

Risinghill Revisited

The Killing of
a Comprehensive
School

THE RISINGHILL RESEARCH GROUP

Isabel Sheridan, Philip Lord, Lynn Brady, Alan Foxall,
John Bailey and Yvonne Fisher

RISINGHILL REVISITED – Book 1

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‘How can the bird that is born for joy
Sit in a cage and sing?
How can a child, when fears annoy,
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring!’

William Blake, (*from ‘The Schoolboy,
Songs of Innocence and of Experience’*)

Dedication and Preface

This book is dedicated to Risinghill's inspirational (and sometimes controversial) headmaster, Michael Duane, now sadly deceased. The Risinghill Research Group (RRG) hopes that it will serve to recognise more widely the enormous contribution that he has made to education, and to the lives of so many children, in particular the children of Risinghill.

The following letter (from a Mr L Seymour) was one of many letters (hundreds in fact) of support that were sent to Duane when news of the LCC's proposal to close Risinghill was leaked to the press in January 1965. It is a fitting Preface for *Risinghill Revisited (RR)*, and as former pupils of the school, the authors are delighted to find themselves fulfilling Seymour's prophecy:

“... maybe one day some of your pupils will write about you ...”

Address removed

Dear Sir,

I was reading of your 'troubles' at Rising Hill Street School, and it took my mind back 45/50 years when I was one of the Pupils at a School just 'across the way' from yours, at the Prospect Terrace School (which was off Sidmouth St in Grays Inn Rd). Sidmouth Street in those days was a slum of the worst order, I was born in the turning, and I know what it was like! it was a turning down which the Police paraded in 'threes'. This was the district of ill clothed, ill fed kids, you think that your school of today is tough you should have known it in 1920 or thereabouts! $\frac{3}{4}$ of the children were verminous, their clothes were in shreds, and if one had shoes or socks or even a top coat! one was 'living it up' indeed! Even so, we had our pride, and it was sudden death to invade one another's 'Manors'. One was usually met with a shower of Flint Stones (most side turnings were flints in those days). It was the usual thing for a Policeman to call after dinner and it always went something like this, the Teacher would ask who went home through Ampton Street today? on finding out, he would then say, Empty your pockets on my table! and sure

enough out would tumble all the pennies the boy (or boys) had stolen on their way home via Ampton Street, from someones Gas Meter! But we had wonderfully good patient Teachers and a Headmaster second to none. Although we didn't get an Oxford Education we were taught to read, write, and add up. We were also taught to 'play the game' and not to make capital of someone else's misfortune. But the Man who made the greatest impression on me was our Headmaster his name was

Denny box Thomas, and he retired about 1924 (check the Records if you are interested). As his name denotes he was Welsh and what a ~~Welsh~~ Welshman! He had grey mutton chop whiskers that seemed to extend all round his face except for a pink shiny bald head! Like most Welshmen, he loved to sing and nearly all his songs were about 'Blue skies', that we would all reach tomorrow! and as he sang his blue eyes would flash and his Mutton chop whiskers would work up and down in rhythm with the music! a truly awe-inspiring and wonderful sight which I have never forgotten! But while he did not produce Academic wonders he made a point of turning out boys who would be

good truthful lads, lads who would be proud to call themselves Britishers, (Empire day was one of his favorite days). He loved to read Dickens, and he taught most of us to love Dickens, for he realised (as I do now) that it was about kids like us that Dickens wrote! We understood the Dickensian situations, plots and plans, they weren't strange to us, we lived them everyday! But I've never forgotten our Headmaster, and many a time when I've been in trouble in different parts of the World, his teaching has been a great comfort to me, as for the quality of his teaching I leave you to guess when I tell you that purely for fun I took a London Examination last year and had a 90% 'Pass'! and the Examiner did not believe me when I told him my age! and that it was 50 years since I was last at School! That in my opinion, is another 'feather in the cap' for my old Headmaster! I know that at the moment you seem as though you are 'flogging a dead horse', but 'press on' and maybe one day some of your pupils will write about you as I do my old Headmaster! Bless him!

Good luck Riving Hill School

Name removed

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List of Abbreviations

In presenting this book, the authors have had to make use of many abbreviations and acronyms, a number of which have now fallen out of current use. They set out here a list of the most important of these.

Abbreviation	Meaning and context
AC	Advisory Committee for Rivinghill's development
AMA	Assistant Masters Association
CEO	Chief Education Officer
CP	Corporal Punishment
EC	Education Committee of the LCC (qv). The LCC took on responsibility for education in London in 1904 from the former School Board for London (also known as the London School Board). The EC had, over the years, many sub-committees. We also use "EC LCC" where there may be confusion
EO	(Chief) Education Officer (See also CEO)
GB	Governing Body (of a school). Also called a Board of Governors. We use RGB to denote the GB of Rivinghill specifically where there might otherwise be confusion.
GLC	Greater London Council
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector (of schools)
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority. ILEA was formed when the GLC (qv) was inaugurated in April 1965 taking over responsibilities formerly held by the EC (qv), but only for 12 inner boroughs of London; the outer boroughs each took responsibility for education in their own area. In formal terms it was a special committee of the GLC. It was disbanded in 1990 when the GLC was dissolved. It is important to note that the ILEA was formed and the EC dissolved at a critical point in Rivinghill's life, a few months before its closure.
ILP	Independent Labour Party

IOE	Institute of Education
LCC	London County Council. The LCC was the principal local governing body for the County of London throughout its existence from 1889 to 1965, the year Risinghill closed.
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LSP	London School Plan 1947
MD	(William) Michael Duane
NUT	National Union of Teachers
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RGB	See GB
RR	Risinghill Revisited
RRG	Risinghill Research Group
WWII	World War 2

Editorial and Research Notes

The Risinghill Research Group (RRG) has received many communications from a wide range of people involved with the story of Risinghill and its history; and anecdotes of many other people have been accessed for the compilation of *Risinghill Revisited* (RR), which comprises two books, *The Killing of a Comprehensive School* and *The Waste Clay*, the former being the first of these. Extracts from these communications have been quoted freely throughout RR so that they may be heard with the voices of those who played a role in this story, and in doing so a policy has been adopted of leaving the texts with their original spellings and grammar except where some editorial intervention has been necessary to make the text clear. Such emendations are marked with square brackets, thus [].

The majority of participants in this study (primarily former pupils and teachers of the school) completed a detailed questionnaire, and at the time gave permission for their names to be cited; indeed, for many of the participants, this was a key factor in their decision(s) to share their memories of Risinghill. Unless otherwise stated, all of the contributors are named; however, for ease of referencing, the authors have chosen to identify the pupils by their first names and just the first initial of their family names (as received – either maiden name or married name.). There are some exceptions to this rule, notably in *The Waste Clay*, where it has been simpler, in some instances, to use the first initials of both the first name and the family name, either because the contributor expressed a preference for being identified in this way or for reasons of data protection.

Where the teachers are concerned, only a small number (eight) participated in the research and all gave consent for their names to be cited in full. Members of the RRG are usually cited by their first names only i.e. Isabel, Philip, Lynn, Alan, John and Yvonne, who joined the RRG in September 2017 to assist with the proof-reading of RR. Margaret Duane, widow of Michael Duane (MD), and Leila Berg, author of *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*, are also identified, as are some others, notably Simon Duane (Duane's youngest son from his first marriage) and three of Duane's former pupils from his previous schools - Howe Dell and Alderman Woodrow. The bulk of the research with the pupils and teachers is reported in *The Waste Clay*.

In line with other publications of an investigative nature, the research for RR took a number of forms. Much of the research was conducted on-line; in libraries and archives; and the RRG

interviewed a number of people, two of whom are perhaps the most important as both were adults at the time and were intimately involved with the events described – Leila Berg and Margaret Duane. The RRG also received many emails, letters and telephone calls, mainly from those pupils who wanted to speak to the researchers direct and/or did not have access to a computer and so were unable to complete the questionnaire on-line or download it from the RRG’s website, www.risinghill.org.

Many of the documents consulted during the research for this work are available in multiple locations, and some are quoted in Berg’s book. The authors have cited the more accessible versions, sometimes using the secondary source where the primary source is not currently available. All of the information gathered for the writing of RR will, on its publication, be deposited with the Institute of Education (IOE), who has expressed interest in this project.

When the RRG began its research over twelve years ago, certain archives, such as the London County Council (LCC) archive (held at the London Metropolitan Archive (LMA)), and the MD archive (held at the IOE) have since been reorganised and catalogued formally, with many files that were open then now being closed, some for one hundred years precautionary to data protection requirements. The authors have noted in the text where reference is made to such files. It is also important to point out here that, in 2006, Margaret Duane gave the RRG full access to the MD archive, kindly arranging with the IOE for any duplicate files (of which there were several) in the archive to be sent to Isabel, and some of these files have since been closed.

In addition, the RRG has its own collection of documents, especially copies of materials received from Margaret Duane direct. This is referred to as the ‘RRG Archive’. Bob Dixon, a former Risinghill teacher, who kept his own, personal archive of Risinghill. The authors refer to this collection as the ‘Bob Dixon Archive.’

Introduction

When Risinghill, a new, purpose-built co-educational comprehensive school, opened in Islington, North London on 3 May 1960, no one could have imagined that it would be closed just five years later, and that its demise would attract so much public attention. Nor could it have been envisaged that a book written about the school would make publishing history (in 1968) by becoming the UK's first non-fiction best-seller. *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School* was researched and completely written by Leila Berg in the twelve months of 1965, but two years of legal wrangling were to pass before her book could be published such was the sensitivity of some of the material involved.

The back cover of Berg's book reads:

'WILD SCHOOL IS TAMED BY LOVE'

'DOES SPARING THE ROD BREED CRIME?'

'PARENTS WILL FIGHT MOVE TO CLOSE SCHOOL'

The school which produced these headlines in 1964 and 1965 was Risinghill, a co-educational comprehensive in Islington.

This is its story, told often in the words of pupils and parents, the story of its courageous headmaster, Michael Duane, and the story of its eventual closure. It is a passionate indictment of educational bureaucracy and bureaucrats, of intolerance and stupidity. It is a story in which the word 'love' occurs again and again, in neither a sentimental nor a titillating way, but as a key word in a basic conflict about the state education of children. It is a sad story, written in anger and without fear.

This book is also about the state education of children. It is written not so much in anger, but disbelief. And it is written from the perspective of the Risinghill pupils, many of whom have prospered in life despite being written off as failures.

In the 1960s, swinging though they might have been, children were not listened to and neither were their parents. This point is made very powerfully on the first page of Berg's book where she quotes the first line from the verse beginning *'All I have is a voice'* from W. H. Auden's

poem “September 1, 1939”.² These are the voices of the Risinghill children, heard for the first time, and hopefully they will be listened to. The authors invite you to revisit Risinghill with them now - to learn not just about the politics of the comprehensive school, considered (unfairly) by many to have been a disaster, but also the politics that continue to feed the myths and political manoeuvrings which blight the development of state education in England today.

On the first pages of *The Killing of a Comprehensive School* and *The Waste Clay*, the authors have chosen to quote from William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* as they believe this is appropriate at a number of levels: (1) because the story can be seen as a parable of innocence and experience; (2) Blake was a Londoner, who knew the district of Islington well (in fact a school House was named after him); and (3) because Duane would, in all probability, have approved these quotations from a great fellow libertarian.

The story of Risinghill is a complex one, and the structure for how best to tell it has been difficult to determine. In the end, the authors decided to present it in three parts. In this, the first part, the tale is presented from a chronological viewpoint with introductory chapters giving the historical and political background to the events as they unfolded at the time:

- Part A: Two preliminary chapters, the first introducing the story of the school, placing it in its 1960s context; the second introducing each of the books’ authors, and the RRG members.
- Part B: Three chapters in which the headmaster, MD, is introduced, and where the backgrounds to two major elements of the story (Corporal Punishment (CP) in schools, and the organisational and political structure of education in the 1960s) are presented.
- Part C: A chronological telling of the story in eleven chapters, starting with the development of state education through to the birth of the school in 1960, culminating in its death in 1965.

² This was the date of the Nazi invasion of Poland. We believe Berg, as a professional writer and a woman, would have felt an affinity with the sentiment of this line: without going further into this poem, this verse would probably have invoked echoes in Berg’s mind of the Risinghill story, strengthened (perhaps) by her knowledge of what happened to Poland’s Jews after the Nazi invasion.

The results of the RRG's research with the teachers and pupils are, as indicated above, reported in *The Waste Clay*, which focusses on: (1) the respondents' attitudes to the school, and where the pupils are concerned, on their careers and subsequent lives; (2) the course of comprehensive education in England, looking at this in tandem with the later careers of the two, main protagonists in the story, Duane and Berg; and (3) the lessons to be learned from Risinghill where the RRG presents its conclusions of the affair.

There are so many people to whom the RRG is indebted for making RR possible that it is difficult to know where to start. First and foremost, it would like to thank all the Risinghill pupils and teachers who participated in this research, and in particular Yvonne: (1) for providing a different perspective on what life was like for some pupils in the school; and (2) for her expert help in putting the finishing touches to RR. Without their inputs, RR would not have been possible. The authors are also indebted to: Margaret Duane, for giving them a personal perspective on her husband's life pre and post Risinghill); to Leila Berg, for providing invaluable information about the writing of *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*; and to Bob Dixon, for giving the RRG his own, personal archive of papers and press cuttings relating to the birth, life and death of the school. Bob was an active member of Risinghill's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and was part of the PTA deputation that was invited to the House of Commons to discuss the PTA's appeal.

Also to be especially acknowledged are: Michael Foreman and Jonathan Cooper (former Alderman Woodrow pupils, Alderman Woodrow being one of Duane's previous schools) for sharing their memories of Duane with the RRG; Duane's youngest son (Simon) for providing information about his father; Professor Hori (an admirer of Duane's work) from Japan; Sara Aitchison, senior archivist at the IOE and her staff for their helpfulness; Leila Berg's children, Param and Jenny, who have supported the RRG throughout; Professor Clyde Chitty (for reviewing the political chapters in Part C) and Dr Michael Fielding for his encouragement of RR. The RRG regrets that it cannot name everyone who has contributed to this project by completing a questionnaire, sending letters and/or emails and providing photographs, for which it is profoundly grateful. Last but not least the authors would like to thank their spouses/partners for putting up with their absences while they revisited the school.

The Risinghill Research Group

Isabel Sheridan, Philip Lord, Lynn Brady, Alan Foxall, John Bailey and Yvonne Fisher.

PART A - Preliminaries

CHAPTER A1 - Prelude

*'Maybe the wildest dreams are but the needful
preludes of the truth'*

*Alfred Lord Tennyson
(‘The Princess’, 1847)*

A1.1 - Background

There is a tendency nowadays to see the 1960s as a completed whole, and to see it as ‘swinging’ all through. That is not how it was. The first half of that decade was very much like the late 1950s in its attitudes; its social policies; and its laws when people tended to be (or were expected to be) deferential to those who presumed authority. The sexual revolution had not yet begun;³ women’s liberation was in the future; homosexuality was illegal; there were no effective race discrimination laws; and the use of Corporal Punishment (CP) in schools was the norm albeit that the official line was that the practice had disappeared or was in decline. By 1965 things were slowly beginning to change, and many of the freedoms that are taken for granted now were only just emerging. Risinghill was embedded in that process of change, perhaps one of its many catalysts.

The 1960s was also a time of hope; there was a perception of progress and of opportunity; expectations were high; jobs were to be had; unemployment was low – as Bob Dylan then famously sang ‘The times they are a changin’’. It is in this context that *The Killing of a Comprehensive School* should be read.

In this first chapter, the bare facts of the story (as told by Berg) are given. Her book was controversial, catapulting her to fame, along with Risinghill’s progressive headmaster, Michael Duane (MD). Over the years, the various aspects of this *cause célèbre* has been mulled over thoroughly by the educational community with one of its members, M Brearley, declaring in the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (1968) that the truth of the Risinghill

³ Just one example: Philip remembers that in 1963 as he entered Reading University, a male student was expelled from the University because he was discovered in a female student’s bedroom. The case was reported in the national press. By the end of the decade no one would have noticed such a thing.

affair was probably too complex to ever be established satisfactorily; an observation that, until now, has proven to be the case.

New material obtained from different sources, notably Margaret Duane, Leila Berg and Bob Dixon (all now sadly deceased) and various archives holding documents not available to Berg when she was researching her book has helped the RRG to unravel much of the mystery that has surrounded the affair. A detailed survey with some of the Risinghill pupils and some of the staff of the school has also provided valuable information in this regard: their contribution(s) to the debates about the school, and thereby the wider debate(s) about progressive education synonymous with the comprehensive, is a valuable one, adding another (political) dimension to the Risinghill story, which has largely been ignored. The RRG has discovered fresh and shocking evidence of deceit and obfuscation; of authoritarian and arrogant attitudes to children, parents and teachers; and of the politics of an education system that was (and in the opinion of the authors, still is) seriously flawed.

In line with Berg's account of the Risinghill affair, this story revolves around MD and certain officers in the London County Council (LCC), all of whom were named in Berg's book. The part played by the then Secretary of State, Anthony Crosland, and his deputy, Reginald 'Reg' Prentice, in the affair, specifically in relation to their handling of the statutory appeal and consultation processes following the LCC's proposal to close the school, is also examined here.

A1.2 - The Area

In the 1960s, Islington was a predominantly working-class area situated just north of the City of London, within easy walking distance of the Kings Cross and St Pancras main-line train termini. Chapel Street Market sat on the school's doorstep, a place where many of the pupils escaped to at lunch times. It was a busy, bustling area then, and still is. Some might have described it as run down (parts of it were) and there were still a number of undeveloped World War II (WWII) bomb sites, which the children often used as playgrounds. While many areas were considered to be slums, it is important to point out that this was (and probably still is) a matter of definition, familiarity and perception. As was the case in many other parts of London, there remained a number of bomb-damaged houses and some very old and decrepit Victorian tenements awaiting demolition, most of which were multi-occupied as there was a chronic shortage of social housing then. In stark contrast, there were small pockets of fashionable town houses (occupied mainly by professional people) in what were considered

to be the ‘posh’ parts of the borough, for example Finsbury and Canonbury. Today Islington is much gentrified, though not completely.

A1.3 – The School

Risinghill was one of several, new purpose-built comprehensive schools that were built in London after WWII in fulfilment of the *London School Plan 1947* (LSP). (London County Council, 1947) Behind this plan was a desire to provide equal opportunities for all children regardless of ability and/or social background. When the school opened in May 1960, it was housed in a large, modern, purpose-built site at the Angel in Islington.⁴ The site had previously held the former Risinghill Primary School, which was closed in 1956.

The broad, initial intake of the school was drawn almost exclusively from four existing secondary schools in the wider neighbourhood, each of which closed as Risinghill opened. Two of the schools were secondary schools (or secondary modern schools as they were sometimes called then) and the other two were secondary technical schools with no grammar school intake(s) to speak of. The authors have much more to say on the secondary school system when telling their story. In the autumn term following Risinghill’s opening the initial roll was supplemented by a first form intake of eleven-year-olds from the local primary schools, who had either failed the 11+ examination or passed it, but were denied grammar school places; the reasons for which will be examined in later chapters. The four merged schools were:

A1.4 - Gifford Secondary School

This was a large, co-educational school located in the Caledonian Road, which stretches north – south from Kings Cross right the way through to the district of Holloway, a distance of approximately three miles. The school, along with Pentonville Prison, sat roughly in the middle of the ‘Cally’ as it was, and still is, known locally. It catered for children in the age range eleven to fifteen; the majority of whom lived in the streets bordering this part of the Cally. In line with most other secondary schools in the area, Gifford’s intake comprised those who had failed the 11+ examination or had failed to gain a place at the grammar school, and it provided a general education in preparation for the workplace. As far as the authors have been able to establish, Gifford did not provide an opportunity for children to sit the GCE ‘O’-

⁴ The Angel was a famous public house at the intersection of Islington High Street and Pentonville Road in Islington; there has been a public house of this name here since 1614. It was also the name of the adjacent London Underground train station.

Level examination(s) although it did offer pupils in their fourth and final year of education a ‘commercial’ course of study, which included basic accounts and typing. The school had a reputation for being one of the toughest schools in the district, probably because of its location (close to the prison and to Beaconsfield Buildings, some very old and decrepit Victorian tenements that were earmarked for demolition) with the children, in particular the boys, having the same, rough and tough image. Around five hundred boys and girls joined from Gifford when Risinghill opened; it was the largest of the four contributory schools by far.

A1.5 - Ritchie Secondary School

Ritchie was a smaller school than Gifford and was for girls only. It was situated in Ritchie Street, with its playground fronting onto Liverpool Road. The school was very close to Chapel Street Market and Risinghill Street. As was the case with Gifford, Ritchie provided a general secondary education for its pupils from eleven up to the age of fifteen when they left to start work. There was no opportunity to stay on and sit *any* examinations. Here the focus was on providing the girls with a basic education to apply for jobs in shops, factories and offices (if they were lucky) and life skills in preparation for marriage. By way of example a section of the school was set out as a flat where home-making skills were taught. Around four hundred girls joined Risinghill at its opening.

A1.6 - Northampton Technical School for Boys

As its name implies, Northampton was a technical school specialising in precision engineering, instrument making and watchmaking. It was situated in Chequer Street, Clerkenwell, the then centre of London’s watchmaking industry, and was adjacent to Bunhill Fields, some half mile from Risinghill. In the past it had connections⁵ as the junior section of Northampton Polytechnic (now the City University) in Northampton Square, London – hence its name. Northampton’s pupils were drawn from a London-wide catchment area with some of the boys travelling many miles to attend such was its reputation, though most were probably from the central London area. It prepared boys for apprenticeships and placement as prospective skilled engineers; some probably went into higher education through Technical Colleges and/or the Polytechnics (now defunct, transmuted to universities). A limited range of GCE subjects was provided in preparation for further education. Risinghill had a superb

⁵ There were clearly some connections to the very end. Philip remembers going to the pool under the Polytechnic’s buildings for school swimming lessons, and going to the school prize-givings in its main hall.

purpose-built engineering facility to enable these boys to continue their technical education. Around two hundred of them joined Risinghill when it opened.

A1.7 - Bloomsbury Technical School for Women

This was a small, technical school for girls specialising in millinery, tailoring and photography. Situated in Queens Square, near Holborn, Bloomsbury was approximately three miles from Risinghill and was the smallest of the four contributory schools with around eighty pupils; it was also furthest from the Risinghill site. Although it is referred to in the LSP (at page 71) as 'Bloomsbury Technical School for Women' it was known locally as 'Bloomsbury Technical School for Young Ladies' and it catered for girls up to the age of sixteen. Sewing, with a focus on tailoring, was Bloomsbury's speciality⁶ but as indicated, it also offered a course in photography, presumably because photography was important to the fashion world. All of these subjects were offered on the new Risinghill curriculum.

A1.8 – Quiet, difficult start and explosive closure

The school opened at the start of the summer term on Tuesday, 3 May 1960 and clearly there was a period of adjustment for all concerned as the merging of four very different schools was never going to be easy. Discipline, in the early days, was an issue, but this would have been expected of any such school of that place and time. However, the headmaster and staff worked hard to bring these problems under control, and by 1961 the school was beginning to flourish. Academic success rates were improving though these, understandably, were not spectacular as many comprehensives of that era were starved of pupils in the highest quintile of academic ability; these pupils being creamed off, in the main, to the grammar schools in the area. Socially, however, the school was functioning well, providing help and support for pupils who were deemed to be disruptive and/or challenging - as witnessed by the falling numbers of pupils on probation, to be discussed later.

From the very beginning, there was an unusual amount of interference from the LCC, and in private MD was hounded by some of the LCC officials, notably those who reported directly to the Chief Education Officer (CEO), W F Houghton. All of these officials were very critical of Duane's methods; prominent among these criticisms was Duane's refusal to countenance CP to maintain pupil control. Conversely Duane was held in high esteem by others in the LCC and by some of the country's leading educationalists, notably Sir John Newsom.

⁶ It also had close contacts with the corsetry industry.

The LCC closed the school in the summer of 1965 against the wishes of the pupils, the parents, the majority of the teachers, and against the public, if not private, views of administrators and politicians in charge of education - at both national (central government) and local (LCC) level. The reasons provided for the closure was a falling school roll, and the need to use the school's premises to house another single-sex girl's' school on the grounds that single-sex education was becoming more popular.

Parents, pupils and staff mounted a campaign against the closure, and the action caused a furore in the national press, attracting the attention of Leila Berg, then a prolific author of children's books and a journalist to boot. Berg, after visiting the school, became involved in the fight to save it, and her book took a stance very much on the side of MD and his pupils.

As former pupils the RRG members went their various ways, some not aware of the fuss, some aware but not really touched at the time, others aware and concerned, but life took over and everyone moved on. However, they have not forgotten their experiences of the time: this has stayed with them, as it has for many of the Risinghill pupils, some of whom have contributed to the research for RR. Their voices may have gone unheard if Isabel and Lynn, good friends at Risinghill, had not met up in 2004 (after many years) and started to talk about Berg's book, which, in turn, led to the formation of the RRG. Key players still alive were contacted; other ex-pupils and staff were reached; and through public archives and private documentation made available to the RRG, the story could be retold.

Risinghill Revisited is not for the RRG members or about them. Nor is it about historical tourism into their pasts or the pasts of those ex-pupils who have contacted them. They have seen the comprehensive school reviled: the phrase 'bog standard' being used time and again to rubbish it, and by implication themselves, on account of their association with a school that has been described widely as a failed educational experiment and worse. The ever-changing systems of education in England have been, and still are, riddled with politics and political agendas. This is to everyone's detriment, especially for the disadvantaged in society or the academically less able, and it is in this regard that RR has lessons for today and for tomorrow. Many of the issues that it raises are still unresolved.

For all of the above reasons and more, the authors believe that this is a fitting and opportune time to celebrate: (1) the school; (2) its staff and its pupils; and (3) the headmaster, MD. It is

hoped that RR will give them all justice, in all senses of the word, and that they will all continue to be remembered and remain influential.

CHAPTER A2 – Research Team Introductions

‘Memory ... is the diary that we all carry about with us.’

Oscar Wilde

(‘The importance of being Earnest’, 1895)

Each of the RRG members approached this project with their own different backgrounds, objectives and prejudices – but they all had something to say, and so they introduce themselves,⁷ collectively and individually, describing how they have fared since attending the school, and their motives for updating the Risinghill story. These introductions can be read as supplementing the research undertaken with their fellow pupils later in the process, and the background presented in the previous chapter.

Although none of the RRG members are educationalists, they see this independence as a positive advantage - for the following reasons. First and foremost, *Risinghill Revisited* (RR) is written from the perspective of the pupils, who, until now, have not had a say in any of the debates about Risinghill or Berg’s book. Second, they are able to give an essential inside view. Third, the considered views of pupils after their schooling appear to be overlooked in the literature on education where ‘success’ tends to be measured in terms of academic achievement when this could not be further from the truth, as will be demonstrated here and in *The Waste Clay*. Last but not least, although RR is likely to be of interest to educationalists it does tell a human story, one that the authors hope will appeal to the public at large in much the same way that Berg’s book did. It has certainly been written in the same spirit.

⁷ The RRG comprises Isabel Sheridan, Philip Lord, Lynn Brady, Alan Foxall (all ex-pupils of Risinghill) and John Bailey, the creator of RRG’s website (www.risinghill.org.uk), who, although not a former pupil, was familiar with the school and the district in which it was situated. Yvonne Fisher, also an ex-pupil of the school, joined the RRG late in the process, and has contributed to RR, as discussed.

A2.1 – The Authors

Isabel Sheridan



1965



2014

Isabel was at Risinghill between May 1960 and July 1963. Isabel was previously at Gifford School.

I left Risinghill in 1963 with an ‘O’-Level GCE in English, and a RSA School Certificate in five subjects (English, Civics, Commerce, Shorthand and Typing.). At the suggestion of one my teachers, I went on to do an advanced secretarial course at North London Day College where, in addition to shorthand and typing, I was studying for two ‘A’-Levels (English and British Constitution.). However, I left after a year as I wanted to start work. By now I had passed the RSA Stage II examinations in shorthand and typing and was well on my way to gaining the 120wpm (words per minute) Pitman’s shorthand qualification, which I obtained later at night school.

Although I have some regrets about not taking my ‘A’-Levels, I have never had any problems finding work. And I can honestly say that, with the exception of one job from which I was made redundant, I have enjoyed all the positions that I have held, moving on when they ceased to be a challenge or when a better opportunity presented itself. With age comes experience, and in my twenties and thirties I was working at director level as a Personal Assistant (PA), becoming an office manager later in life.

One of the PA jobs that I applied for in my late twenties was for the Human Resources (HR) director of a subsidiary company of General Electric, the American organization. During my interview, I was quizzed about the ‘Blackboard Jungle’ and I did not understand what the interviewer (a man) was talking about. I must have looked at him blankly because he

rephrased the question, somewhat sheepishly, this time asking what I thought about Risinghill. I pointed out, very politely, that it was not a 'Blackboard Jungle' and had served me well, giving me the basic skills, qualifications and confidence to apply for the senior secretarial positions identified in my Curriculum Vitae. And because I felt that I had been stigmatized in some way, I also remember telling him that I would not have applied for the job on offer if I did not believe that I could do it or words to that effect. Whatever I said must have 'ticked all the boxes' as I was offered the position straight away. Risinghill was never mentioned again so I forgot all about it. It was not until 2004, when I met up with Lynn, an old school friend, that I discovered why I had been quizzed in this fashion.

Lynn and I met in 1960 on our first day at Risinghill. We were thirteen years old then and formed a close friendship continuing into our late twenties. By now we were both married, had children and I had moved to Bedfordshire whereas Lynn remained in Islington. In fact, she still lives there today. In the 1970s we slowly drifted apart, but every year we would write a few lines in our Christmas cards promising, faithfully, to meet up, but work and family commitments always got in the way. In the spring of 2004, however, I finally kept my promise. After giving up work (now with time) I no longer had an excuse for keeping away.

A good thirty years had passed since we had last seen or spoken to each other, but as we hugged on Lynn's doorstep, the years just melted away. We had not planned on doing anything in particular, other than lunch at Manzies, the pie and mash shop in Chapel Street Market, but Risinghill was calling and was only a few minutes' walk away. As I looked up at the windows of our old school, now called Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, I could not help but smile at the venetian blinds that were hanging askew and at half-mast, making the place look untidy, vandalized even. These blinds had, from the outset, been a source of frustration for the Risinghill children, many of whom had never seen venetian blinds before and so did not know how to operate them correctly. That said, even some of the teachers had problems lowering, lifting and locking the blinds in position without jamming them, but more often than not it was the children who took the blame.

The day passed all too quickly with Lynn giving me a book (*Risinghill: death of a Comprehensive School*) as I was leaving. I had no idea that a book had been written about the school, and I was even more intrigued when she refused to tell me what it was about. All she would say was that it had made the author, Leila Berg, and the school quite famous. I promised to ring her when I had read it as she was keen to have my feedback.

Berg, to my mind, had captured the essence of Risinghill but what I found very disturbing was her descriptions of Islington and of the pupils' homes and families. She had painted a picture of extreme poverty and deprivation, which was not how I remembered Islington or for that matter my childhood. Gifford Street, where I had lived, was undoubtedly in a poor, working-class area and my home (four rooms on a split landing in an old tenement house) was not the best place in which to bring up six children. But it is what goes on inside a home that is important, not what it looks like from the outside. I did not go hungry, did not live in squalor and although I did not have much in the way of material things, I was loved unconditionally. Those four rooms in Gifford Street will always have a special place in my heart, as they do for my siblings. And I know, from talking to my mother just days before she died, that when she had all of her children around her in Gifford Street, despite the hardships, this was one of the happiest periods of her life. My family might, by today's standards, have been poor, but it was not deprived.

In all other respects the book, in my opinion, presented an accurate account of what life was like in the school. Although pseudonyms were used for the teachers and pupils, I found myself putting names to the faces, and I was also able to confirm some of the events that Berg had described. This was not a work of fiction. Moreover, her portrayal of Duane was exactly how I remembered him. There were, however, aspects of her story that I found difficult to follow, notably the politics of the grammar school as I did not understand what this had to do with Risinghill or its closure. But for me the most disturbing part of the story was the LCC's treatment of MD both during and after his headship of the school. This was appalling. In fact, I could not believe that it was true.

I had to read the book a second time to get my head around the political aspects of the story, not that I succeeded. As for the arguments about social mobility and class, which dominated parts of the book, this was a lot of twaddle to me. It was not something that, until now, I had paid much attention to, possibly because my parents had always told me that I was as good as anyone else. This was also a message that had been preached at Risinghill. It must have sunk in as I took this philosophy with me when I went out into the working world. I never considered myself to be inferior, socially or otherwise. As to the question of whether I considered myself to be working-class or middle-class, something that came up in conversation with Lynn, I had never thought about this before. But if I had to give an answer, I would say that I was working-class albeit that, as a house owner with a nice car and

holidays abroad every year, I probably fitted into the middle-class bracket. So for me this was a daft question, and I think I surprised Lynn when I said that I did not need a social badge to tell me what I was or was not. Lynn, however, had always been the more radical thinker and was far more passionate about such things. At school she had worn her CND⁸ badge with pride and was fondly referred to as ‘Ban the Bomber’—a title that my brothers and others remember to this day.

Berg’s conspiracy theory was something else that I struggled with. If, as she claimed, the LCC had conspired to close the school long before the official decision was taken, then had the Secretary of State, who was responsible for making the final decision not been culpable also? To accept this theory, one also had to accept that the LCC cared not a jot for the Risinghill children who, if there was any truth in Berg’s claims, were used as pawns in a sick, political game. Again, I could not believe this. However, the closure of Risinghill barely five years after it had opened was certainly very odd, and I began to wonder if Berg did have a point.

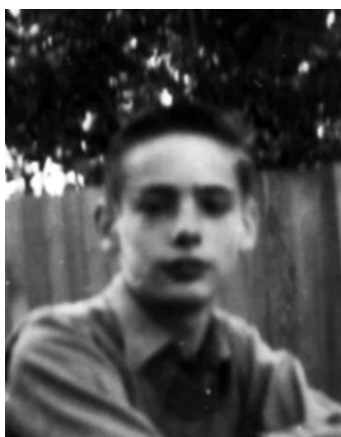
It was Lynn who suggested we write a sequel to *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*, which, at the time, I’m not too sure I took very seriously. I had never written anything of substance, did not know much about education and I knew even less about the politics of it. Lynn, however, was very keen. Within a matter of weeks she had tracked Berg down and arranged for us to go and meet her. To say I was surprised would be putting it mildly. I was absolutely terrified at the prospect, not of meeting Berg, but of writing a book about a topic about which I knew nothing.

While Lynn’s focus was on the pupils and some of the wider, social issues arising from Berg’s portrayal of them as children, my interest lay in establishing the facts of the Risinghill affair. We had, by now, started researching the Risinghill story and it was clear, even to me, a complete stranger to the world of educational politics, that the pupils were perceived to be these poor, illiterate, no-hopers whom were never going to amount to much. This grabbed my attention. I was now beginning to understand the power of the ‘system’ and this so-called class structure that has us all neatly labelled and compartmentalized without us even realizing it. Writing a book filled me with trepidation but I could not wait to get started.

Isabel Sheridan (née Wingrove), 2013

⁸ The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Philip Lord



Ca. 1960



2010

Philip was at Risinghill between May 1960 and July 1961. Philip joined Risinghill from Northampton Technical School.

Fragments and fractured – that is what I see of my education from the distance of fifty or so years. Not a jigsaw, because the pieces do not fit well together, and I feel the lack of coherence even today. There were no long spells of stability, and in many ways I regret that; in other ways I think it has given me flexibility, resilience and an ability to adapt quickly. During childhood my parents moved around a lot and so I had been to many schools before I arrived at Risinghill: first a primary school in Forest Hill, a junior school in Redhill, then briefly (after failing the 11+ as a dreamy, lazy, sensitive boy) to a secondary modern school in Redhill, and on to another in Nunhead in South East London. At Nunhead I passed the ‘13+’ to go to Northampton Technical School and thence of course to Risinghill when it opened. Soon after getting into Northampton we moved back to Redhill in Surrey, and it was decided I should commute to Northampton and Risinghill schools from there – a train journey to London Bridge, then on the tube to Old Street (for Northampton) and to the Angel (for Risinghill). It must have taken a good hour in each direction. I am not sure how I managed it – I took the dog for a walk in the morning before setting off. But I recall having to do very little homework, a great blessing. A few other Northampton/Risinghill boys had similar commutes, but I think mine was the longest. Interestingly, the fares for these journeys were paid for by the local authorities of one’s place of residence (in my case by Surrey County Council), presumably believing it was in the interests of the child’s education. I have not

checked, but I cannot believe this would happen nowadays in our more affluent but more publically mean society.

I left Risinghill when I was sixteen with four 'O'-Levels, mathematics, physics, engineering and technical drawing. I vividly remember when walking away from the school for the last time thinking that none of my schools had taught me how to think; I felt let down. Now on reflection the contrast between Northampton and Risinghill was in the latter's favour. Though Northampton no doubt gave a superb technical training, outside of its core subjects of fine metalwork, technical drawing and mathematics (and perhaps physics) the teaching was pretty appalling. It may have been because of the impending closure of the school, but in the humanities - English, geography, history, etc. we seemed to be subjected to a stream of indifferent supply teachers. I remember a term or two of English simply comprising dictation just to keep us occupied and quiet; we went over the industrial revolution and Jethro Tull (inventor, not pop group) countless times for history with different teachers; one bluff geography master amused us with risqué stories. In all non-technical areas I am self-taught; I read and still read incessantly. There was no chemistry or biology to speak of (I don't think Risinghill did these either), nor any attempt at foreign languages – things I have missed in my working and intellectual life. Not being taught early how to learn has always added a layer of difficulty to life. I always envied my brother, who went to grammar school, learning French, Latin and Greek.

I do remember a distinct improvement in the teaching of my-non-core subjects when I got to Risinghill, particularly the English teaching – alas too late for 'O'-Levels - and for the first time I enjoyed PE: we could more or less do as we wished under supervision, and I particularly remember enjoying tennis and using the trampoline.

From Risinghill I went on to Croydon Technical College to get my 'A'-Levels as it was closer to home in Redhill; I suppose too it had more resources and a wider range of options. With the 'A'-Levels I went on to Reading University to read mathematics and physics; I got in by the clearing system, but acceptance was a mistake – I should have taken a year out and learnt better how to learn. But I had no family experience to refer to, nor access to the advice of a school or college experienced in these matters, nor did I have the experience of extra years. I was the first in my family to go to university, like so many people of my generation – it was an opportunity that had to be grabbed. Reading University was not a huge success, and

I came out with a poor degree, an honours 3rd in mathematics. During my time at Reading I got married, far too early.

Deeply interested in education by my background I went on to get a postgraduate certificate in education at Sussex, and then to teach at a newly formed boys' comprehensive school in North London. I very quickly became disillusioned with, and exhausted by, teaching, but stayed out the year for the kids who were taking exams. There are some interesting parallels and contrasts (one being social class tensions) between that school and Risinghill, but that subject is too long and complex to go into here.

I was lucky – I was offered a research job with the Medical Research Council at St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College (close to old Northampton haunts in Clerkenwell), where I was engaged in research into the health effects of air pollution – we were studying the health effects of the London 'Pea-Souper' fogs. For the first few years I took evening study to gain an MSc in Mathematics, but then tired of study and with family obligations I did not go on to do a PhD. I regret that now, and still have a lingering desire to finish the job and do one (now nearly everyone in my family has a doctorate).

An opportunity to move on came in the late '70s when I landed a computing management job with a publisher in Amsterdam. Our second son had just been born – and we moved to the Netherlands. My youngest son eventually went to a Dutch 'kleuterschool' (an infant's school), the eldest to a secondary school mainly for the children of EU employees at a local EU scientific facility. He had a wonderful education there – being taught in three languages according to subject – in English, French and German, and of course he picked up playground Dutch. I was very impressed by both the Dutch and EU education system; they were well organised and gave kids of all abilities a broad education, and the course materials were very well thought out. And the schools were relaxed; there was certainly no corporal punishment. More interestingly education was more professional and did not seem so politicised as it was, and still is, in Britain. It was free of the neurosis that attends and blights the English (but less so the Scots) over education, and childhood in general.

I eventually came back to an IT job in the UK at the end of the '80s, after a divorce, the family having all left the Netherlands before me. The job did not last long – but I was lucky enough to get a senior computing job in the pharmaceuticals industry just as the previous company went bust. In the mid '90s SmithKline Beecham offered me a job to build an

electronic data archive. I got enthralled by the difficult and extraordinarily interesting problem of preserving digital information and became a known expert in this field, for which I was elected a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts for this work. I still teach this subject part-time for the University of Dundee.

