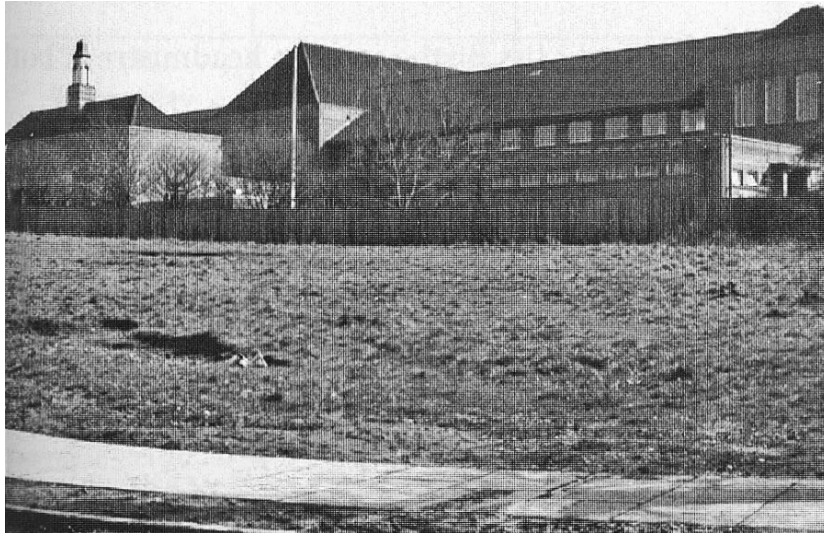


HILLSIDE SCHOOL

Hillside Avenue, Borehamwood, WD6 1HN
1939-2014

Excerpts from
The School Log Book:
about the first of four headmasters,
Mr Dennis Gernat, B.A.
and the War and after,
and his Deputies

The School (& its flagpole?) in 1939....



....and the first 7 lines of the Headmaster's Log Book:

1939.
14th Sept. This school was due to open today, but remained
opening. closed in accordance with instructions received
following the Declaration of War on 3rd September.
Staff The following Staff has been appointed:-
Mr. R.D. Gernat, B.A., Tr. best. Headmaster.
Mrs. J.J. O'Keefe, Tr. best. Assistant.

A copy of this and other Exhibition documents can be found on-line, at:

www.robertnewson.co.uk/hillside

Welcome back to Hillside School!



*This document was prepared in October, 2014 by
Keith Newson
(7 Lings Coppice, SE21 8SY; kip.newson@gmail.com)
from material presented, given or lent to him
by ex-colleagues and former pupils,
for the 75th Anniversary of the opening of the School
(in September, 1939).*

*A copy of this and other Exhibition documents can be found on-line, at:
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Only 4 Head Teachers in 61 years! - ABOUT the first one (1939-61)

Mr P D Gernat, B.A. Headmaster: Sept, 1939 to Apr, 1961

Dennis Gernat initiated the first (and only) official Hillside School 'Log Book' by writing this, on page number 1:

1939.

4th Sept. This school was due to open today, but remained closed in accordance with instructions received following the Declaration of War on 3rd September.

opening.

Staff The following Staff has been appointed:-

Mr. P.D. Gernat, B.A., Tr. Cert. Headmaster.

Mr. J. J. O'Keefe, Tr. Cert. Assistant.

Mr. A. H. Mills do.

Mr. G. J. Brew do.

Mrs. D. E. Taylor do.

Miss J. M. Durber do.

Miss J. Wright do.

Miss E. P. Loveley do.

Mr. G. J. Macklin, Handicraft Instr. (3½ days p. wk)

Miss M. Woodroffe, Domestic Subjects Instructions.

caretaker The caretaker, Mr. G. Withers, commenced duty on the 24th July 1939.

