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This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in The London Journal, DOI:10.1080/03058034.2023.2170687.

The final definitive version is available online:

https://doi.org/10.1080/03058034.2023.2170687

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Social Economy in the Classroom: The London Birkbeck Schools

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Abstract: The London Birkbeck Schools represent a hitherto largely unexplored episode in the history of British education. They embody the contradictory faces of mid nineteenth-century radical Liberalism and are of interest first, because they were determinedly secular and pioneered what was for their time a novel and progressive pedagogy. Second, they had an explicit social purpose. 'Social economy'—the antithesis of the 'political economy' of the founders of the London Mechanics' Institute in whose lecture theatre the first school was established by William Ellis in 1848—was a central element of the curriculum. The schools and their values were contested. Their curriculum was attacked by the Church for its godlessness. Their teaching methods, advanced for the times, were lampooned by Dickens for being little better than the rote learning they challenged. Following the 1870 Elementary Education Act some collapsed or were incorporated in Board schools, but others went 'up market' in competition with them. Only one school building remains nearly intact today, reflecting in its architecture some of the most progressive elements of Ellis' philosophy, but London streets and roads bearing Birkbeck's name mark the locations of schools long gone and the curriculum issues are rehearsed in present-day debates.

Keywords: education; history; politics; William Ellis; Birkbeck

Accepted for publication on 15 December 2022

Social Economy in the Classroom: The London Birkbeck Schools

The lead article in the Christmas 1852 issue of Charles Dickens's *Household Words* (written by Dickens's collaborator Henry Morley) describes the narrator escaping the febrile atmosphere of the Chancery High Court for the calm sanity of the nearby London Mechanics' Institute. It being daytime, the premises are occupied not by adult students but by children:

> There are about three hundred and fifty children in attendance on this school, which is conducted by five teachers. It is one of the Birkbeck schools, several of which are now established in and about London for the children of parents who can pay sixpence a week for schooling.

Our narrator observes a lesson in progress, based not on rote learning, but on teacher questions and pupil answers around an 'everyday object'—a penny—which the teacher takes out of his pocket. The children seem alert, engaged, and happy. The narrator is particularly impressed by

> a little fellow with light flaxen hair, one of the youngest in the class. ... There was not a question that he did not answer and there was not one of his answers that was not clearly and correctly given. It was a touch of the very pleasantest comedy, when this imperturbable young philosopher got the class over a difficult case, by suggesting the line of conduct which a capitalist would probably pursue in given circumstances. A young man with his business head—he is eleven years old—and his knowledge of the laws that regulate prices and other matters in the country, ought to be in Parliament. ... We pictured him to ourselves as he will be hereafter, with a square bald head, sitting beside the neatest of wives, and arguing with his eldest son the question, how he shall dispose of certain capital into which a portion of his wages shall have been by that time converted. It is too much to hope that he will ever be Prime Minister.[1]

The Birkbeck schools were established between 1848 and 1862 as part of an effort to translate the ideology of 'useful knowledge', developed in the contested context of the Mechanics' Institutes, into the British school system. Their instigator, William Ellis (who with George Birkbeck and others had helped to establish the London Mechanics' Institute a quarter of a century previously) exerted an influence that went well beyond the schools that he founded and which bore his or Birkbeck's name. Though modelled on nonconformist principles they were secular, they pioneered what was for the time a novel and progressive pedagogy, and they were coupled to an explicit philosophy of social progress through individual self-fulfilment within the tight constraints of the existing social order.

One amongst many initiatives in children's education in the decades leading up to the 1870 Elementary Education Act, the Birkbeck schools represent a hitherto largely unexplored episode in the history of British education. The parallel movements for the (Anglican)

National and the (non-conformist) British and Foreign schools are well documented—the former laying the basis for today's voluntary aided schools. Perhaps because most Birkbeck schools did not survive long following the 1870 (Forster) Elementary Education Act, educational historians in general mention them in passing, if at all, as just one amongst other initiatives alongside the 'mainstream' schools of the period. Philip Gardner declares that the history of elementary education is itself one of the most 'desolate areas' of contemporary scholarship.[2] Gary McCulloch by contrast holds it to be 'a site of struggle' and 'a contested and changing terrain',[3] but declares also that 'The educational world of the nineteenth century has become increasingly silent and distant as the focus of scholarship has become mainly confined to specialist studies of the twentieth century'.[4] Those historians of education who have commented on the Birkbeck schools would probably agree with Robin Gilmour that they represent a 'strange and interesting chapter' in the history of education; a 'remarkable instance of the complex workings of practical utilitarianism in Victorian England.'[5]

This article situates the schools in the educational context of the period, opening with a summary of the circumstances surrounding their establishment, focusing on their links with the Mechanics' Institute movement (representing a wider movement for popular education) and with the contested concept of 'useful knowledge'. It then proceeds to describe their growth and influence between 1848 and the late 1860s and their fate subsequent to the 1870 Act. Discussion centres on their distinctive features, on contemporary assessments of their value, on the conflicts surrounding the schools' teaching and curriculum and on their legacy in respect of the Board schools that supplanted them. It concludes that far from being a curiosity, the London Birkbeck schools were a significant element of the London educational scene and they influenced subsequent developments elsewhere. They offer a window on contemporary debates regarding what children should be taught and how. Their legacy can be found today in London's physical landscape and in national debates about the purpose and content of education for citizenship.

The Impetus and Spread of the Birkbeck Schools

Ellis' first school opened in July 1848 in the lecture theatre of the London Mechanics' Institute (LMI) in Southampton Buildings between Chancery Lane and Staple Inn, High Holborn. Its establishment combined progressive ideals with an explicitly political mission. The foundation of the LMI in 1823 had been fraught by conflicts over curriculum, constituency, and control—over what should be taught, to whom, and who should decide. On one side were Thomas Hodgskin and others who argued for working-class collective

emancipation based on ‘natural law’ and an understanding of the political economy of capitalism.[6] On the other were Utilitarian liberals associated with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK, formed just a few years after the LMI) who advocated individual self-help as the basis for social progress. The conflicts were quickly—but never fully—settled in favour of the latter; calls for ‘really useful’ (as opposed to ‘merely useful’) knowledge extended well into the middle of the nineteenth century.[7] Until his death in 1841, George Birkbeck was the mediator, securing financial and institutional support but at the same time insisting on the right of Hodgskin (and others) to lecture: without Birkbeck the LMI (and London’s Birkbeck College today) would arguably not exist.[8]

By mid-century, however, the LMI was in financial crisis. Earlier attempts to establish a school in association with the Institute had met with failure.[9] The LMI’s Management Committee’s report to the Quarterly General Meeting in September 1831 records a proposal to open a school in the LMI’s premises and that of March 1832 reports the admission of 33 pupils. The initiative seems to have been as much an attempt to supplement the LMI’s income with rent during the day from unoccupied space as an educational endeavour. It was short-lived; complaints from neighbours regarding noise and unruly behaviour led to closure within a year.

