

NEW EVIDENCE ON LIFE, LEARNING
AND MEDICAL CARE AT BEACON HILL
SCHOOL

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PREFATORY NOTE

Three new and evocative sets of documents on Beacon Hill School (“BHS”) are here made available. They contain unprecedentedly detailed evidence of the school’s physical layout and day-to-day operations. Apart from matters of daily life, they suggest BHS’s relations with the state, and raise questions about wider social forces in the Britain of the late 1920s and early 1930s. The documents also invite readers to make an imaginary visit to Telegraph House, Beacon Hill, in the early 1930s. With the help of these documents, as a well-known American radio commentator used to say, “You are there.”

Although there is much published work on the educational theories of Bertrand and Dora Russell, especially those they relied on at BHS, we know far less than we would like of daily life in the school. Anyone interested in experimental or “progressive” education knows how hard it is to find and to produce reliable accounts on all sides—pros, cons, and the shades of grey between. With publication of Documents I–III, we go some distance to remedying that lack for BHS.

Document I is a reminiscence of daily life and learning at BHS by Katharine Tait, Bertie and Dora’s daughter. Tait’s document dates from the end of 2003, and appears just over 70 years after the events it relates. Katharine Tait lives in the very house where her parents, her brother, John, and she spent happy holidays in the 1920s and early 1930s.¹

¹ Katharine Tait’s memoir is an extended answer to questions put by William Bruneau to her, in the first instance through an intermediary—Richard A. Rempel. Once contact was established, the Tait–Bruneau correspondence flourished without further help from Dr. Rempel. But that first exchange would not have occurred without his help, and I wish publicly to thank him.

Document II consists of medical reports on BHS prepared between 1930 and 1934 by Dr. Florence Erin Smedley, an officer of the local English authority responsible for children's welfare in Sussex.

Document III contains letters and pupil lists in fulfilment of BHS's legal obligation to report under the Children Act 1908. The lists are jointly the work of the Russells and of Dr. Smedley; a first list of boarding pupils would be prepared by the Russells, then checked by Dr. Smedley against her own records. The letters are Dorá's clarifications, additions, and subtractions to the attendance lists. Together, they show how detailed was surveillance of BHS.

None of these documents makes claims of totality or pretends to "final truth". There is no need, as all are original and primary sources offered by participants—one (Katharine Tait) a pupil at the school and the owners' daughter, another a busy pair of civil servants anxious to preserve children's health and welfare by standards of the time, and yet another the harried owners of BHS. It is for us researchers and, one supposes, enthusiasts or opponents, to make inferences and assessments.

All three documents are consistent on matters of detail, yet provide markedly different perspectives on BHS. Katharine recalls what it was like to be eating, learning, playing in one room or other at BHS, and enjoying the natural world that surrounded the school. She recovers a child's view of space and place (down to the fascinatingly horrid cesspool to the west of the house). In the end, she detects and describes the inescapable order of things and events in daily life at BHS—times, friendships, study, exploration in grounds and town—and how BHS children could not imagine the world *otherwise*.

On the other hand, we have Erin Smedley, whose outsider's view of the school is a verbal picture taken on a single day each year, incomplete even so (as photographs and pictures necessarily are). The Introduction records ideas, policies, and expectations that may have shaped Dr. Smedley's perspective. But it is for the reader, in the end, to sort these interpretive matters out for himself or herself.

In order that readers have background they may need to make ready use of the documents, the Introduction gives legal and regulatory information from the 1920s and before, some Russell family history, and a brief note on social and health policy of the day.

Throughout, there is much emphasis on matters of physical and psychological health. For many reasons, some arising from the very ideas of "progress" and "education" as the Russells understood those terms, that emphasis is to be expected. But in Document I, the emphasis is not the central point, as Katharine Tait's writing is a careful and stylish recollection for no other purposes than to answer this researcher's questions, and, one hopes, to please herself.

INTRODUCTION;
OR, DR. SMEDLEY'S SUSPICIONS

Bertrand Russell had an abiding distrust of the state and its ways, not least its way of educating young people. Writing on compulsory education in early twentieth-century Britain, Russell claimed that

[t]eachers, on the whole, from contact with children, have come to understand them and care for them, but they are controlled by officials without practical experience, to whom children may be merely nasty little brats.²

It was bad that officialdom had charge of state schools, but worse that children in them were subject to arbitrary discipline—factory discipline, really—and fed a constant diet of propaganda.³

Russell thought that until an international authority took over all schooling, it was better left in the hands either of creative and contrarian public school teachers, or of experimentally-minded private schools.⁴

When it is desired to try any innovation in educational methods, it is almost inevitable that it should first be tried in a boarding school.... (*OE*, p. 129)

The Russells' own Beacon Hill School, as innovative as Bertie and Dora could make it, opened in September 1927 in Telegraph House.

BHS was at least two hours by train or automobile from London in the South Downs of West Sussex.⁵ Harting was three miles off, and Petersfield further still. The school's rural location suggests its founders hoped isolation would protect it from official interference.⁶ But if the Russells thought this, they slightly exaggerated the risk.

On one hand, British private schools were subject in the 1920s and early 1930s to scant supervision, especially if they accepted no state funds.⁷ (The

² Russell, "Freedom in Society," *SE*, p. 179.

³ Russell, "Free Thought and Official Propaganda", *SE*, p. 160.

⁴ Russell did accept that small, weak states would have educational bureaucrats, and certainly thought an international authority would have them. He recommended such officials be taught a "broad mental outlook" and have much "expert knowledge". See Russell, *Education and the Social Order* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), pp. 86–7.

⁵ Dora Russell and Bertrand Russell, [*Prospectus for*] *Beacon Hill School, Telegraph House, Harting, near Petersfield* (1927), p. 1.