All the log-book pages in this hard-bound volume were already numbered, but there was also an alphabetical Index, which Mr Gernat decided (at first, anyway: he didn't keep this up for very long!) to use to list all members of staff with their details, starting by making this entry for himself, under G:

Gernat, Percy Dennis. Tr. Cert.; B.A. Hons. Geog. (London)
 page 1. Reg. No. 19/11288. D. of B. 19. 1. '01.
 Training College: St. Paul's, Cheltenham.
 Last appointment: Headmaster, Boreham Wood L.C. School.
 commenced at this school 4. 9. 39. Left

G

So, he was then nearly 40, trained in Cheltenham and putting down his teaching qualification (a Training Certificate, from a Church Training College in Cheltenham) before his Honours B.A. in Geography, because he gained that degree by working in the evenings at Birkbeck College, London, whilst he was already teaching in an elementary school. He was already the Headmaster at the only County Council school in Boreham Wood, which was known locally as Furzehill School, an 'elementary school' for children from 5 to 14. When the Herts L.E.A. decided to build one of their

earliest non-grammar County secondary schools (in anticipation of the London County Council building one or two of their large estates of 'council houses' in and for Hertfordshire), the plan was to begin by moving the top three years from the elementary to the secondary school, and transferring nine or ten of the Furzehill teachers with them. Gernat applied for, and got, the post of Headmaster of what he called the 'County Senior School' on Hillside Avenue; but as he had written in the new 'Log Book', other arrangements were delayed by the declaration of war!

6th Sept. Education Office notified that all members of Staff were available for duty.

11th Sept. As this school is situated in an area designated as "neutral" for Air Raid Precaution purposes, and as no measures for protection during air raids have as yet been carried out, instructions regarding opening must be awaited. In the meantime the Staff will be in attendance each day, carrying out preparations in readiness for opening, and making and fixing curtains in certain rooms for "black-out" purposes.

16th Sept. Inspector's Visit. Visit by E. G. Jeffries, Esq., N.M.S. re opening of school.

18th Sept. Copy of circular letter regarding "Schooling Air Raid in an Emergency; 'Neutral Areas'; received from Precautions Education Office.

20th Sept. At an Emergency Meeting of the Managers it was decided that the school should not be opened until adequate measures of protection for the children during air raids had been provided.

22nd Sept. Copy of letter from the County Council received stating that it is anticipated that it will not be long before work on trench shelters is commenced.

9th Oct. At an Emergency Meeting of the Managers it was decided that as work on trench shelters has not yet been commenced, the County Council should be asked to carry out measures to

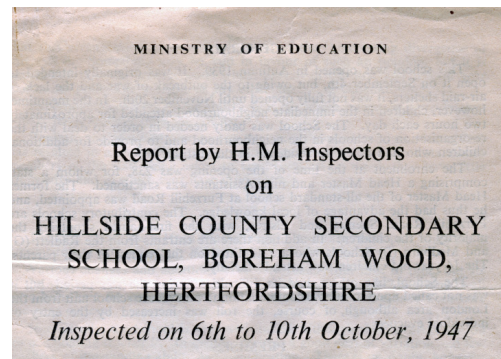
make the caretaker's room into a Refuge Room as a temporary measure, in order that air raid protection for half the estimated number of children who will attend this school should be available. Children could then attend on alternate days until such time as protection for all had been provided.

Staff . It was also decided that teachers should take turns temporarily in assisting at Shenley School in giving instruction to the Shenley senior children who will attend this school when it is opened.

The "Caretaker's Room" mentioned was in the cellars under the western end of the class-room block, with the boiler room and the coal-cellar. Other ground floor areas were turned into shelters with sandbags to make blast-protection walls. The Log shows us that the teachers and the non-teaching staff (cleaners and kitchen staff), were recruited as 'volunteers' for this and other "air-raid precautions" ('A.R.P.'), such as fixing black-out, etc. to the windows, and patrolling the buildings, and the loft spaces, during the air-raids. Most of the local air-raid warnings came later, in 1940 and '41, but the Log recorded these in detail, not because Gernat was reporting any war-damage (still less any war casualties), but because he felt he had to keep a record of pupils' attendance (and non-attendance), as well as of every staff absence (for whatever reason). The Log Book is certainly not a vivid social history of wartime Boreham Wood!