Ellis, however, had been a supporter—and a financial backer—of the LMI from its inception and his proposal came with an offer of £1,000 to support the new initiative. The new school was launched in 1848 (figure 1) designed to train pupils ‘in the various qualities which lie at the base of all social wellbeing—such as industry, knowledge, skill, economy, temperance, respect for property, and forethought’[10] and to submit to the laws of ‘social economy’ as a necessary condition of economic prosperity and of their own betterment.[11] Social economy (used by Ellis to contrast with Hodgskin’s ‘political economy’) explicitly associated personal morality with the workings of commerce. Given its secular nature it was perhaps inevitably based on ‘natural’ law—but a very different ‘natural law’ (with a very different purpose) from that of the joint initiator of the LMI.[12] Opposition came from both right and left. Significant divisions continued within the LMI; a stormy meeting of the LMI’s Management Committee on 16 April 1849 (which received a requisition signed by 71 members of the Institution to call a public meeting on the issue) was entirely taken up with the matter. The General Meeting that followed was adjourned twice and resistance was ended by placing the LMI School firmly in the hands of the LMI’s own Management Committee.

Figure 1. Left: 1825 engraving of the interior of the LMI's Lecture Theatre in which the first Birkbeck School was launched in 1848. (Wellcome Collection, Creative Commons). Right: Lithograph of the LMI's façade in 1865. Across the top of the two ground-floor windows on the right is written 'London Mechanics Institution' but this is replaced on the left-hand window by 'Birkbeck School Established 1848' (Courtesy of Birkbeck College).

Ellis appointed as teacher John Rüntz, initially a cabinet maker, who had trained with the British and Foreign School Society, before becoming master of a British School in Wilson Street, Finsbury. Rüntz—in some documents spelt 'Runtze'—subsequently became the superintendent of all the Birkbeck schools.[13] A prominent member of the Metropolitan Board of Works, he was also an energetic campaigner for London's open spaces, and he is memorialised today by a drinking fountain and a lake, Runtzmere, in Hackney's Clissold Park that, together with Hackney Downs and Finsbury Park, was secured for public use through his efforts.

The success of the LMI School in attracting both pupils and wider attention led Ellis to publicise the venture in pamphlets[14] and advocate their introduction elsewhere.[15] This was accompanied by practical action. In the same year as the LMI School opened, Ellis funded a day school to accompany William Lovett's National Association Sunday School (which Lovett had opened in 1843) and, with his friend George Combe, started William's Secular School, a school very similar to the London school, in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh school, like the one Ellis had established in the LMI would address the 'unfavourable condition of European society' through teaching the 'natural laws by which individual and social

wellbeing is determined.' This would include training of the population 'to submit, in their practical conduct, to the requirements of these laws, as necessary conditions of prosperity.'[16]

These initiatives in London and Edinburgh were followed by other schools, some founded by Ellis, and some merely inspired (and in some cases funded) by him. The London schools were to be established 'wherever a dense and poor population pointed to a great need of good instruction at a cheap rate.'[17] In 1850, Ellis opened a school for 70 girls immediately adjacent to the LMI boys' school in No. 9 Southampton Buildings. By 1852, at least 10 schools in London, some of which bore Birkbeck's name, owed their foundation to him. According to one estimate, by 1852, some 2,000 boys and 250 girls in London, Manchester, Edinburgh, and Glasgow were attending schools founded by or associated with Ellis.[18]

Some schools were launched in the premises of other London mechanics' institutions. In 1848, on the heels of the opening of the LMI School, a day school opened at the City of London Mechanics Institute[19] as did another, off Tottenham Court Road in the John Street (now Whitfield Street) Mechanics' (later Scientific and Literary) Institution (still standing in 1949)[20] by a Mr Brooks, who had been a teacher at Lovett's Holborn school. Another school that adopted Ellis's plans was started in 1850 in the Paddington Mechanics' Institution in Carlisle Street, Edgware Road, by a Mr Curtis, a British School master who had taught for a time at the LMI School. Curtis hired the Institution's premises during the day, fitting it with moveable desks that could be put on one side in the evening. Rental was on an annual tenancy, and it was abandoned after a few years and the desks removed.

In addition to the schools associated with the LMI, Ellis himself established and funded five further London Birkbeck schools between 1849 and 1852, in Finsbury, Westminster, Bethnal Green, Peckham, and Kingsland, and a final school in Gospel Oak (figure 2). Ellis did not at first intend his schools to become permanent institutions but wished rather to set an example of his teaching methods and curriculum and to train teachers who would implement his principles elsewhere.[21] Early schools recruited pupils through door-to-door canvassing. Initially (as with the schools opened in Mechanics' Institutions) rooms or buildings were rented, several in disused chapels. Later schools were specially built.

The Finsbury Birkbeck School opened in mid-1849 for boys only, in the Bethel Chapel in Bell Yard, City Road, where the lease had some sixteen years unexpired.[22] The following summer Ellis purchased, through Rüntz, the lease (which had fourteen years to run) of another old chapel in Vincent Square, Westminster, and opened a school with Rüntz's brother George as master. A fourth Birkbeck school was opened in January 1851 for both girls and boys on the corner of Cambridge Road and Bath (today, Birkbeck) Street in Bethnal

Green. A school on the site had existed since at least 1818, (and had been rebuilt *c*.1835) associated with a Congregational chapel; it closed in 1846 when the school—and chapel—moved to new premises on the corner of Bethnal Green Road and Pott Street, with a school for 400 pupils in the basement. Ellis established a school in the vacated chapel that, unlike the Finsbury and Westminster schools was purchased freehold in 1849; this was subsequently replaced with a 'large and well fitted' permanent building. Subjects taught included natural sciences, algebra, mechanics, French, and bookkeeping. The instruction was described as 'above average', although discipline was described (prejudicially or objectively) as 'indifferent'.[23]

Figure 2. Locations of the London schools established and funded directly by William Ellis (author's original).

Some schools were spectacularly successful. A fifth Birkbeck school opened in Peckham in mid-1852, with William Shields (who, like Rüntz, had started as an unpaid volunteer master at the Holborn LMI School) as its head. The Peckham School was a landmark for Ellis as the first school especially built for the purpose. On freehold land, and in no danger of being closed if the renewal of lease was refused (as had happened to the Westminster School) it was initially designed to accommodate 400 children, but, hugely oversubscribed, it was enlarged four years later to accommodate over a thousand. Fees started at 6d per week or 6s per quarter, plus 'The cost of a slate, an English grammar, a

geographical primer and a writing book as each one is finished, and when a sufficient progress has been made in arithmetic, a text-book of algebra and another in geometry.'[24]

The sixth school opened in December of the same year in Colvestone Crescent, Kingsland, under the mastership of James Rüntz, the second brother of John Rüntz. Like Peckham, this was built specially for the purpose upon leasehold land and converted into freehold some twenty years later.[25] After referring to the ordinary subjects intended to form its curriculum, its prospectus goes on to specify as an important branch of education the 'conditions of human well-being':

> So that the children may not go forth to take their part in the work of the world utterly ignorant of any safe guides of conduct; this teaching including, amongst other things, the knowledge of the laws relating to the production and distribution of wealth, the means by which wealth is made to accumulate, the advantage of division of labour and interchange, the laws which regulate wages and profits, the causes of variations in values and prices, the nature of the means adopted to facilitate interchange, but, above all, the courses of conduct which ought to and must be followed in order to secure future happiness and well-being.[26]

In addition to those opened in other mechanics institutes, schools inspired though not controlled by Ellis opened in London in Lower Road Islington (1849) and in Windsor Street Highbury (*c*.1850). Outside London, following the opening of the Edinburgh school, Ellis provided significant financial or other help to the establishment of at least eight schools (some also called Birkbeck schools) in Glasgow, Leith, Manchester, Salford, Blandford (Dorset), King's Sambourne (Hampshire), Dunton Bassett (Leicestershire), and Hethersett (Norfolk). All featured social economy as a key element in the curriculum; Ellis wrote of the Leith school that it would accustom those who benefited from it 'to look for their own up-raising and that of their children through work done by themselves, rather than through words of complaint and anger directed against the works or neglected works of others.'[27]

