

FORMER ST EDMUND'S SCHOOL

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FORMER ST EDMUND'S SCHOOL

Corner of Birmingham Street and Castle Hill, Dudley

Originally known as the St Edmund's District National School, Lord Ward of Himley donated the land and its foundation stone was laid by Lady Ward in August 1848, with architect William Bourne appointed. Records indicate it was built to accommodate 375 children aged 5-11: 115 infants and 260 older children. In 1881 it was reported that "this flourishing school has been of immense value to the poorer classes of the (Dudley) inhabitants, having turned out some very clever boys and girls".

The school finally closed in 1974 and the building is now the Dudley Central Mosque.

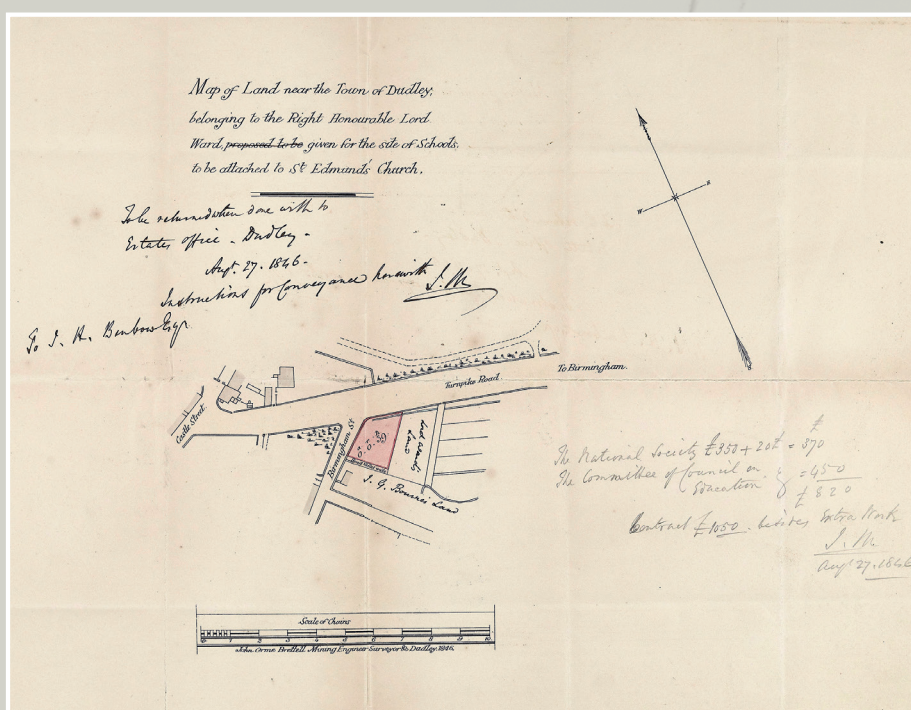
In 1976 it was Grade II listed, meaning it is a building of special interest warranting every effort to preserve it.



Bentley's map of 1839 - showing the plot where school would later be built



Right: Roper map of 1855 showing school



The 1846 location plan (left) includes hand-written notes indicating the contract price was £1,050 (about £125,000 in today's money); £370 of it came from the National Society and £450 from The Committee of Council on Education. Where the remaining £230 came from is not included but an 1881 book states that Lord Ward donated £100 towards the building fund.

(1846 plan courtesy of The Hive Archives and the Diocese of Worcester).

ARCHITECTURE

Exterior

The building is of a Tudor Gothic style with walling of squared limestone, Gornal sandstone and coursed freestone ‘rubble’ (masonry with irregularly shaped blocks). It has two storeys plus attics in the gables and a basement.

The Birmingham Street frontage, with its slightly projecting gable, has: a door with a four-centred arched head and three-sided square hood mould over it; three tall windows with transoms (horizontal bar across); and two lateral chimney stacks rising from ground level. The double-doors on the left-hand side are a later addition (by 1944), located where the third light of the current two-light window was.