Kept by Gernat with the Log Book, was an interesting 11-page document, compiled two years after the war in 1947, with this title:

The opening paragraphs of this **HMI Report** look back to the start of Mr Gernat's second Headship, (some 8 years earlier), in that "difficult" time when Britain found itself at war with Germany. Thus this 1947 Report begins with the Inspectors' comments on the difficulties the Head and this School had faced during the war:



This school was opened in Autumn 1939. It was originally intended to open it on September 4th, but owing to the outbreak of war and the lack of air-raid shelters, it was not fully opened until November 20th. In the meantime, however, children in the immediate neighbourhood attended for approximately two hours each day. The School was badly needed in order to deal with the re-organisation of schools in the neighbourhood and to provide for additional children who had taken up residence in the district.

The enrolment at the time of the opening was 238, for whom a staff comprising a Head Master and nine Assistants was sanctioned. The former Head Master of the all-standard school at Furzehill Road was appointed, and

he thus had the advantage of local knowledge. The contributory schools are Furzehill Road, Shenley and Elstree, with the first-named supplying the majority of the children. In addition there are entrants from the Radlett (G) and Medburn (B) Schools who are admitted on the request of their parents. The 14 year old children now attend officially.

The School, like others, had its difficulties during the war period, but it was not called upon to offer accommodation to an evacuee school unit from the London area although, of course, the roll was increased by the entry of individual evacuees.

The school buildings remained substantially the same in 1947, although this HMI Report points out that the playing field “...under the 1944 Education Act, will need to be extended to 17 acres.” The Report described the buildings thus:

The recognised accommodation is 480 and consists of hall, gymnasium, six classrooms, four Craft rooms, a Science room, a Housecraft room and a flat, which includes a large practical room, a Handicraft room, three Staff rooms, a Medical Inspection room (which serves as a clinic), a waiting room and a kitchen.

However, with 407 pupils (203 boys & 204 girls) on roll by October 1947, additional ‘temporary’ accommodation (for both teaching and cooking & serving school meals) had by then been provided. The Inspectors recognized that this was a real challenge:

The raising of the school leaving age and the attempt to reduce the size of Forms, coupled with the rise in numbers owing to new housing, has made it necessary to provide additional accommodation in the form of Ministry of Works huts.

These were the ‘HoRSA’ huts - Huts for the Raising of the Leaving Age, from age 14 to 15. But Mr Gernat’s logbook entries are mainly about staff attendance (or absences), with some references to fund-raising (particularly for the war effort – for national savings, war weapons weeks, the Red Cross, or on Empire Days). There were references to fuel shortages in the particularly cold winters, but he recorded these because they meant sending some pupils home. There was probably a separate ‘Punishment Book’, but this has not survived. Gernat did record in the Log Book any of the more serious accidents to pupils, but he wrote little or nothing about the organization of the curriculum, the timetable, or the balance of courses in English, maths, sciences and craft skills, with PE and games, or other recreational or extra-curricular activities (drama, art, music, dance, etc). Individual pupils seem to be named only when they secure places on technical or commercial courses, usually in Watford, at age 14 or 15. Occasionally a visiting School Manager wrote a comment in the log, recording general, usually favourable, impressions about the children’s good manners, or (more critically) the state of buildings or equipment. At this stage, the “Managers” (unlike the later Governors) had a general responsibility for a group of schools. Otherwise the Head was accountable, day to day, to the County Education Department, who took responsibility for building maintenance, and allocated funds for books, equipment, etc, and paid the staff. Only very rarely, did the Head receive such visiting H.M. Inspectors from the Education Ministry.

