

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 65

The Burston Strike School

1 Introduction

This leaflet covers the main records held by the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) relating to the Burston School Strike, 1914. Details of some resources held elsewhere, including the Norfolk Heritage Centre (NHC), Burston Strike School Museum and The National Archives (TNA) at Kew, are also listed.

2 Background to the Burston Strike

The following account is a brief outline of the Burston School Strike. There are many publications which give a detailed history of the Higdens and a more in-depth account of the strike's progress. For further details please refer to the bibliography at the end of this leaflet and to the Norfolk Library Service's catalogue, available on their website, at <<http://norlink.norfolk.gov.uk>>.

Tom Higdon and his wife Annie were appointed as teachers at the Burston and Shimpling Council School in 1911, taking up their posts on 1 February. They had previously worked as teachers in Norfolk at Wood Dalling School, 1902-11, where, as at Burston, Annie was headmistress. The Higdens were Christian Socialists and they objected to poor conditions at the school. They were also concerned about the employment of children by local farmers, which interrupted some of their pupil's education. However, many of these farmers were also school managers and the Higdens' activities, including their encouragement of the farm labourers to join trade unions, created social tensions. Eventually, the Norfolk Education Committee gave the Higdens the option of dismissal or employment at another school.

However, when the Higdens transferred to Burston and Shimpling Council School in 1911, they found that the conditions for many labouring families were very similar to those in Wood Dalling. At Burston, Tom Higdon gained election to the parish council, in the hope of making improvements, and Annie repeatedly made requests to the school managers for better conditions at the school. These activities created tensions with the rector and chairman of the school managers, Revd Charles Tucker Eland, and local farmers.

In 1914, allegations of pupil abuse were made against Tom and Annie Higdon which triggered a high profile dispute between Norfolk County Council, as the Local Education Authority, school managers, local community leaders and labour, social and political organizations. Following the teachers' dismissal, many of the school children and their parents, who believed the allegations to be fabricated, protested. On 1 April they were led out on strike by one of the children, Violet Potter, to show their support for the Higdens. Many parents refused to send their children to the official Council School and, instead, a separate school, the Burston Strike School, was established. At first, it was

held outside on the village green and, later, above a carpenter's shop in Burston.

The Strike School was supported by many labour organizations, particularly the Agricultural Labourers' Union and the Railwaymen. Eventually, enough money was raised to build a permanent schoolhouse, which opened in 1917, with George Lansbury and Sylvia Pankhurst in attendance at the ceremony. The Burston Strike became the longest running strike in history and the school existed until 1939, when Tom Higdon died. The school building still exists today and now houses a museum which tells the story of the Burston Strike.

3 Documents held and the Norfolk Record Office

The Norfolk Record Office holds a variety of documents, which provide an insight into the Burston Strike and the Higdons' activities in Norfolk. These include records of the Norfolk Education Committee, the Burston and Shimpling Council School and Burston Parish Council:

- Thomas Higdon was a parish councillor for Burston and Shimpling, and the parish council minutes record his election on 16 April 1913. Between 11 March 1914 and 14 April 1919, they contain entries concerning the strike and its consequences. Most of these entries relating to Tom Higdon and the strike were later crossed out, or noted as 'out of order' and 'untrue' in the margins, see reference PC 14/1. The Parish Council minutes for 6 October 1939 record Tom Higdon's death, reference PC 14/8.
- There are also entries concerning the Higdons' employment at Wood Dalling, which commenced in April 1902, in the school's log book, see C/ED2/120. Annie Higdon's final entry, which was thought to contain political and inflammatory remarks, was expunged from this book with permission of the Norfolk Education Committee. For a copy of the erased entry, see MC 31/51, 478X1.
- For minutes of the Norfolk Education Committee, which cover the initial period of the Burston Strike, see C/ED 16/6. There are also copies of some minutes relating to the strike in the County Council's file, reference C/ED 36/5.
- For Norfolk County Council's file on the strike, 1914-1978, see C/ED 36/5. This file includes exhibition material and photographs used at the Festival of Education, 1970, extracts from the Burston Council School log book, and a copy of the obituary for Annie Higdon from the *Eastern Daily Press*, 1946. There are also photocopies of entries in the County Council's committee minutes, 1914-1950, relating to the Burston Strike.