⁶ Peter Wilkinson, Archivist, West Sussex Record Office, says that BHS was in "a remote situation in the South Downs. The nearest village (or rather hamlet) was North Marden ..." (personal communication, P. Wilkinson/W. Bruneau, 15 Oct. 2003).

⁷ See the convenient summary of pertinent legislation and regulation in J. Chuter Ede *et al.*,

word “scant” is crucial, as we shall see.) His Majesty’s Inspectors of Education would not enter the premises. Nor need such a school have anything to do with the competent Local Education Authority. The Russells need not have worried overmuch about the British educational bureaucracy.

On the other hand—as Dora, Bertie, their children and their other pupils attested—the school’s rural location did not protect them from snoopily neighbours. Nor did it discourage visits by well-meaning progressive educators from most of the inhabited continents.⁸

BHS began in Telegraph House, a roomy country residence “high on the South Downs, 620 feet above sea level, and within a few minutes walk of the top of Beacon Hill which is nearly 800 feet.”⁹ There was a view on fine days of the distant ocean.

Dora and Bertie chose the location mainly because it was owned by Frank Russell, Bertie’s brother. Frank had to find a tenant, and since Bertie and Dora were looking for a home for their school, and for themselves and their own two children, John (1921–1987) and Kate (Katharine, b. 1923), Telegraph House was a natural choice.¹⁰ In any case, the fine views and rural setting suited the Russells, believing as they did in the advantages of open-air exercise,¹¹ and of proximity to historical and natural sites that could be integrated into the BHS programme.¹²

Between 1927 and 1930, the school operated with as many as 16 children, and

Private Schools and Other Schools Not in Receipt of Grants from Public Funds: Report of the Departmental Committee (London: HM Stationery Office, 1932). At p. 45, the Committee notes that under the Education Act, 1921, §§33–4, “the person responsible for a school not in receipt of grants is required to supply the Board of Education with certain brief particulars, which however are not revised by the submission of periodical returns”. Those “particulars” included the name of the owner of the school, its first location, its proposed pupil intake, and whether it kept a register. As Mr. Ede noted, once a school owner had submitted these initial data, he or she need never again report to a public authority.

⁸ Correspondence David Garnett/David Harley [Hilton, UK/Hamilton, Canada], 2 June 1980, in BRA REC. ACQ. 468; “Recollections of Beacon Hill School”, typescript, fos. 3–4: “We were less fortunate in our [“our” means “the School’s”] children. There are two great drawbacks to “prog” schools. The first is that they attract undue attention, and one suffers from visiting students of education gawping at one....” See also Katharine Tait, *My Father Bertrand Russell* (Bristol: Thoemmes P., 1996; 1st ed. 1975), p. 96, on visitors to BHS and their opinions of the school.

⁹ Bertrand and Dora Russell, *Beacon Hill School*, prospectus, p. 1.

¹⁰ On the circumstances of BHS’s opening, see David Harley, “The Russell School: Beacon Hill and the Constructive Uses of Freedom” (unpublished PHD thesis, U. of Toronto, 1980), esp. pp. 144ff.

¹¹ Tait, *My Father*, pp. 73–8, on her parents’ determination that BHS children would be well and properly fed, thoroughly exercised, and well slept—every single day. Tait says that Bertie and Dora’s idea of freedom “did not extend” to anarchy in questions of healthful eating and healthful behaviour.

¹² On fresh air, see Tait, *My Father*, p. 80.

a staff (depending how one counts) of about a half-dozen.¹³ Tuition fees may have produced £1,500 per annum. Since a typical teacher's salary in a small state school would have run somewhere between £180 and £220 per annum, and since rentals, other salaries, supplies, and further operating costs had to be taken into account, Bertie considered he must raise at least £1,200 each year to keep BHS afloat.¹⁴ This he and Dora did through lecture tours and paid journalism.

There was no move to accept state funding at BHS.¹⁵ Indeed, in 1929–30, Bertie and Dora worked with like-minded friends to dissuade the British government from offering more funds to Church of England and Roman Catholic schools.¹⁶ At BHS, independence came at a high price, but with the guarantees of equally high principle.

It must therefore have been something of a surprise when, after more than two years' operation, the owners of BHS learned they would soon be inspected under the provisions of the Children Act 1908.

The records do not show how the Medical Officer of Health for West Sussex, Dr. Ralph Smedley, came to be known, or made himself known to the owners of BHS.¹⁷ But we do know that on 15 October 1930, not long after the third

¹³ It is not yet possible to say exactly how many children were enrolled at BHS before 1934, at which point we have a list (n. 42 below, List 5) under the regulations of the Children Act 1908. Until the release of pupil files now under embargo in the Dora Russell papers, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, enrolments for any period in the life of BHS are hard to fix. This generalization applies as much to the school's eleven-year history after the departure of Bertrand Russell, 1932–43, as before.

On the make-up of the staff, see *SLBR*, 2: 262–3; letter B. Russell/O. Morrell, 16 August 1927; see also Harley, *loc. cit.*; also, Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree*, Vol. 1: *My Quest for Liberty and Love* (London: Virago, 1977), pp. 198–9, 241; and Vol. 2: *My School and the Years of War* (London: Virago, 1981), pp. 25–45. See also, below, Document 11, Report 1.

At various times in 1928–29, teaching—on a broad definition of the term—was given by the BHS school secretary, the school matron, a general subjects teacher, a science master, an art teacher, a music teacher (part-time), possibly a riding instructor, a nurse, and occasionally a medical man—not to mention the sustained teaching of Bertie and Dora themselves.

¹⁴ For comparison, see “I First Saw [Bertrand Russell]”, *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 15 Oct. 1929, p. 13, where Russell says BHS “costs him \$10,000 a year” (£2,000 at the time).