Thus it is from that 1947 HMI Report that we know that Mr Gernat was then working closely with the ‘feeder schools’ and that the 11+ children were “*divided into three classes – A (above average), B (average), C (below average)*”; and that there was a fourth “*Adjustment Class, which caters for children who are very backward*”. This ‘Adjustment Class’ contained “*28 pupils of varying ages*” who were “*very backward indeed, but are taught in an enlightened, understanding and sympathetic manner by an assistant master who has attended a special course on the Education of Backward Children.*” We also see that (in 1947) “*There is no segregation of the sexes until the children reach the third year*” (i.e. at age 13+): then the girls were segregated in separate classes from boys. The HMIs were not happy with this arrangement! They were also concerned that all the teachers, with the exception of two science teachers, were non-specialists, and taught subjects as various as English, Mathematics, History, Geography, R.I., gardening, art & craft, needlework and music (which was mainly choral singing, not involving instruments or even much appreciation of recorded music), and games and physical education (with apparatus). But the HMIs did finally conclude that (in October 1947) the school was “*above the average*”; and that, as a result of the Head’s discipline and “*pleasant control, ably backed by his staff*”, “*.....the children behave in a friendly, orderly manner*”, and that “*They respect the presence of older persons, meet them naturally and politely, and generally behave in a community spirit and in an unselfish manner.*”

Although neither the Log Book nor the HMI Report is a broad and more personal view of the school and its Head in the 1940s & 50s, we can turn to other, more anecdotal evidence from Gernat’s colleagues at that time. Janet Clark was teaching in East Barnet in the days *before* 1965,

when she was appointed Head of Champions School (the third of 5 mixed secondary moderns schools that were opened in the town - and she the only woman Head!). She describes her first encounter with Mr Gernat:

"The first time I visited Hillside, the girls in the visiting netball team I was supervising were under strict orders to make no sound as we walked from the main entrance along the corridor past Mr Gernat's room. His reputation throughout the area was of a martinet. Only years later when I was Head of Champions did he and I compare our early impressions: he had been given to understand that I was a battleaxe! In East Barnet we thought of Boreham Wood as a rough place and Hillside as a rough school. A local councillor had applied for a place for her daughter at our girls' school, as she had no wish for her to attend Hillside, a co-educational school. The opportunity for her to apply for a place in a single sex school meant that that request would be granted." This must have been in the early 1950s. Later in her account of local schools, Mrs Clark wrote:

"Dennis Gernat may himself have been a pupil at a local school. I understood that he started his career as a pupil teacher at Medburn.....Within a short time of the opening [of Hillside], Mr Gernat was having to rely on a staff made up mainly of women. There were, I believe, two men apart from Mr Gernat. Was Miss Blythe the original Deputy Head? Mr Gernat once described her as 'my senior mistress'. Mr Gernat had the advantage of knowing and being known by the local families. But children from the Welsh families still needed time and discipline to enable them to settle. It was not surprising that it took time and strong leadership to establish Hillside."

There were 5 men and 5 women on the Staff list (on p.1 of the Log) on 4th September, 1939, but soon after that several of the men would have been taken away for war-work, or would have enlisted into the armed forces. Janet's reference to "Welsh families" dates back to the pre-war post-depression days, when unemployed miners were being offered a house and a new start in Borehamwood. But these challenges, of teaching children from 'problem families', continued *after* the War, when the new LCC housing estates began to fill up with people from inner London. She writes: *"In 1948 the school leaving age was raised to 15, adding yet more pressure on staffing and accommodation; Hillside, as the only secondary school, had to cope with ever increasing numbers, and I believe there were, at its peak, 750 pupils on roll. and (about the late 1950s and early 60s) she wrote "I had the impression at the time that Hillside, like other secondary modern schools, offered pupils who stayed on beyond the school leaving age the experience of studying for external examinations, such as the College of Preceptors or the R.S.A. Were their commercial courses introduced when the leaving age was raised in 1948?"*. The Log-book in these later years does begin to record the building of extra (and better equipped) class-rooms, workshops, and laboratories. Gernat also recorded the setting up of those in-school examination courses, aimed at encouraging pupils to stay on voluntarily to gain better qualifications. He was also recruiting better qualified specialist staff: Mr Harpham in 1951, Doug Harwood and Don Angood (Geography) in 1953, Wladis Kuzian (Mathematician, some time before 1958); and in 1959 G.C.E. O level passes were first recorded (Jeffrey Bliss gained 5 passes, 12 others fewer – but no credits or distinctions mentioned yet). Some specialist staff had better paid 'graded posts'; and in 1960 Diane Manser was appointed as a Domestic Science teacher, and Joan Ramsden (Art and Crafts) was appointed in June, and Beryl Radbourne (Needlework, etc) in September 1960. Dennis Gernat retired in April 1961, handing on to Bert Smith a secondary school that was almost ready to set up its own 6th Form.