- For various records including letters, pamphlets, photographs and newspaper cuttings concerning the strike, collected by Bertram Edwards as research material for his book, *The Burston Strike School* (London, 1974) see MC 31/1/77.
- There is a microfilm copy of the Burston and Shimpling Council School's log book, 1903-1950, which contains references to the strike. The microfilm references for this are MF/RO 614/4 and MF/RO 615/1. The original log book is retained by Burston Community Primary School.
- There is a school management file, reference C/ED 68/131, for Burston and Shimpling, which contains brief references to the Strike School and the Higdon's. School management files contain letters from teachers and managers of individual schools to the Norfolk Education Committee, with copies of replies. The Burston file contains a newspaper cutting from the *Eastern Daily Press*, 26 January 1923, relating to the seizure and sale, on the village green, of Tom Higdon's desk from the Strike School as a result of income tax non-payment. There is also a letter from Revd Charles Millard to the Education Committee which warns of the danger of losing the present mistress of the Council School due to the rise in rent for the schoolhouse and consequences of making a 'less sensible appointment' with Mrs Higdon's presence in Burston, 1 December 1932.
- Minutes of the National Union of Teachers, Norfolk Division, include a few references to the Burston School Strike, mainly between April 1914 and 1917, which the branch supported, even though its Union Headquarters did not. The references for these records are SO 273/1/1/1 and SO 273/1/2/1.
- Minutes of the South Norfolk Labour Party include some references to Tom Higdon and illustrate his broader political activity as a member. For minutes covering the period 1918-1969, see SO 242/1/1-2.
- For a recorded memoir of Tom Potter, the brother of Violet Potter who led the children out on strike, speaking to children at Hoxton County Primary School about the Burston Strike, see AUD 16/1.
- The Burston Strike had many social repercussions for the community and some of these are documented. For diocesan court papers, 1917, relating to the controversy concerning the memorial to Sgt. Herbert Garnham, a former pupil at the Burston School, see DN/CON 179. This dispute had its roots in the Burston Strike. Herbert Garnham's father was a supporter of the strike who objected to a memorial tablet for his son being erected in the local church since its rector, Revd Charles Eland, had been an opponent of the strikers. Having failed to obtain a faculty to remove the memorial tablet, Mr Garnham went to the church and smashed it with a coal hammer. Later, in 1917, a faculty was granted for the memorial's removal. The events, including the removal of the memorial and imprisonment of Mr Garnham, are also recorded in

the Burston and Shimpling Parish Council minutes for 3 March and 27 October, reference PC 14/1.

- The NRO holds a few records documenting the Burston Rally, which is held annually on the first Sunday in September to commemorate the strike. The rally includes speeches by politicians and trade union leaders. Previous speakers have included Tony Benn, John Prescott, Arthur Scargill, Ken Livingstone and Ian Gibson. In particular, there are photographs of the seventieth anniversary rally, 1984, reference MC 2432.

4 Resources at the Norfolk Heritage Centre

In addition to documents held at the Norfolk Record Office, there are sources available at the Norfolk Heritage Centre (NHC). Several photographs of the Burston Strike School, including Tom and Annie Higdon, are held at the Heritage Centre. Some of these photographs are also available online through the Library's catalogue at <<http://norlink.norfolk.gov.uk>>.

The NHC also holds copies of local newspapers, which reported the progress of the Burston Strike, ensuing incidents and events at rallies. Please contact them direct for full details of newspapers available on microfilm and in hard copy. Their address is at the end of this leaflet.

5 The Burston Strike School Museum

The Burston Strike School Museum is based in the former Strike School building. It is managed by trustees who now run it as a visitor centre. Their website at <<http://www.burstonstrikeschool.org>> gives a history of the Burston Strike, details of the Trust's resources and publications, and information about visiting the museum. Their contact details are at the end of this leaflet.