I left the pharmaceuticals industry some ten years ago to set up my own small consultancy specialising in digital archiving and preservation, but now have become semi-retired and moved to Scotland to be near the families of both me and my partner Alison's families. There is too much to do: leaving aside home improvements and decorating, learning the baroque lute, instrument making, bird watching, photography, family history, travel, gardening and environmental work and I shall always be studying – maybe even a PhD at last. And Risinghill.

Near the end of my stay at Risinghill and while at Croydon Tech I started to get interested in left-wing politics – exploring ideas, the Labour Party, young socialists, the Fabian Society, communism, CND, anarchism. In part this was a natural development given my family's strong left-wing sympathies and their overriding concern for fairness, but it was strengthened by my commuting to school over the years and the social and environmental contrasts and ugliness I saw. I was born of a solidly working-class father, a skilled metal worker, and a lower-middleclass, aspirational mother; at Risinghill I was in a familiar working class milieu; home was in fairly comfortable middle class Redhill. I was very conscious of class differences. The travelling time to school gave me much time to think and dream. This political – perhaps moral - engagement shaped my youth and future paths. At university I had two wonderful summer vacation jobs running an adventure playground in Reading – further grist to my child-centred educational views. When Risinghill was so publically closed in 1965 I followed the story keenly in the press and did understand the general political background – educational freedom was intimately part of my libertarian socialism. When Leila Berg's book appeared a year or two later I bought it – but then found I could not, did not want, to read it. Perhaps it was too close to my heart, and too close in time. It remained unread on my bookshelves until the 2000s.

I do remember Michael Duane; from this distance of time I recall a tall, seemingly self-assured handsome man. I had very little direct interaction with him, so I cannot say his influence was direct, but rather an ideal as I half understood at the time what he was striving for. Perhaps the closest thing I remember is my mother telling me that he had told her I would

have become head boy if I did not have such a long journey. But I knew nothing of this at the time. In a similar fashion I was influenced by a Mr Chapman, a very similar headmaster at Nunhead Secondary School with, I believe, similar ideals. I remember him being upset when a boy 'had' to be publically caned (performed by the rather coarse PE master whom I suspect now was sexually aroused by it).

After ending my teaching, Risinghill moved to the back of my consciousness until perhaps sometime around 2005. My disgust at the war in Iraq had revitalised my radical leanings and I read Leila's book as part of my re-education. It gave me insights I hitherto had lacked, and facts I was previously unaware of, but I found the book unsatisfactory. I found it overstated, perhaps naïve in several ways, though it was probably necessary at the time. Stimulated, on Friends Reunited, I found out about the Risinghill Action Group, and responded to that, searched out my old press cuttings and made scans of them for the group – but then became inactive again. Our company had just landed a big contract in Europe and this absorbed huge amounts of time and energy for a year or two, to be followed by two more long contracts in the Middle East. Now, having eased back from work I got an unexpected email from John Bailey - so I resumed, keen to finish important unfinished business.

Philip Lord, 2013

Lynn Brady



1963



2014

Lynn was at Risinghill between May 1960 and 1962. Lynn joined Risinghill from Ritchie School.

I bought the Risinghill book in the early 1970s and was looking forward to reading about the school. I had enjoyed my time at the school; it had been good for me, academically, vocationally and socially. I thought the buildings and the facilities were great. The teaching and learning was much broader than at Ritchie. I was interested in subjects such as English, French, shorthand and typing, metal work, trampolining, photography. I also liked being in mixed classes and was very surprised when I was in the A classes. The 11+ had graded me as not very intelligent but here I was holding my own in class and enjoying learning.

However, when I started to read Leila Berg's book I found it difficult to identify with her descriptions of the pupils, family lives and homes. I was furious when I read:

The development of such children is astonishing. When they cry as babies – their first attempt at communication – they are hit and told 'Stop that row!' When they first learn to speak they are either met with tight-lipped silence or told 'Shut up!' and cloute. (Berg 1968a, p12)

This view of working class family life did not represent my life and childhood experiences at all; although some aspects of the school's life were familiar. For the next thirty years the book gathered dust on my bookshelves until I loaned it to Isabel. I was not surprised when she also reacted strongly to the descriptions of the pupils and our families. Although I didn't agree with many of Leila's views, it was the book that started our discussions about our own schooling and the wider social and educational issues.

Unlike Isabel, I have always realized that Risinghill was famous. People I worked with in the education sector were always interested when I said I went to Risinghill School. In the 1980s I was told by a professional that he had been involved in testing pupils at Risinghill and in other more formal schools. He said they couldn't understand why Risinghill children consistently did so well in the tests. I have always wanted to know if this was a true story. Over the years I have followed the debates about how to improve the educational achievement of working class children. I still live in Islington and I've seen many of Islington's schools hit the headlines in the local and national press when they were deemed to be 'failing' schools.

If attaining school qualifications is a measure of success then I would certainly have been considered to be one of the failures – I failed the 11+ and then left school at fifteen without any qualifications. I enjoyed learning but I wanted to work and earn money. At that time studying was not for me. I did not feel a failure leaving school at fifteen as that was the norm for most local children. Using the typing skills I had learned at Risinghill, I landed my first office job. Without these skills I would probably have been destined for shop or factory work. I gave up office work when I had my children; by then I was a personal assistant to the managing director in a publishing company. However, my touch-typing ability has proved to be a valuable skill.

I re-entered the education system when I was twenty-eight. By then I was married, with two children and living in Hackney. Due to the lack of childcare facilities for under-fives in Hackney I set up a local playgroup with another local mother. I became a member of the playgroup management committee. To learn more about the role of the childcare workers who were running the playgroup for us I decided to join a part-time childcare course that had a crèche for my children. This was my first taste of adult education. I really enjoyed the course and I am pleased to say 'The Grasshopper Playgroup' is still providing childcare for Hackney children.

From these small beginnings came a lifetime of involvement in working with children, young adults and their parents. Thanks to Adult Education I was able to attend many other vocational courses. I also became a Marriage Guidance Counsellor. This was during the period when their training was free of charge in return for working on a voluntary basis.

I was almost forty when I started my first degree at the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster). I realised that without qualifications to support my work experience I was unlikely to get interviewed for jobs I was capable of doing.

I was so naive when I started at PCL that I didn't realize that it was possible to achieve degrees at different levels – I thought it was pass or fail. Despite this, I was one of a small group of students to graduate with a first-class honours degree. My family and friends were proud of my achievements, but one colleague told me “*this was only the equivalent of a 2.1 from a good university*”! Still, this wasn't held against me in 2000 when I was accepted by Brunel University and the National Children's Bureau to carry out a research study and PhD⁹. So, an 11+ plus failure that left school without any qualifications is now Dr. Brady.

I also have a teaching qualification. I have taught adults in many formal and informal settings. My greatest love is teaching people, like myself, who left school without any qualifications, it is great to see them begin to enjoy education and then go on to get jobs. I firmly believe in giving people the opportunity for life-long learning. Education should be made available for people throughout their lives when they are ready to learn.

I still live in Islington and my children went to the local mixed comprehensive, Islington Green that was similar to Rivington. This school was made famous by Pink Floyd for the song 'Another Brick in the Wall – we don't need no education'. It has since become one of the new academies.

So how important is it for children to go to a good school with a National Curriculum and are poorer children stereotyped? How much is educational achievement related to nature, nurture or wealth and opportunity? There is no doubt that schooling is important, but I would argue that I am a product of formal and informal life-long educational learning. I was lucky enough to have two parents who helped all of their children learn to read, write and think for ourselves. I also had the opportunity to work in the 1960s when it was easy to get a job without any qualifications and then learn on the job whilst earning a 'good' wage. When I was ready I was able to study as an adult at a time when mandatory grants were still available and course fees were paid for everyone. This supported path into education is now closed.

⁹ Specialist Foster Care for Traumatized Young People with Challenging Behaviour: Appraising Joined Up Service Provision (2005).

I currently work for Coram Voice (previously ‘Voice for the Child in Care’). I am a Senior Learning Consultant, Community Advocate and I act as an Independent Person for 1989 Children Act complaints. All of my work is to ensure that professionals listen to children’s views, wishes and feelings when decisions are made about them. Advocates are essential to help children voice their complaints. I think the on-going Jimmy Saville scandal has shown how often children are ignored when they try to speak up on their own. My latest research study in 2011 revealed that many children in England were not able to access advocacy support¹⁰. The cuts to local authority budgets have now made the situation even worse for children who need to be heard.

In 1965, the Risinghill pupils were not listened to when they were campaigning to stop the closure of the school. Today, despite improvements in legislation, not much has changed for large numbers of children and young people who want to give their views on issues that affect them.

Lynn Brady (née Stockwell), May 2015.

¹⁰ Where is my advocate? A scoping report on advocacy services for children and young people in England, Office of the Children’s Commissioner (2011).

Alan Foxall



1960?



2015

Alan was at Risinghill between September 1960 and July 1965, nearly the whole of the school's lifetime. He joined Risinghill from White Lion Street primary school. Alan appears in Leila Berg's book under the name "Roger".

It all began a long time ago when I was too young for my height and too tall for my clothes. I remember 'twas a dark and dismal day that I first went to Risinghill School (the original one) and it got darker as I went down the narrow stairway to the lower floor classroom. Then some genius switched on the lights (electric they were) and all was revealed, a warm gaily decorated room where I spent my first school days learning to write my own name without first copying it from a small card.

The year would have been 1956, and my world was a very strange and blurry place (it was some years later that some clever so and so twigged I was short sighted). It got much stranger and more frightening when I was told that I was going to another school. I cried my eyes out thinking that I must have done something very bad, if the school wanted to get rid of me. It took a while before it sunk in that everyone in my class (and of course the school) was going, as Risinghill was closing down (for the first time).

My mother and my grandmother first took me to my new school, it was called White Lion Street and for the first year or so there I was quite happy (I think). I can't remember if I cried on my first day, not that it makes much difference as I cried a lot; being tall and awkward I was often bullied and that was only by the teachers. Things got a lot worse when I got into the senior classes and was taught by two expert sadists, a Miss Collins and a Mr Boundy. Happily, there was a light at the end of the tunnel as, at the age of ten, some enormous district

nurse who, after having whispered the word "*banana*" in to my ears and realizing I hadn't heard a thing, announced very loudly to the world (well, the rest of the class) that "*this child is deaf....*". "*Shame*" everybody else seemed to say, "*We just thought he was stupid*"!

It was then that my first saviour came into my life, he was the new Headmaster of White Lion Street and his name was Mr Straker. He had me put into a special class, as I had fallen behind in my education. He put me in the front row of the class and made sure that I both saw and heard everything that was being taught. I made considerable progress in this class and eventually was put in for (was there a choice?) and passed the 11+. However, what with my disabilities and the fact that I was often off sick, the school recommended that I should go to Risinghill (the new one) as they did not think I would cope in grammar school.

So in the autumn of 1961 with my brand new uniform and very cold knees (I was still wearing shorts) I ventured forth into senior education. I first met Michael Duane a few days after I joined and was shocked rigid by the fact he called me by my first name. He seemed interested in me and in my progress at the beginning and through my years at Risinghill. He always looked at me when he spoke to me as if he knew that I was instinctively lip reading (I was never taught to do so), unlike some other teachers who could only shout at me, thinking that somehow that helped me. Michael Duane was always there when I needed him (which thankfully wasn't often) as I was doing reasonably well at this school. I can remember that when it came to deciding what senior class I was to join in the fourth year, he persuaded me that I should do Engineering (he wasn't wrong).

Nineteen sixty-five, the year of the school closure, passed alarmingly fast and before I knew what was happening, the Engineering Class and I got whipped off to Sir Philip Magnus. The only good thing about this new school was that I learnt a lot of card tricks from the maths teacher who was a budding magician (failed more like it) and by the end of the year I was shuffling a deck single-handedly and pulling the aces out every time. I left the school with only two 'O'-Level GCEs and two CSEs.

My dad got me my first job with the company he worked for in Esher, Surrey. The personnel manager (an ex-headmaster), a Mr Duncan interviewed me and said he thought I should continue my studies as a Student Apprentice. Well, in 1966, £5 a week plus one day a week at college seemed like a good idea. Six years later I am still at college, although by this time

doing Higher Education diplomas. The company closed in 1972 and I joined the then London Electricity Board (LEB) as an Engineering trainee.

I spent five or so years with the LEB and after a brief period seconded to a classified military project in Iran. I left the Board and joined Ford Motor company as a Plant Engineer in their foundry, hot work I can tell you, especially when I had to cross very militant picket lines. By this time I was married and when I got transferred to Ford's European Operations working in France and Germany; we were expecting our first child and almost our first divorce because I was abroad so much. I decided to leave Ford's and I joined a petrochemical company as a Project Engineer in Wood Green, London for five years. This company closed down (getting to be a habit) and I joined a pharmaceutical company initially for four months on an agency basis and left nine and half years later when the company closed down (this is getting seriously worrying). I was out of work briefly and then I got offered an agency post with Tate & Lyle (sweet work that) that lasted for two years (no they didn't close down). Out of work again for four months then I was offered a post as a Senior Electrical Design Engineer with an Irish Utility organization. Unfortunately this company was some years later sold off to another English organization, although I was promoted to a Senior Manager's position I was never really happy with the change in ownership and in 2008 the company and I parted ways. In the meantime having achieved Chartered Engineer status and Fellowship of the IEE¹¹ I moved to a local mechanical and electrical contracting company where nowadays I act as a Consultant.

A few years ago I got approached by a couple of ladies (thought my luck was changing) who had a questionnaire about Risinghill. I got very interested in what they were doing and when they asked me to join them I happily accepted and so became part of the Risinghill Research Group.

I have had a good career thanks to three teachers at different times in my life, Michael Duane especially as he saw something in me that others were trying to ignore, and not only me but many hundreds of children during his career as a teacher.

The last memory I have of MD was on the final day of Risinghill (in July 1965) when he was loading his things into the back of a red van. He was surrounded by a vast number of pupils, teachers, parents and the odd onlookers, the strange thing was the relative quietness, nobody

¹¹ IEE = Institution of Electrical Engineers

seemed able to speak, and all they could do was stand and stare and by their mere presence demonstrate their support and appreciation for the man and his work. The spell was all too soon broken when he was driven off leaving everybody behind to his or her own thoughts and emotions to begin their new lives without him.

Alan Foxall, 2013

John Bailey



1965



2015

John was not at Risinghill but became interested in the Risinghill story by accident when he tried to trace an old girlfriend, an ex-Risinghill pupil, on Friends Reunited. His interest was further strengthened after he read Leila Berg's book.

From 1958 to 1962, I went to Bishopswood Secondary Modern School near Crouch End, Hornsey. In September 1964 I met Linda H at the City Day College, Bunhill Row. I was going there one day a week on a general course organised by my employer, The Post Office. She had been a pupil at Risinghill but moved to the college for a secretarial course.

By December 1964 we were an item racing around on my Vespa GS and having fun. We would both don our parkas and go up West and here, there and everywhere in North London. I can still remember the loud flapping noises of those parkas when we were going flat out down the hill in Ferme Park Road in Hornsey. We were risking our lives speeding like that especially as we didn't have helmets or protective clothing but we felt so alive and cool. Seems stupid now!

Linda still took her studying serious but I was too interested in clothes, music, my scooter and my girlfriend to bother. However, I can remember us both reading the national newspaper articles about Risinghill in 1965 but, I must confess, I didn't really understand what the fuss was about. By June 1966 I completely lost touch with her when I met the love of my life, the girl who became my wife, Pat. I soon realised that I had to get a better job. I had a lucky break within the Post Office by transferring over to Post Office Telephones in May 1967. I then went back to college determined to get some qualifications.

To cut a long story short, I got promoted a few times and ended up with a good job in BT looking after Access Network planning and records for the UK. I left in 1996 but, fortunately, I have always managed to get telecoms related contract work.

In 2004, one of my wife's friends wanted to use Friends Reunited to find an old school friend. I helped her and got hooked on it. I wondered if Linda had put herself on it so I had a look at the Risinghill School area. She wasn't on it but I read the article that Friends Reunited had added on the history of the school. It explained how Leila Berg had written a bestseller in the 60s. Intrigued, I found a copy on eBay. Once I started reading it, I found I couldn't put it down.

I went back to the school notice board and saw that a small group of ex-pupils were doing some research with the objective of producing a sequel to the book. I asked them if they thought a web site would help their project and I said I could help. So here I am.

By the way, Linda completed the Risinghill questionnaire so Isabel gave her my email address and she emailed me in September 2004.

John Bailey, 2015

Yvonne Fisher



1965



2018

The purpose of this brief profile of the events that shaped my life, is to show that the three years of complete misery I endured from 1960 to 1963 cannot solely be because I did not fit into Risinghill School. Why I did not fit could also be due to the type of child I was.

My first panic attack, which I remember very clearly, occurred at the age of four. It occurred on the day I first went to school when my mother left me at the school gates and told me that she probably would not collect me and, in fact, she continued, I would never see her again because she would most likely be dead. At four years old, I believed her. It is only with hindsight that I realized that she was ill. Nonetheless, panic attacks dominated my early life, accompanied by guilt and total self-loathing, as I lived in fear that I would be the cause of my mother's impending demise. This fear was reinforced by a never-ending narrative that, not only was my existence a mistake, but that my continued existence would result in her being 'taken away'. I was sending her mad. She wished that I had not been born but, if I had to be around, I needed hurry up and grow up and get out of her life.

In contrast, I loved my father; he was an intelligent man. Unfortunately I did not see him much. He was either working or drunk. He loved me, I think, in his own way. But, as my parents rowed constantly when they were together this did little to help me. Making matters worse was that we lived in one room. I had no escape from either one of them. My grandparents lived in a dark room adjoining ours doing little to provide the stable environment I so needed. My grandmother worked long hours as a milliner at the Angel, Islington; my grandfather was an unemployed alcoholic who continually talked about cutting his throat. My overriding memory of him was watching him draw a cut-throat razor across

the stubble on his chin and throat, looking in a broken mirror, and repeated to himself, like a mantra, 'cut your throat'. Today, this would be classed, rightly so, as emotional abuse.

I was born and grew up in Islington - or Canonbury as my mother insisted on - as she was terrified that she would be considered 'common'. In public or when I met anybody, I had to wear white gloves because she had seen Princess Anne in a pair and so these gloves became almost a status symbol. Yet, I was alone both mentally and physically most of the time and frightened of everybody and everything. I became a good target for bullies and, on occasions, I truly prayed to die. My God, my cat and an Enid Blyton book called Shadow the Sheepdog shared a parity of preciousness in my childish emotional turmoil.

By the age of seven I had discovered self-harm; something that I could control. I would punch myself in the face resulting in spectacular nose bleeds. If my nose started to bleed spontaneously as it did, that was never as satisfying. It was also a cry for attention because my mother would have to touch me and, along with a certain degree of irritation, display some signs of caring about me. I started to throw myself down the stairs but, despite the number of times I did this, I only succeeded in injuring myself once - I broke my arm. I also cut my arms but more usually would cut myself in places that only I knew about. That brought me peace.

By the age of thirteen I realized that I could fight back. I had grown up fast, both physically and psychologically; I knew what I wanted, and I was determined that nobody would stand in my way. I no longer needed to self-harm, although I think I believe the remnants of self-harm has continued to the present day, manifesting itself as an eating disorder.

Ultimately, I gained nothing from my secondary education at Risinghill School; my education and qualifications came later. Risinghill was just another frightening place where I was forced to be and I felt an enormous sense of freedom when I passed through its gates and walked away from that school for the last time in December 1963.

I had my first daughter when I was seventeen. Much is written of the 1960s being a decade of love and liberation but the reality was vastly different. There remained a huge stigma of being an unmarried mother in 1966 although, for me, my new daughter increased my resolve to fight. My parents were devastated when they found out I was pregnant and, being the coward I was, I could not help but be terrified of their reaction. Yet, for the first time ever I felt that I had something to live and fight for.

In fairness to my mother, it was she that made it possible for me to train as a nurse as, once she had accepted the addition of a new member of family in our one-roomed accommodation, she did a lot of babysitting for me. This allowed me to work long shifts and unsocial hours. But I had to watch both her and my father very closely with my daughter. My treatment at their hands never allowed me to trust them with her. But things changed when my daughter was three years old and I was a third year student nurse. In that year, I met my future husband. We married a few weeks after we met and my life, literally, took off. We went on to have four more daughters, and, to date, we have fifteen grand and great-grandchildren. Of course, with great happiness comes great sadness. My husband died in 2012 shortly after the death of our second daughter, Joanne, aged just thirty-seven years.

It was not until the age of forty-one, in 1990, that I finally confronted my mother with an explosion of pent up emotions that had become so much a part of me. She was desperately upset and explained it all away under the guise that she had been ill. This, though, was not good enough as the legacy of my early years had left me with an anger I had never experienced before. The result, we did not talk for around six months. I knew she was hurt and, in the end, I felt so guilty that I thought I would make my peace with her. On the day I set aside to go and see her, she suddenly, without any apparent illness, died. Once more, I was denied closure – I almost felt she had planned it.

This, though, is not about self-pity as I am not a self-pitying sort of person. What happened, happened to me and if I could choose a life to live it would be the one I now have. Indeed, it is my experiences and my struggles that have made me the person I am and most of the time, I like that person. I know that, in contrast to my mother, I am a good, loving and caring mother and in return I am loved and cared for. Rather than follow her example, my early life made me determined to be everything she was not. My husband and I had a fantastic relationship and I have been a sensitive, considerate and compassionate nurse. I have achieved my academic ambitions so far and am still achieving; I have a BA (Hons), BSc (Hons), PGCE, MA (Medical Law) and a PhD in Medical Jurisprudence.

With the exception of John, who did not attend the school, we all left Risinghill with nothing much in the way of formal qualifications. However, all of us left with strong memories of the school and its ethos.

PART B - People, Policies and Attitudes

CHAPTER B1 - The Headmaster: Michael Duane

‘The conduct of schools, based upon a new order of conception, is so much more difficult than is the management of schools which walk the beaten path.’

John Dewey

(‘Experience and Education’, 1938)

William Michael Duane¹² (MD) was born on 25 January 1915 in Dublin, the only child of John Joe and Ellie Duane, both working class Irish Catholics. Having survived the First World War, John Joe’s untimely death in one of the many bloody skirmishes following the Easter Uprising of 1916 was tragic. According to Margaret Duane, whom Isabel and Lynn interviewed in 2006, he was shot by accident at work or on his way to work, and was not one of Michael Collins’ rebels, as some have claimed. In 1916 he was, for example, still a soldier in the British army, and this was very much a case of him being in the wrong place at the wrong time, when he returned home in 2017. Ellie, as far as the authors were able to establish, was a domestic servant, taking whatever work was available when her husband died. Times were hard then; many people were unemployed, and Dublin was becoming a very dangerous place to live in.

B1.1 - Childhood and Education

Although MD was very young at the time, he remembered the fearful sounds of artillery fire, and of being carried in his mother’s shawl as they fled from the fighting. They went to Portarlinton, a small town forty-five miles southwest of Dublin, where he was entrusted to the care of his grandparents (the Duane’s) as Ellie’s own parents were dead. As was the case with so many others of that era, Ellie was forced to leave Ireland to look for work in England.

The next five or six years were extremely unhappy for Duane. His grandparents resented having to take him in and they treated him badly, so badly that he often dreamed of saving enough money to run away. This dream was, in part, realised when, at the age of ten, he was

¹² Duane rarely used his first given name William, and in this book the authors follow that practice by referring to him as Michael Duane (abbreviated to Duane or MD). However, in referencing works and documents by him the authors retain the initial W, thus Duane, W. M. Note that this distinguishes him from his second wife, Margaret, referenced by Duane, M.

put on a boat to join his mother in England. He made the sea crossing alone. Shortly after his arrival, Ellie applied for the position of housekeeper to two Catholic gentlemen in Hampstead, North London, taking her son with her to the interview. Although she did not get the job, these gentlemen offered to take young Michael under their wing and he became a ward of sorts, remaining with these people for the rest of his educational life. Margaret was unable to explain why Ellie had left her young son with two strangers as this was not something that Duane had discussed with her in any detail. And it was not something that she had given much thought to either. On reflection, she believed Ellie was probably forced into a decision that she would have preferred not to take as this was an era of considerable hardship, when many families were still suffering from the effects of the General Strike (2016). Ellie, however, did not desert her son. She had a very close and loving relationship with young Michael, taking him out for trips to places such as the London Zoo and Lyons Corner House (renowned for its tea and cakes) when she could afford the money and time.

In talking about Duane's childhood, Margaret also recalled Ellie's desire for MD to enter the priesthood, almost from the day that he was born, providing (in the authors' opinion) a more likely explanation for Ellie leaving her child in the circumstances described. Duane's early schooling does point in this direction. His first school was the Dominican School in Archway, North London. From there, at the age of eleven, he was sent to the Jesuits School, a few miles away in Stamford Hill. It was here that he began his ecclesiastical training, developing his views on indoctrination and punishment:

Fear of physical punishment in the education of children has a very long history! Dictators operate on exactly the same principle – fear! What did the Jesuits say? ‘Give me a child until the age of six then you may do with him what you will!’ I was educated by the Jesuits but, because I was eleven by the time I was in their hands, they didn’t have a real chance to indoctrinate me. I was only beaten twice in seven years, so either they thought me malleable enough, or I enjoyed my school. I certainly look back on it with some affection.

Contrary to what people believe of the Jesuits, their central teaching was that whatever you do, however trivial, you must do it to the best of your ability and if you fail to do what you sincerely believe to be right, then you are committing a grave sin. (Laiken, Undated)

While at the Jesuits School, Duane and his peers were interviewed for the priesthood. All of his friends were accepted straight away, but he was not: instead, he was asked to finish his schooling first and then go to university before taking this final step. Unable to understand why he had been treated differently, this upset him terribly:

For some reason, they must have seen something in Michael and we don't know what – Mike didn't know what and why he was different to all his friends. He felt a bit miffed about this at the time ... that he didn't get accepted. (M. Duane, 2006, p8)

The authors have no idea what MD did immediately after leaving school, but do know that, in January 1935, aged twenty, he began a degree course at Queen Mary College, London, graduating three years later with a degree in English Language and Literature. Then, in 1939, he underwent teacher training at the Institute of Education (IOE), after which he joined Dame Alice Owens School in Islington, North London. It was around this time that he married his first wife, whom he had met at university. The first child from this marriage (a son) was born on 14 October 1940, which was also the year in which MD began his army service - just after the outbreak of WWII in September 1939. Later children were born in 1943, 1947 and 1955 respectively, the youngest of whom, Simon, first contacted the RRG in March 2006. He subsequently acquired two stepchildren when he was remarried, to Margaret.

B1.2 - The War Years

Duane joined the Royal Armoured Corps in 1941 as a Second Lieutenant. In 1942 he was promoted to the rank of Captain, where he was second in command of a squadron of tanks. In the same year, he became Staff Captain of a Brigade. Other advancements followed; the most significant being his promotion, on the battle-front, to Major in 1945; a title that he never used in civilian life. He served in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, and was also the Liaison Officer between the British and the American forces, working under Field Marshal Montgomery and General Miles Dempsey, Commander of the Second Army.

His war record is impressive: mentioned twice in despatches, receiving the 'Croix de Guerre Avec Palme', Belgium's highest honour, and made a 'Chevalier de l'Ordre de Leopold II Avec Palme' for his services in France and Belgium. One of his decorations was for leading his platoon across a stretch of river, under cover of darkness, and through enemy lines. By commandeering a number of small paddleboats from a lake in Brussels, he was able to get his

men across, under the noses of the German soldiers, without making any noise. His Croix de Guerre and promotion to the rank of Major was “for the courage and bravery displayed during the glorious battles that led to the liberation of Belgium.” Whether he considered the battles as ‘glorious’ is a moot point; however, he did play a key part in the D-Day Landings by providing British Intelligence with crucial information (about enemy firepower) prior to the assault. His brief was to obtain surveillance of German munitions in Antwerp Harbour, no easy task when one considers he was in occupied France when he received his orders. To get to the harbour, Duane drove through the enemy lines at night (with headlights switched off) and rested up in the woods by day.

After the war, he joined the United Nations Association of the UK (UNA-UK) and was its chairman for a time.

On discharge from the army, he was given an impeccable testimonial from the then Brigadier V FitzGeorge-Balfour, who himself had a distinguished military career. The testimonial is cited in full in Berg’s book and can also be found in the Duane archive held at the IOE (now in a closed file, MD/2/3). To re-quote two of the paragraphs from Berg:

He has undoubted organising ability and powers of leadership, while his independent character ensures the capacity for original thought and sound judgement. . . .

His many interests are reflected in considerable independence of opinion and character, but he gets on equally well with those who do not agree with them; though he enjoys putting over his views, he never rams them down other people’s throats and is quite broad-minded enough to appreciate the point of view of others. (Berg, 1968b) p.25

In stark contrast, Dr David Limond, a lecturer in the history of education, has described MD as follows:

Duane could be autocratic (one former student has described him as having an aristocratic bearing); he could be vain (I have several indications that he enjoyed flattery) and frequently exhibited an unwillingness to compromise which may have gone beyond assertion of principle and entered the realm of downright stubbornness. He was self-

assured and even conceited, and I confess that I have not always found myself liking him at the most basic human level. If it is said that here I am not passing an academic judgment, then so be it. (Limond, 2003) p.71

Limond, however, never met MD. Nor do the authors believe that he has met any of Duane's students or indeed anyone who knew Duane well. Therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that his observations are based purely on archive materials, probably the same materials that the RRG had examined at the IOE, or secondary sources. The IOE materials provide full details of Duane's schooling and army career so the authors were surprised that Limond did not make the obvious connection - that MD's "aristocratic bearing" could come from his Jesuit and/or army training. The authors, who did know him and were his students, remember a man of impressive demeanour – but that is not the same as aristocratic, or indeed autocratic.

Needless to say, Margaret was deeply offended by this portrayal of her husband:

He was in a tank in the D Day landings, he was a tank commander. This chap doesn't want to know about that does he? No! There was one of those poems that he wrote and I mean, talk about having a breakdown after the war, you know, you could understand it, couldn't you? He didn't have what some people call a good war, he had a terribly, terribly rotten war, and that didn't help, it didn't help at all. He describes it in this poem – how they were walking on bodies, it was absolutely awful.”
(M. Duane, 2006, p8)

Here is the poem in question as supplied by Margaret. Entitled 'The Camp' it deals with the liberation of Buchenwald Concentration Camp where MD, as Liaison Officer between the British and the American forces, witnessed first-hand the plight of the Buchenwald inmates.

The Camp

*The Corps centre-line ran alongside
Beech Wood. The leading division
Paused. Urgent calls crackled
Demanding medics, food, ambulances pronto*

*Behind barbed wire skeletons with skins
Stared out from shaven skulls.*

*Around us neat piles of
Dead and dying, like logs
Layered criss-cross with dangling heads*

*Bursts of fire from pale soldiers
Ended the slouching arrogance
Of guards who failed
To leap to instant orders
Officers turned a blind eye.*

*In this camp, poised on the tips
Of bayonets, hate and madness swayed,
Outraged love burst from the barrel of a gun.
There remained only tears
For the dying in Buchenwald*

Michael Duane (undated)

Another, equally haunting, poem of Duane's (again provided by Margaret) is about Falaise, claimed by some to be one of the fiercest battles of WWII. Around ten thousand German soldiers are thought to have lost their lives at Falaise with fifty thousand or more taken prisoner:

After Falaise

*His men, flung like discarded dolls
Lay close around the young captain.
Old in war beyond his years he lay
Tranquil*

*Ghouls, stealing among the bloated dead
Emptied wallet and holster and hacked away
His ring finger*

*On the grey tunic, tight with corruption,
Campaign medals and an Iron Cross flashed
Indifferent pride*

*Around his stinking corpse snapshots
Of a young woman and two fair children
Lay scattered
Larger than death his sex had risen
Still yearning for his new, young
Widow*

Michael Duane (undated)

As was (and still is) the case with many war veterans, MD never spoke about his war experiences. It was not until the 1990s, when he was in his twilight years, that Margaret began to understand the effects of this on her husband, and why he had sometimes suffered spells of depression. He was a changed person after the war; so too was the world that he returned to.

B1.3 - The Post War Years

In the 1940s secondary education was reorganised in the light of the 1944 Education Act. As will be seen later (in Chapters C1-C3) the way was also being paved for a new type of school - the comprehensive. In line with these reforms, some educationalists were advocating a bolder, more progressive, approach to teaching which included the rejection of Corporal Punishment (CP). All of these developments were close to Duane's heart.

Following a short spell back at Dame Alice Owens, he tutored at the IOE for a year. It was at the IOE, in 1947, that he first met John Newsom, who would become influential in his career¹³.

B1.4 - Howe Dell County Secondary School

In September 1948, Duane, then thirty-three, was appointed headmaster of Howe Dell, a new County Secondary School in Hatfield, Hertfordshire. John Newsom, who was the County Director of Education at the time, had encouraged MD to apply for the job¹⁴. When Newsom

¹³ John Newsom was knighted in 1963 for his report 'Half our Future'. This report was about the 'average child' and was one of the milestones in the history of comprehensive education.

¹⁴ He was also on the interview panel with the Divisional Education Officer and the Chair of Governors, a woman, who was in tune with Duane's progressive ideas and welcomed the policies he put forward for the school.

asked him how long it would take to put Howe Dell on its feet, he replied that he would need at least three years. He was told that he would be given five years — with no questions asked.

Because Howe Dell was not quite ready, Duane was asked to take the headship of Beaumont Boys' School in St Albans for one term. He agreed willingly and, judging by the praise from the Divisional Officer, this temporary role was very successful:

This School is so very different from the one you took over in September that anyone connected with the former establishment would scarcely recognise it as the same School now. (Berg, 1968b, p27)¹⁵

John Newsom was also pleased with Duane's efforts, writing to him to say that, with his headship, Howe Dell could become one of the greatest jewels in Hertfordshire's educational crown. (Berg, 1968b, p36)

But the Howe Dell headship was to prove far more challenging and would end in disaster. When the school opened in January 1949, not all of the accommodation was available: some lessons had to be taught in a school that was four miles away, and this situation continued until the summer of 1950. Staffing was another serious issue. After the war, there was a chronic shortage of experienced teachers, and problems with the recruitment of administrative and domestic staff too.

The pupils, from relatively poor, working-class backgrounds, were drawn from six village primary schools, and the intake included some older children from a nearby orphanage. These children were barely literate, having been educated in elementary schools where different age groups were all taught together. Their IQs ranged from fifty-one to one-hundred-twenty. Many could not read at all. (Berg, 1968b, p36)

Duane believed that, if he and his staff were to educate these children successfully, it was necessary to adopt some of the newer, educational methods that were emerging at this time. In short this was a friendlier, less structured, approach to teaching which included the removal of fear from the classroom. This, though, went against the traditional view that discipline could best be maintained through CP¹⁶.

¹⁵ This can also be found at IOE, in file MD/2/3, now closed.

¹⁶ Although Duane's plans for the school were endorsed fully by the Education Authority, the rejection of CP was a contentious and divisive issue. For many teachers, the cane was seen as an essential work tool; some

Despite the many difficulties, he developed a good working relationship with his teaching team and with their support abandoned CP. Together they introduced a system where the children were asked to take responsibility for their actions: key to this approach was involving them in considering appropriate, alternative forms of punishment.

The school had been open for about a year when it was asked to participate in a UNESCO research project whose aim was to determine how children would react to two black teachers in the school. (James and Tenen, 1953) The following extracts from the UNESCO report provide a flavour of the school's policy and what MD stood for:

The headmaster and his staff were enthusiastic believers in the new method of education. The headmaster had previously been a lecturer in educational method, and had taken over this school in an attempt to translate principles into practice.

. . .

They interpreted learning in this widest sense, so the emotional needs of the children as individuals were considered to be as important as the more conventional academic requirements . . .

. . .

The headmaster and his staff made it their business to know as much as possible about the home life of each child, and to help each to understand and resolve its personal problems. In his spare time the headmaster visited the villages from which his children were drawn, and talked to the parents in their homes and at village meetings, explaining to them his aims in the school.

. . .

In the daily life of the school the aim was self-discipline: not authoritarian, imposed from above by more powerful adults, but collective, and the few general rules there were had been arrived at after

even considered the practice of flogging to be a contractual right. Corporal Punishment was also viewed by many to be an aid to education itself, and was used unashamedly in this context.

discussion with the children and evolved from their common experience, not without dust and heat. There was no corporal punishment . . . Because the aims of the headmaster and staff were to free the children from the distortions caused by fear, and to help them to acquire self-confidence and the ability to live harmoniously, the treatment of misdemeanours aimed at being constructive rather than retributive. Relations between children and staff were very informal and friendly. (Berg, 1968b, pp13-14)

Although MD had the support of his staff and the parents, the governing body (GB) was a different matter. Here there was a lot of opposition to his ideas, and in particular to the concept of self-discipline. A big blow for him and his staff was the replacement of the progressive chair of governors with one who was very much a traditional authoritarian. This man, Alderman G. Maynard, was a powerful member of the local Conservative Party. He had considerable influence in the area and on the mainly Conservative GB.

In contrast to the previous chair, Maynard was opposed to Duane's progressive ideas, and had strong views on CP too. He insisted that Duane be made to use the cane — which Duane refused to do. The two did not see eye to eye and according to Margaret this was because Maynard believed he (MD) was a communist. Duane was, in fact, a socialist at this time and had no communist leanings whatsoever. His youngest son, Simon, confirmed this:

I do remember that he was very anti-Communist Party. (I believe he regarded its members as reactionary, and he was certainly not a Soviet sympathiser). (S. Duane, 2007)

Within months of Howe Dell opening, rumours and complaints about the school started to circulate. Fears about communists were rife at this time, and one rumour was that some teachers were spreading communist propaganda. Other complaints were about inappropriate sexual behaviour amongst the pupils (a girl's knickers had been pulled down when the children were playing boisterously on a pile of hay in a barn) and the supposed fact that the pupils had seen a sex education film showing a black man and a white woman. This, however, was a well-known filmstrip on human physiology by the biologist and educator, Cyril Bibby, in which the male figures were shaded more strongly than the female.

There was also a formal complaint from the Royal Victoria Patriotic School orphanage at Essendon, near Hatfield, that the children attending Howe Dell were taking a different view

on life compared to the children who attended other schools in the area. It seems they were not being taught to 'know their place' in society. (Royal Victoria Patriotic School, 1949)

These complaints resulted in several small school inspections, and a special inquiry to investigate the 'knickers' incident. The inquiry committee comprised just two people; one was Alderman Maynard. Interestingly, no evidence of indecent interest was found. However, the committee took this opportunity to express its concern about other matters that were unrelated to the investigation, in effect challenging Duane's methods and his leadership in general¹⁷.

The parents and teachers, however, were perfectly happy with Duane and what was being achieved in the school. In a questionnaire that he sent to one-hundred-fifty parents, many of whom were said to be semi-literate, he received one-hundred-thirty-seven replies (a commendable 91% response rate). (Berg, 1968b, p33) Some results:

- 72% said their children were happier
- 62% said their children had become more interested in school work
- 57% said their children had become more self-confident.

But this parental involvement did not impress some of the governors, who considered Duane's actions to be inappropriate and ill-advised. He was instructed to never again communicate with the parents in this way.

The teachers, who wanted to express their support for Duane, sent a letter to the GB requesting permission to take part in the meeting to discuss the inquiry's findings. They did not receive a reply. At this meeting, the governors denounced Duane's policies, stating very firmly that "a five year programme as envisaged by the headmaster at the expense of the children could not be tolerated." (Berg, 1968b)¹⁸. The meeting was stormy, at the end of which MD offered his resignation; however, this was ignored.

Maynard and the governors appear to have been in a very powerful position, more powerful in fact than the Local Education Authority (LEA) which had appointed MD and approved his

¹⁷ Correspondence relating to the inspections can be found at the IOE, in file MD/2/4, now closed. The authors saw these pre-closure.

¹⁸ Also in IOE file MD/2/3, now closed.

policy for the school. By the autumn of 1950, the GB had engineered a formal inspection of the school. The authors say ‘engineered’ because it was very unusual to inspect a school formally that had been open for only twenty months. New schools were normally allowed a far more generous time frame (up to seven years) in which to settle and become established before any formal examination took place.