The Castle Hill frontage (seen in the image to the left) has a slightly projecting gable but with a stone mullioned window with three-sided square hood mould over it and diamond pattern cast iron glazing bars; a plain doorway; and again two lateral chimney stacks rising from ground level.

The north-facing porch (now flat-topped - see later) was the main entrance to the school, but this doorway has been partly bricked-up and a window installed.

The roof has plain tiles and eaves.

The sandstone rubble forecourt wall is separately Grade II listed. It is topped with saddle-back stone copings and has pointed arched doorways. This is a different design to that in the old engraving.

Interior

The 1846 plans show the school was L-shaped with a porch in the corner.

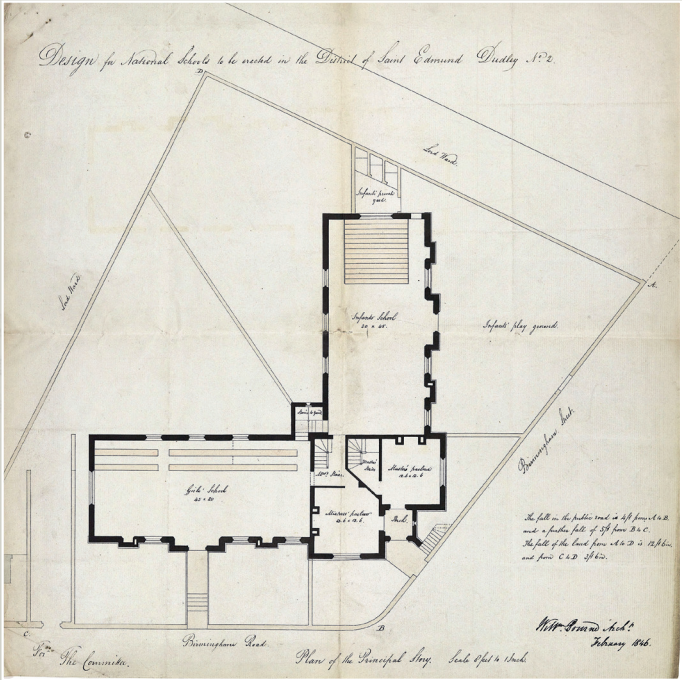
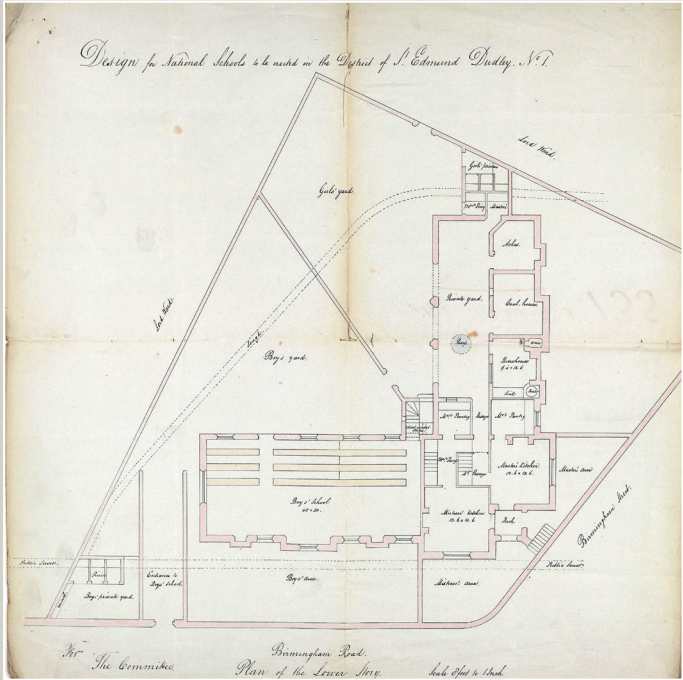
The lower ground floor included the boys’ school, the masters’ and mistress’ kitchens, a coal house, ashes space, a water pump in a ‘private yard’ area, a brewhouse with a sink, oven and boiler,

an understairs closet, masters’ and mistress’ privvies, girls’ privvies, separate boys’ private yard with urinals and three privvies, and four separate outside areas for boys, girls, mistresses and masters.