¹⁵ BHS was by no means alone in its resistance to the temptation of state funding. See Public Records Office [Kew], ED 15/36, “West Sussex and Chichester Joint Education Committee: Small Private Schools, Summary of Returns”, 6 Aug. 1919. In a list of 73 schools, with “approximately” 1,587 children in attendance, the Summary is able to say only that 37 schools kept registers of attendance, 14 did not, and 22 “may” have done. Beyond that, the document is silent, since the 1918 Education Act neither required nor permitted more state knowledge of (or intervention in) schools that took no state funding.

¹⁶ See BRA REC. ACQ. 396, for correspondence (14 May 1929) between Bertrand Russell and Charles Trevelyan on this subject, and later correspondence (18 June 1930 *et seq.*) leading to publication of a letter on the matter in the *Manchester Guardian*.

¹⁷ See “Document: Description”, below at note 40, for the archival fonds on which these assertions rest.

anniversary of BHS's opening, Ralph Smedley's wife, Dr. Florence Erin Smedley, drove up to BHS. It was the first of four attested visits to the school, and the beginning of an official relationship that lasted until the school's move from Telegraph House to Boyles Court, near Warley, Essex.¹⁸

The Children Act 1908¹⁹ significantly increased the kinds and quantities of state intervention in private life. In justification, Liberal politicians referred to overcrowding in the larger British cities, endemic poverty, uncontrolled disease, and the persistence of child labour (including labour at night, and work carried out below minimum ages set under nineteenth-century legislation).²⁰ Compulsory schooling, national work insurance, and public health standards depended, the government insisted, on a closer regulation of the private lives of the young—and thus of everyone, one might say.

An earlier Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906 allowed local education authorities to provide lunch in school on the rates (property taxes). This was a significant extension of local government power, further intensified by a 1907 Education Act legalizing medical inspections in all schools, and ordering school clinics where possible. All these provisions were recapitulated in the 1908 Act, and supplemented by still more requirements. Children could no longer be committed to prison, foster parents were to be registered, juvenile courts were established, and parents were to be prosecuted for criminal neglect where their actions had contributed materially to the ill health of their young.

In practice, it took another half-century before the 1908 Act was fully observed.²¹ A Children and Young Persons Act in 1933 made new and detailed provisions for the young, but year upon year, the Cabinet passed regulations, and revisions of regulations, in hopes of making the original 1908 Act a "living presence" in Britain.²² By 1929–30, Cabinet was agreed that inspection under the Children Act should extend to all premises where adults had supervision of children aged 7 or under (after 1931, aged 9 or under).

The Act had obvious implications for educational practice and provision.

¹⁸ According to Dora (*Tamarisk Tree*, 2: 61–3) BHS moved because Bertie wanted Telegraph House for other purposes. It is safe to say the translation to Boyles Court was not on account of official pressure from the Smedleys or anyone else in public office.

¹⁹ United Kingdom, *The Statutes, vol. XIV, from 65 Ed. VII to 1 & 2 Geo. V* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), this being 8 Edw.7.c.67, "An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Law Relating to the Protection of Children and Young Persons, etc.", pp. 563–4.

²⁰ Cf. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/deleted/library/documents6/chilpol-02.htm> [accessed 5 May 2003], "NHS Policies for Children, 1974–1998: an Overview", sec. 1, "Historical Background".

²¹ Brian Watkin, *Documents on Health and Social Services 1834 to the Present Day* (London: Methuen, 1975).

²² Viz. David Batty, "Timeline: the History of Child Protection", *The Guardian*, 10 Oct. 2002 [accessed at www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4521410,00.html, on 26 May 2003].

Even so, political sensitivities in the period made it unlikely that Local Education Authorities, or His Majesty's Inspectors, could do *all* the work implied by the Children Act. In the minds of most parliamentarians, Medical Officers of Health ("MOH") were the logical people to do at least some of it.²³ MOH would report on the health and welfare of children in private institutions of all kinds, first to the Health Committees of their own Counties, each of which would be responsible for annual statistical summaries and reports to be lodged with the Home Secretary in Whitehall.

In theory, the MOH in West Sussex should have come personally to visit Beacon Hill School. But Dr. Ralph Davies Smedley, MOH and Schools Medical Officer in West Sussex 1913–40, was married to Dr. Florence Erin Smedley, Inspector of Midwives for the County. Dr. F. E. Smedley, as her name usually appears in the reports she wrote from 1930 on, "presumably assisted her husband in various aspects of his work."²⁴

On 15 October 1930, therefore, it was Erin who came to see what was what at BHS. The result was a group of manuscript reports that, figuratively speaking, throw open the front door of Telegraph House, introducing us to the material life of the place until its removal in 1934.

Few documents so usefully illumine the physical, social, and medical circumstances of BHS, at the same time giving evidence of the local "official" view of BHS. One wonders if there are similar documents for all other progressive private schools not in receipt of any state funds whatsoever. If there were equivalent Children's Act inspections for A. S. Neill's Summerhill one would give much to know their contents.

Archivist Peter Wilkinson says that "One senses a mixture of caution, curiosity and suspicion in Dr. Smedley's notes." Part of the explanation for these attitudes lies in the Children Act, and its insistence that the burden of proof (of good intentions and practice) rested with any person or institution that cared for children. If Russell was suspicious of the state, Dr. Smedley, representative of the state, was almost as suspicious of him and Dora.

In any case, as a public official or the representative of such an official, it was perhaps to be expected that Erin Smedley would not take a broadly positive view of BHS.

After all, progress from the difficult conditions of the 1920s and early 1930s had been painfully slow everywhere in England,²⁵ and Erin Smedley may have

²³ Reprint of the relevant sections in Watkin, *Documents*, p. 418, col. 1.