The inspections were made on 20th September and the 7th, 8th and 9th November 1950. The printed inspection report by HMI was issued in January 1951. (Ministry of Education, 1951) The conducting HMI was a man who believed in CP. When this inspector presented a verbal report to the GB of the inspectorate’s findings, he denounced Duane’s policies despite some of his colleagues finding areas of work in the school to be ‘good’, ‘very good’ and even ‘outstanding.’ It seems the children blossomed in the arts and crafts, but did not measure up in the more academic subjects such as English and mathematics. (Ministry of Education, 1951, p5)

While the inspectorate appears to have acknowledged the effects of the poor accommodation and staffing problems on the smooth running of the school, the inability of the children to perform to the required academic standards, because of their low IQs, was strongly rejected. The authors were tempted to ask: “What’s new?”

By now Duane was a well-respected figure in the district and was selected as a Labour candidate for a seat on the Rural District Council (RDC) albeit that he did not pursue this. He was also a Justice of the Peace (JP), often sitting on the same bench as Alderman Maynard, who was Chairman of Magistrates. Maynard had already expressed his concerns about Duane being a JP, and according to Margaret, the RDC nomination infuriated him even further. Four months after the inspection report, the GB met again to discuss progress. At this meeting the governors called for Duane’s dismissal, citing poor inspections and his election to public offices while employed at the school as their reason.

John Newsom must have been completely taken aback, if not embarrassed, by the GB’s decision. In the summer of 1950, he had taken MD with him on a trip to Holland, visiting a number of secondary schools and attending an international conference on secondary education at which MD was a speaker. His contribution to the symposium was well received, and Newsom was particularly pleased because he (Duane) had drawn on the successful work at Howe Dell.

The GB's resolution to dismiss Duane did not go through the Divisional Executive, largely because Maynard considered this unnecessary. Many of the Howe Dell governors were also on the Divisional Executive so in his view this stage of the dismissal process was unimportant. But those members who were not Howe Dell governors objected strongly to the manner in which the dismissal was being handled, and at a council meeting formally claimed the resolution as their right:

They stated that there was not sufficient evidence to make a recommendation concerning dismissal and by eleven votes to two recommended that no action be taken against Mr Duane pending an early full inspection of the school by the Ministry. (Berg, 1968b, p38)

Meanwhile, both the parents and teachers appealed the GB's decision, sending petitions to the Divisional Education Officer and the Minister of Education. There was plenty of support for MD from outside too - from prominent educationalists, leaders in the community and others who approved of his work at the school.

Duane had also started legal proceedings against the governors and was supported in this by his union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT). He did this, fully aware that a headmaster who appears in a court case, even if he were to win, would have difficulty finding another job. He was probably torn at this time as he had a young family to support and could not afford to take too many risks. Even if he was successful in his claim for unfair dismissal he would still have to work with the same people, so he was in a no-win situation. It was at this point that Newsom intervened and advised him to resign, which he did, and on tendering his resignation was immediately suspended with pay.

On leaving the school, Duane was given a glowing reference by Mr Bowmer, a member of the Divisional Executive:

I was a member of the interviewing committee at the time Mr Duane was appointed Headmaster of Howe Dell School, and was very much impressed by his personality.

The effect on both children and parents was even better than our wildest hopes. Apart from his exceptional educational ability and experience, Mr

Duane has a quality of leadership which is rare even among headmasters.

(Berg, 1968b, p39)

Howe Dell closed in 1954 but was reopened as a primary school in 1955. It was probably not the first new school to be closed in dubious circumstances, and would certainly not be the last; something that is discussed later in this book, under section C.

In 2017, when the authors were putting the finishing touches to RR, the RRG was delighted to receive the following email message from a former pupil of the school, now in his eighties:

I attended Howe Dell secondary modern school from its opening.... Michael Duane was the Head, and a man I had the greatest respect for. I became school captain and realised what a difficult job he and the staff had been given, looking back I think miracles were performed with little local authority support. (Day, 2017)

There is a large section of Berg's book that is devoted to Howe Dell; it is almost a story in itself¹⁹. What the authors found interesting was the parallels with Risinghill, explaining perhaps why Berg gave such a detailed account of what happened to MD at this school. Most, if not all, of the documents used by Berg for this part of her story can be found in the Duane archive held at the IOE.

B1.5 - Alderman Woodrow Secondary Boys' School

Duane had no difficulty securing another headship; once again getting John Newsom's support. His next headship, in 1952, was at Alderman Woodrow Secondary Boys' School in Lowestoft, Suffolk. It was at Lowestoft that he met Margaret, who would later become his second wife. At that time, Margaret's youngest son was a pupil at Alderman Woodrow. She remembered him coming home on Duane's first day at the school and telling her that the new headmaster was quite strict, which surprised her as there had been rumours that the school would become another Summerhill (nearby) and as such would be more lax.²⁰

Duane's leadership style has often been compared to that of A.S. Neill, who founded Summerhill, the renowned small, private, non-authoritarian boarding school that still exists

¹⁹ The authors have seen the original documents relating to this period at the IOE and now understand why Berg spent so much time on this part of Duane's career – but there is no room to examine this aspect of Duane's earlier life further here, except as needed for the following chapters.

²⁰ When Duane arrived in Lowestoft he did visit A.S. Neill, headmaster of Summerhill, mainly because he wanted to know how Summerhill's School Council meetings were run by the children. Over a period of time, he became great friends with Neill, but was not his protégé by any means. (From Margaret Duane)

today. However, these two headmasters were working in completely different environments. Summerhill was set in the countryside and chosen by parents who could afford to pay the fees and wanted this particular type of education for their children, whereas schools like Howe Dell, Alderman Woodrow and Risinghill were state schools located in largely working-class areas where parents had very little choice or control over how their children should be educated.

During his time at Alderman Woodrow, Duane had one or two brushes with authority but managed to put his stamp on the school without too many problems. This was Labour country albeit that the town of Lowestoft was in the middle of a Tory-controlled district. Consequently, there was less opposition to the comprehensive concept (something Labour was championing at the time) and to his progressive ideas.

One of the key issues that he wanted to tackle was CP. As with most schools in the country, the boys at Alderman Woodrow were caned regularly. It was even reported in Berg's book that one teacher at this school habitually threw hammers at the children. (Berg, 1968b, p42) Duane, of course, was not prepared to allow this state of affairs to continue and approached the matter in the same way that he had at Howe Dell, calling a staff meeting to express his views about CP and then trying to win the teachers around.

In the interim, his way of getting over the problem was to insist that, if any caning was to be carried out, it should comply strictly with the regulations. By making this stipulation, only he, as headmaster, would be allowed to use the cane.

After years of flouting the rules some teachers were not happy about this and deliberately ignored his instructions.

Once he heard a boy cry out in pain, and walked into the class-room and found a master beating a boy with the blackboard ruler: he took the boy straight out of the class and into his own study. Later he discovered that this particular teacher, when Mr. Duane had addressed the school at assembly, would take his class into his room, shut the door, and say, 'Well you can put all that right out of your minds. He thinks he runs the school but he doesn't. He's only been here a year and he doesn't know what he's talking about. I'll deal with you the way I like, not the way he likes, and I want that understood!' (Berg, 1968b, p41)

However, once again, slowly but surely, Duane started to win over the hearts and minds of the majority of teachers. Those who were persuaded began to appreciate that there were alternatives to CP while others realised that, despite their personal views, they had to abide by the rules.

Over time, the school adapted to MD's policies and routines, but he was becoming increasingly restless. On the surface, education appeared to be moving in the right direction but where the 'big' issues were concerned, nothing much had changed. In a published letter to the editor of the *Lowestoft Journal*, he airs his frustrations quite forcefully:

Sir – Good discipline exists in a school when the parents and the teachers are agreed about the aims and the methods of rearing children. The most educated seven percent of our population pay for well-educated teachers in private nursery, preparatory, public and direct grant schools to teach their children for 16 years in classes of under 20 to become literate and intelligent . . .

. . . Less fortunate teachers struggle to teach the forty-one per cent at the "bottom of the pile" for barely 10 years in classes of over 30. No wonder they do not speak, read or write as their teachers would wish; nor do they go to the university....

Language (including maths, science, music, art ...) is intelligence; that is why the wealthy keep their young in education for 20 years. And they now do this the more easily because three quarters of the population, through taxes, pay for the very expensive institutions like grammar schools and universities that are attended by less than a quarter of the population, while the rest have to make do in secondary modern and so-called comprehensive schools, so they are doubly suckers! Is it, therefore, an accident that the least educated do the deadening jobs that require little initiative?

It (corporal punishment) has been almost universally out-lawed in other western countries. It can be associated with psychological perversion affecting both the beater and the beaten and it is ineffective in precisely those cases in which its use is most hotly defended. (W. M. Duane, N.D.)

It was around this time that MD decided to look for a more challenging role. He had made no secret of his desire to return to London at some point as this was where he had always wanted to be:

I want to work in an area where the problems have not yet been solved where the children are being pulled by their environment into completely impossible shapes. I have to be in a job where I can be used and burnt out, with nothing left in reserve. This means London. London is a battlefield.
(Berg, 1968b, p239)

This was when he applied for, and was appointed to, the post at Risinghill. In contrast to his difficult ending at Howe Dell, he left Alderman Woodrow on a positive note: the last school inspection report was a good one. (Ministry of Education, 1957)

Duane was also liked and respected by the children; two of whom contacted the RRG in 2006 to provide details of how he had influenced their lives. The first, Michael Foreman, is a well-known illustrator of children's books and is an author in his own right:

I cannot emphasize too much Michael Duane's impact when he arrived at Alderman Woodrow. I can see him now, bounding across the stage at his very first morning assembly. He was such a contrast from the previous regime – a sudden switch from 'learning' to 'education.'

He was crucial to the life I have lived. There have been others along the way to whom I am indebted, of course, but I would not have met them without the initial belief, direction and support given to me by Michael Duane. The belief was the most important factor. He made an ordinary working-class boy believe that he had a talent for something. (Foreman, 2006)

Similar views were expressed by Jonathan Cooper, a successful teacher and lecturer in art, but now retired:

At that time my parents and teachers were trying to get me to enrol for evening classes at the Lowestoft School of Art. I was rather an introverted child, lacking in confidence so I held back. One day Michael Duane called me into his office. 'Take this money,' he said, handing me a sixpence.

'This is your bus fare. A bus leaves from outside the school in five minutes. Get on the bus, go into Lowestoft and enrol at the Art School.' This I did and my future career was thus decided, teaching and lecturing in Art Education for the past forty years!

He knew his pupils as individuals and recognised their strengths. His approach should be a role model for today's teachers. He acted instinctively for the good of the child. Some educationalists today seem to think more of their own research and status than they do of their own students. It seems that the less contact they have with students the better and 'on line' and 'PowerPoint' talks continue to distance them from an individual approach.

Michael Duane helped shape my future and it was through his actions that I saw my way forward. I came from a working class background with little hope of success, having gone to the local secondary school after being termed a 'failure' at the age of eleven. My hope is that Michael Duane's message will get through to this test ridden, target based society that we now find ourselves in and that it is not too late! (Cooper, 2006)

Duane certainly had a way with children and, as will be demonstrated in RR, managed to turn around some of Risinghill's most disaffected pupils. That he had a more difficult job winning over his staff is not that surprising. Despite all the promises about educational reform, few were prepared to stray too far from the established path, and this included those who, on the face of it, openly supported the comprehensive model.

CHAPTER B2 - Michael Duane and Corporal Punishment

'To force him (the child) by stern measures to conform may, however, merely produce results on the surface; a class ruled by fear of punishment can give a wonderful impression of quiet orderliness to a casual visitor.'

LCC booklet, 'Punishment in Schools'

1952, reprinted 1961

There are many facets to the Raisinghill story, and Duane's approach to discipline is one of them. His refusal to use Corporal Punishment (CP) was claimed by many, including Berg, to have been a key factor in the closure of the school. The London County Council (LCC) however, denied this vehemently. At the time, one official even went as far as to say that CP was not happening in any of the LCC's schools:

So I waited while the Chief Inspector made a long speech about the progressive outlook of the L.C.C., about how they didn't have corporal punishment (Berg, 1968b, p203)

These claims were made in 1965 when Berg was researching the material for her book, and when the press, sensing that Raisinghill was being closed because of MD's refusal to use CP, was supporting the fight against its closure. In 1968, however, when Berg's book was published, the LCC, now called the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), had something very different to say on the subject:

The officers also asserted that corporal punishment had been diminishing in London schools, but Dr L. Payling, the chief inspector, declared that he knew of no school where it was the announced policy to dispense with the cane. (Guardian, 1968a)

While CP might, in some schools, have been in decline, and in some CP was rare, no other school in London had declared to its pupils, staff and the community at large that it had given up the practice:

No Inner London headmaster since Mr Michael Duane at Risinghill has gone on public record to emphasise that his school has abandoned corporal punishment, according to the chief inspector of the ILEA.
(Guardian, 1968a)

These startling revelations emerged at a press conference called by the LCC in 1968 to refute the claims made in Berg's book, namely that MD had been ordered to reinstate the cane or face a drastic reorganisation of his school. Berg took the unusual step of naming those, whom, she claimed, were responsible for making these threats. One of them, Dr E W Briault, the Chief Education Officer's (CEO) deputy, dismissed Berg's accusations, pointing out that he too was against CP:

Mr Duane rejected corporal punishment. This was accepted – privately so am I against it. (Guardian, 1968a)

In fact all of the officers charged by Berg categorically denied making any such threats. The CEO, William Houghton,²¹ reiterated what he had said from the outset — that Risinghill was closed simply because of its declining intake and had nothing to do with MD or the school. Along with many other LCC officials, he also showed a level of support for Duane's ideals:

I had a great deal of sympathy with the aims of Mr Duane – I never concealed that. (Guardian, 1968a)

Whether or not MD was threatened in the manner as described by Berg is something that will be examined in later chapters. For now it is important to focus on CP and in particular where the LCC stood on this. Was it pro or anti CP? And how did the Authority police it? It should be noted that, at this time, CP was widely claimed to have been in decline, not just in London but nationally. Those attending school in the 1950s and 1960s, however, will know that physical punishment was still being used then so what is the truth of the matter?

In much the same way that the authors were forced to look at the history of the comprehensive (to be discussed later in chapters C1-C3) to appreciate the politics of education, so too were they compelled to take another journey into the past to understand

²¹ To avoid confusion, Sir William Houghton and the ILEA are referred to as 'Mr Houghton' and the 'LCC' respectively hereafter; these being their titles in the period we are largely concerned with here i.e. 1959 through to 1965.

why, when CP was said to have been in decline, Risinghill appeared to be the only school in London to have dispensed (publicly) with the practice.

B2.1 - Brief History of Corporal Punishment in Schools

Today, CP is illegal in British schools, having been abolished by government legislation in 1987: although the ban applied only to the state sector and those schools which received any element of government funding. Schools in the independent sector continued to cane children right up to 1999 when, under the UN Convention on Human Rights, they were forced to stop. So what is CP?

Corporal or physical punishment is the use of physical force intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort for discipline, correction, and control, changing behaviour or in the belief of educating/bringing up the child.

Physical pain can be caused by different means such as hitting the child with a hand or other object, kicking, shaking or throwing the child, pinching or pulling the hair, caning or whipping. (Nault, 2003)

The reason(s) why children were beaten at school (and why some schools, even today, would like to see the practice reinstated) has a long and complicated history that goes back to biblical times:

He that spareth the rod hateth his son; but he that loves him chastiseth him betimes” (Proverbs 13: 24)

and

Withhold not correction from the child; for, if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.

*Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.
(Proverbs 23: 13-14)*

Through the ages parents worldwide have taken the maxim ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ quite literally, with the result that young people of both sexes have been flogged in the firm belief that this was for their own good. Working-class children were beaten by their parents

while the aristocracy tended to hand over this ‘privilege’ to their governesses and/or private tutors. Later, when schools came into being, the teachers assumed the role of the parent (under the principle of *in loco parentis*), taking full responsibility for any corrective measures during school hours. The poor, who did not as a rule attend school, were beaten in the work place by their employers. Most of the early schools were faith schools, and CP soon became a panacea for every breach of discipline. It was in this spirit that the birch (a rod made of twigs or sticks bound tightly together) was adopted in schools, factories and penal institutions nationwide. Though hard to believe, it was only in very exceptional circumstances that a parent would interfere when their child was flogged at school or at work. As Scott points out, “most of the ancient philosophers and law-makers were in favour of flogging children, not only as a means of inducing them to conduct themselves well and to tell the truth, but also as an aid to education itself.” (Scott, 1959)

It was not until the eighteenth century that public opinion in Britain turned, albeit very slowly, against the birch. This was because philosophers and legal reformers were beginning to talk seriously about reformation in place of the birch. In the nineteenth century the movement was given impetus due largely to:

1. The death of a soldier (Private Frederick John White) after a military flogging in Hounslow Barracks on 11 July 1846, twenty-six days after receiving 150 lashes,²²
2. The killing of a boy (Reginald Chancellor) by his schoolmaster in 1860;
3. The phasing out of the birch in Europe and other parts of the world. Poland, for example, abolished the practice as early as 1783. Other countries followed suit, with Holland banning CP in 1850 and France in 1887. Norway and Sweden did not fall into line until much later — in 1935 and 1958 respectively. (Times Educational Supplement, 1972)

Britain, to its shame, chose not to emulate what was happening elsewhere in the world. Instead of outright abolition it sought to remove CP by voluntary means. Regulatory measures were introduced to restrict its use with some Local Education Authorities (LEAs), including the LCC, recommending phasing it out completely. These rules, however, were

²² Flogging was not abolished in the British Army until The Army Act of 1881. Judicial ‘birchings’ for juveniles remained on the Isle of Man statute book until 1993.

flouted openly as schools were reluctant to give up the practice, especially those where the cane was bound strongly to religious beliefs. At one time Britain had a reputation for school floggings that was rivalled only by that of Germany. (Scott, 1959) In the public imagination it was the independent/public schools which had the worst reputations. Here the older pupils were often given the right to flog the younger ones - within the system of 'fagging' where a younger pupil acted as servant to a senior boy - a practice that was also associated with sexual abuse, but was never talked about openly.

Another mitigating factor was that teachers, in general, saw CP as an essential tool for maintaining discipline and did not want to give it up. And neither did the courts. The Magistrates Association was renowned for its lobbying of parliament to maintain the *status quo* and was supported in this by MPs from across the political spectrum.

So, although there were tentative moves to abolish CP, progress was slow and extremely difficult. With so much opposition it is not surprising that successive governments all sat on the fence, preferring to let history take its course.

In 2005, despite the UN Convention on Human Rights and the UK's Human Rights Act of 1998, some of the independent schools were still fighting to retain CP and took their case to the House of Lords, where their appeal was rejected:

The claimants' beliefs regarding the use of corporal punishment by both parents and teachers are based on their interpretation of certain passages in the Bible. For instance, 'He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him': Proverbs 13:24. They say the use of 'loving corporal correction' in the upbringing of children is an essential of their faith. They believe these biblical sources justify, and require, their practices. Religious liberty, they say, requires that parents should be able to delegate to schools the ability to train children according to biblical principles. In practice the corporal punishment of boys takes the form of administering a thin, broad flat 'paddle' to both buttocks simultaneously in a firm controlled manner. Girls may be strapped upon the hand. The child is then comforted by a member of the staff and encouraged to pray. The child is given time to compose himself before returning to class. There is no question of 'beating' in the

traditional sense. 'Smacking' would be closer to the mark: see Elias J (2002) ELR 214, 216-217, para 4. In practice the schools rarely resort to corporal punishment. (Regina v Secretary of State for Education, 2005)

B2.2 – The LCC's Policy on Corporal Punishment

While Scott argued that CP in British schools had all but disappeared by 1936, the authors know from personal experience and other evidence that this was not the case. Interestingly, the LCC appeared to have been under the same misapprehension. In 1952 it published a booklet entitled 'Punishment in Schools' from which the following extract is taken:

There is far less punishment of children in schools today than there was in the elementary schools of fifty years ago. It is strange to think that there was a time when children received corporal punishment for mistakes made unwittingly, for example, in spelling and arithmetic. Many factors have contributed to this welcome change: smaller classes, a more sympathetic understanding of children. (London County Council, 1952)

Many of the sentiments expressed in this booklet tied in with the spirit of the *London School Plan 1947* (LSP); details of which will be provided later. Suffice to say here that this was a progressive plan that did not sit well with the central government and/or the establishment in general, nor did the removal of CP. While this booklet fell short of an outright ban on CP, there is no mistaking the fact that the LCC had every intention of getting rid of it. In this booklet, the cane is mentioned only once, and in the following context:

It is hardly necessary to say that irregular, cruel or excessive punishment, including striking's on any part of the head and shakings, should on no account be inflicted, and that with delicate and nervous children corporal punishment of any kind is quite indefensible. For children, even the witnessing of caning is a disturbing experience; where caning is deemed necessary, the punishment should therefore not be given in front of the class. (London County Council, 1952)

No rules are laid down for the smacking, slapping or caning of pupils in any circumstances.

In 1952, when Duane took on the headship of his first school, he was following these guidelines to the letter. The following text from the booklet, which deals with self-discipline, is something that he firmly believed in and later established at Risinghill:

A child has to learn that he must control his own desires. He has to learn, for example, that he must often subordinate them to the needs of the group in which he works or plays. To force him by stern measures to conform may, however, merely produce results on the surface; a class ruled by fear of punishment can give a wonderful impression of quiet orderliness to a casual visitor. To be lasting, conformity must come from within, not be imposed from without; it must spring from a child's inner desire to be true to his better self and to be at one with his fellows. (London County Council, 1952)

For the authors this all sounded wonderful but, as stated earlier, was not their experience(s) or that of their fellow pupils,²³ just two examples:

Teachers were very strict at Moreland Street School where I had come from and it reminded me of a boy who had been talking in Assembly and Mr Hodgkinson stampeding through the pupils sitting on the floor and grabbing the boy by the hair and hauling him out of the doors. (Linda H., 2005)

We were brutalised at primary school (Ecclesborne Primary) before we even went to Risinghill ... Me and Steven were always getting into trouble, getting caned and slippered for the slightest thing. (Michael D., 2005)

And it was not the experience of the RRG's friends and family members either, all of whom reported that they had been on the receiving end of a smack, slipper or the cane while at school or were shouted at for the flimsiest of reasons.

Boys were usually caned on the palms of the hand or on the backside, depending on the severity of the 'offence' and/or the whim of the teacher. A slipper was sometimes used

²³ A detailed analysis of the pupils' answers to the question(s) about CP can be found in *The Waste Clay*.

instead of the cane as this was a handy weapon that, for some reason, was not subject to the same rules and regulations governing the cane:

I remember Mr Edwards the PE²⁴ teacher who carried a spare plimsoll around with him. It came in very useful when anyone did not want to jump the horse vault. (Maria H., 2005)

Girls were caned only in exceptional circumstances and were not spanked with a slipper, leastwise not in the schools attended by Isabel and Lynn prior to joining Risinghill. Their punishment was administered with a ruler that was rapped smartly across the knuckles or the backs of their legs. When girls were caned or beaten it was usually by a female teacher, as male teachers were not allowed to physically discipline girls. Historical sexism was one of the reasons, as was the abolition of judicial CP for women in 1805 (Whipping of Female Offenders Act.). Less talked about were the sexual aspects of spanking and whipping where it would seem girls were considered to be more at risk from sadistic paedophiles than boys.²⁵ More generally, possible association of CP with sado-masochistic abuse of either boys or girls was rarely mentioned.

Shaking (by the shoulders) and shouting directly into the face was a less brutal form of punishment for both sexes but fearsome all the same. More minor offences — such as talking in class, getting a question wrong or simply not walking on the right side of the corridor in an orderly fashion — were likely to result in a smack, slap or cuff across the head. Again, it was the boys who were singled out for this type of punishment: girls, for the most part, were simply given a verbal warning. Another painful and humiliating experience for boys was to have a teacher pull them to their feet by their ears or sideburns for not paying attention in class. This usually happened without warning as taking the victim by surprise was part of the fun. The sound of a chair tipping over and the commotion that followed did, occasionally, result in the class erupting in laughter, but for the injured party there was nothing funny about having to dance on tiptoe in front of one's peers.

Throwing objects at the children was also common practice, and girls were just as likely to get hit with a missile as the boys. As with the pulling and twisting of ears and sideburns this was not considered harmful at all — rather, some teachers thought they were being playful:

²⁴ Physical Education

²⁵ The World Corporal Punishment Research Corporation (Corpun) has an excellent website (www.corpun.com) for those interested in researching the different aspects of CP in detail.

He would throw chalk and occasionally blackboard erasers at people, or hit them over the head with the blackboard ruler, and then shout things like “Stop hitting my ruler with your head.” Most of us found this quite amusing, unless we had just been hit. (Bob J., 2004)

This attitude of playfulness at the time is well illustrated by an amusing, illustrated book first published in 1953 and still in print, *Down with Skool!*, by Geoffrey Willans and illustrated by the well-known cartoonist Ronald Searle, supposedly written by the fictional schoolboy, Nigel Molesworth, about life at St Custards, his school. (Willans, 1953) The book contains satirical references to CP, and illustrations (e.g ‘Kanes [canes] I have known, Table of grips and tortures for masters’). The same attitude is demonstrated in the lyrics of a risqué music hall song from the 1840s - where an imaginary conversation between Prince Albert and Queen Victoria is reported about producing children:

*So V unto A so boldly did say:
The state is bewildering about little children.
And we are increasing, you know we have four,
We kindly do treat ‘em
And seldom do beat ‘em
So Albert, dear Albert we’ll do it no more.²⁶*

Note the conjunction of kindness and infrequent beating.

Even though CP had been banned at Risinghill, a small number of teachers continued to ignore the rules. There was a particularly bad attack on a pupil by a master where, despite Duane’s protests, the LCC failed to take any action. This teacher was eventually removed from the school though not before he had done some damage. The pupils remember him well:

All this time (and it must have been close on to 5 minutes) he had Colin by the neck, saying this child was an example of the bad behaviour typical at the school (Colin was nothing of the sort). While he was still raging some of us noticed that Colin by now was turning a shade of blue, his tongue was out as he was struggling to take in air. (Bob J., 2004)

²⁶

Despite the references to CP, both the song and the book are very amusing!

The authors recognise that the use and forms of CP differed between and within schools, and that their experiences may seem harsh to some, or even lenient, to those children who felt that they were brutalised by their teachers and still carry the emotional scars. What surprised them was that many people, including Dr Payling, the LCC's Chief Inspector, did not believe (or professed not to believe) that any of the practices described here was CP in any sense:

'A lot of nonsense', he said in a warm, friendly way, 'was being talked about corporal punishment. People like that man, Mr Duane, talked as if the hitting, slapping, and pushing about that goes on in schools was corporal punishment. Corporal punishment didn't really exist.' (Berg, 1968b, pp201-2)

B2.3 - The LCC'S 1952 Policy in Practice

In November 1959 Mr Houghton issued his own instructions about the use of CP in the LCC's schools. Entitled 'Corporal Punishment in Primary and Secondary Schools' this directive was issued, in confidence, to the London Teaching Service, and in stark contrast to the LCC's 1952 booklet, spoke of using canes of different patterns, smacking and how CP was to be administered:

Corporal punishment shall be given only with the open hand of the teacher used on the arm or the hand or with a cane of approved pattern. Two canes, a larger and a smaller, are approved. The smaller cane only may be used for boys below 11 years of age and for all girls, irrespective of age. The larger or the smaller cane may be used for boys above 11 years of age at the discretion of the head master or head mistress. Corporal punishment of girls shall not be administered by a head master or assistant master. (London County Council, 1959)

While the intention was probably to put some rules around the use of the cane to protect children from being beaten indiscriminately, Houghton's failure to draw the reader's attention to the Authority's 1952 booklet was, to say the least, surprising. As a stand-alone document this directive gave a totally different impression of the LCC's declared policy on CP, and what Duane made of it is anyone's guess. By now he had accepted the Risinghill headship, after declaring at his interview (in 1958) that he had no time for the practice: more about this in the next section, C.

Barely two years later, in April 1961, the LCC issued an updated version of the original 'Punishment in Schools' booklet which was a repeat of the 1952 one; the only difference being a change of name in the endorsee from Brown (the previous CEO) to Houghton (London County Council, 1961a). This left the LCC in the somewhat invidious position of continuing to advocate, very strongly, a move away from CP in one directive whilst legitimising its use in the other.

Unlike the 1952 and 1961 *Punishment in Schools* booklets published by the LCC, the 1959 pamphlet was clearly not intended for public consumption:

Then I said 'I have, of course, seen the fairly pleasant brown booklet, that is fairly easily obtainable. I have also seen this, which is not so pleasant, not so easily obtainable, but was reissued seven years after that brown booklet was published,' and I held up a white double-leaflet headed Corporal Punishment...

'That is highly confidential!'

'I know. It says so on the outside. Why is it?'

'This is intolerable! This is grossly improper! I don't know who gave you that document! Nobody has any right' (Berg, 1968b, pp203-4)

The above exchange took place between Dr Payling and Leila Berg at a meeting convened by the LCC in 1965 to prove to Berg that CP was not happening in any of its schools:

One head after another said 'Of course we don't have corporal punishment.' But one after another they made it clear that they regarded a head who told the children he wasn't going to use corporal punishment a traitor – they used the same words Anglo-Indians use of an Englishman that gets too friendly with the natives. A little while later, the head who didn't use corporal punishment would be saying 'Of course, I use it for ... swearing' (or it might be talking or running, or lying, or coming late.). Quite soon, one of these picked heads who didn't have corporal punishment was saying 'The cane must be used when with some children you don't get the appropriate response to stimuli'; this head also said,

twice, 'Corporal punishment gives a child something.' (Berg, 1968b, p204)

It would seem this pamphlet was so confidential that even the chair of the LCC's Education Committee (EC) in 1965, Mr James Young, was unaware of its existence. When assuring MD, in the presence of Houghton, that Risinghill was being closed for administrative reasons, and had nothing to do with CP and/or the way in which he (Duane) managed the school, Young appeared to have been under the impression that the LCC had dispensed with CP years before:

MR YOUNG - There was no question of the methods by which you run the school because in fact, on the question of corporal punishment, several years ago the Council laid down – I don't know what the rule is, but you could probably quote it – there should be no more corporal punishment, and there has been no change so far as the Committee or the officers are concerned. (London County Council, 1965b)

Houghton was undoubtedly familiar with the 'rule' and the booklet that his chair was struggling to recall but failed to come to his assistance. Duane didn't say anything either, perhaps because he was lost for words.

B2.4 - The Political Climate

In Scotland, the preferred instrument of CP (instead of the cane) was the strap; a thick strip of leather, popularly referred to in Scots as the tawse. Use of the tawse used to be common practice in Scottish schools but appears to have faded out in the 1970s and/or 1980s until its abolition in 1998. A peculiar insight is given by the following note in the (Scottish) *Sunday Standard* in 1982 commenting of the tawse makers, John Dick of Lochgelly:²⁷

It is almost fading away in any case because of the difficulty in obtaining the special leather. It was now being manufactured principally for export: 'There are outstanding orders for Australia, New Zealand, Canada and America. There's medium, heavy and extra-heavy ... The two-tail heavy has been the most popular and retails at £5.90. (Sunday Standard, 1982)

²⁷ Philip remembers canes for punishment being on open sale, and displayed in the window, of James Smith and Sons, the well-known and respected umbrella makers in New Oxford Street, London as late as the 1970s – possibly 1980s. Whether intended (covertly) for sexual practices or child chastisement was not clear.

In 1962 a Liaison Committee on educational matters (under the title ‘Consultative Committee on Educational Matters’) was established in Scotland in accordance with the recommendations of a UK government Working Party tasked with consulting the different teaching bodies/associations in Scotland on such issues. This committee comprised six representatives of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS – a Scottish teachers’ union), two of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA), and one representative each from the Headmasters Association, the Scottish Branch of the Association of Headmistresses and the Association of Directors of Education, plus four representatives of the Department²⁸ including the chairman and the secretary of the Committee. In 1968 it produced a booklet, the Foreword of which reads:

Following agreement in principle that the teaching profession be encouraged to move towards the gradual elimination of corporal punishment as a means of discipline in schools, the Liaison Committee set up a Sub-Committee to study the detailed implications of this conclusion. In the light of a report by the Sub-Committee, the Liaison Committee have drawn up the Statement of Principles and Code of Practice set out in this booklet, which also includes some of the Committee’s necessarily more tentative conclusions on the difficult subject of “alternative sanctions” i.e. disciplinary sanctions other than corporal punishment. (Liaison Committee on Educational Matters, 1968).

The text continues with the ‘Code of Practice’ section leading with the comment “until corporal punishment is eliminated its use should be subject to the following rules”, one of which is that “the strap should not be in evidence, except when it is being used to inflict corporal punishment” (!) Duane must have been aware of this document as a copy of it can be found in the Duane archive at the IOE. (MD/7/3/7)

Earlier, in 1963, the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) was asked by government to look at primary education in all of its aspects. Falling out of this review was the famous Plowden Report of 1967, which put the child firmly at the heart of education. On CP this is what Plowden had to say:

²⁸ Presumably the Scottish Department of the UK government.

It has been almost universally outlawed in other western countries... We think the time has come to drop it. After full consideration, we recommended that the infliction of physical pain as a recognised method of punishment in primary schools should be forbidden. (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967)

Also in 1963 came John Newsom's 'Half our Future' report commissioned by the previous Minister for Education, Sir David Eccles. This looked at the average child in secondary education. Newsom's views on discipline were in line with Duane's:

They need to develop a sense of responsibility for their work and towards other people, and to begin to arrive at some code of moral and social behaviour which is self-imposed. (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1963)

The Newsom Report was ignored and, to some extent, so was the advice of Plowden in that CP continued to happen in schools. Which leaves one wondering why our politicians bother to set up advisory committees and/or commission costly reports when they have no intention of following the experts' advice, even when said advice is supported with evidence that is overwhelming.

On 4 January 1968, just before Berg's book was published, *The Guardian* ran an article under the heading 'Faith in caning affirmed by head teachers' that: (1) provides an insight into the politics of the time; and (2) explains why Duane's abandonment of CP was embarrassing for the establishment:

Head teachers today asserted their right to determine the types of punishment to be administered in their schools, and in doing so made clear a desire to retain corporal punishment as one of them [...] So a year after the Plowden Report recommending the abolition of corporal punishment in primary schools (in the West Riding for instance, it has been abolished), the head teachers were still sure that it was a weapon they needed in reserve. In this respect Britain's schools are now among the laggards of western countries, but no one here minded; or even mentioned the word Risinghill. (Sunday Times, 1968)

In the same year (February 1968) the LCC issued another booklet on the elimination of CP in its schools which, on the one hand, carried forward some of its original aims in 1952, but balked at abolishing the practice altogether. Unlike the West Riding, the LCC appeared not to have had the stomach, or maybe the inclination, to practice what it had been preaching for the past 16 years:

Although the Liaison Committee have not included in the Statement of Principles or the Code of Practice any reference to disciplinary measures other than corporal punishment, they naturally gave a good deal of thought to the question of alternative sanctions. (Liaison Committee on Educational Matters, 1968)

In contrast, the Liaison Committee (under the Code of Practice section) does appear to have bended to Plowden insofar as primary school children were concerned:

Corporal punishment should not be used in infant classes. Its elimination from infant classes should be followed by progressive elimination from other primary classes. (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967)

By 1973 the LCC had abolished CP in its primary schools. Its secondary school children, however, would have to wait until 1987 for the government to finally step in and outlaw the practice. This was a terrible indictment of both the LCC and the central government: the LCC's CP policy taking 35 years to come to fruition, and the government having to be dragged into the twentieth century, some 216 years after Poland.

B2.5 - Reaction to Leila Berg's Book

It is against this backdrop that the LCC officials' bizarre statements about CP in 1965 and later, at its press conference in 1968, must be viewed. With regard to the latter, far from pouring oil on troubled waters, this conference unleashed a tidal wave of publicity that put the LCC back where it had been in 1965, defending a position that was indefensible, and finding itself in a state of flux as a result. The media, sensing that it had not been told the whole truth about the Risinghill affair, rallied in support of the school once again, resurrecting all the old arguments ... this time with vengeance. In the *Sunday Times*: 'Who killed Risinghill?' (Sunday Times, 1968), in the *New Statesman*: 'The Tragedy of Risinghill', (Anon, 1968b), in the *Daily Mail*: 'Plot to close Risinghill is denied' (Daily Mail, 1968) and

in the *Daily Express*: ‘The Guilty Ones who Closed no-cane School’ (Daily Express, 1968) are but a few of the headlines that appeared in the national press afterwards.

Interest in the Risinghill story continued throughout the spring and summer of 1968, largely because of the letters that were pouring in to the newspapers questioning the LCC’s motives for closing the school. Berg, of course, was delighted with all the publicity as she had been given a perfect platform (courtesy of the LCC) for the launch of her book.

Surprisingly it was not just educationalists who were putting pen to paper to express a view; people from all walks of life were genuinely shocked by Berg’s revelations and were asking questions about the LCC’s motives. From the letters (in the press) that the authors have seen, very few appear to have believed the LCC’s version of events – that Risinghill had been closed for administrative reasons and had nothing to do with CP or Duane. The adverse publicity was such that friends and supporters of the LCC were forced to respond, but in defending the Authority’s position appear to have made matters worse. By way of example a Margaret Cole had this to say on the subject, in this case in the Labour newspaper *Tribune*:

The LCC never officially banned corporal punishment to schools. People may regret this, but under prevailing conditions it would have been impossible to enforce. Many of the LCC officers were strongly against it and advised to this effect, but they were not empowered to issue orders one way or the other. (Cole, 1968c)

Those who had been following the Risinghill story in the media would, of course, have arrived at the same conclusion as the authors, that being there could not have been too many (if any) officers of the LCC advising against CP if Duane was the only head in London to have dispensed (publicly) with the practice.

The suggestion that the officials were not empowered to “issue orders one way or the other” is equally ridiculous. While it is true that, without primary legislation, they might not have been able to enforce a total ban, they clearly had a duty to promote the Authority’s declared policy on CP, and to police its guidelines. This they failed to do. And they failed spectacularly. More to the point, if the West Riding was able to dispense with CP, what was stopping the LCC? It was, after all, one of the most powerful LEAs in the country. Cole also ignored the fact that Risinghill had, for almost five years, operated a non-caning policy so it was not the impossibility she claimed. The barrier to enforcement was, if the truth be known,

more to do with the fact that there were divisions within the LCC hierarchy on this issue, which Cole and others, including the LCC's Chief Inspector, Dr Payling, were unwilling to discuss. To remind the reader, this was the same Chief Inspector who, in 1965, appeared to have had considerable difficulty in recognising what constituted CP when this was spelled out, very clearly, in the LCC's own guidelines.

Margaret Cole was, initially, something of an enigma for the authors, who did not discover her link(s) to the LCC until much later in the research process. Many of her letters were published in the press, and she was remarkably well informed about Duane, the school and the LCC: too informed (in the opinion of the authors) for someone who, on the face of it, was an impartial observer. She was, without doubt, one of Berg's fiercest critics, but Berg did not know who she was, and neither did Duane. Both believed she was an innocent bystander, who, like any other member of the public, was entitled to express an opinion about the Risinghill affair. And she did so with confidence - two weeks later, again in the *Tribune*:

Yes, I do think Mr Duane was a bad administrator – a conclusion I reached after studying what happened over a long period. (Cole, 1968b)

This was a new twist — as Berg, in her response to Cole, was quick to point out:

I must say, though, that her initial letter (Tribune June 7) caused me a certain glow, because she has suddenly raised a completely new allegation, never made by the LCC, nor even by the Inspectors specially appointed to look into administration that Mr Duane was “an impossibly bad administrator.” This can only mean that the (now defunct) LCC is finding that the ground which it has chosen is getting so rickety that its friends are casting about desperately to find new footholds. (Berg, 1968a)

Cole was in fact the chair of the LCC's Further Education Committee (FEC) in 1965; one of three powerful sub-committees of the Education Committee (EC) involved with Risinghill's closure. She was, therefore, in a position to write with authority about the school albeit that she chose not to make this fact public. To the authors, her stance seemed at odds with her background: she was the wife of the famous libertarian socialist, G. D. H. Cole. In 1941 she was co-opted to the EC and became an active supporter of the comprehensive ideal enshrined in the LSP; one might, therefore, assume she would be a natural supporter of Duane. However, when one considers her stance against the backdrop of the Old Labour vs New

Labour squabbles, which came much later, in tandem with the authors' story of Risinghill, her stance is perhaps not so puzzling after all. Cole continued EC work through the creation of the ILEA in 1965, up to her retirement in 1967.

Insofar as Duane's competence is concerned, there are several flaws in Cole's argument that are worth considering here. Duane's army testimonial shows that he had "undoubted organising ability and powers of leadership" (Berg, 1968b) but even more important are his employment references, which are impeccable. These can be found in the Duane archive held at the IOE, in file MD/3/1.