The upper ground floor, or ‘principal storey’, included the girls’ school, infants’ school, infants’ privvies, infants’ playground, and masters’ and mistress’ parlours.

Very few original internal features remain, but in 1944 a surveyor identified the building mostly had blue brick floors apart from the hall flooring which was ‘deal boards’.

Above: 1846 plans showing lower ground floor (left) and principal storey (courtesy of The Hive Archives and the Diocese of Worcester).



HISTORICAL EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS

Chimney stacks

In 1940 an application to the National Society was submitted for a grant to fund the “taking down of 14 dangerous chimney stacks and re-building six of them”. The work was considered very urgent and was estimated to cost £63.12.9. In the end it cost about £100 (about £5,700 in today’s money).

Bell tower and dome

The corner entrance porch was built with two storeys, plus an impressive bell tower and decorative dome on top which were the tallest parts of the building. In September 1946 “the building inspector from the Town Hall and also an architect” both considered the bell tower (by then unused) dangerous and it needed to be immediately demolished. The stonework at the top of the tower was believed to weigh about 15 tons. The work was estimated to cost £100 (but in the end cost £140, about £6,000 in today’s money). And so began a long saga . . .

One of the school managers, Rev. John F Ferley, wrote to Canon Rees Jones (Worcester Diocesan Director of Religious Education), advising him of the dangerous bell tower and dome. The school was already earmarked for closure with the sale proceeds going to the diocese, so funding this work was a problem: the school managers had no money, it was felt that the Parochial Church Council (PCC) would not agree to pay (they had spent a lot on the building in recent years), and in view of the imminent closure a public appeal was unlikely to raise sufficient funds. However if the school became a Controlled School, which it was trying to avoid, the Local Education Authority would pay for such work.

Further correspondence, which now included the Bishop of Worcester and a Mr Fussell (Director of Education at Dudley Borough Council), indicates the bishop asked for the school to become a Controlled School. However, as this process had not yet started, funding would not be available for some time. Ferley asked again if the Diocesan Education Committee would pay. He also suggested that the school managers could pay, with a guarantee of repayment from the sale proceeds. He argued that the PCC would also pay only with a guarantee, as it had financed the school on behalf of the managers for some years.

In December 1946 the Diocesan Appeal Fund agreed a conditional grant of “£40 to the trustees and managers of Dudley St Edmund’s Church School” repayable from the sale proceeds in due course. Records indicate the work was completed shortly afterwards but nothing to explain how the deficit was funded.

Then in May 1947 it appears that a retrospective application was made to the canon which also included a request for a further £40 to urgently re-surface the playground. The Diocesan Education Committee endorsed a £180 grant application to the National Society in March 1948.



*Lithograph of school from 1840s
Dudley Museum & Art Gallery*

SCHOOL LIFE

Diocesan records from 1951 describe the school's 11 January 1847 trust deed as being *"in the Ministry's Scheme"*. The deed was in the *"usual National Society pattern"* and the school's 1869-90 Logbook (effectively a hand written diary of each day in school) shows this included lessons covering: catechism (a manual of religious instruction usually arranged in the form of a set of questions and answers designed to teach); Bible; Christian year; hymns; and prayer book.

National Schools were founded during the 1800s by the National Society for Promoting Religious Education. They provided elementary education in accordance with the teaching of the Church of England, to the children of the poor. They were usually located next to the parish church and named after it. The schools were eventually absorbed into the state system.

Other subjects included grammar, spelling, geography and indoor physical exercise (if it was *"too cold to go out to play"*).

EMJ Houghton, who completed a Worcester Diocesan Inspection of Schools inspection on 5 June 1876 reported as follows in the Logbook: *"Number of pupils on register - 136. Number presented - 110. Percentage of merit - 31. Percentage of passes - 91. Summary: Earnest and therefore successful work has been done here, and the result of the examinations was for the most part as highly creditable to Miss (Mary M) Bott as it may well be satisfactory to all who take a real interest in the religious instruction of the children"*.