The last school to be founded by Ellis was in Gospel Oak. It bore his own name (rather than that of George Birkbeck) and was launched in 1862 under the superintendence of Edmund Kell Blyth (later to become Ellis's biographer) rather than Rüntz. Edward Teather, the master appointed, had previously been assistant master at the Peckham School. Like the Peckham and Kingsland Schools, the Gospel Oak School was specially built (for some five hundred children) on freehold land, but was rebuilt on a nearby site two years later when that land was bought (and the original premises destroyed) by the Midland Railway Company for its extension to London. An 1867 account of the school in the Illustrated London News (figure 3) emphasises the importance of education in 'the truths of social and moral science' in counteracting restrictive practices of trades unions 'thwarting the conditions of general

well-being.'[28] Ellis's name remains today in the boy's school (in a new location and in new buildings on Parliament Hill) as does his philosophy in the school's motto—'Rather Use Than Fame'.[29]

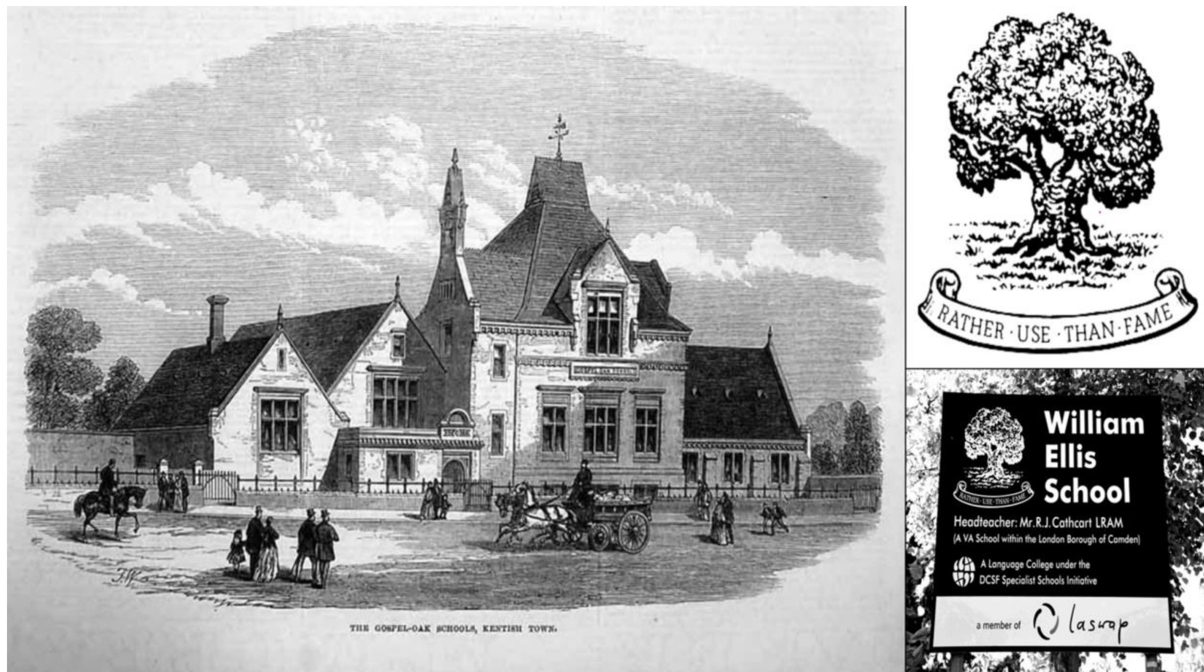

Figure 3. Left: The Gospel Oak School in 1867 from The Illustrated London News, September 14 p288 and right: the William Ellis School board and motto – 'rather use than fame' – today (author's original).

Distinctive Features

In their initiation and development, the Birkbeck schools arguably represent part of a discursive shift in the understanding of childhood leading to the 1870 Education Act in which the child is valued neither economically for productive capacity nor idealistically for innocence but rather 'as futurity, with his or her value lying not in childhood but in the qualities of the adult he or she will someday become.'[30] Ellis's Utilitarian educational philosophy, manifest in the teaching of social economy, is perhaps the clearest example of this shift. It was associated with other values: the extension of education to the working class as a whole, including girls; a repudiation of corporal punishment; the absence of religious education; and a shift from rote learning and the monitorial system to classroom teaching (and associated architectural innovations in school design) facilitating a dialogue between teacher and pupils including lessons based on common objects or situations. None of these were entirely novel for their time. The nearby Clerkenwell Green charitable school, erected in 1737 for the children of local Welsh artisans living in poverty, admitted its first girls—as boarders and day scholars—in 1758. Harold Silver argues that there is no reason to believe that secular teaching, imaginative pedagogy, and humanity (in particular the avoidance of

corporal punishment) were atypical in schools prior to the 1850s.[31] Collectively, however, they distinguish the Birkbeck schools from others of the period, although their implementation was inevitably affected by contingent factors.

All have been the subject of more recent historiography. For example, Jacob Middleton, focusing on the period 1890–1940, challenges the assumption that corporal punishment was an uncontroversial and widely accepted means of maintaining school discipline.[32] However, contemporary comments on the Birkbeck schools suggest that its formal exclusion elsewhere prior to the 1870 Education Act was unusual. Moreover, as with other features of the schools, the extent to which practices lived up to Ellis's philosophy is unclear. A sympathetic visitor to the first, LMI School recorded that he was 'sorry to record that the cane is not dispensed with.' During the first three months of the school's existence corporal punishment had been entirely absent, but when the number of scholars increased from 70 to 230, it became impossible to maintain order without the 'magic aid' of the cane.[33] Local hostility to the Peckham School, discussed below, suggests that the schools' secular nature was more controversial, although this too was by no means universal; an Anglican source said of the Bethnal Green School in 1853 that it provided a 'first rate intellectual education but where Bible is absolutely excluded.'[34]

The schools' most significant features lay in their curriculum and instructional technique. In addition to social economy and possibly through the influence of Lovett, the schools taught physiology and personal hygiene to both girls and boys. Their teaching, described as 'collective, conversational and catechetical' featured the 'object lesson', a discourse based around a common article to reveal is origins, qualities, uses, and significance.[35] Although articulated more coherently than elsewhere, neither the pedagogic principles championed by Ellis nor the teaching of social economy as a route to personal fulfilment and social progress were novel, at least in the 1840s. And while they may have been so in the 1820s, when Ellis was using the London Mechanics' Institute as a vehicle for developing his views on both the curriculum and on teaching methods, it has been pointed out that Ellis's *Conversations Upon Knowledge, Happiness, and Education; Between a Mechanic and a Patron of the London Mechanics' Institution* (1829) may have borrowed more than the title from Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy* published in 1816 and which had appeared in five editions by 1824.[36] Marcet's *Conversations* in turn draws on the work of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, and David Ricardo. James Mill's own *Elements of Political Economy* was intended as a school textbook, as was Ellis's *Outlines of Social Economy*, published twenty-five years later. In 1849, shortly after opening his first school in the LMI,

Ellis followed his *Outlines* with another ‘questions and answers’ text intended for teachers, developing his *Conversations* pamphlet published twenty years previously.

