering the work of those people who started free schools, is to set them in the context of modern society rather than vague historical "trends". They were responding to contemporary conditions. Growing within many of them was a restlessness, a personal desire to find a more workable system than what exists. In their search for something workable, they may well have encountered Summerhill or Tolstoy, or Dennison, but in most instances, the stimulus for the search was personal experience of the modern world, not a written account of what someone else did. The essence of The Ark is what Elizabeth Hibbert decided to do, direction for which was found, in part, by reference to the works of Winnicott and Steiner. There was, of course, a time when Steiner's response to his perceptions of his society and its children's needs, was manifest in the Waldorf School in Stuttgart. Steiner's published works - reflections of his experience - serve as a reference point for Elizabeth Hibbert, lending a touch of professional authority to a personal belief, and thus to some extent, legitimizing it. Hibbert makes Steiner's "esoteric vocabulary"[60] easier to understand. We learn about each by reference to the other.

While finding Steiner and Winnicott useful guides, Hibbert does not perceive any similarities between The Ark and Summerhill.[61] She

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[60] Head, D., op. cit., p. 100

[61] Three hundred and seventy-five free schools came into being in North America between 1968 and 1971, most of which were modelled after Summerhill, and were affiliated with the American Summerhill Society. During the same period in the United Kingdom, the only new schools to open their doors to those parents seeking an alternative were The Ark and Scotland Road Free school.

points out that some parents removed their children from The Ark when teachers suggested that they felt some discipline was necessary for small children. Neill would have probably objected to this on the grounds that the only difference between his school and The Ark, concerning attitudes towards discipline, is in the source of discipline. Even then, the identification of the differences between the two schools is a moot point in that both Neill and Hibbert acknowledge the need for an adult to conscientiously respond to the ferocity of a developing child's self-control, Hibbert by protecting the child from that violence,[62] Neill by letting the child work it out for himself.[63] Hibbert describes the difference herself:

> Our policy is one of non-interference with firmness and care for each child.[64]

Scotland Road Free School

During September 1970, John Ord, B.Sc. (Econ.), came off the dole and returned to his chosen profession, teaching, at St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Secondary School, in Liverpool. There he encountered Bill Murphy. Sharing a common sense of disillusionment with the school system in which they worked, the pair designed an alternative school during their spare time. It took them four months. At Christmas Ord left St. Catherine's School, rented four rooms over a greengrocer's shop in Limekiln Lane, off Scotland Road, and began the lengthy process of

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[62] Winnicott, D. W., op. cit., p. 11

[63] Even this is not the whole truth about Neill, whose purpose was to separate what was worth being disciplined from what was not.

[64] Head, D., op. cit., p. 99

explaining his idea of a free school, to the community. With Bill Murphy he established the Scotland Road Community Trust, and the two spent several months getting to know the people who lived in and around Scotland Road and the Vauxhall area of Liverpool, mainly by meeting them in local pubs.

During the second week of June 1971, Ord opened the Scotland Road Free School, for an experimental six week term. The school was registered with the Department of Education and Science as an independent school. Although it was essentially a part of all that the Scotland Road Community Trust aspired to do for the people of this particularly depressing area of Liverpool, when it opened, it was unique - the latest alternative school; the most obviously urban street school - and it attracted immediate attention. It was never Ord's or Murphy's intention that the school be separate from the other parts of the Trust. It was the Trust that was registered as a charity, not the school. Nor did the Trust committee comprise teachers only. Ord and Murphy, with Denise Pyle and Mary Baxter were the four teachers on the committee. With them were David Stevens and Michael Griffies, both social workers; Michael Keating, a fund-raiser; Robert Earle, a docker; Frank Connor, a Ford worker; and James Hunter, an architect.

The school began with eight students, whose ages ranged from ten to fourteen years. They were young people who, for various reasons, were not attending local state schools. Housed in a local community centre, the free school relied for its existence upon the energy of Ord and Murphy, plus £112.00 obtained from the sale of tickets, and a few small donations.

Ord's answers to questions about the school did much to establish a frame of reference for the various groups around the country who followed his example over the ensuing five years, and set up free schools in Manchester, Glasgow, London and Birmingham. Like others who came afterwards, Ord had trouble explaining the word "free". When he called his experiment a free school, "free" meant that the pupils and teachers had been freed from the local education authority's clutches, and belonged to the community. There being no reason for him to be drawn, at this stage, into the academics of defining "free" beyond this, he felt no obligation to do any more than admit that there probably were some similarities between his school and the Danish friskoler, and even remotely with Summerhill. But fundamentally, Scotland Road Free School was unique.[65]

> Most children leave school at 15. They have one tenth of the money spent on their education that is devoted to a university entrant. They are still forced to take exams as part of the machine. If you treat them in a freer fashion and encourage them to be better personalities, they might be able to take a more critical approach to life.[66]

Attendance at lessons was to be voluntary; learning was to be based upon discussion and outside projects in the city, its museums, libraries, and factories.

The school had not been established without the knowledge of the local education authority. At one point during the six months preceding

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[65] It might have been nearer the truth to proclaim the school unique in Britain, for there were at this time, about a hundred similar street schools in cities in Canada and the United States, and 275 other free schools in those countries.

[66] John Ord, quoted by Carol Dix in "An Alternative School", The Manchester Guardian, June 18, 1971. See Appendix 11, Item 7.

the opening of the school, both Ord and Murphy had approached officialdom, and received what they felt to be a negative response:

> For instance, we've tried to interest the official teaching bodies, but we've had no response from the Institute of Education or from the training colleges. They think enough is being done....We've been accused of running away from the system when all kinds of progressive reforms are under way in schools now, and why leave the system just when things are happening? But we don't see it as trying to step outside, just aside.[67]

The fact that Ord and Murphy had the legal right to provisional registration by the D.E.S. was no guarantee that their work would be acceptable to the local education authority, or the people who lived in Scotland Road and Vauxhall. The area was so depressed that it had, for some time prior to 1970 been the focus of a good deal of official attention. Truancy levels were high, as was unemployment and crime. Thus while in the months that were to follow Ord and Murphy were destined to become quite well-known in the columns of various national and local newspapers, and on the college lecture circuit (at £100 a time), there were various agencies within the community who could be depended upon either to misunderstand the motives of the Scotland Road Community Trust, or to politically oppose it.

The Plowden's Reports' concern with "the ingrained dirt of generations" had been responsible, in 1968, for the designation of some fifty primary school departments in Liverpool, as being in need of immediate and special attention. The grouping was called the Educational Priority Area, and Scotland Road was in the middle of it. The area included within its boundaries some of the most depressing rows of artisan dwellings

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[67] Dix, op. cit.

in the country, but also the Philharmonic Hall, Everyman Theatre, The Regional College of Art and the University of Liverpool.[68] Eric Midwinter's comparison of the housing within the EPA area with that of "a select Liverpool suburb", describes statistically the kind of living conditions experienced by people who were also represented by the Scotland Road Community Trust:

1. 120 out of every 1000 EPA houses had more than 1-5 inhabitants to each room;
   4 out of every 1000 suburban houses had more than 1-5 inhabitants to each room.

2. 420 out of every 1000 EPA houses were shared accommodation; 10 out of every 1000 suburban houses were shared accommodation.

3. 190 out of every 1000 EPA houses enjoyed normal amenities (hot water, bath, and toilet);
   900 out of every 1000 suburban houses enjoyed normal amenities.

4. 150 out of every 1000 EPA houses were owner-occupied.
   500 out of every 1000 suburban houses were owner-occupied.

5. 600 out of every 1000 EPA houses were privately rented;
   80 out of every 1000 suburban houses were privately rented.

6. 40 out of every 1000 EPA inhabitants were in class 1 or 11 of General Register Office Classification;
   250 out of every 1000 suburban inhabitants were in class 1 or 11 of General Register Office Classification.

7. 540 out of every 1000 EPA inhabitants were in class IV or V of General Register Office Classification;
   230 out of every 1000 suburban inhabitants were in class IV or V of General Register Office Classification.[69]

It does not necessarily follow that the working-class ghettos of Liverpool, or of any other city for that matter, suffer a paucity of compassionate educators and well-run schools, although the obvious

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[69]Midwinter, E., op. cit., pp. 33-34.

biases in the foregoing statistics and John Ord's previously-mentioned observation that a university entrant has ten times the amount spent on his education than is spent educating a child in Scotland Road, would suggest that they do. It was the good fortune of the people in Scotland Road, therefore, that Eric Midwinter, who had been appointed Director of the Liverpool EPA project in 1968, had perceived the stated objectives of this state-system-run attempt at resolving the educational problems that beset the poor, as "lofty" and "begging the question".[70] Midwinter's reflection on the inappropriateness of "the siren calls of academic successes in a misty future", and his feeling that the educational standards of the EPA schools may be "not low, but wrong", contributed eventually to the establishment of the EPA Community School, whose objectives and planned programmes are basically the same as those of Balsall Heath Community School, Barrowfield Free School, White Lion and Leeds.

> As a theoretical goal we had defined the Community School as one which ventured out into and welcomed in the community until a visionary time arrived when it was difficult to distinguish school from community. In the short term, it was hoped that this would engineer so harmonious a balance between school and home that the child's education would be the more stable. In the long term, one foresaw the school as an agency, alongside other social and communal organisms, working towards community regeneration.[71]

The EPA Community School became a reality in Liverpool in the second half of 1969, with thirteen school departments participating, somewhat like

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[70] Midwinter, E., op. cit., p. 12.

[71] Ibid., p. 160

a collective. It grew with the incorporation of nine other departments within the EPA, and of course in this structure it is very different in scope from any free school. In that its objective was to effect change within the community, one might say that Midwinter and Ord had a common goal. In fact, Midwinter's direction for the Community School would suggest that the Scotland Road Community Trust was the project's natural counterpart:

> The Community needs to be changed, and thus the Community School has to be involved in changing and not in standing still. Teachers will have to become social prosecutors rather than social defenders, if the school is, in effect, to shift itself massively and become a positive influence on social change.
>
> It is immediately obvious that the school cannot operate alone, and here one meets one of the first golden rules of the Community School; namely, one cannot have community education without community development, and one cannot have community development without community education.[72]

John Ord saw the free school as an integral part of the Scotland Road Community Trust:

> What they are setting up is a community center. They hope to get the parents in as well. "Mind you, we had nice ideas about school councils," said John Ord, "where we'd try to get parents in to discuss ideas, until we realized that most of the parents work, at least the mothers do. The fathers are generally down the pub."[73]

Midwinter and Ord exhibit, therefore, a common sensitivity towards the social problems of a community in which home and school need to be

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[72] Ibid., p. 23.

[73] Dix., op. cit.

regenerated into a dynamic and constructive relationship. Although they both sought the best way of restoring dignity to an appallingly decayed society, the schools they developed were very different from each other. Midwinter saw a need for leadership in a community that had no strength to help itself out of a depression into which circumstances had allowed it to drift. Ord and Murphy saw within the depression an intense resentment towards an oppressive political and social system of which schools were only a part, and they sought to set a spark to the energy for self-rejuvenation latent within the community. Midwinter worked from within the established system, attacking irrelevant curricula and meaningless academic pursuits with a sharp wit and biting rhetoric, and establishing a project with potentially far-reaching implications for millions of other people in the country, who live in slums. Ord and Murphy, on the other hand, stepped aside from the established system, having no faith in its ability to remedy problems of which, in their opinion, it was one of the main causes. In short, the EPA project was the means by which the education system of this country sought to make itself more relevant to a community; and the Scotland Road Community Trust was an attempt by the members of a community to do it themselves.

The people of Scotland Road, for whom so little had ever been done for a century or more, suddenly found themselves, in 1970, with two proposed solutions to at least some of their educational ills, if not all of their social ills. The question was, which one to accept? Both, or neither? The possibility that the EPA Community School might produce some community changes depended largely upon the acceptance of the project by

the people living within the priority area - a long process requiring a lot of re-educating of teachers, and the dissolution of hard-learned aversions to schooling, many of which are every bit as ingrained into the community as is the dirt that Plowden found. Anyone living in Scotland Road, who was aware of this new two-pronged attack on the social ills of the area might be forgiven for mistrusting Midwinter, and feeling very uneasy about the free school also.

"First of all," Murphy said, "the people here have got to get control of the community themselves - political control. That may happen through the Community Trust. The free school is part of the Trust. The Trust is much bigger than just the school."[74]

Eric Midwinter's hope for the implementation of a large scale EPA community education program, under the aegis of the Department of Education and the local education authority, and John Ord's hope that "our example will be supported enough for others to set up free schools", are essentially the same, and the regenerated urban society that Eric Midwinter considers possible within a hundred years, "granted the radical change of attitudes",[75] would be one of what Ord calls "freedom" - that "lies not in dropping out of society, but in being fully involved".[76]

Both the poor and the powerful possess mighty weapons with which to fight ideas and actions that they do not like: the one has monumental apathy; the other the backing of the established system. Of the two the

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[74]To the author, in an interview, December 18, 1974. See Appendix 1, pp. 35-36 for a resume of this interview.

[75]Midwinter, op. cit., p. 183.

[76]Dix, op. cit.

former is the more dependable. The Scotland Road Community Trust steered a path between these two forces, from the moment it opened its doors, gathering as it went, bouquets of flowers and thorns from the established system, and a gradual, almost reluctant support from the community. In whom were the members of the community to put their trust? Given that their aspiration is for a better life, and that current political and educational machinery is not helping them to achieve that, where do they go? To the newly-aware, re-sensitized system; to the Community Trust; to the pub; or home to watch television?

During 1971 at least therefore, the citizens of Scotland Road and Vauxhall found themseleves in the unusual position of having two agencies struggling to lift them and thousands of others like them out of the mess they had been in for generations, the one an attempt to fuse community education and community development into some sort of thermonuclear reaction that would ultimately produce great social energy; the other trying to achieve the same thing through community action, the "self-perpetuating spontaneous combustion of working people managing their own affairs."[77] Since both agencies had been aware of each other from the beginning, and, although sceptical of each other's effectiveness, did not doubt for one minute the sensitivity and compassion inherent in each project, they worked alongside each other, and at times, together. The EPA, particularly as managed by Eric Midwinter, provided a far more comfortable milieu for the Scotland Road Free School, than was subsequently

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77 Comment made to the author by Bill Murphy, December 18, 1974. See Appendix 1, pp. 35-36.

to be experienced by others in other parts of the country, who found themselves in head-on collisions with local education authorities. Why were there two alternatives in Liverpool in 1971? In retrospect the answer seems to hang upon a common lack of faith held by Ord, Murphy and Midwinter, in the ability of the combined forces of the Department of Education and Science, the EPA Steering Committee, and the people who live within the priority area, to achieve very much.[78] Even with such great odds against the success of either project, Midwinter was prepared to work with it, in spite of his pessimism. Ord and Murphy on the other hand, had in effect, no faith whatsoever in the ability of an outside organization to bring about the kinds of changes needed in the society. History had listed too many previous failures: there was only one way to go for the people of Scotland Road, and that was to take control of their own situation, politically, economically and educationally. Midwinter was, therefore, the one who was outside, because he was outside the community - inside the education system perhaps, but outside of a community of people whose living experience had told John Ord that only they could help themselves.

"We may have only fifteen or twenty years in which to accomplish this challenging feat of urban salvage," wrote Midwinter.[79] In John Ord's experience a system that had only recently acknowledged the existence of

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[78] At the conclusion of Priority Education (1972) Midwinter wrote: "Granted the radical change of attitudes, the total commitment to urban re-appraisal, and the huge in-put of necessary resources, we could outwit the futurelogists and invent our own destiny. But we are probably doing too little too late."

[79] Midwinter, op. cit., p. 191.

"the ingrained dirt of generations," was hardly likely to bring about such change in twenty years.

The Scotland Road Free School, one of several components of the Scotland Road Community Trust, grew to a strength of fifty students, aged between nine and sixteen years, during 1971. When it opened its doors in January, 1972, after six months of operation, it had been visited by the D.E.S. inspectors, had obtained the use of local education authority playing fields and swimming baths, and had access to the local school meals service for some students. Ord, commenting on the school's lack of traditional hierarchy or compulsion, pointed out that "most of the students had already been staying away from state schools when they came to the free school," and now attended "a school which might not give the formal type of education of secondary modern schools, but was designed to bring the best out of them and allow them to discipline themselves in a free atmosphere."[80]

There were at this time still several quite basic problems. In spite of having asked the local education authority on several occasions for more comfortable premises than the St. Benedict's Church hall in which they were currently housed, and for secondhand furniture, these had not been granted. The school had at this time, five teachers who, along with parents and children, had improved upon their premises, but apparently not sufficiently to avoid an attack by two local politicians, Councillors R.S. Charles and K.W. Edwards, who requested council "to ask the Secretary for Education and Science to withhold registration of the

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[80] Dewhurst, E. "Free School Under Attack", Manchester Guardian, January 25, 1972, Appendix 11, Item 8.

school in view of the serious concern felt by the council and its educational standards." Ernest Dewhurst, writing in the January 25 edition of The Manchester Guardian, reports:

> Councillor Charles said yesterday that it was in a district where children had a "rough time" growing up to adult life and he did not think the alternative to state education would help to fit them for it. He sure the organizers had the best intentions, but he was concerned mainly for the welfare of the children. He understood there were no fixed classes or curriculum, little discipline, and that facilities were poor compared with those of council schools.[81]

Whether or not councillor Charles was aware that the curriculum to which he would have had the free school children return had recently been described by the director of the EPA project as "arguably of Victorian origin and before," matching an "austerely sterile trait with a quashily romanticist style," is not mentioned in Dewhurst's article. And apparently the councillor's concern for pupils at the school, or ultimately, by the D.E.S. Within a few more months the school had moved into a disused building, and had taken its pupils and several visiting inspectors on a visit to Wales.

When it opened again on September 11 for the autumn term it had "about one hundred" pupils on the register. And on September 12 Ord was informed by the D.E.S. that the school had been granted an extension of provisional registration - the first of its kind to achieve such status.

By this time the school had become quite well-known - or notorious - in the country's press. Initial struggles were paying off; the school was a step closer to "recognition", that final stamp of approval and

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[81] Ibid.

D.E.S. respectability, that all famous independent schools have, except Summerhill. And quite suddenly, it was no longer the only free school or similar experiment in the country. In Manchester, Parkfield Street Free School had opened with five volunteer teachers; in Maiden Lane Community Centre, Camden, someone started a tutor group to save eight truants from being put into care, and called it South Villas Comprehensive for a while before changing the name to Freightliners Free School. In Balsall Heath, Birmingham, another EPA area, Richard Atkinson started St. Paul's Road Free School. In London, David and Jean Head started Operation Otherwise, after a year-long diet of Friere, Illich, Ord and Murphy. And in Islington, what subsequently proved to be one of the most successful free schools, White Lion Street Free School, opened in an old sixteen-room red-brick house. It would be an exaggeration to say that each of these new schools was following Scotland Road in anything more than a purely chronological sense, excepting that Ord and Murphy had obviously started something with their defiance of the established system. It has been mentioned before that a close look at this country's free schools reveals a considerable amount of American influence. Scotland Road's only interest was the children who lived around it. Furthermore, Scotland Road Free School was perceived by Ord and Murphy as a street school. Murphy said at one time that he did not think that Freightliners Free School or White Lion Street Free School were particularly relevant to the kinds of social changes he was looking for in Liverpool.[82]

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[82]Personal comment to the author. A record of the conversation held in Liverpool on December 18th, 1974, is in Appendix 1, pp. 35-36.

However, the apparent flurry of free school activity across the country brought more publicity to Scotland Road. College lecture committees paid £100 or more a time to hear Ord and Murphy tell them that they were part of the problems that the free school might help resolve,[83] until it was realized that the pair had a point, at which time the colleges ceased asking them to speak. Curious educators visited the school in droves. Other groups of disenchanted teachers or worried parents began planning free schools in Leeds, Brighton, Coventry, Glasgow, and Bermondsey. More and more attention was given to the three or four hundred free schools in the United States and Canada. Sasha Moorsam referred to "a free school movement over there", and "vulnerable efforts in this country."[84] Maurice Punch wrote about "the contemporary free school movement" in Britain. And on May 8th, 1973, almost on the day that Brian Addison opened Barrowfield School in Glasgow, and just a few weeks after Lois Acton had started The Bermondsey Lamp Post and Sue Israel began working at the New School in Hammersmith, Punch attempted to draw attention to what he called "the cruel dilemma" facing free school teachers and workers, who, "in their barely-concealed romantic attachment to the working class community....may trap the children in the cycle of impoverishment by their unwillingness to entertain any alternatives to re-invigorating the immediate locality."[85] At the time of publication this observation was perhaps most unique for the significance it placed upon what had until recently been an insignificant

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Moorsom, op. cit., p. 149. See Appendix 11, Item 4.

[85] Punch, M. "Tyrannies of the Free Schools," Manchester Guardian, May 8, 1973. See Appendix 11, Item 1.

fluttering on the periphery of the education scene. In retrospect however, the point is relevant within the conservative, middle-class world of education, in which it was made. The suspicion that the crudities of the working-class world are unacceptable in conventional society; the assertion that free school teachers, in their abhorence of conventional education "may fall prey to their own hidden curriculum, that shapes children in subtle and insidious ways", is a matter of great concern for anyone who ignores the possibility that "conventional" and "working-class" may be synonymous.

Punch was far from being alone in his reflections on the tyrannies of the free schools. His article evoked a response from Richard Gwilt, of Manchester, whose personal experiences with a child who had briefly attended Parkfield Street School, lead him to conclude that "the problem with the free school is that it is neutral: children, having been conditioned to be more or less active or passive, are likely to remain so . And the notion of freedom which is encouraged is highly unsuited to our crowded technological society."[86]

And thus a debate which had simmered for years in the pages of The Daily Mirror, with periodic references to sex at Summerhill, heated up somewhat as public attention turned briefly to the new urban free schools, with Scotland Road the main target.

The observations of Punch and Gwilt turned out to be the forerunners of trouble for the school just at the point in its life when it seemed to be getting established. In February of 1973 the Liverpool education authority had offered the school some slight financial support in the form

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[86]Letter in the Manchester Guardian, May 15, 1973. See Appendix 11, Item 9.

of a grant of £479.00 to pay off various debts. In the months following this gesture, several parents in the area complained to the l.e.a. about the rowdy behaviour of the students - or at least some of them. On July 16th, Councillor John Hamilton, Labour chairman of the l.e.a. recommended to the l.e.a. that the school be told to leave its premises by the end of August. "They are not fulfilling their tenancy obligations", said Councillor Hamilton.[87] At the same meeting the l.e.a. Education Committee refused to pay the school's rates. Ord's reference to the eviction threat was to begin, with his colleagues at the school, lobbying local councillors. They began by countering the threatened eviction with a request for financing over a period of three to five years. His argument for such financing was one that was subsequently the plea to local education authorities by virtually every free school in this country, and many in North America. It points to the frailty of the free schools, and to the ability of a local education authority to use its financial supremacy like a club. Ord said:"We feel that with city council help we would, in a year, be able to put all our ideas into practice, and the school would blossom."[88] Hamilton responded by saying that he would reconsider his decision if the school paid its rates. John Ord, however, had had enough. In early September a D.E.S. inspector spent a day at the school and issued a largely unfavourable report; letters to various trusts and charities failed to bring in the badly needed funds. On September 19, Ord resigned. The school owed more than £500.00 and he needed a regular income to support a growing family. His final comment on

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[87]"City Free School is told to quit", in Liverpool Daily Post, July 17, 1973. See Appendix 11, Item 10.

[88]"Teachers prepare to do battle", in Liverpool Echo, July 27, 1973. See Appendix 11, Item 11.

leaving was: "It will be tragic if the school closes down, but if it does I think we will still have proved our point."

To support the school, a considerable number of parents rallied. Forming a new organization, a consortium of eleven community organizations, they pledged to take over the tenancy of the school building, from which the school was still about to be evicted. Represented by a Liberal councillor, David Alton, the new group, called The Scotland Road People's Centre, put their request to the council, who defeated Alton's motion by three votes to seventeen.[89]

On January 11, 1974, Scotland Road Free School closed, and seventy-seven children were without a school to go to. The response to the closure reflects again the power of the local education authority and the weakness of the small group of individuals who either ran the school or sent their children to it. Most of the schools in the area were Roman Catholic, and the governors and managers of these schools have powers of admittance. For sixty-six of the free school's former pupils, the request to re-enter the local Catholic schools was denied. Liverpool's Director of Education, C.P. Clarke made several suggestions as to why the children may have been refused admission. It was possible, he said, that parents who withdrew their children to attend the free school were informed at the time that they would not be readmitted. A bad attendance record at the free school (where attendance was voluntary) may have caused the governors of some Catholic schools to refuse the children admission on the grounds that they might disturb other pupils, or prove to be a bad influence.[90] An article in the Daily Post, on April 14, 1974 described

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[89]"Eviction decision for free school", Liverpool Daily Post, November 18, 1973. See Appendix 11, Item 12.

[90]"Pupils without schools", Daily Post, January 25, 1974. See Appendix 11, Item 13.

the situation at that time:

> More than 50 children who were pupils at the experimental Liverpool Free School in Scotland Road have not been found places in secondary schools.
>
> The aftermath of this experiment in handling difficult children has been far-reaching. Because the free school failed to pay its bills to the corporation, even the controlling Labour group grew disillusioned. And the free school had to end.
>
> But it left 77 pupils who had been associated with the free school without traditional school places. Of these, 66 pupils who had previously gone to Roman Catholic schools, in the area, of which there are a number, many of them with vacancies.
>
> But after meetings between the education department and the Roman Catholic school governors, it became obvious that the governors were generally reluctant to accept the free school pupils back.
>
> The headmasters argued that addmitting them would place intolerable burdens on the staff....Some of the children had been away from any formal discipline or formal teaching situation for up to three years.[91]

By March 12, 1974, sixty-three children were still out of school. Twenty-one members of "an Interdisciplinary Service Group", (i.e., the Scotland Road People's Centre), accused the l.e.a. of being "tardy and unimaginative" in its attitude and inaction regarding the children. The group had five reasons why they considered the situation to be intolerable: the children were on the streets; they were putting pressure on peers to truant; re-integration into local schools was going to present the children with major personal and educational problems; parents are embarassed and angry; without an education, the future job prospects for the children were very poor.[92]

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[91]"Free School may be revived - with discipline", Daily Post, April 15, 1974, See Appendix 11, Item 14.

[92]Letter to the Editor, Education Guardian, Manchester Guardian, March 12, 1974, See Appendix 11, Item 15.

In early April the l.e.a. schools' sub-committee began to consider the possibility of establishing a special unit for the fifty children who were still out of school. Director of Education C.P. Clarke had gained some ground with the principals and governors of the Roman Catholic schools, and was able to report to the l.e.a. that the children would be readmitted provided parents agreed to what were described as "reasonable conditions".

In May, the Kingsway Project was set up by the l.e.a. Located near to Scotland Road, and staffed by senior members of the l.e.a.'s advisory staff, it seemed to meet many of the parents' needs. Ten children started with the project and a further four girls joined in September. A full-time teacher took permanent charge of the project on September 1, 1974.

The Scotland Road Community Trust, and The Scotland Road People's Centre, which were by this time two organizations with overlapping membership and common interests, did not die with the school. It was stronger than the school; it didn't have the problems the school had; it was not subject to the will of the l.e.a. or council in the same way. Murphy and some members of the Trust purchased several old buses from the Corporation, repaired some of them and started a transport cooperative that included special transporation for the elderly of the area, and a play-bus, which was a converted double-decker with the seats removed, which drove to a different street each time it was taken out, so that local children could play together in it. In an interview given as he was converting the downstairs part of the bus, in December, 1974, Murphy

observed:

> Quite honestly, the Trust is strong now. We're probably doing more for the local people now than we were doing when the school was operating.[93]

Parkfield Street Free School

In January, 1972, when the Scotland Road Free School was at its best, the Parkfield Street Free School opened in the Moss Side area of Manchester. "Opened" is perhaps an exaggeration, since the school began with scarcely more than one family in a small house in a formerly "posh", more recently decrepit, and by now demolished slum area near Manchester City's home ground. David Graham and his wife, Jane, had a son named Ben who did not want to attend the local state school. To the Graham's, Ben was not alone in his wish for something other than the local school. They rented No. 32, Parkfield Street and began a school for Ben, who was seven, his brother Daniel, who was six, and two other children aged eight and six, who belonged to another family. With £200.00 in cash put up by supporters, Parkfield Street Free School opened for its first year. It was the second street school in Britain.

The story of this free school is very different from that of Scotland Road. The aims, hopes and support organizations were similar to those in Liverpool, but several essential ingredients were missing, and, as has been observed earlier, the survival of a free school is dependent upon certain things, among them being financial independence, ownership of presmises, strong organization, and a friendly local education authority.

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[93]This observation was made in an interview with the author. See Appendix 1, pp.35-36.

Unfortunately for Parkfield Street Free School, it possessed none of these. Consequently, rather than being given by fate that chance to at least get established, it found itself, almost from the first day, enmeshed in a series of detrimental situations, that brought about an early demise. However, there is much to be learned from the Parkfield experience, for whereas one may select from the lives of the free schools in Liverpool, Glasgow and London, various elements within the overwhelming weaknesses, that served to sustain them for at least a reasonable period, the Parkfield experiences were almost all negative from the point of view of the people whose hope it was to run a successful free school. For example, the Summerhill-style General Meeting, held every Wednesday from the beginning, did not work because the children were too young to involve themselves effectively which reduced the affairs to the level of an ordinary staff meeting.[94] Then Ben, for whom the school was started, left. At the beginning of May, a family friend enrolled her two children, but the youngest stayed only a few weeks. By the end of May the only child left in the school was one boy, the last to join, and the only one who remained with the adults who first started the school, through all its subsequent problems.

Why had everyone gone? There are three factors that seem to contribute to the transience in British free schools: some children use the free school experience to compare, and then opt back into their original state schools;

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[94] White Lion Street Free School, The Bermondsey Lamp-Post, and Sundance, all experience this same problem, which appears to stem from the fact that while the adults who design the schools understand the virtues of such meetings, and come to them knowing what it is that they wish to do and say, children do not. The author attended a General Meeting at Kilquhanity progressive school in Scotland, and saw first-hand the effectiveness of the process when a fairly extensive set of rules are obeyed, and articulate children are experienced. See Appendix 1, p. 40 for a brief account of the visit.

other children are forced back by local education authority henchmen; and others disappear into new housing estates and relocation schemes. The first of these three factors seems to be common to experimental and free schools in North America as well as in Britain, and may in fact be the most natural role for such schools to play in relation to state schools. But the other two factors are uniquely British. No-one ever stormed Tolstoy's school at Yasnaya Polyana a century ago, to drag unwilling pupils away. And in the same vein, in recent years Canadian and American free schools have found themselves turning away prospective pupils recommended to them by local school authorities. Not so in Britain, however, where even in Manchester, local education authority Educational Welfare officials openly opposed some parents who had enrolled their children in Parkfield.

So, reduced to one child, Parkfield Street Free School closed. "Closed" is also perhaps an incorrect word, since the school may hardly have been said to have ever really opened. But the soul of the school remained alive, and this faint glimmer in the hearts of a handful of people, plus the constant reminders in the national press of a similar and apparently thriving experiment in Liverpool, were sufficient to bring about a reincarnation within a different body, just a few weeks after the apparent demise of the school. The new creature was named Parkfield Street School. Its name reflected two things: one was that the word "free" had, according to Lucia Beckett, one of those involved in the street school, "caused endless problems";[95] the other was that the family-style operation

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[95]Head, op. cit., p. 63.

of the first project, had failed to attract the children who may have needed the school most, that is, those who were playing in and damaging the local street. Parkfield Street Free School had excluded the people on Parkfield Street. Parkfield Street School would, hopefully, include them.

There was, however, a lot more this time, besides the school. David Graham and five associates began an organization called Community Action, similar in some respects to the Scotland Road Trust, and incorporating a considerable variety of projects. There was a bookshop called "Grass Roots", a food and clothing store called "On The Eighth Day", a publication named "Claptrap", a Claimants' Union, a Women's Rights Organization, and a Wages Pool. Graham's hope was that the community would develop a means of sustaining itself in terms of its physical requirements and morale. A Marxist, Graham was of the opinion that the strength of the inhabitants of decaying streets around Moss Side, lay in cooperative action. Like Ord and Murphy and the Scotland Road Trust, Graham and his associates' primary interest was the quality of life within the community, not just the school. The school was a part of Community Action, and it was hoped that the Wages Pool for example, would provide among other things, for the salaries of the street school teachers.

David Graham, John Ord and Bill Murphy may be seen now as the kingpins of the hopes for alternative education in Britain in the early 1970's. The key to their aspiration lay in the establishment, within the housing estates that comprise much of many large British cities, of self-sufficient communities whose people were able to live with dignity, rather than merely exist in the sunless world of an outmoded and unworkable established system. By 1975, they had been joined by Brian

Addison in Glasgow, Lois Acton, Fred Butlin, Sue Peace, Sue Israel and Chris Sharp in London and Dick Atkinson in Birmingham - practitioners all, working independently, and frequently with no reference to each other, at basically the same thing; community survival. And the most important aspect of survival, the part that concerned children and the community's future, was the school, "free", "street" or "community", in Shepherd's Bush, Balsall Heath, Glasgow, Bermondsey, or the freight yards of Kings Cross station.

Parkfield Street School re-opened on June 2, 1972 with nine children: four ten-year-olds, two eight-year-olds, one eleven-year-old, and two thirteen-year old girls. For the three months that followed, it incurred both the interest and suspicion of many local residents, as the children played their way chaotically through the summer. For the new staff it was a constructive time. The nine children stayed for the summer, and said they would like to return in September.

Free schools in Britain have been described as degenerate. There are several reasons why they earn this unenviable reputation that provides so much ammunition for political opponents, unfriendly local education authorities and the press. The three major reasons seem to be sex, drugs, and violence - the fare upon which the film and publishing and television industries have built fortunes, and which are apparently acceptable in these fantasy-forms, to a fairly large element in British society. Parkfield Street School encountered and suffered from all three.

The first was a local sex scandal in July, that began with a discussion about sex between a male teacher and some teenage girls, and rapidly became the talking point of the whole street, with accusations and counter-

accusations, and suspicions growing to a level at which several girls on the street refused to enter No. 32 unless the offending gentleman was removed.

The second problem was one of violence. It arrived on September 1, in the form of four children from a neighbouring street, The best description of their behaviour in the school, is written by Lucia Beckett:

> For the first day they were subdued and suspicious, trying to figure us out. But the second day they exploded with more aggression and destruction than we had ever met with newcomers. Alan would start it, testing us by smashing light bulbs and windows, throwing matches, punching, kicking, swearing, hitting, teasing, spoiling. The three girls, who had been with us for some time, Lucy, Pat and Alison, ceased to have any stabilizing influence and got caught up in the riot - Pat fell for Alan and assumed a leading role in the destruction. The school was too weak to cope, as this was the first week of working together and no practical ideas had been discussed. We thought it was just a natural reaction of newcomers - to test the situation - but the degree of violence was bewildering.[96]

The response to such violence among children in free schools has been a concern of many progressive and free school educators. Homer Lane's Little Commonwealth, in Monkton Wylde was an attempt to deal constructively with young people in whom life had built resentment. Summerhill, particularly during A.S. Neill's lifetime, received many difficult and distressed children as pupils. A.S. Neill wrote extensively on his conviction that the most effective way for a child to rid himself of excessively violent behaviour, was to work it out himself - which required a very tolerant environment.[97] This approach to child-rearing found

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[96] Head, op. cit., p. 67.

[97] Neill, op. cit., pp. 138-145.

considerable support in North America during the late 1960's, where many free schools modelled themselves after Summerhill, and where, in 1977, with the majority of free schoools no longer in existence, the "relationship-oriented spirit of the late '70's"[98] has produced an extension of free-school principles into what is now called Parent-Effectiveness Training. Thomas Gordon, the psychotherapist who devised P.E.T. has written: "Like all good humanistic psychologists, I believe that people will behave well, as long as they have no reason not to."[99] Gordon is advocating, as did Neill, that "when an older child's behaviour does not actually interfere with the parents' needs the parents are to lay-off and respect his values.[100]

The Parkfield staff's attitude towards the extreme destructiveness that they encountered, was not gleaned from Gordon's book.[101] It was their unanimous decision at thattime, their reaction to an immediate problem.[102] They were satisfied eleven days later that it had, despite the carnage, been the right response. Two days later, however, one staff member experienced a degree of violent behaviour that evoked from her a different, though equally effective response:

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[98]Brown, Catherine. "It Changed My Life" in Psychology Today, Vol. 10, No. 6, pp. 47-57.

[99]Ibid., p. 53.

[100]Neill, op. cit., pp. 208-217.

[101]Gordon, T. P.E.T.,(New York: American Library, 1975.)

[102]Head, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

> Once again, we went to the park, Alison, Pat, Alan Keith and Jane with Martin and myself. On the way, just walking down Parkfield Street, they threw stones at a cat and urged their dog to chase it, opened car doors, honked horns, smashed bottles, 'found' plastic animals, went to every sweet shop to buy or 'nick' sweets and ice lollies, stole someone's papers and comics and finally ran inside the local primary school saying it was much better than the free school.
>
> In the playground Alison tried to get hold of my clogs. I was too tired and fed-up to lend them to her and we had a dispute: I told her I couldn't trust her, and she just repeated that she wanted my clogs and tried to take them with some additional hitting, etc. Finally, she seized a box of matches from my pocket with great joy. She gave me a fair time in which to get them back, but I didn't try. In the end Alan came up and Alison very ostentatiously gave them to him, watching my reaction. Alan started striking and throwing the matches and Alison said she was going to burn my hair and got hold of the matches. I walked off. I was by this time totally exhausted. Despite her having only one match, I made for the grass knowing she couldn't strike it. She followed me, and on the way picked up a piece of glass and threw it. I sat down. A few minutes later she came towards me. I went straight across and grabbed her wrist very hard - she dropped the glass and I shouted very vehemently, 'What are you trying to do? Do you want to hurt me? If so, you're going the right way about it.' I let go of her and walked away. She looked frightened and quickly disappeared.
>
> She had found my breaking point. Should I have waited till it was so near? Was it safe to be so cross and mean with a kid? I thought she would hate me after that, but after half an hour, when I next saw her, she wanted to hold my hand. And did.[103]

Of course, parents and teachers the world over are faced with the need to respond to tensions in children every day, and Lucia Beckett's concern about the rightness of her response is something that a lot of parents have to contend with daily. What is noteworthy, perhaps, is that both incidents described were considered by the adults involved

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[103] Head, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

to be part of school, and, given that the children felt the need to be destructive, a more important part at that time than any curriculum subject. In a state school, the park incident could not have happened, and the children involved in the vandalism would have been suspended or expelled. Thus in these descriptions of violent behaviour in free school children, it is possible to observe an essential feature of the free school, namely its level of tolerance, and a value system that places human needs, as expressed through human behaviour above pre-arranged subject study. It is a child-centred environment, as opposed to a teacher-centred one, in which what is required by the child is, as far as is humanly possible, put before what is needed by the adult. Whether or not this is a good idea is the essence of the continuous debate between free and state schooling. Whether or not the opposing approaches are transferable is also debatable. One may wonder whether or not Alison would have returned to take Lucia's hand if she had known that Lucia was being paid £3,000 a year by the local education association to tolerate threats of matches and broken glass. These incidents in Parkfield Street, which are among the most violent in free-school history, serve to illustrate a central characteristic of free schools - their tolerance - and the associated culturally weak position in which this places them, in that traditionally in this country Alison's behaviour, whatever its motive or reason, is considered intolerable, an offence to an adult, and therefore, requiring constraint by punishment or imposed discipline.

Incidents such as these reveal something also about the adults who elect to work in schools like Parkfield Street, and to tolerate, or at least not react violently, to children's violence. It seems that they

have a very different understanding of what is important to a child, and what must be done with a child if he is to grow into a constructive adult, from that of those people who decide what will go on in a state school. It seems that they set little store by academics and curriculum, although they all encourage reading, writing and an understanding of community ways. It seems that their basic subject is an active understanding of their children. It appears from all this that for its short life, Parkfield Street School along with Scotland Road Free School, the Ark, Freightliners Free School, and others were, in the early 1970's, more important alternatives than Summerhill, because they brought the Summerhill principles into the slums where most people lived, and popularized them - taking more than a few knocks in the process. Parkfield Street Free School is what you get when you put Summerhill in Moss side.

The third problem encountered by Parkfield Street School occurred on September 10th, when an unfortunate mistake publicized throughout the street that someone living at No. 32 was regularly taking drugs. "The gossip ran wild", and shook the school severely. The staff again experienced the fear that they would lose the few pupils they had. They reacted, however, with tolerance, trying to support the person concerned rather than the gossips.

> At that time John wanted to go. I'm glad he did not. We all became very fond of him. But again, as in the previous crisis, by letting John continue to live upstairs, which helped him, the survival of the school was threatened.[104]

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[104]Head, op. cit., p. 70.

It is fortunate that Lucia Beckett's descriptions of the events at Parkfield are so graphic and simple. Similar situations have been experienced by most other free schools. It is worth reflecting that in the experience of virtually every free school in this country some local education authority officials, some suspicious but inactive locals living around the schools and some reporters of local newspapers who discover the problems related to sex, drugs and violence exists in the slums, choose to identify the free schools with them, implying that such things occur far less frequently in the state schools.

The problems weakened the school both internally and externally, even though the staff's method of handling them was strong and positive. And they do serve, by example, to point out some of the strengths within free schooling. The people who decide to run a free school, look at the daily lives of the people who live in the slums, housing estates and high-rises that surround many of Britain's cities and perceive a high level of distress. They also perceive that however well-intentioned, many local government and local education authority efforts to relieve the distress, and provide a more effective structure for living in these places, are only partially successful. They then identify the problems in terms of poor living conditions, high unemployment, many broken homes, and few recreational facilities. If the estate planners, local counsellors and and educators' concepts of what are satisfactory living conditions, are not considered adequate by the residents of a particular area, then those residents will, by their behaviour, show their distress. The group that may be least able to cope with adverse conditions, are the children, whose distress at the absence of a comfortable environment, is manifest in

destructive behaviour, withdrawal and apathy.