Given Cole's position within the LCC, and the part played by her in Risinghill's closure, the authors were surprised that she appeared to be ignorant of these and other facts, notably that the LCC had appointed Duane in the full knowledge that he was a progressive head with a track record for dispensing with CP in his previous schools. At his interview, he had made it quite clear that he had no time for CP so the LCC was either barking mad to have given him the job or it approved of his decision to remove the practice. In fact, he made this point some years later, in 1985, as the following extract from a paper produced by him at this time demonstrates:

It is crucial to the whole discussion of corporal punishment and Risinghill to realise that at the interview for the headship I was asked by Mrs Irene Chaplin for my views on corporal punishment. Knowing well that at that time a majority of London teachers had voted to retain the power to use the cane, I replied that I had no time for it, thinking that that would almost certainly put an end to my application. I was, therefore, genuinely surprised, after a wait of over an hour, to be offered the headship, and assumed that any move I made to lessen the use of the cane – because I was not so deluded as to think I could abolish it immediately – would be fully supported by the Education Committee, whose pamphlet I already had at Howe Dell. (W. M. Duane, 1985, p6)

What also needs to be taken into consideration is that Duane beat off stiff competition for the Risinghill headship; there being forty-three applicants for the post, eight of which were selected for interview.(London County Council, 1958) He was clearly an exceptional

candidate, and for Cole to have suggested otherwise was, in the opinion of the authors, somewhat mischievous.

In concluding this chapter, the reader is left to ponder on a society that allowed the beating of children in school right up to 1999 when it had abolished Judicial Corporal Punishment of convicted criminals in penal institutions over fifty years earlier, in 1948, and for military personnel over one hundred years earlier: So much for the law and asses.

B3 - The Educational Hierarchy

*'A critique of bureaucracy fit for the times would
have to show how all these threads –
financialization, violence, technology, the fusion of
public and private – knit together into a self-
sustaining web.'*

*David Graeber
(in 'The Utopia of Rules', 2015)*

Before embarking on the chronicle of Risinghill, it is useful to set out (briefly) the management structure for education that pertained during the 1950s and 1960s, and the political landscape within which this stood. This also enables the authors to introduce some of the main players in their story, chiefly politicians and civil servants, and some of the arrangements which were adjunct to the structure - such as the conduct of national examinations. Interestingly this structure has remained, in essential features, fairly stable since the 1940s, but with changes in emphasis and changing remits. Personalities have come and gone with some leaving long-lasting marks on the structure and on the system in general. Only the major outlines are described here and there were, of course, some exceptions to this.

B3.1 - The General Shape of Education Contemporary to Risinghill

The first thing to note is that there was no single structure for the UK as a whole since Scotland and Northern Ireland, to a large extent, conducted their own educational affairs and still do. The structure described here relates to England and Wales and in particular that applying to central London. Seen overall it was (and still is) a structure dominated by divisions and partitions. It is also worthwhile remembering that, in those days, a more patrician view of parents, teachers and pupils was expected to those in authority – exemplified in the case of Risinghill primarily by civil servants at the local level, but also some Westminster politicians. Indeed, this expectation is reflected in the next part of this story (section C) which deals with the development, birth and premature death of the school.

An assumption often made when talking about the nation's education is to identify it with state-provided (and state-funded) education. Seen as a whole, education provision was, and still is, split between the private (including some charitable foundations) and public (state) sectors with the former 'creaming off' the more academically abled students, overwhelmingly

from more affluent families, representing around 8% to 12% of the school population. However, there has always been a small intake of pupils from poorer families to private schools through the scholarship route.²⁹) The negative effect of this primary division on state provided education in England and Wales has been profound and is discussed in section C where the history of state education (and what came to be known as the tri-partite system) is examined in more detail. It is mentioned here purely to provide a flavour of the educational landscape within which Risinghill operated.

After WWII, the tri-partite system became the norm in the state-funded sector, introducing a further division of the secondary school population into three types of school: grammar, technical and secondary modern, the latter taking the place of what were previously called secondary schools and before that elementary schools.

In addition, there were differences between Authorities, and within Authorities policies could differ according to the school with, for example, some technical schools recruiting (and testing) at 12+ and others at 13+. Indeed, many were unaware that such a test existed, including Isabel, Lynn, Alan and John. Only Philip was aware of the 13+ as he remembered taking it to gain entry to Northampton. What is odd is that two of the pupils who participated in the research for RR and took this test (one who lived in Islington at the time, and another in Poplar) remembered having to take the 13+ in order to gain entry to Risinghill, a secondary modern albeit that it was commonly known as a comprehensive. The technical schools were few in number and were phased out during the 1960s.

It should be noted that the period of Risinghill's life (1960-1965) was one where there were many opportunities for young people to join the workforce, either by going directly into a job or taking up an apprenticeship. In consequence there was less angst about finding work than there is today, less concern about the need for formal qualifications and therefore less pressure on young people to stay on at school and take examinations.

Administration of the public education system (known as a 'national system, locally administered') was spread across three constituencies: central government; local government; and the teaching unions. This hierarchy mirrored the political landscape; therefore the electoral climate was of importance. In the following paragraphs, attention is paid to how

²⁹ Such opportunities could not always be taken up - before WWII Philip's uncle, from a large working class family, won a scholarship to a Blue Coat School (run within the charitable sector), but was unable to take up the opportunity because of issues with uniforms – something we see echoed in the Risinghill story in Part C.

these three levels operated in the 1950s and 1960s as this is a key factor in the story that follows. Although opportunities were increasing with the expansion of the university sector, only some 5% of the population went on to the universities in this period.

B3.2 - Education and Central Government

As the Ministry of Education is where the overall educational policies for England and Wales are formulated (within the constraints set by other departments, chiefly the Treasury) and therefore where the educational political tenor is set, in the period under discussion it should be noted that there was rather less control over the details of how education was delivered; a prime example being the absence of a National Curriculum, which was not introduced until 1988.

There were as many as five Secretaries of State for Education during the short, five-year life of Risinghill, the first three under the Conservative administrations of Harold Macmillan and Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the last two under the first Labour administration of Harold Wilson. The Labour ministers feature in the Risinghill story as they were in office during 1964-65 when the decision to close the school was first mooted by the LCC and then endorsed by central government in 1965. They were Michael Stewart (October 1964 to January 1965) and Anthony Crosland (January 1965 to August 1967) respectively. A junior minister in the Department during this period was Reginald (Reg) Prentice, who also features in the story. He later became Secretary of State for Education (March 1974 to June 1975) in Wilson's second administration. Two years after his stint in the Ministry, Prentice left the Labour Party and joined the Conservatives, subsequently taking up other, non-educational, ministerial roles in Margaret Thatcher's administration. Prentice, for the record, was Crosland's deputy at the time of Risinghill's impending closure, seemingly deputising for him when it came to discussing with parents and staff the Risinghill Parent Teacher Association's (PTA) appeal against the LCC's decision to close the school.

In very general terms the Conservatives were in favour of retaining grammar schools and the 11+ examination whilst being against, or at least lukewarm, towards the comprehensive model which, in the period under discussion, advocated a *single secondary school* for all children. The Labour Party was more supportive of the comprehensive, generally seeing it as fairer, less socially divisive, and providing greater opportunities for the disadvantaged. But this support was not universal. Some in the Labour Party, including Prime Minister Harold Wilson, saw the grammar school as a way for more able but poorer children to succeed and

break out of poverty; for many of these politicians it had been the route to their own success. Crosland, on the other hand, was famously considered to be against the grammar and very much in favour of the comprehensive, which on first sight makes his rejection of appeals to close Risinghill rather odd – an issue which is examined in the next section, in chapters C9 and C10 respectively. However, in view of Prentice’s later defection to the Conservatives, his handling of the PTA’s appeal is perhaps less puzzling.

This is no place to go into the fascinating details of the history of schools inspection in England, but the role of the schools inspectorate in the 1960s is a central thread in the Risinghill story, which was way before the days of Ofsted, the current inspection body introduced in 1992 under the Thatcher administration. In the 1960s the regime first introduced in the nineteenth century still applied - of Her Majesties Inspectors (HMIs) reporting to the Secretary of State. Nominally, the HMIs were a politically independent body. The Ministry HMI associated with Risinghill was a Mr Munday, who appears to have taken a friendly approach to the school and to MD. However, by the 1960s some Local Education Authorities (LEAs), including the LCC, had developed their own cadre of inspectors, who were not formally HMIs. This added, lower level, inspection tier within the educational hierarchy is described in section C, but it is worth noting here that this layer presaged the changes which came later – political in flavour – and which finally found expression in the creation of Ofsted.

B3.3 - Education and Local Government (LCC)

Below central government, education in England was the responsibility of the LEAs. These often equated to the County Councils, and in 1960 when Risinghill opened, London was viewed as a Council, and administered by the LCC, which was established in 1889. The LCC’s constituency contained a very large population and it governed the richest part of the nation: in consequence it wielded considerable power and influence and was not intimidated by the central government. This, no doubt, was one of the factors in its demise. Another, equally powerful, reason for getting rid of it (from the Conservative’s viewpoint) was that it had been controlled, continuously, by Labour since 1934. Symbolically, perhaps, the LCC, Greater London Council (GLC) and Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) premises were centred on County Hall, on the South Bank of the Thames, directly opposite the Houses of Parliament. In the April of the year of Risinghill’s closure (1965) the LCC was abolished

and replaced by the GLC. This tier of governance lasted until March 1986, when, under the Thatcher administration, control was devolved to the individual London boroughs.

Within the LCC, as in other counties, education was directed by an Education Committee (EC) and its various sub-committees. On the establishment of the GLC, education for the City of London and the twelve inner London boroughs (including Islington) was passed to the ILEA. The ILEA was established in 1964, assumed control in 1965 and was abolished in 1990, when educational responsibilities were passed on to the constituent London boroughs. During the whole of the Raisinghill period, the LCC and GLC were controlled by Labour administrations.

The EC was chaired through the period of Raisinghill's creation and life by a Mrs McIntosh (May 1961 to March 1964) with Mr James Young taking over in March 1965. Initially, chairmanship of the ILEA was by James Young, with Harold Shearman taking over in 1964-1965, followed by Sir Ashley Bramall in 1965-1967. After that, the chairman was Sir Christopher Chataway. Some members of the various committees and sub-committees feature in the Raisinghill affair, perhaps most interestingly Margaret Cole, mentioned in the previous chapter. Cole was a champion of the comprehensive model: she later became Dame Margaret Cole. In 1964 she was, as indicated earlier, chair of the LCC's Further Education Sub-Committee (FEC), one of three sub-committees involved with the initial proposal to close the school.

In terms of educational direction and administration, the changes in 1965 (to central government, including a change in political colour, and the reorganisation of London governance) must have been unsettling for the civil servants working at both levels. Note also the EC chairmanship of James Young in March 1965, when the decision to close Raisinghill had not yet been agreed formally. How much this affected judgements and decisions at the time is a matter of speculation, but the possible effects on Raisinghill should not be discounted. The EC and ILEA both had an executive civil service to administer education, but from the evidence that the authors have seen, and which is recounted in what follows, scant (or only token) attention appears to have been paid to the elected representatives on these bodies. This included the LCC's own inspectorate, separate from the Ministry HMIs, as noted above. This bypassing or obstruction of the wishes of the elected representatives has been mentioned by others; for example Kerckhoff et al, note an example from Manchester, quoting a remark of Lady Shena Simon to Alderman Sir Maurice Pariser made in 1955:

The Chief official ought to be prepared to carry out whatever policy the [Education] committee decided upon, but we have had recent experience of how, without apparent opposition – the official can obstruct. (1996)

These officials were also responsible for allocating children to secondary schools as they moved from primary to secondary education after taking the 11+ exam; in the case of Risinghill this was done in collaboration with the school's deputy head. In view of some of the evidence to be presented later, one is tempted to consider whether in 'collusion' would be a more appropriate verb.

A number of the LCC/ILEA officials and schools inspectors played a significant role in the closure of Risinghill. Heading this list is William Houghton (1909–1971, later Sir William), Chief Education Officer for the LCC, and his successor Dr Eric Briault (1911-1996)³⁰. Houghton was CEO from 1956. Briault was Deputy Education Officer (1956-71) to Houghton and then the Chief Education Officer (1971-76). Both these CEOs had a reputation for being strong supporters of the *London School Plan 1947* (LSP) which, as will be demonstrated in chapters C1-C3, implied support for the introduction of comprehensive schools. Yet they displayed negative attitudes to Risinghill and to Duane. Their senior subordinates included the LCC inspectorate, of whom significant personnel for the Risinghill story are: K MacGowan, a local HMI; Dr Payling, who was recruited as the Authority's new Chief Inspector in circa 1964; and L Clarke, another local HMI. An Assistant Education Officer, Mr Turner, also appears in the story, as recounted by Berg. All of these gentlemen displayed hostility towards the school and Duane.

The LCC, and later ILEA, divided the map over which they had responsibilities into geographic units for administrative reasons, Risinghill being in the North London Division. As will be shown, these geographical divisions had some significance at the time of the closure.

B3.4 - Local Organisation

During the time of Risinghill the local inner London boroughs had no responsibilities for education. While Risinghill was in the development stage, an Advisory Committee (AC) was formed to give direction to the process, including the appointment of the headmaster. The

³⁰ The Independent carried an obituary (9 March 1996) which mentions, negatively, Risinghill - "children were being short-changed". (See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituaryeric-briault-1341074.html>, accessed 7 February 2016.)

membership of the AC included figures from the wider educational and London environment. However, when the school opened, the AC was replaced by a governing body (GB) as was normal practice then, and now. The GB was largely drawn from the locality of the school, representing various interests, including local borough councillors, church leaders, and other worthies, some of whom may have been parents of children at the school, though the authors doubt it.

Within the school, heads had much scope for setting the school agenda in areas such as: the curriculum (there being no National Curriculum in those days); timetabling; forms; and streaming structures. Non-teaching administrative structures tended to be very lean by today's standards – perhaps a school secretary, a librarian (if there was a library), and a caretaker. There was much less reporting on students – limited for the most part to a report for parents once a term. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) were not so widespread as today, though the movement had started earlier in the century. Schools Councils were rare.

Another constituency in the delivery structure was the teachers' unions. These had no formal role in setting schools agendas or in setting the curriculum; however, they, or perhaps more accurately, their members, could influence particular events in particular schools. The unions MD belonged to seem to have been pretty ineffective in supporting him and/or having much of a say in how education was to be delivered.

PART C – The story of Risinghill

CHAPTER C1 - The Development of State Education

*‘Education without values, as useful as it is, seems
rather to make man a more clever devil.’*

C. S. Lewis

(‘The Abolition of Man’, 1943)

When the authors and other members of the RRG read Berg’s *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School* for the first time, they found certain parts of the story difficult to follow, mainly because they had not understood fully the politics of education. This, they soon discovered, had a massive impact on the school. It also became clear that, unless they were able to explain the political motivations and the differing party political perspectives on how the working-class and the (presumed) less academically able should be educated, their story would be difficult to tell.

As children, the authors and their RRG colleagues were described by Terence Constable, a former Risinghill teacher, as the “waste clay of an educational experiment” (1968). But what was this experiment? And on what basis was it deemed to be a failure? To find out, the authors were forced to go back to the beginning, to understand, first and foremost, the premise on which this experiment had begun life.

Initially the authors had taken only a cursory look at the educational politics prior to the opening of Risinghill, but this had not told them a great deal. A more detailed examination, however, revealed that, as early as the nineteenth century, at the heart of the education debate was the grammar school and how to educate working-class children. This was of interest because the politics of the grammar had featured heavily in Berg’s book.

When looking more closely at some of the arguments that prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s about state education, the authors discovered that many of these were about preserving the status of grammar schools and the role of the 11+ examination, based largely on intelligence testing, to determine a child’s academic abilities. Although interesting, these arguments did not take them any further forward in terms of understanding how the comprehensive system had evolved, much less why it was considered to be a failure. They could not, for example,

find any scientific research upon which this experiment might have been based. Nor did they find any meaningful discussions about what it was meant to deliver. It seemed, at a first glance, that the comprehensive school had evolved more by luck than judgement, and without any great enthusiasm either.

C1.1 - So what is a comprehensive school?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989) it is:

a secondary school catering for all abilities from a given area

To some in the RRG this definition did not make a lot of sense because there were no grammar schools among the schools merged to form Risinghill, and the secondary schools the authors had attended prior to and upon joining Risinghill did not have too many children who had passed the 11+ examination. Others in the RRG did understand that the grammar schools had ‘creamed off’ those considered more academically able, but only understood it from a personal perspective of loss, envy and disappointment without understanding its socio-political import³¹. Both views were reinforced by noting that Risinghill did not have an intake of the local 11+ successes after its establishment. Although the classes at Risinghill were streamed within the different year groups, the pupils were roughly at the same academic level for their age, with a few exceptions in the ‘A’ and ‘B’ streams, and it varied considerably thereafter. There was no proper ‘grammar stream’ as commonly understood.

It did not take long to discover that Risinghill was not, in fact, a comprehensive school. It was officially named ‘Risinghill Secondary Modern School’ on 6 May 1959 (London Metropolitan Archives, 2006). This was in line with other comprehensives of that era, including Kidbrooke, London’s first comprehensive school. However, Kidbrooke was never referred to as a secondary modern and neither was Risinghill. The term ‘comprehensive’ was an unofficial - one might say rhetorical - designation.

This came as quite a surprise to everyone in the RRG as nobody had thought of Risinghill as anything other than a comprehensive as per the definition, at least in intention. It was completely different to their previous schools, which *were* commonly known as secondary

³¹ It was probably true for the majority of parents, as well as children, that they were not really aware of the separation of children into radically different forms of education. However, in some families where one child went to a grammar and another to a secondary modern or comprehensive school the contrast in the education received between the siblings was marked, and the opportunities available to one over the other child stark.

moderns or technical schools so everyone was confused. Besides, this was not how Risinghill was described to prospective parents at the time:

Risinghill School is a Comprehensive School. This means that it includes all kinds of work hitherto done in separate grammar, technical and modern schools. (W. M. Duane, Undated)

It is perhaps useful to point out that, for a school to be truly comprehensive, it needs to have an equitable spread of pupils across the whole ability range; hence the dictionary definition. In 1960, the recommended proportions were 20% in each of five ability groups.³²

We were told we would have the full range of ability; that is 20% in the top group – those who would normally go straight to the grammar school; 20% in the bottom group – those just above ESN³³; and 20% in each of the three other groups; average, above average and below average. (Laiken, Undated)

Although this might well have been the original intention, Risinghill did not have anywhere near the recommended spread of academic abilities:

But in fact we never had a pattern that was basically different from: 0.7% in the top group; 7% in the second group; 20% in the third group, 30% in the fourth and NEVER LESS THAN 43% IN THE LEVEL JUST ABOVE ESN. So in fact we were a large secondary modern school. (Laiken, Undated)

This difference between the theoretical and actual distribution of ability at Risinghill is dramatic when shown graphically, highlighting the gap between advertised intention and actual practice (Figure 1). (N.B. Children falling in the ‘ESN’ range are not included in these figures). In fact, inspection of the lower four quintiles in Figure 1 shows that Risinghill was not only a large secondary modern school, but one with a student population with an ability range much less than that expected of a ‘normal’ secondary modern school taking the lower 80% of the ability range, (excluding the ESN pupils).

³² i.e ability groups defined by dividing into quintiles the ability range of the eligible population as a whole as determined by some measure, such as IQ scores.

³³ Educationally Sub-Normal – the phrase then current to refer to those in the very lowest ability range

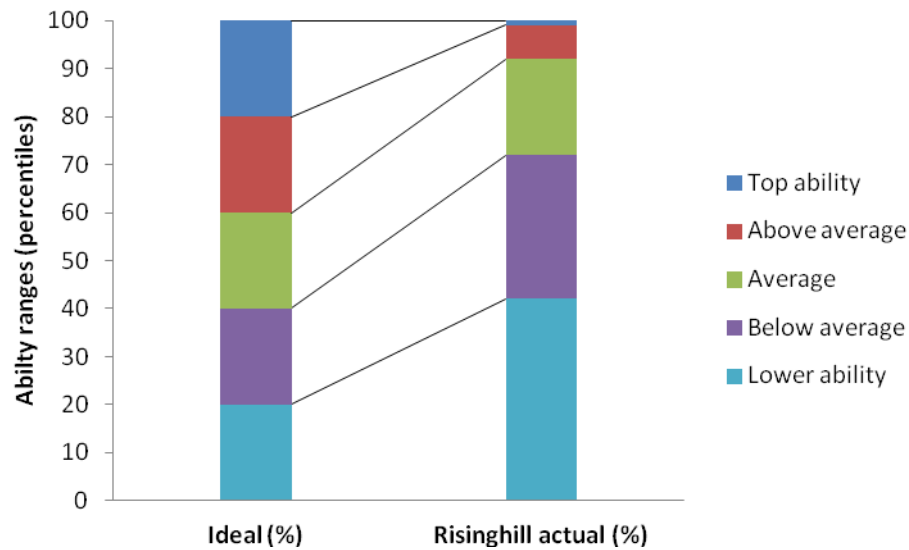


Figure 1: Differences between the ideal and actual range of student abilities at Risinghill

This is shown graphically in Figure 2 where Duane’s figures are re-plotted excluding the top ability range and re-scaling the remaining quartiles to 100%. Over 70% of pupils fell into the Lower Ability or Below Average ranges of ability, so the school’s population did not even match that of a secondary modern.

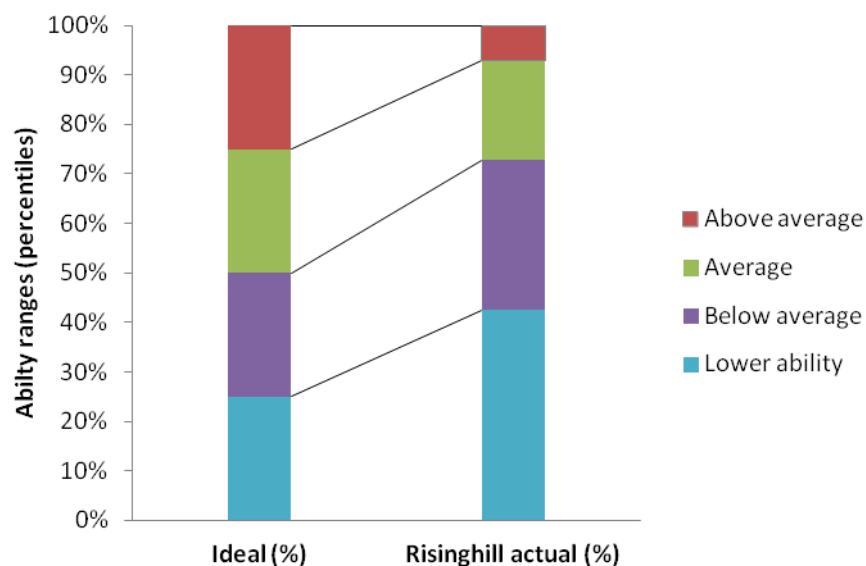


Figure 2: Distribution of abilities at Risinghill, excluding the top quintile. Here “Ideal” refers to a normal Secondary Modern School.

When examining the politics of state and comprehensive education and the role of the grammar school within it, all will become clear. However, although the grammar and

comprehensive are inextricably linked, unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this book to present all the arguments ‘for’ and ‘against’ either. Rather, the authors’ aim in this first chapter is to provide a basic understanding of the history of the comprehensive model, as without this knowledge it is impossible to make any sense of what happened at Risinghill. The decisions (some might say indecisions) of that era had a significant impact on the school.

C1.2 - The Beginnings of State Education

Today we take our state-funded education system for granted and accept that all children have the right to free education until they are sixteen, but of course this has not always been the case. For centuries most children received no formal education at all.

Grammar schools started in the sixteenth century with an emphasis on teaching Latin grammar to the sons of wealthy parents, hence the name ‘grammar’ schools. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century and the growth of industrialisation that education became a broad, political and social issue, with Britain needing a literate and numerate workforce that would have the ability to manage the wide variety of processes involved in industrial production.

Some children were being educated by the church, ragged schools (free schools for poor children) and other benefactors: the majority of children, however, were not educated at all. Many generations of families were poor and illiterate. Other than the Poor Law³⁴ and the workhouse system³⁵, state help for poor families did not exist. Consequently, the majority of children started working at a very young age to help supplement the family income.

In 1833, in a bid to start educating children who were working, the Factory Act ordered factory owners to provide children under the age of thirteen with at least two hours of education a day. (Factory Act 1833 (3 & 4 Will. IV) c103). Unfortunately many children remained uneducated as the wealthy owners did not always adhere to the legislation.

Partially funded state education for children up to the age of ten was started by a Liberal government in 1870. (Forster Education Act) The schools that were set up were known as ‘Board’ schools and across the country they were managed in small, local areas by elected

³⁴ The Poor Law Boards of Guardians operated on a union/parish basis. Accepting financial help would often mean a family would have to enter a workhouse and be separated. Education was not a priority for workhouse children.

³⁵ For a summary of the Workhouses and the Poor law see the Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor_Law_Amendment_Act_1834 (Accessed 12 March 2014)

school boards. These supplemented existing schools. Parents were still expected to pay school fees, but these were waived for some of the poorer ones.

Providing education for working-class children was also seen as a means of reducing their involvement in crime. There is a long history that documents the methods used to educate and reform children caught up in crime (Packman, 1981) For many years, such children and young people were categorised in law as ‘deprived’ or ‘delinquent’³⁶.

Children up to the age of sixteen who had committed a crime(s) and were deemed by the courts to be delinquent and/or out of control could be sentenced to reformatories; these were later known as ‘borstals’ or ‘approved’ schools and are now called ‘secure units.’ Here the focus was on education and reforming their criminal behaviour to achieve rehabilitation into the community. Conversely, those who were assessed as likely to start offending were placed in industrial schools, providing them with education and vocational training as a means of helping them to find work (Parker, 1990). Education was a focus for reform in both institutions; however, the children were perceived to be different. Reformatories and industrial schools also started to receive state funding in 1870. (Parker, 1990)

It was in 1880 that education became compulsory for children between the ages of five and ten years, but this created financial difficulties for families who relied on their children’s earnings. To ensure children’s attendance at school, the School Boards introduced ‘School Board Officers’ (later to be known as Truant Officers). (Parker, 1990)

Compulsory state-funded education effectively became free with the 1891 Education Act. This legislation provided state payment of children’s school fees. (Parker, 1990)

The kind of education provided in these schools is within the passed-on memories of some of today’s parents and grandparents. Philip remembers his grandfather talking about his schooling in the 1890s in Peckham (a depressed area of south London, then and now). The memory is of a rigid, authoritarian system and large class sizes - but his grandfather did come out of it numerate and literate. In contrast his grandmother attended a small, one-class, one-teacher rural school in Hampshire, where she told him of helping teach the younger children and reading them stories by the time she approached the leaving age of about fourteen. He also recalls his father-in-law talking about assisting at a rural boy’s borstal, teaching

³⁶ Although these legal distinctions no longer exist, these terms are still used to describe different groups of children.

gardening and farming. Rough and ready are words that come to mind of the education provided.

C1.3 - The Introduction of Local Education Authorities

In 1902, the management of state-funded schools was removed from the numerous small School Boards. (Balfour Education Act, 1902) These were replaced with Local Education Authorities (LEAs), and grammar schools were brought into the LEA funding systems. In inner London, the LCC took over the powers and responsibilities from the School Board for London and the Technical Education Board in 1904 (Balfour Education Act, 1902). By then the LCC was already a powerful and influential body³⁷. It had a progressive approach to education and was ahead of the rest of the country in building new schools and offering scholarships. A Chief Inspector was responsible for the running of all London schools, which were separated into divisions on a geographical basis. With a variety of schools in the capital, the aim of the LCC was to co-ordinate the operation of all of them:

Its immediate priorities were to integrate the Board Schools and the 'non-provided' schools mostly owned by religious organisations into a single coherent service. (London Metropolitan Archives, 2006)

In 1913 the LCC appointed, the now controversial, Sir Cyril Burt as its first psychologist. A major part of his role was to consider the needs of delinquent and maladjusted children. He was also interested in the use of intelligence testing to determine children's abilities and the debate about whether intelligence was linked to that of nature (genetics) or that of nurture (family environment and other factors.).

At that time it seemed obvious that a child's performance at school and indeed later on in life was related to social class, but it was not clear whether this was because better-off people were able to give their children a better start in life, with education and so on, or whether intelligence and educability were to some extent inherited genetically, with a higher average level in the upper classes. (Goodhart 1999)

By 1918 legislation had been introduced to raise the school leaving age from twelve to fourteen.(Fisher Education Act). This change gave LEAs, including the LCC, the additional

³⁷ Created in 1889, the LCC was the first metropolitan-wide form of general local government. See www.london.gov.uk [Accessed 27 December 2013].

responsibility for providing and managing secondary schools. The majority of children did not, however, have the opportunity to attend a state secondary school as very few existed. Instead, they attended the local elementary school from the age of five until they left at fourteen. Here, the focus was on providing all children with a basic standard of education to enable them to enter the workforce. These children, in general, did not sit examinations.

It follows that the schools offering the best education were the independent and grammar schools, where young people had the opportunity to sit the ‘School Certificate’ and the ‘Higher School Certificate’³⁸, enabling them to apply to universities. But they could continue their education after the age of fourteen only if they had a scholarship or if their parents could afford the school fees:

This system divided children along clear lines of social class – children from poorer backgrounds were almost all confined to elementary schooling. Less than 2 per cent of the population attended university.
(Giddens, 2001)

Therefore, the majority of school-leavers had no qualifications — restricting their access to many jobs and professions.

Although LEAs aimed to develop a coherent education service, in many parts of England the schools were unevenly spread, and there continued to be a variety of state and private schools operating alongside the elementary ones. These were Independent (private) schools, Voluntary Aided (church-run) schools and other grammars in the direct grant aided categories. There were also a small number of technical schools specialising in the engineering and needlecrafts trades, also commerce and other vocational disciplines.

C1.4 - Early Education Reforms

During the 1920s the debates about the most appropriate methods for educating all children gained momentum. Simon in Benn and Simon (1972) attributes the first formal call for one type of secondary school to the Assistant Masters Association, which passed a resolution at its 1925 conference, whereas (Fogelman, 2006) reports that it was the Independent Labour Party and the National Union of Teachers who first called for a ‘multilateral’ school on the

³⁸ The Secondary School Examinations Council, who administered these examinations, was set up in 1917

grounds that it would offer more parity in the system. This was the original name for the comprehensive.

While the LCC was very supportive of the idea of a single secondary school for all, the Conservative government in office was not. Nor did the concept appeal to too many in the educational hierarchy who, although recognising the need for a more equitable system, thought that integrating grammar school children with the masses was taking equality too far. Despite all the negativity, the idea of a multilateral school did begin to gain some support in government, due largely to the influence of a small group of progressive Labour MPs. To explore the issues, several committees were set up to report on specific aspects of children's education. Some of these committee reports have had an on-going influence.

The Hadow Report of 1926 (Board of Education, 1926) paved the way for selection by ability. Sir Cyril Burt provided information on psychological testing for this report. He, and the report's authors, acknowledged that less-able children would benefit from reforms in secondary education, but they were adamant that grammar schools and selective education were necessary to educate 'brighter' children:

However, the dominant view of educational policy-makers in the inter-war years was that no reorganisation should affect the status or integrity of the grammar school but should be carried through by the creation of separate secondary schools. Thus the authors of the most influential of the inter-war reports on education, the Hadow Report of 1926, concluded that children's secondary education should be determined on the grounds of ability, and the authors apparently had no doubts that it was possible to distinguish between academic children, who would benefit from a traditional examination-orientated education in a grammar school, and the less able, who would benefit from courses of practical instruction in a modern school. (Kerckhoff et al., 1996)

Another important report of the period was the Spens Report of 1938. (Board of Education). It was this committee report that first proposed the long standing 11+ examination system, used to separate children into different types of schools according to academic ability and aptitude. By this time Burt had left the LCC and was now Professor of Psychology at the University College London. In this role he provided a memorandum that was used to develop

the second part of the chapter in the Spens report on *The Mental Development of Children between the ages of 11+ and 16+*. The Spens' authors took the view that it was possible to determine children's intellectual abilities at the age of eleven:

We were informed that, with few exceptions, it is possible at a very early age to predict with some degree of accuracy the ultimate level of a child's intellectual powers, but this is true only of general intelligence and does not hold good in respect of specific aptitudes or interests. (Kerckhoff et al., 1996)

With assurances that children's abilities could be measured using intelligence tests, the Spens report rejected proposals for a single secondary school that would incorporate academic, technical and general education. Instead, the report endorsed a tripartite (three part) schools' system with academic grammar schools for more academically inclined children; a variety of specialist technical schools for those who would benefit from developing specific technical skills; and secondary modern schools providing a mixture of general and vocational education for the remainder: the remainder representing the vast majority of children. The Spens Report did, however, recognise that in very rural communities and under-populated newly built areas, a tripartite system might not be viable. In these circumstances it was thought that a single multilateral school, serving a number of small communities, might be more appropriate.

Some educationalists and politicians, though, remained concerned about determining children's futures at the age of eleven, believing that some children could be late developers, and other children who passed the 11+ might not be emotionally suited to the grammar school regime. Moreover, the evidence emerging at this time showed that the less-privileged child, who passed the 11+, did not automatically gain a grammar school place. Competition for these schools was fierce, and many children were turned away because of their social backgrounds. Take, for example, Yvonne's experience:

In 1960, I passed my 11+ and was considered to be a clever child. My mother was overly proud and was determined that I should attend Dame Alice Owen School, which at the time, was situated at the Angel, Islington. I remember going with her for an interview and also remember her bitter disappointment when my application was rejected on the grounds that we lived only in one room. It was considered that I would have no scope for

study; a little like Virginia Woolf, an Owen's girl needs a 'Room of One's Own'. (Yvonne, 2004)

So for all of these reasons the case for a multilateral school continued to be argued in and outside of government. The broad thrust of this argument was:

- Greater equality in education would be achieved because all children would be in the same school and they would, therefore, all have the opportunity to take academic examinations.
- Their vocational and general educational needs could be met within the same environment.
- There would be social and cultural benefits from grouping differing social classes and mixed abilities together. Society was, after all, becoming more multicultural, less stratified, and so was the workforce.

The landmark Butler Education Act (1944) introduced during the period of the wartime coalition government, aimed to ensure that every child be given an equal opportunity to succeed; this was to be based on their individual ability. The Act was wide-ranging and carried forward many of the recommendations set out in the Hadow and Spens reports. The Act recognised the importance of education for economic advancement and social welfare. Its aim was to provide secondary education for all children so that every child had equal opportunity to obtain a place in a grammar school, regardless of family background. Most Local Education Authorities (LEAs) interpreted the 1944 Act to mean the provision of schooling according to ability.

It is worth noting that, for many people, the term 'secondary education for all' meant a 'grammar school education for all.' (Chitty, 1989)

A tripartite system of secondary education was introduced for all children with a change from primary to secondary education at the age of eleven. The appropriate type of school was to be determined by the 11+ examination, which used a variety of tests to assess children's verbal and non-verbal reasoning. This included mental arithmetic, a written essay question and a general problem-solving paper:

It was thought that this new system would ensure that the most academically-able children would benefit from the education provided by grammar schools and further education, while those attending secondary modern and technical schools would gain from an education more suited to their perceived needs and future role in the workplace.

What is interesting is that the 1944 Fleming Report, which was commissioned by Butler (Committee on Public Schools, 1944) gave recommendations and proposals on how to integrate and link independent schools with state sector schools, but the findings of this report were never taken seriously.

Nonetheless, Butler does appear to have conceded to the mounting pressure from the Labour Party and other influential bodies, such as the LCC, for a different type of education. The Act did not, for example, specify that non-selective secondary schools (in effect multilateral schools) would be unacceptable. This gave some LEAs, notably the LCC, a unique opportunity to experiment with the provision of education:

The White Paper recognised “three main types of secondary school to be known as grammar, modern and technical schools,” but very significantly went on to say that “it would be wrong to suppose that they will remain separate and apart. Different types may be combined in one building as considerations of convenience and efficiency may suggest. In any case the free interchange of pupils from one type of education to another must be facilitated.” This statement enunciates no educational philosophy or principle and makes no statement of national policy, but it leaves the door open to any suitable combination, and the discretion of local education authorities is in no way cramped by any over-riding decision by the Central Government. (London County Council, 1947)

Unlike today, LEAs had considerable autonomy to organise their schools in whatever pattern they considered appropriate:

A well-known phrase described British education as being a ‘national system, locally administered’. In other words, the general framework was set by national policy, but much power resided with the LEAs who were able to determine the detail of how they interpreted and administered this. (Kerckhoff et al., 1996)

As such, many began to develop their own, preferred structures. Some implemented the tripartite system while others chose not to include technical schools, establishing instead a bipartite (two part) system of grammars and secondary moderns. This was because technical schools required extra space and expensive specialist equipment. But some LEAs, including the LCC, while initially providing a tripartite system, embarked on a radical programme of full ‘comprehensivisation’ as it was called then.

C1.5 - An Education Service

How the ‘national system, locally administered’ worked in practice is an important element of the Risinghill story. For this reason, it is helpful to explain the system in a little more detail.

Clyde Chitty draws attention to the dynamics of this model where the balancing of autonomy with power and accountability within a loose framework of consensus are described as follows:

As with all ambiguity models, organizational structure is regarded as problematic. There is uncertainty over the relative power of the different parts of the system. The effective power and influence of each element within the structure is said to vary with the issue and according to the level of commitment of the individuals concerned. (Chitty, 1989)

Dr Briault, the Deputy Chief Education Officer of the LCC at the time of Risinghill, described the system as a ‘triangle of tension’ – between the school, LEA (locally administered) and government (national system). In his view,

. . . providing the sides held, the tension could be seen as constructive and valuable in preventing the dangers which would arise if too much power became concentrated at one point of the triangle. Briault, 1976, quoted in (Chitty, 1989)

What Briault did not take into consideration, however, was the inherent conflicts between the three points, also the divisions within the triangle. It is perhaps useful to point out here that schools, namely the head and governing body (GB), were part of this structure, and also enjoyed a level of autonomy:

I will begin by saying that the local education authorities, as I see it, will have responsibility for the broad type of education given in the secondary schools ... the governing body would, in our view, have the general direction of the curriculum as actually given from day to day, within the school. The head teacher would have, again in our view, responsibility for the internal organization of the school, including the discipline. (Chitty, 1989)

By the time Risinghill came on to the scene (in 1960) the above system appeared to be grinding to a halt, largely because the observed protocols and lines of responsibility between the three parties were becoming increasingly blurred. By way of example the central government was wandering into areas that, hitherto, had been strictly the domain of the LEAs, and the LEAs, in turn, were encroaching on territory that, historically, had always been the responsibility of the heads and GBs.

Last, but by no means least, was the role of the CEO, a civil servant, in the system described. It is worthwhile here turning to Derek Gillard's (1987) paper '*The Chief Education Officer: the real master of local educational provision?*' This provides an insight into the extraordinary powers wielded by CEOs, quoting Ribbins:

On the face of it therefore, CEOs have traditionally had considerable opportunities for exercising power, especially in education policy making. Even as late as the 1970s this was still clearly the case. Peter Ribbins, for example, writing about secondary reorganisation, says: 'In most of the case studies a report presented by the CEO is identified as forming the basis for the authority's final decision as to the form of reorganisation to be adopted ... in some cases the identification of the plan with the CEO was so great that it was even named after him as with the "Peter Plan" in Darlington, where the Conservatives grumbled that the plan was "the view of one man and one man alone." (Ribbins, 1985)

But at the same time, a CEO was supposed to:

Implement, with care and accuracy, the decisions and policies of the authority as expressed in meetings of the Council and Education

Committee ...and must 'never in public be critical of, or unenthusiastic about, the decisions of the Council.' (Brooksbank and Ackstine, 1984)

What happened at Risinghill does, therefore, have to be viewed in the context of a delivery system that was flawed. Without giving too much away at this stage, the authors can report that there was an extraordinary level of interference by the LCC and its CEO in the day-to-day running of the school when this was supposed to have been the responsibility of the school's GB and Duane:

A constructive result of this meeting, Dr Briault claimed, was that Mr Duane radically reorganised the school into year groups to allow closer supervision by the staff. (Guardian, 1968a)

Duane, for the record, did not radically reorganise Risinghill. Following a visit from the LCC's inspectorate in 1962, he agreed to reorganise the first year into forms but categorically refused to change anything else:

The wholesale reorganisation of the whole school would in my opinion undo the work of the last two years by cutting through the bonds formed between the Tutors and the Heads of House on the one hand and the children, particularly the disturbed children, on the other. (W. M. Duane, 1962a)

Moreover, he refused to be coerced on the issue of discipline and punishment (another area in which the CEO's officers meddled) but more about this later. It is the 1944 Education Act that the authors end this chapter with, taking two quotes from a book by Dent that was written about the 1944 Act in 1962:

After 16 years there are still important sections of the Act not implemented; yet nothing less than complete implementation will suffice to satisfy the nation's needs ...