Both of these Heads relied heavily on the support of their two deputies, Miss Blythe and Mr O'Keefe. Both deputies stayed on after Bert Smith had retired, and then remained in post after I took over, in January 1970. They were both very useful to me during *my* first 18 months as Head, because they knew the pupils, their siblings and parents, and knew all the Hertfordshire and other local educational and social support services.

By the end of Mr Gernat's time as Head, Mr O'Keefe (often known by his initials, as "JJ") was definitely confirmed as Senior Master and Miss Blythe (always known by that name) as Deputy Headmistress, and they were jointly responsible for formal punishments (as of course the Head was). Their details had been entered in the Index of Staff in the log-book, O'Keefe under O:

*O'Keefe John Joseph. D. of B. 20. 7. '06. Reg. No. 27/12536
pages. Training college: St. Mary's, Str. bert.
Strawberry Hill, Maiden.
Last Appointment: Boreham Wood S.H. School.
Commenced at this school 11. 9. 39. Left.*

Sadly, we haven't found a photo of Mr JJ O'Keefe.

Miss Blythe's later entry (in 1941) was under **B**:

*Blythe Thora Violet. D. of B. 11. 11. '07. Reg. No. 27/2969 L. bart.
 Training college: Fishponds, Bristol.
 Last appointment: Boreham Wood J.M. & J School
 commenced at this school 9. 9. 41. Left*

Thora Blythe (always called Miss Blythe - never Thora), had taught at Furzehill (with Dennis Gernat), but came up to join him at Hillside in September 1941. Later she was formally recognized as Deputy Headmistress, with particular responsibility for the girls; John J.O'Keefe ('JJ') was later Senior Master and taught general science and PE & Games; he had been on Gernat's 1939 list of Hillside staff. Both deputies were occasionally administering "regular punishment" (with a cane).

With the School Log Book, we found a copy of this circular letter from the N.U.T., dated October 1938:

DEAR SIR (or MADAM),

IRREGULAR CORPORAL PUNISHMENT.

The Law Committee at a recent meeting were seriously concerned to note the increase in the number of cases in which members of the Union are sued for damages or are summoned in the Police Courts for assault in consequence of the administration of irregular corporal punishment.

It is most important that it should be brought to the notice of all members, in their own interests as well as in the interests of the profession, that teachers should abstain from using irregular methods of correction, such as boxing the ears, slapping or cuffing the face or head, hitting with rulers, or other unauthorised forms of punishment. Such methods frequently lead to legal proceedings and are strongly deprecated by Magistrates and Local Education Authority. Irregular punishment may give rise to permanent injury to a scholar and even if such injury does not in fact result, damages may be claimed and the teacher be placed in serious difficulties in defending the proceedings as well as in his relations with the Authority in whose service he is engaged.

At the top of this letter was scrawled 'P.D.Gernat'. The Union's 'Law Committee' would have advised on any legal cases against its N.U.T. members. There must surely have been a school "Punishment Book" (separate from the Log Book), but this has not survived, so just how frequently the cane was used at any period is known only from unreliable anecdotal evidence.