An adult who is prepared to attempt a solution for this distress will gain nothing by providing more of what has already been proven unworkable. What may be required for children in places like Parkfield Street and Scotland Road, are schools that will teach them the same fundamental things that the state schools attempt to teach their more fortunate, richer cousins in the stockbroker belts of Surrey and Hampshire, and in those quiet, relatively stable small towns all over the country: survival. But the values and behaviours that may help a shopkeeper's son or a librarian's daughter to work their ways towards some semblance of economic security, may be of little use to the majority of children living in Parkfield Street, for whom the personal search for security and love, and the need to know a reason for living, may be all that matters. John Holt, the American de-schooler, once remarked that he thought that all children needed to survive was to know that someone loved them.[105] The people who attempted the Parkfield Street School placed this need above all others, having concluded that much of the destructive and distressful behaviour among children may reflect a perception by those children that they are not loved by the local education authority, the local council or the city planners, or sometimes by their parents, and that their parents aren't loved very much either. The tolerance shown by the staff of Parkfield Street School towards suspicion, drug-taking and violence, was an instructional methodology. Backed by a practical, business-oriented

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[105]Personal observation to the author, February, 1973.

support group, the tolerance showed love, which provided security, from which perhaps, one day, a happier community might find strength.

One of the many tribulations of the Parkfield Street School was that conflict arose not only with the children and local residents, but also with officialdom, and struck in this form just as unexpectedly as did the local vandals. Children in need of love must experience loving, and quite possibly the same ought to be true for those educational welfare officers who, in performing their legal duties, became angels of death for the Street School. On September 15, an educational welfare officer called upon the mother of the four children who had been so destructive in the free school, and threatened her with prosecution if she did not return her children to their old school. The children were returned the next day. A week later two more mothers were similarly visited and returned their children to the state school.

Down to three children, the school staff visited the Manchester local education authority where they were told that the local education authority had no notice of the school's provisional registration and that they were required "to submit details of our curriculum and premises to the Chief Education Officer before we were legal."[106] The staff decided to seek advice from the Scotland Road Free School. The brief interaction between the two schools proved useful. Ord and Murphy told the Parkfield staff that they had been misinformed. There was no need to submit anything to the Chief Education Officer.

The encounter with the local education authority reflects on one of the previously-mentioned problems free schools encounter: no matter how

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[106]Head, op. cit., p. 72.

overwhelming and significant their perception of their role may be, in terms of all schooling in a large city, they are insignificant. The visit to the local education authority office and the receipt of incorrect information accompanied as it was by the implication that without it the school was illegal, appears almost like bullying, with the "little guy" - the free school - getting hit whichever way he turns. However, from the point of view of the local education authority the situation seems very different. D.A. Fiske, Chief Education Officer for Manchester, points out that the total school population for the city is approximately one hundred thousand children, and that at no time has more than fifty children attended a free school. Most educators in the city have no knowledge of the existence of the Parkfield Street School. In reference to the local education authority's attitude towards free schooling, Fiske wrote:

> The Education Committee in Manchester has never taken a hostile line towards ventures such as this, but I am bound to say that what we have learnt about their activities in the last few years has not prompted the view that they have anything very useful to offer.[107]

Assuming sincerity in both camps, one can only conclude from this and similar situations elsewhere in the country that the idealogical differences in some cities betwen local education authority's and free schools is such that each knows little of the other's rationale, and that each develops a number of protective behaviours towards the potential effects of those differences. If someone associated with Parkfield Street School takes illegal drugs, and someone else gains a reputation for undesirable

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[107]Letter to the author, June 21, 1976. See Appendix 11, Item 16.

sexual behaviour; and if, while on a school walk, children registered in the school, (and truanting from the state school) steal sweets and smash windows, these behaviours will be perceived by members of the local education authority who have certain legal responsibilities to the state, as undesirable. Any local education authority policy of non-intervention may be seen as positive support for an institution which does not appear to punish children who, by breaking windows, are offending against community standards. On the other hand, to the sensitive and locally concerned staff of the free school, who unlike local education authority members, live on Parkfield Street, the antisocial behaviours of the drug-takers, and the children who smashed windows and stole sweets, are understood as expressions of personal distress. Lacking the dances and chants of other primitive societies, or the tradition and willingness to seek direction from a compassionate local witch-doctor, the victims of these seemingly insurmountable difficulties try to exorcise themselves. Anyone who has experienced this within a council estate or city slum would be hard-pressed if asked to design a suitable school, to start thinking in terms of history, geography or English literature.[108]

From the viewpoint of the local education authority however, truanting, theft, and destruction of private property are offences, and toleration of them would lead to anarchy. Therefore, undesirable though the living conditions may be, the standard must be maintained;

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[108] This brings to mind the expressed desire of American educator and philosopher John Dewey to discover through his University Elementary School in Chicago a method of "making learning more useful to men" -The School and Society (Chicago: University Press, 1900), p. 118.

the responsibility of a parent to his child must be protected, and the school must aspire to something better. The Manchester local education authority now operates two alternative schools, described by the Chief Education Officer as "two detached centres specifically for young people who have fallen out with the schools...where, with a good pupil-teacher ratio, continued academic studies can be provided whilst at the same time due attention can be given to the pupil's other needs."[109]

Lucia Beckett provides a succinct analysis of the effect that this difference in approach had upon the Parkfield Street School staff, and presumably upon the local education authority.

> The whole saga of our legal troubles seemed just like "Catch 22". You have to have five children before you can register, yet these kids were truanting until we were registered.[110]

The encounter with Scotland Road Free School stimulated the Parkfield Street School staff. Several ex-pupils returned in October, and an eight-year-old girl was registered at the school after her mother "won" a confrontation with the Educational Welfare Office. However, as on so many other previous occasions, the respite was short-lived. A Department of Education and Science inspector had visited the school on November 13, and had discovered only two children present; and, following a brief six-week period, the school was deregistered on January 18 - on which day the staff discovered that five more children wanted to enrol.

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[109]Fiske, letter, op. cit. See Appendix 11, Item 16.

[110]Head, op. cit., p. 73.

It has been pointed out previously that members of the Scotland Road Community Trust concluded some time after the free school in Liverpool had closed that they were, in some ways, able to cater more successfully to their children's needs through the various activities of the trust, than they had been able to do with the school.[111] To a lesser extent, the same may be said of the Parkfield Street School, and the various neighbourhood organizations that appeared following the meeting at Scotland Road. Under the general name of Community Action, the bookshop, health food store, newsletter and other unions and rights organizations all of which supported the school, have, in part functioned continuously, if somewhat shakily for four years. After the school closed, number 32 became a local meeting place and a crafts centre for a few weeks, until the "big boots" (adults) ransacked the place on February 17, and a few days later five members of the local chapter of Hell's Angels announced their intention of moving in. This latter group were put off, and a small family took over part of the building while David Graham, who had been working primarily with the support group, tried twice to re-open the school without much success.

The causes of this second collapse are extensions of the causes of the first one, and serve again to describe the root causes of free school failure. In spite of the hard work of a few people on Parkfield Street, for most people in Moss Side other things were more important than

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[111] The author interviewed Murphy as he worked on converting a double-decker bus into a mobile play unit for local children, December 18, 1974. See Appendix 1, pp. 35-35.

school: the prospect of re-location; the search for a decent house; acceptance by peers; membership in the right gang; prowess at breaking and entering, bicycle theft or whatever it took to gain admission to a high-status gang. In Moss Side, just as in Barrowfield, Watts or New Jersey, the poor and the unemployed show a tolerance for the idealogical young college graduates who try to run free schools; but it is the tolerance of people whose lifelong experience is that middle-class drop-outs are only temporary visitors to the world of the genuinely poor.

By the end of 1973, former free school workers had identified five teenagers in Moss Side who wanted to remain with them, in spite of the fact that there was now no building to house the school, and the Manchester Education Department had made it quite clear that they did not approve of the free school. Fortunately, for these five teenagers, several other adults were sufficiently interested in them to start a tutorial scheme enabling them to tutor the five in various homes on weekdays. And it was this that kept alive the spirit of the venture. After Christmas this very small group gained the use of a local youth club, The Hideaway, and at that point it became the nucleus of a small free school.

Within a few weeks, twenty children were regularly attending what was now being referred to as the Manchester Free School. In April the group moved to the Acquarius Neighbourhood Centre in Hulme, where it shared premises with a playgroup. By November, thirty children were registered, and the group provisionally registered itself with the Department of Education and Science as The Manchester Free School.

The Manchester Free School was very different from Parkfield Street School. The tutorial scheme of its early days in late 1973, had obliged

pupils to travel a lot, taking up time and limiting activities. Such activities as there might be depended upon whoever was available to help the group, and as a direct result of this inconvenient situation, pupils were briefly introduced to a farily wide range of experiences, included among which were candlemaking, leather working, video production, shoe-making, silk-screening, drama and painting. Additionally, there were regular opportunities to visit a local ice-rink and swimming pool, and to go camping. Formal instruction, centering around reading, writing and arithmetic, took up about two hours of each day.

It was during a camping trip, in February of 1975, that a "disaster" reminiscent of those which continuously beset Parkfield Street Free School, struck. A school worker described it:

> We returned to find much of the building badly smashed up - we counted 53 broken window panes in two of the rooms we had been using - and there was no choice but to move out for the time being. For the next three months three of the helpers' homes were used, plus other facilities such as the Children's Art Centre on Moss Lane East. It became impossible to move back to Aquarius, and other premises were sought. A short-life home was found in Longsight, and it was expected that the council would agree to us using it temporarily. But this did not happen, and in September, 1975 we squatted. It meant that for a term we had a building that was our own. But, not for long - the adjoining street was demolished, part of our street was smashed up, and although our block was safe for the time being, it became more and more uncomfortable to stay there with dereliction all around us. The Department of Education and Science who had been very patient, following us through every move, were talking of a full inspection in three months' time, and it was obvious that our building would be declared unsuitable.[112]

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[112]"Manchester Free School Info, May 1977", printed and distributed by the school. The full text is in Appendix 11, Item 17.

In January, 1976, the Manchester Free School withdrew its provisional registration, and, reduced to whatever space might be found in supporters' homes, the group reverted once again to the tutorial scheme that had kept the idea of a free school alive in the past.

> It was decided to take in no more kids until we had a building, numbers fell and we began to get very dispirited as activities decreased and attempts to find other premises fell through."[113]

Then, in May, 1977, an anonymous donor gave the group enough money to buy a house. So, revitalized for the fourth time, the Manchester Free School is again provisionally registered, and open at 103 Withington Road, Manchester.

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[113]"Manchester Free School Info, May, 1977", op. cit. See Appendix II, Item 17.

Freightliners Free School

The development of the small tutorial group known as South Villas Comprehensive in Camden into the Freightliners Farm at the back of Kings Cross station, parallels that of the Manchester Free School and Scotland Road Free School. It is, however, simpler and stronger. One of the characteristics of free schools that emerges from any detailed study of them is that they are essentially local, responding to needs that are specific to a certain place. Scotland Road Free School was designed to help the children of a Liverpool slum; Parkfield Street School was designed to help children in a Manchester slum. Although very isolated from each other, they were similar because they evolved in similar conditions. London is different in this matter. Its size and cosmopolitan nature affect the style of its schools. Behind the Scotland Road and Parkfield Free Schools were Marxist-Communist political organizations that perceived the possibility of an improved lot for all members of a particular community through efficient, practical social organization. Freightliners has little of this intense political organization behind it, neither do the other free schools in London. Although people who start free schools in inner-city slums are doing something that sets them apart from those who are content to live with the established state school system, the London free schools are not so openly or directly linked to a particular ideology. First of all, they exist within a system that they are not necessarily trying to change. Secondly, they are schools set up to help children in trouble. Thirdly, they are rarely supported by the kinds of support groups that were behind Scotland Road and Parkfield Schools. Fourthly, they seem to be more smooth-running.

Between January, 1972, and the present time, the free school that Jenny Simmonds started in Camden has changed its name from South Villas Comprehensive to Freightliners Free School, to Freightliners Farm in the Maiden Lane Community Association. Each name reflects well the primary function of the place at a particular time in its history. Jenny Simmonds was, in 1972, a second-year Education student who, like many students who visit areas like Camden, became immediately aware of her need to be involved in the community in more ways than just as a student on teaching practice. She decided to try to help the seven children of one family, all of whom were truanting from the local school. These children, together with one other from a neighbouring family, came to her basement flat in South Villas, Camden during school hours, and she tutored them in the basic subjects until July and the summer holidays came. She was financed in this venture to the tune of £250.00, donated anonymously. The money ran out in July.[114]

In September of 1972, South Villas Comprehensive, as Jenny Simmonds named it, became part of a larger organization, the Maiden Lane Community Association. This association differed from Community Action and the Scotland Road Trust in several ways. It was funded by the Camden Council; it was given a temporary home on fourteen acres of freight yards behind Kings Cross station; and it comprised a variety of cultural and leisure activities as opposed to the money-making and political unions of its counterparts in Liverpool and Manchester. It was, in fact, a place for

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[114] An article in the Times Educational Supplement of July 28, 1972 reports that Miss Simmonds had £50.00 of her own, bringing her total finances to £300.00. See Appendix 11, Item 18.

local children to enjoy themselves, and for some to learn to read and write. It had a playground, a youth club, and the free school.

It has already been pointed out that some local education authorities have naturally been reluctant to finance alternative schools - particularly free schools - whose manner they have found threatening. The simplicity and non-threatening nature of the Maiden Lane Community Association made it more elegible for financial support, and it got money from both Camden council and the Inner London Education Authority. The parents of the children attending the free school part of the association's activities had completed ILEA form DO/35 - a well-known piece of paper among alternative schools in London - whereby they acknowledged that their children were receiving instruction in tutor groups at the Community Association's premises. The Inner London Education Authority paid the association installments from its "Voluntary Bodies Fund" to cover maintenance and the salaries, at minimum scale, of two full-time teachers. Thus, during the school year between September, 1972, and June 1973, Freightliners Free School (newly renamed to fit its new location), had a total of seventeen pupils, aged between eight and fifteen years, and five full-time adult workers, including the two paid teachers and two youth workers.[115] During this same period the Maiden Lane Community Association expanded its activities to include an Old Age Pensioners' Lunch Club, a Greek Arts Theatre and a "farm," primarily consisting of two goats and some chickens. The Arts Theatre was constructed by local

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[115]The paid teachers shared their salaries with the unpaid staff.

Greek people, by converting an old canopy in the freight yard. It soon became a meeting place for various Greek and Cypriot organizations, such as the Cypriot Refugee Association, the Cypriot Community Workers Action Group, and a Cypriot Old Age Pensioners' Group.

The theatre was built with volunteer labour, and served a variety of cultural needs within the community, the primary ones of which were dance and drama. The "farm," which grew over the following five years, was also developed voluntarily by the children who had come into the association by virtue of their registration in the free school. The success of these two projects within the association serve to draw attention to another and very interesting characteristic of free schools: the happier and more leisure-oriented they are the more acceptable they seem to be to local education authorities, and the more appealing they are to local citizenry. People associated with the trusts, community action groups and other organizations that have served as support systems for free schools, seem more willing to work towards a project that offers tangible pleasure than they are to support one that is weighted towards a more theoretical, political or economic end.

The free school obtained, in mid-1973, a bus and the loan of a cottage in the Lake District, and these two acquisitions did much to expand the horizons of the children and establish the sort of activities in which the school would be involved. The bus made it possible for the children to visit local markets as well as going out into the countryside and visiting various museums and other interesting places. One of the side effects of all this was that the children became interested in farm animals. It was from this interest that Freightliners Farm grew.

Empty box cars made excellent homes for the goats. Various rabbits and guinea pigs were quite easily accommodated. The theatre supported itself; so did the youth club, which had a membership of more than a hundred teenagers. The staff of the school had agreed to operate within I.L.E.A.'s "six conditions" required in order to be considered for funding, and consequently they received financial support.[116] The teachers employed at the school were mostly qualified to teach reading and writing, so that was the thrust of the school's academic programme. It operated quietly, regularly, with virtually no change in its pupils and only a few changes among staff for almost three years, obtaining minimal but regular support from I.L.E.A. and the Camden Council, slowly increasing the size of the farm and running a programme for the children based upon reading and writing and enhanced by visits to a wide variety of places normally outside the experience of most children.

Who were the children?

Martin was sixteen years old in 1975, the son of a self-employed home-maintenance repair man. He lived with both parents and had a comfortable, if poor, home. He had been quite happy at his primary school, but had disliked secondary school, describing some of the staff as "arrogant" and pointing out that the no-smoking rule in the school made it necessary for him to truant because he smoked. When he first began truanting, he left the school premises after registration in the morning and after lunch. However, a modification to the rules involving regis-

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[116]All six conditions are listed in Appendix 11, Item 2.

tration for individual lessons left Martin with little choice but to truant all day. An incident in the school which resulted in a teacher hurting Martin's hand by bending it backwards caused him to use a classroom chair to "defend" himself. After that he left the school entirely. His parents made arrangements with Chris Sharp, who worked at Freightliners, to enroll him in that school - a move that was supported by I.L.E.A. because Freightliners had agreed to the authority's "six conditions" for support, the first of which was "to get children back to school as soon as possible." While he attended Freightliners, Martin became interested in photography and graphics. He left school in July, 1975.

Mike was a year younger than Martin. His parents are Turkish Cypriots and the family was on the verge of breaking up, it being the father's wish to return to Cyprus. A local demolition plan meant that Mike, his sister and his mother would be re-housed sometime during 1976. Like Martin, Mike felt quite positive about his days at primary school, but had found the impersonal atmosphere of his secondary school very insecure. He attributed this to the high staff turnover, and blamed some of the children at the school for making life difficult for some teachers. It was the lack of a strong relationship between the students and the teachers that made Mike truant. He registered at Freightliners early in 1975, following a series of discussions between his mother and the school's staff. He responded well to what he acknowledged was a more secure relationship. He learned to play the guitar, and stayed at the school until his sixteenth birthday.

Alan joined Freightliners when he was ten years old, after being expelled from his primary school. His short life had been a miserable

one, and in this he is probably representative of the kinds of inner-city children for whom a school like Freightliners seems helpful. Alan is one member of a large, fatherless family. He is unusually small for his age, and has a chest complaint that is aggravated by heavy smoking and the dampness of his mother's flat. His physical stature made him useful to older boys for breaking and entering, and by the age of twelve he had a long criminal record. Since he was invariably caught, he made almost weekly court appearances during 1974. Freightliners has been useful to him, providing him with somewhere to go regularly. In mid-1975 he was offered the chance to train as a jockey when he leaves school in 1978.

In December, 1974, the school was invited to become involved in a project in Dunford Bridge, South Yorkshire, at the Lifespan Educational Trust, a commune that had offered one of thirteen derelict railway cottages on its property to the free schools of the country, provided that the students of these schools would visit Lifespan, live in the commune for a week or so, and spend part of their time renovating the house. In April, 1975, Chris Sharp took several students to Lifespan.[117]

The period between May, 1973, and June, 1976, was, therefore, an extraordinarily long and stable one for any free school, and it is worth reflecting on the relationship that seems to have existed between the various adults who ran the school and the local authorities. There being nothing about the Maiden Lane Community Association to threaten or offend Camden Council or I.L.E.A., both authorities put money into what was

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[117]The full account of the Lifespan project - which was designed to bring free schools together for the first time - is in Part III.

perceived to be a sensible and effective community use of available space, and a sincere attempt to make life easier for those children, old people and immigrants in the area whose lives were an endless struggle.

It is probably reasonable to consider free schools as very temporary institutions, dogged by continual economic and personnel problems, daring to exist within a society that is unused to them and contemptuous of the naivete of young, well-educated middle-class men and women who seem to give up the very thing to which the poor aspire, living in self-imposed poverty, preaching against the values of the very society to which many of their neighbours yearn to belong. Free schools are essentially in opposition to both the local education authorities whose style they usually reject, and the deprived, depressing society of the poor, whose values they appear to espouse. The more radical, noisy and widely publicised they are, the faster their hesitant benefactors back away, and their opponents, the Angels, "big boots" and gossiping neighbours move in for the kill. Their vulnerability is one of the few things they all have in common, and this weakness is their ultimate downfall.

The past decade has seen so many free schools that were dreamed of and written about in the gestetnered pages of the A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, replete with mellow phrases about macrame and pet rabbits, Summerhill and finger-painting, of hands firmly embedded in the clay and hearts set on a brave new world, but that never saw a single student, and faded away like early spring flowers in a late frost. Others were so short-lived or so completely overwhelmed by the odds against them that their existence passed almost unnoticed, and they were little more than a passing fad in the lives of the truants and troublemakers of Brighton, Sheffield, and Shepherd's Bush.

By comparison with these, Freightliners Free School has been a successful school. The practical and down-to-earth contribution of an inner-city cultural and recreation complex, built upon the ruins of a British Rail freight yard, evoked a positive response from several sectors of local society. Additionally, the school staff was sufficiently well-qualified in education and social work to be acceptable to the quizzical eyes of I.L.E.A. and the Camden Council. One has, therefore, an inclination when reflecting upon free schools, to see Freightliners as a place in which several relatively successful elements have come together. The comparative inoffensiveness of the school, its accent on the provision of recreational facilities for people of all ages, and its willingness to comply with I.L.E.A.'s conditions for obtaining financial support have had the effect of keeping the school alive, while other politically noisier schools have disappeared. It was observed that after Neill's death Summerhill would never again be as strong or as controversial because he was its strength. Similar observations were made about Homer Lane and Pestalozzi. It is clear that the same thing applies to free schools. In each one there is an individual who, in many ways, is the school: Elizabeth Hibbert in The Ark; David Graham in Manchester; Ord and Murphy in Liverpool; and Chris Sharp and later Fay Hiscock in Freightliners.

By the end of 1976 Freightliners Free School was nearing the end of its existence. Smaller than before, it began to be the victim of I.L.E.A.'s club-swinging, as funding was withdrawn. Camden Council, faced with development of the freight yards, also withdrew support. The school was reduced to a tutor scheme again, which is what it had been in the beginning. The farm, which had become popular among local children, was told to

move. Fay Hiscock wrote, on March 4, 1977:

> We are negotiating with the London Borough of Islington to find a site for the farm project, and I am still hoping that it may be possible to include the tutor scheme or some related educational project, probably on a voluntary basis, and allowing it to develop at its own rate out of the farm and crafts on the site.....At present severe lack of staff and uncertainty about the future have badly affected the running of the tutor scheme, but I feel that we have something positive in that several children are continuing to attend.[118]

In late March, 1977, I.L.E.A. sent letters to the parents whose children were still attending the school, informing them that because there were more than five children in the tutor-scheme it constituted a school, and was to be closed down. The letter was sent without any prior consultation with the staff of the school. Fay Hiscock's comment was: "I don't know what we're going to do now."

Chairman of the Inner London Education Authority's Schools sub-committee, Mary-Lou Clarke, felt that withdrawal of support for Freight-liners Free School was justified:

> Concerning Freightliners School, can I say that the school did not collapse for lack of financial support from the Authority. We were aiding the project to the full extent of our ability from mid-1974 until 1976 when deteriorating physical conditions at the school and concern at the education being offered there led the Authority to a decision to withdraw assistance and to return the children to local secondary schools where possible. However, a full term's notice was given before financial support was withdrawn.....In this case, despite a willingness on the Authority's part to work in partnership with Freightliners we were faced, I think, with the school's failure to achieve its own aims and objectives."[119]

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[118] Letter to the author, March 4, 1977. The full text of this letter is in Appendix 11, Item 19.

[119] Letter to the author from Mary-Lou Clarke, Chairman, Inner London Education Authority's Schools sub-committee, April 22, 1977. Full text in Appendix 11, Item 20.

Mrs. Clarke also described the manner in which Freightliners Free School died:

> Following adverse reports from H.M. Inspectors, the Department of Education and Science subsequently closed the school. [120]

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[120] Ibid.

White Lion Street Free School

On September 18, 1972, the situation in Britain regarding alternative schools was as follows: the Ark was settling quietly into its third year in a cottage on the edge of Oxford. Parkfield Street Free School in Manchester was pulling itself out of a chaotic summer and, with stolen equipment replaced, broken windows repaired and booted-in doors re-hung, five workers prepared to encounter the youth of Moss Side. In Liverpool the Scotland Road Free School had one hundred pupils, and had just become the first of its kind to be granted an extension of provisional registration by the D.E.S. South Villas Comprehensive in Camden had just become part of the Maiden Lane Community Association and re-named itself Freightliners Free School. And in Islington a group of teachers and social workers who had been quietly planning and negotiating for a year opened the doors of a sixteen-room, red brick, badly vandalized house and began the White Lion Street Free School, for any child living within half a mile, who cared to come in.

Twenty-seven children, aged between three and fourteen years of age, responded. Many of them were truants. Twenty came after arrangements had been made between their parents and the new school. Seven were referred by social workers. The staff (about eight people), who were all unpaid, were the remnants of a force of some thirty volunteers who had spent July and August renovating the badly vanadalized house, which had been leased to the group by the Islington Borough Council for £100.00 a year. By the opening day, a considerable amount of work had been completed. One bathroom had been converted into a pottery room and another (the house had four) into a darkroom. Land adjoining the school

> were unattached and not settled: through discussion, this led to the adoption of a system in which each child is allocated (with, of course, their full approval) to an adult, who is responsible for following the child's progress, particularly in the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy, for close contact with the family, for day to day organization of the child's programme and for keeping records of his or her progress. Within this system, individual timetables can be organized as a real knowledge of the child's present situation and needs is developed. Work on basic skills is almost always done individually. There are certain regular items in the school week: we hire a gymnasium with trampoline and other equipment on Tuesday afternoons, and a learner swimming pool on Wednesdays (seven children have learnt to swim while in the school and others are taking progressive swimming and life-saving tests). There is a regular visit to the local library every Thursday. Because we do not believe it is possible to satisfy the range of any child's interests within a building, they all spend about a third of their time out on visits, both local and farther afield.[122]

In November, 1972, the school received its first visit from two or Her Majesty's Inspectors. Alison Truefit, one of the school's workers, described the visit:

> This is what happened to us. The HMI who happens to be allocated to our area, visited us in the three months after we opened.....He is not a specialist, unlike some HMI's who are experts in particular curriculum areas. It does not seem to be the practice to come unannounced. Occasionally he has called to make an appointment for a visit or to return a report we'd written (for our full inspection), but could not be persuaded to come right in, even for a cup of tea. He came only once quite unexpectedly, a few days after our full inspection, saying he'd forgotten to check the lavatories and register. He looked at them and then went straight off again. [123]

In December, the planning of the previous year, the comparative stability of the school, its good reputation with I.L.E.A. and the Islington Council, could be seen to have paid off. Unlike Parkfield,

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[122] White Lion Street Free School Bulletin No.2. p.8 See Appendix 11, Item 21

[123] Truefit, A. How To Start A Free School. pp.11-12.

which had by Christmas closed again, White Lion was a comparative success. More children were admitted, and the staff found themselves with over two hundred applications for positions from prospective teachers.

In the first three months of 1973, the school attained a level of stability and progress unknown by any of the other struggling alternative schools in the country. The stability was reflected in two ways, both closely related to the day-to-day operation of the school: the expansion of facilities within the building, and the extension of the children's experiences beyond the school and familiar community. In January, for example, various groups of children visited local police and fire stations (Kings Cross and Cannon Street), and Islington Town Hall. February brought the Chinese New Year celebrations, which were attended by most children, and visits slightly further afield to the Natural History Museum, and for six older children, to a cottage in Wales. March brough visits to the New Forest and Epping Forest.

In March the school was six months old, and the following account of the expansion of the pre-schoolers facilities shows how changes come about in a free school:

> We started with five pre-school children in two separate rooms, when the whole school was twenty-five strong.... visualising older children reading to small children in a cosy family. Six months later when the size of the school had nearly doubled, we found it necessary to knock a hole between our two nursery rooms to keep a better eye on things. The older children came in and out like raiding parties, creating havoc and sometimes carrying a little one off to keep as a mascot. We wondered if we should put a gate on the first floor landing so that the little ones could go upstairs, but not wander down and out the front door and follow others to the corner sweet shop. Would a gate serve to slow down stampedes on the stairs, or cause more accidents? When we found that the little ones were clinging to the nursery door for a

> chance to get downstairs, we decided to make a rule: all nursery children must stay in the nursery, and need to be returned when found on the stray.[124]

The spring of 1973 brought more expansion. One group of children spent a week on a farm in Belgium, and visited Paris, Ghent and Ostend. When this particular group returned it was to discover that Islington Borough Council Social Services had awarded the school an unconditional grant of £4000.00 and the I.L.E.A. had begun paying for some of the meals for some children - all of which contributed greatly to the recognition of the need for the school.[125]

By May the school's population had risen to fifty-one, of whom six were full-time workers, seven part-timers, and thirty-eight children. In June the school received another inspection; in July the school noted that a good number of its pupils had registered for over five hundred sessions during the school year - one hundred more than was required by the 19744 Education Act, which was, therefore, quite remarkable for children who had been truants.

The school had spent, in all, only £ 95000.00 for its first school year, and ended the year with an excellent attendance record, a long waiting list for both student and teaching positions, a programme that had almost visibly expanded every month, and a feeling among many members of the local community that their children's lives had been extended well beyond their previous experiences. This, then, was the result of careful planning. The school did not have a very strong financial base, nor did it have the support

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[124] White Lion Street Free School Bulletin, No. 2., pp. 12-13. See Appendix II, Item 22.

[125] A spot check on one day in May, 1973, in Islington showed that six-hundred secondary school pupils were absent without cause, according to Moorsam, op. cit., p. 149. See Appendix II, Item 4.

groups of other free schools; it was not established as a political movement nor did it set out to antagonize the local education authorities. Like Freightliners, it was simply an attempt to run a school - useful to the community and to the local education authority, and not at all threatening. The threatening nature of some free schools has been discussed before, and will be considered later. It would seem that aggression is a poor tactic for free schools; the adversary they perceive themselves as having is much stronger than they are, and wields a big club most effectively. The better organized, quieter free schools have lasted longer than the noisier ones.

The history of the school during its second year is one of tightening organization and the growth of more formality in the curriculum planning, much of which emerged in the light of experience. An example of this is the development of the weekly school meeting - an essential ritual, it seems, in any school that labels itself "free," but one that has met with the varying success that is to be expected when an idea is transplanted from the place of its birth to alien ground. It had taken only a few weeks of school in 1972 for the adults to realize that most of the children had little experience of such decision-making processes and could contribute little to them. Thus, the staff had decided to split the general meeting into two parts, one with the children on Mondays, and the other with parents on Wednesdays. By July, 1973, the end of the first year, the Monday meetings had improved so much that it was decided to merge them with the Wednesday meetings, "to involve the children even more closely in the running of the school." [126]

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[126] White Lion Street Free School Bulletin, No.2, pp.8-9. See Appendix 11, Item 21.

In August, initial discussions began at these meetings about the school's loose academic programmes, and it was agreed that certain areas of study should be continuous and organized. Work on this took place during August and September, and produced something approaching a basic curriculum, albeit unlike any other:

> We are starting with four areas: bodies (waste products, sex, vision, death, for example); thinking (wolf children and the relation of language to thought, sleep, madness, decision-making including choosing between jobs, life styles, gadgets - as well as moral decisions, learning how to learn, the parent/adult/child model of behaviour etc.); employment (job experience-every child has the chance to get a part-time job of some kind, ways of assessing the value of jobs to society and oneself, ways of improving your knowledge of yourself...); the future (....technologies, change in institutions such as schools, predictions and planning, impact of the media, ecology, etc., etc.)[127]

By this time the number of students had risen to forty-three, and all 1972 grants had been renewed, making it possible for five staff members to receive £16.00 per week. Six of the seven full-time staff members were qualified teachers, the other was a qualified playground leader.

A brief inspection in July was followed by an indication that the school could expect another full inspection by December, prior to registration.

Within a month, however, it was realized that the more formal curriculum had adverse as well as beneficial effects. The feeling among the staff was that the four subject areas had broken up previous friendships among the children, and failed as a teaching structure. Meetings were held with parents and it was decided to retain the structure, but modify it in order to avoid breaking up the strong friendships between some children. Not all of the staff members supported the decision to retain the programme.

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[127]Bulletin No.2. op.cit. p.9. See Appendix 11, Item 21.

Some of the older children were observed at this time to be in need of a more formal programme in literacy, and while several registered to study for 'O'-level G.C.E. in English and Mathematics, others began English drill by using a card system:

> This system is always being added to and updated, but we feel it is quite useful. It is based on a graded English "syllabus" we arrived at with the help of many standard grammar text-books. It includes conventional exercises (put speech marks in the right places) and less conventional ones ("write this out posh"), but most of the actual content relates to the school or the area and we try to make some of it mad and crazy. The cards are used as "medicine," prescribed when someone is making a particular kind of mistake, or is ready to move on to a new skill.[128]

And in this comparatively stable fashion the school progressed through its second year, receiving a favourable report from the inspectors and losing only one child. In May the school admitted to its programmes several adults, who soon formed a Tenants' Association - the first such group to emerge from the school.

> Our main aim is to fight for better living conditions on our estate. To do this, however, we have to work very hard at all times. Mainly we have to attend many council meetings, to put forward our grievances to our local councillors, and sometimes we feel that we are banging our heads off a brick wall.[129]

Thus, White Lion Street Free School now had a community action group. However, it is worth noting that in Liverpool and Manchester an organization like a Tenants' Association was part of a larger conglomeration of support groups that backed up the school, or incorporated it. In this case, the reverse was the case, with the association coming from the school, and the

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[128]Bulletin No. 3, p.20. See Appendix 11, Item 23.

[129]Bulletin No. 3, p.18. See Appendix 11, Item 24.

adults who formed it acknowledging the school as the centre for their activities.

In December, 1974, the school began to encounter problems which eventually led to its demise. One might have imagined from the foregoing history of the school that it had perhaps beaten fate and was destined to become well-established by virtue of the very careful planning that had gone on before it ever opened. In a way, the school became a threat, in only minor ways, but nevertheless a threat. First, a petition to I.L.E.A. for funds, supported by a large number of signatures, was ignored. At the same time the school was told by the council to remove an eight-foot wall that surrounded the garden, and replace it with a six-foot fence. In February, 1975, I.L.E.A. withdrew what little support it had given the school, at a time when it had never been larger, with eight full-time teachers, each paid £15.00 per week, and forty-seven pupils. By July, 1975, the Wates Foundation grant expired, and the school settled into a period of constraint, depending increasingly upon parent and volunteer help, that lasted until the end of 1976. Support from the Islington Council and other foundations was proving inadequate in a city whose costs of living had increased by twenty-five percent in a year. By February, 1977, it was clear that the school would have to close if it did not obtain more regular support from I.L.E.A., and there being little or no indication that this was forthcoming, the school made a formal request to the chairman of the Schools sub-committee for financial support of its educational activities "at least for an experimental period on the basis of no more than the per-capita cost of educating children in their maintained schools."[130]

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[130]Letter from the school to I.L.E.A. February, 1977. See Appendix 11, Item 25.

The school's fight for survival intensified in March, 1977. Peter Newell, a worker at the school and a founder-member of the A.S. Neill Trust, wrote of the school's plight in the Times Educational Supplement, revealing the conflict that had been simmering between the school and the Inner London Education Authority, over the question of continued support. Arguing that the school would be forced to close in July if the Authority did not grant-aid it to the tune of about £20,000 a year, Newell wrote:

> In the five years since we opened we have been telling the authority that our legal status of independent school is no reflection on our attitudes, but is inescapable until they substantially grant-aid us. There are plenty of sections in the flexible 1944 Education Act that would allow them to do so without stifling our experimental characteristics. Alternatively they could fund us as a voluntary organization, as Islington Council does. We are asking for no more than the unit cost of educating the same children in maintained primary and secondary schools (and we do have many children who had indicated in one way or another - truancy, disruption, etc. - that they could not accept the education offered in local schools)... we suspect the main reason has a firmer ideological base. Those who have spent their energies on removing selection and building up comprehensive schools see no place for "alternatives." This is not to say we regret the ending of selection, or the passing of the voluntary-aided grammar schools. But we see a danger in a centralized bureaucracy creating a unified school system and strictly limiting the development of new structures, when there is no concensus over the aims of education.[131]

Mary-Lou Clarke, Chaiman of the School's sub-committee of the Inner London Education Authority, was more optimistic about the school's future than was Newell:

> I recently met a deputation from the school and we hope to be able to work out a way of harnessing their work in a supportive role for pupils who, for various reasons, seem

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[131] Newell, Peter. "Threatened Alternative," Times Education Supplement, March 18, 1977, p.29. See Appendix 11, Item 26.

> unable to benefit from the disciplines of normal school life. (It means essentially that they would cease to operate as an independent school, in which capacity the Authority does in fact have no powers to assist as long as there are adequate places for our pupils within the maintained system.)[132]

In the last weeks of June, 1977, Mrs. Clarke's guarded optimism proved ill-conceived, when the School's sub-committee decided not to support White Lion Street School. Journalist Peter Wilby described the action as shabby:

> The ILEA's stand looks shabbier still when you compare the British record in alternative schooling with other Western countries. Denmark has a century-old tradition of parents starting their own schools with state help. In the U.S. more than a million children attend publicly-financed alternative schools. Free schools also flourish in Australia and Canada. Yet, apart from the White Lion, Britain has just three small alternative schools, in Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, which are also wobbling on the brink of disaster. No education authority has yet given a free school significant financial support. Despite the substantial research budgets of the School's Council and the National Foundation for Educational Research, nobody has bothered to evaluate the White Lion experiment.
>
> The trouble with the British Left is that it lacks the courage of its convictions. Tory authorities up and down the country shamelessly subsidise fee-paying schools to the tune of £23m. a year.....Yet, for the sake of some piffling bureaucratic principle, the Labour-controlled ILEA cannot even part with £20,000 (which it will have to spend anyway) to help a handful of dedicated idealists and deprived inner-city kids.[133]

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[132] Clarke letter, op.cit. See Appendix 11, Item 20 for full text.

[133] Wilby, Peter. "A Mean Death for a Free School", New Statesman. July 1, 1977, p.10. See Appendix 11, Item 27.

Balsall Heath Community School

Birmingham, like Liverpool, had an Educational Priority Area. It was located in and around a low-income, high-crime area called Balsall Heath. The variety of activities and projects within the Birmingham Educational Priority Area were considerable, embracing at least some of the basic needs of the children in the area, whose English, Irish, Jamaican, Pakistani and Indian parents had been obliged to make Balsall Heath their home. Birmingham 12, the district of the city that contained several of the projects, is a scruffy place - a hotch-potch of old and new slums with a high incidence of vandalism and, with few exceptions, a very low level of cooperative community action.[134] One of the tasks the Educational Priority Area Committee set itself was to provide pre-school and play-group centres for local children, "and give these children a better start than the vandals had."[135] By the end of 1970, Balsall Heath, together with its neighbouring areas Tyseley, Moseley, Aston and Handsworth, had a total of eleven play-groups, nurseries and play centres primarily for Pakistani and Jamaican children. Cooperative effort between project members, local churches and parents' groups maintained these centres in the face of considerable opposition from local vandals who had, at one time or another, burned, burgled and attempted to destroy every one of them.

The problems encountered by the people who ran these centres reflect the nature of daily life in Balsall Heath. For example, the Educational Priority Area project headquarters was located in an old house which, "for

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[134]The author's personal view of Balsall Heath, obtained by walking the streets of the area for several hours. Also the opinion of Dr. M.R. Atkinson, Director of the Balsall Heath Community Education Project in a pamphlet, "Professionalism and Inner Ring Education," for details of which see Appendix 11, Item 28.

[135]Jones, J. "The Birmingham Story", Where. No. 54. February, 1971. p.41. See Appendix 11, Item 29.

a while lay fouled and vandalized, a recognized doss-house for the meths drinkers."[136] But with "unstinting help from the Housing Department, and with teams of volunteers,"[137] it was made into a nursery for up to sixty children. Not far from this was St. Paul's Day Care Centre, established after a 1968 survey showed that six hundred families "desparately needed help of the kind that could be provided by a day nursery."[138] Currently it handles eighty children. In nearby Wills Street in Handsworth there is a small playgroup that has been "hit by vandals" on several occasions; St. Thomas' Playgroup was located in an area described as being "at the top of a bleak hill in an area despressingly short of communal facilities."[139] St. Barnabas' Playgroup grew up beside a church that was vandalized and set on fire in 1970. Church Road Playgroup nearby took care of another fifty children in an area of gross overcrowding and prostituion. Villa Road Playgroup, not far away, had all its equipment stolen shortly after it opened. Yet, in spite of these obvious hardships, these centres together catered to over one thousand children, and when the Educational Priority Area project closed in 1976, most of them continued to operate.

For adults and older children, and for those inhabitants of the area whose problem was not one of being very small, but rather of being unoccupied or bored, there was less help. Truancy among children in local junior schools was not particularly high, and, among secondary school children, was limited to a relatively small number of disruptive or violent

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Jones, J. op.cit.

[139] Ibid.

teenagers.[140] Vandalism, on the other hand, was a major problem, and so was the lack of public recreation facilities.[141] The few people in the area who were prepared to articulate their concerns on this matter frequently related the problem back to a lack of communication between themselves and the local council - particularly the Planning Department - and the lack of police patrols. In other words, much of the vandalism and uncertainty with a community resulted from various ethnic groups being alienated from each other: tenants from the council that owned their houses; children from the police who only appeared when a crime had been committed; and schools from the daily routines of a poor, working-class society.

It was felt, by a small group of parents and by two ex-Birmingham University lecturers, Dick Atkinson and Terry Tebo, that an independent community school, like a free school, if properly located and operated might be able to forge a link between its pupils and the residents of the community in a way that local state schools had not been able to do. The concept was far from being a new one, but the design, as is the case with all free schools, was a local one - a response to the needs of this specific community. Thus, in the spring of 1973 St. Paul's Free School came into being at 120 St. Paul's Road, in Balsall Heath - a long road of tightly-packed Victorian terraced houses, most of them occupied by Pakistani immigrants. The school had six pupils, three teachers and no money. The intent at the beginning was to start with no rules or timetables, (the traditional

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[140] Letters to the author from Mr. A. Bullus, Headmaster of Park Hill Junior and Infant School, and Mrs. B. Harris, Headmistress, Highgate School Balsall Heath, both refer to truancy problems and solutions. See Appendix 11, Items 30 and 31.

[141] "Birmingham," Cirkusact, University College, London, 1975. See Appendix 11, Item 32.

structures of most free schools) and see what happened.[142] Pupils' projects were to be responses to the needs of the community, rather than being related to any particular academic programme: studies of people living on St. Paul's Avenue; studies of food prices; involvement in the activities of other local institutions; and examination of locally sensitive issues such as police patrols and community planning.

