

## A history of dining at IPS

In 2020, the new Ibstock Place School refectory was inaugurated; with a design which was acclaimed for its naturally-ventilated timber design. This stunning facility, undoubtedly, has provided an enjoyable space for pupils and staff to congregate and socialize (albeit, in a socially distanced manner for now). It joins its predecessors in the School Archives which are replete with documents showing the value of the dining experience. Indeed, dining held an important place with its physical, social, and moral value in the School's past.



Figure 1

The first official dining hall at Ibstock Place School was opened a year after the School began its residence at Ibstock Place House. Indeed, Ibstock Place had been purchased by the Froebel Institute with a view to moving its Demonstration School from its temporary 'evacuation' location (Dennison House in Little Gaddesden) into Roehampton, directly across from the Froebel Training College (now Roehampton University). The School purchased the house from Major John Paget in the Summer of 1945.

However, the property remained under possession of the Ministry of Supply, which had utilised the space during the Second World War as a headquarters for the first British Radio Observatory. While children moved onto the campus in October 1946, it was not until July 1947 that the Ministry fully removed itself, leaving the temporary huts to the School's disposal. One of these huts became the new dining hall. (figure 1) This dining hall remained in place until the 1990s, when it was replaced by the current refectory's predecessor.

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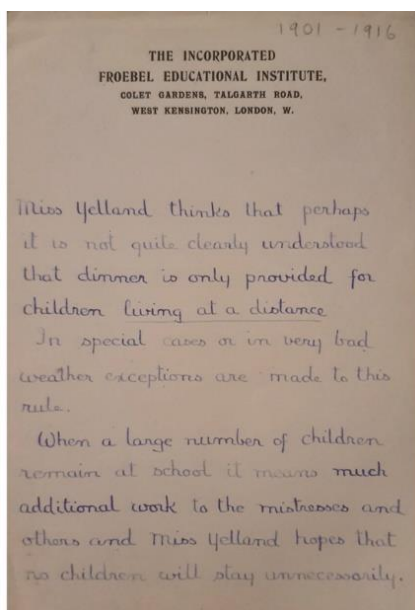


Figure 2

### *Social Spaces of Dining*

Dining was often highlighted as a much-enjoyed part of pupil life. In the early 1900s, Headmistress Anne Yelland sent a note home to parents asking that dinner be reserved only for those pupils not local to the School (then, in West Kensington). Ostensibly, the dining room was oversubscribed, which created additional work for matrons and mistresses.

'Miss Yelland thinks that perhaps it is not quite clearly understood that dinner is only provided for children living at a distance...' (Figure 2)

In a 1937, the pleasure of dining is echoed in a pupil poem written about the Froebel Education Institute. This upper IV poet illustrated dinner as a social period which it would be a crime to stop.

'There dinner is the noisiest time  
(To stop the din would be a crime!)

The experience of dining was, of course, not restricted to the aforementioned dining spaces at the School. Pupils commented often upon their love of food and dining beyond the School in their excerpts in the annual 'School Magazine'. In 1959, 12 year-old David identified his favourite dish (which he shared with his family) as a German dish called 'katofalm coucken'. In a short essay, he instructed readers how they might create this delicious meal for themselves.

'...first you peel some potatoes and then grind them on a lemon grinder then put the ground potatoes through a sieve to get the potato flour out; after this add some plain flour, then make this mixture into pancakes and fry them. It is best to eat these pancakes when they are still hot. You can put sugar or jam on them but I find them too sweet so I put mashed apples on them; this is called "affel nose" in German. When I am at home and we have it we have about three fat ones each. I like them more than any meat even chicken or chops.'

A couple years earlier, in 1955, 12 year-old Richard shared his love for porridge and stew, two meals he enjoyed to eat, and cook, while camping with his classmates. He confidently - and cautiously - recommended himself as a reliable cook for either dish.