The Education Act, 1944, concerns intimately every one of us – man, woman, and child. It lays unprecedented obligations upon both the public authorities and the private citizen. Its full implantation – in the spirit in which it was conceived as well as in the letter of its law – may make all the

difference between a happy and glorious future for our country and an unhappy inglorious one. To make it a real success, the wholehearted co-operation of every citizen is required. (Dent, 1962)

The “spirit” in which the Act was conceived and how it was interpreted are an integral part of the Risinghill story. So too is the question of “full implementation” which, in the twenty-first century, has still not been achieved and indeed may be even further off.

CHAPTER C2 - Changing Education – 1944+

‘A system of morality which is based on emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar concept which has nothing sound in it and nothing true.’

Socrates, from ‘Plato's Phaedo’

In 1944, WWII was coming to an end, heralding the beginning of a new era when, after years of hardship, working-class people believed they had earned the right to a brighter future. High on their list of priorities were better housing, better jobs and a better education for their children.

When, in 1945, Labour won the General Election convincingly, it was thought that, in line with the Party's promise of radical social reform, the comprehensive school would become a reality, but this did not happen, suggesting that Labour was not so brave or radical after all. Instead the tripartite system set out in the 1944 Education Act was implemented, that being a system of grammar, technical and secondary ‘modern’ schools to replace the old secondary or senior schools as they were called then.

Social, political and educational changes continued and 1947 saw three important developments: raising the school leaving age to fifteen; giving brighter children the option to continue their education until aged seventeen; and the requirement for Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to submit development plans to meet the Act's new requirements for secondary education.

The technical schools did not take off, and the system became, in effect, a bipartite system that was not wildly different from that which had been in place before the war. It would seem that, even in the 1940s, our politicians had a flair for giving their old schools new clothes:

The 1944 Education Act provided secondary education according to “age, aptitude and ability”. Such innocent and common sense-sounding words. But they became the foundation of a post-war system every bit as divided and class-biased as in the bad, pre-war days. It was put over by the con trick of renaming “senior schools” as “modern schools”.... It was

“modern”, apparently, to leave school earlier than in the grammar schools, to have larger classes, and to lack specialist teachers, for example in maths, science and modern languages. It was “modern” to spend less on those who needed education most. (Morris, 2004)

Ellen Wilkinson, Labour’s first Minister for Education in 1945, openly supported the retention of grammar schools and so did her successor, George Tomlinson, who took over in 1947. This was because they and many others, known as the ‘Old Guard’ of the Labour movement, saw the grammar school as an opportunity for brighter, working-class children to move up the social ladder. They had fought hard for the municipal grammar school and did not want to see the scholarship system disappear.

Despite these difficulties, the LCC remained committed to its plans for multilateral (comprehensive) schools. So too did a number of LEAs in other parts of the country, though not all were fired with Labour’s ideals. For many LEAs, particularly those in rural areas, going comprehensive was simply a question of economics. Government funding was tight after the war so building a single, large comprehensive unit that would serve a number of communities was an attractive proposition. And in some areas, notably the Isle of Man, Anglesey and parts of the West Riding it also enabled some of the more progressive Authorities to address the thorny issue of removing selection (the 11+ examination) and grammar schools at the same time.

The 11+ was proving controversial for a number of reasons:

First, it was seen as having a very negative influence on the curriculum in primary schools which, particularly in their later years, devoted much time to the narrow content of the examination and to practising standardised tests. Secondly, there was concern about the apparently arbitrary variation among areas of the country in which the proportions went to grammar schools. Thirdly, there was an accumulating body of research casting doubt on the technical efficacy of the examination (e.g. Yates and Pidgeon, 1958). Fourthly, there was concern about the all or nothing nature of the 11+, which came increasingly to be seen as inconsistent with the realities of child development. (Fogelman, 2006)

With grammar schools unevenly spread across the country, parental dissatisfaction with the education system was growing. Moreover, passing the 11+ examination did not guarantee a place at the grammar and this was another bone of contention. Many believed the admissions criteria were skewed in favour of the more affluent, making a mockery of the idea that ‘bright’, working class children were able to move up the social ladder.

Because children’s futures depended on their passing the 11+ examination, some parents coached their children to ensure they passed, failure often being linked to assumed low intelligence and limited life chances. As has been noted competition for entry into grammar schools increased because these schools provided the way to university and a professional career. The tripartite system also reinforced the incorrect assumption that children of a lower social class had lower intelligence.

Within the framework of the tripartite system there was the added concern that roughly 10% of children were incorrectly graded each year by the 11+ exam:.

Half of these wrongly selected for grammar schools and half wrongly going to secondary modern schools. (Walford, 1997)

Another, less obvious, reason for the government’s climb down on the comprehensive school was that a new social order (the middle-class) was emerging after the war, and this was becoming more vociferous in its complaints about the school system. Unable to get their children into a grammar school, which was the only school to offer a route to the university, these parents were looking for a reasonable compromise, and in this regard the comprehensive was seen as a much better proposition to the secondary modern. The comprehensive, for example, gave children the opportunity to take the GCE and other examinations, such as the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), which the secondary modern often did not. All of these factors combined to make the political climate less hostile to the introduction of comprehensive schools than it might otherwise have been.

C2.1 - The London School Plan 1947

The *London School Plan 1947*, which is still available in some libraries, leaves the reader in no doubt as to how the LCC intended to implement the requirements of the 1944 Education Act. This was to establish a secondary school system that catered for children of *all* abilities under the one roof:

That in a reformed system there is no place for the senior or modern school differentiated from other types, for such a school would have an inferior status in the eyes of parents because it would in practice provide solely for those who fail to secure admission elsewhere” (London County Council, 1947)

This policy statement was probably very embarrassing for the new Labour administration which had promised so much in the way of social equality but was now dragging its heels on the comprehensive. The LCC, though, was determined to realise its dream of a single secondary school regardless of whether the government supported it openly or not. Under the ‘national system, locally administered’ it was, after all, free to organise its schools in whatever pattern it thought fit, as the following demonstrates:

... In an area where it is proposed to organise secondary education on the usual tripartite plan, the education to be provided in each school can be conveniently described by using one of the terms: “grammar,” “technical,” “modern.” These terms are inappropriate, even as terms of art, to describe the nature of education to be given to maintained secondary schools in London, for the Council has decided that the development plan should aim at establishing a system of comprehensive high schools providing all pupils with equal opportunity for physical, intellectual, social and spiritual development which, while taking advantage of the practical interests of the pupils, should make the full development of personality the first objective. (London County Council, 1947)

Graham Savage, a former Chief Education Officer (CEO) of the LCC, was one of the main authors of the LSP. According to an article in *The Times* (1965b) he was responsible for renaming the ‘multilateral’ schools as comprehensives:

“I said ‘comprehensive’. For two reasons: one because they will cater for every activity; two because all children from a given area, regardless of ability, will go to them.”

The many changes detailed in the LSP were clearly a radical departure from the norm. This was a bold, provocative plan that would put the LCC on a collision course with government,

not that this appears to have bothered the LCC unduly. It was a powerful LEA that had controlled London (under the auspices of Labour) since 1934, making it a formidable adversary for any government in office, including Labour.

When it became clear that the LCC was determined to press ahead with its plan for a system of comprehensive high schools in the capital, there was opposition from many different quarters. The London Head Teachers Association (representing grammar school interests) was one of the first organisations to petition the Ministry to voice its disapproval. Over the next few years several other objections followed, with the LSP attracting much heated debate in and outside Westminster.

The Conservatives were totally opposed to the idea of disbanding grammar schools in favour of comprehensives. But as has been demonstrated, there were pockets of resistance within the Labour Party too. A major bone of contention - for politicians on both sides – was the proposed size of some of the larger comprehensive units, which were intended to accommodate up to 2000 pupils.

It was in this atmosphere, and without any great enthusiasm, that the Ministry sanctioned a limited number of experimental comprehensive schools — doing so largely in response to growing post-war pressure for more parity in the system; calls for the abolition of the 11+; and a desire to be seen to be satisfying middle England.

C2.2 – London's First Comprehensive

Approval for London's first purpose-built comprehensive was granted in 1949. This was Kidbrooke in Greenwich. The initial plan was to close five existing schools, one a girls' grammar school. However, when Kidbrooke was about to be opened in 1954, the Conservatives were back in office and action was taken to retain the grammar school. The result of this government intervention was that the LCC's first comprehensive school became, in effect, a secondary modern: without the required spread of abilities (20% in each ability group) it could not be fully comprehensive. There is another, equally important, point to bear in mind here, and it is this. Aside from rendering the LSP redundant, this action struck at the heart of the 'national system, locally administered', setting a precedent for any one of the three parties (central government, LEAs and schools) to break the rules if they did not suit.

Sir David Eccles, the Minister for Education, though not responsible directly for the Kidbrooke decision, later clarified the government's position as follows:

One has to choose between justice and equality, for it is impossible to apply both principles at once. Those who support comprehensive schools prefer equality. Her Majesty's present Government prefer justice. My colleagues and I will never allow local authorities to assassinate the grammar schools. (quoted in Chitty, 2005)

As Graham Savage reflected later in 1965, the subsequent infighting had a massive impact on the LCC's plan to develop comprehensive schools:

It then became a political matter. Damn it, I wish education could be left out of politics. The Conservatives were all against it. They opposed it simply because the other side proposed it. (quoted in The Times, 1965b)

The political climate remained tense throughout the 1950s with the LCC sticking steadfastly to its goal despite the hiccup with Kidbrooke. In the wake of Kidbrooke, however, the Authority was finding it increasingly difficult to bring the rest of the capital's grammar schools on board. Whereas a number of these had agreed, in principle, to become part of the new (comprehensive) arrangements, many were now holding back, and there was very little that the LCC could do about this. This was because the grammars were not obliged to join in the scheme if they did not want to, nor were other schools in the 'independent', 'direct grant' and 'aided' categories. Rather, these schools were *invited* to participate in the new scheme; page 230 of the LSP refers:

That the governors of independent, direct grant and aided secondary schools and the appropriate authorities of non-provided³⁹ elementary schools be informed of the Council's policy in regard to post-primary education in London, and be invited to enter, in due course, into negotiations with the Council on the part which they can play in the general scheme. (London County Council, 1947, p230)

³⁹ Under the 1902 Education Act schools not funded from local taxes, mostly church funded schools.

Clearly the LSP was compromised (to put it mildly) by the Kidbrooke decision; however, as indicated, the LCC was determined to press ahead with its plans, regardless it would seem of the consequences.

C2.3 – Expanded Testing

Examinations have always been seen as a way of measuring children's abilities. In 1951 the then secondary school examinations (the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate) were replaced by the General Certificate of Education (GCE). These were also at two levels: the Ordinary Level ('O'-Level) examinations were taken at sixteen and Advanced Level ('A'-Levels) at eighteen⁴⁰. However, the majority of children attending secondary modern schools at this time had little or no opportunity to sit these exams:

The 1944 Education Act sought to extend educational opportunity by introducing the principle of 'free secondary education for all'; but patronizing attitudes towards the sort of education thought 'appropriate' for working-class children persisted in the type of curriculum provided for the majority of pupils attending secondary modern schools. (Chitty, 2004)

But some secondary modern school children were entered for, and passed, the new GCE examinations, leading to a greater questioning of the 11+ and the reliance on intelligence testing in general; one of the reasons, no doubt, for the LCC and other LEAs pressing ahead with the comprehensive.

C2.4 – The Curriculum

One of the biggest flaws in the 1944 Education Act was that no consideration was given to the curriculum when reorganising secondary education. Consequently, nobody really knew what a secondary modern school was supposed to look like, much less what it was expected to deliver. The government, in defending its position, appears to have relied solely on the delivery system to provide the answer:

The absence of any curriculum guidelines in the 1944 Act was defended by R.A. Butler (since 1941, President of the Board of Education) in a debate in the House of Commons on the grounds that general responsibility for

⁴⁰ There was also a Special Level ("S"-level) examination for high-flyers, and later an intermediate examination between "O" and "A" levels in some subjects (Advanced Ordinary level). Note that the GCE system did not apply to Scotland.

running the secondary schools rested with headteachers, governing bodies and local education authorities. (Chitty, 1989)

Given that the majority of heads had been through the grammar school system, and the idea of a grammar school education for all children was now being touted by government in a bid to improve the image of the new secondary moderns-cum-comprehensives, it was the grammar school model that was adopted in most cases. But this model was inappropriate for children who were barely literate having received only a basic education in their previous (elementary) schools. Because of this, many of the early secondary modern schools, such as Howe Dell, floundered - as Ms Kirsten Tait, one of a team of Assistant Principals at the Department for Education & Science (DES), noted:

It seems to me, in the light of what has happened since, that one of the major weaknesses of secondary reorganization was that it was not combined with a really important debate as to what a comprehensive curriculum would look like ... When schools were reorganized as comprehensives, they took with them into the new system a sort of watered down version of the old grammar-school curriculum. And, with hindsight, I think that that was a mistake, and that enormous possibilities were lost, particularly in the area of technical education. Quoted in Chitty (1989)

Some heads, however, including MD, recognised the futility of forcing a grammar school curriculum on children who were barely literate, and instead tailored the syllabus to meet the needs of their pupils. While this approach was often criticised, it is important to point out that many LEAs believed that this was the right course of action. And where the comprehensive was concerned the LCC was proposing a new type of education all together:

The nature of the education to be provided in the secondary schools proposed in the plan can therefore best be described as a liberal education. Such an education would minister to three main, overlapping types of interest – cultural interests for the enrichment of life, vocational interests in preparation for the successful gaining of a livelihood, and community interests leading to responsible participation in the duties of citizenship ... (London County Council, 1947)

Perhaps not surprisingly, once these new schools became established all the experts had an opinion and these differed widely. Should the comprehensives turn out academics or technicians, or was there a need to be more vocational? And who had the last say? The government had washed its hands of the problem so was this the responsibility of the heads and GBs, as Butler had indicated, or the LEAs?

Simmering in the background was the argument about integrating the grammar into the comprehensive, vexing even the Labour Party, which could not make up its mind either way; thus the Labour MP Emmanuel (Manny) Shinwell in 1958:

We are afraid to tackle the public schools to which wealthy people send their sons [sic], but, at the same time, we are quite prepared to throw overboard the grammar schools, which are for many working-class boys the stepping-stones to our universities and a useful career. (Shinwell, 1958)

Hugh Gaitskell, Leader of the Labour Party at the time, denied the accusation vehemently, and in a letter to *The Times*, a week later, used language that would turn the comprehensive on its head:

It would be much nearer the truth to describe our proposals as amounting to 'a grammar-school education for all' ... Our aim is greatly to widen the opportunities to receive what is now called 'a grammar-school education'; and we also want to see grammar-school standards, in the sense of higher quality education, extended far more generally. (Gaitskell, 1958)

These words were translated later into the slogan 'grammar schools for all' — a phrase used frequently by Harold Wilson, Gaitskell's successor.

Engaging non-academic children in a grammar school regimen was not the only problem facing LEAs at this time. In the post-war period there were insufficient schools and not enough suitably qualified teachers to go around, making the grammar school model even more of a challenge. While policies were introduced to improve teacher recruitment and training, progress was slow and many new schools suffered as a result. This was an ongoing problem that continued into the 1960s and beyond. Risinghill never had a full complement of

staff, not even when it opened. As MD noted in his commentary on Risinghill's 1962 inspection:

Ever since the school started with a staff of Head, Deputy and 73 equivalent full-time teachers, of whom nearly a quarter were people put in at the last moment because it had been impossible to attract properly qualified staff up to the full establishment when the school opened, staffing has been a matter of serious difficulty. At no time has the staff been up to the establishment in numbers except for very short periods. It has certainly never been near it in the matter of qualifications, and frequently short of it in competence. (W. M. Duane, 1962a)

C2.5 - Immigration

Another emerging issue, which successive governments had not made provision for, was the education of immigrant children from black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. This situation arose from the Nationality Act 1948, which gave Empire and Commonwealth citizens the opportunity to settle in Britain. Families came from many different countries, including the West Indies, Asia, and Cyprus, but also from outside the former colonies such as Poland and Italy. They often settled in large cities – for example London, Birmingham and Liverpool, where, in the post-war period, there was a broad shortage of skilled and manual workers.

Many of the children arriving in the country could not speak English, compounding what was already a massive challenge for inner city schools. As with the curriculum, it was left to the heads and/or the LEAs to devise their own strategies, there being no national policy in place:

Teachers' unions and local policy-makers were agreed that immigrant children should be dispersed through the school system so as to reduce pressures on individual schools. (Jones, 2003)

For the majority of schools, the aim was to assimilate ethnic minority children into the British way of life. However, this was difficult to achieve as families started to develop links with local communities and migrant organisations, sparking debates about teaching English as a second language - should children be discouraged from using their home language in school, or was it important to respect and value their individual cultures and mother tongues?

Meanwhile, the grammar and independent schools continued to flourish, taking their pick of not only the academically gifted children in the area, but also the more talented teachers.

All these developments need to be taken into account when looking at the events leading up to Risinghill's birth in 1960 and its death in 1965.

CHAPTER C3 – London Education Post War

*'When fiction rises pleasing to the eye,
Men will believe, because they love the lie;
But truth herself, if clouded with a frown,
Must have some solemn proof to pass her down'*

Charles Churchill

('An Epistle to William Hogarth', 1763)

The political battle to shape the future of education continued into the late 1950s and early 1960s with Party politics playing an important part in the battle for the retention of the grammar. For the LCC this was a particularly difficult time. Its new comprehensive schools were coming under attack and to add to the Authority's woes, the Conservative administration, now under Harold Macmillan, had begun the process of breaking Labour's stranglehold on the capital. In 1957 a Royal Commission, the Herbert Commission, (Butler, 1960), was set up to explore the feasibility of replacing the LCC with a new, strategic body that would control the greater London area. This Commission would report on its findings in 1960, the year in which Risinghill was born.

Despite these setbacks, by 1959 the LCC had opened sixteen new comprehensive units though how many of these had been merged with a grammar school and were truly comprehensive is difficult to say. As has been noted elsewhere, Risinghill did not have the required spread of abilities to function as a comprehensive school, leastwise not in the way that the *London School Plan 1947* (LSP) had intended.

There were, in fact, very few secondary schools in England with the required spread of abilities to make them fully comprehensive. From what the authors have been able to establish, the majority appear to have been large secondary moderns (built large) with all the attendant problems of illiteracy, teacher shortages and class sizes that bore no resemblance to the grammar whatsoever. Evidence of this can be found in the Newsom Report of 1963, which showed that a good half of the secondary school population in the early 1960s was of below-average ability. Nineteen years after the 1944 Education Act, which had promised so much in the way of equality, this was a terrible indictment of government policy. Aptly named '*Half our Future*', the Newsom Report made very uncomfortable reading.

C3.1 – The Comprehensive Post Kidbrooke

A system that is in disarray will inevitably come under criticism. It was the comprehensive, however, that was singled out for attention, not the system per se, which the authors found somewhat disturbing. The main criticism was that the comprehensive was not creating greater equality. This, of course, was true, but what the critics all failed to take into account was that, because of the government's intervention with Kidbrooke, the comprehensive had become a secondary modern in all but name, and the secondary modern had never promised to deliver on equality, nor was able to.

But battering the comprehensive suited those who had a vested interest in keeping the grammar separate. It planted the first seeds of failure in the minds of those who were warming to the concept of a single secondary school for all abilities, and at the same time increased the pressure on the LCC to abandon the comprehensive model. It was a clever strategy that, to this day, is still being used to maintain the status quo.

It goes without saying that, for the LCC to have challenged its critics on these grounds would have been difficult, political suicide no less: it was hardly going to admit that it was failing to bring the grammar into the comprehensive as this was tantamount to saying that its 1947 development plan was in tatters. The Labour Party, who, at this time, was seeking re-election, did not say anything either: the removal of the grammar was a sensitive issue, likely to upset middle England, and votes mattered. Besides which the grammar school was still seen by some Labour politicians as a way of advantaging working class children, or at least the most able of them, as has been discussed. This included Harold Wilson, who was about to become the next Labour Prime Minister. The Conservative government in office adopted a similar position, probably because it, too, was reluctant to rock the boat for fear of upsetting the middle-ground voter.

So in the 1960s nothing much had changed on the education front despite all the political posturing and the promises made in the 1944 Education Act. With the politicians fiddling, it is hardly surprising that education continued to burn:

The Crowther Report of 1959 showed that only 12 per cent of pupils continued in school until the age of seventeen, and early leaving was shown to be more closely related to class background than to academic performance. (Giddens, 2001)

What is interesting about the Crowther Committee (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1959) is that, in looking at the provision of education for fifteen to eighteen year olds, it chose, deliberately, to steer clear of the arguments about secondary education, recognising, at the same time, that it was putting the cart before the horse:

We are not in this report concerned either with the general pattern of secondary education or with the problems of allocation; but it is necessary to be aware of what has occurred before 15 if one is to understand what happens afterwards. Equally, what we have found out about boys and girls of 15 and over throws a good deal of light on the kind of provision that ought to be made for them in earlier years if a great deal of good human material is not to be wasted. (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1959, Chapter 2, para. 28)

The report goes on to give a potted history of the secondary education system in England and Wales from 1938 through to 1958. It also gives a brief description of the composition of the existing state schools, and the numbers of pupils attending them (it appears to exclude Public Schools). The results are fascinating, but not entirely unexpected. It is worth reproducing the figures, as shown in Table 1 adapted from the report (Chapter 2, para.29, Table 5); it is re-ordered by the total number of pupils per school type (fifth column).

School type	Number of schools (percentage of total schools)	Number of pupils aged 11 to 14	Number of pupils aged 15 to 18 (percentage over 14)	Total pupils (Percentage of all pupils)	Average school size (number of pupils)
Secondary Modern	3,890 (48.5%)	1,499,183	49,800 (3.2%)	1,548,983 (60.6%)	398
Grammar and Direct Grant	1,414 (17.6%)	452,652	229,324 (33.6%)	681,976 (26.7%)	482
“All age” schools⁴¹	2,297 (28.6%)	120,189	723 (0.6%)	120,912 (4.7%)	53
Technical	279 (3.5%)	67,681	27,513 (28.9%)	95,194 (3.7%)	341
Comprehensive	86 (1.1%)	63,666	11,384 (15.2%)	75,050 (2.9%)	873
Bilateral and	54	29,614	3,133	32,747	606

⁴¹

See below

Multilateral ⁴²	(0.7%)		(9.6%)	(1.3%)	
Totals:	8020	2,232,985	321,877 (12.6%)	2,554,862	

Table 1: State schools and pupils by school type in 1958

In 1958 most children (1,548,983, 60.6%) were educated in secondary modern schools, but only 3.2% of these were educated beyond fourteen years. The second largest pupil group was those in grammar or direct grant schools (681,976, 26.7%), but in this case 33.6% were over fourteen, over ten times more, proportionately, than those in secondary moderns. At that stage, those called ‘comprehensives’ were new, and few (just 86 schools, 1.1% of the total number). The proportion of pupils in these schools educated beyond fourteen years was midway between the grammar and the secondary modern, at 15.2%. Note that the Crowther report distinguishes comprehensive schools and bilateral (and multilateral) schools – a naming distinction which was to soon disappear. For those called multilateral/bilateral schools, the proportion of pupils over fourteen years was just 9.6%. If comprehensives and bilateral/multilateral schools are combined the proportion over fourteen years was 13.5%.

The figures also show other interesting features of the state education system then:

- Surprisingly the third most common form of schooling was in what Crowther called “all age schools” (120,912 pupils, but only 4.7% of all school pupils). These schools served students from the age of five until they left school in their teens. It is assumed that these schools were non-selective, but only a mere 0.6% of their pupils were over fourteen years. They were even less well served in this respect than secondary modern school students – assuming that pupils did not move from these schools to others to continue their education. It looks as if most of these schools were small, rural schools as their average pupil size was just fifty-three.
- Technical schools were very much in a minority both in terms of the number of schools (1.1% of the total) and in terms of pupils (3.7%).
- Grammar schools, on average, were larger than secondary modern schools by about one hundred pupils on average.

⁴²

See below

The situation described here must have been very similar to that obtaining when Risinghill opened a couple of years later. Here is the report's description of the comprehensive:

The existing English comprehensive schools have been formed in two main ways. Some have been new schools in new districts, or in districts where greatly increased grammar school provision was needed. Others have been formed by accretion round an existing grammar school. (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1959, Chapter 2, para. 37)

Eighty-six schools are identified as comprehensives. However, the report does not state how many of these were formed around an existing grammar school so once again there is a question mark about their 'comprehensive' status.

The Crowther Report undoubtedly helped to improve the lives of many young people as it: (1) paved the way for the school-leaving age to be raised to sixteen; and (2) resulted in a better system of vocational training for those who had left school without any qualifications. But it also gave credence to the lie, intentionally or not, that the comprehensive, as publicised, was a viable proposition.

Someone once said that, if you tell a lie that is big enough, and for long enough, people will eventually come to believe it. This was true of the comprehensive, and it had a huge impact on schools like Risinghill where, despite having less than 1% of pupils in the higher ability range and large classes that bore no resemblance to the grammar were expected, nevertheless, to perform to the same, high, academic standards.

C3.2 – Creating the Image

The adoption of the grammar school model for the comprehensives denuded of the higher ability range changed the dynamics of it completely, bringing even more chaos to a school that was already in crisis. There was, however, a method in the madness. And the grammar school curriculum was only part of the deception. If the general public was to be convinced that the comprehensive was on a par with the grammar, then it needed to have the right image, academically and aesthetically. It is no accident that, in some of the early comprehensives, notably Kidbrooke and Holland Park, which pre-dated Risinghill, the teachers wore black, academic gowns and the children a full grammar school-style uniform. At Risinghill, where 42% of the pupils were of below average ability, bordering on ESN, a

grammar school curriculum across the board was, of course, nonsensical. So too was the idea of a full school uniform, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, C4.

Portraying the comprehensive as a ‘grammar school for all’ might have made sense politically, and it might even have helped the LCC who was struggling to bring about more equality in the secondary school system, but from an educational perspective it was a recipe for disaster. It was also a betrayal, in every sense, of the Authority’s LSP, which had called for an education that could not have been more far removed from the grammar. The most surprising aspect of this U-turn, however, is that the LSP had not been rescinded or reviewed when all of these changes were taking place, suggesting that the LCC remained committed to it despite all the difficulties that were being encountered with its implementation. This is a crucial point, and one that needs to be borne in mind when considering the events leading up to, and including, Risinghill’s closure.

The above is an over-simplification of the politics of the time as the LCC was by no means the only LEA to be struggling with the ‘grammar schools for all’ concept. With no direction from the central government, others were taking a similar approach, presumably on account of them experiencing the same difficulties with the integration of the grammar.

In making these observations, the authors are not passing judgement on Kidbrooke, Holland Park or, indeed, any other type of secondary school. All they are saying here is that, where Risinghill is concerned, it is important to bear the facts of the matter in mind. And the facts are that when MD took on the headship of Risinghill, the LSP was still in place. He was firmly committed to the spirit of the LSP, and one has to assume that those who appointed him were of the same mind. The question of whether or not this was a good plan or a bad one is a different argument all together. The RRG’s focus has, from the outset, been to look at the facts surrounding Risinghill, and the reasons for its closure.

C3.3 – The Development of Risinghill

The large comprehensive units had, as indicated in chapter C2, been criticised from the outset. Initially, it had been thought that a minimum ten-form entry of about 300 pupils was required (divided into two ‘grammar’ streams, two ‘technical’ streams and six or seven ‘modern’ streams) but by 1960 the talk was about eight-form entry schools, possibly because the grammar stream had become redundant.

The LCC, though, had more compelling reasons for cutting back:

There was, undoubtedly, a basis on which to build for the future, but the LCC Education Committee (still Labour controlled) recognised by the early 1960s that the 1947 London School Plan was now out of date and in need of significant revision for two important reasons. First, the plan had envisaged a higher school population in the capital than there actually was; secondary school rolls had peaked in 1960, and the decline offered an opportunity to vacate older, unsatisfactory accommodation. Second, the authority had, by this time, entered into negotiations with the denominational authorities with a view to encouraging them to participate in a revised comprehensive school (LCC, 1961, p.15). It fell to the new Education Officer, W Houghton, to revise the 1947 plan in the light of the authority's anticipated future needs. (Kerckhoff et al., 1996)

The building of Risinghill was nearing completion when all of these different factors were coming together. Its development in the late 1950s (when the jury was still out on the comprehensive), and its birth in 1960 (when secondary school rolls had peaked before waning) are key aspects of Risinghill's so-called decline, and is something that, in a later chapter, the authors will come back to. Note also the revision of the LSP by the "new Education Officer, W Houghton" which began in 1961, two years after Duane's appointment.

The LSP recommended a combination of mixed and single sex schools ranging in size and form-entry. The small units, catering for up to five-hundred pupils, had a three-form entry while the bigger units were shown as thirteen-form entry schools, capable of accommodating up to 2000 pupils. Several voluntary schools, along with some of London's most prestigious grammar schools, were linked to a number of units in the plan. This included the renowned Owen's grammar schools for boys and girls located at the Angel, Islington.

Risinghill was one of eight comprehensive schools planned in the North London Division, which was large and included the London boroughs of Islington, Finsbury, Holborn and parts of St Pancras. Page seventy of the LSP shows Risinghill as a new, purpose-built thirteen-form entry secondary school for 1500 pupils (2000 once fully comprehensive) with only two schools (Gifford Secondary School for Boys and Girls and Ritchie Secondary School for Girls) identified as transferring to it. One must assume the 2000 capacity was to be realised

later, when the LCC had found a grammar school that was willing to merge with Gifford and Ritchie and/or more funds were available in the budget to expand the building.

Although the two Owen's schools were the closest grammar schools to Risinghill, these are shown in the LSP as merging with Northampton and Bloomsbury (the two technical schools that were put into Risinghill) to form two single-sex units in Holborn and Finsbury (*London School Plan 1947*, p71). No doubt the grammar school politics of the day had the effect of changing minds. Owen's was never merged with a London comprehensive despite its willingness, at the beginning, to enter into the new arrangements. As for Starcross (the all girl's school for which Risinghill was later sacrificed) the original intention was for this small, five-form entry school to be transferred to a new, mixed comprehensive in Somers Town. (*London School Plan 1947*, p56). Starcross came under the LCC's North West Division of schools whereas Risinghill was in the North London Division. The authors make the distinction because this is something that they will return to when examining the LCC's reasons for closing Risinghill. On the face of it, this was a school that was earmarked for amalgamation with a mixed comprehensive, begging the obvious question: 'Why was Starcross not merged with Risinghill?'

Budgetary approval for Risinghill was given in 1957:

On 27 June 1957 (Ed.573) the Sub-Committee authorised the acceptance of a tender submitted by J.M. Hill & Son, Ltd., for the erection of a new county secondary school for about 1,250 boys and girls at Risinghill Street. (London County Council, 1960)

The architects were the Architects' Co-Partnership. The total budget, which included an allowance for repairing and redecorating an existing school building on the site was just under £600,000. This building became part of the new school known as the 'conversion block.' Because Risinghill appeared to have been built for 1250 pupils, not 1500 (2000 once fully comprehensive) as per the LSP, the authors were unsure as to whether this was the first phase of a two-phase development or whether the school had (then) been scaled back permanently.

By 1958 the project was well under way. In the October an Advisory Committee (AC) was set up for the early development and governance of the school. An important part of the AC's remit was to recruit a suitable head. From the authors' discussions with Margaret Duane (in

May 2006) they know that John Newsom was a member of the AC, as was Janet (Jennie) Lee, Baroness Lee of Ashridge, who was married to Aneurin Bevan, architect of the National Health Service in 1934. Jennie Lee is said to have been one of the most successful ministers in Harold Wilson's administration (1964-1970). According to Margaret, Lee was very supportive of MD and his plans for the school:

... there was this group of people who interviewed Mike and after he was appointed, he was at the school for a few months before it opened – getting the timetables organised and seeing the teachers from other schools that were coming, all that kind of thing. Jennie she was there then, very interested and very supportive. (M. Duane, 2006)

However, the new CEO, W Houghton, appears to have had serious reservations about MD's appointment. This surprised the authors as Houghton was not involved in the recruitment process, and did not meet Duane until long after Risinghill had opened:

I never even saw him until long after my appointment, and never discussed policy with him until the rows started I was not 'hand-picked' or 'initially strongly supported' by the E.O⁴³. It was clear, much later, that I had been appointed by a very small majority and against the advice of the E.O. (W. M. Duane, 1985)

As discussed in chapter B2, Houghton and his officers did not support Duane's approach to CP, so it is probably safe to assume that this was one of the reasons for Houghton's objection to the appointment. Duane had also made it plain to the AC that he had no interest in running what he called a 'watered down grammar school', so it does beg the question: Why did the AC appoint Duane if it favoured CP and/or the grammar school model? There are several indications of Houghton favouring both, which will be discussed shortly. There is also strong evidence to suggest that he did not see eye to eye with the AC on the development of the school. This is clear from a recommendation that he made to a sub-committee of the Education Committee (EC) in 1958 where his opposition to the inclusion of Gifford in the Risinghill project is noted:

⁴³

Education Officer. See List of Abbreviations.

Nevertheless in spite of all the uncertainties, I still feel that the correct solution of this most difficult problem is as follows:- (a) to avoid adding an annexe to the new Risinghill school; (b) to approve and sustain by every possible means the continuance of the Gifford school; (c) to approve the establishment of a R.C. secondary school in the school premises at Ritchie Street, N. (Houghton, 1958a)

The AC appears to have over-ruled Houghton on all three counts. An annexe *was* added to Risinghill at Ritchie Street School, and when Gifford closed it became Giffard (not Gifford) Roman Catholic Secondary School. Gifford was a tough school in a tough area and because of this did not have a good reputation, certainly not one that would have lent itself to the grammar school model. The chair of Gifford's GB, Mrs Joan Evans, was a member of the AC. She was also the wife of Albert Evans, then the Labour MP for South-West Islington, and she was very supportive of Duane's plans for the school.

Houghton's next quarrel with the AC was over the location of Risinghill. This was on the old Risinghill School site in Risinghill Street, a poor, run-down area that had been bombed heavily in the war:

... the bitter quarrel which broke out between the Education Officer and his immediate Assistants, principally Dr Briault on the one hand, and the Labour Party when they bulldozed their decision to build the new school on the site of the old Risinghill Street School against the urgent representations of those officials that such a move would be disastrous. "It will become a wreck in a month" was the final verdict of the officials. (W. M. Duane, 1985)

These disagreements between Houghton and the AC had a massive impact on the viability of the school, as will be discussed in the following chapters:

The humiliation and resentment felt by the officials was so deep that they resolved, in the words of the Education Officer, to "bring the elected representatives back to heel". (W. M. Duane, 1985, p9)

To clarify, the “elected representatives” were those sitting on the EC, of which the AC was a sub-committee. The membership of the EC was not accountable to Houghton; indeed, it was almost certainly the other way around.

In the autumn of 1959, just before the opening of Risinghill and after Duane had been given its headship, the LCC’s Chief Inspector, Dr L.W. Payling, was given the task of conducting a large-scale investigation into London’s comprehensive schools. His report, entitled *London Comprehensive Schools*, noted diversity in curriculum and pastoral matters, but also identified significant continuity from the selective system as far as setting and streaming practices were concerned. As quoted in Chitty:

Differences between the grammar school and comprehensive education were deliberately marginalised, and London Comprehensive Schools is an early example of how the term ‘comprehensive’ was fudged, or – to use John Elliott’s term – ‘grammarised’ (Chitty, 1989)

This investigation seems to have been more of a public relations exercise, aimed primarily at silencing the LCC’s critics. It also appears to have been the start of the comprehensive becoming a lower-class grammar school, expected to conform to traditional patterns and practices regardless of the needs of its pupils. That Houghton was determined that Risinghill should be run on grammar school lines is clear from a report that he produced in 1958:

Close contact with Northampton Polytechnic⁴⁴ and with industry will be stressed and a general course in secondary education leading to the General Certificate of Education established and pursued. (London County Council, 1958)

Duane, however, was appointed by the AC on a different remit, as has been reported. Further evidence of his desire to run Risinghill on the lines of what he (and presumably the AC) believed to be a true comprehensive school can be found in his job application:

I have always been interested in the development of schools which are not tied to rigid concepts of ‘grammar’ ‘technical or ‘modern’. The size of this school and the facilities provided seem to offer scope for considerable

⁴⁴ Remember, Northampton Technical School had close ties to Northampton Polytechnic (now the City University).

development of an education nearer to the real powers and needs of children. (W. M. Duane, 1958)

To remind the reader, page twenty-seven of the LSP refers to the terms “‘grammar’, ‘technical’ and ‘modern’ as being inappropriate, even as terms of art, to describe the nature of education to be provided in maintained secondary schools in London” and it is interesting that Duane, in his job application, makes a similar statement.

Houghton, however, appears to have been determined to press ahead with his own plans for the school regardless of whether the AC supported him on this or not. This is clear from the manner in which Risinghill was presented to the national media. On 5 March 1960, just before the school opened, the *Daily Telegraph* was invited to report on a visit by a group of Bloomsbury School girls to their new school. Dressed in their smart Bloomsbury uniforms, with berets perched on their heads, the girls projected an image that was so far removed from the mixed comprehensive known to the RRG members that, when they first saw this press cutting, they did not recognise their old school at all.

In Houghton’s report (1958b) a balanced intake is proposed “to make the school fully comprehensive” (p1, para.5) though how this was to be achieved with the four schools that had been identified to form Risinghill (Gifford, Ritchie, Bloomsbury and Northampton) beggars belief. These were all secondary schools with a dearth of children in the higher ability groups. While Bloomsbury and Northampton might have addressed the imbalance to a degree, these were small schools in comparison to Gifford and Ritchie. Gifford was the largest with five-hundred-plus children and Bloomsbury was the smallest with around eighty. Bloomsbury, in any event, specialised in the arts and in tailoring, not the more academic subjects so Houghton was either misinformed about the spread of academic abilities across these four schools or he chose to ignore the obvious.

The Houghton report will be discussed in more detail later - when examining the birth, life and death of the school, covered in chapters C4 through to C11. Suffice to say here that the reason(s) for Risinghill’s closure are complex and require some understanding of the politics (internal and external to the LCC) that prevailed at this time.

Another curious aspect of Risinghill’s development is that it was scaled back to an eight-form entry unit with the EC (seemingly) ratifying this change in 1962 – four years after the school had been built. Although MD was aware that Risinghill was too small (because the main

assembly hall was only able to accommodate two thirds of the pupils) he had no idea that it had been cut back from the outset and/or that this was made official in 1962. The authors did ask Margaret Duane about this, and as far as she was aware, when MD applied for the Risinghill headship, he believed that he was taking on a large, thirteen-form entry unit that, at some point in the future, would become fully comprehensive with a roll of circa. 2000.

In 1960, the Herbert Commission reported on its findings, making a recommendation to replace the LCC with a different body, the Greater London Council (GLC). The date for the GLC elections was set for April 1964. In the run-up to these elections, Risinghill would come under attack for the first time - by a Conservative Alderman sitting on the main board of the LCC. Nineteen- sixty-four was also the year in which the LCC, whose educational body was now called the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), as noted earlier, would announce its proposal to close the school barely four years after it had opened.

As has been demonstrated, RR is a complex story, comprising many threads, which will be pulled together in the next eight chapters. It was a tough school, of this there is no doubt; however, it was not the 'Blackboard Jungle' that some have claimed. And contrary to what the LCC said at the time (that Risinghill's declining roll was attributable to Islington parents preferring single-sex schools) there was another, more sinister, reason for the fall in pupil numbers, as will be shown. What follows is the authors' version of events, based on numerous documents found in the course of their research, and their interviews with those directly involved in the affair, notably Leila Berg and Margaret Duane.

CHAPTER C4 - Birth of a Comprehensive School 1959-60

'Once you believe, or say you believe, that all children are of equal value, whatever their intellectual attainments, you are changing the whole concept of school ...'