6 Resources at The National Archives

Records concerning the Burston Strike School, particularly the school file (reference, ED 21/12712B) are held by The National Archives (TNA) at Kew. Their address is at the end of this leaflet. For further details of records relating to the Burston Strike held at TNA, see A. Morton, *Education and the State from 1833* (Kew, 1997).

7 Other Information Leaflets

Other information leaflets, produced by the Norfolk Record Office, which may be useful:

- Leaflet 32 *Schools in Great Yarmouth*
- Leaflet 55 *Guidance on the Preservation and care of School Records*
- Leaflet 62 *Education in Norfolk: A Brief Historical Outline*

- Leaflet 63 *A Guide to School Records*
- Leaflet 64 *Grammar and Independent Schools in Norfolk*
- Leaflet 66 *Exam results and Pupil Files*

8 Bibliography

S.J. Curtis and M.E.A. Boulwood, *An Introductory History of Education since 1800* (London, 1966).

B. Edwards, *The Burston School Strike* (London, 1974).

T.G. Higdon, *The Burston Rebellion* (London, 1917). There is also a facsimile copy: Trustees of the Burston Strike School, *The Burston Rebellion* (Diss, 1984).

P. Horn, *The Victorian and Edwardian School Child* (Gloucester, 1989).

A. Morton, *Education and the State from 1833* (Kew, 1997).

National Committee, *Burston School Strike and evicted Glebe Tenants* (? London, 1916).

R. Nevitt, *The Burston School Strike* (Oxford, 1992).

P. Scobie, *The School that went on Strike* (Oxford, 1999).

W.B. Stephens, *Education in Britain, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, 1998). Available through the Norfolk Library Service.

W.B. Stephens and R.W. Unwin, *Materials for the Local and Regional Study of Schooling, 1700-1900* (London, 1987).

Trustees of the Burston Strike School, *The Burston Strike School: the story of the longest Strike in History* (Diss, 1990s). Copies are available from the Burston Strike School Museum.

R. Vyrnwy-Pierce, 'The School Strike that lasted 25 Years,' *Norfolk roots*, no. 2 (Autumn, 2004) 23-27.

B. Zamoyska, *Burston Rebellion* (London, 1985).

9 Useful addresses

Norfolk Record Office

The Archive Centre
Martineau Lane
Norwich NR1 2DQ

Telephone: (01603) 222599
E-mail: norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk
Website: <http://archives.norfolk.gov.uk>
Online catalogue: <http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>

The National Archives

Kew
Richmond
Surrey, TW9 4DU

Telephone (020) 8876 3444
Website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

King Edward VII School

Gaywood Road
King's Lynn
Norfolk
PE30 2QB

Telephone (01553) 773606
E-mail: office@kingedward.norfolk.sch.uk
Website:
<http://www.kingedward.norfolk.sch.uk>

Norwich High School for Girls

95 Newmarket Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR2 2HU

Telephone (01603) 453265
E-mail: admin@nor.gdst.net
Website: <http://www.gdst.net/norwich>

Norfolk Heritage Centre

Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Library
The Forum
Millennium Plain
Norwich NR2 1AW

Telephone: (01603) 774740
E-mail: norfolk.studies.lib@norfolk.gov.uk
Website: <http://www.library.norfolk.gov.uk>

Burston Strike School Museum

Church Green
Burston
Norfolk

For visits or information please refer to
the advice on their website:
<http://www.burstonstrikeschool.org>

Norwich School

70 The Close
Norwich
NR1 4DD

Telephone (01603) 728430
E-mail: enquiries@norwich-school.org.uk
Website: <http://norwich-school.org.uk>

Paston College

Grammar School Road
North Walsham
Norfolk
NR28 9JL

Telephone: (01692) 402334
E-mail: enquiries@paston.ac.uk
Website: <http://www.paston.ac.uk>

Thetford Grammar School

Bridge Street
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 3AF

Telephone (01842) 752840

E-mail: tgssec@hotmail.co.uk

Website: <http://www.thetgram.norfolk.sch.uk>



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