In 1938 "regular corporal punishment" was very widely used in schools; the campaign to outlaw *all* such punishment in all schools was only just beginning.

But for pupils like **Keith Kiff**, in 1944 - who left school as soon as they were 14, and hoped to find paid work - a **Leaver's Certificate**, with the

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.

Headmaster: HILLSIDE SENIOR SCHOOL,
 P. D. GERNAT, B.A. BOREHAM WOOD.

Tel.: Elstree 1922.

Leaver's Certificate.

Name (in full) Keith Lionel Kiff.

Date entered 9.9.41. Date left 21.12.44.

Reason for leaving Exempt from further attendance.

*General Classification for scholastic ability First. Grade.

*Attainment within the above grade Excellent.

Best subjects Arithmetic, Geography.

*Regularity in Attendance Good.

*Punctuality Excellent.

*Conduct Excellent.

*Reliability Excellent.

*Speech Good.

*Appearance and Cleanliness Excellent.

Remarks A trustworthy willing boy of good record
at school for work and character.

P. D. Gernat
Headmaster.

*Grades:—First, Second, Third.
 *Scale of assessments:—Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor.

words “A *trustworthy willing boy of good record at school for work and character*” and “*first grade*”, or having “*excellent*” for conduct, reliability, punctuality, appearance and so on – was really much more important – even more so, perhaps, than gaining a ‘*first grade*’ in both *Arithmetic* and *Geography*? Surely pupils like Keith Kiff avoided getting caught breaking the rules if at all possible?

More rebellious boys than Keith might have thought an escapade worth a caning, if they believed what they had been assured, that this would then remove the stain on their record! But whether any corporal punishment did in practice teach them to change their own attitudes and behaviour is an open question.

We cannot be certain why Miss Blythe had remained as a teacher at Furzehill (the J.M.&I. school), in 1939-41, and then transferred to the new Hillside Senior School, two years later than Mr O’Keefe. They were both class teachers (and not specialists), though JJ taught PE, Geography & Science. But the Log Book confirms that it was Miss Blythe who was in charge if Gernat was away, or ill. Both Deputies were responsible for discipline, of the boys and girls respectively (under Gernat), and then under his successor, Bert Smith. In 1969, when Smith suddenly decided to apply for the headship of Mount Grace (and got the job), and when I applied for his job at Hillside, it was too late for me to resign from my post before Christmas; so Miss Blythe was Acting Head of Hillside for that Autumn Term, 1969 - and she took that responsibility in her stride!

In this 1970 **photo (right)**, Miss Blythe and I were on the Hall stage, where she (as usual) had her own stall at the annual ‘Harvest Sale’ for *Save the Children Fund*. It was the beginning of her last school year as Deputy Headmistress: she was nearing the end of her 32 years at Hillside. She was talking to me about the pupils she knew so well, who were all busy raising money for kids less fortunate than themselves. She genuinely cared about all those 11 to 17-year-old boys and girls, and about the school and the wider community in which they should have their rightful place. No doubt *that* was the secret of her discipline: it was based on respect, not on fear of punishment.

That the school already, by then, had a fine history of fund-raising for good causes - which had started way back during the war with National Savings, War Weapons Week, and The Red Cross - was also down to her! Of course we would have to move the school on after Miss Blythe (and John O’Keefe) retired; but I knew it was vital to the spirit of Hillside School that such traditions should also be carried on.



A Footnote: ‘Regular’ (though not frequent) punishment with a cane did continue throughout Mr Gernat’s and Mr Smith’s time; it was then last used at Hillside in 1981 (when Julian Marcus was my Deputy Head). It was finally and formally abolished (and this was published in the School Prospectus) as late as 1985.

Throughout *my* 31 years of teaching, I never used the cane, or used or threatened any form of corporal punishment. In U.K. state-run schools, corporal punishment was finally outlawed by Parliament with effect from 1987 (the year I retired).