The link between the school and the community, and a major component of the school's programme, was a magazine called The Heathan, a publication produced by the school and sold at cost to local residents. The Heathan is impressive in its organization and sense of purpose. Of interest to anyone in the area with a house or a child, the magazine is a combination of articles, interviews, cartoons, essays, photographs and poems about the quality of life in Balsall Heath, whose preparation must draw from the pupils of the school a clear comprehension of how to research, compute and write. For example, the front page of issue number 2, published in November, 1973, has the heading "Shopping Around", under which is an analysis of food prices in all local grocers shops and supermarkets, together with recommendations on which stores provide the best value for money, and a warning, based upon studies made in the consumer magazine, Which, that expensive foods may be no more nutritional than cheaper brands.[143] Local residents use The Heathen to learn about their community, and the school uses it to raise local issues. It is one of the only local newsletters in the country that

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[142] "Lesson from All at the Do-As-You-Please-School", The Birmingham Post. July 18, 1973. See Appendix 11, Item 33 for full text.

[143] The Heathan. No. 2, November, 1973, pp.1-2. For full text see Appendix 11, Item 34.

is designed specifically to bring school and community together.[144] Pupils' work, particularly poems and short compositions, is also an important part of the magazine. Concentrating on local life rather than the more traditional classical subjects for poetry and prose, the works are folk art, emerging from the streets:

> Straws in the Wind
> The vandals have been.
> The windows are smashed,
> The schools are burnt.
> Train seats are ripped and bottles are thrown.
> Cars are smashed and people are hurt.
> The vandals have been
> And gone like the night.
> But their mark is left and who knows
> When they'll return?
>
> T. Doyle.[145]

> Old people are scared of vandals, because they will go to old people's houses and break in. They might knock them down and the old people might get hurt. If they phone for the coppers, the coppers can't do anything about it. Vandals throw bottles outside people's doors and break into shops.
>
> D. Brown.[146]

By Christmas of 1973 the casual, unstructured atmosphere of the school began to change as the teachers gradually raised the standards. The spring term began in 1974 with the pupils being expected to arrive on time for

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[144] Others are published by Barrowfield Community School, and the community trusts that supported the late Parkfield Street Free School and Scotland Road, Free School.

[145] The Heathan, No. 4. June, 1974. p.7. See Appendix 11, Item 35.

[146] The Heathan, No. 4. June, 1974. p.6. See Appendix 11, Item 36.

regularly-scheduled classes. And, coincidentally, it was at this time that local authorities in the area began to see a need for the school which the school was unable to meet: the problem was truants. The spring of 1974 was a difficult time for many secondary school students in Balsall Heath. The leaving age had been raised to sixteen years at a time when many teenagers in the area had difficulty waiting until they reached fifteen years of age to leave. Truancy rose considerably. One report in The Heathan pointed out that "many teenagers who should by law be at school, merely wandered the streets of Balsall Heath this spring. They had nothing to do."[147] Local Education Authority officials and members of the Balsall Heath Association both requested the school to take in some of these teenagers, but it had little space, few facilities, and no money.

In May, 1974, the first steps were taken by the school to organize a support system. The three teachers were joined by several other members of the community in forming a management committee that would handle the legal and financial affairs of the school and attempt to find salary money for the teachers. The composition of this committee is interesting in that the committee was one of the first steps taken by the school to make itself more independent of the community while remaining an integral part of it. Two mothers, Mrs. McGhee and Mrs. Whiteley, a local painter named Saidy Sarr, two local community workers, Gill Southwell and Rob McCann, one pupil and Alex Hughes, a local headmaster, comprised the committee. These people, by formally coming together in this way, were cementing earlier links with the school. They do not represent a very wide range of community interests,

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[147] The Heathan, No. 4. June, 1974. p.7. Appendix 11, Item 35.

but are, predominantly, educators. Mrs. McGhee's son, Adrian, a pupil at the school, appears, from his contributions to The Heathan, to be a particularly lucid individual whose command of the vernacular is prose at its finest:

> Every Saturday afternoon a copper comes round Brunswick Road checking it. It may be robbed, it may be bust up by vandals. The reason he comes round every Saturday is because vandals used to bust it up. I think it's very stupid, and the people who do it must think they're very clever to smash up the telephone boxes. I don't see the kicks they're getting out of it. It's terrible, because I can't go into the 'phone box without someone giving me a dirty look. It's just because I'm young - they think I'm a vandal. I know I'm not an angel, but I wouldn't go and do stupid things like that.[148]

Adrian has also contributed a poem about two boys burning furniture.[149] Mrs. Whiteley's son, Tom, had taken part in a cruise along the canals around Stratford, and had graphically described the adventure.[150] Gill Southwell and Rob McCann worked in the St. Paul's Nursery, which was part of the EPA project, and the Malvern Street Playground, respectively. Thus, six of the nine committee members were professionally concerned with children, and two of the remaining three were mothers of particularly active pupils, leaving only one member, Saidy Sarr, whose concerns may have been directed more generally towards the community than towards children. The composition of the management committee gave it a flavour, therefore, that was considerably different from that of the support groups behind the Scotland Road Free School and Parkfield Street Free School. The Scotland Road Association,

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[148] The Heathan, No.4. June, 1974. p.6. See Appendix 11, Item 34.

[149] The Heathan, No.2, November, 1973. p.9. See Appenxis 11, Item 37

[150] The Heathan, No.2, November, 1973, p.9. See Appendix 11, Item 37.

and Moss Side's Community Action group comprised many members whose interests were primarily social and political rather than educational, and whose projects and activities ranged far beyond the immediate needs of the schools, to a point in fact, where the schools were only one of these groups' many concerns. In the case of the Manchester Free School, recently grown from the Parkfield Street School, it was pointed out by one observer that one of the school's problems was that in late 1974 there appeared to be a break between the school and Community Action, as the latter organization saw a diminishing role for the school in its attempt to redirect society in political terms.[151] Balsall Heath, on the other hand, was supported at this critical time by a group whose primary interest was the school alone, and this may be one of the reasons why the school was able to not only survive in an alien educational world, but ultimately to become an accepted part of that world.

Another aspect of the school's structure that has helped it a lot is its pupil-teacher ratio. For most of 1973, and half of 1974, it remained at 2:1, and it was not until June, 1974, that the total number of students was allowed to rise to fifteen. This, together with the single-mindedness of the management committee, has helped to keep the school manageable and secure. Unlike Scotland Road Free School, whose role within the larger context of social and political change made it imperative that as many children as possible, of all types, join; or Parkfield Street School and Barrowfield, whose students were nearly all truants or vandals, Balsall

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[151] This observation was made by Leslie Black, who worked extensively at Lifespan Educational Trust, while various free schools, including Manchester, visited.

Heath Community School was just not open to anyone who wanted to attend.

> The Community School has in fact just increased its numbers. But not with 'problem' kids. It is NOT a school for drop-outs or troublemakers. It is NOT a 'Do-as-you-please school'.....It is the job of the new management committee to see that it is a good school, that its pupils do good work, and that it serves Balsall Heath well as well or better than other secondary schools.[152]

The school did not consider itself "free" for long, therefore, and was steered away from its early associations with free schooling by its teachers and management committee. It saw its role in the community as that of a small but steadily-expanding oasis, whose standards of living and learning were higher than those around it. Brian Addison in Glasgow, David Graham in Manchester, and John Ord in Liverpool were all trying to resolve a different problem from that perceived by Richard Atkinson, the man who started Balsall Heath Community School. For Ord and Murphy, an oasis was irrelevent in such an enormous cultural and social desert: there was no crusade to be won, simply a lot of hard work for everyone. For David Graham and his associates in Moss Side, it was the same way; and so also for Brian Addison in Glasgow, Lois Acton in Bermondsey and Jennifer Simmonds in Camden. Atkinson's approach to the problems of Balsall Heath is unique. Single-minded, positive in his attempts to engineer community action through The Heathan, and the wide variety of local activities that emanate from the school; rejecting the thieves, truants, drop-outs and vandals, attacking them in the newspaper, while at the same time warning local citizens against the weaknesses and unpredictability of the police, and the slothfulness of

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[152] The Heathan, No. 4. p.7. See Appendix 11, Item 35.

city planners, Atkinson and his colleagues, most of whom were professionals in child care and education, strove towards making 120 St. Paul's Avenue the focal point of a movement designed to raise the consciousness of the people of Balsall Heath.

The school had always been poor, but never moreso than in late 1974. The management committee had failed in its first few months to secure very much money. From the outside the building that housed the school looked shabby - shabbier than many others on the street.[153] The garden was impenetrable. Inside, the main feature of the front room was a snooker table; a back room contained an old settee and several chairs, and adjoined a tiny kitchen. On the wall of this back room was pinned a timetable, listing the classes that the students were expected to attend. Although there were less than would have been imposed upon a state school student, there were still enough classes in English, Arithmetic and Social Studies to occupy pupils for a good part of each day.

Small sums of money were made available from trusts in the spring of 1975 and the school was able to consolidate its position in the community as its chances of survival improved. Inevitably, the Department of Education and Science inspectors, and everyone connected with the school was reminded by their presence that its future was not merely a local matter, but would ultimately be determined from the results of a full inspection. The following description of this visit was written in The Heathan:

> It's easy to start an independent school. All you need is five or more pupils and a couple of teachers. The Department of Education and Science then gives you

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[153] The author visited the school in November, 1974. An account of this visit may be read in Appendix 1, pp.28-29.

> two or three years to get going. Then they take a very thorough look at you. Are you doing well for the pupils, or are you falling down on the job? In order to find this out, the Community School has just been inspected. Three inspectors, (HMI's), spent three days in the school and looked at every aspect of its work. One inspector came to Bingo while another came to a Management Committee meeting to talk to parents. Most of all, of course, they looked at the children's work, progress, attendance, etc. Has the school passed? We won't know for a few weeks yet. But if it has, it will do a power of good in the local community, with the Council, and with the Trusts which support it.[154]

The school did "pass."

By late spring of 1976, the school, re-named the Balsall Heath Independent Secondary School, was directly or indirectly involved in some type of community activity five nights a week,[155] from Womens' Night on Mondays, through Bingo, Keep Fit, Junior Gym Club, Family Socials and Karate lessons. Within the school itself, three significant events occurred: several students sat C.S.E. exams; a new magazine called "Working Our Way," containing the poetry and prose of the students, was published, and educational aids designer, Frank Triggs, joined the school staff. Richard Atkinson wrote the following description of Triggs:

> Frank Triggs has just started working with us. He is a toy and educational aids designer and builder. He's an artist, but a very practical, useful one. You name it, he can build it. He is going to spend part of his time with the school children. They will work with him in the same way that apprentices do, picking up skills from the craftsman and building useful things in the process. Some of Frank's time will be spent at the Nursery and the Playground. It's obvious how useful he will be to these two projects. But he is also generally available. The school,

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[154] The Heathan, March, 1976. p.4. See Appendix 11, Item 38

[155] "What's On?", The Heathan, July, 1976, p.4. See Appendix 11, Item 39.

> nursery and playground are not going to hog all his time. He's there to help anyone who could use or learn from his skills, whether it's children, adults, or even other local schools.[156]

As the school moved into its fifth year, 1977, Balsall Heath looked different from what it had been in 1973. Poor housing, vandalism and prostitution remained, but the local education authority had, by then, established "Local Adjustment Units" within individual schools to help maladjusted pupils; "Guidance Units" for younger children, and Suspension Centres for the more violent older children. Furthermore, the links between the nursery schools and playgrounds begun by the Educational Priority Area project, and the Community School, were firmly established, although the E.P.A. project had ended.[157] The most succinct description of the Community School was made by the headmistress of a local state school, Mrs. Harris, who saw the school four years after it had opened, as independent from the local education system:

> I think I should make it quite clear.....that this free school does not consider itself to be a truancy centre. Indeed, it has refused to take any subsidy from the Local Authority, which would imply that this was its function. It looks upon itself as a truly alternative school which takes pupils for all their school life.[158]

The school's name was changed again early in 1977 to St. Paul's School. As the Independent Secondary School, the former Community School, (which had once been the St. Paul's Free School) had shed its last attachments to the free school movement. Atkinson put the last nail in the coffin of the

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[156] The Heathan, No.10, July,1976, p.4. See Appendix 11, Item 39.

[157] Atkinson, M.R. "Professionalism and Inner Ring Education," unpublished paper written in 1977 and available from the school. See Appendix 11, Item 28.

[158] Letter to the author, June 7, 1976. See Appendix 11, Item 31, for full text.

free school idea a few weeks prior to giving the school its most recent name, when he wrote: "The school is most definitely not the free school of popular imagination, imposing a mish-mash of progressive ideas."[159] His description of the daily routine of St. Paul's School illustrates just how far that school had moved away from its original structure, seeming to reject, over the five years, any label or practice that threatened its survival, and, in the process, finding that survival meant rejecting the notion of free-schooling:

> Three rooms are given over to general space, where the children gather from 8:30 a.m. onwards to play snooker, darts, read the morning papers, play records, make tea or coffee and chat with the teachers. The same place is available after lessons until 5:30 p.m.
>
> Twelve rooms are used for lessons which run compulsorily from 9:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Anchor subjects are English, Math, History and Art and Craft. These proliferate into Environmental Studies, Home Management, Photography, Woodwork, Needlework, Cookery, Music, P.E. Trips etc.
>
> All subjects are compulsory for all children, as, of course, is attendance. Lateness must be made up after school. Absence means work must be done at home the same day and involves an immediate home visit. Teaching is formal, indeed visitors are surprised at how traditional the approach of the teachers is. But the setting is relaxed and informal - first names, carpets on the floor, a homely atmosphere, the walls festooned with paintings, posters, plants and flowers; something like a primary or village school, but for secondary age children who otherwise would receive almost no schooling at all, and combining both traditional and progressive methods.[160]

In late 1976, Atkinson left the school to become Director of the Balsall Heath Community Education project. Before leaving, he was able

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[159] Atkinson. op.cit. p.5.

[160] Atkinson. op.cit. p.5.

to acknowledge an event that made the school unique, that recognized its development, its rejection of the "free school" label, and its compromises:

> The final seal of approval has recently been given by the D.E.S. which, after a full three day inspection, has recognized the school as efficient.[161]

In June, 1977, Fenton Thorpe, a pupil at St. Paul's School, described it in the following way:

> In this school you are more at home and it is a smaller community so you get to know the teachers better. You don't want to play truant from this school, because when you get here in the mornings it's different. You don't have to rush into lessons straight away, and when it is time to start work, the school has a lot of interesting things to offer. It's got everything an ordinary school has, but better. In St. Paul's School you are somebody, and not just a number on a register.[162]

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[161] Ibid. p.6.

[162] Thorpe, F. "St. Paul's School," Working Our Way. No.3. St. Paul's School Magazine, 120 St. Paul's Road, Birmingham, 12. p.2. See Appendix 11, Item 10.

Leeds Free School

The Woodhouse area of Leeds is as depressing a place as may be found in Britain. Rows of Victorian tenements, decaying in the middle of new concrete "developments," and a gleaming white university close by. Scheduled for re-development, Woodhouse has no centrepoint - no place from which other places may be referenced. A few years ago, Eldon Methodist Chapel was one of the few buildings that looked different from everything else on those streets, not only by virtue of its ecclesiastical affiliations, but also because it had been, over the years, badly vandalized, daubed with paint until it displayed, like so many other disused churches, all the stigma of rejection and irrelevence to which its situation in the middle of a slum inevitably condemned it.

Eldon Chapel, which had in earlier decades resounded to the thunder of preachers and German bombers, was put to a very different use for the last three years of its life, when, in 1972, a young woman named Bridget Robson acquired what she termed "this draughty, unhygienic old church"[163] to house the newly-formed Leeds Free School. Starting with about twenty children, over half of whom lived in homes where the father was unemployed, and twelve of whom had at one time or another appeared in court, she and several friends started the school as one of several proposed activities that it was hoped would improve the life of the community. As had occurred in Manchester, Liverpool and Balsall Heath, a Community Trust was formed, partly to support the school and partly as a blanket organization through which other projects, including a human rights organization and a women's movement, could develop.

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[163] Letter to the author from Bridget Robson, Leeds Free School, July 10, 1974. The full text is in Appendix 11, Item 41.

There were, in 1972, several aspects of life in Woodhouse that set it apart from other inner-city areas in the country in which free schools either had been established or were being planned. An area of densely-packed workers' houses and small factories, it looked much like Scotland Road or Moss-Side, worse, perhaps, than Hammersmith, but better than Barrowfield. The close proximity of the university, the absence of high-rise developments, and the relatively small size of both Woodhouse and Leeds had given this small area a sense of isolation. The poverty of Glasgow, or Bermondsey or Liverpool was so extensive and involved so many thousands of people, and had existed for so long, that it was a culture in its own right, a way of life with customs, rituals, markets and clubs; its employed workers often all members of the same union, frequently all working in the same factories, or in factories whose products complemented each other.[164] This was not the case in Woodhouse, which was close enough to relatively affluent areas of the city for its inhabitants to consider themselves members of a depressed "pocket" - a ghetto - rather than citizens of a large community.

Such an area lacked individuals able to counteract the sense of isolation and lack of identity. Thus, when Bridget Robson and her colleagues decided to start a school in Eldon Chapel, the venture was unique. The problems to be solved were enormous, the resources with which to tackle them almost non-existent, and the experience of this small group in handling such affairs, very slight - a factor that greatly influenced the growth of the school.

Something very interesting about free schools is the degree to which they are established to satisfy a need felt by those who work in them,

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[164] Such was the case with the Bermondsey docks, the Liverpool docks and the huge Manchester textile and food factories.

rather than by the children and parents for whom they are established.[165] It may well be that the only way of assessing the impact of the schools over the decade they have existed is in terms of the extent to which they have been accepted by the public, and by those representatives of the public interest who have responsibility for social welfare and education. Thus, while some wide-eyed twenty-year-old, middle-class drop-out may perceive revolution as the only solution to the social ills of many a British city, Department of Education and Science inspectors, local education authority officials and the retired colonels who administer the country's grant-making trusts may feel very differently, and may make their views felt by withholding any financial support for these ventures, which is, as can be seen by reference to any one of them, a death sentence.

Such seems to have been the case in Leeds, and reference to the published statements about education in general, and the Leeds Free School in particular, illustrates the extent to which political overtones and unsubstantiated claims may have undermined the school before it really got started. The following is a paragraph from a pamphlet published by the Leeds Community Trust prior to the school's opening:

> The majority of Leeds children are victims rather than beneficiaries of the State education system (Leeds is the second worst borough in the country for expenditure on books per pupil). This system produces exceptionally high absentee rates in the secondary-modern schools and a bored elite in the high schools suffering from a cramming of useless information bearing little relation to the problems of modern life.

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[165] This has been elaborated by Ian Lister in his book Deschooling, and is a complaint made about free schools by several educators who favour de-schooling society, and who see free schools as having objectives and approaches towards the manipulation of children's behaviour, very similar to those of the state schools.

> A Free School in one of the communities of Leeds will provide a working, practical alternative that will allow the community to work with and for its children in a framework that is under community control.[166]

Virtually every statement in this paragraph is a broad generalization - a blanket condemnation of all state schools; unsubstantiated claims about absenteeism; and unprovable reflections on the relative value of the Leeds school curriculum. The assumption that any community would want a free school and want to control it could not be substantially supported. And the assumption that the proposed school would be a "working, practical alternative" could be challenged by free school workers from Los Angeles to Denmark.[167]

Most people who have started free schools in Britain have done so when they themselves were in their late twenties or early thirties,[168] and many of them entered into the venture possessing several years' experience in some related field. Whether motivated by insecurities about their chances of survival, or by understandings of the weakness inherent in taking a theoretical position that cannot be backed up by any practical activity,[169] they chose, in the main, not to publicize their activities beyond appeals to Trusts, and occasional notes in the A.S. Neill Trust newsletter. Thus, the publication of a pamphlet containing a free school

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[166] "Leeds Free School and Community Trust" unsigned, un-dated pamphlet. See Appendix 11, Item 42 for full text.

[167] The same pamphlet refers to Lane's Little Commonwealth as the first free school.

[168] Jennifer Simmonds, one of the youngest, started South Villas Comprehensive when she was twenty-two years old.

[169] This is a characteristic, according to Eric Midwinter, (Priority Education, op.cit.) of ninety percent of academic research.

philosophy by a group of youthful activists prepared to make generalisations that smack more of political than educational intent, is unique among this country' free schools.

> We firmly believe that only in (a free school) can each child's creativity and capabilities be developed to a maximum. In a state school, there is so much "wastage," so much talent ignored, so many "products" (and in many cases this is the correct word to use) lacking in confidence and the ability to stand on their own two feet. The adults coming out of a free school, however, would, we hope, be confident, aware, and capable of building a better world.[170]

> The school system has, of course, decided some years before teenage,on its successes and failures, particularly at the extremes. The failures, so called, might as well leave school at 13 at the latest. Free school is thus a way of taking the pressure off. The teenager can nearly deschool him or her self should they wish. Alternatively they can avail themselves of the facilities, and involve themselves in the relationships (and inter-relationships) the free school tries to offer.[171]

These observations and accusations are not substantiated, and this weakened the school's position in relation to the relatively well substantiated defence of Leeds' schools by the Leeds City Council Department of Education official responsible for supervising the Leeds Free School, D.M. Jepson. He pointed out that Leeds truancy figures were slightly below the national average according to the 1974 Association of Education Committees survey,[172] and suggested that the free school pamphlet's greatest weakness was that whoever had written it had failed to take into consideration

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[170] "Leeds Free School" pamphlet, op.cit. See Appendix 11, Item 42.

[171] Letter from Robin Gutteridge of Leeds to Gwen Lambert, Huddersfield. See Appendix 11, Item 43.for full text.

[172] Letter to the author from D.M. Jepson, August 23, 1977. See Appendix 11, Item 44.

a wide variety of factors that cause truancy rates to fluctuate annually according to such things as whether or not certain schools are new, or whether or not a certain area has a stable population. He suggested that the estimated number of truants in Leeds was about 360 of a total population of 140,000 pupils, which could not reasonably be termed "exceptionally high." Concerning accusations about the curriculum and its irrelevance, he suggested that some of the factors that had to be taken into consideration outside of the schools were "changing sociological patterns, pressures of external examinations, varying parental motivation towards education, hours of sleep of the pupils themselves, and the sophistication of the media."[173]

The group started the free school in September, 1972, and ran it through to the end of 1973 with what was described by one local headmaster as "little continuity of policy or procedure," but "an abundance of good intentions."[174] Towards the end of the first year, one worker in the school, Robin Gutteridge, wrote several descriptions of the school and its pupils that reflect on the extreme poverty and acute problems of many of the pupils:

> At Leeds Free School there are 39 kids on the register. 25 are 11 or over, 20 are 13 or over, 14 are under 11. The kids/young people can be described in three groups:
>
> 1. Teenage truants or "problems" from state schools - those who never settled, or got unsettled; who fell out, or never fell in; some who just plumped for the free school as a fair bet; mainly working class.
>
> 2. Younger brothers and sisters of '1'.
>
> 3. Usually younger (under 11) children of Free School workers and thinkers.

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Letter to the author from E.A. Rockliffe, Headmaster, City of Leeds School, June 7, 1976. For full text see Appendix 11, Item 45.

> The Leeds Free School suits a lot of teenagers caught in that age of not being a kid and not being a grown-up, especially those who have fallen out, or just got fed up with the state system. It makes little in the way of demands. Attendance registers can mean a lot or otherwise. There's no institutionalised competition to fail at, no need to produce finished pieces of work, or even start them, no reason to be dictated to by teacher.
>
> Freedom does work in a matter of fact, bits and pieces way. One of our most destructive lads, aged 15, did a splendid frieze with gloss paint the other day.....Andros,(3) and Richard (5) spent hours last week finding worms on the bomb-site, asking questions, making the soil moist.[175]

It is interesting and significant to compare the student population and lack of curriculum of the Leeds Free School with Balsall Heath Community School's refusal to accept "troublemakers" and its expectation that pupils follow set lessons and complete work. Richard Atkinson's intention in Balsall Heath was to raise the standards within the community by providing it with a school whose standards were high. The situation in Leeds was just the opposite, not only in terms of the interpretation of the concept of freedom as the absence of compulsion, but also in terms of the physical state of the school itself. Eldon Chapel was an unpleasant place. One observer described it as "a disused and condemned ex-church in appalling condition, in which safety and health precautions were non-existent."[176] Another observer wrote, more elaborately,

> The premises were a disused chapel. Since the building was vandalized (by whom was not clear) and the doors daubed with garish, painted slogans like "Co-op", the general appearance was not impressive .....My contacts with what, for lack of a better

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[175] Gutteridge, op.cit.

[176] Letter to the author from Mrs. M. Morris, Headmistress of Westfield Primary School, Leeds, June 21, 1976. For full text, see Appendix 11, Item 46.

> term could be called "the staff" were depressing in the extreme.....There seemed from what I could gather, to be little attention to health and safety precautions. It all seemed haphazard and slipshod."[177]

The atmosphere at Balsall Heath, Freightliners and White Lion Street Free School was, for as long a time as possible, constructive and optimistic, with former teachers and social workers carefully trying to incorporate these schools into their communities in such a way that an atmosphere of collaboration with local authorities and state schools existed, rather than one of confrontation, with sarcasm and bitterness on both sides, as was the case in Leeds. In the Leeds Free School there seemed to be little structure. Gwen Lambert, who runs the Taylor Hill pre-school in Huddersfield, described her visit to the Leeds Free School's first meeting as "very confusing" with "a lot of disagreement about basic procedures within the group, and a lot of dissention."[178] She left the meeting before it had ended. Mrs. M. Morris, Headmistress of Westfield Primary School, near Woodhouse, wrote:

> On one occasion, whilst attending a day course at Leeds University, I visited the Free School (it being quite near the university). There had been much publicity about the inception of the school and members of the public had been invited. I was made reasonably welcome until they found I was a teacher, when I was treated as a spy."[179]

In the spring of 1973 the time arrived for the Department of Education and Science inspection that would determine whether or not the school could continue to operate with provisional registration. Unlike Scotland Road Free School, or Balsall Heath or White Lion Free School, all three of which

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[177] Rocklifee, op.cit.

[178] Observation to the author by Mrs. Gwen Lambert, Huddersfield, on January 10, 1975.

[179] Morris, op.cit.

had built up at least some support from a few members of their communities, the Leeds Free School was isolated from most of the residents of Woodhouse, and all of the teachers in the surrounding state schools. During the eight months of its life it had attracted much antagonism, little support, no money and some thirty pupils, who were, on the admission of the staff, under no obligation to do anything. The situation was not satisfactory, even to those who worked in the school, and the pending inspection prompted a great deal of soul-searching. The staff wrote out a list of their problems, and some suggested solutions, identifying problems that have beset every free school from time to time, and have forced many to disintegrate into tutorial groups, or to disappear altogether.

> There seem to be three possibilities open to us, plus two outside ones.
>
> 1. Stay in the present building and undergo the inspection. They can complain under four headings: suitability of premises; adequacy of premises; efficiency and suitability of the instruction; properness of the staff; and have done so in the first three.
>
> 2. Move to another building.
> In this case it seems that although the sections in the Notice of Complaint about the buildings become inapplicable, the section about the efficiency and suitability of the instruction still pertains.
>
> 3. Set up tutorial groups. Section 36 and 37.....
> The onus is on the LEA to detect kids being educated otherwise. As records exist about our kids from their state schools and the Free School itself, they would soon trace them. Once they have been located, any proceedings take place through the parents. The parents are first of all summoned to explain themselves, so it's largely a question of whether parents are willing or able to do so. Any attendance orders or prosecutions are also served on the parents, in fact, in law, the LEA or whatever can ignore a tutor who isn't also the parent concerned. A lot depends on the friendliness of the authorities.
>
> You could, of course, get the parents to sign their children over to you. Tutor groups must not have a

central building.

A. Section 56. Under this section you try and persuade the LEA and DES that your kids need "special education" and they ought to allow you to provide it. Idealogically fraught (truancy centre, maladjusted kids, possibly psychological tests etc.); dependent on LEA and DES cooperation.

B. It's also theoretically possible to split the school into two part-time, unconnected institutions, as the quality of education provided by such independent establishments is no concern of anyone. Unprecedented. Would need parents' cooperation under section 36, and probably end up in more legal tangles than usual.

One thing is certain. We should have started negotiating with the DES and LEA months ago. Because the 44 Act is so nebulous, and lacking in adequate definitions, their cooperation (active passive, indifferent) is essential.[180]

One of the results of this introspection was the restructuring of the school to include a proposed timetable, modifications in the voluntary attendance concept, and a serious look at the ways in which some other free schools had organized themselves. The following account of the proposed new structure of the school, including its timetable, was written by one of the school's workers.

STRUCTURE

"Structure"-"Manner in which a building or organism or other complete whole is constructed, supporting framework or whole of the essential parts of something."

As Holt in his book on free schools "Beyond Freedom" and Dennison in "The Lives of Children" point out, all things are structured, and freedom or unfreedom can only exist in a context of such structures. There is no such thing as an absence of structures.

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[180]Gutteridge, Robin. Statement concerning Leeds Free School, sent to Gwen Lambert, undated. See Appendix 11, Item 47.

> The Free School is structured at the moment - in such a way that provides little opportunity for kids. Boredom Rules OK. The idea of leaving kids to themselves is the right one when appropriate; but when the kids are crying out to make/learn/experience/ excel, other than with themselves, it becomes neglect.
>
> Coming back to the point of all things, in this case growth, occurring within specific contexts, it seems sensible to suggest structures whereby this can happen. The structures are, of course, free from compulsion, being offered to the kids for them to take up/leave well alone/ or change as they see fit. Most of the activities go on already, but because of a lack of internal organization, they don't happen often enough, or simultaneously.[180a]

During the remainder of 1973 the school began to falter seriously. The local council had announced its intention to demolish Eldon Chapel, and the Department of Education and Science, dissatisfied with what its inspectors had seen, had begun the process of demolishing the school. The only alternative method of maintaining some kind of programme when a free school closes, is through the establishment of tutorial groups. In terms of the 1944 Education Act it is possible for an individual to operate a small tutorial group of not more than five pupils, as long as the group does not have a central building.

The decision to move into tutorial groups in the summer of 1974 caused many of the older children, and nearly all of those who were not family members of the school's workers, to return to their old schools. The decision was a relief for everyone concerned. Leeds Department of Education had lost a mild irritant; the local state schools got their pupils back; and some of the intense personal pressures that had accumulated over the previous eighteen

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[180a] Gutteridge, Robin. Statement concerning Leeds Free School's structure, sent to Gwen Lambert of Huddersfield. undated. See Appendix 11, Item 48.

months, as this young, idealistic group had seen its dream of "building a better world" collapse, disappeared. Bridget Robson described the period in the following way:

> Our situation at the moment is very perilous. We have been running for eighteen months on next to no money and have consequently exhausted ourselves physically and mentally, and haven't really progressed as well as we should have done, because poverty is such a limiting factor, i.e. you can't give kids freedom to develop when their environment limits and shuts them in at every turn.
>
> I shouldn't really sound too pessimistic; the last eighteen months have been a period of development in many ways. We have all learnt to trust one another to a certain extent. We have developed confidence in our ideas and our ability to communicate them. At the moment, however, we are going through a time of reassessment.....In the autumn term (September to Christmas) we expect to be operating tutor groups in our own houses prior to establishing ourselves in new premises)for which we're raising money in the summer) in January.
>
> We're also trying to tighten up our organization; working to more of a timetable so that both adults and children will feel more secure.[181]

In view of the changes that were taking place in the school, and the awareness of weaknesses, it was unfortunate that the group did not accumulate enough money to obtain their new premises. Instead, by September, 1974, the size of the school had diminished to ten children, all of whom were under ten years of age, and three adults, operating tutorial groups out of their own homes. Doubtless the physical environment had changed, but the Leeds Free School no longer existed.

Eldon Chapel was demolished in 1975.[182] Mrs. Morris, of Westfield

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[181] Letter to the author from Bridget Robson, Leeds Free School, July 10, 1974. The full text is in Appendix 11, Item 41.

[182] In a letter to the author, on August 2, 1977, J. Rawnsley, Director of Administration for Leeds, describes the Chapel in the only report on file. See Appendix 11, Item 49.

Primary School, described the free school as "just ticking over" in June, 1976, and still operating out of the same flats with just a handful of children. Thus, the story of the school to that date was not a happy one, a sad tale of unfulfilled dreams, of an abundance of goodwill and integrity, that never did achieve what it set out to achieve. Bridget Robson's acknowledgement that that period was one of development for everyone concerned is perhaps the key to the school's contribution to our overall understanding of free schools. In terms of an attempt to establish a thriving alternative school, Leeds Free School was, at this date, a failure.

Reduced to the tutorial system that had sustained it in the past, what was once a free school of forty pupils kept itself alive with the tutorial groups well into 1977, at which time it began what may be a revival. A house, No. 7, Marlborough Grove, which the various groups had been using occasionally for some of their tutorial work, had gradually become the (illegal) gathering point for the groups. In March, 1977, the group applied for planning permission to redesign it. They described their rejuvenation:

> Now we have changed and are generating new strength - 7 Marlborough Grove is more clearly defined as a social/resource centre where people do not have to worry too much about keeping quiet...We have applied to the Manpower Services Commission for a grant to build an adventure playground under the Job Creation Scheme.....[183]

The description from which these sentences above are taken is optimistically headed: "Leeds Free School and Community Trust"!

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183 "Leeds Free School and Community Trust", A.S. Neill Trust Newsletter. March, 1977. See Appendix 11, Item 50.

The New School - Sundance

During 1972 a small group of people tried to start a private school in Hammersmith, London. The man behind the venture was Alan Stewart, the executive manager of a large company. He was assisted by his wife, Caroline, a psychiatrist at a private centre for individual education; her sister, a teacher in an open-area primary school; and a friend, who is a sculptor. Groups of this ilk have come together for many reasons in Britain: well-educated themselves, creative and financially secure, they seek to provide the best they can for their children - a far cry from the slums of Barrowfield, and the undernourished children of unemployed Greek-Cypriots in Camden. Unlike their counterparts in Birmingham and Islington, they had no model. Addison, in Glasgow and Atkinson, in Birmingham, acknowledge Mabel Chrystie and George Dennison, in whose First Street School in New York they found inspiration; Bill Murphy and John Ord in Liverpool felt similarly indebted to John Holt. But for Stewart and his immediate family these did not suffice; nor did Montessori, whom they had found to be "too rigid and middle-class,"[184] or Summerhill, which seemed to them essentially American and not entirely successful. They were not seeking solutions to the problems of the depressed working classes and the children of the unemployed: they simply wanted a good school for their two children.

They were convinced that if such a school existed, other members of their particular class and income group would send their children. They were loathe to enroll their own children in the local state schools, which they regarded

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[184]This and other quotes attributed to the Stewarts were made to the author during various discussions and interviews in October, 1974, in their home.

as "autocratic and irrelevent." It seemed to them from their position as "rate payers and citizens" that the Inner London Education Authority was incapable of resolving its problems with truants, who wandered the streets of London, frequently vandalizing buildings and getting into all kinds of trouble with the law. They were not prepared to blame their children or anyone else's for not being able to accept school, in fact they sympathized with them. The problem in schooling as far as they were concerned did not touch the sensitive, hopeless areas of survival and "getting a job" of the slums; it was simpler than that. For a certain type of child and for certain types of parents, a different kind of school was needed. So they decided in 1972 to design their own school, selecting materials and designing a curriculum according to whatever seemed right to them.

They called their school The New School, and began the search for premises by approaching Hammersmith council. The building they received was not perhaps what they had hoped for, and there were conditions attached to the use of it. Number 29 Norland Road in W.11 was a "squat" - a three-storey building in poor condition, owned by the local council, but effectively relinquished by them to anyone who could break in and take up residence. Empty except for the broken and rusting remnants of previous occupants, the house was one of several in a terrace on a small side street, close to the Hammersmith flyover - an area long-since evacuated by most permanent residents, and occupied almost solely by tramps and gypsies.[185]

The building was leased to them for £2.50 per week, from January, 1973.

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[185]The author visited the building on two occasions, in 1974 and 1975.

Having agreed to let local truants use it during evenings and at weekends, it was named The New Community School Centre. The New School Trust, which was established primarily to avoid payment of taxes on any monies obtained from Trust, appointed a director at a salary of £2,500 per annum, and advertised activities at Norland Road as a parent-owned co-operative.

On the day before the Centre was due to open, the newly-appointed director quit. In order to minimize the inconvenience this caused, one of the parents, Mrs. Susan Israel, agreed to take over the operation of the school temporarily, and another parent, Liela Cadaman, an American, agreed to assist her. Mrs. Israel's qualifications for this position consisted primarily of her interest in and association with Summerhill and A.S. Neill. Her husband had been a pupil at Summerhill. With two of her four children unhappy at local state schools, she was prepared to devote a considerable amount of her own time to their education. She was able to do this by working at the New School. For Mrs. Cadaman the situation was similar. Her two boys had experienced considerable trouble at the local school and the chance to assist in the running of the New School made it possible for her to work closely with them. The Stewarts' two children also attended the school; their mother spent as much time there as her job allowed. Four other children were also registered and eventually the total number of pupils reached twenty, of whom eight were the children of the adults working at the school.

The demands upon Susan Israel were considerable and as the school moved cautiously through its first weeks, gathering supplies and materials and developing a programme, she shouldered more and more responsibility. Before many weeks had passed, school matters were beginning to creep into her own

personal life, and friends were drawn into the running of the school. Her evenings were frequently taken up with planning and, above everything else, fund-raising. Members of the Trust wrote to one hundred and forty trusts, requesting financial support for the purchase of virtually everything that the school required, including the renovation of the building, installation of heating, re-wiring and the purchase of books and other items. From most trusts they received what are known as the "standard refusals"; from several the refusal was preceded by a request for more information. In the end, eight trusts gave money, two of them fairly generously, three others offering no more than token support. The Hillden Charitable Fund gave £800.00 towards the purchase of heating equipment; Hammersmith council gave the school £250.00 in addition to the building; Kensington and Chelsea councils gave £100.00; Joe Lyons sent a cheque for £15.00; British Oxygen and George Wimpey gave £10.00 each. An organization called "Make the Children Happy" printed the school's appeals for money at no charge.

The New School's educational programme was initially very exploratory. Susan Israel and her husband wanted for their children an environment which they termed "self-regulatory", which meant following the Summerhill model of self-discipline and cooperation quite closely;[186] Liela Cadaman, who was at the time in the process of separating from her husband, wanted a combination of stability and freedom for her two sons, Mordecai and Mario. The programme initially run at the school, comprising primarily outings to parks and a lot of art and crafts work, was designed to provide the children with

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[186]Part 11 of Summerhill by A.S. Neill, (pp.95-200) describes this method.

things to do rather than a pattern of work to follow: they could select what they liked, work with it for as long as they wished, work or play alone or with others in whatever way they wished. Very little attempt was made to "teach" anything: Susan Israel and Liela Cadaman frequently worked on their own projects while the children worked or played on theirs.

During the late afternoon and at weekends, the building was used by local teenagers, many of whom were truants, as a youth club. Mrs. Israel made several attempts to incorporate the two groups and was successful in that some of the girls in the youth club began to work in the school.

Late in 1973 and during the first months of 1974 trouble began. More and more truants began to attend the school during the day.[187] Some were paid to help run the school. Others, however, were very difficult, and in January of 1974 there occurred a series of incidents that rapidly brought the New School Community Centre to a close. Four teenage boys tried, one afternoon, to rape Susan Israel. A few days later she discovered that two other teenagers were using one of the rooms in the Centre to store stolen lead. A few weeks later yet another group of teenagers stole most of the school's equipment, valued at several hundred pounds. Finally, in March, 1974, two boys took Mrs. Israel's two-year old daughter Hannah into a room in the school, held a knife to her throat, and threatened to kill her. Mrs. Israel called for help from the man who was the newly-appointed director of the Centre and discovered that he had taken an unscheduled coffee break. Finally, she called her husband, who persuaded the boys to let the child go.[188]

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[187] Mrs. Israel was offered a full-time position by I.L.E.A. as a social worker on the strength of her work with these truants - an offer she refused.

[188] This incident was described to the author by Mrs. Israel, who pointed out that her husband, following his success at persuading the boys to give up the knife, "beat the shit out of them."

The following day Susan Israel informed the Trustees that she was removing the school from the premises.

One week later the school, minus the truants and some of the children - including those of the Trustees - who had been withdrawn, moved into Liela Cadaman's basement apartment in Sinclair Gardens, Shepherd's Bush. One month later a group of teenagers burned No. 29 Norland Road to a shell. Council workmen propped up dangerous walls; an organization called The Gentle Ghost took over what was left of the building; gypsies set up an encampment in the back garden; and the truants disappeared.

Susan Israel and Liela Cadaman were left with their six children. Twelve other children had been removed by their parents. The two women decided to re-establish The New School in Liela Cadaman's basement flat, as a fee-paying free school, modelled after Summerhill. They advertised the school in the A.S. Neill Trust Newsletter and the Children's Rights Workshop Newsletter. The fees were set at £65.00 per term. A new teacher was brought in, and the school was re-opened. It had thirteen children: four were Susan Israel's; two were Liela Cadaman's sons; the other seven were all from one-parent families of what Mrs. Cadaman called "the freak fringe".[189] The children made up a very different group from those who comprised other free schools in the inner city slums of Manchester or Glasgow. Parkfield Street's or Barrowfield's children had been cast from a very different mold - rough-hewn and frequently violent, they are the most recent of a long line of victims of poverty. Isolated from the es-

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[189] A personal observation to the author by Mrs. Cadaman.

tablished ways of the middle classes, they fight for survival, frequently in groups or gangs, often with clear objectives: vandalism and truancy; and usually with well-defined enemies: teachers and the police. Often they lose the fight and withdraw at an early age into the twilight zones of unemployment and prison. The children at The New School also lived deprived and, in many cases, depressing lives, but of a different type. Theirs were the problems of a different society. Some of their parents were very well schooled; others worked in respectable professions; only one child had ever been in trouble with the police. Even so, their lives were fraught with tensions and imbalances. A brief description of them will illustrate.