²⁴ Wilkinson/Bruneau, personal communication, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Just *how* slow is the theme of John Stevenson's remarkable study of *British Society 1914–45* (London: Penguin, 1984), esp. Chap. 4, "The Economy and Living Standards", 103–42; Chap., 7, "Health and Health Services", pp. 203–20; and Chap. 9, "Childhood, Youth and Education", pp.

operated from the premiss that until proven otherwise, BHS was contributing little to national recovery. There were fly-by-night operators among the proprietors of private schools throughout the United Kingdom, and no doubt more than a few of the 73 private school operators in West Sussex had earned Erin Smedley's dislike. The question was, of course, whether BHS was a "fly-by-night" operation.

Erin Smedley's comments on the condition of the road leading to the school, and on the physical condition of Telegraph House and the surrounding estate, are at odds with the well-known views of the Russells themselves, of former pupils, and of many visitors to the school. It is their perspectives on detail of this kind, more than the facts themselves, that distinguish Documents I and II. The matter of the road comes up in both Documents, as of course do pertinent questions of deportment, food, sanitation, and the like: but what a great difference in perspective (and not just the difference imposed by the passage of time in Document I *vis-à-vis* Document II)!

Biographers of Russell, especially from Clark onward, convey the glowing reports of visitors to BHS during Bertie's time as co-owner. One is entitled to ask if these positive accounts—the house, the grounds, the food, the teaching—were entirely reliable, coming as they did from people disposed to the school and to one or both of its owners.²⁶ Report 3 mentions a broken covering for an electrical outlet, and this safety hazard was hardly a matter of opinion or taste. Passages of this kind give Dr. Smedley's views additional interest.

Erin Smedley's reports cover four of the five years 1930–34 inclusive, absent only 1932. We may infer from Dora's letters (Document III) that she came to accept Dr. Smedley's visits as necessary, if not immutable features of her administrative landscape. By February 1933 Dora indicates she prefers Erin Smedley's to Ralph Smedley's visits, thus suggesting ... a liking for the devil one knows?

Dr. Smedley had opinions about most things at BHS, but on the empirical side, her sustained description of Telegraph House, of the diet and the exercise patterns of the children, sleeping arrangements, and the like, are valuable—

243–65. Cf. Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900–1967* (Harmondsworth, Mddx.: Pelican, 1970), sec. 4.1, "The Economy, the State and the Working Classes", pp. 143–66.

²⁶ Clifford and Joan Allen, David Garnett, Gerald Bullett, Sylvia Pankhurst, and Miles Malleson were among the writerly intellectuals whose children either attended or lengthily visited BHS. Most of these adults, not to mention the likes of Ethel Mannin, liked BHS—the place and its ways. Virginia Nicholson's delightful *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900–1939* (London: Viking/Penguin, 2002), pp. 87–8, talks of BHS. But all 362 pages of the book make a collective biography of the free-spirited "experimenters" who made the 1920s and 1930s a literary and artistic feast in the Britain of the inter-War period. The times were hard, but these were enthusiasts, and BHS benefited from their effusions. But just as one may be mildly sceptical of Erin Smedley's views, one may fairly question the opinions of the Bohemians who loved BHS.

whether or not accompanied by her own opinions. It is bracing to read her notes on these relatively indifferent matters, spiced as they are with comments on the national origins of the staff and aristocracy of the owners, on who is married to whom, on the absence of rules of discipline (maybe or maybe not within her official brief as a visitor under the Act).

As a balance to Dr. Smedley's reports, we have attendance lists. Dora provided the MOH (sometimes abbreviated CMO, for County Medical Officer) in satisfaction of requirements at §§1–3 of the Act, an illustrative example of which appears in Document III. These attendance lists may be read as a barometer of the school's success in retaining pupils. But they are no less revealing of apparently distant matters, such as which pupils came from the distant United States, and what happened with young children deprived of parents for long periods, unsurprisingly liable to be removed at short notice from BHS.²⁷ Further, although we have knowledge²⁸ of children judged to be "difficult," the five lists transcribed in section 2 of the Document suggest there is much more to be learned.²⁹

We have first, though, Katharine Tait's memoir. Tait's choice of detail, and her inclusive approach to description, immediately distinguish her work from the much earlier Smedley reports. But the difference is more than one of selection. Tait persistently asks what were the effects on her as a child of BHS practices, of BHS's physical set-up, and indirectly, of the school's curriculum. Document I raises at once broad questions of pedagogy *in private*—where Document II is, unsurprisingly concerned with social practice *in public*. The documents ask to be read together.

²⁷ Because of some pupils' relatively short stays at BHS, a complete and faithful census is difficult to make. Dora Russell often claimed that attendance ranged as high as 20, or even for a short while, 25 pupils. Records in the PRO, the West Sussex Record Office, and the Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, justify a claim in the range 15–20. I have settled, for the time being, on 16 for the years when Bertie was co-owner and co-director of BHS.

²⁸ Dora's and David Harley's discussions of this matter are helpful, *q.v.* in *loc. cit.*, as is Bertie's hair-raising discussion of "problem children" in his *Auto.*, 2: 154–5.

²⁹ Dora and Bertie wrote regular reports on all pupils, dealing with general behavioural and psychological questions, not just educational ones. These are held in the Dora Russell papers at the International Institute for Social History, but are embargoed in most instances until 2020. We shall have to rely on inference to help us for some years to come, and the few reports in BRA REC. ACQ. 53, 370g.

DOCUMENT I. MEMOIR

“Memories of Beacon Hill”
by Katharine Tait³⁰

First, the mile-long flint drive, lined with young copper beech trees (now in 2003 forest giants). Then the long sloping lawn to the left and dense shrubbery on the right, giving way to further lawns in front of the house. There have been so many pictures, I don't really need to describe the outside of the house, except perhaps the sunken lawn in front of the library wing, with its screening ever-green hedge and useful side door. We used to play dragon and Tom Tiddler's Ground³¹ on this lawn and the side door was home.