The monitorial system too had already been significantly modified in the 1820s and 1830s under the influence of Samuel Wilderspin and David Stow: it seems likely that Ellis was influenced by Wilderspin, probably through the agency of Combe. The influences seem to have included the architecture as well as the teaching methods of Ellis’s schools. Wilderspin’s model school in Spitalfields included a separate room for a ‘class’ of children opening off the schoolroom.[37] An 1850 guide (written principally for Wesleyan Methodist schools) argued that good teaching should not cram the memory with daily lessons that the children repeat by rote without understanding the meaning of what they say: but rather ‘exercises the mind by familiar illustrations of what is taught, by questioning, and ellipsis, in the gallery and in the class-room.’[38]

In practical terms too, many of Ellis’s precepts had been applied, most notably in London at Bruce Castle, Tottenham (opened in 1827), and University College School (1830). However, while both were founded on the precepts of a secular, modern education, based on Utilitarian principles, neither of these were seen as part of a mission of extending education more widely (and specifically at the working classes). Ellis was the first both to advocate this systematically and to take practical steps to implement his ideas, both in the establishment of schools and in the training of teachers.

Perceptions and Contemporary Influence

In general, the Birkbeck schools were known for high educational standards but poor discipline, though whether their reputation for the latter was due to their repudiation of corporal punishment or to the absence of religious instruction is unclear. It seems likely that in addition to the apprehension regarding a possible repeat of unruly behaviour that had accompanied the first, LMI, school, there were political reservations. By 1848, Hodgskin, with the support of Dickens, had retreated into journalism as an advocate of free trade however challenges to the promulgation of ‘useful knowledge’ continued. The *Peoples’ Magazine* in 1841 had declared that Mechanics Institutions were ‘traps to catch the people ... and prevent their attaining a knowledge of the true cause of their miserable and degraded state.’[39] Friedrich Engels in turn had written off MIs as useless ‘organs of the middle classes’, their teachings ‘uninspired and flabby.’ Their purpose, he argued, was to teach students ‘to be subservient to the existing political and social order. All that the worker hears in these schools is one long sermon on respectful and passive obedience in the station of life to which

he has been called.' He continued, hopefully: 'The mass of working-men naturally have nothing to do with these institutes.'[40]

Little of this hostility—from the left, anyhow—was directed publicly against the Birkbeck schools, possibly because in the educational context of the day they offered, for those who were in a position to take advantage of it, the opportunity of a decent education for their children. It seems likely that proponents of 'really' useful knowledge saw their efforts as better directed to contesting in the public domain the ideas on which Ellis's educational philosophy was based, rather than questioning what was taught within the relatively small number of Birkbeck schools themselves.

Moreover, some of those who were critical of mechanics' institutions saw the Birkbeck schools as setting a progressive example. Richard Cobden, addressing the 1854 conference of the National Public School Association, distanced the Birkbeck schools from mechanics' institutes and challenged how 'we go prating about, and members of Parliament are solicited to attend meetings of mechanics' institutes, under the impression that they are helping the working classes, when, in fact, they don't reach them in the smallest degree.' Good schools, he said 'were much more important' and the best examples were the

> schools called the Birkbeck Schools in London, and a school in Edinburgh also, the Williams School. ... Well, but there cannot be a doubt that the quality of the instruction given in those schools is vastly superior to that ordinarily given in other schools for working people. And I have no hesitation in saying that those schools, comparing them with the average of British schools and national schools, are incomparably superior. They don't confine themselves to teaching, parrot-like, what the children don't understand, but they draw out reasons and invoke reasons for everything they teach a child. They teach the children of the poor ... the laws that regulate the rate of wages, the laws of capital and labour ... with an effect most salutary to the interests of society.[41]

Dickens, whose lifelong engagement with mechanics' institutions has been well documented, had a rather different view.[42] The Christmas 1852 leader on the Birkbeck schools in *Household Words* with which this essay opens contains an exchange between pupils and teacher comparable to Gradgrind's notes on the performance of Bitzer under M'Choakumchild in Dickens's *Hard Times*, the first published instalment of which appeared in the same journal in April 1854. Gilmour argues that the whole of *Hard Times* can be read as a coded critique of Ellis' educational philosophy and that Dickens's own lack of exception to the laudatory tone of Morley's opening article in the Christmas 1852 edition of *Household Words* was because its editor, W.H. Wills, was ill and Dickens had the whole issue to proof:[43] Morley had by that time already adapted his style to one modelled on Dickens' own.[44] Alternative explanations are that Dickens was a personal friend of the SDUK's publisher

Charles Knight,[45] whose precepts were close to those of Ellis or, more simply, that his concern was for the consequences of education for the child rather than its social function; for its neglect of the imagination rather than its role in reinforcing (or undermining) an unjust social order and that this applied as much to the content as to the method of the Gradgrind schools.

In part at least, this muted criticism can be attributed to wider developments in progressive educational policy. Mainstream Chartism held that educational provision should be state funded and under local democratic control rather than relying on individual initiatives, on philanthropy, and on middle-class patronage. Keith Flett argues that the post-1848 emphasis by Chartists on the need for education, which would be 'national, universal, gratuitous, and to a certain extent compulsory',[46] 'froze out the concept of "really useful" knowledge as it had existed in the 1830s and 1840s.'[47] At the same time the Mechanics' Institutes themselves, together with their auxiliaries—including savings banks and schools—fed off and fostered a growing male labour aristocracy, securing concessions and privileges that ensured that the only section of the working class with any organisational strength did not use it on behalf of that class as a whole.[48] Moreover, Ellis's educational philosophy had influenced other reformers, not least the educationalist and feminist Barbara Bodichon, whose own school in in Portman Hall, Carlisle Street, off the Edgware Road, had been heavily influenced by Shields's own methods at Peckham and whose teachers included the reformer (and co-founder of the National Trust) Octavia Hill.[49] It had also received the accolade of royal patronage. From 1855, on the recommendation of Albert, Prince Consort, Ellis gave Saturday afternoon tutorials at Buckingham Palace on 'the principles of social economy' to Queen Victoria's children.[50]

Most hostility came from the right. The schools were challenged both from within the Church and by other schools who saw their interests threatened. From its formation, the 'evil' influence of the LMI was seen to be not just on its members but on the whole of the then existing system of education: the Birkbeck schools were perceived in like manner. In one case at least the attitude of the Church led to closure. Although successful, with an attendance of some 300 boys, the Westminster School was closed in 1864 on the refusal of the Dean of Westminster to renew the lease.[51] The National School in Peckham certainly saw itself as under siege from the opening in 1852 of the nearby Birkbeck school, which was denounced from the pulpit and in a leaflet. This opened with self-congratulatory remarks on the 'success which continues to attend their efforts on behalf of Christian education, and the evident marks of Divine blessing upon the School' and continued:

> The opening of large Schools in the immediate neighbourhood upon Socinian principles, and the plausible addresses to parents sent from door to door by the promoters of this 'godless' scheme, could hardly be without some effect upon the number of new admissions. Still, as yet, the Committee rejoice to say, this effect is very inconsiderable; whilst it is most important to observe that many parents, who were at first induced to countenance the Birkbeck School, by a specious programme of most unsuitable instruction, have, on discovery of the hollowness of the system, withdrawn their children, and entered them at our Schools, wisely determining that an Education whose only recommendation was that it was sound, scriptural and simple, must be better than one which seemed only calculated to spoil children for usefulness in this world, and avowed the most entire indifference to all preparation for the next.[52]

