

### Ambleside Private School

Few of us knew about Ambleside, a private school for children below the age of eleven that operated in Ranmoor between 1929 and the 1950s. It used to occupy two adjacent houses, numbers 411 and 413 Fulwood Road;. These houses were demolished in the late seventies and replaced by the current blocks of flats almost immediately opposite the bottom of Storth Lane.

The school's existence was drawn to our attention by a lady who had attended Ambleside in the 1950s and provided a photograph of pupils and teachers at this time. The school took in around 40 children, a small number of which were apparently weekly boarders.

Ambleside School had been started as a preparatory school in 1929 by Miss Olive Yeomans who used part of her parents' home for that purpose. Miss Christine Foot ran the school between 1936 and 1939, and when she left to become headmistress of a school in Basingstoke her sister Agnes (previously a dispensing chemist) took over. Agnes Foot stayed headmistress at Ambleside until she retired about 1970. She continued living at 411 Fulwood Road until her death in 1977. The photo below was taken sometime in the 1950s. Agnes Foot is the lady in the middle of the photograph's second row.



As in other private schools, schooling had to be paid for and academic learning was emphasized. Additional teachers included Mrs. Staves, who taught English, piano and singing, and Miss Bassett-Smith, who provided ballet lessons in the Parish Hall at the bottom of Ranmoor Road. Miss Foot was responsible for teaching Arithmetic.

The following extracts about the school were taken from the Sheffield Forum website:

*"I was a boarder at Miss Foot's school. There were eight of us in Miss Foot's class, including Mrs. Staves who also taught the class! I remember the girls wore school caps like the boys – so cool! We had straw boaters for summer and a maroon and silver uniform. After homework, Miss Foot read a story [to boarding pupils] while we had supper. There was a woman who cooked and did laundry for us*

*called "Ward". She wore a very theatrical Victorian maid's uniform! . . . I liked it there. Miss Foot resembled Queen Victoria! She'd give us all a little peck on the cheek as she tucked us [boarders] up nicely each night... she really was a sweet lady. My dear Mum couldn't afford the fees so we had to leave eventually".*

*"it was all safe and comfortable; was happy at that school".  
"There was a cook called Mrs. Bevan who would heat up the disgusting school meals. I would retch at the smell of meat and potato pie when I came into the school in the morning. I became so worried about this my parents came to talk with Miss Foot. It was arranged I could have a boiled egg on those days but I had to sit at a separate table."*

Other private schools in Ranmoor at different times were in Graham Road in the late 1870s, 23 Ranmoor Crescent between c1910 and c1925, and 69 Nethergreen Road between c1902 and c1935. The Ranmoor Archive would like to expand its records about local education. **If you have any memories of Ambleside or other local schools, please let us know** ([warr@ranmoor.plus.com](mailto:warr@ranmoor.plus.com)); your recollections could be extremely valuable to readers in years to come!

### The Families of Tapton Hall

Tapton Hall, at the top of Shore Lane, has been owned since around 1960 by the Sheffield Masonic Lodge, but before then, it was home to three major Sheffield families.

The earliest record we have of a house on this site is the 1808 sketch by the surveyor William Fairbank reproduced below. It shows an earlier Tapton Hall centrally at the top of the drawing in a rural, agricultural setting near the Manchester Road overlooking an earlier Endcliffe Hall.



The house had been built about 1788 (by Joseph Badger) and purchased soon after this by William Shore, a Sheffield banker. After William died in 1822, his wife Mary continued to live here for a further three decades. She died in 1853, aged 96.

One of the interesting facts about Mary Shore is that the later-famous Florence Nightingale was her granddaughter. Florence often came to stay at Tapton

Hall as a young girl and left several written accounts of her visits. Her new surname came about after her father, William Edward Shore, changed his name to Nightingale in 1815 for reasons associated with a family inheritance.

Apart from the Fairbank sketch, we have no other record of what the early house looked like. It was clearly substantial, but when Edward Vickers, founder and head of Naylor Vickers & Company of Millsands, purchased it and its eight acres of land in 1854 he promptly commissioned architects Flockton, Lee and Flockton to knock it down and design a grander residence which became the current Tapton Hall.