Examples of school discipline in the Logbook are: pupils sent home if late, or *"kept in"*; if pupils talked while waiting for clothes (uniform?), they were *"punished"*; girls were punished for rude behaviour during school time; and one day in January 1869 *"the children were very troublesome at closing time, so kept them in school until they were perfectly quiet"*.

Pupil numbers always dropped if it was raining and older pupils would be sent out to round up the absentees, and on 1 March 1869 there was poor attendance due to a fair being in town so the attendees were given the afternoon off!

The 1904-33 Sales Accounts records list items for sale that had been made by the infants. These included:

- During the 1904/5 school year six pinafores were sold for 5d each; five aprons for 7d each; and six pillowcases for 5 1/2d each. Six bolster-cases sold at 8d each (1905/6).
- From 1916/17 the infants were also producing raffia and cane items such as: serviette rings sold at three for 1d; 13 framed pictures at 1/2d each; and 20 baskets at between 1/2d and 1 1/2d each. They also started selling knitted items and more needlework items such as: 18 pin cushions at 1/2d each; nine needle-cases at 1d; four dolls beds at 5d or 6d; and four knitted dishcloths at 1/2d or 1d.
- In the 1918/19 year they sold 11oz of pink vest wool to the Girls' department for 4s 1d.

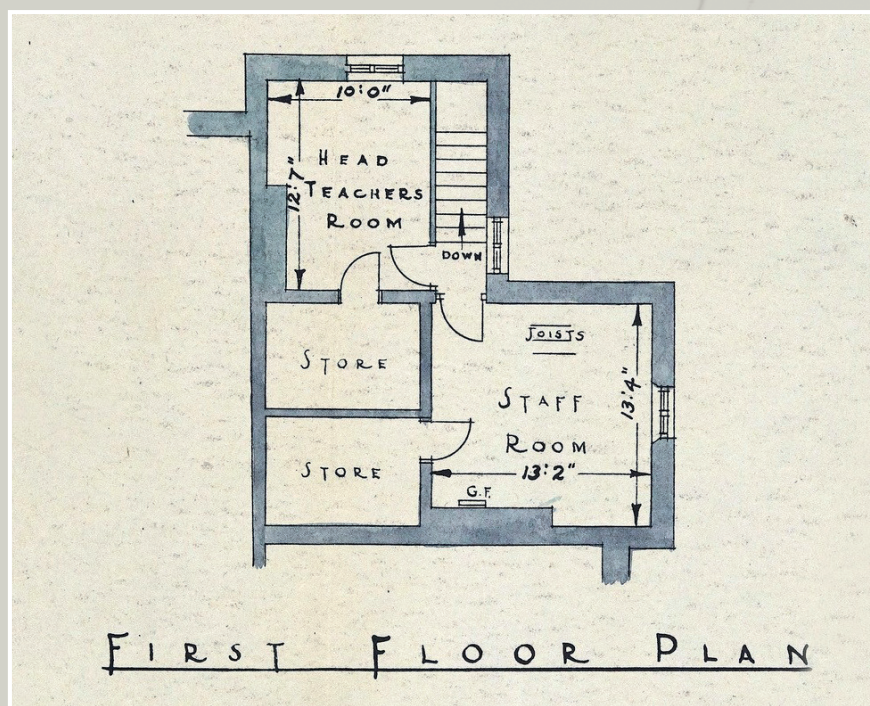
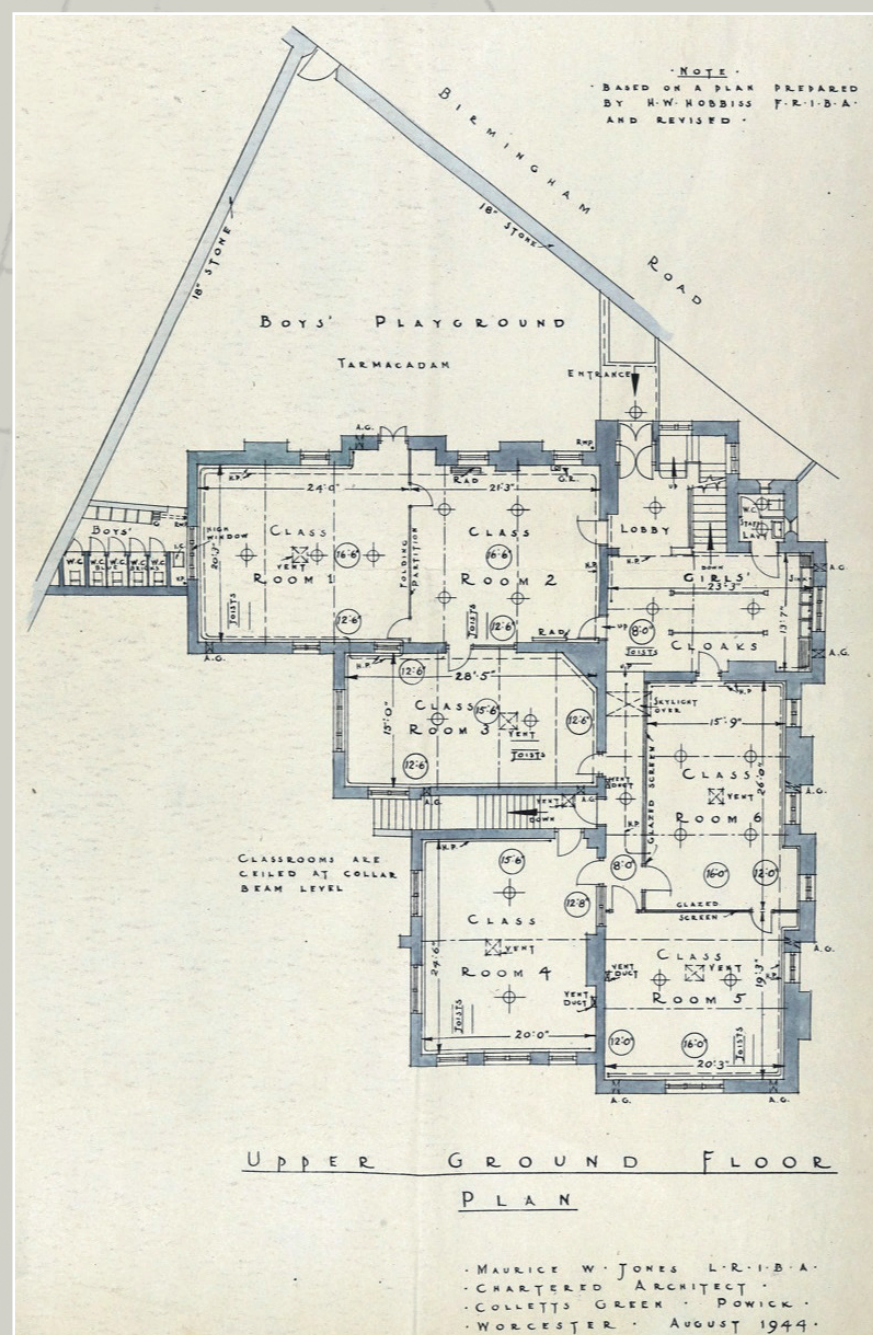
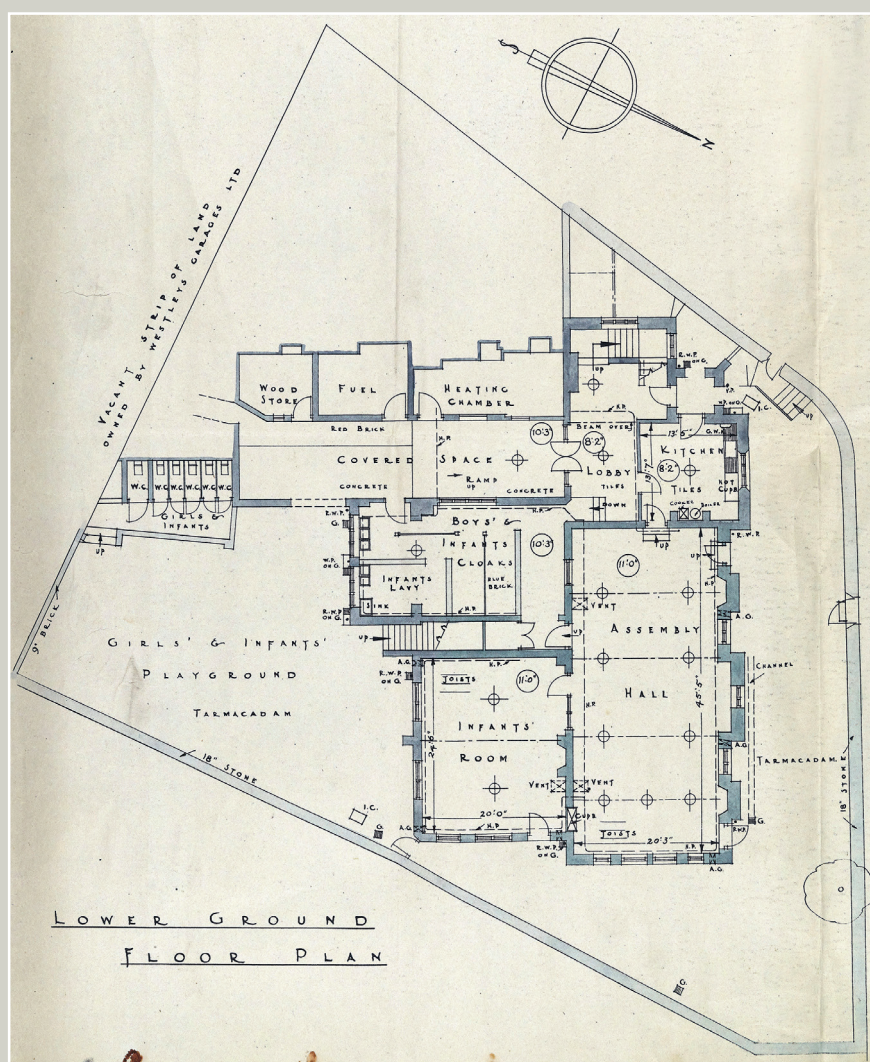
The Mixed School's Sales Accounts for 1904-66 show they achieved a higher turnover with their generally more advanced produce:

