

Portobello School during The First World War

During the First World War the school routine was considerably upset. Towerbank School was taken over by the troops, and the pupils had to come to Portobello School to continue lessons. The only possible arrangement was that the pupils of Towerbank received their lessons in the morning and the Portobello Primary children received theirs in the afternoon. The Secondary pupils of the school continued a normal timetable. The routine was upset farther when the male members of staff had to leave for war services and eventually no male teachers were left in the school, with the exception of the Headmaster, Mr. Mackay. The staff shortage became so serious that higher grade pupils had to be used on occasion to teach the younger children. Another unfortunate result of the war was a stringent economy in the use of coal for the class-room fires.

Many teachers and former pupils of the school gained decorations during the war. A Roll of Honour was compiled, containing the names of teachers and former pupils serving with the forces, and in 1916 the Roll of Honour took up eight pages of the School Magazine.

CHANGES AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Meanwhile, the Education Act of 1918 had made a change in the administration of Scottish education. The school Boards disappeared being replaced by Education Authorities elected triennially in the counties and four largest Scottish Burghs. Later, in 1929 these in their turn were replaced by Education Committees chosen from the Country and burgh Councils.

Until this time the School had taken pupils only up to the third year of the secondary course, those pupils wanting to continue their education beyond that stage having to transfer to Leith Academy or Broughton. However, in 1928, the School was pr-graded to full secondary status and given the new title "Portobello Secondary School". The leaving Certificate in those days was a "group certificate." To attain it pupils had to pass in one year in at least two subjects, at one of which had to be English, at the Higher level, and in three other subjects at the lower level. Failure in any of these exams meant that the Certificate would not be granted, so to attain your "Highers" at that time was a considerable academic achievement and the possession of the Certificate was vital for entry to the universities and various other institutions. It was of course, gained by only a small minority of pupils.