The response, by the Master of the Peckham Birkbeck School, was to issue a pamphlet of his own (in which the original is quoted in full).[53] The details of Shields's rebuttal are interesting. He notes that out of its year's income of £400, the National School spent more than £100 on clothing for its pupil-teachers and children, and £2 2s 2d for hair-dressing. The Birkbeck schools, he asserts, would never spend their income on clothing or on hair. They would see this (as they would matters of religious education) as the responsibility of the parents.[54] Shields adds that there should be no competition between the two schools because they are directing themselves to different social classes:

> The Birkbeck Schools address themselves to, and have been accepted by, the parents of those children only whose clothing is provided at home and whose personal cleanliness is attended to there exclusively. Did a boy present himself to me, neglected in either respect, I should regard the cure of the evil as a home question. But the truth is, in the Peckham schools, no case of such a kind has occurred. A visitor perceives at a glance that the children are from a class whose parents need no such help.[55]

Others rallied to the defence of the Birkbeck schools and, in praising the content and delivery of education, also emphasised its social consequences. George Bartley—an Examiner for the London School Board (LSB) writing after the passing of the 1870 Education Act—instances the sacrifices that poor families might make to enable at least one of their family to have a year or two at a Birkbeck School, commenting on the fact that since this advantage would generally go to the eldest son, the younger children might be sent to work earlier than might otherwise have been the case in order to support the continuing studies of the first born.[56] The weekly fee also meant disruption in times of hardship. When parents were on short time or if winter boots were required, pupils in the lower school would be withdrawn from school in order to save money.

For supporters and those sympathetic to Ellis's ideas, the operation of the schools itself provided a focus for debate. The Peckham School, by 1870, was divided into three sections: an Infant school for boys and girls under seven years, and the junior and upper

schools—the difference between these representing not ‘the grade of advancement of the children’ but rather the status of their parents ‘the payment being higher and the children consequently belonging to parents of a superior position in life’. Bartley comments that this arrangement is not ideal: ‘a Junior culminating in an Upper School would be far better: but the social class feeling among parents renders the adoption of this system at present impossible.’[57] Moreover, for some at least who may have had reservations about aspects of the curriculum, the Birkbeck schools represented a way forward in a confused and dysfunctional educational system. In Parliament, formally moving the establishment of a Royal Commission on the State of Popular Education in England (the Newcastle Commission, essentially a precursor to the 1870 Act and to which Shields gave evidence), Sir John Packington made specific reference to the Birkbeck schools:

> There were, for example, the Birkbeck Schools, started in this Metropolis by Mr. Ellis, in which many thousand children were now receiving education, and where no inquiry was ever instituted into the religion of the parents. But the great majority of these children were under religious instruction either on Sundays or at other times. Such schools had, at least, this good mark of religion about them—that they taught the children charity and forbearance to those of different religious denominations to their own. The present educational machinery was a mongrel system of State interference and voluntary subscription; and he could not see how it would ever remedy the evils connected with the subject in this country.[58]

The Impact of the 1870 Act

Following the 1870 Education Act, Ellis and others continued to argue for social economy to be part of the curricula of all schools. In an effort to influence the teaching of the Board schools, Ellis issued a pamphlet (virtually identical in content to one produced more than ten years earlier) advocating a curriculum ‘leading the young to observe, examine, acknowledge and obey’ the ‘laws of industrial life’.[59] To some degree this was successful, in aspiration if not in execution. ‘Elementary Social Economy’ was one of the ‘essential’ subjects prescribed by a curriculum sub-committee (chaired by T.H. Huxley) and accepted by the Board in the summer of 1871. In practice this was never implemented. One reason may be that other issues were seen as more pressing: the Social Science Association, in its annual conference of that year, focused on what it saw as a breach of secular principles through local school board payments to denominational schools.[60] Ellis had himself vigorously promoted a public system of secular education in a pamphlet produced at the same time as the first LMI School was opened.[61]

Towards the end of his life, believing that under the new system and despite his efforts, ‘moral training was likely to be little more than a pretence, even if recognised at all’,

Ellis published 'An Appeal to the London School Board' in which he declared 'It is your mission not to despise, but to correct error; not to denounce, but to disprove mischievous doctrines': all Board schools, he argued, should teach social economy as an antidote to socialism.[62] These approaches were quietly ignored; the LSB had more on its mind, and included progressive individuals. Although dominated by male establishment figures, women were permitted to stand and to vote—as property-holders—on the same terms of men, and two women—the physician Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Emily Davies, founder of Girton College—were elected, together with Benjamin Lucraft, a former Chartist and one-time chair of the First International.

All the Birkbeck schools were affected by the establishment of Board schools (with monitored teaching standards, often in modern buildings and funded from public sources) in their neighbourhoods, but in different ways. Some collapsed. Attendance at the Bethnal Green School fell from 400 in 1870 to 140 in 1879. It closed in 1884; its premises were sold and later demolished. Ellis's first, LMI school, was itself closed in 1873 after the LSB rated the school 'inefficient' when it found the premises to be inadequate. (It was impossible to implement the progressive teaching regime that characterised 'purpose built' schools such as Kingsland in the Institute's lecture room gallery).[63]

Other Birkbeck schools continued to thrive,[64] but their character changed, their constituency becoming rather different from those families originally targeted by Ellis: 'They were originally, like the others, adapted for artisans ... but in consequence of the Education Act and the foundation of Board schools in their neighbourhood the fee has been increased, and they are now middle class schools charging £1.1s per quarter. They have retained their original reputation as the best schools of the district.'[65] The charge of being for the 'middle class' was one that had in fact been levelled at the Birkbeck schools from the beginning: in 1851 a critic (possibly motivated not by a desire to re-establish the dominance of the 'mechanics' but by opposition to the LMI's secular nature) complained of 'the recent experiment of the Birkbeck schools being virtually for the service of the middle classes, like the private schools of mere instruction, with which alone they really compete.'[66]

The Peckham Birkbeck School faced significant competition from new schools in the area: by 1871, there were 60 elementary schools in Camberwell. However, located in an area characterised by the 'diversity in the style and social status of the houses'[67] (and presumably therefore by the social status of their inhabitants), the Birkbeck School survived for a period by emphasising the quality of its provision, adding an additional department for upper school girls and boys (which, in apparent contradiction to Ellis's views on the subject, added Greek

to the curriculum) and charging higher fees, ranging from 15/- to £1 5d per quarter. The school lasted until summer 1887 when Shields became ill and, following the failure to secure a successor, it was closed; Shields died the following year. In a final irony (given Ellis's views on the relation between education and destitution), the Camberwell Board of Guardians took over the school buildings as a workhouse—the 'Birkbeck Workhouse'[68]

Figure 4. The 6th, Kingsland, Birkbeck School, constructed 1852. Above left: c 1880 (courtesy of Hackney Archives) and below: as Colvestone Primary School today. Except for the removal of the belltower and chimney the façade and much of the fabric is original. Right: a classroom today showing rooflight and ventilation (author's originals).