Leila Berg

(Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School, 1968)

Duane's headship of Risinghill began on 2 February 1959 some fourteen months in advance of the school opening. This was to give him sufficient time in which to prepare the school for occupation. On taking up his appointment he was, therefore, surprised to be given an office at Gifford School to use as his base and even more surprised to be asked to manage it. Gifford had been without a permanent head for three years, but the Advisory Committee (AC), which had appointed Duane, and agreed with him the time-frame for getting Risinghill ready, had not discussed with him the idea of a concurrent headship, nor did this form any part of the terms and conditions of his employment. Moreover, this request came from officers reporting directly to Houghton, the CEO, who had no jurisdiction over Duane or the AC so Duane was not obliged, morally or contractually, to accept the secondment, which he declined, politely. During this period he was based at Risinghill (in a make-shift office) and/or at County Hall where he often came into contact with Houghton's officers who continued to press him about the secondment; however, he refused to be coerced, and for good reason(s).

As a new build, Risinghill did not come with all the furniture in situ, nor did it come with all the specialist equipment and machinery in place, much of which had to be ordered from scratch and installed professionally. He was also responsible for overseeing all the snagging work where his presence on site was crucial. It would have been extremely difficult for him to have managed this aspect of the job remotely as Gifford was not within easy walking distance of Risinghill. Besides, this was a large, mixed school with over five hundred pupils and as such would have demanded his full attention; the prime reason, no doubt, for him turning the secondment down.

Another mammoth task that fell to him was the production of the school's timetable. This, for obvious reasons, had to be completed well in advance of the school opening. According to

Margaret Duane, the deputy head was asked to help with this, but she appears to have been more of a hindrance:

One thing, she was supposed to be doing this time table – they had to do it between them – I mean this was an enormous great time table thing for the school – before we had computers – and she was supposed to do one section of it, and she made a complete and utter mess of it and Mike had to do it all again

You know as a deputy head, you are supposed to rely on them to do lots of things, but she was totally out of her depth.” (M. Duane, 2006)

Many of the teachers from the contributory schools were transferred to Risinghill on comparable posts and salaries. This included Duane’s deputy, who, at the time, was the head of Ritchie School. She was just four years off retirement, explaining perhaps why she was given the position without competition and without Duane even meeting her, but more about this later.

To return to the saga of Gifford and its temporary headship: when Duane declined the use of an office at Gifford along with its headship, Houghton’s officers were furious; presumably because they believed he was not fully occupied and could easily do both jobs. Or maybe they were vexed purely because they were unaccustomed to having their requests rejected. Whatever the reason, they did not reveal the full extent of their anger until much later, and when it came it took Duane completely by surprise. The first outburst was early in 1962 - after a critical inspection of the school, though the LCC preferred to use the word ‘visitation’ for this exercise; an anomaly that will be discussed in chapter C6.

For a year before the opening of the school he was based at Gifford and generally responsible for it; he did not perhaps then see the need of nursing the future material of his school. (London County Council, 1962c)

The above quote is lifted from a 32-page report produced by an Inspector MacGowan, who appears to have been a local HMI attached to the LCC, not the Ministry of Education.

For the record, Isabel, who was at Gifford from 1958 through to 1960 when it closed, can state, unequivocally, that she never set eyes on Duane until she saw him at Risinghill. Her

recollections of Gifford being run by a female head coincide with the memories of another, former Gifford pupil:

I went to Gifford Street School ... Also I remember Mrs Whitnell the Headteacher – very small and went around the school with her little pouch bag and bunch of keys.
(Hammond, 2006)

Whitnell was, in all probability, the deputy head of Gifford as this was a mixed school where the norm was to have a male head and a female deputy. Because Whitnell was of retirement age it is not unreasonable to assume that she was managing the school on a temporary basis pending its amalgamation with Risinghill⁴⁵. She appears to have been doing a reasonable job (there being no major incidences in the school that Isabel or Maria can recall) explaining, perhaps, why the AC chose not to raise with Duane the idea of a concurrent headship, if indeed it had considered this as an option at all. One does for example have to question whether, in the overall scheme of things, another year without a permanent head would have made that much of a difference to Gifford.

The next attack by Houghton's officers on Duane came in 1964, after another critical visitation. This time the conducting HMI was an Inspector Clark whom Duane had crossed swords with over the Gifford affair. He, too, was very anti Duane, as will be discussed later, in chapter C8. In 1990, when talking to Graham Wade, a journalist for *The Guardian*, Duane described this encounter with Clark as one of the worst experiences of his teaching career:

My worst experience was when an HMI asked me whether I thought I was fit to be a teacher. (Wade, 1990)

These quasi inspections are important elements of the Risinghill story, and will be dealt with separately, when looking at the events of 1962 and 1964 in chapters C6 and C8 respectively. What also has to be taken into consideration here is the vagaries of the 'national system, locally administered' where these HMIs, along with Houghton and his direct reports, seem to have been under the impression that it was the Chief Education Officer (CEO) who held the balance of power, not the elected representatives sitting on the AC or the EC, to whom the CEO was ultimately accountable. The most telling evidence, however, of their anger with

⁴⁵ A similar arrangement seems to have been in place at Northampton School, as Philip recollects. A year or two before the merger into Risinghill the Head, a Mr Wilkinson, left and the school was run by his deputy Mr Woolhead, who also taught engineering. Mr Woolhead, of fond memories, was one of the teachers who transferred to Risinghill.

Duane over the Gifford headship can be found in an interview that Berg had with the LCC's Assistant Education Officer, Mr Turner, in 1965. This was when Risinghill was about to close (for 'administrative' reasons) and when Berg was questioning the LCC's failure to find Duane another headship:

When I asked at County Hall why Mr Duane had not been given another headship, and happened innocently to say that the amalgamation of four unwilling schools into the new Risinghill had made difficulties from the start, particularly as the toughest and roughest one had been without a head for so long, Mr Turner, the Assistant Education Officer, said furiously, 'Gifford did have a head! You're surprised at that, aren't you! He didn't tell you that did he! Do you know who it was? It was Mr Duane!' He was supported in this statement by Mrs Leila Campbell and the Reverend H.W. Hinds, who were both new to his Department; the three of them made a little play of not being able to agree whether he was headmaster of Gifford for nine months or twelve. In fact he was not head of Gifford at all (I checked on this later) but the L.C.C. had intended he should be; and furthermore, if I had reported what they had told me, at this time when there was a lot of public sympathy for Mr Duane, it would no doubt have served to discredit him (for they believed, incorrectly, when they spoke to me, that I was the regular correspondent of a national newspaper). (Berg, 1968b)

What is also very odd about this affair is that Mrs Evans, the chair of Gifford's governing body (GB), had no problems with Duane whatsoever. She was, as indicated previously, also a member of the AC. According to Margaret Duane, Mrs Evans, along with Jennie Lee, spent a lot of time with Duane in the early days of his headship, going over his plans for the school and taking a genuine interest in them. In fact Mrs Evans became one of Duane's greatest allies on Risinghill's GB, of which she later became the chair, though not for long. Therein lays another story; the details of which will be discussed later.

The authors assumed, initially, that Evans knew of Duane's rejection of the Gifford headship and had accepted this gracefully. On reflection, however, they wondered if she was even aware that he had been approached about this matter. A concurrent headship had not, as stated, been mentioned by the AC when offering Duane the job. This does raise questions

about whose idea this was, and what information was fed to the likes of MacGowan, Clark and Turner who clearly believed that Duane was contractually bound to do as they had asked, and when he refused were prepared to make such venomous (and public) statements after the fact.

The Gifford debacle sets the scene for what happens later between Duane, Houghton, Houghton's officers and others in the LCC hierarchy, which is why the authors have mentioned these events here. This assumption of authority over MD and, arguably, over the AC and EC, is another, key factor in the Risinghill story, which, up until now, has not been appreciated. What follows does, for example, need to be viewed in the context of: (1) a delivery system in which heads were supposedly captains of their own ships; and (2) the potential for the abuse of power within said system, noting in particular the power(s) of CEOs.

C4.1 – Birth

When the school opened on 3 May 1960, there were no proud announcements in the press, and no photographs taken of the children in their new school. The only publicity that the authors could find was a double-page spread in the local parish magazine with the unconsciously prescient title 'History in the Making.' (Anon, 1960) This had passport-size photographs of Duane and his deputy, presumably supplied by the LCC, as the photograph of the deputy had obviously been taken when she was a much younger woman. The article also featured a photograph of the main teaching block, taken when the school was empty, leading the authors to question why the LCC was happy to celebrate Risinghill's birth with the local church, but not so keen to share this news with any of the local or national newspapers. They wondered if this was because the children pouring into the school on 3 May 1960 cut a very different image to that which had been portrayed in the *Daily Telegraph* two months previously; there being very few blazers and ties on show, and no school caps, hats or berets. In fact many of the children turned up on the first day not wearing any uniform at all:

My first day at the school, uniform was optional, my mum couldn't afford it. I would have liked it to be like everyone for the first day. (Annette M., 2006)

The Risinghill uniform was very basic (a grey skirt or trousers with a white shirt or blouse and a royal blue jumper or cardigan) but for some families was still unaffordable. Another

reason for the lack of uniform was that the whole of the Fourth Year (Year 10) pupils were at Risinghill for only one term, and for the majority, who came from Gifford and Ritchie, where uniform was not mandatory, it stands to reason that this cohort would not bother with it at all.

The only pupils to bear any resemblance to the photograph in the *Daily Telegraph* were the children from Bloomsbury and Northampton; some of whom arrived at the school wearing blazers and ties, much to the astonishment of the Gifford and Ritchie contingent. At the other end of the spectrum were the children who came to the school dressed in shabby, worn-out clothes with ‘spuds’ (holes in their socks) peeping over the heels of their shoes, and some were not wearing socks at all. Isabel remembers one child, who kept his coat on at all times: rumour had it that this was because he was not wearing anything underneath. Child abuse was not talked about in those days, and Isabel, along with her friends, just thought the boy was very poor and/or had parents who did not know how to look after him properly. This was an extreme case, or so the authors thought. It was quite a shock to discover that it was not necessarily so:

Of the present school population, 307 children are from families on the books of the Care Committee and include N.S.P.C.C. and F.S.U.⁴⁶ cases.
(W. M. Duane, 1964a)

If this figure is true, and the authors see no reason to doubt it, this represented an astonishing 25%-30% of the school roll. The question of the Risinghill children being desperately poor and/or deprived is an interesting one that is examined in more detail in *The Waste Clay*, where the pupils are invited to comment on this and other aspects of their childhoods. For now, suffice to say that, as children, the majority of pupils who participated in the research did not think they were poor, nor did they consider themselves to be deprived, though most were conscious of living in difficult circumstances.

Isabel, to her surprise, found that she, along with her younger brother, Neil, was on the books of the LCC’s Care Committee. It would seem that, in 1961, she and her brother were one of 142 families that were in receipt of free school dinners. Although Isabel could not recall having many (if any) school dinners at Risinghill, her brother did remember: (1) standing at the back of the dinner queue, waiting for those who had paid to be served first; and (2) making a contribution every day of about sixpence, which he understood to be half the cost of

⁴⁶ National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Family Service Unit respectively.

the meal. Looking back, Isabel remembers her father having a life-threatening operation in the early 1960s, which put him out of work for over a year, and this might account for the family receiving some financial support (in the way of subsidised school meals) and being put on the books of the Care Committee as a result. In those days there were no welfare benefits to speak of - certainly not enough to feed and clothe a family of six children and two adults. However, Isabel did not consider herself to be in need of care or protection at this or any other time, and recalls spending her dinner money (a shilling, 5p in today's money) in the pie and mash shop or on cigarettes. In her view she was no poorer than the majority of pupils who attended Risinghill, most of whom were dressed tidily, were clean and looked reasonably well-fed. It is, therefore, difficult to say how many of the 307 children mentioned in the above report were truly 'in trouble' in the sense that they were unloved, ill-fed and/or ill-clothed.

In the RRG's survey with the pupils, Yvonne did describe herself as an abused child. As mentioned in chapter C1, she passed the 11+ examination; however, because she did not have a room of her own in which to study was denied a place at her local grammar school, Dame Alice Owen. An Owen's girl, however, was also required to 'look the part' and this was probably another, perhaps more compelling, reason for Owen's rejection of her:

My mother spent as little money on me as possible. I had a grey skirt and blue jumper, which was school uniform, which I had to wear at weekends as well. I was seen down the market on Saturdays and Sundays in these clothes, which contributed to the bullying that became part of my life.
(Yvonne F., 2004)

Another Risinghill pupil to have passed the 11+ examination, but failed to get a grammar school place on account of his parents not being able to afford the grammar school uniform was Bob J:

I went with my mum to an interview and after I had been with the headmaster for a while I was told to wait outside while he discussed some stuff with my mum. I have no knowledge of what went on, but I always had the feeling she failed her part of the interview. This may be unfair, as it is just as likely that she made it clear she couldn't afford the many uniforms

needed at William Ellis, or fund the school trips. Whatever the reason we got a rejection letter a few weeks later. (Bob J., 2004)

As can be seen, for the under-privileged child to gain a place at the grammar school in the 1960s was not as straightforward as the politicians were claiming.

Duane, it has to be said, was very relaxed about school uniform. He did not give anyone a hard time for not wearing it: his only rule about dress was that stiletto heels should not be worn because of damaging the flooring, though this restriction was probably aimed more at the staff than it was the pupils. This approach did get him into trouble with some of the local HMIs, who saw this as a major weakness, contributing to what they believed to be a lack of discipline in the school. The discipline argument is a curious one that is still being used today to make the case for school uniform; however, the RRG could not find any scientific evidence to support this notion, nor was it able to establish, categorically, that uniform created an environment in which every child was made to feel equal. At Risinghill, the wearing of uniform served to marginalise some of the school's most vulnerable children and, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, was the root cause of the gang fights in the school.

C4.2 – The Building

The authors' first impressions of Risinghill were similar to those of their research colleagues, and the pupils who took part in this survey. Whereas their previous schools had been housed in old Victorian buildings with concrete playgrounds surrounded by high brick walls, here there were open spaces with areas that had been laid to grass; some of which had even been planted with trees. In addition, there were tennis courts, a gymnasium equipped with trampolines, and so many other facilities that the children were not expecting that it is fair to say that the majority were gob-smacked.

As the name implies, Risinghill was built on a steep incline, making it quite a challenge for the architects:

...[The site] had probably been one of the most difficult used in London for school building. In particular the steep fall across the site had complicated planning especially in play areas to a far greater degree than

would have applied if a flat site had been available. (London County Council, 1962b)

There were seven playgrounds, all on different levels. These were reached by either steps or ramps, or a combination of both, depending on the steepness of the fall. Access to some of the specialist areas scattered around the site was reached in a similar manner. The workshops, gymnasium and tennis courts, for example, were at the bottom of the incline, some distance from the main teaching block at the top of the hill. Sitting alongside the main building was the old Risinghill Street School. This had been refurbished and was known as the conversion block, accommodating the tailoring and needlework departments, also the art rooms. All of the other disciplines (engineering, science, home economics and photography) were housed in separate, single-storey units that were dotted around the site away from the main building.

While most of the pupils surveyed loved the scattered nature of the site, some found this daunting:

Both the size of the school and 'order of magnitude' larger than what was the norm or it seemed to me back then. It took, it seemed, 15 minutes to walk from one side of the school to the other. (Eric, 2008)

Others missed the security of a smaller school and hated having to move from one class to another for different lessons:

I felt lost in such a big school. In Gifford I had my own desk and teachers came to me, I was secure with my classes and things around me. At Risinghill having to take a mass of books around with you and getting soaking wet while walking to another block for a lesson and having to sit in wet clothes and shoes was a nightmare. Losing your timetable and not knowing what room your to go to still haunts my dreams. (JS, 2006)

There were three entrances to the site. The main entrance, in Risinghill Street, faced Chapel Street Market, where the pupils spent many a lunchtime — either in Manzies, the pie and mash shop, or one of the popular cafes. School dinners were relatively cheap but were not taken up by many. The majority liked to escape for an hour to do their own thing, especially the smokers. Unbeknown to parents, dinner money was often spent on cigarettes, which could be bought individually then without any trouble. A shilling (5p), the price of a school dinner,

covered the cost of two or more cigarettes with change left over. Duane was fully aware of this, and tried to do something about it:

If you wish your child to take school dinner regularly, please write a note to this effect. Some children in the past have used the money for school meals on sweets or other quite unsuitable purchases. (W. M. Duane, 1962c)

The second entrance was to the left of the teaching block in Donegal Street. As with the main entrance, pupils could be seen coming and going from here as Duane's office, along with his deputy's, was on the first floor of the teaching block, overlooking both entrances. The third entrance, however, was tucked away from view at the bottom of the incline. Here there was no chain-fencing to speak of, and because the gate was easy to climb over, this was the favoured escape route. Directly opposite was a new housing estate, which offered lots of places to hide and a quick getaway into the maze of streets leading to Kings Cross, the 'Cally' and many other popular areas, including Chapel Street Market.

For the staff, the plan of the building was a disaster, and not just because of the ease in which the children were able to come and go as they pleased. In the early days pupils were forever getting lost *en route* to lessons, sometimes accidentally on purpose:

Open-plan buildings need a high degree of self-discipline. It was going to take these belted children years to get used to their freedom. They had come from small secondary schools that had high prison walls round them, with straightforward no-nonsense playgrounds, and, within the school, classrooms grouped round a central hall for easy supervision. (Berg, 1968b)

With classes constantly interrupted by stragglers claiming to have lost their way, it was very frustrating for the teachers who, because they did not know all of the children at the beginning, had no idea who was pulling the wool over their eyes, and who was telling them the truth.

C4.3 - The Defects

Short cuts were taken at the planning stage of the building, and there were a number of defects:

... like every other new school Risinghill had to be built within Ministry of Education costs limits and it was necessary at tender stage to make economies of about £36,000. (London County Council, 1962b)

These savings resulted in the tight planning of staircases, corridors, the classrooms and even the main assembly hall, which was designed to take only two-thirds of the school. (W. M. Duane, 1962f) The authors touch on this later, when discussing Risinghill's capacity and their suspicions that it was actually planned for fewer pupils than was advertised.

Economies were also made in the fixtures and fittings, some of which had a disastrous effect on both the staff and pupils. For example, the huge, plate-glass windows were not fitted with safety catches, and had to be kept shut permanently:

But the most appalling thing was that the windows were made to slide open, leaving an open space of twenty square feet at waist height from the floor. They terrified the staff and fascinated the children. (Berg, 1968b)

In the winter the pupils were less inclined to play around with the windows as an icy draught, caused by even the smallest of gaps, was soon noticed. Come the summer, however, it was a different story. Sliding the windows open (to call out to friends, but mostly to let in some air) was common practice as the rooms were sometimes unbearably hot, making them very uncomfortable to work in. Even the teachers tended to ignore the rules in the summer as they were impossible to enforce. While venetian blinds were fitted to some of the windows to help make the rooms cooler, these were a magnet to the children, many of whom had never seen venetian blinds before and so did not know how to operate them. Once jammed, they remained jammed, and were invariably left hanging, at half-mast, making the rooms look untidy. As one pupil recalled:

Venetian blinds were always hanging half-mast over the windows ... I am still reminded of Risinghill to this day when I see venetian blinds and they have no place in my house. (JS, 2006)

In the summer of 1964 the inevitable happened:

When I was in the third year, we were in a class in the teaching block on the third floor. The class had got very disruptive and we weren't taking

any notice of the teacher, the windows opened sideways and the window was wide open. I think it was a supply teacher. One boy was dancing on the tables and jumping from table to table, as he did this he jumped out of the window by accident. The class went deathly quiet, the teacher ran to the window and the boy was lying on the grass and his arm was right back. He was lucky because it was grass outside. All of the teachers came running in to look after us, and he was taken to hospital, when he came back to school his arm was in plaster. After that they altered the windows so that that they wouldn't open wide any more. (Annette M, 2006)

Forty years later, this accident was reported, inaccurately, by the controversial then Chief Inspector of Schools in *The Sunday Times Review* (Woodhead, 2005) that “someone got chucked out of the window” at Risinghill. This is typical of some of the stories that have appeared in the media about the school. It should be noted that, in the period 1960-1964, Duane repeatedly asked for safety catches to be fitted to the windows, but his requests were ignored. It would seem there was never any money in the budget:

It also makes a nonsense of the refusal to make so many important but minor alterations to Risinghill on the grounds that there was no money for this purpose. Such requests as the provision of secure cloakrooms: of toilets accessible from the playground: of an efficient system of securing windows: of adequate fencing ... have not yet been met after nearly five years, and when the need for these things had been amply demonstrated. One child had fallen from a first-floor window and broken his wrist before one such request was met. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

Despite the shortfalls, the school does appear to have been “good enough, anyway, to earn an architectural award.” (Constable, 1968).

C4.4 – The House System

To help create smaller and more manageable, intimate environments within the school, the pupils were organised into Houses, each with its own head of House. Presumably this was also to help pupils to integrate and meet and make friends with pupils from the other schools.

The school's routine instructions, at page one, show the head of House's first responsibility as "knowing every child in the house personally" (W. M. Duane, 1962f) which epitomises Duane's approach to teaching. They were also responsible for: discipline; the appointment of tutors to tutor groups; registration and attendance; the supervision of school milk and school meals; accounting of House funds; advice to parents about their children; the preparation of school reports; and the organisation of social and sporting activities in the school. (W. M. Duane, 1962f)

The Houses were all named after influential authors associated with the area: Johnson, Blake, Defoe, Milton, Keats, Fox, and for a short time, Payne. Each House was sub-divided into five tutor groups with every House having its own dining room where pupils met and ate together. The tutors were also tasked with "knowing every member of their group" and for the conduct and discipline of their charges. These groups comprised about thirty children from every age group and contributing school; however the authors were unable to establish how the pupils were allocated to the different Houses.

Risinghill was overcrowded at the beginning but the authors did not notice anything out of the ordinary, and this was probably the case for most of the pupils. This might have been because they were accustomed to smaller schools and large classes where the same teacher often taught different lessons in the same classroom. As Berg pointed out in her book, most of the classrooms in their previous schools were off a main, central hall so they did not have the same freedom to roam as they had at Risinghill. The authors do, however, remember that morning assemblies were held on a House basis, and the (rare) full school assemblies were very cramped because the accommodation in the main hall was too small.

C4.5 - Coming Together

The pupils arrived together to start their first day without any introductions or inductions. Although the Bloomsbury and Ritchie girls appear to have adapted quickly to a mixed environment, some of the Northampton lads found this more difficult:

It came as a bit of a blow when we learned we were to be moved to Risinghill (from Northampton) and worse when we heard that we were going to have to mix with girls. Don't get me wrong, I like girls, always have done, but they create a bit of a distraction. When we finally arrived

at R and met you girls in 3A it was a bit of an eye-opener, to me at least.
(Michael L., 2006)

The first day at RH was, to say the least, a huge culture shock. There were girls everywhere. Am I right in assuming that the ratio of girls to boys was 60:40, it certainly seemed like 80:20. (Ian H., 2006)

The same could be said for some of their teachers, whose brusque approach was not, on the whole, appreciated by the girls; some of whom, instead of jumping to attention when their surnames were bawled out, ignored the teacher or gave him a cold stare, sometimes back-chatting him if they felt particularly aggrieved. At Northampton, this would not have been tolerated.⁴⁷ Here insubordination could have been treated with a few strokes of the cane, but at Risinghill there was no Corporal Punishment (CP) and, in any event, masters were not allowed to physically discipline girls. What these teachers failed to comprehend was that, in their previous schools, the girls had been treated more gently and were unaccustomed to teachers shouting at them, and generally behaving in a dictatorial manner. This mode of teaching, however, was common-place in an all boys' school then so for those who had never taught anywhere else, Risinghill was an eye-opener in every sense. While some of the Northampton teachers adapted to this new, more progressive, way of teaching, others had no understanding of why it was suddenly all going wrong for them.

One Northampton teacher, Mr Nunn, often fell foul of the girls in his maths classes, for all of the above reasons. Isabel and Lynn did not get on with him at all, spending, on occasions, more time in the corridor outside his class room than they did in it. Their grievances, however, were more to do with the fact that he was teaching maths at an advanced level – far above what they had been taught in their previous schools – and they were not the only ones to be struggling. Bored children switch off easily and can become disruptive, especially if they are made to feel inadequate by their teachers.

Philip, on the other hand, was full of praise for Mr Nunn. In his questionnaire, Nunn is cited as one of the teachers to have inspired him at Risinghill:

⁴⁷ Philip notes: Not that the lessons at Northampton were better taught. I remember English lessons in particular being appalling; history was an endless repetition of the Industrial Revolution. In the school's core subjects, metalwork and technical drawing, maths and physics the standard of discipline was however high. In my time other subjects seemed to be taught by an endless number of supply teachers of dubious skill and motivation. These subjects were much better taught at Risinghill.

Mr Nunn, my mathematics teacher at Northampton and Risinghill, for awakening and fostering an interest in mathematics. (Lord, 2006)

It just goes to show that, given the right environment, and the right children to work with Nunn was more than capable of bringing out the best in his pupils.

In this and the following chapter(s), the reader will see that many teachers joined Risinghill on the premise that they would be teaching children in the higher-ability groups. But this did not happen. Many children of average and below-average ability were put in the A and B streams to create a wider distribution, explaining, perhaps, why some teachers, struggled. Philip, incidentally, was one of only four pupils in 1961 to pass the GCE in mathematics. (W. M. Duane, 1961b)

C4.6 – The Teaching Team

In some of the reports about the school it has been suggested that Duane handpicked his staff; however, this was not the case. Most of the teachers were transferred over from their previous schools with some being promoted to jobs that Duane would never have sanctioned. As Berg was to record, he had a difficult task ahead of him:

Of the three heads⁴⁸, two came to the new school, which was unlike anything they had ever known, both philosophically and architecturally, for it offered freedom where they had thought always in terms of ‘control’, ‘discipline’, of locks and high walls. They came to positions which were both subservient to another head to whose philosophies they did not subscribe and yet of considerable importance. One of them certainly, both of them probably, came extremely unwillingly and unhappily. The authority appointed them to positions of importance before they appointed Michael Duane. Not only were they teachers whom Mr Duane would never have chosen to carry out his policy; they came to the school with no idea that they would have a head with a policy different from theirs, and who would need them to support such a policy, and even initiate it. (Berg, 1968b)

⁴⁸ Gifford, to remind the reader, did not have a head in place at the time of the merger; Northampton had an acting head who did join the school.

Here Berg is probably over-egging the situation, but of the three acting or full heads two became heads of department in Risinghill and the third, Duane's deputy.

The teachers also had to adapt to their new surroundings. As indicated above, those who had been in single-sex schools took longer to adjust than the teachers from Gifford. Some of them, never quite made the transition, leastways not in Isabel's or Lynn's view. The staff also had to adapt to Duane's new school ethos and this would have been difficult, not that the LCC appears to have given this much thought. For those who had joined the school with expectations of teaching at grammar school level, life was even more difficult. In her book, Berg makes the point that it was not just the teachers who suffered, but also the children. Isabel and Lynn could relate to this, having struggled in the A stream for maths:

Since the L.C.C. had stated that the ratio of children in each ability group would be the usual twenty per cent, teachers for academic subjects had been engaged. When the position was found to be different, the staff could have been changed, but certain governors insisted on holding on to the academic staff as long as possible – useless, even perhaps unintentionally destructive, to the children. So these teachers found they had children of well below average ability in their A classes; understandably, they were bewildered, resentful, and frustrated. (Berg, 1968b)

While the younger teachers - on discovering that the school was perhaps not for them - were able to escape, those in senior positions with high allowances would not have found it easy to secure comparable posts elsewhere. A move would have been even more challenging for those on the brink of retirement. As Duane reflected later in life:

Many really deadly dull, boring and inefficient teachers who had managed to get high posts, partly because they had been on the staffs of previous schools and were transferred by the ILEA, went on being inefficient and being a damned nuisance in the school as far as I was concerned."
(Laiken, Undated)

Staffing levels and the quality of teachers required to meet the pupils' vocational and pastoral needs would prove to be another serious issue.

From the start the school was never fully staffed. A third of the teaching vacancies remained unfilled throughout the school's history; a situation that was so bad that Duane was forced to cover the gaps:

The Head last term taught 17 periods a week to help out in the shortage of Maths teachers and to take over the most difficult classes in the Fourth Year. In the current term he teaches for 13 periods. (W. M. Duane, 1962a)

The overall effect is clearly demonstrated in Duane's response to the 1962 visitation report produced by the LCC inspector, Mr K MacGowan:

At no time has the staff been up to the establishment in numbers except for very short periods. It has certainly never been near it in the matter of qualifications, and frequently short of it in competence. This is clearly reflected in the subject reports where, out of 14 subjects considered, no less than 12 contain references to notable difficulties of staffing, including shortage, lack of adequate qualifications, inexperience, unsuitability of personality and sheer incompetence. (W. M. Duane, 1962a)

While Berg tended to focus on much of the 'bad' from a teaching perspective, there were a number of dedicated (and also very gifted) teachers whom were sympathetic to what Duane was trying to achieve with the children. Even those who might not have been so talented were prepared to give his ideas a whirl, as will be demonstrated in the next section on CP.

Bob Dixon, a former teacher of Risinghill, and to whom the authors are indebted for providing them with so much information about the school, describes in his last book, *The Wrong* (2007), how Duane persuaded him to think more creatively when it came to handling the more difficult children:

Once, when I had a serious and running dispute with one of the boys in 4BL, Duane asked both of us into his office to talk about it. I felt a bit put out over this at first as it was an unusual procedure (to me, anyway) but I realised it was a sensible thing to do. Otherwise, when children wrecked lessons day after day, I often sent them to stand in the corridor. I think I overdid this but I didn't know what else to do. They weren't being taught in the corridor but the others weren't being taught if the disruptive ones

were in the classroom. An extension of this practice takes us into the question of school exclusions. No-one seems to have solved this problem (or symptoms of the problem) yet and it probably can't be solved within society as it stands.

Duane did not believe in exclusion or expulsion as it was called then. In fact one of the reasons for Risinghill having so many challenging pupils was because he took children that had been expelled from other schools or rejected because they were known to be troublesome. This annoyed some of Houghton's officers, who wanted him to use public expulsion as a deterrent for truancy and/or bad behaviour, but he refused:

The suggestion of public expulsion is scarcely realistic. The school is formally assembled. The boy is forcibly, if necessary, brought to the attention of the school. His misdeeds are recounted and he is told with due solemnity that he is to be expelled. What is presumed to be the effect on the assembled school (a) if he is brought by force, (b) if he is in fact delighted at the prospect of having a reason for not attending school, (c) makes a rude gesture and expresses his opinion of the Staff and the school in a series of four-letter words? I make these points in all seriousness because the Staff know many boys – and girls – capable of doing just these things.
(W. M. Duane, 1962a)

In *The Waste Clay* a more detailed account of the teachers' views of Duane and the school are provided, also their thoughts about the reasons for Risinghill's closure. Whereas Bob Dixon and others had a good working relationship with Duane, and learned a lot from him, Terence Constable, another former teacher of the school, had a very different opinion:

It seems odd that Duane, who went to such lengths to "break through" with children, apparently gave up so early any attempts to communicate with his teachers. (Constable, 1968)

Constable joined Risinghill in 1965, just before Risinghill closed. His paper, *The Risinghill Myth* (1968) is an account of what he claimed to be the truth of the Risinghill affair, and the authors will be looking at some of his assertions later. For now let them just say that his claims have been taken at face value by people like David Limond and Margaret Cole whom,

interestingly, have also written with authority about Duane and the school, but without any real experience of either.

C4.7 – Corporal Punishment

Duane approached the issue of CP with the staff in much the same way that he had at Howe Dell and at Alderman Woodrow. This was to call a meeting to explain his views about CP and why he wanted to remove it. Past experience had taught him that it would take time for the teachers to come around to his way of thinking so he was both surprised and delighted when, within weeks of this meeting, they informed him that they were ready to give up the practice. (W. M. Duane, 1960b)

Unbeknown to Duane the teachers had, at this time, been discussing amongst themselves a caning incident in the school which some had found distressing. The victim, a young boy, was a troubled child with an appalling history of abuse, and as such was not considered by these teachers to be responsible for his actions. For them, the use of CP in these circumstances was indefensible. They called a staff meeting to discuss the incident during which the whole question of discipline and punishment was debated at length. The meeting ended with the teachers deciding to take a vote on whether or not CP should be removed. Not everyone was in favour of a total ban but the majority vote prevailed, and the news was passed to Duane, who was both surprised and delighted as he had not envisaged winning the staff over so soon.

The next day, at a full school assembly, Duane informed the children of the teachers' decision, much to the astonishment of everyone present. While the teachers had agreed to give up CP, they had not anticipated Duane making this public. In fact some of them were so angry that they sent a deputation to him to express their concerns about the announcement. His response was simple:

But you are not doing away with corporal punishment unless you tell the children. (Berg, 1968b, p62)

Without full disclosure it was, of course, impossible to do away with CP and this was the point that Duane was making. The teachers, however, did not see it this way. They had taken what they believed to be a massive leap of faith, and Duane had betrayed them, making them look foolish in the process. What they were asking for, without saying it outright, was to have

a covert policy on CP as this allowed them to at least keep the threat of the cane in reserve; something they felt they needed. This approach was not dissimilar to that taken by the LCC where, as has been discussed in Chapter B2, there were two ‘Punishment in Schools’ booklets in use then, one advocating the removal of CP and the other providing guidance on how to administer it.

Looking at this from the perspective of the teachers, the authors have a level of sympathy for them. First and foremost they were entering uncharted waters at a chaotic time in the school’s history. Indeed the school was *making* history by becoming the first school in London to declare (publicly) that it had given up the cane. Second, many of the staff was probably still struggling with Duane’s whole school ethos and all the other changes that had been forced upon them as a result of the move. Change, at the best of times, is difficult and perhaps they simply wanted to wait until the school had settled down before abandoning CP all together. From Duane’s perspective, he probably decided to grab the moment as the teachers might well have changed their minds later. This, of course, is all supposition on the part of the authors. The first twelve-eighteen months of the ban were certainly very challenging, as Duane himself admitted:

Over the whole range of activities for which the children had previously been caned in their previous schools, we found they were testing out the staff to see whether we meant what we said. Gradually, of course, this died down – mind you it took about 18 months to do so. We did not have an effect on the older children – they were too heavily conditioned really to change their point of view and they left before any alteration in their behaviour could be observed. (Laiken, Undated)

C4.8 – When Two Tribes go to War

When new schools are opened they will often have a gradual intake over several years; the idea being to give the pupils time to settle and familiarise themselves with their new surroundings. Had this philosophy been adopted for Risinghill, and had the LCC opened the school in September as opposed to May, the authors believe that many of the early teething problems, for which it was so heavily criticised, could have been avoided. The broad thrust of these criticisms (from within and without) was the perceived delinquency and disorder throughout the school’s history, when in truth many of these problems disappeared within the first year.

Of the 1200-plus pupils starting in May 1960, the youngest had only just completed part of their first year (Year 7), and the majority of the older pupils were in their fourth and final year of education. The latter were due to leave in July, barely two months after joining the school and it was from this cohort that much of the violence and disruption stemmed. Although it is fair to say that the Gifford boys caused most of the fights, the Northampton lads were not entirely blameless. Fighting rival schools and gangs from other districts was all part of the Islington youth culture then, and still is today:

The first year was the year of the gang fights. The boys of Risinghill came from Northampton, a boys' small technical school, and Gifford a large mixed. Because the Northampton boys were older – they tended to stay on at school a year or two past the school-leaving age – they were chosen as prefects at Risinghill. Furthermore, they were well-spoken, and had always worn uniform, which meant they were different from the Gifford boys, readily identifiable, and an easy focus for anger. (Berg, 1968b)

While the Northampton pupils would probably disagree with Berg's description of them, the Gifford and Ritchie pupils did have this perception of the Northampton boys being a bit posh. In their blazers and ties they looked very different to everyone else albeit that most of them came from the same neighbourhood and the same, working-class backgrounds. Some were more able in maths and physics but from what the authors can remember were roughly of the same ability in every other subject. A number of the Northampton boys travelled long distances to attend the school, and it is possible that, because they came from the outskirts of London, they were, as Berg suggests, well spoken. However, the authors are of the opinion that these boys were in the minority ⁴⁹. They would also question Berg's view that the Northampton boys were older, largely because when Risinghill opened there was no Sixth Form, and the Fifth Year (if there was one) would have been very small, catering (perhaps) for the Northampton and Bloomsbury pupils who might have been half-way through a GCE course. The boys were, therefore, roughly all of the same age range, though Berg is correct when she says that there were more boy prefects chosen from Northampton than Gifford.

⁴⁹ Philip, who attended Northampton School, certainly does think Berg has over-simplified. He was also one of that minority who travelled a long way (from Redhill in Surrey) to attend the school. Outside of school he simply went back home, detached from the neighbourhood, as did others who did not live locally. Incidentally, because of the distances travelled by these pupils (and maybe other factors) this very small handful was not made prefects. Philip remembers his mother telling him Duane told her he was not made a prefect because of the travel. Regarding posh accents, these boys might well have sounded different – Philip's was probably a working class south-east London accent.

This, coupled with the ‘uniform’ issue, was the root cause of most of the fights in the school, of this there is no doubt.

Integrating pupils from four very different schools was a difficult task in itself without adding this extra dimension of gang warfare to the mix. Indeed, the authors were surprised that this was not taken into account as anyone with any knowledge of the district would have known that, when putting the Gifford and Northampton boys together (in particular the older boys who were about to start work) was inviting trouble as they were bound to fight. As Michael D, who joined Risinghill at the age of eleven, pointed out:

Kids went around in gangs. We were the younger ones. Older brothers were in the gangs and that’s how it went on, was part of the scene. This spilled over into the schools, not just Risinghill, but all of the schools in the area. There was the Angel gang, Highbury gang and so on, always having fights. (Michael D., 2005)

Not all of the pupils who completed the RRG’s questionnaire, however, were so philosophical: in the early days many were daunted by the school’s atmosphere:

It was a scary place compared to Northampton, the school I had come from. (James M., 2006)

Risinghill was a jungle. Many students were unruly thugs. One of the first incidents that I witnessed was a teacher being pushed to the ground and kicked by a group of students. Admittedly, the hat⁵⁰ was grim, I can picture it still, but the unprovoked attack, the gratuitous violence, directed at a rather timid woman, was appalling and I was petrified and shocked. (Yvonne F., 2004)

Although Isabel, Philip, Lynn and Alan did not see any violence of this kind, they do remember the rumours about the gang fights. However, they cannot recall hearing anything about the teachers getting attacked. Philip does recall once that some boys were let out early to forestall a gang fight that was rumoured for when school ended – whether it came to anything he has no recollection. So Risinghill was not perfect by any means, and the authors have tried to keep an open mind on this, using, where possible, their research with the pupils

⁵⁰ The students took exception to the teacher’s hat.

and teachers to verify the facts. Interestingly one of the teachers, who participated in the research study, did witness an assault of the type described by Yvonne, also a fracas with a male teacher who, apparently, was ambushed by a group of older boys and beaten with a ruler – to give him a taste of his own medicine (the teacher’s words, not the authors’). These events are covered in more detail in *The Waste Clay*.

While the school’s abandonment of CP was thought by many, including some of the pupils, to be the reason for all the fighting and misbehaviour, the authors do not believe this to be the case. It had not been a deterrent at Gifford where boys were caned on a regular basis, often in front of their class mates. These public beatings did not have any effect on their behaviour; in fact, the reverse was true. A boy that could take his ‘six of the best’ without flinching – and there were many at Gifford who did – won not only a victory for himself, but also the admiration of his peers.

C4.9 – Assessing Pupils’ Academic Levels

In Houghton’s 1958 report (to be discussed in the next chapter) a balanced intake was promised to ensure that the school became fully comprehensive; however, as has been reported, less than 1% of the pupils were in the top ability group, and about half were in the two lower groups, explaining, perhaps, why the LCC did not make provision for a Sixth Form. This had a massive impact on some of the academically gifted pupils. James M, for example, joined the school from Northampton and left in 1961 with five GCE ‘O’-Levels when he would have liked to continue his education:

There was no 6th form and we were encouraged to leave and get a job which I did. (James M., 2006)

Philip, with four GCE ‘O’-Levels, went on to study for GCE ‘A’-Levels at Croydon Technical College, which was also much closer to his home. Here again the authors come to the point of there being no grammar school-level intake into the school as none of the four merged schools appear to have had a Sixth Form: therefore no provision was made for those pupils who would have benefitted from further study. At a time when the central government was encouraging children to stay on at school for another year, and was talking about making this compulsory, the authors found it very odd that Risinghill was set up in a way that militated against this, which in turn led to them questioning whether Risinghill had, from the

outset, been set up to fail. Other London comprehensives of that era, such as Kidbrooke and Holland Park for example, did have Sixth Forms when they were built.