- In 1904/5 they sold: 15 blouses at 1s each; five pinafores at 9d; 32 Holland aprons at 10d; 10 chemises at 10d; 12 pairs of socks at 1s 4d; and 12 pairs of stockings at 1s 6d.
- Thirty-six towels were sold in 1905/6 at 6d each, and in 1910/11 12 tea-cloths were sold at 3d each.
- By the early 1920s they also sold: petticoats at 4s each; sleeping suits at 6s 6d; nightgowns at 3s 6d; print knickers at 1s 6d; print overalls at 1s 11d; calico knickers at 1s 3d; a lingerie set at 14s; and caps at 10d.
- In the late 1930s the pupils were making and selling: Zephyr dresses at 1s 3d; Gingham dresses at 1s 6d; Linette dresses at 1s 9d; and Ritzo pinafores at 1s 3d.
- By the early 1960s skirts and blouses were sold at 7s 6d and 4s 6d respectively.

A 1944 building survey provides some interesting information:

"...There are 266 children on the books and seven women teachers. There are six classrooms on the upper ground floor and also a cloakroom and a staff WC. The head teacher's room, the staff room and two stock rooms are perched high in a turret on the top floor (actually in the two gables' roof-space). On the lower ground floor there is one classroom for the 'admission class', the school hall, a kitchen, cloakroom and lavatory and the fuel and heating chambers. School meals are provided and the hall is used as a dining room...the school is lighted by electricity, heating is supplied by a low pressure hot water installation, mains water is laid on to lavatory basins and WCs and the drains are connected to the sewer".