The Kingsland School provides a contrasting example. Built initially for only some 300 children, it had expanded by 1889 to accommodate between 500 and 600. The school is of particular interest because its fabric survives largely intact today as a local authority school, Colvestone Primary School (figure 4). Grade II listed by Historic England, it reflects in its architecture some of the most progressive elements of Ellis's philosophy and contrasts strongly with the buildings of other, later Board schools in the area. Its Gothic style, in red brick with stone dressings, was the style of choice for many schools of the 1850s and 1860s, decried by Gargano as 'a quaint museum style, suggesting a realm of sheltered morality ... a symbol, not of moral striving, but rather of a disengaged moral complacency.'[69] In these and other respects, the school represents a move away from the ecclesiastical towards a more modern, 'civil' style, anticipating the edict of Edward Robson, architect to the LSB, that:

> a building in which the teaching of dogma is strictly forbidden, can have no pretence for using ... that symbolism which is so interwoven with every feature of church architecture as to be naturally regarded as its very life and soul. In its aim and object it should strive to express civil rather than ecclesiastical character. A continuation of the semi-ecclesiastical style which has hitherto been almost exclusively followed in England for National Schools would appear to be inappropriate and lacking in anything to mark the great change which is coming over the education of the country.[70]

Two aspects of the Kingsland School's design stand out, neither of them exclusive to the Birkbeck schools: the presence of individual classrooms and good lighting and ventilation. Between the two larger gables of the schoolroom galleries at either end of the Colvestone street frontage and on either side of the entrance (an open stone porch with pyramidal roof on carved capitals) are two smaller gables of the classrooms. Ellis' Gospel Oak school featured eight classrooms, five for boys and three for girls, together with 'a large lecture-room for lessons illustrated by apparatus and experiments.'[71]

Mary Sturt suggests that even in 1885 separate classrooms could be considered a 'doubtful luxury'[72] though Elain Harwood makes clear that the issue was one of implementation: 'The schoolroom could not be superseded while there was a lack of qualified teachers.'[73] Ventilation had been a growing concern alongside other sanitary reforms in educational and other institutional settings since the early part of the century, but even after the 1870 Act the design of the Birkbeck schools were recognised as progressive. An 1872 *Building News* report declared that

> many of the architects who had taken part in the recent competitions had failed to succeed because they had failed to make any provision for cross ventilation. It was the decided opinion of all who were practically acquainted with the matter that thorough cross ventilation must be secured if the health of the children was to be considered. In some of the best Birkbeck schools which he had visited, ventilation was secured by skylights. The roofs were open, and the class-rooms were placed side by side. This effected a considerable saving of space, but he did not think that the ventilation could be so complete as by windows on each side of a room.[74]

Original skylights with large opening windows and large side windows are still visible in Colvestone School today. In this and in other respects such as the provision of a Masters' house on-site, it could almost be a model for the non-conformist (principally Wesleyan Methodist) 'Educational Establishment Complete' advocated little more than a year before its construction by Jobson.[75] Its architect, T.E. Knightley, had been engaged in 1851 as the surveyor for the Birkbeck Freehold Land and Building Society that was established shortly after the first Birkbeck school within the premises of the LMI. Subsequently, Knightley was responsible for the extraordinary 'phantasmagoria'[76] of the Birkbeck Bank's new

headquarters—an architectural paean to the Broughamite concept of 'useful knowledge', built to replace the first (1824) premises of the LMI.[77]

The Gospel Oak School also survived, but 'as in the other schools, an increase in the fees charged was made, and the range of subjects taught somewhat extended so as to seek for pupils from a somewhat higher stratum of society than was contemplated in their inception.'[78] In 1865, the assets of the four Birkbeck schools then remaining (Bethnal Green, Peckham, Kingsland and Gospel Oak) had been vested by Ellis in a Deed of Trust: the Birkbeck and William Ellis Schools Trust 'for the education of children of small tradesmen and others of moderate means'.[79] In part, the survival of the Gospel Oak School was due to the collapse (or in the case of the Kingsland School the transformation) of the others. The premises of the Bethnal Green School were sold in 1886 following its closure, under the orders of the Charity Commissioners and the funds invested for other Birkbeck schools. The Kingsland School ceased to be a potential beneficiary when it was transferred together with neighbouring Board schools to the London County Council in 1905.

Following Ellis's death in 1881, charging higher fees and facing increased competition from neighbouring Board schools, numbers at the Gospel Oak School fell. After an unsuccessful proposal in 1887 to convert to a Teacher Training College, the school closed. It reopened in September 1889 as a secondary school—a 'Middle Class Technical School' continuing to teach social economy but paying largely token adherence to Ellis' principles. By 1900, other subjects, including classics and religious education, had become part of the curriculum. Both had been abhorred by Ellis who had described classical scholarship as 'groping among the rubbish and filth and superstition of by-gone times.'[80] In 1937, the school moved to new purpose-built premises and under the 1944 Education Act it became a 'direct-grant' grammar school. In 1977, when direct grant status was abolished, Governors considered the option of becoming independent but were opposed by parents who sought a High Court injunction to prevent this happening; the following year it became a (now much sought-after) comprehensive. Under the terms of Ellis's Trust, Birkbeck College, as successor to the old LMI, continues to exercise its right to appoint a governor.

Birkbeck Schools Today

The legacy of the Birkbeck schools can be found today both in London's topography and in our national educational and cultural landscape. Beyond the institution of the Gospel Oak School and the surviving fabric of the Kingsland (Colvestone) School, material evidence is largely limited to place names. Birkbeck Street in London E2, Birkbeck Road and Mews in

E8, and Shields Road in Peckham still remain to mark their association with Birkbeck schools.[81] Other street names can be found in old maps.

However, their place in the history of British education is important. The Birkbeck schools of course existed alongside many other educational initiatives in the decades prior to the 1870 Education Act. What was distinctive, if not altogether new, about them was their rejection of rote learning and their insistence on social economy in the curriculum. In this, they articulated Lancaster's exhortation that schools should aim to produce pupils 'trained to future usefulness to themselves and the community'[82] echoed in the Elementary Code of 1904, but in a very specific way, transferring into elementary education what by mid-century had become the largely dominant ideology of the mechanics institute movement.

It was in this respect that the Birkbeck schools exerted perhaps the most significant influence after 1870, contributing to what was by the early years of the twentieth century an argument that social studies should be at the heart of the curriculum.[83] It has been suggested that—particularly through their influence on Arthur Acland and on the introduction of civics into elementary schools during the 1890s—Ellis's schools were 'the parent of all social studies courses that exist in schools and colleges today'.[84] Contemporary opinion went even further: for one writer in *The Times* in 1873, Ellis was 'the founder' of social science.[85]

The Birkbeck schools present a window on changes in school education in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, if not a driver in their own right. Today, more than a century and a half on, the conflicts they stimulated—in relation to what should be taught, how, to whom and indeed the purpose of education—are still with us.

As a postscript it might be fitting to end this account with Dickens' fictional anti-hero Bitzer, one of Gradgrind's best students in *Hard Times*, a contrast to the eleven-year-old pupil observed in the opening passage from *Household Words* above. Under interrogation for betraying a fellow pupil:

> 'I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir,' returned Bitzer, 'but I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to, is a person's self-interest ... I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware.'[86]

Irrespective of any leanings we might have to 'really' versus 'merely' useful knowledge—to the politics of Hodgskin on the one hand or of Ellis on the other, or to their latter-day successors—current debates around the relative merits of individual versus collective 'self-help' and the revival of pressures to include a new version of 'social economy' in the school curriculum should perhaps make Bitzer a warning to us all.