What is not clear is how the pupils were assessed for their new classes on joining Risinghill. The authors do not remember being tested, and some teachers surveyed didn't know much about this either. However, one senior teacher said "there were various ability tests but I can't be specific about them now." (Coates, 2004)

At Gifford and Ritchie, and probably Northampton and Bloomsbury, classes were not graded by ability, so some pupils were pleased to be placed in the top stream at Risinghill while others were annoyed at being separated from friends, and put in classes with children they did not know. But being in the 'A' stream did not, as has been reported, mean that you were clever. Many children were upgraded to create a wider distribution:

This has meant that our A forms have always had a number of Group III children and our present 1A has several Group IV children. (W. M. Duane, 1964c)

It was probably for this reason that the maths teacher, Mr Nunn, and others like him, struggled⁵¹. What it was like for the staff teaching the lower streams is open to speculation as many of the children could not speak English. Despite this, it would seem certain governors were determined to recruit academic staff to teach at grammar school level, despite Duane's insistence that teachers with more generalist skills were required:

When within the first year I realised what the pattern would be I began to urge on the Governors the desirability of appointing more teachers of general subjects with an emphasis on their qualities as stable personalities. This was bitterly opposed by Mrs Chaplin, Mrs McGregor and Miss Murray who have, quite obsessively, insisted on high academic qualifications in newly appointed Staff, and have, too often, swayed the balance of the Governors, especially when Mr Harper was Chairman (W. M. Duane, 1964c)

The name 'Murray' was of interest to the authors as they had come across it when searching the Education Committee (EC) minutes for evidence of: (1) what appeared to be the scaling

⁵¹ Philip recalls this as being his experience when he later started teaching.

back of the school in 1958 (or thereabouts) from a thirteen-form entry to eight-form entry school; and (2) the official scaling back (to an eight-form entry) in 1962. Murray was the chair of the LCC's Schools Planning Sub-Committee in 1962 and was aware of the latter change, but interestingly not Duane. The Schools Planning Sub-Committee was also one of three sub-committees involved with the initial proposal to close Risinghill. Ms Murray is someone whom the authors will come back to when discussing these issues – in Chapters C6 and C11 respectively.

C4.10 – Governing Body

Mrs Joan Evans was made chair of Risinghill's governing body (GB) soon after it opened. Her chairmanship, however, was brief, less than a year in fact, due to what was claimed by the LCC to be an election technicality. Two other governors, whom were also very supportive of Duane's policies, disappeared at around the same time. The new chair, Mr Harper, was a former HMI and was rumoured to have been put in the post to bring Duane into line; however, Duane got on well with Harper and there were no major problems as far as Margaret Duane could recall. Mrs Evans did, however, become chair of the GB again (in 1964) when the post came up for re-election.

C4.11 – Giving the Children a Voice

Towards the end of the first year, a school council was set up to give the children a say on issues which affected them directly. This was unheard of in the 1960s though one or two independent schools, notably Summerhill, had been running school councils for some years before, and very successfully by all accounts.

The council had two representatives from each House (a boy and girl): four co-opted members in the event of a particular group or section of the school not being fully represented; four representatives from the teaching staff (two male, two female); and four non-teaching staff i.e. the librarian, school secretary, school keeper and school meals supervisor. (W. M. Duane, 1960a)

The children took their responsibilities seriously — too seriously, it would seem, for the teachers if Berg is to be believed, and the authors have no reason to doubt her:

One day, at a Council meeting, the head boy said that some members of the staff were not turning up for their playground duty, as arranged, and

the prefects were having to do it for them, in addition to their own. (Berg, 1968b)

Although the culprits were not mentioned by name, this caused quite a stir in the staff room. MacGowan was not too pleased about this either:

There is moreover some suggestion that members of staff feel that the Council discusses matters which properly are the affair of the Staff. It is clear that the fledgling democracy of the school is in need of firm and discreet guidance by responsible adults. (London County Council, 1962c)

For a school that was beginning to look like it had been rejected at birth, it is a miracle that Risinghill made any progress in its first year of life. By the end of 1960, however, it had abolished CP and was the only state school in London to have done so publicly. It was also the only state school, as far as the authors are aware, to be listening to children through the medium of a school council. When one considers that many schools are still struggling with the concept of a school council today, this was a remarkable achievement. Later in this chapter, evidence of the council working for the good of the school will be demonstrated, as will be the teachers' reaction to it.

C4.12 - Parent Teacher Association

An indicator of the high esteem in which Risinghill was held by parents can be found in the fact that the school established a thriving Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at a time when this was not so common, though the PTA movement had started in the late nineteenth century. The PTA's appeal to the Secretary of State in 1965 against Risinghill's closure notes:

Only two parents have withdrawn their children from Risinghill during the period 1960 -1965, except for reasons of removal to other districts. Many, in fact, continue to send their children even after such removal. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

As will be seen later, one of the reasons given by the LCC for Risinghill's closure was that Islington parents had lost faith in the school; hence the reason for the PTA providing evidence to the contrary.

In the 1960s parents did not, on the whole, get too involved with their children's education. This was especially true of working-class parents who, because they were working long (and often unsociable) hours in manual jobs, found it difficult to attend after-school meetings. A typical working day for the average two-parent family would start at 5.00am or 6.00am and finish at 9.00pm or 10.00pm with mother being the first to go out in the morning – usually to a cleaning job or perhaps an early morning shift at the local factory. She would return in time to see her husband off to work, and her children to school. When her husband came home in the evening, it was not uncommon for her to go out to work again – usually to the same job that she had done in the morning. This pattern of women fitting jobs around their children was common then as child-care was unaffordable for most families. It still is today. In the 1960s, however, there were no welfare benefits to speak of so many women were forced to do menial jobs and work unsociable hours just to keep their families' heads above water.

The main draw-back for parents attending after-school meetings, however, was because many working-class parents were poorly educated, and as such tended to avoid contact with people whom they perceived to be more intelligent and/or of a different class. Adding to the problem was a general reluctance on behalf of the central government to encourage parents to become more involved with their children's education. As Duane pointed out:

... I am certain that the intention of the 1944 Education Act assumed bringing in parents, but this was worked on very intensively by a group of sub committees, who rigorously eliminated, gradually, the concept that the parent has a right to be on the governing body of a school. Technically we could have parents on governing bodies today without changing a single word of the Act. I think that the sooner this is brought about the better.
(Laiken, Undated)

Parents did, occasionally, visit their children's schools, but more often than not it was to make a complaint about the excessive use of CP or bullying. Relationships were, therefore, strained on both sides and Duane worked hard to remove these prejudices. He understood the value of getting the parents on board and unlike the central government took steps to make this happen. In 2013, the RRG received an email from the daughter of Mrs A de Swarte (a former Risinghill teacher) who was keen to point out that her mother was actively involved in Risinghill's PTA and was very proud of it. So, too, was Duane.

Today, of course, it is very different. Schools are required by law to hold parent governor elections, and in many parts of the country parents now represent a third of a GB's membership⁵². In some disadvantaged areas, however, parents continue to display a reluctance to become more involved with the running of their schools, possibly because they suffer the same lack of confidence.

C4.13 - Settling Down

During that first school year, all of the children were busy testing out their relationships - with each other and with their teachers. There were inter-schools rivalries, plus rivalries relating to ethnicity, colour, class, ability and age. To make things more difficult, the adolescent girls and boys, who had been at the single-sex schools, were also mixing together for the first time. Many of the fights between the Gifford and Northampton boys were over the girls, and there were fights between the girls (often over boys) too.

By November 1960, however, the fighting had died down as most of the older boys had left in the summer to start work. Those remaining were now joining together to form school sports teams, resulting in the previous grievances being set aside. A corporate identity was slowly beginning to emerge with the children taking great pride in their school and their achievements, sporting and otherwise. The school council was also beginning to take effect:

After a particularly vicious attack on a prefect and at the suggestion of Mr Osborne, one of the Staff representatives on the Council, four of the 'gang' and four of the prefects were invited to appear before the Council to state their grievances. After a discussion lasting over an hour it became clear that there was a certain resentment based on Gifford-Northampton rivalry; that the prefects had allowed their friends privileges not accorded to Gifford boys or to the 'gang' in particular; that the situation was exacerbated by the personal rivalry between the Head Boy and the leader of the 'gang' over the former's girl-friend. From that day there has not been a single act of violence of this kind in the school (W. M. Duane, 1962a)

⁵² Since writing this chapter, the law on parental representation on GBs has changed. Free schools and academies, for example, are not bound by the same rules/regulations. In this respect there has been an erosion of parental rights under the new Education Act, a fact that isn't widely appreciated.

Even MacGowan was forced to admit that there had been a significant improvement insofar as the fighting was concerned:

Some achievements must be placed to the school's credit. The nasty violence of its early days has largely disappeared. .(London County Council, 1962c)

But the council was not fully supported by the staff and it folded towards the back end of 1961/early 1962 on account of the teachers boycotting meetings. This included some of the heads of House, notably the head of Johnson, as reported by a pupil:

... I do remember going over to Johnson and asking for time to go to one of the meetings and or something like that and the Head of Johnson, at the time, saying "why do you want to waste your time going to that rubbish!" Or words to that effect. (Eric, 2008)

Judging from a fairly recent research study conducted by the NSPCC into school councils, it looks like the same apathy exists today:

Staff identified two main issues as standing in the way of the development of some councils and these were time constraints and staff resistance. (Baginsky and Hannam, 1999)

Many schools are still struggling with the concept of giving young people a say on issues that affect them directly, and the authors doubt that this has anything to do with teachers not having the time to attend meetings. When their presence is required at, say, a staff meeting or a GB meeting, which normally takes place after school hours, 'time' does not appear to be a constraint. The same criticism (of not engaging with the pupils) can be said of the GBs where pupil participation is rare. Yet the pupils are the main stakeholders are they not? The authors are not suggesting that they be given a seat on the GB, merely that they be given the opportunity to attend meetings (or parts of meetings) where they might have a valuable contribution to make.

C4.14 – The New Intake

Of the 286 pupils admitted in September 1960, (London County Council, 1965c) just five were in the top ability group and ninety-nine were in the lowest group of all (W. M. Duane,

1962a). Nineteen children appear not to have been graded: presumably because they were new to the country and did not speak the language. This pattern remained pretty much the same throughout the life of the school, as will be shown in the ensuing chapters.

The September intake brought the total number of pupils in 1960 up to 1,323:

A promising start was made; there were 403 first-choice and 51 second-choice applications for admission to the school at 11+ (286 pupils being admitted), and the roll then totalled 1,323. (London County Council, 1965c)

CHAPTER C5 - Race and Sex – 1961-62

'The new always carries with it the sense of violation, of sacrilege. What is dead is sacred; what is new, that is, different, is evil, dangerous or subversive.'

Henry Miller

(‘The Air-Conditioned Nightmare’, 1945)

By 1961 the dust had settled with the teachers finally beginning to make some progress with the children. Because of the size of the school, many of the pupils were still getting lost *en route* to lessons, and some were still truanting. But Duane was getting to grips with the latter by using some novel techniques:

I stopped bunking off after the first year and the only other time I bunked off was at the end of the 4th year when there was all the trouble and the school was closing. (Michael D., 2005)

Michael was, by his own admission, a difficult child. He hated school and had been truanting for a long time, since he was about seven or eight years old. It was not until he joined Risinghill, however, that he was caught in the act by a School Board officer, who found him playing football on a housing estate, when he should have been in school. This was when the whole sorry story of his truanting came out, shocking both the London School Board and Michael's parents.

Michael's father was a sign-writer whose beautiful handwriting Michael had longed to master since he was old enough to write: in fact he was so enamoured of this that he begged his father to teach him the basics so that he could practice on his own. By the age of eleven, he had become so proficient at copying his father's hand that, when the School Board showed his parents a pile of letters explaining their son's absences from school, they were mystified. It would seem the forgeries were so good that Michael's father could not tell the difference between his own handwriting and that of his son's:

My dad, when he found out, said "I gave him some notes", he was a bit shocked as he thought the signature was his! (Michael D., 2005)

Habitual truants were dealt with severely in the 1960s and Michael faced the possibility of being sent away to an approved school for truancy and fraud. However, because he was so young, the London School Board decided to give him one last chance at his new school, Risinghill.

Michael remembered his first meeting with Duane vividly. He had steeled himself for a caning, but to his surprise was told very gently that children were not beaten for getting into trouble at Risinghill. He did not believe a word of this as he had been smacked, beaten with a slipper and caned on a regular basis at his previous (primary) school for misdemeanours that were far less serious. So when Duane asked for his help in keeping the ‘School Board man’ off his (Duane’s) back, he became even more suspicious, to the point that he firmly believed a trap was being set into which he had no intention of falling. Duane, however, was patient and Michael eventually dropped his guard, yielding to the questions that were being asked of him, which, in the main, were about why he did not like Risinghill. Because he had not been at the school very long, he could not think of anything specific to say, so he responded along the lines that he hated everything about it, forgetting that he had attended practically every PE and games lesson as he was passionate about sport.

The truth of the matter was that Michael was miffed about not joining his primary school friends at Barnsbury, another secondary school in the area, and once this had been established Duane was able to make some progress with him:

He said “Barnsbury refused you, do you know why?” I told him that it was probably because of the trouble at Ecclesborne⁵³. He then said “you play football for the school, so you must like football, cricket and stuff. Here we do try to understand why children get into trouble. If you get into trouble here, you will not be punished, but we have to find a way of keeping you here. Lessons you don’t like, what you have to understand, you have to think about the lessons you do like and then we can go from there – until you settle in. (Michael D., 2005).

A deal was finally struck that worked for both parties. Provided that Michael remained in school and attended all of his lessons bar History and Science, which he loathed, Duane promised that, in place of the latter, he could join another class for PE and games. However,

⁵³ Dudley’s primary school.

it was stressed that this was only a temporary arrangement, aimed at getting him back into the swing of things, and it worked:

But, as I said, he let me have double games and gradually I started going to all the other classes. So it worked with me. I was captain of the football team and helped with the training. And I was a prefect when I left.
(Michael D., 2005)

Another pupil, Andy P, remembered how Duane put a stop to a lot of the bullying in the school:

The bullying at Risinghill had got very bad and he decided to do something about it. He went into every classroom as lessons were in progress and singled out all the oldest and biggest boys and girls and told us to report to the main hall the following morning before the first lesson. We wondered what this was all about but found out the next day. Mr Duane said as we were the eldest and biggest he was making us his personal squad of pupil minders. This meant that we were to stop any bullying when we saw it. The headmaster went on to say that bullies do not pick on those bigger than themselves and if they knew we were about it wouldn't take place. He was clever and wise enough to know that some of the bullies were actually amongst the ones he had picked out and were standing there before him. This responsibility struck a chord, and bullying ceased to be a big problem, although when it did sometimes occur it was quickly stopped. I cannot help feeling that this could be one approach that schools of today could use to help eradicate this mindless behaviour.
(Andy P., 2006)

C5.1 - The Governing Body

Several events (mainly internal politics within the LCC) had an impact on the school's governing body (GB) in the first twelve months. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mrs Evans, who had been the chair of the GB and supportive of MD's policies, was removed from office. Apparently her name had not been included in important ballot papers so she had to go, despite the fact that this was against the GB's wishes. Although disappointed at losing Mrs Evans, Duane developed a good working relationship with the new chair, Mr Harper: his

only problem with Harper being that he was often swayed by certain governors on staffing issues, the same governors who, from the outset, had insisted on high academic qualifications in newly appointed staff when Duane was keen to recruit teachers with more generalist skills. These governors were also opposed to the idea of MD bringing in foreign teachers to help teach the immigrant children, many of whom could not speak English. But Duane ignored these governors and recruited Greek, Turkish and African teachers (on the rare occasions that he was in a position to make new appointments) and these teachers made a huge difference in the school.

C5.2 – Cutting Back

In March 1961 came the first of many cutbacks. Contrary to the promises made by Houghton in his 1958 report, notably that the “long established traditions of Bloomsbury” were to be maintained and developed, the LCC gave notice on 7 March 1961 that the photography course was to be abandoned. Despite Duane’s objections, this happened almost immediately:

When the school opened in May, 1960, it was understood that the present scheme would operate until July, 1962, which would have completed the promised training for girls entered to Bloomsbury specifically for the purpose of receiving technical training in photography. (W. M. Duane, 1961c)

Although photography was removed from the syllabus in 1961, in 1963 children were still joining Risinghill on the premise that it remained an option:

From memory what happened with my schooling was that I did not get into the first two selections (which I think were both comprehensives, what has changed!!) and so went to a Secondary Modern School. After two years I believe I took a test which I think was called something like the 13+ which enabled me to apply to a comprehensive school and the reason I chose Risinghill was that it had a photography department – oh the dreams of youth!!! – but unfortunately when I arrived it was no longer there. (I never did pursue that avenue as a career either – never mind). (Linda S., 2006)

Linda travelled across London from Poplar (E14) so her disappointment at not being able to study photography was all the more acute. What was even more peculiar was that, in 1961, the photography course was removed from the list of options set out in a letter to parents of Third Year children entering the Fourth Year so she should never have been put in this position. Linda, however, was not a pupil at the school in 1961 so her parents would not have received the letter in question. (W. M. Duane, Undated) Even so the authors found it hard to believe that the LCC's Admissions Officer and Risinghill's deputy head - who were jointly responsible for the school's intake(s) - could have made such an error two years after the photography course had been discontinued. In the light of Risinghill's alleged decline in popularity (to be discussed in the following chapters) one does have to question if this was an unfortunate error made by two people or if it was more a case of the LCC choosing not to advertise the fact that it had started cutting back on the school's facilities within a year of it opening. Note also, the requirement for Linda to take (and pass) the 13+ examination in order to secure a place at Risinghill.

By the end of the summer term, the school would also lose a workshop, housecraft room, a science lab and art rooms, along with eight of the school's most experienced members of staff. Three more were to go at Christmas. (W. M. Duane, 1962a). This put even more pressure on the teachers whom, by now, were showing signs of exhaustion. Along with Duane, they complained bitterly about the staff cuts but the LCC officials pressed ahead, giving no explanation for their actions.

It was around this time that Payne House was dissolved, yet another indication of the school shrinking. The children were absorbed into the remaining six houses. (LCC Care Committee, 1961)

So, within a year of opening, Risinghill was being run down for no apparent reason, giving some credence to Berg's argument that it was destined for closure, perhaps before it had even opened.

C5.3 – Forging Links in the Community

In spite of these setbacks the school began to blossom. Parents were beginning to visit the school on a regular basis, and Duane welcomed them with open arms. Sometimes they had been invited in specifically to talk about a behavioural problem with their children, but on other occasions they came in voluntarily looking for advice on matters that were not strictly

school-related, such as help with completing application forms for council housing. These parents, more often than not harassed mothers with toddlers in tow, warmed to Duane's easy-going manner and spoke to him without fear or embarrassment, even when their children were in trouble:

Christ, mate, I don't know where he gets his fucking language from, honest I don't, the bloody little bugger, but if you get any more of it you tan his bloody arse, the fucking little sod. (Berg, 1968b)

Far from being offended, Duane would roar with laughter. He was learning something about Islington and its culture. Although the f-word was part of every-day speech for many working-class parents, this and other profanities were usually left on the doorstep when entering the home. This was because Islington parents did not, as a rule, use bad language in front of their children. And they did not like to hear their children using it either. A child caught using a four-letter word (or any swear word) was likely to get a stiff reprimand, if not a wallop, from their parents. Relatives, neighbours and even passing strangers (in the street) were known to chastise children for swearing then, strange though this might seem today.

Duane, of course, did not condone bad language of any kind. His way of dealing with it might not have sat comfortably with some but was effective all the same. As Berg quoting Duane indicates:

A few days ago I heard one of the boys shout abuse at another which included the word --. I told him that I did not like to hear a good word misused and made him write it out six hundred times after school. He appears to bear little resentment. I hope that I have not damaged his sex life irretrievably. (Berg, 1968b, p124)

The school was, as Berg points out in her book, becoming a warm and vibrant part of the community. This was because of Duane's determination to get the parents involved at every opportunity. Although some teachers welcomed this approach, others were less accommodating as they resented having to spend time with parents because they saw their jobs in very clear terms. This was to get the children through their exams, not become social workers. Some voiced their opinions loudly, though never to Duane direct. Rather a sympathetic ear was found in the deputy head or inspector MacGowan, who seems to have been a permanent fixture in the deputy head's office throughout 1960, 1961 and 1962.

By now Duane was visiting the homes of some of the school's most challenging pupils and, with the help of teachers like Chris Lymbourides, the homes of the ethnic minority children too. There were many racial tensions in the school at this time, particularly between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot children on account of the imminent partitioning of Cyprus. A lot of the violence in and outside of the school stemmed from these confrontations. On one occasion a teacher, Anne Burton, bravely stood between two Cypriot boys who were fighting. As the daughter of this teacher – some years later - pointed out:

I know a family story, that my mother broke up a knife fight, while she was heavily pregnant with me, with the immortal words: 'It's got to be me first Hassan!' for which the staff teased her mercilessly afterwards. (Burton, 2011)

Andy P, a former pupil who contacted the RRG in 2006, also recalled the Turkish-Greek divide, describing an incident in one of his lessons which was truly horrendous:

We were in the science lab when the door opened and a Turkish boy calmly walked in and poured a glass of clear liquid over the head of a Greek lad. The glass contained acid. His hair, with skin from his scalp attached, just started to fall out. He was in terrible pain. The teacher rushed him over to the sink and doused his head with cold water while an ambulance was called. (Andy P., 2006)

The authors were shocked to read these accounts as they were not aware of any racial tensions in the school. The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot boys and girls that they had hung around with were not hostile towards each other, and as Michael D points out below, the Greek and Turkish boys often fought alongside the English boys and each other when there were disputes between schools.

Only racial thing we had was with Tudor Rose [another local school]... But it wasn't really a racial thing, just that there were a lot of Greek kids at Tudor Rose causing trouble. We had Greek kids fighting with us; it was more about school against school. Hugh Mydd[leton] was another school that we used to fight with, same sort of thing. (Michael D., 2005)

While some of the fights in the school probably were race-related, and some arose as a result of the Cyprus conflict, the authors believe that, on the whole, race relations in the school were good. Most of the skirmishes, in their opinion, were caused by bringing together four very different schools without any introductions, and without any thought to the gang culture which prevailed at this time. With regard to the latter, it would, in the authors' opinion, have been far more sensible to open the school at the start of the new academic year (September) or to have staggered the intake in May – perhaps by including only the two larger schools, Gifford and Ritchie, leaving Northampton and Bloomsbury to join later.

C5.4 – The Corporal Punishment Ban in Practice

It was the school's abandonment of Corporal Punishment (CP), however, which the staff complained about the most. Discipline was lax in the early days, and some of the teachers were run ragged as a result. Even Duane had to admit to this, as has been reported. Here is another example:

... the short term effect was a great trial on staff who, to any real extent, depended on corporal punishment or the threat of it, for maintaining discipline. For the staff who were able to teach without this threat, but relied on interest, etc it was still a very testing period. But with those teachers, the situation more rapidly restored itself to a reasonable state of affairs. With the teachers who did rely on corporal punishment, the situation never really improved – they found the going tough. Where the teacher was idle, or did not care about the kids at all, then the kids gave the teachers hell. (Laiken, Undated)

Despite the fact that CP had been outlawed, some teachers continued to ignore the rules. There was a particularly bad attack on a pupil, serious enough for a complaint to be made by the child's Probation Officer. (W. M. Duane, 1962a) But Duane's requests for Houghton's officers to take action against this individual were ignored. Their refusal to intervene was surprising given Houghton's endorsement of the LCC's 'Punishment in Schools' booklet published that year (April 1961): a booklet that continued to promote the guidelines for the elimination of CP first issued by the LCC in 1952. However, as demonstrated in chapter B2, Houghton also endorsed another CP booklet for the London Teaching Service at around the same time, which legitimised the use of CP (by way of advice on the type(s) of cane to be

used) so Duane's inability to get him or any of his officers to take any action is, perhaps, not so surprising after all.

C5.5 – The First Visitation

During the summer term the school received an informal visit from Mr Munday, a Ministry HMI, who was pleased with the school's progress. He was particularly impressed with Duane's decision to remove CP as very few schools in the country had done this. It was some of Munday's other observations, however, which were of interest to the authors as these appeared to support certain claims made by Berg about the different teaching factions in the school. The following is an extract taken from a report that Duane produced for his staff about Munday's visit where he shares some of the questions put to him by Munday:

He wondered whether any of the staff were unsympathetic to the idea of the comprehensive school ...

He asked 'whether any anti-faction had developed, as was common in big schools'. (W. M. Duane, 1961a)

While there were some teachers who, undoubtedly, caused a lot of trouble for Duane, the authors do not believe that the staff, as a whole, played a significant part in the school's closure. But what they do believe is that Houghton's officers used these disagreements to drive a wedge between the staff and Duane, enabling them (the officials) to make a claim that would later be used against Duane - that he did not carry his staff with him. In the next chapter (C6) examples of this are provided.

C5.6 – Sex Education

In the autumn of 1961 MD became involved in what was called the 'Great Sex Row.' This was when he introduced sex education lessons at Risinghill. The first lesson was an off-the-cuff experiment; the roots of which lay in a conversation that he had eavesdropped upon between two pupils:

I overheard a girl telling a friend what her mum had said about the daughter of a neighbour alleged to be about to have a baby by a schoolboy. I broke in and asked what the father had said. They looked startled that I had heard and that I had asked the question, but replied that the father had 'nearly killed her'. They followed this up by asking me what

I would do if my own daughter (aged fourteen) told me that she was going to have a baby. (Berg, 1968b, p119)

Duane's response to the above question was that he would support his daughter, recognising her fears, and that what happened to the baby would depend on how his daughter felt about the young man, his age, her own feelings about motherhood and so forth. The girls were astonished at this reply. They simply could not believe that he was not shocked and hung on to his every word. It was their undivided attention which tempted him to relay this conversation to a class of Fourth Year boys later in the day. This was a mathematics class, but Duane had long since given up on teaching these boys maths as he simply could not hold their attention. Instead he was trying to get them interested in issues that were likely to affect them on leaving school, but even this was proving difficult:

It was clear from the first that discussions were a bore. They were not interested in 'Jobs' or 'The H-Bomb' or 'Current Affairs' for more than a few moments at a time. The horses died and remained very dead no matter how hard I flogged them. (Berg, 1968b, pp118-9)

As with the girls, the boys were all ears, amazed that Duane had even broached the subject of sex outside of marriage with them. He followed this up with an invitation to answer *any* question on the subject, offering to leave the room while the boys wrote their questions on paper if they were too embarrassed to ask out loud. When Duane returned, he found a pile of folded notes on his desk and proceeded to answer each question as truthfully as he could. Some of the questions shocked him, but it was the marked improvement in the boys' behaviour which surprised him the most:

Whereas at the beginning they were restless, ready for a 'lark' or a 'muck-about' or a 'giggle', horsing about, overfull of undisciplined energy, loud in volume and manner, by the end they were quiet in a way I had not hitherto experienced, leaning forward on every word, listening carefully (this a remarkable change!) to questions asked by other boys, and in general displaying a self-control such as I had not observed in them during other lessons. On other occasions I had had to bully them into making their desks tidy, picking up the odd scraps of paper from the floor, and into leaving the room in a reasonable state for the incoming class. On

this occasion to my surprise they did these things without being asked. Further, they went out of the room in a relaxed and quiet manner, said, 'Cheerio, Sir' and walked down the corridor instead of galumphing. (Berg, 1968b, p122)

Because the lesson had gone so well, Duane produced an uncensored account of the questions that were asked by the boys, and his responses. He gave copies to the staff, the governors and MacGowan, who immediately took the matter up with his superiors at County Hall:

Inspector MacGowan, however, was distressed and horrified, and went off to County Hall to show the Chief Inspector his copy of the document that proved when the boys of Risinghill said 'What is a cunt?' Mr Duane told them. (Berg, 1968b, p125)

To provide a flavour of the lesson, here are some of the questions that were asked and Duane's responses:

'What is a --?'

'The common or vulgar word for the outer parts of the female sex organs.'

'Is -- a swear word?'

'This is what your father and mother did to produce you, my father and mother did to produce me, and all fathers and mothers do to produce any baby. Because nowadays we have got to the unhappy state that we speak of -- as if it were something dirty or evil instead of what it is, a normal and natural act, we use the word to shock people or to make them embarrassed, and so it is used as a swear word.'

'How does a woman have a baby?'

Again, a simple and illustrated explanation. At one point I was explaining the function of the testicles and saw a look of puzzlement pass over their faces at the word 'testicles'.

'You probably know them as "balls".'

(Berg, 1968b, p120)

From this uncensored account, Duane produced a paper entitled ‘A small experiment in sex education’ which he discussed with his chair of governors, Mr Harper, before approaching his staff about taking the matter further. Sex education was something new, and Duane was well aware that he could not introduce it formally at Risinghill without first obtaining the necessary approval:

The new chairman said it was an excellent piece of work, and added, ‘Have you got anyone who can do the same for the girls?’ (Berg, 1968b, p125)

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was also consulted. In fact many parents took up Duane’s invitation to visit the school to view the material, and they, too, were very supportive, with some going as far as to say that they wished there had been something like this on offer when they were at school. MacGowan was the only person to voice any disapproval though the authors suspect there were others who shared his concerns but did not want to speak out. In this particular instance, the ‘national system, locally administered’ appears to have been operating in the way intended (by giving heads and GBs full responsibility for the day-to-day running of their schools) as the sex education lessons went ahead without any interference from Houghton or any of his officers. Eight months later, however, Duane would be hauled over the coals by Drs Briault and Payling - not for the sex education lessons per se but because his paper had attracted the attention of the Family Planning Association (FPA), giving the school publicity at a time when the LCC appeared to have had a covert policy of keeping its new comprehensives out of the media spotlight. The FPA’s interest in Duane’s paper is covered later in this chapter, as is the LCC’s bizarre stance on the (positive) publicity that followed.

Michael D, in recalling his first sex education lesson, remembered watching a film with black and white silhouettes, suggesting this was the same Cyril Bibby material that Duane had used at Howe Dell:

We had a film about sex education, it was a black and white film ... it was silhouettes, showing you about a man getting an erection and that sort of thing. It was quite educational and I remember the girls found it

interesting, there was nothing pornographic. We had a couple of these films when I was about 14. (Michaëlle D., 2005)

Although the authors could not recall seeing the film, Isabel and Lynn both remembered the sex education lessons, in particular the first one. As was the case with every other girl in the class, their initial reaction was one of shock, quickly followed by embarrassment. The boys, however, hid their discomfort by joking around, firing awkward questions at the teacher to see how far they could go. But once the novelty had worn off, the lesson proceeded like any other with the children asking questions that they would never have thought to ask of their peers or parents.

Word must have got around the school that the teachers were prepared to explain anything and everything, including the meaning of c***, as some classes appear to have tested the water far more adventurously than others:

*First inkling we had, caused a bit of a stir. Somebody shouted out c**** and Mr Yon said "Do you know what it is?" and he wrote it on the board and explained it. That teacher had a way with kids and everyone liked him. And Mr Yon explained about the vagina and all that. I remember I asked something that was for the first time. (Michael D., 2005)*

We might have been entering the 'swinging sixties' but very few parents spoke to their children about sex then: most would have died just to hear their child say the c-word let alone explain what it meant. Such a question would probably still shock many teachers and parents today so MacGowan's reaction was understandable, and especially when one considers that this was the year in which the Director of Public Prosecutions had sued Penguin Books for publishing the infamous D H Lawrence novel, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. This book was being contested on the grounds of obscenity - because of its explicit sex scenes and the use of previously banned four-letter words. Although Penguin was found not guilty of obscenity, from a political perspective it was probably not the best time for Duane to be talking about sex and/or four-letter words at Risinghill.

It was around this time that the contraceptive pill was introduced. This, too, was controversial and for all sorts of reasons. Many would have liked to see the pill banned. Although family planning did not form any part of the sex education lessons at Risinghill, teenage pregnancies were discussed – in line with the conversation that Duane had eavesdropped upon. These

were on the increase, which is why the FPA had taken such an interest in Duane's experiment at Risinghill. It published an article based on Duane's paper, but did not mention him or the school by name. However, this inevitably upset the LCC because of the publicity that followed. As Berg was to ask:

Was the position that the L.C.C. did not know what ---- was, or that they did know but didn't want anyone else to know? Or was the reason the one given by the Education Officer to Mr Duane at a stormy County Hall meeting – that comprehensive schools are a hot political issue, and that the L.C.C. must have 'the right image', and didn't want to give 'their enemies' any handle?" (Berg, 1968b, p125)

Duane would, over the next three years, be criticised time and again by Houghton's officers for not creating what they considered to be the 'right image' for Risinghill, even when the press coverage was, for the most part, good.

C5.7 – Examinations

From a teaching perspective the year ended on a positive note. Of the thirty-two children entered for GCE, sixteen passed. This was an improvement on 1960 where eighteen pupils had been entered but only five had passed. The records of those taking the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) commercial examinations, however, are missing. Perhaps vocational qualifications were not considered to be important then?

In conclusion, 1961 saw definite improvements all round. Nothing untoward was happening in the school, unless one counts the sex education lessons and the FPA article, which had infuriated some of the LCC officials.

C5.8 – The beginning of the end for the Comprehensive

Before moving on to the events of 1962, it is important to note that, in 1961, Dr Payling, the LCC's new Chief Inspector, published his review of the LCC's 'comprehensivisation' programme. Entitled 'London Comprehensive Schools' (London County Council, 1961b) the aim of this paper was to: (1) silence the LCC's critics once and for all; and (2) give the ailing comprehensive a new image. Labour's 'grammar schools for all' slogan was beginning to take shape in the run up to the 1964 General Election, and Payling's paper appears to have embraced this principle. Those who remained committed to the original concept, however,

were not fooled by the politics. Payling was accused by many educationalists of 'grammarizing' the LCC's new schools, and this did happen, as will be discussed later. However, without primary legislation, the LCC was never going to get all of the grammar schools on board so perhaps this was seen as a reasonable compromise? Whether people truly believed that a 'grammar school education for all' could be achieved in practice is another matter.

This subtle, but significant, move away from the original concept did not bode well for a head who had been appointed on a different remit and, equally disturbing, a school which bore no resemblance to the grammar, nor could do or wanted to for that matter.

CHAPTER C6 - Visitations and Nativities: 1961 - 62

*'Persecution, whenever it occurs, establishes only
the power and cunning of the persecutor, not the
truth and worth of his belief.'*

H M Kallen (1882-1974)

In January 1962 there was an unusually large inspection of the school by the LCC. The officials called this a visitation, but it bore no resemblance to the Munday's visitation six months earlier. A twenty-strong deputation, headed by MacGowan, descended on the school at short notice to examine and report on everything in detail. Even the school caretaker did not escape attention:

*The schoolkeeper who, when at Gifford, was good, has lost heart and it
has been extremely difficult to recruit cleaning staff. Although the
immediate responsibility for the state of the building is the schoolkeeper's,
the ultimate charge must be laid on the Headmaster. (London County
Council, 1962c)*

A minor detail, but nevertheless worth recording here, is that Isabel, who lived in Gifford Street and attended Gifford School, knew the caretaker and his family well. Her brothers were friendly with the caretaker's two sons, and her cousin was, for a time, engaged to the younger one. Her memories of the caretaker were of a kind, but authoritative, man, who the Gifford Street children liked and respected. This was because he gave children the freedom to play, often turning a 'blind eye' to escapades that others would have clamped down upon - such as running and scrapping in the playground (unless someone was getting hurt) and/or playing an improvised game of cricket in the street (outside of school hours) which sometimes resulted in the odd cracked or broken school window. In short, he allowed children to be children, within reason, explaining perhaps why he got on so well with Duane. He was, for example, one of the few people Margaret Duane asked for news of when Isabel and Lynn interviewed her in 2006. She was clearly very fond of him, recounting intimate details about his life and his family, which, in Isabel's opinion, she could not have known so much about had he not been on good terms with Duane.

If, as the LCC inspectorate claimed, he had “lost heart” at Risinghill, this was probably more to do with the staff he had inherited than it was any difficulties with “recruitment” and/or with Duane: indeed, in this regard, he appears to have been in the same position as Duane:

The speedy removal of graffiti is, of course, a normal instruction to the Schoolkeeper but it is rendered less effective than it should be for the simple reason that the Schoolkeeper is very weakly supported by four assistants, two of whom are men over sixty and can move only slowly, one a man suffering with asthma, and one a Cypriot with a poor command of English of such a kind that repeated difficulties have been experienced over matters of correct collection and delivery of items for the school. (W. M. Duane, 1962a)

The use of the term ‘visitation’ by the LCC for what was, in effect, a detailed inspection of the school is disingenuous to say the least. It certainly was not in keeping with the Ministry’s visitation by Munday six months earlier. To illustrate:

Comments made after the visit by Mr Munday to the Headmaster were to the effect:

- 1. He had enjoyed his visit very much.*
- 2. He had enjoyed every moment of his discussions with the Heads of Houses and the Heads of Dept. he had met.*
- 3. That the visit was not in any real sense an inspection but rather a matter of getting to know the staff and the problem at this stage.*
- 4. He thought that the HM was doing the job as well as anyone could and possibly better than most.*

(Munday, 1961)

A transcript of the full report of Munday’s visit (documented by Duane for his staff) can be found in a document by Duane (W. M. Duane, 1961a).

The inspectors spent four days in the school, during which no discussions or pleasantries were exchanged with the staff or with Duane, who was probably not surprised as MacGowan

was not in the habit of speaking to him unless he had to. It is worthwhile pointing out here two important facts: (1) Risinghill had been open for just five terms, not five years or more, so was not due a formal inspection; and (2) no Ministry inspection reports were *ever* produced on Risinghill, not even when the decision was made to close it. This was not a school in crisis; it was, as Munday had indicated, performing quite well in the circumstances. And he (Munday) was also pleased with Duane's performance, begging the question: What was the purpose of this visit? Even if one were to make the assumption that the school had, within six months of the Ministry's visit, deteriorated to such an extent that a full and formal inspection was required, why call it a visitation? And if this was a formal inspection, surely it would have been organised by the Ministry, as opposed to the LCC, with Munday (or another Ministry HMI) taking charge of the proceedings? These were legitimate questions that Berg had also asked but were never addressed by the LCC.

C6.1 – Looking for Answers - Again

Working on the premise that Risinghill had, perhaps, taken a turn for the worse, the authors decided to look more closely at what was happening in the school in the period September 1961 through to January 1962 to see what might have triggered such a high-powered visit. But apart from a race relations survey, which appeared to be causing some friction amongst the staff and was brought to an end prematurely, they did not find anything of significance to report.

C6.2 - Race Relations Survey

The race relations study was being conducted by a student from the Institute of Education (IOE), under the guidance of Professor James - the same professor who had undertaken the research study *The Teacher was Black* at Howe Dell, as reported in chapter B1. (James and Tenen, 1953)

All was going well until three Jewish communist members of staff complained because the student was Lebanese and not, as they had originally thought, Greek. To cut a long story short, tensions arose between Duane and these teachers, which resulted in the LCC ordering Duane to stop the survey immediately. Duane was so upset by this that he sought the advice of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), also the London Teachers' Association (LTA), both of whom, by the looks of things, were either powerless to act or unwilling. He was so

angry that, at one point, he resigned his membership of the NUT although he was persuaded to change his mind later. In his letter to the NUT he complained that:

. . . communist members are wielding too much influence on my staff when they stopped a research project into racial relations at Risinghill School.
(W. M. Duane, 1962d)

When writing to the authors of *Schools on Trial* (Fletcher et al., 1985), a book in which Risinghill features prominently, Duane expanded on this incident further:

My explanation of the research and the method/s used were discounted and a resolution passed to stop it, a copy being sent direct to County Hall....

The other communist members of staff, some six in all and including Greek, Canadian and British members, cooperated fully with the research, but the disagreement between the two groups was picked on to emphasise 'staff disagreement with the policies of the head'. (W. M. Duane, 1985)

The authors were at a loss to understand why the LCC would have supported a handful of communist teachers over Duane, and on a racial issue at that. They wondered if this was because the survey was something that Duane had instigated without first seeking the LCC's approval, but this was not the case. Other London schools were participating in this study with the LCC's blessing, and with the same research student. His name was Mr Kawa, but in Berg's book he was given the pseudonym 'Mr Jedda':

Mr Jedda, by the way, being thrown out of Risinghill, went on to other London schools, where the staff did not mind him at all. (Berg, 1968b, p141)

Having seen the documents relating to this survey, again the authors were at a loss to understand why the LCC had stopped it. Here is a summary of the types of questions asked of the pupils:

(a) *Friendships.* *A questionnaire designed to discover how far friendships crossed boundaries of colour and/or nationality, and to discover children's views on the qualities thought desirable in a friend.*

(b) *Form A. A questionnaire designed to discover the views of white children on coloured people in this country*

(c) *Form B. A questionnaire for coloured and Cypriot children dealing with their experiences and feelings about their treatment since arriving in the country.*

(d) *Attitude Scale. A scale designed to discover the range and frequency of attitudes towards coloured people expressed during the discussions with the children and in their replies to Form A.*

(W. M. Duane, 1962b)

At Risinghill, where there were children of many different nationalities (nineteen in total) there was much to be learned from this work and, crucially, it was in keeping with other national studies of the day:

The first nation-wide investigation into Britain's colour problem is to be carried out. Its aim: To prevent a race-hate explosion. The probe which will take five years is to be carried out by the Institute of Race Relations. The cost - £70,000 – will be paid by the Nuffield Foundation...