Lawrence is the son of a doctor. His parents are in their fifties and separated. He lives with his mother. His father does not like The New School and has threatened on several occasions to petition for its closure. In school, Lawrence dominates by virtue of his size and age; his interests are in mathematics and science, and he possesses what Susan Israel described as "an uncanny ability to tell people's fortunes."[190]

Mark and Catriona, both about ten years of age, live with their father. Two other children in the family are with the mother. They live on social security payments. Their father, who is a transvestite, attends college full-time. These two children were considered by Susan Israel to be the two most disturbed in the school. Mark's contempt for women, including Mrs. Israel and Mrs. Cadaman, was a constant source of disruption within the school.[191]

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[190]Mrs. Israel wrote a description of each child for the author.

[191]A more elaborate description is in Appendix 1, pp.7-39.

Anna and her sister, Sarah, live with their mother in an "encounter group home." The mother encourages the children to scream, and a room has been allocated within the home for this purpose. Anna prefers the Israel's home to her own, and spends many nights there. In the encounter group home the family lives on social security payments.

The other children from single-parent homes were Jason, who lived with his mother in a "squat:" his mother is a nurse; Angelo, who also lived with his mother, who described her job as "relief massage." Mario and Mordecai Cadaman lived with their mother in the flat that also was the school. The only children attending the school who lived with both parents were Hannah, Toby and Kate Israel. Gane, an eleven-year-old girl who also lived with the Israels, had come to their home after running away from her own twice, and being found once in Northern Spain, and on the other occasion begging in the streets of Hammersmith. The Israels were expecting to adopt her pending the outcome of a court case.

No. 7 Sinclair Gardens had four rooms: a bathroom, a small kitchen and two bedrooms, the larger of which was also the living room and free school. The school also utilized the smaller bedroom, in which the two Cadaman boys slept. The school used Mrs. Cadaman's furniture, stereo system, records and books. For the Israel and Cadaman children, life went on in much the same way as it had done in Norland Road, and the newcomers seemed to adjust. But Susan Israel had grown very tired and upset during the final weeks at Norland Road and the incidents there had shaken her faith in the concept of an urban free school. Consequently she had brought her fears and tiredness to Sinclair Gardens. Mrs. Cadaman had agreed reluctantly to housing the school temporarily in her tiny basement home. Both women brought their

anxieties to the situation in which they found themselves, with the inevitable result that organization of the school became very difficult, and arguments between the two, or between Susan Israel and Mark, Mario or Mordecai were frequent, usually ending with slamming doors, raised voices, and tears.[192]

There were other pressures from outside at the same time. Andrew Mann, director of the Children's Rights Workshop in London - a man who had exercised some influence over the developing free schools - was opposed to the charging of fees. Several members of the curriculum department of the Inner London Education Authority were questioning the lack of any organized curriculum in the school. The owner of No. 7 Sinclair Gardens objected to the school's presence in the basement flat, and informed Mrs. Cadaman of his intention to increase her rent or evict her if she failed to comply. Finally, several parents were in the process of moving away from Shepherd's Bush to less expensive parts of the city, and planned to remove their children from the school as soon as they were able to move.

October and November of 1974 were very difficult months for Susan Israel, and it became very hard to run her small, unstructured, fee-paying free school. She had little money. The Inner London Education Authority, reluctant to support a school like White Lion Street Free School, whose pupils were, in many cases, in desparate need of security and help, was certainly not going to give The New School any money. Personal relationships were weak also. Mrs. Cadaman and Susan Israel continually quarrelled. The teacher they had employed to work with them, a woman named Vicky, who was from the

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[192]The author spent several weeks at Sinclair Gardens, including the first few days of the New School's brief life there. More detailed accounts of this period are given in Appendix 1, pp.7-39.

United States, found herself pulled into the various disagreements, and left. The burden of running the school fell completely on to Susan Israel's shoulders. Personal problems, particularly concerning the pending adoption of Gane, and her husband's disenchantment with his own job as a classical guitar teacher at a state secondary school, took up much of her time. The original New School trustees had, for the most part, disappeared when the school left Norland Road. The Stewarts offered occasional advice, but little concrete help.

In late October Leila Cadaman announced that she wanted all the children out of her flat, and would be disassociating herself from the New School at Christmas. Susan Israel decided to close the school and, for the second time, look for another building. With less than a month in which to re-establish her school, she decided to spend her time planning the next enterprise more carefully. A curriculum was designed, which consisted of five subjects: Culture, Food, Housing, Travel and Medicine.[193] Each subject was carefully divided into a series of units, and she identified friends who would teach them.[194] They were to be as follows:

CULTURES: Sexual behaviour
Politics
Religion
Money
Art
Crafts
Literature
Music

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[193]The author worked with Mrs. Israel in planning the school. A more detailed account of this period appears in Appendix 1, pp.7-39

[194]It is very interesting to note that when this curriculum was designed, Mrs. Israel was unaware of the plans for a similar approach to curriculum at White Lion Free School, with four subjects: Bodies, Thinking, Employment, Future.

FOOD:	Ways of producing it
	Properties of food
	Needed food values
	Markets
	Cooking
	Water
HOUSING:	Prehistoric housing
	Local materials
	Non-domestic building
TRAVEL:	Water
	Walking
	Trains
	Planes
	Countries
MEDICINE:	Pain
	Microscopes
	Hospitals
	Medicines

A detailed description of the school and what it was going to do was prepared. The school was re-named Sundance.[195] As Christmas approached, Mrs. Israel asked the pupils, "If you could design your new school, what would it be like?" A morning was spent preparing plans, and the following design was the result:

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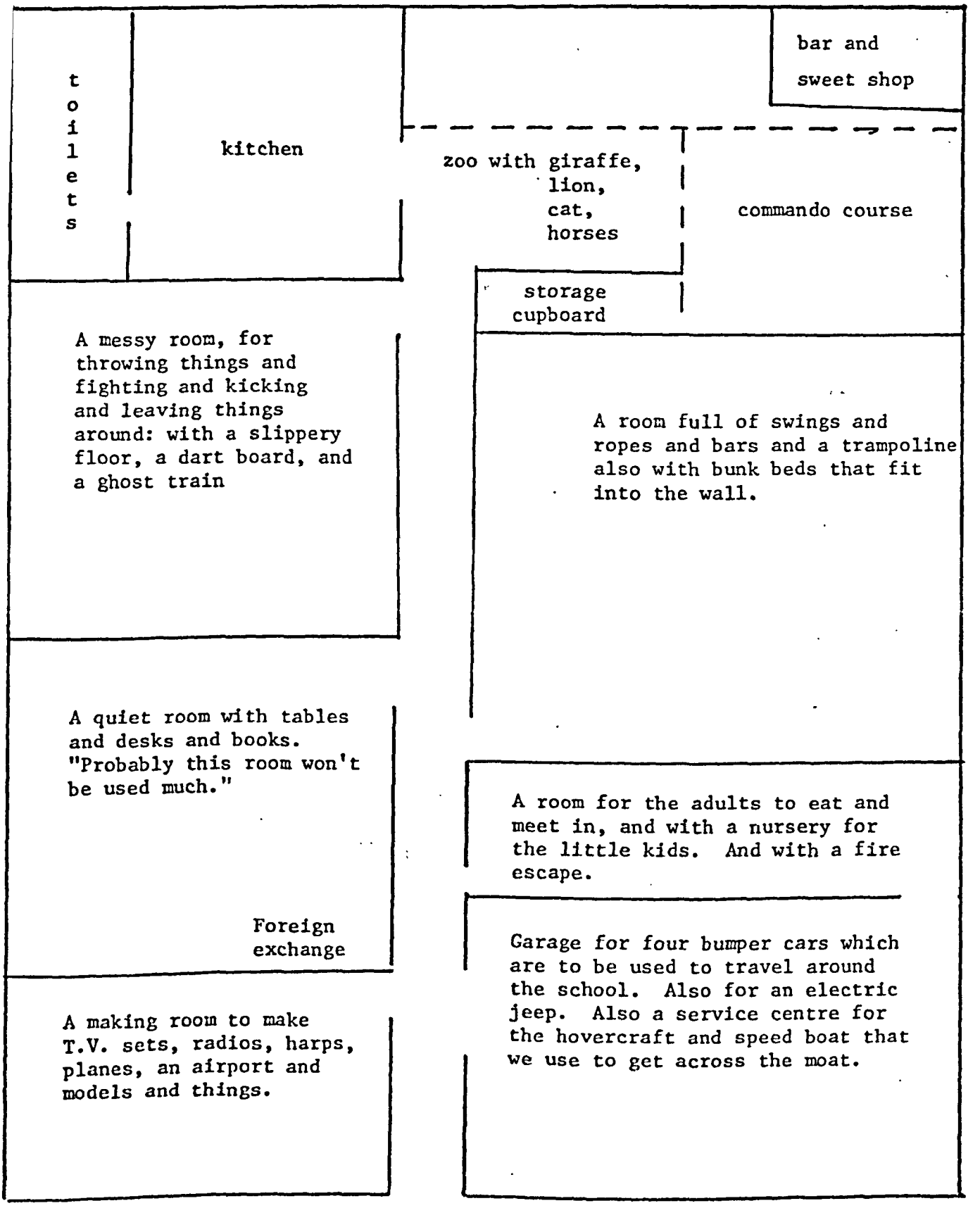
[195]The school was given this name in recognition of the author's involvement in its planning, "Sundance" being the name of the first publicly-financed free school in Canada, opened in 1973 in Victoria, the author's home. A description of the proposed new school and the brochure that was sent to prospective pupils and their parents is contained in Appendix 11, Item 51.

To local ski hill

THE NEW SCHOOL - STUDENT'S PLAN



ENTRANCE with drawbridge and portcullis

Wide, deep moat

ANTI-TANK CONCRETE BLOCKS ON THE PEOPLE SIDE OF THE MOAT

A few days later The New School closed.

However, by late December, with her husband helping her, Mrs. Israel had found another house for the school. It was a badly-vandalized cottage on a quiet street in North Hammersmith. Being at the end of its row, it had a fairly large vacant area beside it, shielded from the street by a high wall of corrugated iron. The house was small: two rooms with badly-rotting floors downstairs, and the remains of what had once been a small kitchen; an extremely dangerous and insecure staircase that lead to three upper rooms that were drier and more immediately usable. Mrs. Israel's husband volunteered to renovate the building, so it was immediately "squatted" and the pair set about obtaining materials for the house.[196] By March, 1976, the top part of the building was habitable, and the six remaining children from The New School moved in. Some of the rubble on the adjacent land was cleared away and a small garden started. Several of the friends identified as possible teachers, joined the school on a part-time basis.

On April 29, 1975, Mrs. Israel wrote:

> The school is going really well - very relaxed and just no hassles on any fronts. We've got new kids and the staff work really well, both with the kids and with each other. Our vegetable garden is actually growing, which I reckon to be nothing short of miraculous.[197]

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[196]The author was informed that the Israels did not pay for a single item!

[197]Letter to the author from Mrs. Israel, April 29, 1975. See Appendix 11, Item 52.

Barrowfield Community School

The flurry of free school activity in Britain reached its peak in mid-1972, by which time three-quarters of all the free schools that have ever existed were either in operation or being planned. Scotland Road Free School had been operating for a year; Parkfield Street Free School and South Villas Comprehensive (later re-named Freightliners) were open; the group of teachers and social workers who started the White Lion Street Free School in September were planning and negotiating with the Islington Council for the house that they eventually occupied for five years. St. Paul's Road Free School, which later became the Balsall Heath Community School, was being designed in Birmingham by Richard Atkinson and Terry Tebo; and in Scotland, ex-Maryhill teacher Brian Addison and Jordanhill College of Education lecturer, John MacBeath, had just begun working with members of the Barrowfield Tenants Association in Glasgow to design a free school for the truanting children of that depressed and poor housing estate.[198]

In May, 1973, Addison registered the Barrowfield Community School, of No. 1 St. Marnock Street, Glasgow, as an independent school. It had five pupils, each of whom had been truanting from local state schools for a long time. Because the school had grown from negotiations with the Tenants Association, it was an extension of that association. Designed to cater to truants and children who did not want to attend local state schools, it was born of a specific need, arising from parents' concerns about their children, rather than being imposed upon the community by agents from outside, as has been

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[198] It is worth noting that free school activity peaked at this time in Britain with a total of eight schools. At the same time there were ten in Canada and over 300 in the United States.

the case with several other free schools. Furthermore, MacBeath and Addison were prepared to do something that no state school could do, and few alternatives were prepared to do: assume responsibility for the pupils' general welfare.[199] No. 1 St. Marnock Street was, therefore, to the inhabitants of Barrowfield, a community centre as well as a school.

John MacBeath described the school's intent in the following way:

> The school's running is based upon three straightforward principles.
>
> The first is our belief that education is a natural process and is intrinsically interesting. We feel that the onus should be on the teachers to present information in such a way as to be interesting and directly relevant to each child's experience, interests and prospects.
>
> Secondly, responsibility for the pupils' general welfare, rather than strictly education needs, is assumed by the school.
>
> The third educational principle involves the school's relationship to the community, and specifically to an inner-city, deprived area such as Barrowfield.
>
> We believe that if we can reach a situation where these three principles are followed successful, then the school will produce people who on one hand can reach a level of self-fulfillment whilst in a different environment, and on the other hand have the confidence and knowledge to do something about these conditions.[200]

These intended practices become easier to understand when set within the context of Barrowfield itself. Barrowfield is a housing estate on the industrial edge of Glasgow's inner ring, not far from Ibrox Park football ground. Streets of heavy, four-storey tenements have slowly been replaced by blocks of flats, some council houses, and several high-rise buildings. The distillery and factories, for whose workers the tenements were built a century ago, are now surrounded by a combination of open, brick-strewn

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[199] This may be compared with the suggestion from Robin Gutteridge of the Leeds Free School that parents sign over their children to the school for what were apparently legal reasons connected with fear of closure by the D.E.S.

[200] Letter to the A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, September, 1975, pp.16-17. See Appendix 11, Item 53.

"development sites" where once the tenements stood; occasional remaining blocks of tenements, some occupied, others boarded up; "new" flats, and the remains of a Victorian Gothic chapel. A stream struggles sluggishly through a ditch that takes it across the estate, its path clogged by scrap iron, car tires and debris dumped there over the past twenty or so years. Barrowfield is a depressing place; closed and boarded at night, it boasts perhaps two or three dingy bars, a couple of chip shops, and a handful of small grocery shops, their windows and doors barricaded against vandals by heavy wooden shutters. St. Marnock Street is very much like other streets in Barrowfield: a factory wall runs along its north side; most of its south side is a rubble-strewn development site. One building remains standing: No. 1. It houses a small taxi firm and garage on its ground floor, and the Barrowfield Community School above.

The school soon developed a curriculum, designed in the light of the nature of Barrowfield itself. Addison once observed, "No-one willingly lives in Barrowfield. There's just nowhere else to go."[201] The school would try to teach its pupils how to survive by means other than theft, vandalism and selling stolen goods in Paddy's Market. It would try to give them the skills and qualifications that would enable them to get out of the estate into some more comfortable world. John MacBeath described it in the following way:

> The essence of our approach to the curriculum is that it should be relevant to the pupils' experiences and expectations. In this way we see our curriculum as being positive as opposed to arbitrary or irrelevant.

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[201] This observation was made to the author during a visit to the school, January 25, 1975.

1. The demands of Society (for literacy, numeracy, general coping skills, credentials)
2. The demands of the immediate environment (for coping with overcrowding, lack of money, lack of amenities)
3. The need to express oneself through activities and experiences.[202]

Financially, the school ran on a "shoestring" budget. MacBeath worked at Jordanhill; Addison was supported by unemployment payments and, when they were cut off by the city's welfare department on the grounds that if he chose to work for nothing that was his business, friends supported him. The Tenants Association provided some funding. The rest of the school's basic expenses were met by a grant of the Scottish International Education Trust.

By mid-1974 the school had twelve pupils, all of whom were engaged in daily class activities and studies, with several studying for public examinations. The school produced its first copy of "The Monthly Bananza," a 5-page newsletter containing some of the pupils' work. The first page of the first newsletter provided some brief view of the school from the pupils. One short paragraph was titled "The Story on the School:"

> This school is the best school in Glasgow. My school may not have the best stuff. It has the best teachers and the best pupils. Brian and Pat are the only full-time teachers. Brian is the head teacher. We have a meeting twice a week. Anybody wanting to visit the school is welcome.[203]

Beside this paragraph are four sentences signed by "George" requesting materials with which to decorate the school. Beneath this is a paragraph by a pupil, Robert Miller, titled "Rab Speaks" in which he explains how his state school stopped him from doing what he wanted to do:

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[202] A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, Sept. 1975, p.17. Appendix 11, Item 53.

[203] "The Monthly Bananza," No.1. September, 1974, p.1. See Appendix 11, Item 54.

> My name is Robert Miller. I am 14 years of age. I was born in Glasgow on 29/10/59. The thing I like doing best is taking things apart and putting them together again like old televisions. I like doing it most in the house when it is raining, but I could do it in school if the teacher would let me. In school I like drawing and projects like the one I did in my old school on Transport. School should let me take things apart only in my spare time, but the schools I have gone to don't. The rest of the time in school I have always got Geography and Maths and English. That's alright, but I should get to take things apart. I started here at the free school on 17th, September.[204]

Addison, who is in his early thirties, is dedicated to the school. Concerning his own reasons for starting the school, he has said: "I felt that a lot of kids feel that education doesn't mean too much to them. I felt that I could help...that I could make education meaningful."[205]

The school, incidentally, is not supported by the City of Glasgow Department of Education, in fact there is a lot of opposition to it. J.T. Bain, Director of Education, gives three reasons why the Department will not support the school:

1. We do not consider the premises satisfactory
2. We do not consider the staff to be sufficiently wide in experience
3. Our own secondary schools feel that they could offer a satisfactory curriculum.[206]

In the spring of 1975 three trusts; Wates, the Scottish International Education Trust, and the Gulbenkian Foundation, gave the school grants totalling £15,000,- sufficient to keep it in operation for about three years.

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[204] Ibid

[205] "The Monthly Bananza" op.cit.

[206] Letter to the author, April 28, 1975. Full text is in Appendix 11, Item 55.

At the same time, Addison was joined by Stella Columbis, a psychology graduate from Stirling University, who had visited the United States and become interested in free schools there.

During 1976 John MacBeath played a more prominent role in the operation of the school. His primary activity was, predictably, raising money. His list of requirements for the school, submitted to the A.S. Neill Trust newsletter is very similar to that of many other free schools: a combination of dreams and practicalities. It reflects the struggle of all free schools against the inevitable moment when the funds run out:

1. We require a building as a base for our activities.
2. To have a staff-pupil ratio that will allow us to function in the way we plan. (8-1)
3. To provide for these 24 children (projected number) of different ages it is essential to have outside contacts which can add to the experience, education and development of the children.
4. The school should provide for the attainment of basic skills.
5. Central to the whole scheme is the need for an efficient transport system.
6. The school should be financed in a manner sufficient for three teaching staff, a building as a base, adequate transport and adequate materials resources to meet our stated aims.
7. The organization of the school should involve parents, teachers and pupils.
8. The contact with families should be stretched to contact with the whole area and its inhabitants.
9. The model stated above should be extended and made available to as many people as desire it.[207]

At this time, Barrowfield is one of five free schools in operation in Britain.

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[207] A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, op.cit. See Appendix 11, Item 53.

The Bermondsey Lamp-post

It becomes clear as one reads through these descriptions of free schools that there are in Britain's large cities, areas of great social deprivation in which some problems seem to be beyond the effective control of local authorities. The part of London that comprises Abbey ward, North Southwark, bordered roughly by Tower Bridge Road, borough High Street, Great Dover Street, and St. Thomas Street, is one such place. The recent closure of the docks and the subsequent failure of several local industries has brought widespread unemployment to the people of this area. The resulting lack of money and the pressures that come upon families in that plight have produced many other complications, particularly in the lives of the children. There are very few day nurseries in the area; few clubs for teenagers. The juvenile crime rate is high (159 arrests for burglary and assault during the first half of 1974, for example, which is an increase of 25% on 1973 figures); housing is poor, and truancy rates purported to be above average for London.

In September, 1974, a registered trust that called itself The Bermondsey Lamp-post Trust, produced a report on the area, part of which read as follows:

> This is a depressed area, overcrowded and dirty. The smells of Bermondsey are repulsive. In the wake of the closure of the docks, the present stagnation on the river-side and the closure of several local industries, there is unemployment and few interesting job opportunities. There are few local shops, and some of these are now being forced to close. Until the recent slump in the economic situation, the area was fast being overtaken by office developments, with the result that the local population, housed in council properties, was losing all services (housed in private property).....There are many derelict properties in the area awaiting redevelopment. The local council and GLC flats are all in need of renovation, and this process is being started. There is a disproportionate amount of heavy traffic through the area. In these

> stressful conditions, many families are in need of help, and many children are neglected and mistreated.
>
> Cases of infestation and vermin are still increasing, and eleven out of twelve children in a recent inspection had head lice. It is known that many children do not receive an adequate diet.[208]

The extent of the deprivation is clarified by reference to the few facilities available for local children. The 1971 census figures indicated that there were 1400 children under the age of five years living within Abbey ward. At that time the area possessed no day nurseries, no one-o'clock clubs, one pre-school play-group operated by the Save The Children Fund, and three half-day nursery schools, run by the Inner London Education Authority. These had proved to be rather unsuccessful, according to Trust reports, because they necessitated children being collected at midday, and working mothers could not do this. The area had, consequently, a large number of unregistered baby-sitters and child-minders. To add to the problems, the Save The Children playgroup was obliged to close in 1972 because Southwark council required the building that it used.

For school-aged children the situation was, in 1972-73, worse than it was for the pre-schoolers. The area only had two very small parks; and of the five youth clubs that border the area, only three were attended by children within Abbey ward. A survey by Trust personnel in late 1974 revealed a total of nineteen teenagers attending the clubs during the first half of 1974. This figure may be read in the context of that presented earlier concerning the fact that 159 juveniles were arrested for various crimes during the same period.[209] The relationship between truancy and crime was described in a

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[208] Bermondsey Lamp-post Trust application to Urban Aid, September, 1974. The full text of this application is in Appendix 11, Item 56.

[209] Ibid. p.3.

report published in 1974, in the following terms:

> In January this year, a crime-prevention patrol from Tower Bridge operated for ten days, and during that time 30 truants were returned to their schools. As a direct result of the patrol the recorded crime figures of Tower Bridge, during school hours, affecting the theft of and from motor vehicles, declined dramatically.[210]

The situation is little better for adults in Bermondsey. The part of London around Tower Bridge, stretching along Borough High Street and the Long Lane Estates, has one bingo hall, no meeting halls, no cinemas and many pubs. There are no tenants associations in the area, because there is nowhere for a large group to meet. The consequences of such conditions are that an area once noted for its community personality, and its sense of community, seems to have lost that, now that the things that once kept it together (primarily the docks) have gone, replaced by, or leaving in its place only "a great deal of tenseness and insecurity involving suspicion of people outside the immediate family, and particularly of officials."[211]

Early in 1972 a woman named Lois Acton decided to start a playground and free school in Bermondsey. Miss Acton, who was head of the Geography department at a local comprehensive school, lived in Bermondsey. Through constant contact with local children and their parents, she became aware of the conditions under which many of them lived, and the dissatisfaction of some parents with their children's education. She brought together a small group of parents and teachers to discuss the business of starting an independent

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[210] Bodycombe, J. (Division Commander, Tower Bridge Section), "The Job", July, 1974.

[211] Bermondsey Lamp-post Trust application, op.cit. p.14.

school. The group began its activities inconspicuously, taking their own children, and a few hangers-on, to museums, parks and occasionally out of the city for two or three days. At the same time, an adventure playground was started on a disused site in Bermondsey Street. Heads of local schools were informed that the group existed. Some local council members and politicians were also told. Everyone told about the proposed school supported the idea in principle.[212]

These "outings" and attempts to rekindle in the children some interest in their world were the beginnings of a free school. Lois Acton's method was quiet, "low-key" - a local response to a local situation. Others who had started free schools had also kept them local in personality, while adhering to certain common principles, and at the same time using their schools as vehicles in their personal trip to some other state: Ord and Murphy did this in Liverpool, changing the initial emphasis on the school to one that reflected a community movement; David Graham tried it, unsuccessfully, in Manchester; Richard Atkinson moved from free school status to D.E.S. recognition and rejection of any association with free schooling in five years. Lois Acton's school was destined to follow the same path.

In the course of the weeks that followed the little school's arrival, it became apparent to some parents that their children's curiosity and interest were re-awakening, and, feeling more secure about the venture, these parents and the few volunteers who worked with their children discussed their venture with local social workers, educators, welfare officers, probation officers and the police. As a result of the support obtained from

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[212] A complete list of the people who supported the venture is given in Appendix 11, Item 57.

these discussions, more comprehensive projects were designed. A tutorial system was started to help local teenagers who had dropped out of school, to learn to read and write; a holiday play scheme was started in 1973, and run with the help of financing by the Inner London Education Authority; two summer camps were held in Devon, involving forty children; for many of whom it was their first summer holiday. One small group spent four days in Paris.

Miss Acton's group began to turn its attention to the task of combining these activities into an alternative school since, although it had never been referred to as such, that was, in fact, what was emerging. Volunteer teachers, all of them fully qualified, and some volunteer helpers from the community were brought together to design the school and, in September, 1973, the Bermondsey Lamp-post Free School came into existence. Local factories and stores, churches and museums offered materials; voluntary helpers came from local industry, the probation service, Guys Hospital, Southbank Polytechnic, and Goldsmiths College. Work-experience sessions were arranged with local garages, factories and shops; Education students came to work in the school. All this occurred in a small flat in Bermondsey: Lois Acton's home.

The children who were enrolled in the school were mostly quite young. There were fourteen of them: three under five years of age; six between five years and twelve; and five teenagers. Eight of these children came from homes described by the teachers as "badly deprived":[213] two of them had been caught housebreaking. For these fourteen children the school offered a richer learning environment than any of them could ever have had in a state school:

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[213]This information and other statistics about the school were obtained by the author by means of a questionnaire. The complete document is in Appendix 11, Item 58.

seven teachers, all of whom, from economic necessity, worked part-time, one with a Masters degree in Economics, each of the other six with bachelors degrees, and three of these with teaching certificates. Additionally, a doctor and a nursery teacher worked as helpers.[214]

Within a few weeks, parents of thirty local children and a considerably larger number from outside the immediate area, applied to enroll their children in the school. But, as Susan Israel discovered when she was running The New School, and Ord and Murphy soon discovered in Liverpool, chances of survival increase when the number of students is kept to a manageable level.[215] Atkinson, in Balsall Heath was, for example, very determined to keep 'outsiders' and 'troublemakers' out of his school; and White Lion Free School permitted only children living within half a mile to register.

Although the Bermondsey Lamp-post Free School ran with the traditional informality of new free schools, the staff did emphasise reading instruction, particularly for the younger children. When the school opened, for example, none of the children under five years of age, and two of the eleven-year-olds could read. By simply reading to the children regularly and having them read back, the teachers were able to teach all of them, without recourse to any reading schemes or packaged materials.

In brief, then, this school's educational philosophy, strongly influenced by the writings of A.S. Neill and George Dennison, was summarized as follows:

> We believe that the absence of compulsion, punishment and competition will free each child to learn faster when and where he chooses, thus

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[214] One of the strengths of this school was that the staff stayed together for several years.

[215] One of the failures of the free school movement has been the lack of effort by those with experience to communicate with those who lacked it.

> becoming a more competent and constructive member of our society. We have already found that as the children become more involved with society, they are...less destructive towards it.[216]

Behind this often-expressed philosophy with its hackneyed phrases and seeming naiveté about the way the country actually runs, there was, in the case of the Bermondsey Lamp-post Free School, an element frequently absent from the other free schools: an economic rationale in which school expenses had been determined through consideration of work-load, the dietary requirements of children whose food at home was insufficient for their needs, the use of learning materials, and the rental of suitable premises.[217] The figure finally arrived at for 1974 was £16,480, which included salaries for six teachers, a trip to Spain, two meals a day for every child and extra meals at weekends for those who needed them. This total is considerably less than the cost of educating twenty children in a local state school, and additionally provided for a pupil/teacher ratio of 5:1.

By the beginning of the school year, September, 1974, the pupil enrollment had reached twenty, with the age level changing considerably, with eleven teenagers in the group and five pre-school-age children. The increase in the number of teenagers naturally altered the daily activities of the school. There was an increase in the comings and goings of the teenagers, and planning activities was made that much more difficult. Five of these teenagers left during the year to start working, and another returned to a local state school - the only Bermondsey Lamp-post pupil to do so during the school's first

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[216] The School, an unpublished statement by The Bermondsey Lamp-post Free School, 1973. Full text is in Appendix 11, Item 59.

[217] A statement entitled "Proposed Expenditure" was part of The School. S . Appendix 11, Item 59.

three years. The family backgrounds of the children were quite naturally different from those of the original group. Four of the new arrivals came from what were described as "pleasant, caring" - albeit poor homes, while eleven others lived under very poor conditions. Two had been "pinched" for larceny.

As the school expanded, local council interest grew and, gradually, support came from local trusts. Just before it opened in September, 1974, the Southwark Council offered the school No. 184 Long Lane, an old, disused, and crumbling bakery with a maisonnete above, part of a Victorian terrace that had been rebuilt in 1954. Behind the bakery was a two-storey bakehouse. The buildings required what the Bermondsey Lamp-post Trust modestly described as "some attention".[218] The building was given to the school on a "bare licence" basis, which meant that the council could ask the school to leave it at any time - a debatable condition since, at the time, the council did not own the building but was considering purchasing it.

The estimate for expenditures for 1974 was not met because very few agencies actually gave the school any money. The Inner London Education Authority helped to the extent that it did with other free schools, by providing some funding for school meals, but gave nothing else. The staff were not paid; the school was only able to raise £250.00 for itself through charity walks in May and November, 1974, and £50.00 from a jumble sale. Two educational charitable trusts gave the school a total of £1,000.00. The school prepared a further estimate for 1975 that totalled £18,050.00,[219] and

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[218] When the author first visited the school in 1975, the upstairs bathroom leaked so badly that the floor had become rotten in one corner and a steady stream of water trickled into the room below, was collected and poured down the sink - a method described by the teachers as having worked well for a considerable time.

[219] Full details of this budget are in Appendix 11, Item 60.

in spite of the acute lack of funds, continued to plan extensions of the newly-acquired building; also, five of the teachers began working full-time. Part-time staff members and students from Goldsmiths College usually spent one day a week in the school. The teachers were obliged, by the beginning of 1975, to commit some of their own savings to the project, and with the addition of several bank loans, managed to raise about £1,000. A piece of simple addition reveals that the school was operating with five full-time teachers, as many part-time teachers and helpers as it needed, and twenty pupils, on a total budget of £2,300 - one eighth of what it required.

The building on Long Lane needed at the time several major renovations. The main staircase had to be made fire-proof; the building needed a heating system other than the oil heater it had. There was no hot water; the nursery area, consisting of two basement rooms, needed a toilet; and the bakehouse, which was to be converted into a drama studio and arts and crafts workshop, required insulation, heating, a fire-escape and plumbing. Of course, none of these things could be done.

Nevertheless, faced with the same reality that other free schools had faced: the insecurity of having no money, no guarantee that plans would be fulfilled, The Bermondsey Lamp-post Free School stayed open. What follows is a description by Fred Butlin, a teacher at the school, of the daily activities:

> We have no formal curriculum: activities arise through the kids' own desires and interests - e.g. Mustafa is interested in animals. He has built cages for two pet rabbits (previously he had rats) and looks after these. Ricky writes plays, and we all spend a lot of time rehearsing these plays. One or two have been shown before local audiences: one at a local hall, and a couple at Goldsmiths teacher training college.
>
> Adults bring in ideas and equipment for activities - for example, candle-making equipment.

> If the kids are interested, they join in. Adults follow the kids' interests and try to encourage them and bring in relevent books and equipment. A lot of individual help and attention is given.
>
> The kids spend a lot of time doing things themselves, for example, the top room is the "teenagers' room". They have decorated it themselves and spend a lot of time in it playing records, talking, etc. Younger teenagers made half a room on the middle floor their own by dividing it with a curtain. Some boys have helped work on the building - painting, building shelves, repair work. etc.
>
> Activities outside of the building include visits to parks, swimming pools, museums and places outside of London; plus holidays to Devon and Sussex. The older girls visit family planning clinics. There is some individual reading tuition with teenagers in the evenings.
>
> There is a nursery for under-5's in two rooms downstairs. The kids do water play, sand play, painting, drawing, reading, dressing up, building with bricks, puzzles, etc., etc.[220]

When asked about the philosophy of education that gave rise to this particular range of activities, Butlin replied as follows:

> This is very difficult. Obviously the main stimuli to the Bermondsey Lamp-post are the inner-city living conditions - deprivation, lack of opportunity etc., old schools, large classes, irrelevent curriculum, etc. leading to dissatisfaction. Our aim is to provide a more relevent education, based on the ideas of Neill's Summerhill, though the theory proves very difficult to put into practice. We would hope to have the kids becoming more self-sufficient, free of learning difficulties, more able to choose what they want to do in life. With older kids, who are only with us a year or so before leaving, this is difficult. We help with finding jobs and sometimes with extra reading and so on.[221]

In September, 1974, therefore, although the school was open and running, obviously its problems were enormous. Basically, it had very little; a lot of support from various agencies, and a great deal of interest, but little money. During the twelve preceding months, the teachers had applied to

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[220] Letter to the author, April 10, 1975. The full text is in Appendix 11, Item 61.

[221] *Ibid.*

twenty trusts and had not received anything from any of them.[222] So an elaborate request for help was sent to the Urban Aid Society, but this also was rejected. The winter of 1974-75 was, therefore, a difficult time financially, but made a good deal easier to accept by the togetherness of the teachers and the support received from the local colleges of education and the council. In March, 1975, Sir Edward Robinson's Trust in Blandford Forum, Dorset, sent the school £100.00, an amount that did little to help meet the budget of £18,000.00. By May, the various other agencies from whom funding might have come, had provided only a few hundred pounds. Again, the teachers had to put some of their own money into the school. A percentage estimate of the relative support from various agencies worked out in the following way:

Trust support.....50% of school funds
Staff savings.....27%
Fund-raising activities.....14%
Voluntary donations..... 6%
Inner London Educ. Authority..... 3% [223]

An approach to Southwark Social Services committee for financial support for the school's programme of preventive social work with some children was placed at the bottom of the committee's priorities list. Thus did the school struggle through 1975 and into 1976, closure seeming to be inevitable.

One more effort to establish the school on a firmer financial base seemed justified. The teachers began to reorganize The Bermondsey Lamp-post

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[222] A complete list of the trusts approached by the school is in Appendix 11, Item 61.

[223] These figures are taken from the school's response to a questionnaire sent by the author. The questionnaire is in Appendix 11, Item 58.

along very different lines. And, just as Richard Atkinson had discovered in Birmingham, they realized that there was a lot to be said for playing down the free school and emphasizing the community activities of their organization. Thus, towards the end of 1975 The Bermondsey Lamp-post became a community resource centre for Abbey ward. One of its activities was to provide for some of the social and educational needs of local children. The free school was buried among a complex of other activities that included housing, legal and medical self-help groups, a youth club, provision of accommodation for the homeless, and provision of exchange visits and holidays for people who would otherwise not be able to afford such things.

As a community resource, The Bermondsey Lamp-post took on a more dynamic identity than had been the case when it was only a school. In addition to the projects just mentioned, there was an increase in the range of activities provided for local children, some of whom had been with the free school and now stayed to participate full-time in the activities available to them. Drama, visits to Lifespan Educational Trust [224] and an exchange visit with a group of children in Italy were planned for 1976. In March of that year, one of the project's organizers wrote, "We're not so much a school - more a way of life."[225]

In September, 1976, Andy Smythe, another organizer, described the Bermondsey Lamp-post in the following way:

> .....we provide a variety of situations into which the consumer fits as he chooses. He may, for instance, be a parent who becomes involved in the teenagers' group because his son is attending and because he

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[224] Bermondsey Lamp-post's first visit to Lifespan is described on pages 286-287.

[225] A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, March, 1976., p.4. Full text is in Appendix 11, Item 62.

likes the atmosphere there; but his own learning priority may be anything from how to deal with housing problems, to how to cope with the death of a close relative. Because of the network of relationships involved, his problem can be serviced immediately by his working on it with the person most appropriate to deal with it at the time.....

The basis of our work is that we are neighbours, no more nor less a part of the community than anyone else. Because of this we are able to realize the problems of the immediate area, and are not hampered by the rigidity of professional distinctions, or the arbitrary routines and time limits of the statutory services...For the same reasons these services have got to know us, and to call on us for information and help, and as a link between the services they offer and their clients. Our closest links are with the Social Services...the Education Welfare Service, the Welfare Clinics at Guys Hospital, the School of Dentistry and the Probation Service.

The project is never closed...Much of the work is indistinguishable from everyday life to the outside observer; consisting of chatting in the street, the clinic, or other people's homes. Indeed the whole project started this way, when the initiators of it, then in full-time employment as everything from teachers to labourers, but living in Bermondsey, met each other, and the families concerned, and started to take measures to improve some features of the community.[226]

Thus did the Bermondsey Lamp-post manage to survive into its fifth year.

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[226]Andy Smythe. "In Bermondsey", A.S. Neill Trust newsletter. September, 1976, p.1. The full text of this article is in Appendix 11, Item 63.

North Kensington Community School

During the first few weeks of 1974 a group of teachers and social workers - all of them residents of North Kensington, who were running an adventure playground, began the eighteen months of planning that eventually resulted in the North Kensington Community School, an educational centre for local children who were considered to be failing either socially, by virtue primarily of growing criminal records for minor crimes, or educationally, by virtue of truancy. As has always been the case with such ventures, the problems are enormous, delays and unexpected complications are a daily occurence, and negotiations for adequate funding, unending. The need for the centre was obvious to the people who started it, but they saw a major portion of their collective energy being expended in trying to convince the trusts and the Inner London Education Authority that their proposed school would, in fact, help local children. By the time they were ready to open, the trusts and the Inner London Education Authority had had several bad experiences with free schools, in terms of both the failures of the schools and the pressure to support them against the Authority's policy and the fact that many requests for funding went beyond the trusts' capabilities.

The following description of the area, written by one of the group's members (anonymously), explains why they felt that they had a particularly good argument:

> North Kensington is one of these colourful, lively but deprived patches of Inner London where every type of social problem is conspicuous. Composed partly of decaying terraced houses awaiting redevelopment, and partly of high and low rise blocks of flats, there is little open space in the form of parks, playgrounds or gardens. The street is the main social centre and meeting place,

> especially of course for the children and teenagers. Although much of North Kensington is now in the process of being redeveloped, until recently the houses were privately owned and let out cheaply as bedsitters and cheap flats to the poor, the unsuccessful and various waves of immigrants. The population of North Kensington is presently made up of West Indians, Africans, Spanish, Portuguese, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Irish and English; mostly families, and mostly at the lower end of the income scale. The cultural mixture and the high turnover of residents have combined to make North Kensington a place where anyone can quickly be accepted as a "local", and be treated with a superficial and undifferentiating friendliness; but there is little underlying sense of community, and few people have any real roots or stable links with the area or with each other.
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> In this situation, the children form a community apart from the rest. Teenagers spend much of their time roaming the streets, in little groups, in search of adventure - which all too often, of course, brings them into conflict with the law. Sometimes these little groups contain really close, warm friendships, which are very important to the children; the other side of the coin, however, is the conflict a child can experience in breaking away from the delinquent way of life when he is so dependent on the friend whose main group activities are stealing, joyriding on mopeds, and other small delinquencies.[227]

By discussing their ideas and their concern for the welfare of these children with local community workers, teachers, social workers, parents and some of the children themselves, the group gradually concluded that a community school would help some of these children. Some mild interest in the project was shown by officers of the Inner London Education Authority, and, since this interest might ultimately be translated into money, the group, hoping for additional aid from the local council and Urban Aid,[228]

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[227] North Kensington Community School Report, 1976. Printed by the school. p.1. See Appendix 11, Item 64.

[228] This was a vain hope, if the experiences of other free schools is a guide. Perhaps if the schools had communicated with each other more often, relative latecomers would have known more about successful methods of obtaining funds.

began their search for premises.

Their first home was the basement of No. 11 Acklam Road, a building owned by the North Kensington Amenity Trust, and rented to the group for a nominal rent. At about the same time, they obtained £2,000 from the Allen Lane Trust, £1,800 a year for two years from the Mental Health Trust and Research Fund, and later, £2,500 a year for three years from the Gatsby Foundation. Unlike most other such projects, North Kensington Community School made a remarkably good start financially, acquiring £6,300 in grants for their first year, and £4,300 for the following year.[229] Their building was far from ideal, consisting of only two rooms - one of which was quite small - and a kitchen. It took the three teachers, plus various other helpers, three months to repair and decorate the rooms.

The school opened its doors in April, 1975, with nine children, most of them teenagers, and the three unpaid teachers. Other children were accepted during those first few weeks as they applied. Initially, the school was far from comfortable for either teachers or pupils. The lack of a definite programme, the lack of money to pay teachers, and the fact that several of the pupils who had registered were very close to school-leaving age, and could conceivably have joined the new school simply as a way of obtaining an early release from their state schools, dampened initial enthusiasm and caused several problems. One teacher left at half-term, and another decided to leave at the end of the term. Eight of the original students left during the first term: two because they had reached school-leaving age; two others

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[229] How the group managed to obtain this money is worthy of consideration. Some possible reasons are: a) that the need was more evident, and the community less capable of looking after itself than was, for example, Islington; b) that the group were not perceived to be politically threatening to council, or ILEA; c) that they carefully avoided making too many references to free schools.

who were placed in special schools; two who simply dropped out; and two who were asked to leave.