Acknowledgements

I would like to record my thanks to my two anonymous referees and to a member of *The London Journal*'s editorial board for their full and helpful comments and for their encouragement in revising this paper for publication.

Notes on Contributor

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[1] Henry Morley, 'Rational Schools', *Household Words*, VI.144 (December 1852), 337–340.

[2] Phil Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England: The People's Education* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 1.

[3] Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1.

[4] Gary McCulloch, 'Compulsory School Attendance and the Elementrary Education Act of 1870: 150 Years On', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 68.5 (2020), 523.

[5] Robin Gilmour, The Gradgrind School: Political Economy in the Classroom', *Victorian Studies*, 11.2 (1967), 212-3.

[6] Hodgskin's first major political text, *Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital*, appeared in 1825, shortly after his proposal in 1823 (together with J.C. Robertson in the *Mechanics' Magazine* that they had launched that year) for a London Mechanics' Institute. A later 1832 pamphlet, *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted*, specifically attacked the philosophy of Henry Brougham, a major suporter of the LMI and by then Lord High Chancellor, whose earlier text, *Practical Observations Upon the Education of the People, Addressed to the Working classes and their Employers* (1825), was a precursor to Ellis' own, more developed educational philosophy.

[7] Richard Johnson, '"Really Useful Knowledge": Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790–1848', in *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 75–102.

[8] Hodgskin's *Popular Political Economy*, published in 1827 and subtitled *Four Lectures Delivered at the London Mechanics' Institution*, provided the basis for Marx's theory of

surplus value and is quoted extensively in his notebooks, written between 1857 and 1858 in preparation for his 'Chapter on Capital' later edited by Engels as Volume 4 of *Capital*. Marx himself described Hodgskin as 'one of the most important modern English economists.' Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1* (1867; London: Penguin, 1976), 1000.

[9] An 1846 SDUK handbook declares that 'Schools were originally attached to the London Mechanics' Institution; they have, however, been given up.' SDUK, *A Manual for Mechanics and their Institutions: A Complete Body of Information for that Useful and Respectable Class of the Population* (London, 1846), 133.

[10] Edmund Kell Blyth, *Life of William Ellis (Founder of the Birkbeck Schools). With some account of his writings and of his labours for the improvement and extension of education* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), 72-73.

[11] Gilmour, 'Gradgrind School'.

[12] 'Industry, knowledge, skill, economy, temperance, respect for property, and forethought' of course needed vehicles for their expression. In 1851 a 'third Birkbeck' appeared in addition to the Institute and the Schools: the Birkbeck Freehold Land Society and the Birkbeck Building Society (BLBS) were established to provide a home for the savings of (and to provide access to the County franchise to) men of the same classes who were members of the LMI or whose children attended the Birkbeck schools. By the 1870s the BLBS was trading as the Birkbeck Bank and had become a major element of the UK property-based financial sector. Richard Clarke, 'Self-help, Saving and Suburbanisation - the Birkbeck Land and Building Societies, their Bank and the London Mechanics' Institute 1851 – 1911', *The London Journal* 40, 2 (2015), 123-46.

[13] Rüntz was also appointed to the Board of the Birkbeck Bank, becoming its Chair in 1868.

[14] William Ellis, *Education as a Means of Preventing Destitution with Exemplifications from the Teaching of the Conditions of Well-Being and the Principles and Applications of Economical Science at the Birkbeck Schools* (London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1851).

[15] William Ellis, *The conditions of well-being as taught in the Birkbeck Schools as they ought to be taught everywhere* (London, 1851).

[16] George Combe and James Simpson, *Prospectus of a school for the secular education of boys* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1848), 1.

[17] Ethel Ellis, *A Memoir of William Ellis* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1888), 70.

[18] John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen & Co. 1973).

[19] Keith Flett, *Chartism After 1848: the Working Class and the Politics of Radical Education* (London: Merlin Press. 2006).

[20] ''Whitfield Street' in J Howard Roberts and Walter H Godfrey, *The parish of St Pancras part 3: Tottenham Court Road & neighbourhood (1949),* Survey of London (London: London County Council. 1949), 30-33.

[21] William Sockwell, *Popularizing Classical Economics: Henry Brougham and William Ellis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

[22] *First Annual Report of the Special Committee appointed to establish the Birkbeck School, to the members of the London Mechanics' Institution, at a Special General Meeting held on Thursday July 5th 1849, and by adjournment on the 12th and 17th days of that month and year*. Interestingly, in addition to congratulating the LMI's management on the success of the first school and the opening of a second, the Report added their 'wish to impress upon you the important fact that however successful the machinery of education already brought into operation may ultimately be, one half of your object only will have been accomplished, until the same educational privileges shall have been conferred upon both sexes of the community.' At the meeting on July 17th the Committee abolished itself so that management of the school was directly controlled by the LMI.

[23] T F Baker, 'Bethnal Green: Education', in *A History of the County of Middlesex Volume 11: Stepney, Bethnal Green*, ed. T F Baker (London: Victoria County History, Institute of Historical Research. 1998), 242-60.

[24] Shields, quoted in Ellis, *William Ellis,* 66.

[25] A Literary and Scientific Institute - possibly a local branch of the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institute (as the LMI had been renamed in 1866) - is indicated on contemporary maps as having existed adjacent to the School.

[26] Blyth, *Life of William Ellis,* 109.

[27] Ibid. 114.

[28] 'The Gospel Oak Schools, Kentish Town' *The Illustrated London News* 14 September 1867, 288.

[29] Kingsland and Gospel Oak survive today, the former having a physical and the latter an institutional continuity with their predecessors.

[30] Kelly Power, 'The influence of changing discourses of childhood on 1860s educational policy', *History of Education* 51.1 (2022), 1-21.

[31] Harold Silver, 'Aspects of Neglect: The Strange Case of Victorian Popular Education', *Oxford Review of Education* 3.1 (1977), 57-69.

[32] Jacob Middleton, 'The Experience of Corporal Punishment in Schools, 1890–1940' *History of Education* 37.2 (2008), 253-75.

[33] Blanchard Jerrold, *The threads of a storm-sail: a little book on the benefits of assurance : Written at the suggestion of the Directors of the Birkbeck Life Assurance Company* (London: Birkbeck Life Assurance Company, 1853), 61.

[34] Baker, *Bethnal Green,* 248.

[35] See, e.g. David Layton, 'Science in the Schools: The First Wave-A Study of the Influence of Richard Dawes (1793-1867)', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 20.1 (1972), 38-57.

[36] W A Stewart and W P McCann, *The Educational Innovators, 1750-1880*, (London: Macmillan. 2000), 330.

[37] Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, *School* (London: Reaktion Books. 2008).

[38] Frederick Jobson, *Chapel and school architecture, as appropriate to the buildings of Nonconformists, particularly to those of the Wesleyan Methodists: with practical directions for the erection of chapels and school-houses* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co. 1850), 151.

[39] Quoted in Malcolm Chase, *Chartism. A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2007), 144.

[40] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* Translated by W O Henderson and W H Chaloner (1844: Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2009), 271.

[41] 'Mr Cobden on Education' *The Times* 21642 January 19, 1854, 10 col A.

[42] Philip Collins, 'Dickens and Adult Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 3.2 (1955), 115-27. See also Philip Collins, *Dickens and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1963).

[43] Gilmour, 'Gradgrind School'.