Beside and behind and beyond the house were enormous, magnificent beech hedges, taller than a man. They reached up the hill to the left of the house and surrounded the tennis court, beyond which was an old summer house of Uncle Frank's,³² surrounded by briar roses. This was later replaced by a large corrugated iron catchment for rain, as we were always short of water. Behind the house was a fine vegetable and flower garden tended (at first) by an old man called Edom. We called him Mr. McGregor, as in *Peter Rabbit*. Outside the hedge beyond the garden was a chalk lane going up to the top of Beacon Hill and beyond it, in the undergrowth, the cesspit, all seething and stinking, which we used to contemplate with fascinated horror. Also across the lane and down the path was a cottage taken over for the staff, in which we once had cooking lessons.

Coming back to the house, on the left of the front door was another dense shrubbery, with a huge Scots pine in the middle of it. This shrubbery concealed what estate agents call “the offices”, on the left a long shed with generator for the electricity, terrifyingly noisy, with long leather drive-belts doing God knows what. Between shed and house, a glass-covered area leading to a fine kitchen and back garden and other sheds for various purposes. All this part was not off limits, but not often visited because we mustn't interfere with the working staff. The kitchen had a big coal range, a large table, a pantry room with big refrigerator and eggs in vats in some kind of keeping solution. Also there was an entry

³⁰ Manuscript, 4 leaves, completed 2 Oct. 2003; copy in BRA REC. ACQ. I,426. Footnotes to this and two later documents are by William Bruneau.

³¹ http://www.little-folks.com/games/games_10.htm gives the rules of this game.

³² John Francis Stanley (“Frank”) Russell, 1865–1931, was Bertrand Russell's elder brother. Frank Russell became 2nd Earl Russell in 1878. Bertie and Dora in 1927 rented Frank's country home—Telegraph House, on Beacon Hill in the South Downs—as a “perfect place” in which to hold a private and experimental school.

to the cellar, with huge central heating boiler—though this was serviced from a door at the other end of the house. Once a kitten got lost in the cellar: we could see and hear it mewing at an air brick, but had some trouble finding it in the labyrinth.

Leaving the “offices” and coming back to the front door, there is a low porch with two urns and then you are in the huge and useless hall, with a door on the left to the staff dining room-cum-office, a door ahead to the passage to the kitchen, then behind pillars the grand, shallow staircase going round to the upstairs. This big hall had an ell to the right where we had our meals, which were wheeled in on a trolley from the kitchen (I still have this) and served from a table to us as we stood in lines. Nourishing food, but not delicious. I still remember boiled calf’s head and tapioca pudding and, of course, the bread baked hard for the good of our teeth. Some of us used to put butter on the ends of our knives and flick it at the ceiling, where it melted into grease spots. At the end of meals, we would sit at the bottom of the stairs, waiting for the trolley with mugs of water. For some reason, it was considered bad to drink with meals.

Another door from the hall led along a passage to a big room which was a dormitory, full of excellent child-size beds made by the blind, as their labels proclaimed. For some reason, we always quoted this as “mad bi the blind”, with a short i. Beyond this room to the right, steps went down to a cold bathroom, two small bedrooms and the library, the best room in the house. A big room with a bay window with benches under it, shelves all round the room and under them low cupboards for us to keep our stuff. Small tables and chairs in the middle, for this was our classroom, where Betty³³ taught science and English and we made up our plays. We learned to use the encyclopaedia and other books and to do writing and arithmetic and copy her neat illustrations of human anatomy. There was a cardboard person on which you could fold back layer after layer, to see muscles, and organs and bones. It was fascinating.

Back in the hall, in the large alcove under the stairs, was a pianola with amazing perforated rolls that produced music when you put them in. The Welsh cook, Walter, used to play the piano too and sing such songs as “When your hair has turned to silver”.

Upstairs were three more dormitories, big rooms, and a small sick room with one bed. When we had epidemics of colds or flu or, once, whooping cough, we

³³ “Betty” was Elizabeth Cross, who at some time “taught almost everything” at Beacon Hill School (Tait, *My Father*, p. 86). Betty was keen to make use of Beacon Hill’s house and grounds as sources of object lessons, but was also the person most closely associated with the creation of the collective plays written by children at the school and later published as *Thinking in Front of Yourself* (London: Janus P., 1934).

were kept in bed in our usual rooms. In bed till you had a normal temperature for 24 hours—matron (a trained nurse) was tiresomely strict about this. Also upstairs the big bathroom where we sat on pots to do our business and had our hair washed over the basin with soft green soap from a tin. Got dosed with radio malt³⁴ too—those who were lucky—the less fortunate got cod liver oil. Through a door to the back stairs were three small bedrooms, one of which was later my mother's. (It says something about the school that I can't remember where my parents slept while they were both at the school—though I'm not sure what it says.)

Going up still further was a small room with a round window and then, at the top, the tower with windows on all four sides, looking out over the downs to the sea. This was my father's study, where we used to go for history lessons, always fascinating.

Coming down and going out again, up the lawn to the "bungalow" my mother had built, where we had some lessons and could do some craft work on our own. It had a loft you could only reach by climbing the rope or the hand rings and it was everybody's ambition to be big and strong enough to get up there. I barely managed it.

Outside again, down the drive and off along a footpath to another long hut, this one used for science lessons with Boris,³⁵ a most magical teacher. Nowadays no children, let alone such young ones, would be allowed to handle the materials from which we learned. It says much for Boris that there were no accidents.

Further on down the drive was a corrugated iron hut which, for some reason, we called the nigger hut. This was our art room, with plasterboard walls on which we painted and tables for potato cuts, lino cuts, all kinds of painting and basket work. Another magical place.

And all around were 200 acres of woods and valleys, with deer and rabbits and stoats and weasels and huge yew trees we could jump into from higher trees and absolutely magnificent beech trees for climbing. Down the back drive, called the green drive because it was overgrown, were the Roman remains; exciting, though they never produced much.³⁶

³⁴ Radio malt was widely popular in Britain from 1920 to about 1950 as a vitamin supplement. It is uncertain, according even to aficionados of the product, how it came to be associated with "radio".