The second term began with two new teachers and several more children, raising the number to ten again. The hard lessons learned during the first term produced several changes. Any connotations with free schooling as practised at Manchester, Leeds and at The New School were minimized, though not roundly renounced as had been the case in Birmingham. Routines were established, however, that did make the school a more formal operation than it had been, and than Leeds, Manchester, Barrowfield or White Lion would ever have wished to be. The timetable, for example, which was established at the beginning of this second term, was not altered again. It was decided that the school day would begin at 9:30 a.m.; that academic lessons would begin at 10:00 a.m. and continue until noon, with one fifteen minute break at 11:00 a.m. Afternoons were to be devoted to a wide variety of activities: swimming, fishing and ice-skating on Mondays; table-tennis, gymnastics and snooker at a local youth club on Tuesdays; cookery, pottery, woodwork and leatherwork at the school on Wednesdays and Thursdays. On Friday afternoons the children would go home. Academic work was to concentrate on very basic instruction. The following description of this instruction explains how the teachers perceived the children's emotional problems and insecurities to affect their mastery of basic information:

> Of the ten children now at the school, three were almost completely illiterate when they came, and five others have needed a lot of help with basic reading and writing. We find that once these children have settled into the school, and have overcome their shyness and fear of ridicule at not being able to read and write adequately, they can make very quick progress, especially in reading. We use mainly a phonic method of teaching, so that the child can immediately start making some kind of sense of the written words around him;

with frequent phonic and spelling practice, and various word games, the hardly literate child can soon begin reading our easiest books, which always gives a boost to the confidence. We now have quite a variety of easy remedial readers, but finding suitable material which is interesting, varied and simple enough, but not too childish, is an ever-present problem.

All the children, even those who are perfectly able technically to read and write adequately, begin at the school disliking doing any original writing, and find it very difficult for quite a while. The reason for this seems to be their general lack of self-confidence, which makes it difficult for them to commit themselves to anything as final as the written word. We are now able to use a taperecorder occasionally, and we hope that recording their speech could be a useful intermediate stage between ordinary conversation and actual original writing. When a child arrives at the school unable or reluctant to write, we use any means we can to get writing started - puzzles, questions, word games, dictation, letters - and for a long while we concentrate on helping the child to enjoy writing, without worrying about neatness, spelling or punctuation. As writing becomes easier, they become able to write more extended stories and accounts of things they have done, books they have read and films they have seen, and thus move gradually into project work and more organized subject work.

Math is less of a problem for the children than reading and writing, although many of them are as behind in math as in literacy, and all of them are confused in some areas. For those who need to start from the beginning, we have made a set of short, graded work-cards which cover addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. At the same time, we work on individual confusions over number values, number sequence etc., and on simple measurement and shape recognition.....Our main difficulty in teaching elementary math is the unwillingness of many of the children to use the math textbooks, both because they are intimidated by them, and because they find reading the instructions difficult.....

Many children are also highly confused over very basic geography, history and science. We try, first to correct basic misunderstandings and give them an elementary framework of knowledge of the map of the world, the structure of the solar system, historical evolution and the structure of matter, rather than start immediately on a long-organized course in these subjects.....

> When reading and writing cease to be such a problem, and they have a reasonable mental framework of the world around them, project work becomes the next stage. The children usually choose topics for projects and these have included animals, early history, families and other ways of living, weapons of war, crime and car mechanics.....
>
> We also anticipate a stage which none of the children have yet reached, for those who were not far behind academically when they started with us, and those who are not successfully re-integrated into normal schools by their final school year. Project work should obviously be continued, but it will probably also be possible for some children to prepare for CSE's. For those for whom this would not be a feasible prospect, we would spend a lot of time in their final year looking into job possibilities.[230]

The importance to the teachers of designing the academic programme in the school in the light of the lives the pupils lead, becomes clearer when one looks at the type of children who attend the school, and how they come to be registered. In the first year of the school's operation, eighteen children were accepted. Two were West Indian; two were half-caste; one was Moroccan; the rest were British or partly British. They came from a total of fourteen families, and included among their group three sets of brothers and one brother and sister. Thirteen were boys, five were girls. All were the children of local workers. Eleven of the children had been in trouble with the police: some had several convictions before they attained their fourteenth birthdays. Seven lived with both parents; seven others lived with one parent; two lived with their grandparents; one other, a girl, has never known her parents. Most of these children were referred to the school by the Educational Welfare Office, although a local secondary school and two

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[230] North Kensington Community School Report. op.cit. pp.5-7. The full text of this section of the report is in Appendix 11, Item 65.

child guidance clinics have also referred children. Eleven of the children were referred because of persistent truanting; four others were suspended from their schools; and the other three are awaiting places in a special school. The following description of the role the school plays in the lives of these children shows how important it is that the children see the community school not only as a means of obtaining basic skills, but also as a place in which they will find security and reassurance:

> Whatever their circumstances, almost all the children have had to cope with obvious stress at home - often through nobody's fault, least of all their parents' - and as a result, their first main need is an opportunity to relax at school. This often appears as apathy or difficult behaviour, but it always changes eventually into a more active and constructive participation in school activities. When the children start at the school, they almost all have in common with each other a poor opinion of themselves, a general feeling of demoralization and distrust of others, especially adults in 'authority' positions, and a blank feeling about their future, or at most, pessimism about it. This is not surprising in view of their long-continued failure in most or all areas of school life, both academic and social. This failure often started, as we find from their previous school reports, in their very first year at primary school. Therefore, our main tasks are to give them as tangible a sense of achievement as we can, as soon as possible, in their academic work; and to help them in all ways we can to relate preferably positively, to at least a few of the children and one of the teachers at the school. This means that we sometimes need to give new children work that is too easy for their real capabilities at first, so that they have a chance to experience success, even before they are sufficiently relaxed with us to concentrate properly, or to try very hard.[231]

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[231] North Kensington Community School report. op.cit. p.10. The full text of this section of the report is in Appendix 11, Item 66.

Andrew Mann, of the Children's Rights Workshop, describes only four non-fee-paying free schools: Balsall Heath, Barrowfield, White Lion and North Kensington. These first three schools are about five years old now. North Kensington Community School has just completed two years. Yet in that short time this school has experienced a greater degree of stability than the others did in their first two years. The key to this seems to lie in the relationship that the school developed with the Inner London Education Authority and other social service agencies. The abrasiveness of the Grahams in Manchester, Ord and Murphy in Liverpool, and to a lesser extent, Susan Israel in London, brought down upon them a mixture of official disinterest and animosity. White Lion Street Free School suffered considerable hardship at the hands of the Inner London Education Authority; and Brian Addison's relationship with the City of Glasgow Education Committee is sufficiently bad that they would have his school closed if they could legally do so. Balsall Heath and North Kensington community schools have emerged from the inevitably arduous interaction with officialdom, relatively unscathed. The secret, in North Kensington's case, is contained in one statement made by that school about its objectives:

> Our overall aim for children at the school is that those who would benefit from it should be able eventually to return to a normal school situation.[232]

A Department of Education and Science directive in 1974 told local education authorities not to finance independent schools. By agreeing to help return truants to normal school life, North Kensington Community School relinquished the status of "independent" that White Lion Free School clung

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[232] North Kensington Community School report. op.cit. p.12. See Appendix 11, Item 67.

to and became, therefore, an adjunct to the local school system. The school poses no threat, therefore, to the legal obligations of the local Education Authority. It is part of the system. A very different part, perhaps, but nevertheless a component. Its viability greatly increased, it is a more attractive proposition for grant-making trusts, local council support, and ultimately, perhaps, direct support from the local Education Authority, which perceives it, quite correctly, as a truancy centre - all of which works out particularly well for the children in the area who need a school like it.

Other Alternatives

The free schools and community schools described thus far are not the only alternative schools that have existed in Britain. There have been hundreds of alternatives, many of them private, highly-structured towards academic success, and very expensive; others describe themselves as "progressive" and much has been written about them;[233] some alternative schools - often the more radical ones - were so short-lived as to have been almost unnoticed; some grew up within the state education system as truancy centres appended to large secondary schools; others, like the Ark, were neither "progressive" nor "free" nor "community", but something in-between, and usually only catering to the youngest children, the pre-schoolers.

The most obvious and publicly-supported experiments in free-schooling began in Denmark in the 1850's, since which time legislation for the Danish education system has been carefully designed to ensure parental freedom about the kinds of schools parents may wish to establish for their children. Britain has no such legislation, and consequently no tradition to compare with that of the "friskoler" of Denmark - a network of about two hundred and fifty small schools, responsible for educating about five percent of that country's children.[234] The first of these schools were set up more than a century ago by N.F.S. Grundtvig and Kristen Kold, as part of the first Folk High School movement. Others, similar in their informality and community orientation, were subsequently founded by the evangelical wing of the Danish

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[233]For a description of these progressive schools, see Skidelsky,R. English Progressive Schools. Great Britain: Pelican, 1969.

[234]Richmond, K. "The Free Schools of Denmark", Scottish Educational Journal, August 25, 1972, Vol. 55, no.28, pp.600-602. See Appendix 11, Item 68.

Lutheran Church, and by both Roman Catholic and Jewish groups, all of which came within the conditions set for receipt of government funding, set out in the Free Schools Act, by which 85% of the costs of operating free schools are met from public funds.[235]

Britain has no act comparable to the Free Schools Act and thus any attempt to establish in Britain a school like a "friskoler" will receive almost no public support in terms of either money, or time and consideration from local authorities: the only reason why a local education authority may show interest in such a school would be to ensure that it met public education standards, and to ascertain ways in which it might be used for the referral of difficult children from state schools. Free schools, like their progressive forerunners, are occasionally tolerated, rarely encouraged and almost never supported.

Nevertheless, they still pop up, like unexpected visitors, the duration of whose stay is undetermined, but probably not more than a few months, and frequently much less. The more durable schools have been described; but there were others. Owen Bishop, Polly Headly and Gerald Rogers tried to start a free school in Coventry in 1973. They got as far as transferring some of the activities that they organized each day in an adventure playground, to an old, decrepit school building, but got little further because of the overwhelming costs of repairing and maintaining the building. Ian Birksted and two friends started the very secretive Brighton Free School in 1972. Begun by several families described as "being distressed by their

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[235]Dodd, Geoffrey. "Left-wingers follow in the footsteps of the religious), Times Education Supplement, No. 19, 1971. p.16. See Appendix 11, Item 69.

children's experiences in school,"[236] the group maintained a secret address, struggled along on donations for one year, and refused all visitors. The school closed in 1974 after failing to obtain support from the local education authority. David Kuhrt and Jane Iremonger, late in 1973, established a community nursery school that it was hoped would grow into the Stroud Green Community School, but this also collapsed for lack of money and no local education authority support.

Seen from the point of view of apparently unsympathetic education authorities, proposed free schools hardly merit support, so weak are their financial and educational bases. The proposed Wolverhampton Free School is a good example. Announcing its pending arrival early in 1976, and describing itself as an "independent free school", it approached the Wolverhampton Education Committee for assistance. Director of Education, Mr. D. Grayson, described the approach, and explained his reasons for ignoring it:

> So far as my information goes a school was never established because the number of pupils of compulsory school age never reached a total of five, a requirement under the Education Act. For about a term, the "teacher/organizer" of the school had one pupil, who was not a truant, but was a child who had presented problems leading to his suspension. The organization ceased to exist after about a term, and the boy concerned is now a pupil at a secondary school.....
>
> No formal approach was made for finance, but hints were received that help in the provision of equipment would be appreciated.
>
> The "Free School" would not have been adequate, for it was located in a very small, private house, built over sixty years ago. The standards would not have been acceptable to the Authority, and I am quite certain that if sufficient pupils had registered, the Department of Education and Science would not have granted it full recognition.[237]

Grayson's indication that the Authority would have had to have been approached formally for financial support, his assurance that a sixty-year

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[236] Moorsom, S. "Free Schools", Where, No.80, April 1973, p.151. See Appendix 11, Item 4.

[237] Letter to the author from D. Grayson, Director, Wolverhampton Education Department, November 3, 1976. The full text of this letter is in Appendix 11, Item 70.

old house would not meet standards, and that the Department of Education and Science would not grant the school full recognition, reflect well the usual relationship that exists between an individual who seeks to establish an alternative school, and the already established education authority. Grayson was right: the Wolverhampton Free School could not survive, just as virtually every other free school could not survive in the face of such official disinterest.

Mrs. Gwen Lambert, who lives in Huddersfield, was able to avoid the financial pitfall into which the unfortunate free-schoolers in Brighton, Coventry and Wolverhampton were pushed. She invested £10,000 of her own money in her experimental alternative school, the Taylor Hill Centre, in Lockwood, Huddersfield. By comparison, the meagre amounts provided for the school by other agencies, illustrate the problems faced by groups without their own money. The local council gave Mrs. Lambert £250.00; voluntary donations amounted to £155.00; fees provided a further £32.60; and various fund-raising activities produced £58.00. The local education authority gave nothing.[238] Of thirty trusts approached, The Common Good Trust offered a few hundred pounds, and the others gave nothing.

What was Mrs. Lambert doing? She purchased a Victorian Methodist Chapel on Taylor Hill, and announced her intention of starting a school. Now in her mid-fifties, she invested all her personal savings in the project. Parents of forty-six children, thirty of whom were under five years of age, agreed to send their children to this free school, and Mrs. Lambert was

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[238]When the author asked Mrs. Lambert if she thought that the local education authority should finance her venture she replied, "No. I want no strings." The full text of this and other information is contained in Appendic 11, Item 71.

able to employ seven part-time teachers. The school, for which planning had begun in April, 1974, opened its doors to the thirty pre-schoolers on May 5, 1975.

Strongly influenced by the writings of A.S. Neill, and, to a lesser extent, by those of Jonathan Kozol, George Leonard, Susan Isaacs and D.W. Winnicott, Mrs. Lambert's original intention was to bring together the various parts of their work that seemed relevant to the children in Huddersfield, and make out of them a free school. Her financial independence enabled her to make use of the "Otherwise" clause in the 1944 Education Act, without having to combat the pressures that local education authorities frequently exert upon such ventures. The Huddersfield Education Committee, she regarded as "indifferent". Local residents, on the other hand, who did not share her interest in the school, and could not, perhaps, depend in this case on the local education authority to kill the project, were very actively hostile.

> Due to a local petition with 40 signatures against my "Private Borstal" I have had planning permission for my converted chapel to be used for only 30 pre-school children. However, during the holidays, about sixteen kids over 6 years old have attached themselves to the centre, and I've only had it open one month.[239]

The Taylor Hill Centre, perceived by Gwen Lambert as a place "with a flavour of its own" in which "freedom means freedom to let the heart rule the head,"[240] and perceived by the local education authority as a pre-school play group, thus operates relatively smoothly, of no challenge or financial burden to the local education authority, or to the local state

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[239] This observation was made by Mrs. Lambert in a questionnaire submitted to her by the author, the full context of which is in Appendix 11, Item 71.

[240] Letter to the author from Mrs. Lambert, May 31, 1975. Full text is in Appendix 11, Item 72.

schools,[241] operating with limits that no longer upset local residents, and thus left alone enough that its staff, and particularly Mrs. Lambert, can pursue at least some of the ideas and practices written about by A.S. Neill and other writers. "I am too old," wrote Mrs. Lambert, "and realistic to expect to change society: my special interest is in changing the vision and the reality for those who come under my influence."[242]

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[241] In a letter to the author, E.B. Ward, Headmaster of Mount Pleasant Junior School in Hudderfield, which is close to the Taylor Hill Centre, described the centre as having "no bearing on this school or the parents." The full letter is in Appendix 11, Item 73.

[242] Mrs. Lambert's letter, op.cit.

PART 11

EVALUATING THE FREE SCHOOLS

CHAPTER 1: WHAT DO FREE SCHOOLS TEACH?

Free Schools teach their pupils three things: awareness of self; awareness of community; and awareness of the relationship between the two. Awareness of self seems to be dealt with in three ways, which can be listed as follows: personal independence and discipline; self-sufficiency; and creative awareness. Awareness of community is developed in five ways: through co-operative group action, community projects, mastery of literacy and mathematics, acquisition of job skills, and success in public examinations.

As happens in most state schools, these components frequently become "subject areas" complete with planned curriculum, timetables and carefully organized pupil-activities. Frequently, pupils who exhibit a particular interest in or aptitude for one of these subjects will be coached for public examinations in that or a related field, if they request so. Free school teachers frequently use the same or similar print materials as those used in state schools, and make considerable use of field-trips, excursions and study-projects. In most free schools part of every day is devoted to "lessons" in subject areas, regularly timetabled and usually taught by an adult. Much of the remainder of each school day is usually taken up with group activities, excursions, instruction and individual study, similar to the things that go on in a state school, but on a smaller, more individualized scale.

The differences between instruction in free schools and state schools is a difference of style. Whereas the state schools' models have evolved from a complex of religious, classical and political factors, the models

upon which most free schools have designed their activities are more easily identifiable as Summerhill in Leiston, Suffolk, and The First Street School in New York. It was in Summerhill that the free school formula was developed. It was at Mabel Chrystie's First Street School in New York that this formula was modified to suit an urban environment. When British free schools began to appear in 1971 they were, in many cases, modified versions of The First Street School, employing what were essentially American modifications of Summerhill's formula, while maintaining a somewhat patriotic association with the original Summerhill whose rural and expensive practices were of only peripheral relevance. From A.S. Neill the free schools got their philosophy; from Mabel Chrystie they learned how to apply it in the cities.

Children at Summerhill had both nothing and everything expected of them. They were not expected to attend classes; they were not expected to obey their elders; they were not expected to be able to either read or write. However, the vacuum left by this lack of external demands facilitated the development of one of Neill's most cherished ideas: that, freed from all imposed discipline, the group and the individuals in it will develop systems of their own which, by virtue of their origins, will be appropriate. Thus, pupils at Summerhill had the same rights as the staff: "No one," wrote Neill, "is allowed to walk on my grand piano, and I am not allowed to borrow a boy's bicycle without his permission. At a General School Meeting the vote of a child of six counts for as much as my vote does."[243] This, claims Neill, considerably reduces the fear in adult-child relationships, enabling the

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[243]Neill, A.S. Summerhill, New York: Hart, 1960. p.Introduction

children to be less susceptible to the influence of adults. He has described this as:

> .....the finest thing that can happen to a child. You cannot make children learn music or anything else without to some degree converting them into will-less adults. You fashion them into accepters of the status-quo - a good thing for a society that needs obedient sitters at dreary desks, standers in shops, mechanical catchers of the eight-thirty suburban train - a society in short that is carried on the shabby shoulders of the scared little man - the scared-to-death conformist.[244]

At Summerhill, Neill emphasized a definite structure that grew and changed almost daily, more through the interaction of the pupils than of the adults. The school day at Summerhill was not unlike that of many English boarding schools: breakfast at 8:15; beds made by 9:00; lessons until 10:00 a.m. The lack of set activities and routines for afternoons, and the wide range of drama, art, carpentry and like skills available for pupils between 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. is what set Summerhill apart from most other schools in the country, making it one of the only schools in which a normal day of activities and learning lasted for fourteen hours as opposed to the six or seven hours available for state school pupils.

Summerhill to A.S. NEill was not simply a school; it was a way of life, a way of enabling a child to discover himself and how he related to the world around him. And it was this concept more than any other that Mabel Chrystie employed at The First Street School in New York. George Dennison, who taught at that school, described the bond with Summerhill - the attempt to adapt that model to the requirements of a poor, urban area:

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[244] Ibid, p.12

From the point of view of standard education, the First Street School is radical and experimental. There are no grades, no graded report cards, no competitive examinations. No child is compelled to study or answer questions when he does not want to. The children are free to consult each other, examine each other's work, leave the room, leave the school building itself, talk to each other and to teachers at will. Several rules have been established by the students themselves meeting as a parliament (a parliament in which some very fine distinctions have been drawn by tots of six), and the parliamentary method is used frequently to decide upon outings and special activities. These are not common practices, even in private schools. Readers who are familiar with the writings of A.S. Neill, however, will have heard of this in a more radical form than we have been able to exemplify at First Street. And perhaps from their point of view we are running a relatively conventional school. The differences are not so much ideological, however, as immediate functions of personalities and of the exigencies of operating a day school in New York. But let me give an example here, since only an example from life is capable of introducing the kind of irony that really obtains.

We believe - with Neill and many others - that going to school should be entirely voluntary; and that young boys from say nine to twelve, should have access to school as to a clubhouse, but should ideally spend their time roving about the city, observing, helping, annoying, adventuring - whatever they wish. Last year we had a group of five such boys. All five had been chronic truants and vandals in the public schools, and in varying degrees all five were on the route to Youth House. Now the idealogical convictions of the teachers indicated that these boys should be given a great deal of freedom; and we felt compromised because we did not actually want them to go venturing, first because they would be fair game for truant officers, and second because we, in case of injury, would be fair game for lawsuits. But in fact the issue never came up. These chronic truants came to school devotedly, and never once suggested a venturesome outing among themselves. After a few months we decided to risk our misgivings. The school had been donated bicycles. Each boy was given one, and each boy was given money for lunch; and then with a great deal of encouragement they were turned loose. Rather, we tried to turn them loose. The fact is, they would not go. And we came to realize that for these particular boys - who had been characterized by the violence of the fearful - there was nothing in the city quite as

> attractive or as supportive as their own school. I do not say this to praise the school.....but to indicate the extreme needs and dependencies of these boys, not one of whom had developed the kind of independence normal to a boy of twelve... .....Much as we admire Neill - and I think we do not disagree with him on anything - we have made no effort to recruit teachers from his disciples, who all too often use his ideas as metaphoric expressions of their own needs. We have gone to great pains, however, to find teachers of ability, and of personal warmth and kindliness, bearing in mind always that the child's desire to learn is nothing less than his total attraction to the world, and that therefore teachers who are vividly in the world in their own right are the best persons for children to associate with. There are considerable differences, then, from classroom to classroom. One room will be relatively orderly, relatively quiet, another relatively noisy and messy.....
>
> The students are divided into three classes, and each class "belongs" to a particular teacher, though there are frequent regroupings for special activities like dance instruction, music, gym and so forth.[245]

In neither of these two free schools have the traditional structures of schooling disappeared. The teachers, the classrooms, the age-grouping, ability-grouping, the accepted need for pupils to be given directions - given a framework within which they can move, are all present, just as they are present in many state schools. What makes them quite different, however, from state schools is the emphasis they place upon a child's independence of thought and action. Whereas in the state school obedience to the wills of adults is assumed in curriculum development and rigidly enforced in the day-to-day operation of the schools, in these two free schools, adult authority and pupil obedience is discouraged; attendance is

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[245]Gross, R. and Gross, B. (eds.). Radical School Reform, pp.228-232.

voluntary; the teacher, in planning and teaching a series of lessons, cannot assume that the pupils will participate; there cannot be regulations that only pupils must obey--teachers must obey them also. Frequently decided by pupils rather than staff, free school rules protect equality rather than fostering inequality as is the case in state schools.

Another way in which these two free schools differ from most state schools lies in their definition of "subjects" and the significance of these subjects in the school day. State schools are organized around the teaching and learning of subjects. Free schools are not. A.S. Neill described a typical day at Summerhill:

> At the beginning of each term a timetable is posted. Thus, Derek in the laboratory may have Class 1 on Monday, Class 11 on Tuesday, and so on. I have a similar timetable for English and mathematics; Maurice for geography and history. The younger children (aged seven to nine) usually stay with their own teacher most of the morning, but they also go to Science or the Art Room.
>
> No pupil is compelled to attend lessons. But if Jimmy comes to English on Monday and does not make an appearance again until Friday of the following week, the others quite rightly object that he is holding back the work, and they may throw him out for impeding progress.
>
> Lessons go on until one, but the kindergartners and juniors lunch at 12:30. The school has to be fed in two relays. The staff and seniors sit down to lunch at 1:30.
>
> Afternoons are completely free for everyone. What they all do in the afternoon, I do not know. I garden, and seldom see youngsters about.....
>
> Tea is served at four. At five various activities begin.[264]

For at least part of each day, therefore, Summerhill pupils may be studying English or Geography, Science or History, with continuous attendance being encouraged once a pupil has committed himself to a particular class. Equally, though, evening art sessions, attendance at local film shows, playing gangsters and being read to were also important "subjects".

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[246] Neill, A.S. op.cit. pp.13-14.

In other words, at Summerhill no distinction is made between the value of work and the value of play, although in timetabling, traditional subjects are given a four-hour period in the morning, while all other activities are given approximately ten hours a day.

The daily activities at The First Street School were quite similar to those at Summerhill, though modified to suit the very different environment of East Village, New York. Local facilities were used heavily; children were grouped in classes, and were expected to involve themselves in activities on a continuing basis. However, as at Summerhill, most of the day was free.

Britain's first free schools appear, in retrospect, similar to The First Street School in what they tried to teach. George Dennison described The First Street School as "small and informal.....oriented entirely towards the personalities of the students, the teachers and the parents",[247] and presumably, teaching pupils by that example, the value of personality - something that, for Dennison, starkly contrasted with the "de-humanization" of the American public school system. Both Scotland Road Free School and Parkfield Street Free School were inaugurated by their founders with almost identical observations about themselves and the state school system. Children in Liverpool and Manchester, and later in Glasgow and Birmingham and London, learned from their teachers in the free schools that smallness and informality was preferable to the large, impersonal state school. Dennison had pointed out that The First Street School had "no grades, no graded report cards, no competitive examination"; that "no child is compelled to study or answer

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[247] Gross, op.cit., p.227.

questions when he does not want to." He referred to the school's parliament, a modified version of Summerhill's General School Meeting. Almost identical learning conditions and decision-making processes were established in Liverpool, Manchester and subsequently Leeds, Sundance, White Lion and Barrowfield free schools, modified in each case to suit local circumstances.

Thus, at Summerhill and The First Street School, and virtually every British free school, pupils were encouraged by the examples of their teachers to respect the individuality and independence of everyone around. In each school, the importance of the individual is emphasized through such situations as voluntary attendance; participation in parliamentary or General School Meetings; the fostering of a sense of equality between adults and children; and the placing of due importance on both traditional academic subjects selected by the adults, and the play activities selected by the children.

At the same time, however, these free schools also teach their pupils about their community. The First Street School was located in the heart of East Village, New York. Other American and Canadian free schools were set up, during the 1960's in the inner-city ghettoes of many large cities. Much of their curricula related to the study of the community, and the best ways to survive in it. With the exception of The Ark and Sundance, every British free school was set up in the slums of a large city, and emphasized in its curriculum, study of the local community and how to live in it. Summerhill was in no sense an urban or ghetto school, and, in this sense, Britain's free schools are probably closer in spirit to their American forerunners than they are to that particular progressive school.

Self

The discovery of self is considered by free school teachers to be the most important component of all free school activities. Most pupils who come to a free school, do so because they do not want to attend a state school and, in the opinion of many free school workers, the reason why these pupils are unhappy at state schools is that they have developed a very low opinion of themselves while they were in the school. Richard Atkinson, Director of the Balsall Heath Community Education Project, which grew from the St. Paul's Road Free School in Balsall Heath, described the ways in which a child in that particular urban area could be adversely affected by his home and street environment, and find little hope for improvement in his school:

> Too many people have stopped caring for themselves and their homes. Rubbish litters the streets and rubble-strewn building sites. Where there are no, or few rules, anything can be tolerated. Standards have slipped so much that residents are unable to sustain a sufficiently resilient communal social and educational life for their children to develop to their best potential. Adults have little confidence in their own ability and are suspicious of all social, educational and industrial institutions.
>
> The decline in morale and confidence in educational aspirations and social standards joins a similar decline in housing, industry and enterprise, which is aggravated by factors entirely external to Balsall Heath.....
>
> With social, educational, industrial, housing and environmental standards all in decline, it is not surprising that as the child in such an area moves through school, he becomes increasingly sceptical of his ability to contribute anything to it, or to learn from it. It becomes difficult for the ordinary professional to even reach him, let alone teach him.
>
> The child may become an under-achiever, a truant, the subject of a probation or intermediate treatment order or simply at risk of failing to develop his or her potential. Delinquency, vandalism and the forming

> of gangs as a consequence of multiple communal deprivation further add to the problems and depression of the area. This is the vicious circle of decline.[248]

In a similar vein, Robin Gutteridge, of Leeds Free School, wrote of his concern for the manner in which adverse pressures in home and school shape a child's sense of himself:

> The school system has of course decided some years before the teen-age, on its successes and failures, particularly at the extremes. The failures, so-called, might as well leave school at 13 at the latest. Free School is thus a way of taking the pressure off. The teenager can nearly de-school him or herself should they wish. Alternately, they can avail themselves of the facilities and involve themselves in the relationships the Free School tries to offer.
>
> If as human psychology has said, much is decided by the age of 5, much must be doubly decided by 13. If a young person has been brought up in an intolerant, unfree, household - Shut-up I can't hear the telly - and then entered a school where much the same unfreedom occurs, if in a more subtle, insidious way, then by the age of 13 there is a reservoir of hate, fear and frustration. This is released in the Free School. What's more, when the kid goes home at night, depending on his home situation, he might refill the reservoir. Not that it's ever likely to be truly or even half-drained.[249]

Fred Butlin, a worker at The Bermondsey Lamp-post, described the depressing state of the Southwark and Tower-Bridge area of London as "stressful - a condition in which many families are in need of help, and many children neglected and mistreated.[250] Butlin's rationale for a free school was that it might "provide an atmosphere attuned to the needs of these

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[248] Atkinson, M.R. "Professionalism and Inner Ring Education", unpublished paper distributed on request from the Balsall Heath Community Education Project. The full text of this paper is in Appendix 11, Item 28.

[249] Letter to Gwen Lambert of Taylor Hill Centre, from Robin Gutteridge. Undated. The full text is in Appendix 11, Item 43.

[250] This quote is taken from the text of an unsuccessful application by the school for funding from Urban Aid, in September, 1974. See Appendix 11, Item 56.

children, where they will be able to relax and find an outlet for their own desires and abilities."[251] Bermondsey Lamp-post workers saw their school as a means by which some children might rediscover their own identities - an atmosphere opposite of that which seemed to exist in the state schools in the area:

> We believe that the absence of compulsion, punishment and competition, will free each child to learn faster when and where he chooses, thus becoming a more competent and constructive member of our society. We have already found that as the children become more involved with society, they are therefore less destructive towards it.[252]

Richard Atkinson's description of the Balsall Heath Community School's parents and their wishes and hopes for their children, shows that particular group's sense of the need for a strong structure within which their children would feel comfortable as they were educated:

> Parents, who all sit on the school's management committee, want their children to do well, receive basic training in the three R's, the kind of discipline relevant to the work-a-day world, study for CSE's and O-level exams, and expect useful employment, not the dole queue, to be the end result.[253]

Provision of an environment within which children will feel secure, is, therefore, of great importance to free school teachers, and many contend that children develop a positive sense of self worth in an atmosphere as free from the constraints of daily competition, compulsion and punishment as possible. The extent to which it is possible to create that environment varies from school to school, and is determined by a wide range of factors,

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[251] "The School", unpublished paper from The Bermondsey Lamp=post, September, 1973. The full text is in Appendix 11, Item 59.

[252] "The School". op.cit., p.3.

[253] Atkinson. op.cit.

particularly money and location. So, although the environments created may vary, free schools have at least one common purpose in their effort to provide pupils with as comfortable a learning and living environment as possible. Every free school designs its available space so that its pupils will have a wide range of things to do. Sundance had a garden and a workshop; Freightliners had a farm; White Lion Street Free School had numerous activity rooms and a basement youth club; Balsall Heath has three rooms for snooker, darts, reading the morning papers and listening to music. Whereas most of the space in a state school is used according to the expressed needs of teachers, albeit on behalf of their large classes, a lot of the space in a free school is given to the pupils to use as they wish.

Timetables are also designed to be as convenient as possible for pupils in free schools. The Bermondsey Lamp-post, White Lion Free School, Freightliners, Manchester Free School, and Scotland Road Free School were all open for three sessions each day: morning, afternoon and evening. Classes tend to be brief, rarely lasting longer than thirty minutes, and teachers spend most of their time giving individual help to pupils. It is not uncommon for a pupil-teacher ratio of four to one to exist. Free schools often coach pupils towards public examinations, if that is what the pupil and/or his parents wish. All free schools teach their pupils the basic subjects - reading, writing and mathematics; most teach history, geography and science: however, in every school but Balsall Heath, these subjects are only taught for an hour or so each morning, and attendance is voluntary.

In summary, the point about timetabling for free schools is that it is the pupil who decides what he or she will do. The adults are in the school to respond, to teach, to coach, to guide, but not to compel.

Self: 1. Personal independence and discipline.

The essence of a free school pupil's growth towards personal independence and self-discipline is that attendance is voluntary in every school except Balsall Heath's St. Paul's School.[254] At Scotland Road Free School this acknowledgement of a child's right to decide whether or not to attend classes was set within the greater context of what Bill Murphy described as "the need for people to have control of the community themselves - political control".[255] At Parkfield Street Free School, the first attempt at encouraging pupils to think and act for themselves, the General School Meeting, did not work well. However, that school's main problem rapidly emerged after opening day, in the form of several very rebellious and destructive pupils. The determination of the staff to allow these children to work out of themselves the tensions and destructiveness they felt became, for a while, the hallmark of that school. The staff's sensitivity towards these particularly difficult children is well illustrated by an observation made by one worker after a particularly violent encounter with an eight-year-old girl who had threatened her with lighted matches and broken glass:

> I was worried about the effect of such feelings of high intensity on my part.....As we were trying to base our discipline on reasoning and natural social rules related to human emotions, to be tolerant too long, as I was on this occasion, was unnatural and bewildering for a child.[256]

Voluntary attendance, and sensitivity to the need for some children to

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[254] St. Paul's School was formerly named Balsall Heath Community School and, before that, St. Paul's Road Free School. The name changes reflected a deliberate disassociation with free schooling in recent months.

[255] Observation made to the author, December 18, 1974.

[256] Head. op.cit. p.69

work negative emotions out of themselves are methods of encouraging personal independence. They are used in all free schools. Some free schools also attempt to involve pupils in the General School Meetings that they hold periodically to establish school rules, but this has not always been very successful. It has been abandoned in some cases, phased out in others, and radically modified to give more involvement for older children and less for younger ones, in other cases. By placing the onus for learning, respecting the rights of others, influencing school rules, and personal discipline, on the shoulders of the pupil, many free school workers feel that personal independence will be stronger than it would have been had the child been confined within an atmosphere of competition and compulsion.

Whether or not these workers are right is something to which there may never now be an answer, because so many free schools did not remain open long enough for any clear effects to reveal themselves. Some free school workers claim that the "proof of the pudding" lies not in some vague future research, but in the written "testaments" of former truants. This following passage from The Monthly Bananza, the magazine of Barrowfield Community School, is an example:

> The real truth about our school is that it is good, and it is the same as any other school in a way.....our school is a sort of a free school. The teachers and the pupils understand each other and their work and we get on better than we would at an ordinary school.[257]

Similar kinds of writings can be found in Working Our Way, the magazine of St. Paul's School, and newsletters from North Kensington Community School, White Lion Street Free School and Freightliners' magazine.

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[257] Untitled paragraph by Anne, a pupil at Barrowfield Community School, printed in The Monthly Bananza, No. 1., September, 1974. See Appendix 11, Item 74.

One factor that suggests that this voluntary and self-centred approach to school does not work is the inability of some free schools to attract and hold on to their pupils. The philosophy described above, with its anecdotes of apparently changed attitudes and modified behaviour, must be seen in the context of the actual impression made upon the pupils. Do children, in fact, want that kind of freedom? If it initially works for them as a therapy, do they still want it when they've rid themselves of negative emotions? The evidence in terms of the number of terms that any individual child actually stays at a free school, suggests that it may be less popular with the pupils than it is with the workers. Parkfield Street Free School lost nearly all of its pupils within a few weeks of opening, most of them having decided to return to local state schools. Freedom of movement and patience resulted in The New School being burned down by teenagers who had been invited to use it during and after school hours. Some of the older members of Scotland Road Free School admitted that the centre established for them by the Liverpool Education Committee after the free school closed, was much better than the free school.[258]

Furthermore, it needs to be noted that the schools that have survived for the longest period, and are judged to have been the most successful, are those that are the most strict and formal. Balsall Heath has compulsory attendance at lessons all day; most of the pupils' time in White Lion Free School was spent on various organized projects and subject-studies. It

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[258]Personal observation to the author when he was discussing the free school with some of its former pupils, December 18, 1974.

may appear, therefore, that a freedom that worked in Summerhill and, given private financial support, also worked in New York, does not necessarily work well in British cities; that voluntary attendance and the opportunity to participate in decision-making, which was never - or rarely - a part of working-class life, is so alien to the children invited to attend free schools that they avoid it after barely a taste; and that inner city children feel most comfortable in a world in which decisions are made and enforced by adults; for is that not the way the thousands of families dwelling in the rows of Victoria terraces, and piled on top of one another in the high-rise flats, survive?

Self: 2. Self-sufficiency

Most free schools place a great deal of importance on making their pupils self-sufficient. Growing from the needs of deprived and poor communities, as some have done, the free schools see themselves as a means by which their pupils may learn self-sufficiency. They do it by example: by trying to be self-sufficient themselves; by providing their pupils with skills-training; and by trying to show them that groups often survive better than individuals do; that individual effort is mostly applied to resolving group needs. Early free schools, in Liverpool and Manchester, attempted to become self-sufficient by having supporting organizations working for them: community action groups, comprising various unions and rights movements, transport cooperatives, bookstores, food cooperatives, all of whom contributed regularly to the support of the school. The New School was backed up by a Trust, made up of many parents, who raised money and volunteered their time. Other schools sought a different kind of self-sufficiency, putting a great deal of energy

into seeking financial support, on a permanent, or at least long-term, basis from local education authorities or trusts. Others, like Balsall Heath and Barrowfield, found their strength in their involvement with their local community.

Unfortunately for free schools, only the last-mentioned method seems to have worked. In every other case, the money ran out and the free schools were forced to admit that they could not survive in the slums of Islington or Camden without financial help from outside agencies - something that most residents had known all of their lives. There is, of course, a very fundamental contradiction between the philosophy that preaches group action and community survival and the free school that tries to "go-it-alone" in a slum where group survival, however criminal and seedy it might be, has been practised for generations.

Gradual realization of this fact did not, however, stop free schools from developing extensive programmes in self-sufficiency. Freightliners ran a small farm in the disused railway tracks on their land behind Kings Cross station. At White Lion Free School the curriculum contained four subjects: Bodies, Thinking, Employment and The Future, all of them dealing, in various ways, with questions of self-sufficiency.

In the interests of their pupils' self-sufficiency, free schools attach little significance to some of the more traditional subjects of the state schools, such as history and literature, preferring to emphasize, as does White Lion Free School, subjects more directly related to the acute problems of inner-city living. Any money that does become available for the purchase of materials is rarely spent on history books. In this, the schools are following the lead of The First Street School. Reading is considered of great importance; so are mathematics and social studies. Physical Education

is more recreation than exercise, and rarely competitive. Cooking and sewing are important secondary subjects, as are music and art, though none of these is taught formally except by the staff of Balsall Heath's newly-named St. Paul's School. In all the other free schools pupils selected freely from what was available and initiated their own projects and studies. The adults around them helped, but did not oblige them to learn anything that they did not wish to learn.

Links with the community, and the need for the pupils to understand living as a series of interactions between self and community, has been, therefore, of great importance in free schools and, in some schools, forms the basis of most activity. At Barrowfield, much of the pupils' time is spent engaged in community activites: the elderly are helped, Christmas parties are planned for the young, housing problems are discussed. In one project, local streets were photographed and the community theoretically redesigned. At Balsall Heath Community School, students found out why local stores charged different prices for food, and published their findings in their magazine, which is distributed throughout the area. They investigate incidents of vandalism, plan community festivals, conduct interviews with local citizens, discuss community planning and publish everything. Scotland Road Free School was one of many components in the Community Trust; Freight-liners was part of the Maiden Lane Community Association.

It is in their many different activities within their communities, and the relationships that they build up with them, that free schools teach their pupils self-sufficiency. Whether or not this works is a moot point. There are several very weak areas: most free schools fail to become self-sufficient communities; some are even rejected by the very communities into which they planted themselves. Concerning curricula there is a further problem: while

rejection of traditional subjects and voluntary attendance seem rational to free school teachers, it does not necessarily appeal to parents of their pupils, whose aspirations for their children may be towards that evasive level in society that has the time and money to study history and literature; and who may view with fear a schooling that denies their children access to these luxuries and to the employment that makes them possible. Balsall Heath Community School - now renamed St. Paul's School - serves to illustrate: it is one of the most successful of all alternative schools, and is the most formal, listing English, History and Art as three of its "anchor" subjects, and Music, Cooking and Sewing as subsidiary activities. Barrowfield Community School, one of the few free schools remaining, is described by one pupil in the following way:

> It's the same as any other school in a way because it has almost as many subjects, and we have just as much work to do, and even harder stuff - sometimes harder than the work in an ordinary school.[259]

On the other hand, there can be few who would argue with the desirability of children being self-sufficient. The problem lies in the extent to which parents will accept the free schools' definitions of self sufficiency rather than taking their chances with the state schools.

Self: 3. Creative self-expression

It is a contention of many free school teachers that inner-city children lack the opportunity for creative self-expression. So concerned with physical survival are most families that anything unrelated is disregarded. Illiteracy

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[259] Anna, in The Monthly Bananza, op.cit.

and the constant threat of unemployment dominate inner-city life, as has been continually illustrated in descriptions of free school activities. Thus, a very careful balance has to be struck between educating for survival and educating to liberate whatever creative spirit there may be trapped within the children. People whose major problem is where the next meal is coming from, or how to stop a bored and distressed father from spending the rent money in the pub, has little trust in the capacity for growth through painting and dancing or music. Neill's pupils learned, and were taught, two art subjects: drama and carpentry. Materials were available for painting and pottery. Most free schools have followed this same direction, and parents in Bermondsey and Liverpool, Glasgow and Kensington have, on many occasions, found themselves sitting watching a play written by one of their children and acted out by his or her free school friends. At Balsall Heath, art and crafts are taught as a subject; at Freightliners, pupils had access to a small community theatre and a dance studio; Sundance owned a lot of kits and tools and painting supplies, and taught pupils macrame and origami; there is a carpentry room at Barrowfield.

There is much variety within the small group of free schools in Britain. No two schools teach the same things. Each school has its own programme, controlled more than anything else, by the constraints of poor financing and an uncertain future. There is no such thing as a common curriculum. It is scarcely possible to describe even a common sense of purpose: one school was part of a Marxist-Leninist movement in a Manchester slum; another was born of frustration in Liverpool; another charged fees to school the children of middle-class, single parents. Some were fairly traditional; in others there were few rules. One can, therefore, only look for common attitudes among free school teachers and, in describing them, acknowledge that they are not necessarily shared by either pupils or parents.