[44] Henry Solly, *The Life of Henry Morley* (London: Arnold. 1898).

[45] William Kennedy, 'Lord Brougham, Charles Knight, and The Rights of Industry', *Economica, New Series* 29.113 (1962), 58-71. Hodgskin's *Labour Defended* (1825) was followed in 1832 by *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted. A series of letters addressed without permission, to H Brougham, Esq, M.P. F.R.S &c (now the Lord Chancellor) by the author of "Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital"* (London: B. Steil 1832). The response, not least from establishment figures associated with the Mechanics' Institute, included a counter-pamphlet from Knight published anonymously and often wrongly attributed to (by then, Lord) Brougham. Charles Knight *The Rights of Industry. Addressed to The Working-Men of the United Kingdom. I. Capital, and Labour* (London: Charles Knight for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, 1831).

[46] Silver, 'Aspects of Neglect'.

[47] Flett, *Chartism After 1848,* 117.

[48] Richard Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in early Victorian England', *Past and Present* 49 (1970), 96-119.

[49] Stewart and McCann, *Educational Innovators*, 315.

[50] Ellis, *William Ellis,* 123: Blyth, *Life of William Ellis,* 170-1.

[51] Joan Ronald, 'Family connections. Birkbeck Building Society & Bank. Law Guarantee & Trust Society' in *Joan Ronald papers* (London: Victorial and Albert Museum, 1986).

[52] Quoted in W A Shields, *Peckham Birkbeck Schools for boys, girls, and infants, etc. Willow Brook Road. [Notice of the reopening of the schools on Monday, July 18th, with an address by W. A. Shields, master of the schools, in reply to certain observations made by the Rev. D. Moore in reference to the establishment.]* (London: London Mechanics' Institution, 1853), 2. Socianianism, strictly a rejection of the Trinity, but by this time used to refer to dissenting beliefs in general, had been a charge levelled against the LMI from the start. On the LMI's foundation, the Minister of Laura Chapel, Bath, had used its temporary location in a chapel in Monkwell Street, Finsbury, to label both the LMI and the Chapel's pastor, Dr Lindsey, as Socinian. Edward Grinfield, *A Reply to Mr. Brougham's "Practical Observations upon the education of the people" etc*. (London: C and J Rivington, 1825), 29.

[53] The Peckham episode was recounted (and Shield's pamphlet reprinted as an Appendix) in Ethel Ellis' biography of her brother. Ellis, *William Ellis,* 197-200.

[54] William Lovett's Sunday School in Holborn, in which William Ellis first taught, offered education 'to all who came cleanly in clothing and person.' Frank Smith, *A History of English Elementary Education 1760-1902* (London: University of London Press, 1931, 1966), 207.

[55] Shields, *Peckham Birkbeck Schools,* 2.

[56] George Christopher Bartley, *The Schools for the People. Containing the History, Development and Present Working of Each Description of English School for the Industrial and Poorer Classes* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1871), 421.

[57] Ibid, 422.

[58] The Commission was formally established in 1859 and reported in 1861. It concluded: 'Much, therefore, still remains to be done to bring up the state of elementary education in England and Wales to the degree of usefulness which we all regard as attainable and desirable.' *Hansard* HC Deb 11 February 1858 148, 1184-248.

[59] William Ellis, *An Address to teachers on the Laws of Conduct in Industrial Life, and on the method of imparting instruction therein in our Primary Schools. Being the first of a course of four lectures on that subject, etc*. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1870), 14.

[60] 'The Association For Promoting Social Science' *Leeds Mercury* 10451 October 9, 1871, 8.

[61] William Ellis, *A few questions on secular education, What it is, and what it ought to be, with an attempt to answer them. Preceded by an Appeal to Richard Cobden Esq, MP and the members of the late anti-corn-law league* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1848).

[62] Ellis, *William Ellis,* 175, 177.

[63] However the Finsbury School Board maps of 1881 and 1886 indicate the Southampton Buildings site to be still occupied by the 'London Mechanics Institute and Birkbeck School', suggesting that some form of provision remained beyond this period.

[64] The longest lived school established within a Mechanics' Institution appears to have been at the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution (established in 1825, shortly after the LMI). As a grammar school, the Liverpool Institute High School for Boys, it finally closed in 1985, was re-opened in 1996 (behind the façade of the original building) as the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts with major support from Paul McCartney. It is now part of Liverpool John Moores University.

[65] Blyth, *Life of William Ellis,* 110.

[66] Joseph Fletcher, *Education National, Voluntary, and Free* (London: James Ridgeway, 1851), 16.

[67] Harold Dyos, *Victorian suburb: a study of the growth of Camberwell* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1973), 180.

[68] *Birkbeck School Workhouse Committee: Signed minutes 1889* (London Metropolitan Archives CABG/073). See also Peter Higginbotham, *The Workhouse Encyclopaedia* (Stroud, Glos: The History Press 2012).

[69] Elizabeth Gargano, *Reading Victorian Schoolrooms. Childhood and Education in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 20-21.

[70] Edward Robson, School Architecture. Being Practical Remarks on The Planning, Designing, Building and Furnishing of School-Houses (London: John Murray, 1874), 321.

[71] 'The Gospel Oak Schools, Kentish Town', 288.

[72] Mary Sturt, *The Education of the People. A history of primary education in England and Wales in the nineteenth century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967),130.

[73] Elain Harwood, *England's Schools: History, architecture and adaptation* (London: Historic England, 2010), 39.

[74] 'School Planning' *Building News and Engineering Journal* 23 (1872), 25-27.

[75] Jobson, *Chapel and school architecture.*

[76] Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 1 The Cities of London and Westminster* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1957), 377.

[77] Knightley's best known building is probably Queen's Hall, built 1891-3 in Langham Place and the home of London's Promenade Concerts until it was destroyed by a bomb in 1941. Knightley's Birkbeck Bank was demolished in 1962.

[78] Blyth, *Life of William Ellis,* 111.

[79] T Wickenden, *William Ellis School 1862 - 1962* (London: William Ellis School Governors. n.d.).

[80] William Ellis, 'Classical Education' *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* 53.ii (1850), 393-409.

[81] Most surviving 'Birkbeck' place names in London however derive from the activities of the parallel initiative to the Birkbeck Schools, the Birkbeck Land and Building Societies (BLBS), later known as the Birkbeck Bank, which was co-located with the first Birkbeck School in the premises of the LMI and played a significant role in the development of the then London suburbs between 1851 and 1911. The Birkbeck Primary School in Sidcup, Kent, and the Birkbeck School and Community Arts College (renamed the Somercotes Academy in 2015) near Louth, Lincolnshire, have no connection with William Ellis, the former deriving its name from the BLBS which initially developed the estate in which it stands. Clarke, 'Self-help, Saving and Suburbanisation'.

[82] Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education, as it respects the industrious classes of the community: containing a short account of its present state, hints towards its improvement, and a detail of some practical experiments conducive to that end* (London, 1803), 137.

[83] Gordon Batho 'The history of the teaching of civics and citizenship in English schools' *The Curriculum Journal* 1.1 (1990), 91-100.

[84] Stewart and McCann, *Educational Innovators*, 340.

[85] 'The Autobiography Of John Stuart Mill' *The Times* 27843 November 10, 1873, 6.

[86] Charles Dickens, 'Hard Times' *Household Words* IX.229 (August 1854), 601-602.