³⁵ Boris Uvarov, the son of an émigré Russian scientist, was a much-loved teacher mainly of natural science at Beacon Hill. He passed on a certain amount of Russian language and literature to interested pupils during his years at Beacon Hill.

³⁶ Dora Russell, *Tamarisk Tree*, 2: 41: "[A] great find was Romano-British pottery actually within our grounds, where there must have been some sort of settlement. One treasure was a bronze ornament belonging to the harness of a horse; we had some fragments of pottery identified by the

The school had two cars, an Austin 7 and an Austin 12, in which we went to Chichester and sometimes to the beach at West Wittering.

We went for long walks, too, beyond the grounds; to Elsted, to Harting, to Chilgrove, to North Marden and East Marden³⁷ and further, as we got bigger. Harting was three miles away from Beacon Hill and that's where we spent our pocket money on sweets, then toiling three miles back again uphill. On rare trips to Chichester we could buy balsa wood planes with wind-up rubber propulsion, the size you could buy depending on how much pocket money you had saved.

It was an isolated life, I suppose: no radios, no TV, no newspapers among the children, few visitors except tradesmen and occasional parents. Except at the end of term shows, when we performed our latest play, put together by us under the skilful direction of Betty. It never felt isolated, there was so much to see and do and learn and always the other children and the staff. Not all the children were nice and I did often feel lonely, but the real freedom to learn, to roam, to experiment—it was incomparable.

DOCUMENT II. REPORTS

Reports on Beacon Hill School, 1930–1934

*by Dr. Florence Erin Smedley, acting as Medical Officer of Health for Sussex Country*³⁸

British Museum.” The find was reported by S. E. Winbolt, “A Roman-Celtic Farm Site; Discovery Near Harting, Sussex”, *The Times*, 10 Sept. 1934, p. 7. More details were provided by young John Russell, *ibid.*, 18 Sept. 1934, p. 8.

³⁷ Bertrand Russell thought parents and other visitors to the school would want and even expect pleasant lodgings for the short periods they would spend at BHS, either inspecting the place, or leaving children off at the start of term, or collecting them at the end. The school therefore rented a pleasant, substantial building named Battine House, next to the rectory at East Marden, a little more than two miles south of the school. A chauffeur brought visitors from Battine House to the school, and some BHS staff lived there for long periods.

³⁸ West Sussex County Council Children's Department. File for Mrs. Dora Russell's school at Telegraph Hill, 1930–34. West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom.

Inventoried at the West Sussex Record Office at
WDC/CH/16/1/128

Four manuscript reports by Dr. Florence Erin Smedley, Inspector of Midwives for the county, but acting as assistant to her husband, Dr. Ralph Davies Smedley, Medical Officer of Health for the County of West Sussex, 1913–1940.

Report 1: 15 October 1930

Report 2: 1 October 1931

Report 3: 3 March 1933

Report 4: 21 June 1934

Dr. Smedley's reports went through several reviews—the typists had to read them, and probably annotated them now and again; Smedley herself had to check them against her own memories and

Report 1

Children Act 1908

The Hon. Mrs. Bertrand Russell
Telegraph House, South Harting

October 15th, 1930

This house is more easily approached from Chichester—only about 8 miles. It is a very big estate, which is held by Mr. Russell on a long lease. The house is approached by an execrable drive of a mile long, which is a mass of loose flints. It is likely to remain so as it would cost about £300 to make it good. The estate gives one an impression of neglect and the interior of the house is also shabby and very plainly furnished.

Telegraph House is really a Nursery school which was opened 3 years ago and is run in terms like other schools, so that most of the children go away for holidays. The holidays are as follows: 14 days at Xmas. 3 weeks at Easter. Summer holidays 1st week in July—3rd week in September. The fees are £150—£180 a year.

The children are obtained by advertisements inserted in the “New Statesman” and “The Nation”. Some of the children are American. Mrs. Russell states the school caters for children between the ages of 4 and 11, but she would be prepared to keep them on to 15.

The teaching staff consists of a (1) trained nurse but the one I saw (a hard-faced woman) was leaving shortly, (2) an assistant nurse not qualified, (3) a Froebel trained teacher, (4) a Swiss man trained under some well known person at Geneva who likes games, (5) A lady who teaches drawing (a German married to an Englishman), (6) A lady who teaches music (an American married to an Englishman).

Mrs. Russell usually takes the foreign languages. All her staff is resident but live at Badene (?) [=Battine]³⁹ House, East Marden.

In addition there is a visiting music teacher.

The school is medically inspected every fortnight by Dr. Dorothea Taylor of Petersfield (who also is the inspector for Bedales school).

Mrs. Russell showed me the weekly menu, which includes a lot of fruit and

private notes, for accuracy; her husband Ralph had to give the typed version a once-over; the typed version (original and carbon copy, presumably) went to London and, possibly, to county files long since lost.

³⁹ Battine House was listed in the 1930 West Sussex County *Directory* with Bertrand Russell as the occupier and as a major landowner in North Marden Parish, probably because of the size of the Telegraph House estate surrounding BHS.

green vegetables and drawn up on lines recommended by Carnegie Shops Picadilly.

I did not go fully into the domestic staff, but a man and his wife act as cook and house parlourmaid respectively and in addition there is a 2nd house parlourmaid.

When I visited the younger children were having a rest on stretcher beds on the verandah of an open air school room.

I was shown all the house and the accommodation is ample for the present numbers but if the numbers increase very much this point would have to be gone into. *Mrs. Russell is aiming at 30 pupils.*

There are 2 bathrooms each filled with a row of basins with hot and cold water—the water is not unlimited, so immersion in the bath is not the regular procedure. The children stand in a basin fixed over the bath and are sprayed with hot or cold water according to season and health. When shortage of water occurs at one time, it is brought by water cart from Badene [=Battine] House.

