Our School.

A History of Carstairs Junction Primary School – from the old to the new...

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1. THE EARLY YEARS

In 1863 the old Caledonian Railway School opened to provide a school for the children in Carstairs Junction, whose parents worked on the railway.

The old school site is where the old Ponderosa Pub is now situated.

The Caledonian Railway built the first school and the school board built the second, where we are now, as they needed a larger building for the pupils in their care. When it opened in March 1904, the pupil role was 189.

The school was formally opened by Sir James King Bart, on Friday 25th March, 1904.

The first Head Teacher was Mr. William A. Russell. He was joined by the first teachers: Mr. Douglas and Mr. Wilson.
When the school first opened the boys and girls playgrounds were separate, mainly because the boys played rough games. They also each had their own entrance doors to the school. The canteen was located in the girls playground.

The new school had a Junior Department for primary pupils and a Secondary Department for those who were older.

In the 1930s, an extension was built. This would be known as the 'annexe' and the infant pupils were to be placed here.
Life at the school 100 years ago was different from life nowadays. The school days started at 9.00am and finished at 4.00pm. You started school when you were 5 and finished when you were 14 or 15 years old.

There were 4 classrooms at the bottom end of the school, and 5 at the top. The Hall was used on Fridays for a Church Service.

Discipline was very strict. For example, pupils had to write using their right hand only. If you tried to write with your left hand you would have your hand hit with a stick. If you got into trouble or you were silly in class you were in danger of having the chalk board duster thrown at you or you could have received 'the belt'.

Classrooms were set out in rows. Instead of having paper and pencil to write with, each child had a slate and chalk.

Pupils had playtime outside and the games they played were not so different from ours today: hop scotch, skipping, football and rounders, for example. Some of the games they played were just called a different name - for example, 'Jailbreak' used to be called 'Bedlam'.

When they went over to the canteen the pupils were offered a variety of hot, healthy meals. Favourites were stew, mince, soup, fudge cake, steam pudding and trifle.
Polish Soldiers in Carstairs Junction

The second world war saw the classrooms at Carstairs Junction Primary School filled with some very different ‘pupils’. In 1940, the school welcomed Polish soldiers who had been forced out of their country after Germany’s invasion of Poland. As the school journal of September 1940 recounts:

“The school resumed on Monday 9 September. The re-opening was delayed on account of the Military being in occupation of the new portion of the school.”

Many Polish soldiers were based in South Lanarkshire and it was the 2nd Signal Squadron who were posted to Carstairs Junction Primary School. They were put in the new school extension. When they arrived, the infant pupils were moved to the Scout Hall.

The soldiers also stayed in temporary black Nissen huts, which were placed in the playground. While they were there they trained to fight in World War 2.

Although the Polish Soldiers were occupying the local school, people in Carstairs Junction were happy to accept them as new villagers.

Many people still remember the Polish Soldiers being here. Mrs Harvey remembers one occasion fondly, when a Polish Soldier “drove a tank down Coronation Street and whistled at my sister.”

Mrs Cheeseman can remember the Soldiers holding “the most wonderful parties. We had a lovely time. We always looked forward to our Christmas parties.” She also remembers that, even during rationing, the Soldiers “had such wonderful cakes and sweets and they gave us them. How they got them, we don’t know.”
When the Polish soldiers left in 1944, they presented the school with a hand made plaque of the Polish coat of arms - a white eagle. It was presented to two pupils, Isabelle Howieson and Jean Waters. Jean still clearly remembers the day they received it, “I think we were only chosen for the presentation because we were wearing tartan skirts that day.”

The plaque (pictured) still hangs in the school today.
Plane Crash!

On 13th July 1940, a dramatic historical event happened in Carstairs Junction. An unauthorised flight patrol made a forced landing into the Primary School's playground at 2.00am.

It was a Hawker Hurricane military plane, flown by Flight Lieutenant W.O.L Smith. The plane hit the church steeple, then ripped off the top of the boys' toilets in the school, before landing in the top playground. Air raid wardens rushed to the scene of the drama to find the crushed remains of the aeroplane. The pilot was miraculously unhurt and safe.

A Hawker Hurricane plane like the one that crashed into the school

We have since spoken to an eye witness, Robert Cowan, who told us his version of events:

Robert said: “It all happened in the middle of a black out. There was a bright flash of orange, so I peeked outside my window and I was amazed with what I saw. There in the school playground was a plane all bashed up. I didn’t know what kind of plane it was but I remember being told that German planes followed our railway tracks in the moonlight.”

Flight Lieutenant W.O.L Smith continued to serve with 263 Squadron and went on to fight in the Battle of Britain. Sadly, he was killed 6 months later on the 29th December, 1940. His name can be found among those honoured for their role in the Battle of Britain.
3. LATER YEARS

By 1950 the school role was 189.

The school looked quite different then from what we know now. For example, the staff room and Mrs. Gibson’s office used to be showers and changing rooms.

In 1952, Mr. Alex Forbes became the new Head Teacher. He would remain in this post until 1971.

The new canteen was opened in 1953, meaning the old one in the girl’s playground could be demolished.

In 1954 pupils, parents and staff had every reason to be proud of their modern school, which was equipped with every up to date aid, including radio facilities in every classroom and an electronic record player.

There was also a large, modern gymnasium which, at the time, was one of finest in the country. However, it mysteriously burned down in 1970...
The school journal from November that year records the event:

“At approximately 1.10am the Head Teacher in the schoolhouse adjoining the school was awakened by a vivid glow in the sky. He quickly discovered that the school gymnasium was ablaze ... Firemen were successful in confining the fire to the gymnasium.”

In 1967, Carstairs Junction Primary School, as we know it now, was established with the closing of the Secondary Department. After that, secondary age pupils attended the new Lanark Grammar school.

The extra space that this created allowed the school to improve the service it could provide, including the opening of a Nursery class and Special Needs Unit by the 1990s. Staff and pupils over the years have had much to be proud of in their fine old school and it is remembered fondly by local people of all generations.
Bibliography and sources

For our research for this book we used the following sources:

- Carstairs Primary School log books and registers - 1904-95
- Pictures from the school archives
- Souvenir programmes - 1954 and 2004
- Interviews with a number of former pupils
- Internet research
Credits

We would like to thanks the following people for helping us with this booklet:

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This is the story of our school – Carstairs Junction Primary.

It tells the story from the early years when a school was first opened by the Caledonian Railway Company and the move to a ‘new’ building in 1904. It covers the dramatic events of World War II, when the school was home to a squadron of Polish soldiers and describes some of the changes the school has gone through since the 1950s.

We hope you enjoy our short journey through the history of our school!