The School Meals Service was used and at the time about 120 children stayed for school dinner. Each child had their own towel in the lavatory area. As the school did not have any playing fields, the County Cricket Ground on the Tipton Road, owned by Dudley Corporation, was used on a weekly basis.



Above left: 1944 Lower Ground Floor Plan of school

Left: 1944 first floor plan

Above: 1944 Upper Ground Floor Plan

Plans by Maurice W. Jones, architect, courtesy of the Hive Archives and with the permission of the Diocese of Worcester.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR THE SCHOOL . . .

In August 1944 a building survey of the school was undertaken by the surveyor for the Dean and Chapter of Worcester Cathedral. The survey identified several problems:

“...drab exterior but much could be done to relieve the heavy brooding appearance by the judicious use of bright paint and decoration, inside and out. The site is cramped, the playgrounds are angular and hemmed in. There is a vacant strip of land...on the south west boundary which should be added to the playgrounds. If this could be done and the closet block is pulled down and built elsewhere it would prove of great benefit to the children. Classroom 6 might with advantage be converted for use as a cloakroom and for lavatory accommodation. It is rather dark for teaching purposes and has glazed screens on two sides. It also interferes with movement by restricting the width of a main corridor to 4’0”... Some of the older floors in corridors and classrooms are worn thin and uneven. The main tiled roofs need to be overhauled and the doors and fittings of the closet block need repair. The slated roof of the closets also needs attention...” The report also included that the stonework needed repointing.

A new Education Act had led to the Dudley Education Authority producing a Development Plan in 1946 for all schools in the borough. The above survey was obviously taken into account with the following proposal for the school: *“Site is too small. No extension possible. Buildings very old - children to be dispersed to other school areas”*.

Correspondence confirms that the school was planned to close in *“Period 1”* of the Development Plan which implies early closure. The school managers replied to the Diocesan Education Committee that there was much regret at the possibility of losing the school, that they couldn’t see any way of retaining it permanently as no other site in the parish was big enough or available, and that the school had been a very effective part of the church. A letter from September 1946 states that the school will move to a ‘controlled’ (by Dudley Local Education Authority) school. It was assumed that ownership of building and site would remain with the Diocesan Education Committee. Correspondence shows that the site was considered valuable, with similar land valued by the borough council at £3 a square yard, meaning the site was worth several thousand pounds.

Having considered the implications and options following the future loss of the school, in May 1947 the Parochial Church Council identified that the school hall (which was also the Parish Hall) was the only parochial building, apart from the church itself. As the school was ‘L’ shaped the PCC’s conclusion was to keep half of the school (the Birmingham Street side) for parochial purposes and sell the Castle Hill side as this was considered to be the most valuable frontage. As *“...very large sums of money were raised to restore the school about 15 years ago...we ought to be allowed to buy half the school at a nominal price”*.

A 1959/60 receipt from the Borough Treasurer for cash recorded in the *‘Logbook’* for the proceeds of the sale of items made by the pupils indicates that the transfer to ‘controlled’ status had taken place. However the pupils had obviously not been ‘dispersed’ to other schools. No subsequent records have been found to confirm who paid for the maintenance and repair of the building (the council or the diocese?) between 1947 and 1974 when the school was finally closed and the building sold.

Julie A Clarke, Dudley Heritage Volunteer
August 2021

Acknowledgments:

Dudley Archives & Local History Centre;

The Hive, Worcester (Archives);

‘An Illustrated Chronicle of Dudley Town and Manor’ by John Hemmingway;

‘Britain in Old Photographs. Dudley’ by Atkins/Matthews/Robins;

‘The Curiosities of Dudley and the Black Country 1800-1860’ by CFG Clark;

‘The Building Stones of the Dudley Area’ by Keith Hodgkins; and

Wikipedia - various.