'The thing I like cooking most is porridge or stew. I seem to have a way with stew and porridge. I do not know what it is but they always seem to turn out with me. I do not know whether it is a natural gift or if it is because I have learnt through experience, or what, but it always turns out. Although I suppose I should not count my chickens before they hatch.'

Understandably, dining was often highlighted for its social and physical benefits. However, the experience of dining also imbued certain 'moral' characteristics, as noted in the Archives.

### ***Dining as a moral experience***

Important decisions about diet were emphasized in relevant lessons, unsurprisingly. These can be sensed in the writing of 13 year old Timothy, who reflected upon the subject in 1954. Timothy concluded that moderation was a key factor in identifying what to eat. He began his short essay for the 'School Magazine' noting the tendency for some people to consider eating as a hobby.

'These people,' he asserted 'do nothing but look forward to breakfast, lunch, tea and supper in rotation.'

Alternatively, Timothy noted, you might find the other extreme in which pupil are far too busy to engage in proper meals: 'These people treat meals as a boring habit, that has to be kept to keep fit, or shall we say alive'.

Timothy argues in favour of moderation, though he is apprehensive to reveal whether or not he judiciously follows this advice himself...

'Then there are other people who find the happy medium. Those people enjoy their meals, they take them philosophically and do not grumble at having to have their food. I personally try to belong to the latter group, although whether I succeed or not will not be brought into this essay.'

Interestingly, this ethical view of eating harkens back to the pedagogical roots of the School. The moderate and, indeed, intentional consumption of 'good food' was highlighted in pedagogical literature for teachers – as well as for parents.



Figure 3

In 1879, Froebel advised his readers of the imperative to teach children to discern between good and bad food for the body.

‘Show them that the use of unripe things is contrary to Nature. Lead them to understand that the use of what is unripe is dangerous alike to physical, intellectual, and moral life – is destructive both to the individual and to society.’

He further asserted an extant link between discerning what food is bad for the body and other consumables which might wreak havoc on the soul.

‘The taste of a thing tells whether the thing itself is beneficial or baleful, life-giving or life-destroying. Indeed, all the senses exist in order that through them the soul of things may be known to the soul of the sensitive being.’

In teaching children to hone their ‘tasting’ skills, Froebel believed, educators were preparing children to discern moral characteristics.

This theory, perhaps, best translates with a classroom example. Froebelian educationalist Elizabeth Harrison, in 1890, described one lesson in her school in which she used the Froebel blocks – and an imagined ‘breakfast table’ - to inculcate moral skills.

‘One morning, while giving a lesson with the building blocks, we made an oblong form, which I asked one of the children to name.

‘It is a table – a breakfast table,’ ‘Let us play they are all breakfast tables,’ said I; ‘I will come around and visit each one, and see what the little children have to eat.

‘What is on your table, Helen?’ ‘oh!’ exclaimed she in eager delight, ‘my children have ice-cream and cake, and soda water, and’ –

‘oh, dear’ oh, dear ‘cried I, holding up my hands; ‘poor little things, just think of their having such a thoughtless mamma, who didn’t know how to give them good, wholesome food for their breakfast! How can they ever grow strong and big on such stuff as that? What is on your table, Frank?’

‘My children have bread and butter, oatmeal and cream, and baked potatoes.,’ said the discreet young father.

‘Ah!’ said I, in a tone of intense satisfaction, ‘now here is a sensible mamma, who knows how to take care of her children!’

‘Oh!’ broke in little Helen, ‘my children’s mamma came into the room, and when she saw what they were eating she  *jerked* the ice-cream off the table.’

The significant gesture which accompanied the emphatic tone, told of the sudden revolution which had taken place in the child’s mind as to the right kinds of food for carefully reared children.

The dining experience enjoys a lengthy history at Ibstock – from its roots in a pedagogy which identifies it as a crucial component to cultivating well-rounded young people, to its significance in providing spaces for social and individual pleasure. We trust that the new refectory may yield many more years of such evidence for the School Archives.

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