CHAPTER 2: EVALUATING THE FREE SCHOOLS

Free school survival depends upon a variety of things: money, local education authority support; relationships with local state schools; support by grant-making trusts; internal relationships; and what the press says. These factors influence a free school singly, and in groups, frequently combining, like the root systems of strong weeds, to choke off the last vestiges of financial support and kill the school. They make or break the individual free school, interweaving themselves into the fabric of the school in combinations and passing alliances of support and destruction. Whereas one school finds favour with the local education authority and works with it, another is roundly opposed or ignored; whereas one free school may be supported by the press, another is not; while one may receive a grant from a trust, another will be rejected by the same trust.

The only system of formal accountability for free schools in Britain is that provided for all independent schools by the Department of Education and Science: a series of inspections and reports that may lead eventually to what is known as "recognition", a process welcomed by many independent schools as a way by which potential customers may see that "the sheep are sorted from the goats and that the goats are prevented from damaging the reputations of all others", a process which the Department of Education and Science wishes to end.[260] Recognition is preceded by "registration". Section 70 of the 1944 Education Act requires that all independent schools be registered with the Department of Education and Science. Registration is provisionally awarded

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[260] Rowan, Patricia. "D.E.S. May End Private School Inspections", Times Educational Supplement No. 3214, January 7, 1977. Full text of this brief article is in Appendix 11, Item 75.

to every independent school by the Department of Education and Science, upon receipt of such information as the name of the school's proprietor, the address and the names of staff and students. After a period of time during which an independent school may establish itself - usually three or four months - Department of Education and Science inspectors visit the school to satisfy themselves on the following four points: the suitability of the premises; the adequacy of the premises; the efficiency of the instruction; and the properness of the staff. If they are satisfied after two or three such visits, then the school is fully registered after one or two brief extensions of provisional registration. Free schools are independent schools and have to undergo inspection.

Many independent schools in Britain are not only registered, but also recognized - a status bestowed upon them by the Department of Education and Science because of a clause in the 1944 Education Act allowing the Department to exempt from registration schools which were recognized as efficient. Most famous independent schools are recognized. To obtain recognition under the terms of this clause, named Rule 16, an independent school must comply with the four criteria for registration and additionally provide a "progressive general education" and function instructionally at least at the same level as the state schools. They must apply for recognition, and satisfy a rigorous inspection. Recognition is, therefore, the final stamp of respectability sought by many independent schools.

For free schools, full registration is essential for survival. Failure to obtain it will result in notice, from the Department of Education and Science to improve various things and satisfy the four criteria. Failure to comply with the notice will result in closure. Most free schools have attached considerable importance to obtaining full registration. Of the very few who have

obtained it, none have sought recognition. Balsall Heath Community School applied for it in 1976 after pointedly disassociating itself with free schooling, and eventually received it - the only school ever associated with the free schools to have done so. The Department of Education and Science inspection is regarded by most free schools as fair. Inspectors are seen as sympathetic and objective, and not overly concerned about the political philosophies that may govern the school's operation.[261]

Thus, Department of Education and Science registration is one measure of the free schools. Free school workers and teachers acknowledge that the process may be the most reasonable means of obtaining local and national acceptance. The fact that very few free schools have obtained full registration, and that several gave up the attempt before any Department deadlines were established, is indicative of the inability of the schools to swim in the mainstream of education as the current presently flows.

In some ways, the first two Department criteria concerning suitability and adequacy of premises, are easily met given sufficient finances. Concerning the fourth criterion, most free schools are staffed with several graduates and/or trained teachers, so that rarely poses any serious problems to them. It is the inevitably subjective interpretation of the phrase "efficiency of instruction" in the third criterion that causes many free schools trouble, primarily because many inspectors consider much of what goes on in free schools to be at best therapeutic, and rarely "instructional" as that word is usually interpreted in the state schools. Scotland Road Free School, Balsall Heath

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[261] Patricia Rowan. op.cit., described the inspections as "tight and efficient". Alison Truefit, in How to Start a Free School, a White Lion Free School publication, described the inspections as having been subjected to "a quite explicit tightening up by both inspectors and the DES". In Liverpool Ord and Murphy took their inspectors on a school trip to Wales. Teachers in Balsall Heath described their inspectors as "objective and helpful". See Appendix 11, Item 76.

Community School and White Lion Street Free School have all, in their time, been registered by the Department of Education and Science, having met all criteria. In each case, these schools were able to meet fire standards and had enough toilets and exits and the like to avoid closure on structural grounds, by obtaining grants from trusts and local agencies, and by doing a lot of physical labour themselves. Other free schools - in fact all the other free schools - failed to obtain registration, some because they closed before applying, others because they failed to meet structural standards, and others still who failed to meet instructional standards.

Another measure of a free school's ability to survive is its relationship with the local education authority. Authorities vary considerably in their attitudes towards free schools. When this attitude has been negative, the free school has been obliged to exist outside of the whole education system, or at best, discreetly on the periphery, picking up occasional handouts from state school sympathizers. The debate among educators on the relative virtues of free schools existing inside or outside of the system, usually assumes that the final decision in this matter rests with those who operate the schools. This may not, however, be the case. By refusing to help, or by ignoring or actively opposing a free school, a local education authority can force it to the outside of the education system against its will. White Lion Street and Scotland Road free schools struggled for years for local education authority acceptance, and were rejected. Freightliners Free School was accepted, supported, then rejected by the Inner London Education Committee. On the other hand, Balsall Heath Community School has received at least some support. The attitude of local education authorities towards free schools has a considerable effect upon them. The decision to support or reject

is not made lightly by a local education authority. Few free schools have survived for long without local education authority support, and some have been forced to close when support was withdrawn. Thus, a free school's capacity to survive may be judged in part by its relationship with local education authority officials.

Thirdly, there is the different relationship between a free school and the state schools around it, from whom it may have got some of its pupils. This relationship does not necessarily reflect official local education authority attitudes. The actual amount of interaction between a free school and local state schools is, in fact, not enough to attract much local education authority attention. However, there is some interaction in some cities; and some state school principals have expressed opposition or support for local free schools.[262] Five free schools in Britain were started by former state-school teachers; several others have received some support from state schools in the form of use of facilities, and loan of materials. Others have received nothing. Just as these various relationships do not reflect local education authority attitudes, so also do they differ from conclusions that may have been made about the school by Department of Education and Science inspectors. Sundance, for example, was started with support and advice from local primary school teachers, and it also received a closure notice from the Department of Education and Science.

A fourth, and very important way of measuring a free school's ability to survive, is by examining its success in obtaining support from the grant-

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[262]Some expressions of support and opposition are in the form of letters sent to the author while he was trying to ascertain this relationship, and are in Appendix 11, Item 77.

making trusts. Every free school has applied for grants, usually in the hope that they will be able to operate on whatever they get. Some have been fairly successful, but most have not, and have only been able to obtain funding to cover a few of their many projects. There are about thirty trusts in the country that have supported free schools and similar institutions.[263] Most of them give out between £8,000 and £15,000 a year, and a few give considerably more. There are eleven trusts with a history of making grants to free schools or closely allied organizations: The Viscount Amory No. 2 Charitable Trust; Alexandra Day Trust; Carnegie U.K.; Gulbenkian Foundation; Normanby Charitable Trust; Aldwyns Trust; Miriam Sacher Charitable Trust; The Bronte Trust; Wates Foundation; The Yapp Trust; and the Scottish International Education Trust. The only trust established solely to support free schools and the like is the A.S. Neill Trust. Individual schools have succeeded in obtaining grants from some other trusts. However, the great majority of requests are rejected. For example, when approached for support by the New School, Fortes gave £5.00, and Charles Clore gave £10.00. National funding bodies such as The National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales and the Social Science Research Council, and Urban Aid, have all been approached by various free schools, with no success.[264]

No free school has been able to survive solely on grants, though several have tried and have come fairly close. Barrowfield Community School has obtained the most trust support of any free school, primarily from the Scottish International Education Trust and the Gulbenkian Foundation. White Lion Street

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[263] The author has compiled a list of trusts most likely to support free schools, and it is in Appendix 11, Item 78.

[264] The addresses of these institutions are in Appendix 11, Item 79.

School and The North Kensington Community School obtained renewable grants that have enabled them to operate for two or three years. Sundance received several fairly large grants for structural alterations to the school and purchase of materials, primarily from the Violet Melchett Fund. Other schools have been far less successful. Taylor Hill, Freightliners, The Bermondsey Lamp-post, Parkfield Street and Scotland Road were unable to obtain funding, though not for the want of trying. However, in some of these cases, the schools were partially supported by other agencies. Freightliners was, for example, the only school funded by the Inner London Education Authority - although, to obtain their money, they had to acknowledge that their pupils should ultimately return to state schools; Scotland Road Free School and the various attempts that constitute the Manchester Free School were, from time to time, supported to a very small extent by local community action groups.

Close examination of the support obtained by free schools from trusts reveals no clear pattern, and it is not possible to draw any overall conclusions about what type of school is most likely to be supported. Too many other factors, such as the way requests are written; personal contacts within trusts; the fluctuating economic fortunes of the groups and families that support the trusts; and the multitude of other projects around the country and the Commonwealth that may require support. Trusts seem more prepared to assist in the initial funding of a project than in the continuing support of it: thus, when grants to repair plumbing or up-grade fire protection standards, or purchase basic equipment run dry, many trusts prefer not to renew support.

Free schools make elaborate applications to trusts[265] and frequently

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[265] The Bermondsey Lamp-post's application for funding from Urban Aid (Appendix 11, Item 56), and the statement of philosophy of Sundance (Appendix 11, Item 51) are good examples of the material sent to trusts by free schools.

receive replies requesting even more information, implying two things: either the trusts examine requests very carefully, or their requests for more information are their standard initial response. The problem from the point of view of the trusts is that they receive large numbers of requests in the mail from organizations about which they know very little, including free schools, many of them every bit as elaborate as the free school applications. If they decide that support is reasonable, they tend to offer money for what might be described as "very safe bets". Thus, the much-publicized and well-planned White Lion Street Free School obtained continuing support from several trusts, while the comparatively weak and nebulous Leeds Free School got nothing.

In short, money comes to the strong, well-planned schools, and not to the highly controversial or weak schools, and it is obtained by negotiation and personal contact, not letters, however lengthy they may be. John MacBeath of Glasgow spent much of the time that he allocated to Barrowfield Community School, negotiating for funds, and very little of his time in the school. The end result of his efforts was that the school obtained a large and continuing grant from three trusts. Richard Atkinson spent his fund-raising time talking with and negotiating with various departments in the Birmingham City Council and obtained substantial support for his school. Susan Israel had personal contacts with some people in two trusts, and got money from both of them for Sundance and The New School. On the other hand, free schools whose teachers simply mailed batches of applications to as many trusts as possible, usually obtained little or nothing.

It would be incorrect to judge free schools' instructional programmes or philosophy on the response they evoke from trusts. However, in the end the question is simply one of survival, and in this matter each free school has tried in its own way to get enough money, some by appealing to private trusts,

others by negotiation with councils and local education authorities. Neither of these approaches works for long and, apparently have no other recourse, the schools close. It is Balsall Heath's great strength that it has managed to gradually incorporate itself into the life of the community it serves, and thus be perceived as relevant by both community and council. The school still needs money, as does every school in the country, but, unlike other free schools, it is established and thus is a "safe bet".

However much they may perceive themselves as part of their local community, free schools are self-contained units with their own individual organizations. It is, of course, quite important that they be perceived by the community as strong, stable alternatives. However, the strength and stability required to project and maintain this image must, in the end, come from the individuals who come together to make the school. The machine that together they make must run smoothly. If it doesn't, the weakness will affect the whole school. So, another way of measuring the ability of a free school to survive is to examine its internal workings - the relationships between its three components: the teachers, the pupils and their parents.

Free schools are started by teachers who attract pupils by discussing their ideas with parents. Answers to the following questions reveal a lot about individual free schools: Do the teachers get along with each other? Do the pupils relate well to the teachers? Do the parents support the school? Money has quite a lot to do with the answers, since the appeal of the school to pupils and their parents, and the ability of a teacher to obtain a reasonable salary, are major factors in the school's life.

Concerning relationships between teachers, it seems that free schools have no more problems than any other institutions have. It takes a lot of dedication to work full-time in as uncertain a place as a free school for

little or no salary, yet that is what most free school teachers do. They are obliged to share, to live communally, to expect little for themselves. Sometimes this arrangement seems to work well. Brian Addison has been with Barrowfield Community School since it opened, and had no wish to leave it: he had very few helpers, in fact only one woman found it difficult to work with him and left.[266] The same is true of Richard Atkinson in Balsall Heath. There are, however, some schools that have experienced a lot of friction. Susan Israel and Leila Cadaman split when Sundance moved from Mrs. Cadaman's flat. A few weeks earlier the pair had dismissed a woman whom they had employed as a teacher, after an argument; and a few weeks prior to that incident, most of the parents of The New School's pupils had withdrawn their children because of the violence that had erupted in part because a bad appointment had been made to the position of Project Director for the school. Similarly, the staff of the Leeds Free School were in constant disagreement.[267] Staff came and went at Parkfield Street Free School and its successor, Parkfield Street School, primarily because of the lack of money. The same was true of The Bermondsey Lamp-post.

Internal strength or weakness is, of course, quite apparent to pupils and parents, and their response to the school's staff represents yet another way of measuring the school's effectiveness and its chances of surviving. Scotland Road Free School and White Lion Street Free School both attracted the attention of many people who lived close to them - not necessarily writers or educators, but parents. Such was also the case in Barrowfield. Parkfield

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[266] This refers to Stella Coumbis, a psychology graduate of Stirling University, who worked at Barrowfield for part of 1975. Her desire to leave was a personal comment to the author.

[267] The author was unexpectedly embroiled in one such "row" on his first attempt to visit the school. The incident is described in Appendix 1, p.2-3.

Street Free School - besieged with problems and internal conflicts from the day it opened - received very little support from the people living on that street. Sundance twice lost most of its pupils, as also did Leeds Free School.

Local support for free schools needs to be viewed within the context of the schools' policies and attitudes towards the local residents. Brighton Free School refused all visitors; Sundance discouraged local visitors; Balsall Heath Community School carefully selects its pupils, rejecting those who would normally have been rejected as "troublemakers" by the state schools. This school rapidly became popular with the majority of local citizens, as a quiet, inoffensive place trying to upgrade community standards rather than catering to the immediate needs of the community's truants and "troublemakers". With such a stance it was relatively easy to gain acceptance from local residents who had also rejected the "troublemakers", and with local state schools, who had done the same. White Lion Street Free School also severely limited its availability, restricting enrollment to those children who lived within half a mile of the school, thereby ensuring that it did not automatically become a resting place for every vandal and truant in Islington. The New School, on the other hand, opened its doors to every "troublemaker" in Hammersmith, and they eventually burned the place down.

What does this tell us about free schools?--That their individual decisions about their relationship with the community they are in are crucial to their survival. It is the extreme situations that are dangerous. Brighton's refusal to interact at all; Sundance's reluctance to have visitors; The New School's attempt to involve truants and vandals; Parkfield Street's open-door policy towards violent and disturbed children; Leeds Free School's antagonism of local education authorities, state school teachers, and inspectors, plus

its open-door policy that was sharply reversed to become one of the most secretive schools in the country. All of these extreme arrangements seem to fail. More successful schools, such as those in Barrowfield, White Lion Street and Balsall Heath, controlled either their pupil enrollment, or their relationship with parents and visitors. White Lion Street Free School did both, setting aside Tuesday evenings for visitors. Barrowfield Community School and Balsall Heath Community School welcome visitors.[268] What becomes clear from all this is that free schools that have controlled their intake of pupils and have spent a lot of their time building up working relationships with parents, and have welcomed visitors, have lasted longer than free schools that have either placed no restrictions on these things, or have restricted everything and shrouded themselves in a veil of secrecy.

Finally, there is the press, searching, as always, for the story that may exist within a local endeavour. What the local or national press may write about a particular school is probably the least important of all the influences upon that school. National press coverage of free school events is usually limited to the Education section of The Manchester Guardian.[269] Local press coverage is different. Here, all too frequently, the search is for something contraversial. And just as a local education authority can force a free school to the outside of the education process, so the press can turn a quiet, unobtrusive attempt to help deprived children into a contraversial, radical alternative. Leeds Free School and Barrowfield Community

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[268] The author's experiences in visiting free schools is described in various parts of Appendix 1.

[269] It should be noted that the former Daily Mirror and Daily Sketch covered Summerhill occasionally. In fact, its most famous description as "That Dreadful School" was taken from a headline in the Daily Mirror.

School have both suffered from this type of reporting. While a free school may not seek sympathy from the press, it can at least hope for objectivity. When biases emerge - usually because of what is not reported - they are frequently damaging. In this way the press can, and does, contribute towards a negative public attitude towards free schools.

What follows in this chapter is a brief analysis of each free school, in terms of its chances of survival. It is assumed here that these "chances" are related to the factors already described: the impression made upon the Department of Education and Science; upon the local education authority; upon the schools around it; the parents to whom it appeals for support; the trusts that fund it; and the press. It seems as though no one agency decides the fate of a free school. Most free schools have collapsed, or are in the process of doing so, and the reasons for their demise are complex. One lost most of its pupils; another never had more than a few; another was closed through the combined efforts of the local council and the local education authority; a fourth went "underground" as internal problems brought about withdrawal of support from parents; another could not raise any money. Those few free schools that survive today, do so because they have the support of the same agencies that have brought other free schools to their knees.

Scotland Road Free School (b. June, 1971, - d. January 11, 1974)

This free school existed for two years and eight months. Its founders were two disenchanted state school teachers. It was immediately provisionally registered with the Department of Education and Science as an independent school.

Six months prior to the school's opening, both founders had taken their proposal to the local education authority and received what they described as a "negative response".[270] The school opened with eight pupils. It would be reasonable to describe this school, in its first few months, as having made little impression on anyone. There are several reasons for saying this. First, the inhabitants of Scotland Road were - and still are - slum-dwellers - people for whom little had been done educationally for a century. They were disenchanted, and had long since given up any hopes that education would in fact be the vehicle by which their children would leave their wretched environment and find something better.[271] Secondly, their community had recently been designated an Education Priority Area, and was in the process of an experiment that might eventually see some school programmes re-designed towards more relevance for the children who received them. The Director of this project was Dr. Eric Midwinter. Thus, from the point of view of the local education authority and many parents, the Scotland Road Free School seemed, initially, to be out of place. Midwinter's feeling was that change would have to come from within the established system:[272] he seemed prepared to

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[270] See Chapter 11, p.19, footnote 46.

[271] Midwinter, op.cit. pp.31-34

[272] Midwinter, op.cit. p.183.

tolerate the free school but not support it; and in this he had the agreement of many parents for whom acquiescence to established authority was a way of life, in their homes, on the soccer field, and in the two cathedrals that stood within the Priority area. The local education authority appeared not to be particularly interested in the free school, nor was the local Institute of Education. The only public acknowledgement of the school's existence occurred in the Manchester Guardian on June 18, 1971.[273]

By December, 1971, when it was six months old, the school had grown a little stronger in some ways. It had been visited by Department of Education and Science inspectors. The local education authority had allowed it the use of playing fields and swimming baths, and provided free meals to some pupils. Local support had grown and there were now fifty pupils enrolled; and some parents had volunteered time to improve the condition of the church hall in which the school was held. However, the gains were small when compared with what had not been obtained. In spite of several requests from the school, the local education authority had not offerred more comfortable premises or second-hand furniture, both of which were known to exist, while at the same time some local councillors were recommending that the Department of Education and Science be asked to close the school because of its poor facilities.[274]

On September 11, 1972, when the school entered its second year, it had grown in three ways. The Department of Education and Science had extended its provisional registration - a favourable reflection of the earlier inspection, and the complete opposite of what the local councillors had considered requesting; the local education authority had allowed the school the use of a

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[273] Dix, Carol. "An Alternative School", The Manchester Guardian, June 18, 1971. The full text of this article is in Appendix 11, Item 7.

[274] Dewhurst, E. "Free School Under Attack", The Manchester Guardian, January 25, 1972. The full text of this article is in Appendix 11, Item 8.

disused school building; and the number of pupils had doubled to about one hundred.[275] However, again these apparent gains, all of which were temporary and conditional - including the pupils' presence in the school - must be seen against the financial instability of the school, which still received most of its money from local donations, jumble sales and fees earned by some staff members for speaking engagements.

What, in fact, do the apparent gains add up to? It may reasonably be said that they do not add up to very much. What they tell us is that at its height, when it had in fact obtained the most support that it ever obtained from the Department of Education and Science, the local Education Authority, and parents, the school had provisional registration, the temporary use of a disused school and less than .01% of the area's 17,000 school-age children.[276]

By the beginning of 1973, inevitably, the school's serious lack of money began to affect its operations. It could not pay its bills. The Liverpool Education Committee paid off £479.00 in debts in February, but just as this gesture came from that unlikely source, so another source of support gave way, when several residents of Scotland Road complained to the Education Committee about rowdy behaviour emanating from the school. Within a few weeks the local education authority support that had been given was removed. John Hamilton, Chairman of the Education Committee, recommended that the school be ordered to leave its premises by the end of August. At the same meeting, the Committee decided not to pay the free school's outstanding rates. In spite of requests

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[275] "School with a Difference Achieves Recognition", The Manchester Guardian, September 13, 1972. The full text of this article is in Appendix 11, Item 80. Note: In this article's title, the word "recognition" is used incorrectly in terms of DES regulations, and refers to extension of provisional registration.

[276] Midwinter, op.cit. p.32 .

by the school for five years' continuing support, the Committee withdrew from any association with the school as rapidly as it could. In September, 1973, a Department of Education and Science inspector issued an unfavourable report on the school. During the following months trusts rejected all requests for funding. Parents began to withdraw their children and the school's enrollment dropped to eighty. Three months later the Liverpool City Council finally killed the school by rejecting a proposal for support made by several parents, by a vote of seventeen to three.

Thus the actual support that this free school received was very little. And what little that had been given, was easily and rapidly taken away. In fact, the Department of Education and Science and the Liverpool Education Committee, by retrieving what they had given the school, set the stage for future experiences of other free schools. On December 22, 1976, the Director of Education for Liverpool, K.A. Antcliffe, wrote: ".....the LEA would be opposed to the establishment of FREE schools.....whilst the FREE school was in existence, the LEA did not give any financial support."[277]

By March, 1974, with the free school now closed, the Liverpool Education Committee was obliged to involve itself in the lives of the school's ex-pupils. The headmasters of the secondary schools in the area had refused to re-admit former free school pupils in spite of requests by the Education Committee to do so.[278] So, what happened, curiously enough, was that the Education Committee found itself having to provide an alternative school for these children. Thus was the Committee's "Education Guidance Unit" established. One line in a report of the unit's first few weeks, observed:

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[277]Letter to the author, December 22, 1976, the full text of which is in Appendix 11, Item 81.

[278]"The Liverpool Kids with no School to go to." Letter to the Education Guardian, from F.J. Disbury, et al., March 12, 1974. See Appendix 11, Item 15.

"Parents have expressed their appreciation of the unit's work."[279]

In terms of the various ways by which a free school's capacity to survive may be measured, Scotland Road Free School fared badly, though little worse than others that were to follow. It never had enough money. It was opposed by the Liverpool Education Committee. Its final inspection was negative. Parents who had supported it withdrew their children after it had become clear to them that the school would not be officially sanctioned. Caught in the "Catch 22" dilemma of being rejected by the Education Committee for having inadequate premises, when it was that same Committee that had refused to give the school adequate premises for its hundred pupils, the school had little hope for survival.

It is unfortunate but true that any instructional or educational worth the school might have had could not take precedence over the political conflicts it had experienced. Actually, very little that it had done educationally was new. Street schools and free schools had existed in North America for a decade, and in Denmark for a century; Summerhill had been tolerated for forty years. Even as Britain's first urban free school, Scotland Road had attracted little attention. The national press largely ignored it with the exception of occasional brief articles in the Manchester Guardian, and the local press was interested in it only when it came into open conflict with the Council. Its educational philosophy and activities have been described in previous chapters. Obviously they were not effective enough to attract the kind of support and sympathy it required to survive. In the end,

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[279]"Former Free School Pupils Settle In." Weekly News, Liverpool, June 14, 1974. The full text of this article is in Appendix 11, Item 82.

all that mattered was the Department of Education and Science, the Liverpool Education Committee, the Liverpool City Council, and those various agencies and trusts in the country that might have given the school money. Between them, they killed it.

Parkfield Street Free School (b. January, 1972 - d. May, 1972. reborn June 2, 1972, as Parkfield Street School, which died on January 18, 1973, re-emerged February, 1975, as Manchester Free School.)

This free school was started in a run-down area of Moss-side, Manchester, in January, 1972, by two Marxists, David and Jane Graham. After a few weeks it became part of a community action movement whose objective was to raise the living standards and hopes of the local residents through a variety of integrated self-help groups, included among which were a bookshop, a food store, a wages pool and a women's rights organization. The free school was the first part of Community Action. Started solely by the Grahams, it had, in its first four months, only four children, two belonging to the Grahams and two members of another family. The group had £200.00. When it opened, the school was unknown to the Department of Education and Science, to the local education authority and to the other residents of the street. Its brief life was marked with a series of conflicts and failures. The school's rapid demise illustrates well the dependence of free schools upon the support of people, who at the school's inception have no particular interest in it, and do not perceive themselves as needing it. The school began its life, therefore, with a major structural weakness: it did not grow from the community, or from the local education authority; it was alien, imposed upon an unwitting community.

The school's relationship with the people of Parkfield Street did not grow beyond the initial mild interest shown by a handful of young children. In fact, by May, 1972, both of the Graham's own children and the two from the other family had returned to the local elementary school, and the free school was left with one pupil, a boy, who was the only pupil who subsequently remained with the school. It was hoped that the removal of the word "free" from the name of the school would dispel some local residents' fears, so this was done and Parkfield Street School began its brief life in Moss-side. To the extent that eight children were enrolled in the new school when it opened in June, 1972, the Graham's hopes proved correct. The school remained upon throughout the summer of 1972 until a series of minor scandals brought it into disrepute in the autumn.

Up to this point, the roles of the Department of Education and Science and the Manchester Education Committee had been all but unnoticeable. The provisional registration sought in January had been withdrawn when the first school closed in May. The provisional registration sought in June had not been followed by any inspections because of summer holidays. The local education authority's role had been initially to watch the tiny experiment during the winter of 1972, but it quickly lost interest in the spring when the school was reduced to only one pupil. In fact, with less than five pupils, the school could not officially consider itself to be a school, but was, rather, a tutor group.

Official disinterest came to a swift conclusion, however, when the school attempted to continue operating into the new school year in September, 1972. On September 15th the Education Committee took the necessary steps to crush the little school, by threatening parents with prosecution if they did not return their children to the local state school. Most parents complied

immediately. The Committee's second step was aimed directly at the school, when it informed the teachers that the school's legality was dependent upon submission of details about itself to the Chief Education Officer - a piece of misinformation that sent the Grahams to Liverpool for advice and confirmation of their legitimacy from the teachers at Scotland Road Free School.[280] The problem was again related to the Committee's opinion that the five children still at the school were truants, not legitimate pupils of a properly registered private school.[281]

The significance of the swift action by the local education authority against the school is, of course, that it illustrates the power of the authority to play with the school like a cat plays with a mouse. The Inner London Education Authority later played the same kind of game with free schools in its area. The Grahams represented several things intolerable to the authority: they were Marxists; their openly-admitted hope was that Moss-side residents would raise themselves from the misery of living in that part of Manchester, through their own efforts rather than by relying on the official agencies and properly-elected officials; the free school had an attitude towards truants that was unacceptable to the authority. Finally, the free school was weak. If one may consider strength to be a combination of form and structure, Parkfield Street School was like a house built of straw. Financially it was poverty-stricken, and could not withstand the slightest assault. Educationally, it was not well-designed, nor did it appeal to children for long. Its case for the right to continue was weak. The Committee's case for closing it was

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[280] The relationship between Parkfield Street School and Scotland Road Free School is discussed in Chapter 1, pp.44-46.

[281] Head, op.cit. p.73.

strong. The Committee never did consider supporting the school sufficiently to help it become established: they couldn't; it was politically too radical. The Chief Education Officer for Manchester, D.A. Fiske, wrote: "We did not think that the school had anything very useful to offer."[282]

Closure meant a second withdrawal of provisional registration, so once again the Department of Education and Science did not inspect the school. What would inspectors have found, had they looked? The premises were below standard and the school had no money to bring them up to the required standard; instruction was almost non-existent, mainly because the staff found their time almost completely taken up with controlling or working with the unruly pupils who destroyed the school's few possessions on several occasions; it is doubtful that the staff would have been judged "proper". Furthermore, the school had little rapport with the community into which it had planted itself. It was not of the community; it did not include community members in its daily operations in the way that, for example, Balsall Heath Secondary School did. It had difficulty keeping pupils for more than a few weeks. No trust would support it.

The school disappeared again, this time for two years, then re-emerged first in the form of several isolated tutorial groups - a survival technique later adopted by Leeds Free School and Freightliners - then, later in 1976, when these groups came together because of the only stroke of good fortune that the school had ever had, when an anonymous donor gave the group enough money to buy a house. And thus is the Manchester Free School emerging, battle-scathed from the ruins of its two predecessors.

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[282]Letter to the author, June 21, 1976. Full text is in Appendix 11, Item 16.

What will it mean to this school to have a home of its own? There is no doubt that such an acquisition is some security, but probably not as much as would at first appear to be the case. The Manchester Free School still has very little. It has no money. It is still not supported by the local education authority; it is not fully registered with the Department of Education and Science and, from the experiences of every free school in the country, these are serious deficiencies. With enrollment now in the thirties, the school has developed some stronger working relationships with the community in which it resides. However, it is still not of that community, and history shows that most parents back off experiments involving their children as soon as the local education authority cries wolf. Scotland Road Free School sustained itself for a while on such things as a favourable inspection that promised hope of registration, and the temporary momentum of a hundred pupils, though even that was not enough when the Education Committee decided to attack. Parkfield Street School had nothing, by comparison, and the new Manchester Free School has only slightly more than that. However, it does have its own home, and, given a good inspection and the strength to work with the Manchester Education Committee, it could survive for at least as long as its meagre financial support from the Manchester Students Union lasts.

Freightliners Free School (b. January, 1972 - d. July, 1977)

This free school was started in a basement flat in South Villas, Camden, by a second-year education student, as a tutor scheme for eight local children. Jennifer Simmonds, the founder, had £50.00 of her own money and £250.00 that had been anonymously donated, and nothing else. Seven of her eight pupils

were from one family. Thus her total support amounted to £300.00 and two parents. She called her group South Villas Comprehensive.

In July, 1972, she was able to increase her support somewhat by associating her school with The Maiden Lane Community Association - an affiliation of local self-help and cultural groups that had been granted the temporary use of fourteen acres of disused British Rail freight yards at the back of Kings Cross station. The Camden council supported the Association.

From what appeared initially to be a very weak starting point, this school obtained support rapidly from that most unlikely of sources, The Inner London Education Authority. The Authority provided funds for the minimum salary for two teachers. It was at this time that the school changed its name to Freightliners Free School. How did the school get the support? There is only one way of getting such support, and that is through form DO/35 - a document of the Authority's which parents signed indicating that their children were being tutored by members of the Maiden Lane Community Association and that it was expected that at some future date the children would return to the state schools from which they had been absenting themselves. Form DO/35 has been a thorn in the sides of many free school workers in London. Seen by some as an abdication of autonomy - if signed - an acknowledgement that the state school system is the main system, and the free schools temporary peripheral experiences in the lives of a wayward few, it has been the subject of bitter argument. The Inner London Education Authority normally refuses to finance a school that will not acknowledge its supportive role in relation to the state schools. However, the parents of the, by now, seventeen pupils at Freightliners did sign the form, and it seems in retrospect that while the financial support that followed made things possible, the Authority did not interfere in the running of the school at all. Here, then, is the only school in London that ever subordinated

itself on paper to the Authority's schools and, at first, it appears to have been a wise move. The staff agreed to work within the six conditions set out by the Inner London Education Authority as necessary to any consideration for support, and, in so doing, set themselves on a relatively stable course for the following three years. However, what may have appeared a security that made many things initially possible, eventually turned sour and the events that occurred in 1976 bore out the reservations expressed by other free schools concerning working with the Authority. The relationship between Freightliners Free School and The Inner London Education Authority was not of equals. As with Scotland Road Free School, when the Authority and the local council decided that the school had operated for long enough, the speed with which they were able to expedite its demise serves as a reminder to all free school workers of where the power really lies.

By August of 1976 Camden Council had decided that it could no longer support The Maiden Lane Community Association. Low-cost housing was to be built on the freightyards. Parents began to withdraw their children in anticipation of the closure of the school, and by October there were only nine pupils left. In other words, decisions made by agencies outside of both the Association and the school swiftly removed what might have been considered, once, a permanent security, and Freightliners Free School had reverted to almost the same situation that South Villas Comprehensive had been in four years earlier. Within a few days, The Inner London Education Authority withdrew its support from the school, following a Department of Education and Science inspection. The school's staff at once began instituting defence measures, various types of which have characterized every free school under siege by a local education authority: they returned to their original status as a tutor group in an attempt to avoid the inspections and "hassles"

associated with free school status.[283] This, however, did not work, and in late March of 1977 the parents of the nine children attending the tutor groups were informed in a letter from The Inner London Education Authority that the maximum number of children permitted in a tutor group was five, and thus the nine constituted a school, which was to be closed at once.

Thus was Freightliners Free School put down by The Inner London Education Authority when they no longer considered it useful enough to warrant support. This school's experience, perhaps moreso than that of any other, illustrates the harsh realities of free schooling. It existed for exactly as long as The Inner London Education Authority and the Camden Council agreed to its existing, and then only by operating within conditions set down by the Authority. Unlike Scotland Road Free School, Freightliners was not set up as a political alternative inevitably in conflict with established authority; on the contrary, it accepted its role as one component in a system controlled by The Inner London Education Authority. Its relatively long period of survival - five years - was directly related to its decision to be dependent - a decision that, in the end, made no difference to its fate.

Free Schools do not seem to last very long, and when Freightliners Free School was finally killed off, it was comparatively old. Its willingness to subordinate itself to the Inner London Education Authority may have staved off its almost inevitable end, but it did not prevent it. Furthermore, in trying to disassociate itself with the free school label, it was doing something that several other free schools learned to do; and while this

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[283] Letter to the author from Fay Hiscock, Maiden Lane Community Association, March 4, 1977. See Appendix 11, Item 19, for the full text.

tactic seems to have some capacity to prolong life, it does not keep the wolves at bay for long. As with so many other free schools, in retrospect Freightliners never did have much, and what little it had turned out to have been temporarily loaned, and easily taken back.

White Lion Street Free School (b. September 18, 1972 - d. July, 1977)

This is one of the only true free schools in Britain that was ever fully registered by the Department of Education and Science.[284] It was started, after one year of careful planning and liaison with various local authorities and agencies, by a group of teachers and social workers. Well-supported by these agencies, it began with twenty-seven children aged between three and fourteen years. It grew into the most legitimate free school in the country, supported by several trusts, well-publicized by the press, and backed financially by the Islington Council. Wates Foundation gave it £8,000; City Parochial Fund gave it £2,000; Islington Council gave it £4,000. The only London agency with which it had a continual tumultuous experience, and from which it received virtually no support, was The Inner London Education Authority.

By limiting its pupil-intake to those children who lived within half a mile of the school, and by providing pupils with a rich variety of learning experiences both inside the school and on field trips that covered half the country, the school rapidly gained both a local and a national reputation as

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[284] Balsall Heath Community School also received registration, but some two years after it had disassociated itself from free schooling.

a constructive and well-organized alternative school. No other free school was as carefully designed; no other free school was as positively supported in its first year as was White Lion Free School.

During its second year it had forty-three pupils. All of its 1972 grants were renewed, and a Department of Education and Science inspection resulted in an extension of provisional registration.

By the middle of 1974, a cursory glance at this school would have indicated a degree of stability far beyond that of any other, with support coming from a wide variety of sources, and coverage in The Times Educational Supplement, The Guardian and Where. Yet, in the light of the withdrawal of that support during 1975, one must ask just how much the school actually had. Questions that were obviously asked by members of the school are: "For how long will the trusts continue to support us?" "Will The Inner London Education Authority make a permanent financial commitment to the school?" The very nature of the Islington community in which the school was situated assured the school of little in the way of financial support from local parents: even those who had put their children in the school had slender resources. And, while full registration from the Department of Education and Science may have encouraged the trusts, it did nothing to ensure the school of any permanent support from The Inner London Education Authority.

Thus, when in February of 1975 the Authority withdrew what little support it had given the school in the form of some free meals, the action may be seen as an all-too-familiar forerunner to the process that would eventually close the school. And thus the familiar pattern took shape, with a few different faces, in the form of the trusts, but with the same conclusion. In July, 1975, the large Wates Foundation grant expired. The school struggled on for another

year and a half before making a last-ditch appeal for permanent funding from The Inner London Education Authority, which was unsuccessful. The Authority's stand against the school was made perfectly clear: the school would have to deregister as an independent school and re-establish itself as a rehabilitation centre for difficult children, dedicated to returning those children to state schools at the earliest possible date. This requirement is the blow that strikes at the heart of the free schools, and characterizes all local education authority attitudes towards free schools. In essence, it is an insistence that there can only be one authority. Any school that wishes support from that authority must be subject to its regulations. It is the blow that struck down Scotland Road Free School, Freightliners and Parkfield Street Free School; and that nearly ruined The Bermondsey Lamppost. It is what Peter Wilby terms, "A Mean Death for a Free School".[285]

Balsall Heath Community School (b. April, 1973, as St. Paul's Road Free School; renamed Balsall Heath Community School in 1974; renamed Balsall Heath Community Secondary School, 1976; renamed St. Paul's School, 1976. Recognized by the D.E.S. 1976.)

This school began life as St. Paul's Free School, in a terraced house in Balsall Heath, Birmingham. It ran under that name for about a year before pointedly erasing the word "Free" from its name in June of 1974.[286] This is one of the few free schools in Britain that was not modelled after Summerhill.

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[285] Wilby, Peter. "A Mean Death for a Free School", The New Statesman, July 1, 1977. The full text of this article is in Appendix 11, Item 27.

[286] The Heathan, June, 1974, p.7. See Appendix 11, Item 35.

It was conceived by two Birmingham University lecturers as a way by which some local children in this depressing part of the inner city might be offered the chance to work towards improving their own community. Right from the start its relationship with the people of St. Paul's Road was excellent. It refused to admit "troublemakers" and truants; it opened its doors to local citizens, and rapidly developed projects addressing the needs of people living in Balsall Heath. It developed strong working relationships with local play-groups, businesses and churches. It was not, therefore, a threat to anyone. In fact, the contrary was the case. It was perceived by many as an agency that might help them and their children, by openly representing them to council, police and press on such issues as community planning, prostitution, police activities and vandalism. Its newsletter, The Heathan, was sold throughout the community and seemed to have the effect of bringing people in the community together by reference to matters of direct importance to them.

During its first year it had very little money other than donations and proceeds from jumble sales. In August of 1973 it received some support from the local education authority in the form of free meals for some children. Later the Department of Social Services gave the school several small grants.

Until the end of 1976, the school was regarded by many as the country's most successful community school.[287] Then, as with so many others like it, it ran out of money. Fortunately, the Birmingham Council decided to support it. The school's relationship with the Birmingham Education Committee and

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[287] Birmingham Daily Mail, January 4, 1977, "Truants' School may be closed". See also Moorsom, S. "Free Schools", Where, No. 80, 1973. See Appendix 11, Item 4.

Council is worth examining because of its openness and sense of cooperation. The school did not present itself as a radical alternative to the state schools, in fact it went out of its way to build strong working relationships with them. In its conduct it was stable, and oriented towards the needs of the community, seeking from its pupils a commitment to their community in terms of the projects they engaged in. In return, it offered them a relaxed and consistent environment in which to obtain the academic credentials they would require if they were to avoid spending the rest of their lives in Balsall Heath or another place just like it. The stance earned the school the respect of surrounding state schools.

The institution that began five years ago calling itself a free school, now denies that title. Its director has described free schools as "imposing a mish-mash of progressive ideas" on pupils.[288] Its survival is linked to this denial, and to its disassociation from progressive education as it refers to techniques developed at Summerhill. Its academic programme is formal; it describes its pupils' parents as wanting their children "to do well, receive basic training in the three R's, the kind of discipline relevant to the work-a-day world, study for CSE's and O-level exams, and expect useful employment, not the dole queue to be the end result."[289] Naive, perhaps some would say, but clearly a point of view that finds support among the people of this inner city slum for whom life has been, all too often, very difficult.

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[288] Atkinson, M.R. "Professionalism and Inner Ring Education", op. cit. See Appendix 11, Item 28.

[289] Ibid.

Such an attitude has obtained for the school solid support both within the community and from educators around the country.

In 1977 the school was "recognized as efficient" by the Department of Education and Science. It seems that its rejection of the label "Free School" led to its acceptance by those agencies and authorities with the power to keep it alive.

Leeds Free School (b. January 1972.....)

This free school was started in January, 1972, by six people, three of whom were qualified teachers, in an area of high unemployment. It has not been a successful venture, having alienated itself from virtually everyone whose support is ultimately needed for a free school to survive. Statements about negative aspects of state education were published and distributed by the school's founders before the school came into existence. They were strongly critical of the Leeds education system, referring to exceptionally high absentee rates among secondary school children, whom they described as a "bored elite". The publications described the curriculum as "useless information bearing little relation to the problems of modern life."[290] This generalization brought a response from the Leeds Council Department of Education, that indicated, with a good deal of statistical support, that only 2.06% of the schools' absentees were judged not to have had acceptable excuses during the 1974 survey - a figure that had risen only slightly in the years up to 1977.[291]

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[290]"Leeds Free School and Community Trust", a pamphlet published by the school. The full text of this pamphlet is in Appendix 11, Item 42.

[291]Letter to the author from D.H. Jepson, Senior Schools Advisor, Leeds, August 28, 1977. The full text of the letter is in Appendix 11, Item 44.