It was a time when respectability was much prized and Edward Vickers certainly lived there in some style with his wife, seven other family members and eight servants. After all, he had been mayor of Sheffield in 1843, served as a magistrate and town trustee and been the first president of the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce. He began handing over the business, by then one of the largest crucible-steel manufacturers in Sheffield, to his two sons Tom and Albert in the 1850s. They initiated a period of rapid expansion with the establishment of the River Don Works in Brightside, and the introduction of a number of technical innovations which placed Naylor Vickers at the forefront of world steelmaking.

Edward Vickers retired in his 60s and, ever the aspiring country gentleman, was by 1881 residing in a large house on an estate in Worcestershire. Meanwhile, Tapton Hall had been sold in 1867 to George Wilson, another major manufacturer in the town, this time of snuff, which the family firm had been producing since the 1740s. George derived additional wealth from his investments in railway and mining companies, and he had become a director of the North Midland Railway company in 1845. Apart from owning land and several farms in the Ranmoor area, he acquired large areas of moorland at Moscar to indulge his passion for grouse-shooting. Apparently George Wilson paid £3,500 for the Hall itself, £1,424 for the furniture and £218 for the wine left in the cellar.

After George Wilson died in 1878, his wife continued to live there until 1904. She was followed by their son, George Kingsford Wilson, who was married to the daughter of Henry Dixon of Stumperlowe Hall in Fulwood. When he died in 1933, his coffin was apparently carried from Sharrow Mill up the hill to Ecclesall church by six snuff grinders as per the family tradition. In turn his son, George Ronald Wilson, lived here until he died in 1958. A bachelor, he lost both legs as the result of injuries sustained in the Great War, but still managed to pursue his hobbies of fly fishing and shooting from a swivel chair!

A year later, Sheffield freemasons purchased the property for use as a Masonic Lodge. They were responsible for commissioning the substantial extension (designed by architects Hadfield Cawkwell Davidson) and for replacing the ornamental pond with a car park. Other parts of the estate were sold to the University of Sheffield for a student hall of residence, since developed into a "village" of student halls.

## Sheffield Before Sherlock

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, Sheffield still used its long-established system of watchmen and constables to maintain law and order. But as the town's population increased, these old arrangements became inadequate.

Reform and modernization arrived after 1843, when Sheffield became a Borough. A new police force, based on Sir Robert Peel's model in London (from 1829) introduced teams of beat constables who patrolled the streets night and day, applying Peel's principle of crime prevention. This approach – relying on vigilance and a show of strength to deter would-be burglars and robbers before they committed their crimes – was reflected in the overall composition of the new police force: officers on the beat greatly outnumbered the handful of detectives employed to be ready for action, if and when lines of defence were breached. In fact, the crime rate proved high enough to require these detectives to be busy every day.

However the new officers were given little guidance about how to perform their task; they had virtually to work it out for themselves. Fortunately, the men chosen for this role were resourceful, capable, enthusiastic, and brave. So they developed their skills "on the job": they studied habitual criminals' methods, learned to recognize significant behaviour both before and after crimes were committed; and compiled records of names, addresses, known associates, favorite haunts, etc. as aids to becoming more efficient at detection and recovery of stolen goods. The detectives also exploited new inventions – in particular, "electric telegraphy" – enabling the Sheffield force to liaise with police in surrounding towns, to cut off the escape routes by which criminals hoped to avoid capture and punishment.

The detectives' efficiency brought them appreciation and rewards; but sadly, it proved to be the direct cause of some early deaths. Long hours on duty, coupled with repeated exposure to harsh weather conditions, led to occupational diseases which too commonly proved fatal. Their wives, prematurely widowed, were then left to raise their families single-handed – in times when financial compensation and support had yet to become either automatic or reasonably generous.

Society member Peter Carter has recently published a book on this subject entitled ***Sheffield before Sherlock***, and his talk to the Society in November 2018 covered several cases solved by the Sheffield detectives – at least twenty years before Conan Doyle's fictional hero first appeared.

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