Mrs. Russell is a highly cultured woman and a writer of books etc. Her manner is gentle and her children appeared very much at their ease with her when she took me round. She has great ideals. She has 2 [*sic*] children, a girl of about 9 or 10 and a baby of 3 weeks (a beautiful specimen of babyhood). The girl of 9 shares the routine with the other children.

Either Mr. Russell or herself is always on the premises, they never go away together.

Mr. Russell is brother to Lord Russell.

Of the children on the list 1. 3, 7 have left and No. 9 is new Derek Forbes. She thinks her secretary must have notified his reception but she promised to look into the matter at once.

[signed] F. Erin Smedley

When I visited Mrs. Bedalt at Harting “she told me the villagers called Telegraph House a Bolshie school or a socialist school. Mrs. Russell writes articles in the papers that children ought to be removed from their parents at an early age”.

Report 2

Children Act

The Hon. Mrs. Bertrand Russell
Telegraph House
Harting

Oct. 1st 1931

Mrs. Russell away. I saw the Matron Miss Griselda Mair, S[tate] R[egistered] N[urse], Liverpool Children's Hospital. There were no children here except 2

Russell children as term does not begin till Saturday Oct. 3rd. I also saw the Secretary and as ascertained from her that:—

- (1) David Semple left this house to rejoin his parents in America in June 1931. Not notified and it was not sure if he was returning again—but now known not to be returning.
- (2) Boswell, David left Dec. 1930
- (3) Phillip, June left July 1930
- (4) Bickford, Judith left June 1931
- (5) Sanders, Bradley left July 1929
- (6) Tragash, Naomi left June 1931
- (7) Holden, Jacqueline left ?

All of whom I am informed have returned to their parents.

Mrs. Ellen Calverton was not here at my visit but is returning on Saturday and many more children are expected—a total of 19—but many over 7.

I called the attention of the secretary to the extremely inadequate fashion in which the regulations were carried out and told her that *strict compliance with the act was expected and would be enforced.*

She had recently had a great overhaul of papers and came across a copy of the act together with forms of notification received from the office relating to reception and removal of infants.

She promised to file these in writing by specified time with regard to the children under 7 admitted to the school on Saturday next.

There are 4 dormitories:

2 on the ground floor accommodating 3 and 5 children respectively.

2 on 1st floor accommodating 5 and 5 respectively.

1 small room with one bed.

All the beds are of the divan variety and are low.

The walls of the rooms are very shabby.

The staff consists of a secretary (woman).

Matron and assistant (untrained).

3 teaching staff.

And a visiting staff from London for special subjects.

Domestic staff 2 gardeners, chauffeur.

3 housemaids, cook.

The staff, with the exception of the Matron, live in a house on the Estate.

Dr. Taylor, Petersfield, visits the school fortnightly for a medical inspection.

The whole place appears to me very derelict. The drive 7/8 mile is too

appalling for words and is almost impassable for motor cars.

They succeeded to the title last year on the death of his brother Lord Russell—but they do not assume the title—they prefer to be called Mr. and Mrs. Russell.

F.E.S.

Report 3 [begins without an official heading]

The Hon. Mrs. Bertrand Russell
Beacon Hill School
Harting, Petersfield

3/3/33

These are the same premises under another name. The derelict condition of the building has not improved since my last visit. It is generally in a bad state. There are 24 children in the school, which caters for both sexes up to 12. As absolute freedom is allowed to the children, there being no rules of any kind except those made by the children themselves and destructive propensities show themselves. The plaster of the bedroom wall was knocked about and the electric switch cap broken, exposing the terminals. This was in the boys' bedroom. *Boys and girls under 7 sleep in the same and at one time, this practice prevailed amongst the elder boys and girls but the girls decided they would like to be separated and this was consequently done.*

The bigger children make themselves into a council and decide quite a number of matters for themselves.

At the time of my visit, 11:45 a.m., all the small children were asleep in their beds, and the bigger ones were resting in theirs and were being read to. At the time of my departure, boys and girls were queued up, to collect their dinner and take it to the table which they lay themselves. Several of the boys were wearing their caps.

The beds are all of the divan type. Beds are made by the children under the supervision of the Matron, and even the 7 year olds perform this task.

I examined one bed and it was fairly tidy. Instead of sheets flannelette blankets are used.

The staff consists of a Matron (SRN), an assistant Matron, a Froebel trained teacher, an Oxford man who gives instructions in Science, a master trained at the Royal College of Art for Handicrafts. Miss Mollard, who is a trained dancing mistress, and she also undertakes the Secretarial work—all these are resident.

There is also a visiting Music Teacher.

The children all appeared happy and merry.

FES

A Dr. visits the house every 5 weeks.

I examined the menus. These were well drawn up.

Report 4 [begins without an official heading]

The Hon. Mrs. Bertrand Russell
Beacon Hill School,
South Harting

June 21st 1934

Mrs. Russell stated that the lists supplied in September 1933 at the opening of the school year were sent and that those that did not return were not on the list because they had left.

The following have left: McNalty July 1933. She has returned to her adopted parents.

The two Notts left in June 1933 and are in London with their mother. Janna Kapp and Jean Forbes have also left.

Mrs. Russell will be leaving South Harting at the end of the term, July 1934 and will establish her school either in Cornwall or in Cambridgeshire. She was uncertain, as it depended on the finding of suitable premises. The move has been decided upon owing to the great difficulty over the water question. She has found it necessary to ration this since Christmas 1933. She stated there had been sufficient to carry out the usual routine with regard to the children's daily ablutions, but not enough to allow of much scrubbing of floors.