Initially supported financially by a community trust and the students of Leeds Polytechnic, both of which ran a considerable number of fund-raising activities for the school, Leeds Free School attracted thirty-nine children - the largest number of children to register in any free school during its first few months. Most of the children had been truanting from state schools. By taking these truants under its wing, the free school alienated both the local education authority and the local state schools from which the children had come. One headmistress described herself as "being treated as a spy" when she visited the free school.[292] A headmaster described his contacts with the school as "depressing in the extreme".[293]

A decision by the Leeds Council Department of Education to make "a close inspection of the school" to ensure that it provided "full and satisfactory services to its pupils" came about in early 1974 when it was reported by the Leeds City Fire Chief that the children in the school was being "exposed to extreme danger by fire". A few weeks later Polytechnic students withdrew support on the grounds that the school was not operating effectively.

In mid-1975 the church that was used by the school was demolished, and many parents sent their children back to the state schools.[294] The three or four adults still associated with the school dissolved their organization into three house-groups of four pupils each, and in that state - i.e. tutor schemes operating with less than five pupils that would constitute a school - the remnants of the Leeds Free School remain.[295]

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[292] Letter to the author from Mrs. M. Morris, Westfield Primary School, June 21, 1976. See Appendix 11, Item 46.

[293] Letter to the author from E.A. Rockliffe, Headmaster, Central School, Leeds, June 7, 1976. The full text of this letter is in Appendix 11, Item 45.

[294] Morris letter, op.cit.

[295] Jepson letter, op.cit.

Thus, what was originally called the Leeds Free School ceased to exist in the summer of 1975 after three years of providing very little educationally for its pupils, and seeing what little it had had in 1972 slip away. During those three years at no time did the school have more, in terms of pupils, space, equipment, publicity and promises of support, than it did during its first few weeks. What went wrong? It seems in retrospect that the school's teachers misinterpreted the nature of free schooling. The school lacked the air of legitimacy that is so important for survival. It could provide little evidence of educational progress, nor could it deny accusations from various city departments about the unhealthiness of its own premises. Its workers did not get along well with state school teachers, frequently accusing them of faults that could not be substantiated. The school attracted very little financial assistance from any trust, and nothing beyond minimal free meal service for approximately half of its pupils from the City Council. It owned nothing of its own, and alienated itself from what appears to be the one agency that, in the final analysis, decides the fate of a free school - the local education authority.

The New School (b. January, 1973 - d. March, 1974.
reborn as "Sundance" May, 1974 - d. 1975)

This free school was started by a group of parents who were dissatisfied with the state schools in and around Hammersmith. They formed a trust, and planned to operate the school as a cooperative. They were almost all well-employed, and fairly well paid. They did not intend to establish anything like an urban free school. They were not interested in attracting pupils

whose parents could not provide some financial support for the school. They wished to be independent of The Inner London Education Authority and the community in which the school was to be located.

Their appeal for financing was made directly to a wide variety of trusts, and they were able to raise £1,700 plus £250 from Hammersmith Council with which to renovate the house they rented from the council for £2.50 a week. To the extent that they could remain independent of the people living on Norland Road, Hammersmith, and The Inner London Education Authority, they would have been free to operate their school as they wished, assuming that they could obtain registration from the Department of Education and Science.

There were, however, two very weak spots in their organization: their rented building, which came to them on condition that they allow local teenagers to use it as a youth club in the evenings; and their lack of permanent financing. There was also the less apparent weakness of the transient natures of some of the parents who enrolled their children in the school shortly after it opened, and who had implied that they would stay, but did not.

Rapidly these holes in the structure grew. The teenagers, many of whom were truants, burned the building to a shell early in 1974. Most parents withdrew their children, and the New School closed. New, smaller premises were found, and the landlord threatened to evict the school if they would not accept a higher rent within a few weeks of their arrival. The Inner London Education Authority became interested in the school's apparent lack of an organized curriculum. The Department of Education and Science inspector came, and issued an unfavourable report, which was followed by a letter ordering the school to close.

By January of 1974 the remains of the school was down to six children, four of whom belonged to Mrs. Susan Israel, the organizer and teacher. For her, the New School was now little more than a private struggle to educate her own children. Since this was impossible within the confines of her small home, her search for new premises for what she insisted on calling "the school" was in part a search for a new home for her family. When she finally found this home, by squatting a terraced house in Shepherd's Bush, she re-opened the school under the new name of Sundance, as a fee-paying independent school. For a few brief months, with her husband helping her, Sundance ran smoothly and undisturbed. Then, as is always the case, the reality of her situation became apparent. The school had no money; The Inner London Education Authority would not support it; parents could not be trusted to pay fees regularly; and the Department of Education and Science would not grant the school registration.

The experiences of this school illustrate well the ways in which even the smallest weaknesses in structure can rapidly grow into enormous problems. A middle-class experiment, cheaply run, imposed upon a poor area, ignoring the adults in that area, and only taking in local truants when ordered to do so by the local council, it was destroyed.

Barrowfield Community School (b. May, 1973.....)

This school began with five pupils and two adults, one of them a qualified teacher, the other a lecturer at a teacher's college. It is located in one of the poorest areas of East Glasgow. Housed in part of an old building isolated in an area of factories, it was started to help truanting and very

deprived children who lived in the housing estate that backed on to the industrial area.

The school began from a position of great local strength. Barrowfield is an area with immense social and economic problems: many broken families, high crime rates and much unemployment. It also has a very active local tenants association. The school was proposed by its two founders to the members of the tenants association, and its first five pupils, and many others who subsequently joined the school, were children of the members of the association. The school grew, therefore, directly from the association. Its programmes grew from local needs. The school's relationship to the community was a very close one from the beginning and has grown since that time. The teachers are well-known on the estate, and are frequently used by the parents as counsellors and mediators in domestic problems.

By contrast, the school's relationship with the Glasgow Corporation Education Department is awful. The Director of Education for the city has written about the school:

> It is not supported by me or the Committee, because:-
>
> 1. We do not consider the premises satisfactory
> 2. We do not consider the staff to be sufficiently wide in experience
> 3. Our own secondary schools feel that they could offer a satisfactory curriculum.[296]

Financially, the school has experienced great troubles. The Scottish International Education Trust, Wates Foundation, and the Gulbenkian Trust together gave the school £14,000 in 1975, and it was this grant that enabled

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[296] Letter to the author from J.T. Bain, Director of Education, Corporation of Glasgow, April 28, 1975. The full text is in Appendix 11, Item 55.

it to survive until the present time. The staff receive very little pay: Brian Addison, who started the school, has never received a regular salary, having been supported by friends for most of the last five years.

What, then, does all this add up to? As with other free schools, precious little. The school's greatest strength is the support it receives from some members of the Barrowfield community. Its weaknesses are financial: the temporary nature of the grants; the opposition of the local education authority. In 1976, one of the school's founders, John McBeath, was still listing the same needs that had been listed in 1973:

1. We require a building as a base for our activities
2. To have a staff-pupil ratio that will allow us to function in the way we plan.....
3. Central to the whole scheme is the need for an efficient transport system.

Barrowfield Community School is one of only three alternative schools started in the early 1970's that has managed, somehow, to survive despite having little more than any other school. There are several reasons why it has survived. It uses the community as its main resource, and does not, therefore, purchase many expensive instructional materials. Also, it is small: at the most, it has had twenty-four pupils. Thirdly, its workers have been personally supported and financed by friends, and have thus made very little personal demands upon the one large grant that the school has received. Fourthly, the two founders, Brian Addison and John MacBeath, have shared responsibility for the school by each concentrating on a different aspect of its existance: Addison teaches in the school and runs it; McBeath raises money. In other words, although the school has, by comparison with Scotland Road Free School and The New School, a very small support system, it is a very single-minded operation. Finally, the lack of interest in the school

shown by the local education authority has had some advantages: in the experience of most free schools that have received any support from local education authorities, that support has eventually turned sour. At least in Barrowfield's case, there has been no interference.

What emerges, then, from examination of this particular school is that survival is rooted in a close bond with the local community. The school offers no particular political bias, nor does it criticize the state schools around it. It simply functions within the community. It makes little attempt to broadcast itself or to advertise its philosophy and practices. It is a very self-centred school, with no sense of national mission. Thus, while some may disagree with it, no one has tried to close it.

The Bermondsey Lamp-post (b. September, 1973.....)

The school was started by six adults and fourteen children in an area of heavy unemployment in Bermondsey, London. The adults were well qualified academically: one possessed a masters degree, three others had bachelors degrees, and the other two were qualified teachers. Twelve of the pupils came from very poor homes. This situation, bringing together well-educated middle-class teachers and the children of the poor has occurred in several communities, most notably Leeds, Islington and Glasgow, and in two of these three places it has had a short life. It has already been noted that the ability of Balsall Heath Community School and Barrowfield Community School to survive may be linked to their natural growth from the communities in which they are located. Similarly, it seems that free schools imposed upon poor people by relatively affluent, well educated members of a different

stratum in society, are "transplants" and do not fare well. Certainly free schools that began as something thought up by teachers and then given to the poor, have suffered hardships themselves and caused some disappointment among the pupils and parents whose expectations they temporarily raised.

Such has been the case with The Bermondsey Lamp-post. The Inner London Education Authority supported the school to the usual extent of its legal obligation to feed some pupils - a financial investment which the school estimated represented 3% of their income, while the teachers themselves contributed approximately 27% from their own savings, and were able to raise a further 20% from various fund-raising activities. What remained was contributed by trusts and amounted to a few hundred pounds. The teachers did apply to Urban Aid for support but obtained nothing. Altogether, the school applied to thirty trusts and received small sums from five of them. One observation from the teachers that throws some light on the process of applying for grants stated, "We haven't compromised our principles with any outside agencies to get money, therefore we have no money."[297]

For this free school, however, this lack of support from traditional sources provoked activities that have prolonged its life and given it some sense of permanence in the community. Reduced to their own resources, the teachers were obliged to seek other, more local ways of establishing themselves and thus took to the streets of Bermondsey, seeking an integration into the community that may not have occurred had they obtained all the funding for which they initially applied. Obviously there are limits to the

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[297] This observation was made in response to a question on a questionnaire sent to the school by the author. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 11, Item 58.

amount of time a school can survive on the friendly nods and smiles of an interested but poor community, but it needs to be remembered that the free schools that have survived have been those with a close relationship with their community, and that money has not necessarily guaranteed a long and happy life.

Examination of The Bermondsey Lamp-post's struggle to survive reveals again, a different scenario from those of other schools, but a similar pattern continually wavering close to decline. The picture is that of a model initially imposed upon a community in the hopes that it will relieve the suffering and help the children.[298] Neglected by The Inner London Education Authority in spite of the fact that it has taken over some of the responsibilities of the Authority, and poorly supported by the many agencies and trusts to whom it applied for assistance, the school struggles on, much of its energy devoted to staying alive, slowly dropping some parts of its programme until it becomes, as it is now, a community project - a way of life in Bermondsey, rather than a school, as poor as the very people it set out to help yet, by virtue of that poverty, closer to them.

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[298] The teachers acknowledge, in their responses to the author's questionnaire, that they were strongly influenced by Dennison and Neill.

North Kensington Community School (b. April, 1975.....)

This school was started in the basement of a house in Acklam Road, North Kensington, by several ex-teachers and social workers. It had nine pupils, most of whom were teenagers, and three unpaid teachers. It was initially funded by three trusts who together provided a total of £6,300 for the school's first year and £4,300 for the second.

The school experienced a lot of initial problems: two teachers left during the first term, and eight teenagers reached the legitimate school-leaving age during the second term.

In its second year the school was more tightly organized than it had been. The number of pupils rose to ten. Class attendance was made compulsory for instruction in the basic subjects every morning. The teachers saw themselves as having two tasks: to raise educational levels and reduce delinquency among their pupils, and essentially this is what the school has been doing for the past two years. Currently the teachers feel that they have had more success in the former task than with the latter.[299]

The school is funded sufficiently until the end of 1978, and there is no indication that present support will continue after that date. If the experience of other schools is a guide, the chances of obtaining continued support from the same sources is slim. Currently the school is located on the first floor of a community centre, where it rents three large rooms and has the use of a nearby adventure playground.

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[299]North Kensington Community School Report, op. cit. See Appendix 11, Item 64.

North Kensington Community School was carefully planned. Its teachers had the advantage of several models from which to choose, and appear to have modelled their school along the same lines as White Lion Free School. North Kensington is not an integrated community, but rather an area of bedsitting rooms and small flats temporarily rented to transients and the poor. The area is described by the teachers at the schools as having "little underlying sense of community" with few people having "any real roots or stable links with the area or with each other."[300] In this, North Kensington is quite different from those other inner-ring areas in which free schools have been established. Balsall Heath is less transient; the people who reluctantly live in Barrowfield's council estate have nowhere else to go; White Lion Free School created a small community around itself by limiting prospective pupils to those living within half a mile. North Kensington is large, amorphous, lacking identity. The community school may not have any more roots than any of the residents do, and if the experiences of others is a guide, this could cause great problems when the money runs out.

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[300] North Kensington Community School report, op. cit.

SUMMARY

Examination of the free schools that have existed in this country between 1971 and 1976 reveals the factors that sustain a free school and the factors that bring about its end. They are four: The Department of Education and Science; The Local Education Authority; the local community; and the grant-making trusts. The role of each of these agencies will be briefly described:

The Department of Education and Science

The Department of Education and Science had, up to July, 1974 provisionally registered twelve free schools.[301] With the exception of Parkfield Street Free School, which de-registered prior to inspection, all of these schools were inspected. Only two, Balsall Heath and White Lion Free School were finally registered. Two other provisionally registered schools were served with notices of complaint under Part III of the 1944 Education Act, which would have resulted in formal closure had they not closed voluntarily. The only school to be recognized as efficient by the Department of Education and Science, achieved that status after it had disassociated itself from the label "free."

The impression of the Department of Education and Science held by most free school teachers and workers is that it is an objective outside agency. There are no records within free schools of upset or complaint about individual inspectors; there are some indications that inspections

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[301] All information relating to the numbers of school inspected and the results of those inspections is contained in a letter to the author from J. L. Barrows, Schools Branch 1, Department of Education and Science, July 24, 1975. The full text of the letter is in Appendix 11, Item 83.

were considered fair and objective. It may be concluded that while some free schools view the Department of Education and Science inspections and registration procedures as a difficult period, most acknowledge that final registration is a desirable status, and that the procedures resulting in this being awarded or withheld are fair.

The conclusion from the Department of Education and Science inspections of free schools is that one has been recognized as efficient, two have been granted final registration, and ten have not.

The Local Education Authorities

The general attitude of most local education authorities towards free schools is one of hostility. The only legal obligation that a local education authority may have towards some free school children, is to feed them. This obligation, which arises when a child has been referred to the free school by a legitimate agency, has, in all instances, been honoured. The only local education authority that substantially supported a free school was the Inner London Education Authority which gave Freightliners Free School a grant from its "Voluntary Bodies Fund" that covered maintenance costs and the salaries of two teachers. This grant was withdrawn in 1975 "following an adverse report by H.M. inspector."[302] In addition to London, local education authorities in Leeds, Manchester, Wolverhampton, Glasgow, Hudderfield, Birmingham, Brighton, Coventry, and Liverpool have had to deal with free schools. Six of these authorities have offered no financial support beyond a few meals to qualified pupils. Only one, Liverpool, has offered a free school anything more - in this case the temporary use of a disused school building. Education directors

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[302] Letter to the author from J.A. Hart, Inner London Education Authority. County Hall, London, November 10, 1976. See Appendix II, Item 2 for full text.

in Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham and Wolverhampton have stated that they have not supported free schools that have operated in their cities.[303]

Local education authority officials in Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and London subjected free schools within their jurisdictions to pressure to close.

The following free schools were forced to close by local education authorities, or local councils, or combinations of the two: Liverpool, Parkfield Street, Freightliners, White Lion Street, Sundance.

All free schools have applied to local education authorities for support, but only one, Freightliners, was successful.

White Lion Street Free School received full registration by the Department of Education and Science, but no support from the Inner London Education Authority. Balsall Heath Community School announced in 1977 that it would have difficulty surviving unless the Birmingham Education Authority granted it £ 31,000 in support. The Authority indicated that it did not have funds for such a grant. The conclusion that may be drawn from these two examples is that while the Department of Education and Science has the power to close free schools, it has never actually done so, whereas local education authority action has closed six free schools.

It is in dealing with local education authorities that free schools come up against personal biases and the individual influencing of decisions in a way not encountered in dealings with the Department of Education and

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[303] These statements are contained in letters to the author by the Directors of Education in each of these cities. The letters are in Appendix 11, Items 55, 16, 76 and 84.

Science inspectors. Press reports of various education committee members in some cities condeming free schools[304] and written observations by some education authority directors, revealing quite negative attitudes towards free schools, including assurances that future free schools would not be supported, are indicative of this bias.[305] However, it is important that the "official" reasons why free schools are not supported, be separated from these unofficial reasons. And the "official" line is well represented by the following statement from an officer of the Inner London Education Authority:

> Independent schools registered with the Department of Education and Science, usually cannot accept that one of their aims is to return children to the mainstream of 'state' education. Therefore, with respect to independent schools, the Authority only recognizes a responsibility to ensure that children from its area, but attending independent schools, and who would normally be so entitled, are provided with free milk and meals.

Local education authorities have within the context of their responsibilities to the state school system, good reason not to feel any great obligation to finance free schools. In most cities where free schools have existed, local education authorities have financed or established "Special Units" or "Truancy Centres" to help counsel

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[304] This is particularly true of reported observations by Liverpool councillors R.S. Charles and K.W. Edwards, concerning Scotland Road Free School, in The Manchester Guardian of July 25, 1972. This article is in Appendix 11, Item 8.

[305] See the letters to the author from Directors of Education in Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester, Appendix II.

unwilling pupils back into the state school system. For example, in the year during which it stopped giving support to Freightliners Free School, the Inner London Education Authority distributed £50,000 to twelve similar projects, each of which had accepted a responsibility to help children return to state schools.[306] Similarly, authorities in Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Birmingham operate truancy and special education units for children having difficulty coping with state schools. Many other authorities throghout the country provide tutorial schemes and units to help "difficult" pupils.[307]

Local education authority officers assume that there can only be one education system: the state system. In their attempt to cater to all children, they have established many special units of the type just described. Wherever a private unit has indicated willingness to work with the system, it has been supported. Schools refusing to operate within these confines are not supported. Thus, most local education authorities will not support free schools.

Local Communities

Theoretically, a school is part of a community, bringing together the local children and adults into a daily routine of activites. In most state schools interaction between teachers and parents is minimal, taking up a very small part of the working week. For free schools, this situation should not exist.

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[306]This school's relationship with ILEA is fully described in Chapter 1. A document in Appendix 11, Item 85 lists the projects supported by the Authority.

[307]An excellent example of a tutorial unit is the one in Bexley, Kent. A description of this unit, printed by the Bexley Education Committee is in Appendix 11, Item 86.

Whereas the state school can function quite well without much reference to the world outside of its walls, the free school, theoretically, cannot. It must be part of the community.

Given that there are many things about free schools that imply a close relationship with their communities, it may be said that they portray themselves as meeting a specific community need: that of improving the daily lives and learning of some local children. Community schools seem to go beyond this, involving themselves in the lives of local adults as well as children.

However, close examination of the relationship between individual free schools and their communities reveals something different from what might have been assumed. Only two schools, Scotland Road Free School and Barrowfield Community School may be said to have grown out of their local communities, their development having been, in part, a result of the discussion and debate and planning that took place in the pubs and local tenants association meetings in Liverpool and Glasgow. Of these two, Liverpool's Scotland Road Free School was much more political and voluble than is Barrowfield Community School, which has instead, kept a very low profile, and gone quietly about its own and the community's business. Scotland Road Free School closed in 1974: Barrowfield Community School is still operating.

A third school, Balsall Heath Community School, was one of several that were planted in a community with little consultation with local inhabitants. In this particular case, however, the transplant worked because the school's founder was particularly sensitive to the mood and needs of the community.

Leeds Free School and Parkfield Street Free School were both imposed upon needy but unsuspecting communities. Try though they undoubtedly did, the workers in these two schools were unable to become an integrated part of their communities. They did little for their communities, and they asked little of the local people beyond tolerance and attendance at occasional jumble sales. They were tolerated, but never really supported in the ways that free schools in Balsall Heath and Barrowfield were, and they soon disappeared.

Three other free schools, North Kensington Community School, Freightliners Free School and The Bermondsey Lamp-post also imposed themselves upon their communities and each, for different reasons in each case, was able to establish itself fairly well: North Kensington Community School because North Kensington has little or no sense of community and would therefore either be unaware of the school, or uninterested in it; Freightliners Free School because it was able to associate itself with a specific ethnic group, the Greek-Cypriots who live in the area of Camden in which the school was located; and The Bermondsey Lamp-post because its members went out into the streets of this large and loosely-knit community, and made themselves known.

White Lion Street Free School also imposed itself upon Islington, but, like Balsall Heath Community School, did it sufficiently thoroughly, and with enough press coverage, that it too was accepted very quickly as a useful part of that community.

The New School did none of these things, giving nothing - or very little - to the community, and asking very little of it, such as it was, for in fairness to the school it must be pointed out that it did not,

in its Hammersmith address, belong to much of a community.

What does it mean to a free school, to be accepted or rejected by its community? It seems reasonable to conclude that a free school's relationship with its local community is the most important thing in its existence. Simply put, free schools with a strong involvement in their communities have obtained strength from them and have lasted a good deal longer than free schools that have not developed this relationship well. Obviously, money is very important, but it seems to come more easily when those who might give it can see the ways in which a community will benefit. Free schools have had money and a poor community image, or no image at all in the case of The New School, and have not survived for long. The simplest illustration of this may be in a comparison between the short-lived Brighton Free School and Barrowfield Community School. The former advertises that it wants no visitors; Barrowfield's door, on the other hand, is always open to anyone who would like to come in. Barrowfield Community School is one of the few surviving free schools. Brighton closed within a few months.

The Grant-Making Trusts

All free schools have applied, at some time or another, to the trusts for financial support. Most applications have been rejected. Free schools that have obtained substantial grants - enough to pay salaries and operating costs - are The New School, Barrowfield Community School, White Lion Free School, Balsall Heath Community School, and North Kensington Community School. The most successful applications for trust-support were made by Barrowfield Community School and White Lion Street

Free School, with the latter school obtaining the largest amount of money. While these two free schools were able to sustain themselves on trust grants for as much as two years, no free school has ever been assured of continuous support by a trust, and no school has been able to function on trust-support alone. The four trusts that have most frequently supported free schools are The A.S. Neill Trust, which has given small amounts to virtually every free school in the country; Wates Foundation, which has given several thousand pounds to White Lion Street Free School, Barrowfield Community School and the New School; City Parochial, which supported White Lion Street for two years, and The Gulbenkian Foundation Trust, which gave Barrowfield Community School several thousand pounds two years ago.[308]

For many free schools, application to a trust is seen as capitulation - the compromising of its principles. The trusts are perceived by many free schools as representatives of the very class divisions in the country that produce the poor whom they try to help. For people as committed to class revolution as some free school teachers and founders have been, requesting trust support is a bitter pill to swallow. However, what may be, in the long run, more difficult to accept are the almost inevitable rejections.

The establishing of the A.S. Neill Trust in 1973 helped most free schools . Although unable at this point to offer any substantial grants, the trust has given the schools a great deal of moral support, and is the only one established to help them.

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[308] A list of trusts which either have supported free schools, or have supported similar organizations, has been compiled by the author and is in Appendix 11, Item 78.

CHAPTER 3: FREE SCHOOLS AND THE PRESS

There are three types of publication that make occasional reference to the free schools: the journals, most notably The Scottish Education Journal, The Times Educational Supplement, The New Statesman, New Era and Where?; the national press, most notably The Manchester Guardian; and local newspapers in the cities where free schools have existed. The Times Educational Supplement, The New Statesman and The Manchester Guardian have performed a dual role for free schools, reporting occasionally on their activities, and publishing letters and viewpoints about free schools and related matters, the great majority of which support the schools. The local newspapers also play these two roles, but have an additional role as well: the sensational report - few and far between, perhaps, but remarkable for their similarities of object matter, headlines and style though written in different parts of the country.

The Journals

Interest in free schools among the five journals that make most reference to them is spasmodic. One of the earliest references was an article in Where? , in September, 1971, by Roy Nash, entitled "A free school inside the State System", being a brief account of the work of Alex Bloom, a Headmaster of St. George-in-the-East, a tough secondary school in East London. Bloom, a man who acknowledged a professional debt to A.S. Neill, became a thorn in the side of the London County Council Education Authority right up to the time of his death in 1955.[309]

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[309] Nash, R. "A free school within the State System", Where?,No. 61, September, 1971, pp. 268-269. For full text see Appendix II, Item 87.

His story was at least in a small way repeated by Michael Duane ten years later in Risinghill. Duane more recently was a founder of the A.S. Neill Trust. Two months after this initial article about alternative approaches to Education, The Times Educational Supplement printed two short articles about free schooling, one by Geoffrey Dodd, about Danish "friskoler" entitled "Left-wingers follow in the footsteps of the religious",[310] and another by Eric Midwinter, Director of the Liverpool Educational Priority Area Project, entitled "Stick With the System",[311] which was a response to an earlier Times Educational Supplement editorial bewailing the failure of the Liverpool Education Committee to support the newly-opened Scotland Road Free School.

Four months later, Teacher published a brief reference to the Scotland Road Free School;[312] and four months after that, in July, The Times Educational Supplement printed a description by Jacques Goldman, of San Fransisco's Education Switchboard, a clearing house for enquiries about the one hundred and twenty free schools that existed in that city at that time.[313] During the following two months The Scottish Educational

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[310] Dodd, G. "Left-wingers follow in the footsteps of the religious", Times Educational Supplement, November 19, 1971. See Appendix 11, Item 69.

[311] Midwinter, E. "Stick With The System", Times Educational Supplement, No. 2948, October 19, 1971, p. 2. See Appendix 11, Item 88.

[312] Cameron, S. "The Liverpool Beat", Teacher, March 3, 1972, p. 3. See Appendix II. Item 98.

[313] Goldman, J. "San Fransisco's Education Switchboard", Times Educational Supplement, July 21, 1972. See Appendix II, Item 90.

Journal published two articles by W. Kenneth Richmond, the first about Denmark's free schools,[314] and the other specifically about Scotland Road Free School.[315] Six months later David Brown published a short article in New Era attempting to describe a theoretical approach to free schools, based upon reflections about Scotland Road Free School.[316]

Thus between 1971 and 1973 these journals introduced free schooling to their readers by referring to Denmark's "friskoler", the United States' many free schools, and this country's solitary, struggling experiment in Liverpool. Observations about Danish and American free schools are enthusiastic; support for what Eric Midwinter called "a gallant and inventive attempt to start a free school" in Liverpool, is apparent whenever the school is mentioned.

As other free schools appeared during 1973, Sasha Moorsom, a free-lance journalist, described them in Where?.[317] When in 1976 many of these schools had closed, Moorsom provided descriptions of the few that remained.[318]

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[314] Richmond, W.K. "The Free Schools of Denmark", Scottish Educational Journal, Vol. 55, Number 28, August 25, 1972, pp. 600-602. See Appendix II, Item 68.

[315] Richmond, W.K. "The Scotland Road Free School", Scottish Educational Journal, Vol. 11, Number 29, September 1, 1972, pp. 623-625. See Appendix II, Item 91.

[316] Brown, D. "Free Schools: A theoretical Approach", New Era, March 1973. See Appendix II, Item 92.

[317] Moorsom, S. "Free Schools", Where?, No. 80, April, 1973. See Appendix II, Item 4.

[318] Moorsom, S. "Alternatives: Free Schools and Others", Where?, No. 120, September 1976, pp. 242-244. See Appendix II, Item 93.

And, as free schools subsequently opened and closed, so the attention of the journals became focussed on these rather than schools in Denmark or the United States. White Lion Free School took up what little press interest there was after Scotland Road Free School had been closed. And, as White Lion Free School struggled through 1977 against what seemed to be insurmountable odds, The Times Educational Supplement carried an article entitled, "Threatened Alternative" by the school's director, Peter Newell,[319] in which he presented the school's case for permanent funding. And in July, 1977, with the school about to close, The New Statesman published an attack on the Inner London Education Authority by Peter Wilby, for its refusal to support the school, in which a comparison was made between state support for free schools in the United States and Denmark, and the British record of non-support.[320]

These, then are the articles written about free schools and related matters, in the major British education journals since 1971. None of them are negative; all of them support the schools.

The National Press

Examination of national press coverage of free schools in Britain during the years since 1959, serves well as a means of enabling us to understand the schools' significance in terms of national events.

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[319]Newell, P. "Threatened Alternative", Times Educational Supplement, March 18, 1977, p. 29. See Appendix 11, Item 26.

[320]Wilby, P. "A Mean Death For A Free School", The New Statesman, July 1, 1977. See Appendix II, Item 27.

When one considers the number of daily newspapers that have been published in the country over the past eighteen years, and the myriad people and events described in them, it is significant that only two newspapers have concerned themselves with alternative education, The Mirror and The Manchester Guardian.

The Mirror's interest began in 1959 when journalist Patricia Boxall wrote one of the best-known descriptions of Summerhill, entitled, "The School Where They Kiss and Cuddle," an article complete with a sketch of a boy and a girl smoking and cuddling at a school desk, and that interwove A.S. Neill's philosophy of education with descriptions of the children such as this one:

> Nobody minds if they read saucy novels, eat their food with their fingers or pair off and disappear to some quiet corner of the grounds.[321]

This same newspaper printed brief articles about Neill, describing Summerhill variously as "the free-for-all school",[322] the "freedom school",[323] "pioneering Summerhill",[324] "that dreadful school",[325] the "Do-As-You-Please School",[326] and "Britain's most controversial progressive school" on the day A.S. Neill died.[327]

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[321] Boxall, P. "The School Where They Kiss and Cuddle", Daily Mirror, July 2, 1959. See Appendix II, Item 94.

[322] "Neill is Coming", Daily Mirror, January 11, 1961. See Appendix II, Item 95.

[323] Untitled Article, Daily Mirror, August 2, 1962. See Appendix II, Item 96.

[324] "Modest Boom For Free Schools", Daily Mirror, April 6, 1962. See Appendix II, Item 97.

[325] Fielding, Henry. "Portrait of the Rebel As An Old Man", Daily Mirror, October 22, 1965. See Appendix II, Item 98.

[326] Wolfe, W. "Do-As-You-Like School Gets a Warning", Daily Mirror, December 21, 1969. See Appendix II, Item 99.

[327] "Continuing To Make Progress", Daily Mirror, September 26, 1973. See Appendix II. Item 100.

The Manchester Guardian appears less concerned with the potentially sensational aspects of free schools, and reflects very occasionally in its Education Guardian section, various personal views on free schooling. The newspaper showed an interest in Scotland Road Free School almost from the time it opened, with journalist Carol Dix describing that school as "a Summerhill in the Slums."[328] Brief reports about the problems the school encountered appeared between January, 1972 and March, 1974.[329] However, the newspaper has not reported any other free schools.

It seems, then, that national press coverage of free schools is extremely limited. The only two schools consistently covered were Summerhill and Scotland Road Free School, with the former used primarily as an excuse for sensationalism. What this tells us about free schools is that they are not considered by the press to be worthy of much attention, while matters concerning state education are dealt with daily, and a considerable amount of space is devoted to examination of the high rates of truancy and dropping-out of state schools that are thought to occur in some parts of the country.[330] No mention is made, however, of the free schools, in spite of the fact that they have portrayed themselves as possible solutions to some of the problems faced by children

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[328] Dix, C. "An Alternative School", Guardian, June 18, 1971. See Appendix II, Item 7.

[329] See the detailed descriptions of this school in Chapter 1.

[330] A series of articles by ILEA director Eric Briault and reported by Carmen Meyer were printed in the London Evening News between March 30 and April 5, 1974 discussing truancy and vandalism. For details, see Appendix II, Item 101.

who contemplate leaving school before they are legally allowed to, whether it be for a day or for good. If, in fact, the national newspapers do reflect the country to itself, it can be concluded that Britain's concern for educational matters does not include any great interest in free schools.

The Local Press

Local newspapers in Liverpool and Leeds have covered the fortunes and misfortunes of those two cities' free schools quite comprehensively. The Leeds Free School, reported by the Yorkshire Evening Post, is only once referred to as having a "go-as-you-please structure" and is otherwise simply called "The Free School".[331] This newspaper concerns itself with four issues related to the school, each of which is of some public concern rather than simply sensational. During September, 1973, Leeds City Fire Officer claimed that the school was a fire hazard, and Leeds Corporation took the school to court over the matter. The Yorkshire Evening Post printed three brief descriptions of this confrontation.[332] On other occasions it reported the withdrawal of support for the school by the Students Union of Leeds Polytechnic;[333] a short interview with Mrs. Joan Mallett, Headmistress of Blenheim Middle

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[331]"Go-as-you-please rule for lessons", Yorkshire Evening Post, January 1, 1976. See Appendix 11, Item 102.

[332]See Appendix 11, Item 103.

[333]"Students Withdraw Free School Support", Yorkshire Evening Post, February 27, 1974. See Appendix 11, Item 104.

School, who reported that five children had left her school to enrol in the free school;[334] and a report of the decision by the Leeds Education Authority to make "a close inspection" of the school to ensure that its standards were satisfactory, with the added threat that if it were found wanting, the pupils might be considered truants, and "appropriate action taken."[335]

A look at the terminology used in the headlines shows that the Evening Post's interest was in the conflicts between the school and the local council. Of the nine articles about the school printed between January, 1973 and February, 1974, only one actually describes what went on at the school: the other eight describe its conflicts. On March 2, 1973, a few weeks after the school opened, Jean Endersby, a writer for the Yorkshire Evening Post's column, "Feminine Angle" wrote a lengthy description of the, by then, notorious Scotland Road Free School, entitled, "The School Where The Children Smoke and Swear."[336]

In Liverpool, eleven reports were written about the Scotland Road Free School. Four appeared in The Echo, five in The Daily Post, and two in The Weekly News.[337] Every article concentrated on the conflicts

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[334]"Pupils quit to join the 'free' school," Yorkshire Evening Post, February 27, 1974. See Appendix 11, Item 104.

[335]"Watchdogs and the New Free School", Yorkshire Evening Post, January 11, 1973. For full details of this report see Appendix 11, Item 106.

[336]Endersby, J. "The School Where Children Smoke and Swear", Yorkshire Evening Post, March 2, 1973. See Appendix 11; Item 107.

[337]See Appendix 11, Items 10, 11 and 108.

between the school and the local council, and were introduced with such headings as "City Free School is Told to Quit"; "Teachers Propose to Do Battle"; and "Eviction Decision for Free School." None of the articles is concerned solely with describing the free school though brief paragraphs in most articles remind readers of the school's radical practices.

Barrowfield Community School is treated caustically by one article in the Glasgow Sunday Post, printed in mid-December, 1974, entitled - as was the description of Scotland Road Free School - "The School Where Pupils Smoke and Swear."[338] The article, written by an unidentified reporter describes "weird, psychedelic posters", "cigarette ends" that "littered the floor";[339] and is replete with observations such as the following selection: "There's no discipline"; "The boys swear openly"; and "The pupils are allowed to wander about as they like."

These three schools have all been the victims of extremely biased reporting, in terms of both the editorial decisions made about the news value of their conflicts with local authorities, and reporters' biases towards those activities in the schools that are most unacceptable. Of the twenty-two articles printed about free schools in local newspapers, only one describes the daily life and activities of a free school in terms of curriculum organization and philosophy; the other twenty-one articles

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[338] "The School Where Pupils Smoke and Swear", Sunday Post, Glasgow, December 13, 1974. See Appendix 11, Item 109

[339] An exaggeration, since the floor had been swept only minutes before the reporters arrived, by the author, who was working at the school during December, 1974.

are all concerned with conflict and morality. Unfortunately for the free schools, it is the local press reports that are most frequently read by the people of Liverpool, Leeds and Glasgow. Thus these accounts must be collectively considered detrimental to the schools' images, and thus a negative factor in their struggle to survive.

In all, national and local press coverage of free schools seems to have done more harm than good to the schools. The relatively objective and frequently supportive descriptions of free schools that have appeared occasionally in the pages of Where and New Era may have provided a few moments of interesting reading to a small minority of educators, but little else.

SUMMARY OF PART II: EVALUATING THE FREE SCHOOLS

Few free schools survive. Those that have survived for four or five years appear to have been able to do so for the following reasons:

1. because they grew out of a community, designed and developed through close collaboration between teachers, social workers and community members;
2. because most of their activities centred around the needs of the community;
3. because they offered their pupils a fairly traditional and organized programme of basic education, particularly reading; and
4. because they do not publicly espouse any political line.

Most of the free schools that have been started in Britain since 1971 have now closed. The reasons for their failure to survive appear to be

as follows:

1. they lacked regular, stable financing;
2. they were in conflict with local education authorities and councils;
3. they failed to win local community support, often because they were set up in poor communities by comparatively affluent professionals who had made little or no prior systematic research into the need for or appropriateness of the model they selected;
4. because the Department of Education and Science refused to grant them provisional registration;
5. because of unreliable funding patterns among the grant-making trusts;
6. because they failed to develop good working relationships with local state schools; and
7. because of negative reporting by the local press.

In the United States and Canada many free schools have survived and are thriving, because they were either established by local education authorities (school boards) or incorporated and financially supported by them. In Denmark, the government systematically finances free schools. In Britain very few agencies help free schools, least of all local education authorities; in fact, one is left with the overall impression that the various organizations and agencies that constitute the established education system of the country, are opposed to the existence of free schools.

PART III

BRINGING THE FREE SCHOOLS TOGETHER: THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS WORKSHOP, THE A.S. NEILL TRUST, AND LIFESPAN

Cooperation between free schools in Britain between 1968 and 1974 was almost non-existent. Isolated individuals who harboured, somewhere in their thoughts, hopes of one day belonging to a "movement" were in most cases so overwhelmed by their own problems, and so poor, that country-wide interaction was impossible. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, self-imposed isolation has been a major stumbling block to any collaboration and continuous exchange of ideas and support that might have helped all the schools. It was brought about by three sets of circumstances, each very different from the other two: paranoia, public curiosity, and disinterest.

Free schools go against the grain in many ways. They challenge the assumption that the state can effectively manage the education of all children. Their informal style, and their priorities, and the structures they produce, are diametrically opposite to those of state school teachers and many of their apologists within local and national government. Free schools operate on the periphery of legality. They are financially very weak. Their eventual, almost inevitable dependence upon the goodwill of the very local education authorities whose values they reject is a mockery of their claim to freedom. Their emulation of Summerhill places them in an awkward position in terms of educational theory: Neill's select little community in Leiston, like Homer Lane's in Dorset, Pestalozzi's in Yverdon, and Tolstoy's in Yasnaya Polyana, was the isolated project of one man working with the fee-paying sons

and daughters of primarily American and Scandinavian middle-class symapthizers - a project never taken seriously by more than a handful of parents and educators in Britain - a fact which reflects nation-wide assumptions about education that simply do not include the kinds of behaviours and curricula of the free schools.

Anyone who starts a free school in such an atmosphere is obviously going to be very sensitive to the forces working against him. Historically most free schools have succumbed to these forces. Those who have not yet done so, will surely see their struggle to ward off what appears to be an inevitable chain of circumstances, as requiring all of the guile and ingenuity they can muster.[340] Their awareness of the role played by the local education authorities, social services officers, and the representatives of the grant-making trusts, is acute. Thus they are cautious, opening themselves to inspection as little as possible, prefering to screen potential visitors and control the numbers of subject-hungry graduate students who may use and abuse their projects in the interests of a degree.[341] And, for what have been previously described as very good reasons, they are wary of the press.

This very natural behaviour in the light of existing circumstances, does, however, place free schools in a very awkward relationship with those people who want to understand what it is that they do. Although

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[340] In this context, the author has, for example, witnessed Dr. Richard Atkinson swilling floors at 120 St. Paul's Road because a Social Services officer was coming; Susan Israel vacuuming carpets and arranging educational materials about her room prior to a visit from someone who might give the school a bus; and Brian Addison cleaning a toilet prior to an l.e.a. officer's visit.

[341] In Appendix I the author describes the way in which Susan Israel reluntantly allowed him to visit her small school.

the free schools in Leeds. Glasgow or Manchester, may be the only examples of their species for many miles, they are, in the eyes of the people who live in the cities, no more than one more small part of the total environment, like the local vegetarian restaurant, meditation centre or sex shop. And, in that the free school may take up a little of the total available space and perhaps a few columns every so often in the local press; and in that the school presents itself as "something different"; it will be the subject of some passing curiosity, some vocal opposition and some genuine interest. If it is in any way controversial, it may be used by local politicians whose pontifications may support or deride it, depending upon their political ends. Thus, the tight-lipped, grudging responses to enquiries, the refusal to deal with the casual visitor who mistakenly thinks that the word "free" includes him, contributes to public resentment, and increases the probabilities of confrontation and withdrawal of support.

Free schools isolate themselves within their own localities because of the problems that openness has caused. Similarly, they isolate themselves within what might be described as an alternative sub-culture. Because a free school is an alternative school, that is, a different kind of school from local state schools, its interests and activities are local, not national. Individual free schools are very different from each other, and the local support or opposition they encounter differs from city to city. Whether or not they would have actually derived any benefits from presenting themselves as a unified movement, rather than leaving that identification to observers, may never be known. What may be

said however, is that for several years in Britain, little more than a theoretical commonality of purpose - perhaps almost coincidental - among a very small group of restless parents and teachers who had read "Summerhill", lead some writers and academics to refer to "the free school movement." They described it in terms that implied the spontaneous budding of rare and delicate flowers in the weed beds of state education, when in fact the total number of such flowers, including those that withered and died overnight, hardly made one small bouquet. It was people outside of the free schools who tried to create a movement, rather than the practitioners in the schools who were so embroiled in their own projects, that they had little inclination to concern themselves with their collective national image. Unlike their North American counterparts - upon whose schools they had modelled some of their own - who brazenly advertised themselves across that continent, producing books, magazines, and at least two national organizations.[342] the free schools of Britain have remained cautious, quiet, and obscure.[343]

There have been three attempts to coordinate Britain's free schools. One has been conducted by Andrew Mann, who directs the Children's Rights Workshop from the second floor of a terraced house on Balfour Street in South-East London; another by the A.S. Neill Trust - an organization

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[342] George Dennson's description of The First Street School (op. cit.); Satu Repo's international magazine "This Magazine is About Schools", which started life as a newsletter from Everdale Place, a Canadian free school; The Summerhill Society, and The New Schools Exchange in California and New York; are all examples of ways by which American and Canadian free schools were publicized.