The dining room, the kitchen and several of the dormitories had been dis-tempered since my last visit and much improved thereby, but the paint work generally was in a very bad state. I noticed one switch cap missing in the big boys' dormitory and called her attention to it (reported it my last visit also).

The younger children were having their morning rest and were asleep in their beds with an assistant in charge. They looked peaceful and cosy.

The elder ones were assembled in a class room, having a lesson in history.

I interviewed the Matron, a fully licensed Nurse and examined the menus and the weight records. A woman doctor visits the school at regular intervals and inspects all the children.

An epidemic of measles broke out early in the year, I was informed by Mrs. Russell that no complications resulted.

F.E.S.

**DOCUMENT III. COMPLIANCE
EVIDENCE OF ATTENDANCE AND PUPIL RETENTION AT
BEACON HILL SCHOOL**

The document set begins with a sample attendance list provided by the secretary to Dora and Bertrand Russell to the Medical Officer of Health, West Sussex, England, in respect of the operation of Beacon Hill School, 1932-34,

and verified subsequently by Dr. Erin Smedley.

Two letters from Dora Russell to Dr. Smedley then follow, illustrating the way the school complied with several legal requirements applying to it under the Children Act.⁴⁰

Attendance List: 24 February 1932

Beacon Hill School
Harting, Petersfield
5th Oct. 1931

Dear Dr. Smedley,

As promised, I am giving you below a complete list of the children under seven years of age that we have here up to date. Most probably we shall be having one or two more during the next few days; if we do, I will not fail to send you one of the printed forms with the new arrivals filled in.

Yours very truly,
[signed] Olive Harrington
Secretary.

- √ Derek Forbes, born 23/8/1925, home address: Mr. & Mrs. Forbes,
Robinswood House,
Hucclecote,
near Gloucester.
- Halfdan Kielland, 22/3/1926 " Mr. & Mrs. Kielland,
20, Montagu Square, W.1.
- √ Joy Calverton, 13/9/1926 " Miss Corbett,

⁴⁰ West Sussex County Council Children's Department, West Sussex Record Office, at WDC/CH/16/1/128. Six attendance lists, of which the list published here is the first. The entire sequence is as follows:

- List 1: 15 October 1930
- List 2: 1 October 1931
- List 3: 3 March 1933
- List 4: 21 June 1934
- List 5: 3 March 1933
- List 6: 21 June 1934

Typescript with manuscript notations in the hands of Dora Russell, Olive Harrington (secretary to the Russells at BHS), and Dr. Erin Smedley. Checkmarks opposite some children's names were entered most likely by Dr. Smedley or a member of her staff, as her own lists and records were reconciled with lists provided by BHS.

The file closes with two letters from Dora Russell to the West Sussex County Medical Officer of Health.

- 26 September 1932
 - 22 February 1933
-

Bradley Sanders, 24/9/1926	"	6201, Clear Spring Rd, Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. Mr. & Mrs. Sanders, Five Gables, Laurens, Otsego County, New York. U.S.A.
Jonathan Pritchard, (date of birth not yet known, but will forward as soon as possible—about 5½ yrs.)	"	2, The Croft, Hampstead, N.W.3.

[annotation on original:] 24/2/32 CMO notified of present position (i.e. that no notices have been received since immediately after Dr. F. E. Smedley's visit).

Letter 1 from Dora Russell

The County Medical Officer of Health
47, West St,
Chichester.

Beacon Hill School
Harting, Petersfield,
September 26th, 1932

Dear Sir,

I enclose notification of new young children in this school. I have notified all, though in the case of four of them the mothers are living here.

Bradley Sanders, who left here last term, will not be returning, though I had expected him back. I see that I am really required to notify always when the children leave. My secretary may have attended to this matter in term, as she usually did, but she is no longer here. I should like to know if it is necessary to send in notifications every time these children go home for the holidays. There are many schools now who take them very young, and it means much extra work to notify holidays, though we have notified final removals.

My under sevens this term are as follows;

Joy Calverton (not yet arrived) age 6
Jonathan Pritchard age 6 this October
Jeremy Pritchard age 4 this August
Halfdan Kielland age 6 last March (not yet arrived)
Jeremy John Maberly age 2 this November.

in addition the new ones filled in on the form.

Yours faithfully,
[signed] Dora Russell
Principal.

[annotation on original:] No notice has been received in respect of 3 removals.
Dr. F. E. S. last visited *Oct. 1931*.

Letter 2 from Dora Russell

Dr. Ralph Smedley,
County Health Office,
47, West Street,
Chichester.

Beacon Hill School
Harting, Petersfield,
22nd February, 1933.

Dear Dr. Smedley,

Thank you for your two letters. I am sorry that Dr. F. E. Smedley is not able to come here on the 22nd, but we shall be very glad to welcome her when she finds it convenient. I would be glad of an appointment if she wishes to see me, as now and then I am in London for business appointments.

I am not absolutely clear about the new regulations under the act, do they mean that children up to nine years, even in properly staffed boarding schools, have to be reported to the local authorities? If this is so, the following is the list of children under nine years of age at present in this school. They will be remaining here until April the 1st, and will all leave me then, with two exceptions, returning on the 22nd of April.

Jeremy John Maberly, aged two.
Jeremy Pritchard, aged four.
Jonathan Pritchard, aged six.
Joy Calverton, aged six.
Derek Forbes, aged seven.
Halfdan Kielland, aged six.
Bertram Sanders, aged eight.
Janna Kapp, aged eight.

The following have just entered:

P.T.O.⁴¹

⁴¹ The verso of this letter is blank. The letter was continued on a second sheet of letterhead.

Bobby Muller, aged six.

Betty Muller, aged ~~five and a half~~. four

Peter Johnson, aged ~~four~~. five and a half

The two children who will be remaining for the Easter holidays are Bertram Sanders and Joy Calverton.

Yours faithfully,
[signed] Dora Russell
Principal.