[343] White Lion Free School and Scotland Road Free School were notable exceptions.

briefly described previously, that was formed in 1974 by a group of educators that included ex-Risinghill Headmaster Michael Duane, White Lion Free School director Peter Newell, and academics Ray Hemmings and Dr. John Daniels, and included among its listed sponsors a lord, Boyle, a Bishop, Huddleston, a leading state educator, Sir Alec Clegg, and two well-known educators, Dr. Robin Pedley and Maurice Ash. The third attempt at bringing the free schools together was made by the Lifespan Educational Trust in the summer of 1975.

The Children's Rights Workshop

Andrew Mann is one of the only individuals in Britain who attempted, virtually single-handed to bring free schools together, or at least to make them aware of each other. He is the director of the Children's Rights Workshop, an organization that embraces a variety of issues related to the rights of children. One of Mann's interests is free schools, and since the Workshop opened in 1973, he has been one of the most active proponents of alternative schools in the country. Balfour Street in South-East London is an untidy row of sagging Victorian houses - the homes of immigrants, students, and various small organizations. No. 73 is as unimpressive and dirty on the outside as any other house in the street, but its interior is made somewhat more palatable by the children's paintings that decorate every wall. The front room, which serves as the Workshop's headquarters, is littered with materials relating to a wide variety of causes and projects about the rights (or lack of them) of children. At various times over the past four or five years, the leading writers and educators who have supported the issue of children's rights

have either worked in or had their books and pamphlets sent out from, this room. Included among them are Leila Berg, a children's author who became renowned in 1968 for her account of the five-year headship of Risinghill Comprehensive School of Michael Duane[344] and who was instrumental in drawing some public attention to the lack of rights for children; the late Robert Ollendorf, a doctor, and Nan Berger, the writer.[345]

The Workshop began in February, 1973, rising from the remains of Children's Rights Magazine, which had ceased publication at that time. Taking on the informational role of the defunct magazine, and working with the English New Education Fellowship and Schools Without Walls, Mann and a handful of helpers established the room on Balfour Street as the successor to the magazine. Public interest in free schools was sufficient during 1973 and 1974, that responses to enquiries and the collection of information about them turned what Mann had expected would be a part-time task into a full-time job for which he has never received a salary. The Workshop was, during the period 1973-1976, and to a lesser extent afterwards, Britain's equivalent of the New Schools Exchange, with one difference: Mann's own biases as to what constituted an alternative or free school.

Mann's definition of free schools as "urban, and not isolated communities in the country",[346] emerged from his own interest in the

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[344] Berg, L. Risinghill (London: Penguin, 1968.)

[345] Berger, N. The Rights of Children, National Council for Civil Liberties, 1967.

[346] Mann, A. Children's Rights Workshop Newsletter, No. 1, December, 1974, p. 3. See Appendix II, Item 5.

plight of urban children. In his "Statement of Aims" of the Workshop, this concern is foremost:

> THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS WORKSHOP was set up to reaffirm the fundamental fact that children are people. Children are not automatically 'underveloped', 'immature', 'incapable', 'irresponsible', or 'ignorant'. Children are people. Children have rights - the same rights as those supposedly enjoyed by adults today. Children have the right to fight for those rights. Furthermore, children have the right to fight for those other basic, human and social rights that are generally denied in modern society.
>
> The Workshop wants to help open the door on children's lives to see children step out of their enforced 'childhood' and to encourage the development of non-oppresive social patterns for children and adults alike. In a world of rigid hierarchies and obscene social divisions, children are inevitably the most sensitive, the most innocent, and thus the most vulnerable victims of social injustice. But the fight for children's rights automatically involves families, nuclear and extended, streets and neighbourhoods. It involves the mass of people. When people look to a new "alternative" society, the children are the catalysts as well as the inheritors of it.
>
> Some of the ideas behind children's rights are suggested in the work of Aries, Henry, Illich, Kohl, Dennison, Holt and Neill among many others; and the ideas can be seen to be working in a growing number of play and learning projects. And, more importantly, these ideas spring from the countless experiences, dimly remembered or passionately felt, mostly unrecorded, of children suffering from loneliness and separation from each other, adult indifference or patronization, parental, school and State repression and violence, liberal and not-so-liberal manipulation and confusions.[347]

In writing of a concern for children - albeit in a style littered with unsupported platitudes - and identifying free schools as a

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[347] Mann, A., op.cit., p.23.

component of the Workshop's activities, Mann's "Statement of Aims" would appeal, however, not so much to the majority of parents, whose poverty alone has produced the rigid survival structures of working class families,[348] but rather to the handful of writers and educators who have been starting the free schools and publishing the children's rights literature. In other words, the Statement may have a very limited appeal to a 'converted few' and be relatively meaningless to the very parents and state educators whose lives would have to change radically, if it were to become a reality, and who will, therefore, resist it. It is in this way that Mann's aspirations for the Workshop impose their own limitations upon its effectiveness. As one person, running a small information exchange, he is acceptable: inoffensive. However, as a man whose stated goal in life touches the lives of everyone, he becomes unacceptable, a person to be kept in check. In view of the many before him who have espoused global change, he runs the risk of being rejected for his naivete.[349] By acknowledging that the solution to the problems he is identifying lies in a radical and wholesale change in society, he classes himself with David Graham, John Ord, and, to some extent, Sue Israel, none of whom, in the final analysis, got much support for their organizations from the society they sought to change. Mann

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[348] In a conversation with Miss Nora Goddard of the Inner London Education Authority, on April 22, 1974, the author was told of the confusion experienced by many West Indian children coming into fairly relaxed primary schools from very rigid and strict homes. See Appendix II, Item 110 for a description of the conversation.

[349] Several free school founders have expressed hopes for global change. It is notable that the schools that have survived to the present day are run by people who did not do this.

writes:

> We see the campaign for children's rights as part of a general movement for the rights of all people... We do not believe in opposing children's rights to parents rights, women's rights, or the rights of the elderly, or indeed the rights of any adult group. For us, the crucial issues is how these partial platforms can be united - synthesized - into a joint programme for social change, in which all sectors of the population, irrespective of age, sex, colour, or class origins, can contribute and benefit.[350]

One need only glance through biographies of men like Tolstoy or Neill to see that encompassing their own small efforts was a greater concern for all mankind. Neill once said, "I'd like to abolish all schools and make everywhere like Summerhill, but people don't seem to want that."[357] Mann's admission that his ultimate objective concerns no less than everyone is in keeping with the spirit of Summerhill. But, in the end, it was not Neill's concerns for the welfare of all humanity that were remembered, but rather the thing he did, Summerhill. Similarly, so thoroughly did Tolstoy explore and describe national and global concerns, that we now use his name to describe events and movements of great immensity. Such is not the case, however, with the Children's Rights Workshop, any more than it has been with the Manchester Free School or The New School. In fact, the aspirations towards global change expressed by David Graham and John Ord, must have seemed both naive and somewhat frightening to relatively humble citizens of the slums of Manchester and Liverpool. Graham's

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[350] Mann, A., op. cit., p. 23.

[351] A.S. Neill made this observation while being interviewed by members of The National Film Board of Canada in their film, Summerhill, 1972.

attempt to start a movement was probably acceptable for a short while in one part of Parkfield Street, but as soon as it moved beyond those limits it was rejected.

The Children's Rights Workshop is a clearing house. Avoiding labels such as 'institution', 'club', or 'public platform', Mann sees it as a facility for anyone interested in children's rights. The Workshop is a series of projects. In 1974 the projects were as follows: Alternative Education, Books, Under-5's, Legal Rights, Children and Photography, Children in Care, Children's Refuges, Neighbourhood Play Facilities, Children and Health, Handicapped Children, Bibliography on Children, Statistics on Children, and the preparation of a Children's Rights Charter. A project at the Workshop is, therefore, something that is being attended to. The Children's Books project, for example, produced in April, 1974 a statement on the need to develop a critical approach to children's literature. In July of 1974 the project produced a series of illustrative screens that were displayed at various conferences, pointing to such things as sexism and racism in children's literature. It imported and distributed material on the subject from foreign centres, notably those in the United State. It approached publishers and libraries to discuss sexism and racism and class bias in various books.

In the Children and Photography project a group researched and explored what they felt was the tendency of photographers to stereotype children as either "ever-smiling and cute" or as waifs. Project workers prepared a public exhibition of the works of various British photographers

...another of photographs of mentally-handicapped children.

The Alternative Education project is the most extensive of all ... the Workshop. Its overall purpose is to provide free schools and ...terested outsiders with the opportunity to exchange information. ... facilitate this, the Workshop provides lists of free schools, notes ... how to start a free school, a definition of free schools, information ...out the current status of existing free schools and suggestions for ...itors and parents of prospective pupils. Additionally, Mammakes ...self available to free school workers as a consultant and coordinator ...activities. In many ways, Mann's observations about free schools ... his definition of them reflect his bias towards them, his defence ...f their right to privacy, and the schools' lack of common philosophy. ...ressing himself to the question, "What is a free school?" he wrote ... following:

> Suffice it to say that British Free Schools differ significantly from the Progressive Schools (e.g. Dartington Hall, Neill's Summerhill, etc.) and from the majority of Free Schools elsewhere in the world, in that British Free Schools are not rural, residential and fee-paying schools for the children of the rich.... a) these Schools are small, have a flexible, non-hierarchical structure, and are housed in non-specialized premises; they cater for a small number of children -never more than 100 - and practise a high ratio of adults to children; b) these Schools have a child-centred approach to learning and child-care, and encourage the maximum access to choice in the learning process; c) these Schools are urban and serve inner-city populations; d) these Schools have been set up as clear alternatives to the state-controlled educational system.[352]

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[352] Mann, A., op. cit., p. 3.

In the light of the descriptions of free schools and the evaluation of them in earlier chapters of this study, Mann's definition can be questioned at several points, particularly as to whether or not the schools do in fact have a flexible structure, or are, as Lister suggests, perhaps "part of the crisis;"[353] whether or not their "non-specialized premises" are acceptable to them, or simply all they can afford;[354] whether in fact a free school established for the social and political purposes of changing society can be regarded as genuinely child-centred, or more realistically, is a reflection of the objectives of the teachers; whether they can only be urban, and do differ that much from the Summerhill model upon which many of them were directly or, via American modifications, indirectly based; and whether they are really alternatives given that the only one of them that has been recognized by the Department of Education and Science achieved that distinction by disassociating itself from some aspects of free schooling in order to retain a few others, and that they all request financial aid from the state system.[355]

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[353] Lister, Ian. "Deschooling", 1974, Chapter I.

[354] Leeds Free School, The New School, Sundance, Barrowfield were all very dissatisfied with their premises; Liverpool's Scotland Road Free School was housed in an old school building; White Lion Free School was housed in a large house that was converted for its own specialized use as a school; Balsall Heath has classrooms.

[355] Freightliners Free School got this aid by accepting the six conditions imposed by ILEA.

The attitude of free school workers towards the Workshop is interesting. They all know Andrew Mann, and most of the London free school workers have met him. He has maintained close contact with White Lion Free School. While she was establishing Sundance, Susan Israel used to consult with him on a variety of matters including squatting, purchasing toys and legal questions. Gwen Lambert in Huddersfield communicated with him when she was starting the Taylor Hill Centre, primarily as a contribution to his newsletter. Brian Addison sent descriptions of Barrowfield Community School to him; and he maintained an exchange of letters with Leeds Free School. With the exception of Sundance and White Lion Free School, however, Mann had never visited the schools. Several free school workers have expressed disagreement with his definition of free schools.[356]

Lack of money seems to be responsible for the lack of communication between the schools and the Workshop beyond the letters. Workshop personnel, particularly Mann, were not able to travel because they could not afford to do so. And the same was true of the free school workers. Thus the two remain apart. Where working relationships between free schools and the Workshop could develop, in London, Mann's role was subordinate but very supportive. The Alternative Education project does not initiate free schools. It observes and supports them to whatever extent its very limited funds will allow.

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356 The author was informed by some ex-Summerhill students at Lifespan Educational Trust that they found Mann's definition presumptuous. Susan Israel told the author that Mann heartily disapproved of her charging fees.

The A.S. Neill Trust

This trust was established early in 1974 by some of the same people who had worked with the Children's Rights Workshop, most notably Michael Duane and Peter Newell. Its objectives are similar to those of the Workshop, particularly the Alternative Education project. The trust describes these objectives as follows:

> To promote the freedom of children, irrespective of age, race, colour, creed or sex, to live as they choose, subject only to the right of others to a similar freedom.
> To provide help and advice (legal or other), training, encouragement and finance to individuals, groups, or organizations whose work and aims seem to foster freedom for children.
> To seek to persuade people in other countries to work towards these ends and to cooperate with them.
> To launch appeals for funds and to administer those funds through the Trustees appointed for the purpose. 357

Duane and Newell were joined by Fiona Green, one of two teachers operating York Way Truancy Project in North London, and by academics John Daniels and Ray Hemmings.

Thirty-three people - a few of whom represented state schools, while most of the rest worked in various kinds of alternative schools - met on April 5, 6, and 7, 1974 at the Terrace, a residential hostel in Conisborough, Yorkshire, to discuss the new association. They agreed at that meeting to organize regional centres, to publish a newsletter, and to work closely with the Children's Rights Workshop. These first

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357 A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, June, 1974.

decisions represent the first attempt that was ever made in Britain to produce a coordinating agency that might eventually bring free schools together. Some interested state system truancy project workers in Sheffield, notably Derek Dakin, director of the Meynell Road Youth Centre, and Gill Dammers of the large comprehensive Rowlinson Campus, agreed to host the next meeting of the trust; Mr. Geoff Edwards who lived and worked at the new Lifespan Educational Trust community near Huddersfield agreed to host a future meeting in 1975; Ms. Val Hennessey became the trust's representative in Brighton, where she ran the children's magazine "Little Digger"; Valentine Aitkenhead, daughter of A.S. Neill's lifetime friend in the Progressive Movement, John Aitkenhead, who, with her father, operates Kilquahanity House progressive school in South Western Scotland, offered to produce the first newsletter.

Thus were initial steps taken on April 7, 1974 to form a national organization - named after a progressive educator, organized by the former Headmaster of a comprehensive school, sponsored by a bishop, a politician, the director of a local education authority, and several academics, with one free school worker on its executive, devoted to the support of alternative education, in particular free schools. Several reasons why free schools have not participated in national efforts to support their cause have already been given. Perhaps some of these reasons applied to the lack of free school representatives on the A.S. Neill Trust executive. Free school representation at this initial meeting was by no means absent, but, in the end took a back seat to the more effectively represented interests of the state schools. Michael Duane's

suggestion that the trust's initial function be "the raising of funds and distribution of these to deserving cases" - which meant supporting free schools - was redirected by the members of the meeting towards the more nebulous goal of "becoming an instrument of educational change" and contributing to the development of "a really new, fresh and dynamic re-evaluation and approach to their job" for teachers in training. In other words, at the trust's very first meeting it was agreed by a majority present that the needs of the state education system should take precedence over those of the private alternatives. The report that emerged from the meeting, and was subsequently published in the first newsletter, made clear the direction the trust was to take:

> Out of (the discussion) arose the question of whether the Trust sees its aim as a basically revolutionary one of encouraging alternatives that in effect seek to change the school system, or whether their aim was a gradualist one of trying to change the system from within. The answer given was 'both', but the emphasis during the weekend was on the latter.[358]

The need to make the Trust legitimate in the eyes of those with power to effect educational change, was of paramount importance at that first meeting, and its significance to the people at the meeting throws a good deal of light on the attitude towards free schools, of that small band of radicals. Suggestions about appropriate ways of "legitimizing" the Trust included asking Sir Alec Clegg to become a trustee; asking Lord Boyle to sponsor the Leeds Free School; and ensuring that "the task of educating parents and encouraging them to enter and take part in school activities" was undertaken by the Trust; and that the Trust

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[358] A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, op. cit., p. 3.

emphasize that "creative artistic activity was a vital ingredient in education."[359]

There existed, therefore, some disagreement among Trust members at that first meeting, about the role of the Trust in relation to free schools, with the majority of trustees biased in favour of working for changes within the school system, and a larger number of workers in various alternative projects feeling otherwise, but unable to alter those biases. The matter arose again a few weeks after that initial meeting when trustee Ray Hemmings pleaded that the Trust concern itself primarily with providing for alternatives to the state schools, rather than working within the system - a view that was countered with the observation that "there are many good state schools" and the suggestion that the Trust provide an index of them. Hemmings referred to the shortcomings of the state schools, specifying their hostility towards innovation and improvisation, and the powerlessness of head teachers. The issue remained unresolved at that time, but reared its head again a few weeks later in Oxford at the first meeting of the Oxford branch of the Trust,[360] where a discussion of that branch's aims remained unresolved because "aims were diverse" among the ten people present.[361]

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[359] Ibid.

[360] A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, op. cit., p. 5.

[361] Ibid., p. 11.

Regardless of the lack of concensus concerning the Trust's activities, some funds were collected, and by October, 1974 the Trust's secretary announced the first disbursement of £150, as follows:

> The Bermondsey Lamp-post is receiving £50 from us, which will contribute towards solving the problems they immediately face. Then we decided to send £40 each to two Free School projects - at Southampton and North Kensington - which are just about to start... Kirkby House is in a different position of course. They are secure in their premises which are at least adequately furnished and have great potential; but they have little spare cash to get new activities started - for instance, to buy equipment for their playgroup and their art and craft workshop. To help towards this we are sending them £30. This pretty well clears us out, but we hope more money will be coming in fairly regularly.[362]

Thus, although the bias of the Trust's executives appeared to be towards working for reform within the state education system, it almost "cleaned itself out" with donations to free schools. Furthermore, in August, 1975 it gave away £790, of which £580 went to free schools. The explanation for this became clear in a statement entitled "Trust Funds" printed in the August, 1975 newsletter:

> We are bound by our Trust Deed to support only projects whose work is directly concerned with children or adolescents, and is conducted in ways which are consonant with the principles of A.S. Neill. The projects also have to be charities or at least 'conducted on charitable lines'. These in short are our legal constraints. Added to this we have tended to favour projects which are operating in areas of extreme need and which have some community support and involvement. (Lifespan is a possible exception to this, but it is making its facilities available to

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[362] A.S. Neill Trust newsletter, No. 6, p. 9. See Appendix II, Item 112.

> free schools from the cities.) We are not giving money to projects which are already receiving support from public funds, or which charge fees.[363] And a project which gets a substantial grant from some other Trust will probably not then qualify for additional help from our very slender resources. We make it a rule always to make personal contact with the people involved in a project we are considering, and we try to assess the relative urgencies of the various applications....
> We have handed money on to the following projects in the quantities indicated:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Leeds Free School: | £ 30 & £ 50 |
> | Bermondsey Lamp-post | £ 50 & £ 60 & £ 50 & £ 100 |
> | Delta F.S. Southampton | £ 40 & £ 100 |
> | N. Kensington Community School | £ 40 & £ 60 |
> | Kirkby House | £ 30 & £ 50 & £ 50 |
> | Lifespan | £ 50 |
> | Basement Writers | £ 30 |

The state's schools were financially relatively well-supported by comparison with these struggling free schools. Thus did the Trust resolve in part the dilemma of differing objectives: those who administered the funds could support the private projects, while others could debate the questions of change within the school system. The members rejected the proposed constitution for the Trust at the 1974 Annual General Meeting "because it did not provide proper democratic control of the Trustees."[364] And it was this formal rejection that brought the suggestion that there be two organizations rather than one: the Trust, which would administer the funds, and a Trust Association which would be responsible for all other activites. And in March, 1975,

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[363] Summerhill, which charged its pupils fees, would not have qualified for support from the A.S. Neill Trust.

[364] A.S. Neill Trust Newsletter, No. 6, p.2. See Appendix 11, Item 113.

this came to be, and the A.S. Neill Trust Association came into existence. It had nearly three hundred members who were prepared to support the free schools, but within the greater context of searching for ways by which the principles of A.S. Neill, currently kept alive within some of these struggling little ventures, might find their way into the fabric of the state education system.

One might assume, that should the Trust Association achieve its larger aim, support for its smaller projects might legitimately decline, since there would no longer be a need for free schools.

The Lifespan Project

Townhead is a small village in the barren moorland a few miles south of Huddersfield in Yorkshire. It was built in 1904 for London-North-Eastern Railway personnel who worked in the marshalling yards in the valley below the village, serving the Manchester to Barnsley line. L.N.E.R. personnel occupied the houses until the beginning of the Second World War, after which the yards were demolished and many people left. In the early 1960's, its people gone and most of its houses empty, Townhead fell into the hands of the Barnsley Council who did nothing at all with it until 1974 when, in spite of a proposal by at least one developer to turn it into a Tyrolian village, the Council placed a demolition order on all the cottages. At this time only two people lived in the cottages: Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Gaunt, the only couple who had refused to move when the marshalling yards were closed.

In 1974, two ex-Summerhill students now in their thirties bought the nineteen derelict cottages with £ 12,500 loaned to them by the mother

of one. Freer Spreckley and Hylda Sims decided to slowly rebuild the cottages. They began doing so on July 21, 1974. Spreckley, who had been a Bangladesh relief worker and a potter before purchasing the cottages, began by attacking No. 15. With £400 and the help of a few friends, he had the place finished by the end of August. By October, two more houses had been renovated and work had begun on building a chicken run, a pottery, a garden and a bee-hive. Spreckley and Sims also opened negotiations with members of the Department of Human Ecology at Huddersfield Polytechnic, for the establishment of a field station for students at the village. By that date the pair had been joined by Mark Abraham, a sociologist, and his wife, Ruth; Daniel Bryson, an electrician; Helen Miller, a textile designer; Geoffrey Edwards, a carpenter and mathematics teacher; Derek Eastmond, a farm-manager and market gardener; John Wynne, a furniture designer; and his wife Virginia, a weaving teacher; Howard Vie, an architect; Christopher Stewart, a plumber; and John and Susan Thorton, librarian and musician respectively. They called the community they formed Lifespan Educational Trust.

It was expected that the community would expand to include about sixty people once it had been established: a mix of adults and children. The children were to be educated by the community, and for this purpose one house was to be set aside as a centre for the children - a place that they could consider to be their own. At Christmas, 1974 it was suggested to the members of the community that the teachers and pupils of the

country's free schools be invited to Lifespan to participate in the life of the community and at the same time to renovate the house that would eventually be the centre for the community's school.[365] In this way the free school pupils would get a holiday, the opportunity to learn building skills and the rare chance to experience a lifestyle very different from their own. Most of all, the project, designed for the summer of 1975, would serve to bring the free schools together in a practical rather than theoretical way, via their pupils rather than their teachers. It was proposed that the renovated building be made permanently available to free school pupils as a meeting and resting place. The project was to be supervised by the community's members and managed by two students from Poulton-le-Fylde College of Education, who were given permission to use the period at Lifespan as their teaching practice.[366] A description of the project was sent to every free school, after which the two students, Richard Booth and Leslie Black, travelled to the schools and confirmed visits to Lifespan by pupils and teachers of Freightliners Free School, The Manchester Free School, and The Bermondsey Lamp-post. Teachers at Barrowfield, Balsall Heath and White Lion Free School were approached but did not participate. The pupils of Barrowfield Community School were going to participate at first, combining their visit to Lifespan with a journey to London to

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[365] This project was designed by the author, who negotiated with members of the Lifespan Educational Trust, and eventually with some instructors at Poulton-le-Fylde College of Education for the release of the two students.

[366] This arrangement was facilitated in part by the author agreeing to act as one of the teaching practice supervisors, and as a consultant to the College supervisor.

live in the homes of some of the pupils of The Bermondsey Lamp-post; however, the latter visit was cancelled by Brian Addison of Barrowfield Community school, who felt that his pupils would feel too 'out-of-place' and far too poor - since the most any one of them could raise for the holiday was £5.00 - to enjoy it, so the trip to Lifespan was cancelled also. Richard Atkinson of Balsall Heath Community School refused to involve his pupils because he did not wish to expand the range of outside contacts available to his pupils at that time; and the staff of White Lion Free School said they did not have the time to attend. Several other schools and alternative projects were contacted: Sundance, North Kensington Community School, and the Leeds Free School. The latter two agreed to visit Lifespan but actually forgot about their arrangements and failed to arrive when expected. Arrangements for travel to Lifespan was also difficult for some schools, and furthermore, Booth and Black found it very difficult to remind some schools of the arrangement they had made because of a lack of telephones, or simple difficulty in locating teachers. Some free schools found it difficult to plan several months ahead for the visit, as had been initially asked of them by Booth and Black. In the end, of the nine schools approached about the project, Sundance did not reply; Balsall Heath and White Lion said no; North Kensington and Leeds said yes and then forgot; Barrowfield said yes then cancelled; Freightliners, Manchester and The Bermondsey Lamp-post did visit the community.

The varied response illustrates well the many reasons why it was difficult for the free schools to spend any time together, or in a common

experience. Priorities, finances, and poor organization got in the way. In fact, seven free schools thought the project worthy of their participation, and two refused for the reasons already described. Only one school ignored the invitation. Only three schools were actually able to participate.

On Monday, April 28, 1975, the pupils of Freightliners Free School arrived at Lifespan. Leslie Black described the event:

> We greeted Chris, Dracey, Dave, Steve, Pat and Liz late in the afternoon after their drive up from London. Chris responded to our suggestion that the week be, in terms of atmosphere, an extension of that which is normal in the school, by stating that he intended the week to be a holiday for the kids - no lessons or emphasis on involvement in literacy (which was such an important part of the school's programme).
>
> After a cup of tea the children were eager to explore the community. Initially, we showed them the house in which we were all to stay, along with that to be worked up (No. 6, next door). The older two boys, Dracey and Dave, soon asserted their independence by breaking away from the "tour" to discover things at their own pace. The younger ones - Steve, Pat and Liz - exhibited some disinterest by quickly involving themselves in exploring the stream and remoter parts of the garden.
>
> Throughout the meal, Steve, Pat and Liz sought security in Chris' company - not opening to outsiders at all. While Chris displayed exceptional and consistent rapport with the kids in satisfying their need for security in a strange situation, he continued to draw out the plans we had for No. 6. His personality caught the appeal of many of us at the dinner table so that a clear base on which to build good relationships was evident.
>
> Some time after supper we lit fires in the upstairs rooms of No. 5. The place soon filled with smoke from the fire in the kids' room - its malfunction initiated activity for the next morning, of a most practical nature. In spite of the nuisances, Chris read to the three younger ones until he fell asleep - after which time the kids read to each other from where Chris had left off.

> During this time Dave and Dracey (driven by the smoke as much as by an interest in communicating) joined us in the adjacent room to carry on a long conversation relating to their backgrounds, interests, attitudes and specifically their dismay at the prospect of facing a week of vegetarian ("rabbit food") meals. From this chat we learned much about their experiences truanting ("bunking off"), appearing in court for petty theft, and coming into "Freights."[367]

On the following morning the two older boys designed and constructed a scaffolding to enable them to spend several hours pointing the chimney on No. 6. Their teacher, Chris, took the three younger children around the village, and in and out of the other houses in the community. During the afternoon the older boys took photographs while the three younger ones stripped wallpaper inside No. 6. In the evening they all went to the cinema in a local town, Holmfirth. By Wednesday morning some of the initial shyness and unfamiliarity among the five children had gone. Black's description of that day provides an insight into the children's behaviour:

> First thing this morning the food issue came to a head - the kids were not being catered for, and consequently were not, in some cases (Dracey and Steve), eating much at all. Chris was very surprised that they had shown restraint in their grumbling. It was decided that they would set up a "carnivorous breakfast" the next morning, not only for the "Freights" kids, but also for Ron, Simon, Claire and Ben (who was spending a week and a half of his holidays from Summerhill at Lifespan). All of the children received the news enthusiastically.
>
> Chris passed on much information about Freightliners and these particular children to Rick while they spent the morning shopping in Holmfirth. Dracey passed the same time working on preparation, measurement and cutting of a beam, for work being done on No. 17, with John Kings. Dave and Les worked on preparing wood for the roof ladders which had finally been decided upon. (Dave's criticism of the early designs had been very helpful

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[367] This description, and others that follow about this project, are quoted from a report of the project written by Leslie Black, one of the participating students, for the staff of Poulton-le-Fylde College of Education, in June, 1975.

in making the necessary adjustments towards a safer final design.) The measuring and cutting was left to Dave, who worked quite meticulously. Steve, Pat and Liz spent a long time pulling out nails and dismembering wooden packing crates - their determination to finish things which they had started was, by this time, quite evident.

In the afternoon Dave and Les continued work on the ladders while the others engaged themselves in various things: Dracey did some photography; Chris, Pat and Liz discussed counterbalancing principles involved in repairing the trap door on a rat trap; Steve...made bread in the kitchen with John Winn; Dave and Dracey walked down to the railway later in the afternoon, before Dave joined Steve and Simon in helping Rick to make a meat loaf for supper.

Dinner was a great success and brought together Lifespan's omnivors Mel, Pat, Chris, as well as Ron, Simon and Claire and the whole of the group from Freightliners.

Chris, Dave and Dracey took Steve, Pat, Liz, Ben, Simon, Ron and Claire to the Youth Club in Millhouse. These kids came back from the evening as very close friends - Steve had impressed everyone with his double thrashing of the local (17 year old) Table Football Champion; Pat had been in a punch-up over someone pushing Liz from a swing; and together they had all stood off a group of local kids who wanted to escalate the confrontation.

Steve and Ben and Simon became quite good friends over card games, exchanges of tricks and jokes, so that it was a late night for the kids. Simon, Claire, and Ron, influenced by the Freights kids no doubt, were smoking in the coal bin and then running around with the accompanying din carried on past midnight.

This pattern of work, play and evenings spent with the people of Lifespan continued for a few more days, until on May 4 it was time for the visitors to leave. They were Lifespan's first free school pupils. The hopes attached to their visit went beyond what they might have gained from it. The Lifespan community wanted it to be the beginning of a growing interaction between firstly itself and the free schools, and later, when the houses were renovated, between the various free

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schools themselves, using Lifespan as a base, a meeting place. Black, as much as anyone else, tried to glean from the visit, insights into what it was like to be a pupil at Freightliners Free School. His conclusions about the visit reflect these three elements of the project: the forming of long-lasting relationships between Lifespan and the school; the hopes that they would return when other free school pupils were there; and the insights into lives of inner city truants;

> The visit was intended to sow the seeds of a long-standing relationship between Freightliners and Lifespan. Chris Sharp, through his very strong relationships with the children he accompanied, made his friendships with Rick and Les (and later with Lifespan children and adults) serve as bridges for the children....In turn the new friendships were bridges for the children and adults at Lifespan. All of these contacts were sound by the week's end, so that Steve, Dave and Dracey felt very despondent about leaving. The feeling was shared by Lifespan villagers, children and adults alike, that it could be none too soon before the return of Freightliners.
>
> Notably, Steve had been able to bring out Simon, Claire, Ron and Ben (ed: these were children living at Lifespan). He himself had been beyond reproach all week (only a short time earlier he had been sent home from a visit to France for aggressive behaviour, e.g. "Ross the Boss" scrawled over everything in sight); and the older boys felt a real attachment to No. 6. They understood full well what its purpose and potential are to be.

On May 5, four pupils from Manchester Free School arrived. They were preceded on May 4 by two boys from Red House, a truancy centre in Denarby near Doncaster, who spent the morning continuing pointing the chimney stack on cottages 5 and 6. The Manchester Free School children, reflecting in their small number the uncertain status of their school, brought with them several friends and brothers and sisters who did not

attend the free school, including one eleven-year-old, Michael, who attended a state school. This visit was not as comfortable as the previous week with Freightliners Free School had been, and Black was able to distinguish several differences between the two schools particularly concerning group and individual action. It was pointed out at some length in an earlier chapter that Freightliners Free School had remained in existence partially because of its inoffensiveness- its willingness to cooperate with the Inner London Education Authority, and its string relationship with the Maiden Lane Community Association. It was also suggested that one of the reasons why Parkfield Street School, which later became the Manchester Free School, had not enjoyed a very healthy relationship with local education authority or local citizens, was that it was too political: its workers had ulterior motives concerning radical changes in social behaviour. Freightliners Free School's main concern was its pupils, and their individual growth, whereas this was not the case at Manchester. The Free School regarded itself as part of Community Action. Any arrangements made with the free school were also made with Community Action. The fact that the Manchester visitors to Lifespan were mostly not connected with the free school, together with inadequate planning on the part of Community Action resulted in Black and Booth having to struggle to get any work done on the house. The description of the visit provides some interesting insights into the workings of Community Action and its relationship with the few children who made up the small and struggling Manchester Free School.

Under clouds of cigarette smoke, the kids dragged their sleeping bags and gear into No. 5. The whole group commenced a brief "sleeping-bag-in" before the call for afternoon tea. Rick and Les (ed: the two Poulton-le-Fylde students managing the project) began chatting with Tony, Geoff and Mike (ed: free school teachers). The kids split off to do some exploration - bicycles were the focus of attention as Gary (aged 13 years), Paul (from Red House) and Graeme (from Red House) fell in together. Darryl kept Shirry (his 3 year old sister) with him....he was the most outgoing and entertaining, tending to choose the adult company in Nos. 13 and 14 rather than going about the business of exploring with the others. Rick took Rachael (aged 5 years) and Shirry over the road to the school yard swings while Darryl (aged 11 years) went on tour with Les....Darryl opened up very quickly during his tour with Les - indeed, he seemed considerably more interested in divulging his dismay about living on the 10th floor of a block of flats (no play area close at hand; too little space in the apartment; very little privacy within the apartment itself) than in hearing about Lifespan. He did however, ask how many people lived here and admired Ilse's candles very much.

Joseph (15 years) worked with Mike and Geoff to clear grass and weeds from in front of the courtyards of Nos. 5 and 6. Another "sleeping-bag-in" took shape in No. 5 - much cajoling, chasing, invitation and smoking among the 12-14 year olds. Tony was off on a walk in the area. The boys, Gary, Paul, Graeme and Darryl took a football across to the neighbouring field for a kick-around. In that the farmer in question shoots at trespassers without asking questions, we called the kids off the field. Through Mike and Geoff we gathered all of the kids into No. 5 for a meeting to explain some of the rules they needed to know (i.e. stay off the neighbouring fields; don't go into the dining area via No. 14 door (the kitchen). We felt badly about doing a "do and don't" thing on the kids and expressed that to them. It was not the sort of impression we wanted them to have of us, and particularly at this early time.

Simon's (a Lifespan resident) motorbike became a focus of attention for the boys. Eventually, with Mel's help it was in running form, ripping away the usual tranquility of the Townhead area. Simon himself joined Gary, Paul, and Graeme....The din raised by the bike evoked all sorts of protest, and the activity was ceased shortly after it had begun.

> With the exception of Darryl, the kids did not respond enthusiastically to the food. In lieu of paying into Lifespan the £ 3. per person as Freightliners had done (for food and fuel), Manchester had decided to bring food for the week, and had purchased some food for Lifespan through their Cash'n'Carry card. Still, there was not enough in the way of meat for the kids, so the "alternative breakfast" once again was brought into effect for Tuesday morning.

Thus did the Manchester Free School visit begin. And on the following day several more of Black's and Booth's plans fell apart. Joseph, the 15-year-old boy suddenly left for Manchester; Paul and Graeme returned to Red House in Denaby; Darryl decided that he was more interested in candle-making than in renovating No. 6. The teachers, Mike and Geoff found it difficult to interest the children in No. 6 and Black and Booth had to spend considerable time with them going over the notes left by Freightliners Free School. In the evening the three teachers went to a local pub leaving one of the eleven-year-old boys in charge of the two small children. In the end, only the two girls haddone any work on the house, and the same was the case on the following morning, with Darryl showing more and more frustration with his three-year-old sister.

On the afternoon of May 7, a much larger contingent arrived from Manchester for what turned out to be a picnic rather than a work session. Most of the visitors were members of Community Action rather than directly connected with the free school. Once again, there were unexpected problems. Community Action had arrived without letting Lifespan know they were coming; during the afternoon one of the visiting children broke

her collar bone in a bicycle accident. By the evening, when Community Action had left, Black and Booth felt the need to discuss events with the free school. Lifespan residents wanted to talk with them also, so it was agreed that various concerns would be brought up at the forthcoming meeting of the whole community.

> Feelings about the apparent weaknesses in the progress being made towards the basic goals set for the week began to come out in evening discussion. We were worried that Tony, Geoff, and Mike (ed: the free school teachers) had not been making significant contact with permanent Lifespan members. Tony mentioned that the three of them resented being set in comparison with the week that Freightliners had spent there....
>
> The meeting, as it related to Tony, Mike, and Geoff, covered three matters of concern. They were specifically:
>
> 1) supervision of Rachel and Shirry
> 2) general supervision of kids (re: the incident yesterday in which a girl was hurt cycling towards Dunford Bridge)
> 3) It had become apparent that the school had brought far too little food to cover their stay. Some balance had to be made up.
>
> The meeting took on feelings of an attack on Tony, Mike and Geoff, in spite of the conscious efforts of Lifespan people to avoid creating...a confrontation. Rick, Les, Tony, Mike and Geoff discussed the situation afterward so as to work out the sort of activity which might correct some of the week's mistakes.

The Manchester Free School left Lifespan on the following day. Black concluded that only three of the visitors, the two girls and one boy, had really benefitted from the week at Lifespan. For Darryl it had been a constant frustration looking after his sister. The visit of this school was not a success: Black and Booth achieved very few of the things they had hoped to achieve; neither the pupils nor the

teachers had cooperated with Lifespan in the manner that members of the community had expected. As was mentioned earlier, Manchester Free School saw itself - and still sees itself - as one part of Community Action. Thus, when five individuals arrived at Lifespan on May 5 it was Community Action that was visiting, not a free school. By the end of the week Black and Booth had dealt with more adults in Community Action than they had children of the free school. The difficulty that the three teachers experienced in relating to the members of the community, and their resentment of Freightliner's more successful visit, reflect the complete lack of communication between the two schools, and between Manchester Free School and any other free school in Britain, prior to the visit. Black found the school insensitive, and uses the visit by Community Action for a picnic, to illustrate:

> Wednesday's Community Action "invasion" was spawned from the desire of the group to show interest in something which involved a part of the group, but it failed to show any sign of sensitivity to the nature, purpose and needs of the specific project going on, not to mention the inconvenience to Lifespan itself.

On May 18, four children and their teacher from The Bermondsey Lamp-post arrived at Lifespan for a five-day visit. Two boys and two girls, all aged between ten and twelve years, had travelled to Sheffield by bus, and were very surprised to discover that Lifespan was not a neat collection of tidy Yorkshire cottages with all modern conveniences. They refused to sleep in No. 5 which was one of the houses being renovated, and instead erected a tent and spent much of their time together in it for the first two days. By May 20, they were a part of the

community, and Booth and Black considered this school's visit to Lifespan to have been far more successful than that of Manchester Free School. The boys worked a great deal on the house. The girls did not. Mel, their teacher, worked closely with them for the whole period, whether they were pointing the chimney on No. 6 or walking on the moors. By the end of their brief stay, these four young children had done much more work on the house than had their predecessors, and were closer to the members of the community. The children seemed very unfamiliar with their surroundings - moreso than did those from Manchester - and needed a lot of time to adjust, i.e., to wander around, help in the kitchen or just sit in the various rooms talking to the community members. The group left early on the morning of May 3.

Booth and Black had set out, with the members of the Lifespan community, to do three things: establish relationships with the free schools; bring members of different free schools together; and renovate No. 6 cottage as a centre for visiting free schools. Of the schools approached, only three came. Of these three, only one was successful in terms of the three things Black and Booth set out to do. Five of the remaining six schools had expressed an interest in the project, but did not participate. The other school did not reply to the invitation. Thus, as an attempt to establish relationships between Lifespan and the free schools, the project was only partially successful. As an attempt to bring various free schools together, the project was a complete failure: no free school teachers met at Lifespan; only a handful of pupils from Red House - which is not a free school - and Summerhill, or from Lifespan itself actually met any free school visitors. At the end of the visits No. 6 was still in a bad state of

disrepair.

Summary

Concerning these three attempts to bring members of free schools together to collaborate, to meet each other, to find strength in numbers, the following things may be said:

1. For a variety of economic reasons, no free school teachers or pupils can afford the time or expense of visiting other free schools.
2. Britain's free schools are very different from each other in practical ways. One - Leeds - sets itself against state education; another - Freightliners - cooperates with the local education authority; a third, White Lion Street seems strong and independent; another, Manchester, seems but a tiny part of a political organization; yet another, Barrowfield, is isolated by virtue of distance. The schools have many individual differences.
3. Free school teachers are concerned only with their pupils and their school, (albeit in the context of eventual national political change). While they may have modelled their schools on Summerhill or The First Street School, they have little time or inclination to discuss the educational philosophies upon which those schools were built. Free school teachers leave the discussion of ideology and educational significance to others.
4. Similarly, free school teachers have left the formation of national organizations to others. In this the British are different from the Americans, who started their own Summerhill Societies and New School Exchanges, and the Danes, who had the superstructure developed for them by an Act of Parliament.

Lacking both the numbers of the Americans, and the government support enjoyed by the Danes, British free school teachers have remained isolated from each other through necessity.

It has, therefore, been the good luck of the free schools that people like Michael Duane and Andrew Mann, Leslie Black and Richard Booth, have been prepared to volunteer - completely unannounced and uninvited - their time to further the cause espoused individually by each of these isolated little enterprises. And each of the three attempts to help has been of some use. Mann has linked the free schools with the issue of children's rights - a movement that has its articulate writers, its conference speakers, its magazines and its supporters in the state education system. The A.S. Neill Trust has given the schools a focal point: ineffective financially, the Trust has at least shown some interest in the schools, even if that interest must be viewed against their greater cause for change in the state education system - a cause which, if successful, would eliminate, or at least greatly reduce, the need for free schools. Lifespan has less to offer: it is not a free school; nor does it have a free school, for it has few children. It was, however, the first place to offer itself as a meeting place, and although very few of the schools invited actually used it during Booth's and Black's project, it was, in the end, the only meeting place. In July, 1975 the A.S. Neill Trust held one of its general meetings at Lifespan and it was through this meeting that free school teachers and supporters finally came together.

Thus have the three projects come together: Children's Rights extended itself into the A.S. Neill Trust, which succeeded in bringing at least some free school workers and teachers together at Lifespan.

These, then, are the free schools.

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