Facts on segregation, housing, education, employment, health and public order will be compiled.

(Daily Mirror, 1963, p2)

It is also worth pointing out here that, at this time, the cold war with communist Russia was at a height with Britain and America treating every member of the Communist Party as a potential traitor or spy. The LCC was not a body that was renowned for being a communist sympathiser; in fact the opposite was probably true, so this decision did not make any sense whatsoever. However, as will be shown in this chapter, there was a method in the madness, with serious consequences for some.

The central theme of the 1962 visitation report, which later became known as the 'MacGowan Report' was one of MD not carrying his staff with him. The authors have interviewed some of the teachers and know that, although there were divisions in the school,

many of the staff was supportive of Duane and of his policies. The removal of CP within weeks of Risinghill opening is a prime example of this. They also know – from their survey with these teachers - that there *was* a small communist faction at Risinghill, and this did cause a lot of dissent in the ranks, making life difficult for Duane:

There was a considerable problem among the staff caused by one or two rabid communists. I felt that they added to the difficulties by causing dissent and discontent. (Canelle, 2005)

So, although MacGowan maintained that Duane did not carry his staff with him, the authors' research with the teachers (discussed in more detail in *The Waste Clay*) does not support this. Rather it supports the idea that some in the LCC were prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to destabilise the school, and jumping into bed with the communists to achieve this objective seems to have been par for the course. The repercussions of this, however, would have horrified Duane, the EC, the LCC hierarchy and even the central government. In all probability, this would have shocked some of the mischief-makers too:

There was a communist teacher, Mr Birch. He was the one who opened me up to the communist ways. We read about Stalin and Lenin. Kids have all got to be the same and have all got to be kept to the same system. Michael Duane, he wanted kids to be individual and that was where the clash was. I went to a few meetings - they don't want you to have a view, so long as you do as you are told. No one is anything better and no one is anything less, you are all the same. That is how he (Birch) wanted the school to run. We used to interview each other in class. I was into Bob Dillon [Dylan] at the time and he said Bob Dillon was a communist, that's how I got into it. Birch said the school lacked discipline and he was quite happy when the school ended." (Michael D., 2005)

Duane was very open-minded and did not force his views (political or otherwise) on his staff or his pupils. Those teachers whom the authors came into contact with at Risinghill conducted themselves in the same, professional manner, and this was probably the case in most other schools. Therefore, if children were being indoctrinated into the communist ways at Risinghill (as Michael D has suggested) then it was the LCC that was responsible for this, not Duane.

C6.3 – Report on the LCC’s Visit

The MacGowan report was, as intimated, very negative and critical of Duane. It ran to 32 pages; an unwieldy document for what was purported to have been an informal visit. Extracts from this report are to be found in the IOE Archives (London County Council, 1962c). As Berg pointed out in her book, the report “drew officially a firm line between the head and his staff” (Berg, p132), and attacked Duane unashamedly:

It praised work that was being done in the school while at the same time saying the head was working against it. It spoke of instructions to the staff lacking precision, which is very strange since Inspector MacGowan when he first saw Mr Duane’s initial routine instructions to staff – a most unusual and conscientious document at that time – was heard to remark that Mr Duane had done everything for his staff but tell them how to wipe their noses. (Berg, 1968b, p132)

It was MacGowan’s criticism of Risinghill’s failure to recruit children in the higher ability groups, however, that was of particular interest to the authors:

This year, Risinghill has failed to recruit any children in the two top categories at eleven.” (London County Council, 1962c)

As has been reported, of the 403 first choice applications to the school in September 1960, only five (apparently) could be found in the top ability group⁵⁴. And in 1961 there were none at all. One would expect a local HMI to be aware of these facts, also the spread of abilities across Gifford, Ritchie, Northampton and Bloomsbury, and the local primary schools from which the Risinghill intake in September 1960 had been drawn. Moreover, MacGowan had been sharing the deputy head’s office almost from the day that the school had opened so it is inconceivable that he was unaware of her involvement with the admissions to the school; a responsibility that she shared with one of his colleagues at County Hall, that being the School Inquiry Officer or Admissions Officer as they were sometimes called. This is a critical element of the Risinghill story, and one that is covered in more detail later. Suffice to say here that Risinghill’s roll dropped dramatically in September 1961, but MacGowan does not mention this in his report at all.

⁵⁴

We could not find the definitive number of first choice applications for 1961, 1962 or 1963.

Assuming these inspectors (all local HMI's) had experience of the schools from which the Risinghill children had been drawn, it is also difficult to see how any of them could have expected Risinghill, after just five terms, to perform to the same, high academic standards as the grammar. Duane, it would seem, was expected to walk on water. When he received this report he was devastated. Three days later he was summoned to County Hall to receive instructions. This was on the last day of term so he was not given any time to investigate the complaints:

It is clear that certain urgent steps must be taken by you to cope with these situations, and in order to help you to do this I am asking the Deputy Education Officer and some of his colleagues to discuss them with you. I shall be glad therefore if you will meet him at County Hall at 3.30 p.m. on Friday, 9 March (room 272), main building). (Houghton, 1962)

The 'help' turned out to be a severe dressing down during which he was told, in no uncertain terms, that this was the blackest report that the officials had ever seen. He was also ordered by Dr Briault to bring back CP and public expulsion to restore order (Berg). Even more threatening, Duane was told at this meeting to get legal representation; the implication being that his job was on the line. Despite being taken completely by surprise, Duane did not buckle. He refused to bring back CP, pointing out that there had been no violence in the school for a long time and that even MacGowan had had to acknowledge this in his report. The officials, however, were in no mood to argue the finer points. But Duane was equally determined to stick to his guns. In 1968, when Berg's book was published, all of the officials involved, including Briault, denied making any such threats (Guardian, 1968a), but a letter that Duane wrote to Houghton following this meeting suggests otherwise:

After very detailed discussion I agreed....

(ii) to canalise the handling of disciplinary problems in order to achieve more uniformity, but not basically to alter our present methods. I could not, for example, accept either corporal punishment or public expulsion. (W. M. Duane, 1962e)

In the same letter, Duane made other, equally interesting, points about MacGowan and the inspection in general.

Margaret Duane did tell the authors that her husband was so badly shaken by this meeting that he had thought seriously of resigning:

Mind you, he nearly gave up when that awful inspection report came in. I remember he came to me and said “look, look.” He said “I think I should resign.” (M. Duane, 2006)

From the notes of a meeting produced by the LCC in January 1965 recording a discussion between Duane, Houghton and the chair of the Education Committee (EC), Mr James Young, it is clear that Duane felt sufficiently threatened by Houghton and his officers to ensure that he took someone with him to every meeting with these officers thereafter. The record of this meeting shows that he was accompanied (not represented) by a Mr C L Allen, General Secretary of the LTA (London County Council, 1965b). Further evidence of Duane protecting himself in this way can be found in: (1) a document that he produced for Berg as background material for the writing of her book; and (2) a letter that he wrote to the authors of *Schools on Trial* where he makes this point emphatically:

... the change when I was accompanied by a lawyer hired by myself simply to act as a witness, not supplied by the NUT. (W. M. Duane, 1985)

On one occasion I employed an independent solicitor to accompany me to a meeting with the Education Officer. As we entered his room the E.O. asked me whom I had brought with me. When I told him that it was a solicitor whom I had asked to witness the meeting, he said, “Oh, then we shall have to be very careful about what we say, shan’t we”, and, of course, on that occasion, said nothing threatening or objectionable.” (W. M. Duane, 1985)

C6.4 – Fighting Back

With his wife’s support, Duane responded to each of MacGowan’s complaints:

So I went through it all. “Look”, I said, “Here it says this is good, that is good” (there were so many things that said it was good). I said “How can it all be so good if you are so terrible?” So we went through it line by line. I don’t want to praise myself up too much, but I really did try and sort this

out because he really could not see a way out then, he really could not see a way out. (M. Duane, 2006)

Margaret was an experienced secretary, accustomed to sorting the chaff from the wheat and she was able to type up Duane's response to this report with ease. Entitled 'Commentary on Report of Inspection of Risinghill School 29th January – 1st February 1962' this document makes interesting reading. It can be found at the IOE (item MD/5/6/7).

Duane had brought MacGowan's report to the attention of the chair of Risinghill's governing body (GB), Mr Harper, discussing with him his response to it, which Harper agreed with. This, however, landed him in trouble again with Houghton's officers, who viewed the disclosure to be a serious breach of his (Duane's) contractual terms. This, of course, was ridiculous. Leaving aside the fact that these officers had no jurisdiction over Duane's contract of employment, this being the responsibility of the EC, he had a moral, if not statutory, duty to bring this matter to the attention of his GB. On the contractual issue, in his letter to the authors of *Schools on Trial* again Duane makes this point plainly:

Of course Directors of Education, chairmen and members of committees do change and no demand is made on their successors that they should honour the implied contracts of their predecessors to support the heads in carrying out the programmes presented to them. Nevertheless it should be made very clear that the appointment of a head implies the acceptance by the LEA of the head's programme, and any subsequent 'trial' or criticism should be examined to see whether the LEA has fulfilled its part of the implied contract before any criticism or condemnation of the head be made. A copy of the head's statement of objectives as presented to the appointing committee might well be included in the file of documents kept about every head – with subsequent modifications added as agreed between the head and the LEA. (W. M. Duane, 1985)

Although Houghton never responded to Duane's detailed commentary on the MacGowan report, Duane did achieve a measure of success. Six months later a smaller group of LCC HMIs, which included MacGowan, returned for another visitation and this time they produced a glowing report. The teachers were amused as they were not doing things any differently, begging another question: Was this level of improvement possible in such a short

period or was the previous inspection flawed? MacGowan disappeared off the scene soon afterwards.

Berg did tell the authors that the officials were not so much concerned about MD's progressive methods - more that he was making them public:

As I said to you, he was told that it didn't matter what he did, they didn't care what he did, so long as he kept it secret. They just did not want it being made public. (Berg, 2004)

There could be some merit in this argument as Houghton's officers were, without a doubt, paranoid about Duane's public promotion of the school's achievements, as will be seen in the following chapters.

Following hot on the heels of the MacGowan report was the Schools Planning Sub-Committee's recommendation (on 8 February 1962) that Risinghill should become an eight-form entry school. This recommendation was endorsed by the EC in the following July without explanation. As with the development of Risinghill, this decision appears to have been shrouded in secrecy. It was never brought to Duane's attention or seemingly to the school's GB, yet the chair of the Schools Planning Sub-Committee, Ms Murray, was a governor at Risinghill. The authors checked the GB minutes (copies of which are held in the MD archive at the IOE) for this period and did not find anything to suggest that this recommendation was discussed.

Coincidentally 1962 was the year in which Houghton produced his review of the *London School Plan 1947*, entitled the *London School Review*. It is worth noting here that, in this publication, Houghton reaffirmed the LCC's "commitment to comprehensive schools, but with fewer, and in many cases, smaller schools than had been envisaged after the war." (Kerckhoff *et al.*, 1996). Where Risinghill was concerned, however, the decision to make it smaller appeared (to the authors) to have been made in 1958 or thereabouts, as will be examined in the next chapter, and in chapter C8.

C6.5 – The End of a Traumatic Year

Duane's prize day speech in October 1962 was explosive. Parts of it were recorded in the *Islington Gazette*, and would not have pleased the LCC officials:

Examinations are necessary in a highly technical society like ours, but to measure a school by exam results is like estimating the quality of a man's life by the number of calories he burns, or the number of foot-pounds of energy he expends. They bear no relation to the real purposes of living. Real life is bound up with other people, with personal relations, with love and man's need to serve. (Berg, 1968b)

Despite the fact that Risinghill had a disproportionate number of children in the lower ability groups, its GCE results for 1962 showed a modest improvement on 1961. Thirty-nine children took the exam and twenty passed. The RSA results, however, are unknown.

Berg records the year ending⁵⁵ with a spectacular nativity play where even the most backward child was given the opportunity to shine at something - be it as a musician, singer or maker of sets and costumes. Unfortunately none of the LCC officials were present to witness this event, which is a pity as they might have learned something about the school and what Duane was trying to achieve with the children:

The nativity play put a glorious end to an appalling year ... a year which had started with an inspector talking of certain children as 'chronically ill-disposed elements'.

It is one of my greatest regrets that I never saw it, this play in which every child's nationality was something to contribute, to delight in. (Berg, 1968b, p143)

The *Islington Gazette* loved it, as quoted in Berg:

'Not for Risinghill the worn-out gimmicks – the paper wings for Angel Gabriel and cute kiddies wrapped in yards of mummy's discarded curtains and a cardboard star while parents smile affectionately. For Risinghill – the impact of luxurious costumes just like King Herod and the three kings from the East must have worn. For Risinghill - the impact of a thunderingly majestic orchestra which accompanied a grandiose choir. For Risinghill – the impact of a multi-racial cast adding oriental splendour and striking authenticity to this most exciting of tales. As I left

⁵⁵

There is some doubt about the date of this play – as noted below.

Risinghill Street and walked in the chilly December night air down Chapel Street Market, I wept slowly with emotion at the greatest nativity play I have ever had the honour and privilege to see.

(For Risinghill too, of course, a real baby).

(Berg, 1968b, p143)

The last parenthesis was Berg's comment. To the RRG's delight, the baby (Sarah Burton) contacted the group to ask if it had any photographs of the event. Sarah explained that she was the daughter of Anne Burton who, at the time, was head of music at Risinghill. The authors could not help but laugh at Burton's reason for including her baby daughter in the production:

Apparently a real baby was used to make the children behave more responsibly (they had been chucking the doll Jesus round the stage and playing football with it.). (Burton, 2010)

There is some discrepancy over the date of this event. In her book, Berg states that it was in 1962 but Burton assured the RRG that the year was 1963.

CHAPTER C7 - The beginning of the End - 1963

*'The building suspense may break your heart, but
there is still a Tempest that has to start. You can
shed tears, create your own rain, but the coming
storm still remains.'*

*Herman Hoyte
(‘The Calm Before the Storm’)*

Fifty-nine pupils were entered for the GCE ‘O’-Level in 1963 and thirty-four passed. (Berg, 1968b) The ‘A’-Level was also being taken for the first time: only three students were entered but two gained a respectable pass. With the A forms still including several children in the lower (Group 4) ability range, this was quite an achievement. It is all the more remarkable when one considers that Risinghill took children other schools had refused to take because they were difficult.

Although Houghton’s officers appear to have had a very low opinion of the school and of Duane, many educationalists were so impressed with Risinghill that they invited Duane to visit their establishments to talk to their staffs and students about it:

This is how it was, people wanted to hear about it. Robin Pedley, the principal of Exeter University had been to Risinghill and he was very pleased with what he found ... that they were not all lunatics! He was delighted with the school, I remember because I met him. I am sure he must have read things about it because he said, “Please come down and talk to my staff and the students.” That was my first visit to the West Country. (M. Duane, 2006)

The school was also becoming of interest to educationalists from abroad:

From Israel:

*After completing your programme I visited a comprehensive school
(Risinghill School, Kings Cross) on the recommendation of a friend from*

Israel. This school's problems are very close to the problems in many of our schools. The problems facing the headmaster are immense and I was very impressed by the effort and devotion of the headmaster and his staff, and by the fantastic enthusiasm of that difficult type of child for their school....

For these reasons I strongly recommend you to include this school on your list of interesting educational experiments for the benefit of visitors to your country.” (Lowenstein, 1964)

From the USA:

After meeting four of your 4th year leavers, I was much impressed by the optimism with which they seemed to view their future. They seemed not so much to be leaving school (“What good will it do me?”), as going out toward real opportunity. (Aldrich, 1964)

A key part of Duane's teaching was to give the children a sense of worth: school assemblies and prize days, for example, often carried a theme of self-belief, contributing no doubt to the confidence of the Fourth Year pupils taking exams or going out into the world of work. Low unemployment and a strong work ethic was another huge factor in the equation, and this was particularly the case with working-class children, who, on the whole, did not see the point of staying on at school to take examinations, not that many secondary moderns offered them the opportunity to do so. The majority were equally disinterested in going to college or university, if this was on their radar at all⁵⁶. Money is what motivated them, and in the 1960s there was a lot of money to be earned. With full employment, it was relatively easy for young people to move from one job to another and they did so, frequently. Employers were not hung up about this, nor were they worried about formal qualifications. A school leaver was paid the going rate for the job, and this was often the equivalent of a university graduate in their first year of employment. Genuine (indentured) apprenticeships were also available then, enabling young people to work and study at the same time.

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that at this time only some 5% of the population received a university education, and that for many institutions Latin to 'O'-Level was still a requirement for entry – something way beyond the resources of a school like Risinghill to provide.

Duane, it has to be said, had little or no time for examinations, believing they were “all part of the process to select out those who are going to work with their hands and those who are going to work with their heads” (Laiken, Undated). He was far more interested in breaking the pattern of the lower social class believing it was fit for only certain occupations, and it was in this context that he encouraged his pupils to stay on at school and make the most of their education. When they achieved their goals, he could not have been more delighted:

I remember one ethnic boy – quite a long time after Risinghill closed. We were in London when Mike spotted a black policeman on duty. He was a Risinghill pupil and they recognised each other instantly; it was absolutely lovely. Michael was so pleased. (M. Duane, 2006)

It is a sad reflection of our times that Duane’s messages of self-esteem are still being preached in some schools today. Ironically this includes Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (EGA)⁵⁷ formerly called Starcross, and before that Risinghill. And by none less than the USA’s First Lady in 2009, Michelle Obama:

‘You too can control your own destiny, please remember that. Whether you come from a council estate or a country estate, your success will be determined by your own confidence and fortitude.’ (Obama, 2009)

As the authors draft this chapter, EGA is being demolished to make way for a bright, new academy. They do wonder, however, whether this academy will offer anything different to what has gone before. The acid test will be if someone else is standing in Obama’s place twenty, forty or even sixty years from now, giving another generation of Islington children the same, desperate messages of self-belief and hope.

C7.1 – Life after the 1962 Inspection

Nineteen-sixty-three was a quiet year, quiet in the sense that Duane was left to run his school without too much interference from Houghton’s officers. By now most of the teachers were coming around to Duane’s whole school ethos and were taking great pride in their achievements with the pupils. The fact that so many educationalists were taking an interest in their work was an added boost as the 1962 inspection had almost destroyed them. Unfortunately this was a period of calm before the inevitable storm.

⁵⁷ Yes, in the same Assembly Hall the authors sat in nearly 50 years ago!

In her book, Berg accuses the LCC of plotting to close Risinghill long before the official decision was taken. Although the LCC denied this, there is no escaping the fact that: (1) Risinghill was never given an official opening; (2) a whole department (photography) was closed down within a year of it opening; (3) the staffing was cut back at a time when a third of the teaching vacancies remained unfilled; and (4) an advertisement lodged by Duane in September 1964 with the Education Department (for a deputy head to replace his deputy, who was retiring at the end of the year) was never activated. No explanation was provided by the LCC for any of these actions - either at the time or later when Berg's book was published. While the authors were, at first, sceptical of Berg's claims, not wanting to believe that the Risinghill children were victims of a conspiracy, the 1962 inspections coupled with certain documents that they had found in the course of their research, prompted them to take a closer look at her claims. One document (found at the LMA) that they had not paid much attention to initially, largely because at the time of discovery they had not understood its import, was crucial to them piecing together Berg's conspiracy theory. This document (a memorandum from Houghton to one of the Education Committee's (EC) sub-committees) is discussed in the next chapter. The Parent Teachers Association's (PTA) appeal to the Secretary of State was another key document that helped them to unravel much of the mystery that has surrounded Risinghill. Berg, without doubt, would have had access to the PTA document as this was given to the authors by Bob Dixon, who was directly involved with the appeal and was given the pseudonym 'Mr Gwyn' in Berg's book. Indeed, it was through Berg that contact with him was made. The PTA appeal is examined in more detail later, but for now the authors cite an extract from it to provide a flavour of what follows from hereon in:

Many parents who wished to transfer their children to Risinghill over the past year and more have been told by a member of the Divisional Officer's staff, by the Deputy Head of Risinghill at that time, and by the School Inquiry Officer that the school was full, that there was a waiting list of over two years, that there was hardly standing room in the workshops, and so on. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

The above claim was made in 1965 at a parents meeting when said parents, after listening politely to the LCC's reasons for closing their school (on the grounds that it had become unpopular), began to speak up about their experiences. Their comments came as a complete surprise to Duane, who had no idea that his deputy had been turning parents away from the

school on the pretext that it was full. Unfortunately his deputy had retired by now so could not be questioned about this. When examining the LCC's and the Secretary of State's consultation with the parents and the community as a whole, the authors will come back to this aspect of the appeal and Crosland's response to it.

To return to 1963: despite all the obstacles that were being thrown in its path, Risinghill continued to flourish with Mr Munday, the Ministry HMI, sending some of his Ministerial colleagues (notably a Mr Craddock) to view the school, so impressed was he with it:

My thanks to you and Miss A and 4T for a pleasant two days last week.

(Craddock, 1963)

In returning this document through me, Mr Craddock emphasises its value as a basis for discussion especially among your younger teachers.

(Munday, 1963)

It would seem the only officials to have been dissatisfied with Duane's performance were those reporting directly to Houghton. Unfortunately for Houghton, Duane was becoming quite a celebrity in educational circles, receiving invitations to speak from a diverse range of public institutions, and not necessarily just about Risinghill, but on a variety of child-related topics. He was a talented head, also a charismatic speaker, and because he was an ardent supporter of the comprehensive, he grabbed every opportunity to promote its values. These engagements took up most of his evenings and weekends.

If 1963 was quiet, the authors suspect it was because the plotters were regrouping. The 1962 inspection had not delivered a failing school with an incompetent head, and with so much interest now being shown in both, it stands to reason that the task of removing one or the other was now going to be more difficult. Some people will be sceptical of this analysis and the authors do not blame them. They, too, struggled with the idea as they did not want to believe that they were mere pawns in a sick, political game. All the evidence, however, was pointing them in this direction so they were obliged to follow the trail to see where it took them.

C7.2 – The Grammar School Politics

Houghton appears to have favoured a school that was more closely aligned to the grammar, but Risinghill did not fit this model in any shape or form. And with Duane at its helm was

never going to. Another problem for Houghton (as the authors see it) is that while he, personally, might have given up on the idea of bringing London's grammar schools into the comprehensive, this issue had not yet been resolved by his masters, the elected representatives sitting on the EC. In 1963, despite all the political in-fighting over the inclusion of the grammar in the comprehensive, the LCC, to all intent and purpose, remained committed to its 1947 plan for a system of comprehensive high schools in the capital. (*London School Plan 1947*) (LSP). Houghton was reviewing the LSP at this time, and if the truth be known was probably struggling to make any headway with it. To complicate matters, at its autumn conference in 1963, the Labour Party had made a commitment to get rid of the 11+ examination (and by implication selection) suggesting it, too, had not given up on the idea of a single secondary school for all abilities. In the public imagination, the comprehensive was, therefore, to be a school in which the grammar was to be incorporated. Behind the scenes, however, Labour remained divided on this issue, as the following quote illustrates:

Harold Wilson's 'science and socialism' speech appeared progressive and forward-looking in 1963, but it was not followed up by a genuine commitment to policies promoting equality of opportunity or enhanced opportunities for hitherto deprived working-class children. In Benn's view: Wilson used to make speeches in the Conference sounding like Nye Bevan and in the Cabinet sounding like Reg Prentice. (In Chitty, 1989)

Reg Prentice, as mentioned earlier, became Anthony Crosland's deputy when Labour came to power a year later, and some years after that defected from Labour to the Conservatives.

It was not until Wilson became leader of the Labour Party (in 1964) that he began to talk more openly about the comprehensive, describing it as a school that provided a 'grammar school education for all' which, of course, was a different concept all together. This was, however, something that many wanted to hear, in particular middle-class parents, who were disillusioned with a system that did not give their children a route to the university and/or what they perceived to be a better start to life. Consequently, in the run up to the 1964 General Election, there was a lot of rhetoric from Labour about its plans for education, but there was no firm commitment on the comprehensive or the grammar.

Houghton, however, appears to have abandoned the LSP in 1958 (or thereabouts) and was moving the ‘grammar school for all’ idea on apace albeit that, at the time, he does not appear to have had a mandate for this. What other explanation can there be for his disagreements with the Advisory Committee (AC) on where Risinghill should be built, what schools should be incorporated into it, and who should be its head? The same analysis can be applied to his proposal for a GCE syllabus at Risinghill when this was a betrayal, in every sense, of the LSP, which had promised an education that could not be more far removed from the grammar. (Page twenty-seven of the LSP refers, as per the quote in chapter C2).

With a General Election looming, the fight for the grammar school became even more intense with the Conservatives using every trick in the book to derail what they believed to be Labour’s plans for a true comprehensive school. In consequence, the comprehensive ideal began to come under attack in some sections of the media, resulting in Houghton’s officers becoming even more paranoid about keeping the LCC’s new schools out of the media spotlight: one of the reasons, no doubt, for them getting hot under the collar every time Risinghill was mentioned in the press. Examples of this will be provided when looking at the politics immediately before and after the 1964 General Election in chapters C9 and C10.

The Conservative’s line of attack was to ridicule the progressive approach being taken by many heads in the new comprehensive schools that were springing up in different parts of the country. What is interesting about Risinghill, however, is that, on the one occasion that it was attacked publicly, the politics of the grammar were forgotten with practically every newspaper (national and local) jumping to its defence, examples of which will be given in chapter C8. Because Duane believed passionately in the comprehensive model, he promoted Risinghill at every opportunity, thinking this would please the LCC, when, in truth, the publicity was, for the likes of Houghton and his team, hugely embarrassing. Consequently, he had some very odd conversations with Houghton’s officers as a result:

Dr Payling particularly mentioned the desirability of avoiding Press publicity. But only two years ago, when I was discussing with Mr Turner and Mr Timpson the best way in which we could build up the number of children in the higher levels of ability, so as more adequately to compete with the Owens Schools and with the long established schools on our doorstep, such as Holloway, Woodberry Down and the Barnsbury Schools, Mr Timpson urged the importance of Press publicity. In consequence I

took every opportunity to establish good relations with the local Press by supplying them with news about the school and the P.T.A. I invited them to our functions and they responded well. (W. M. Duane, 1964b)

Duane does seem to have been a bit naïve in this respect, not connecting the reluctance of these people to avoid publicity with what was happening on the political front, that being the covert nurturing (by some in the Labour Party and some in the LCC) of the ‘grammar schools for all’ concept where talk about poor, backward and/or difficult children was unwelcome. Hindsight, however, is a wonderful thing, and Duane, like many other educationalists of that time and place, could not have foreseen what was on the horizon – a dramatic U-turn on the comprehensive that would seal its fate forever. Nor could Duane have known that, behind the scenes, plans were afoot to close Risinghill and this was another, probably the prime, reason for him getting into trouble with Houghton’s officers every time the school was mentioned in the press.

Some (in fact many) people have suggested that Duane was trying to create a Summerhill in the state system, but as far as the authors can tell he was providing an education that was in line with the LSP and in line with what the Labour Party had been promising for years but had failed to deliver.

C7.3 – Immigration

A further source of embarrassment for the conspirators was that Duane was becoming very popular as a speaker. Amongst the many invitations he received was one that took him to the House of Commons. Here he addressed a committee of MPs on the thorny issue of educating the ethnic minority groups. Integration was difficult then, especially in schools like Risinghill where there were so many different nationalities, and where many of the pupils could not speak English. The government had not produced any guidelines on how to deal with this problem, so schools were being left to their own devices, and many were struggling to cope. Risinghill, however, was making great strides in this area, and its efforts were being recognised by the immigrant communities, notably the Greek community, where, as has been reported, there was a lot of racial tension between the Greek-Cypriot and Greek-Turkish communities at this time on account of the problems in Cyprus:

... the Greek newspaper carried the glowing account of Risinghill’s work which I mentioned earlier; and later, at a Greek-Turkish party where

Michael Duane was a guest, the editor, a Greek poet, talked enthusiastically to him about Risinghill – and introduced him to a friend who particularly wanted to meet him, to express appreciation and friendship and ask him questions... (Berg, 1968b)

Duane believed that, if children were to live and work together in harmony, there was a need to give them some appreciation of the different faiths and cultures in their school. He also tried to educate the parents about what he was doing by visiting the homes of some of the ethnic minority groups with teachers who could speak their language. Houghton's officers did not approve of this, probably because the teaching of English to immigrant children was not in keeping with their own, personal views:

While sympathizing with the desire to foster knowledge of the language and culture of the place of birth of immigrant minorities, I do not feel that this can in any sense be regarded as the responsibility of London schools. The task of the school is really the reverse - to integrate into the English way of life the children of immigrants who have chosen to live and be educated in this country... (Briault, 1963)

This view seems to have been shared by some of the school governors who, as stated earlier, were opposed to the idea of recruiting foreign teachers to help the immigrant children. However, these teachers proved to be an invaluable asset, resolving conflicts before they got out of hand and generally acting as translators for the rest of the staff as well as the pupils.

To provide a flavour of what life was like in the school, and why Duane was keen to foster understanding among the children, here are some extracts from a conversation between four white English girls and a teacher, as reported by Berg:

Joy: I think the blacks should go back, cos there's old people who want homes and there's all darkies in 'em – and Greeks.

Marlene: My mum says if they all went back to their own country there wouldn't be no trouble about it all...

Rene: They eat Kit-e-Kat, monkeys, bananas, green bananas. They eat garlic and even pigeons....

Teacher: I've eaten pigeon pie. They eat it in Gloucestershire. They shoot wood pigeons.

(Berg, 1968b, p138)

The full quotation can be found in Berg (pages 137 to 139); note that the names of the girls quoted here were anonymised by Berg.

Looking back, the authors can remember having these perceptions - of black people eating Kit-e-Kat (a well-known cat food in the 1960s), green bananas and pigeons. However, these perceptions and comments were generally made in ignorance and not out of malice. As children, they simply did not know any different. They and their fellow pupils had no perception of nationality and/or what constituted Englishness. Isabel, for example, was born in India (of white European parentage) so did not look Indian or Asian, nor did she speak the language. However, she was considered to be Indian nevertheless. She was something of an enigma because two of her younger siblings, who *were* born in England, were regarded as English on the one hand but Indian on the other. Similarly, the English children did not understand the differences between the Greek-Cypriot and the Greek-Turkish children who were all lumped together as Greeks or the Asian children who came from different parts of India and spoke different languages.

For the majority of pupils, however, race was not an issue. It certainly did not get in the way of friendships. Some of the pupils who participated in the research for this book recalled, with delight, learning to swear in different languages and teaching their foreign friends the English equivalent.

Around September/October time, Elspeth Huxley from *Punch* magazine visited the school to meet with Duane and the Divisional Education Officer. She was planning a series of articles about immigrants in England, and because Rivinghill was gaining recognition for its work with Islington's immigrant community she was interested in doing a feature on the school – but without mentioning it by name, or Duane. The Divisional Education Officer appears to have gone along with this as he raised no objections; however, this article would later cause a massive row at County Hall.

C7.4 – The Newsom Report

Another reason for Risinghill receiving so much attention at this time was because of the Newsom Report, *Half our Future*, for which John Newsom was knighted in 1963. (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1963) This report focussed on the education of underprivileged children which, at the time, represented more than half of the secondary school population; Berg quotes D. V. Glass (1954):

They are really far more than half. Professor D.V. Glass, writing in his symposium Social Mobility in Britain (Routledge), says 'British sociologists have sometimes been accused of being obsessed with the underprivileged. But I regard 80% of children in secondary modern schools as underprivileged, and in the circumstances am prepared to be viewed as obsessed. (Berg, 1968b, p146)

Duane had known John Newsom for a long time; they shared the same educational values and Duane had adopted many of the Newsom principles at Risinghill. But like so many other reports of that era, the Newsom recommendations were accepted graciously by the government though never implemented in full:

Labour, the T.U.C. magazine, said '... the Newsom Report was received politely but non-committally by the Government as though it were the cart sanding the road of the Lord Mayor's Show'. Mr Charles Carter, chairman of the Schools Broadcasting Council, remarked much later 'The Newsom Report on "Half our Future" appears to have received rather less than half our attention.' The Guardian realized that the Newsom Report was a matter of making 'not just better scholars or better workers but better people' (this of course was exactly why it was landing in the waste-paper basket)... (Berg, 1968b, p146)

At Risinghill, only three teachers expressed any interest in discussing the Newsom Report with Duane. One of these teachers was Bob Dixon. The LCC showed no interest in it either, although it did participate later in a national survey to show that it was implementing some of the Newsom guidelines. None of the LCC's schools were named when the results of the survey were published, but direct quotes from Duane on Risinghill's House system were cited in this publication for which the LCC took credit. (Berg, 1968b, p147) This, by the way, was

the same House system which had come under attack from MacGowan in 1962, and which the officials had tried, desperately, to dismantle.

C7.5 - The Local Community

It was not just the immigrant communities that benefited from Risinghill's work: the local departments of social services in the surrounding boroughs; the almoners in the local hospitals; the Family Service Unit; the N.S.P.C.C; the Probation Service; and even the LCC's own Care Committee(s) all turned to the school for help in dealing with the community's social problems. The local Probation Officers were particularly supportive of Duane's methods. He was the answer to their prayers, and they made these declarations publicly. (Probation Officers of Clerkenwell Court, 1965). When any of the Risinghill children were in trouble with the law, Duane always made an effort to attend court to speak up for them. If he couldn't get there, he made sure someone else from the school attended in his place, explaining why the Probation Service was so enamoured of him.

By the end of the summer Duane had lost eight of the school's most experienced teachers: one to retirement, three to deputy headships, and four to departmental headships in other schools. On top of all the other staff cuts this was a massive blow.

The autumn 1963 intake was, as reported earlier, still only made up of 0.7% in the top ability group. In fact no intake at Risinghill had ever had more than eight children out of a thousand in this group, not that this bothered Duane unduly. His focus was to turn out good citizens, and to prepare his pupils for life after school. Parts of his prize day speech for that year were, again, very controversial:

'You cannot educate against the climate of opinion or attitude in the family, the neighbourhood or society. If our society were to give up the hypocritical pretence that this is a Christian country actuated by Christian principles when the difference between the wealthy and the poor is so blatant and were to bend its efforts to making Christian love or basic democracy a reality, then there would be no limit to the progress we could achieve with our children'. Quoted in (Berg, 1968b, p148)

CHAPTER C8 - Assassination - 1964

*'The promises of this world are, for the most part,
vain phantoms; and to confide in one's self, and
become something of worth and value is the best and
safest course.'*

Michaelangelo (1475 – 1564)

Because Risinghill was closed on account of its declining intake, the authors were curious about the number of rejected first choice applicants (117) in September 1960 as Risinghill should have been able to take all of the first-choice applications and more besides - providing the school was built in accordance with the *London School Plan 1947* (LSP). This called for a large, thirteen-form entry unit with a capacity for 1500 pupils, 2000 once fully comprehensive. The RRG did try to establish if (and when) the school had been scaled back by searching the Education Committee (EC) minutes for the period 1955 through to 1959; however, it did not find anything to suggest this.

Finding the answer to this question was crucial as Risinghill was closed because of a falling school roll; a roll that dropped dramatically in the period 1961-1964:

*Since that time, however, the intake to the school has steadily declined.
This year, with 240 places available for first-year pupils, only 142 could
be recruited, and of these only 76 made the school their first choice and 29
their second choice. In September 1964 the roll of the school fell to 854.
We have noted with regret that Risinghill school is no longer attracting the
numbers of pupils for which it was built and we are bound to anticipate
that, if the school remained open, its roll would continue to fall.
(Houghton, 1964b)*

In talking about what happened in the school towards the back end of 1964, the authors recognise that they are getting ahead of themselves here, but would ask the reader to bear with them as there are a number of strands to this part of the story and in order to appreciate how they all fit together, it is necessary to answer first some of the questions posed below, in particular the question: Was Risinghill built to accommodate a thirteen-form entry or eight-form entry school?

Starting with the above report from Houghton, the first thing to note is that it does not provide the data (number of applications to the school in the period 1961-1963) and, more telling, does not state the numbers for which Risinghill had been built, making it impossible for the reader to arrive at any meaningful conclusions about the scale of the decline. The school was clearly in trouble with a roll of just 854 if it had been built to accommodate 1500-2000 pupils, but the rejection of 117 first-choice applications to the school in 1960 (when the school roll stood at 1323) suggested that, despite the demand for places, the school had, indeed, been scaled back. The authors did try to establish the facts in this regard but were unsuccessful. They were also sceptical of Houghton's claim that this 'decline' was attributable to single-sex schools becoming more popular:

... The popularity of the nearby single sex secondary schools is increasing; this growing evidence of parental preference for single sex schools has no doubt, contributed to the decline of recruitment to Risinghill School. (London County Council, 1964)

Again, no evidence was found to support this claim: in fact there were several flaws in it, the most obvious flaw being that, if single-sex education was becoming more popular in the late fifties and early sixties, why was Risinghill built as a mixed unit in the first instance? And why close Ritchie, Bloomsbury and Northampton (all single-sex schools) to bring them into Risinghill if this was the case? This was of particular relevance to Northampton and Bloomsbury whom, the reader might recall, were earmarked in the *London School Plan 1947* (LSP) for amalgamation with the two Owens grammar schools in the area. While the grammar school politics of the day might well have prevented this from happening, several of the LCC's new comprehensives in the LSP *were* planned as single-sex units into which Bloomsbury and Northampton could easily have fitted as both were relatively small schools. Moreover, the original intention (according to the LSP) was to amalgamate Starcross with a *mixed* comprehensive in another part of London, making the LCC's decision to close Risinghill in order to accommodate Starcross all the more puzzling. The most compelling evidence, however, of there not being a demand for single-sex schools in Islington can be found in the LSP itself. Page twelve of the LSP refers specifically to the "advantages which some children derive from co-education and the desire of some parents for this form of education." This, the authors suggest, is why Risinghill was built as a mixed unit in 1958, and why Ritchie, Bloomsbury and Northampton were put into it.

Three years after Risinghill was closed, the single-sex school argument was dropped, making the authors even more suspicious of the LCC's original claim(s). According to Houghton then, Risinghill was closed simply because it had become unpopular:

The school was closed because the majority of Islington parents did not want to send their children there. (Houghton, 1968)

The RRG's first task was to establish whether there had been a sea change in parental attitudes towards co-education in Islington in the period in question (1960-1964). Second, there was a need to examine what happened in the school post 1960 to bring about Houghton's subsequent claim that Risinghill had become so unpopular that Islington parents no longer wanted to send their children there. Last but not least, a more intensive search of the LCC archives was required if the authors were to determine whether or not the school had been built to plan.

C8.1 - Single Sex or Co-education?

The RRG's research with the Risinghill pupils did not show a marked preference for single-sex schools; the majority could not remember their parents having strong views either way. This tied in with the authors' experiences, also that of their friends and family living in Islington at the time. They were also able to establish, from the MacGowan report of 1962, that the ratio across the whole school was 551 boys to 562 girls. (London County Council, 1962c)

Further evidence of there not being a convincing trend either way can be found in a survey that Duane undertook in 1965. Although this survey did not focus on single-sex education per se, it did look at the decline in secondary school rolls generally. This was towards the end of 1964/early 1965 when the decision to close Risinghill was first mooted. Three of the schools mentioned in the survey were in close proximity to Risinghill; two of these were single-sex units:

... Barnsbury Girls' School is between 200 and 300 short of capacity, Sir Philip Magnus Boys' School is from 150 to 200 short, and Islington Green (previously Tudor Rose) Mixed School has been over 300 short for some time. (W. M. Duane, 1965e)

So while the LCC appeared (in 1964) to have linked Risinghill's falling intake to a preference for single-sex education, in truth Risinghill was in no worse a position than Barnsbury and Sir Philip Magnus. Even the mixed schools, such as Islington Green, were suffering with falling rolls. It should, however, be pointed out that Duane's survey in January 1965 was at odds with data provided by the LCC at around the same time:

On the other hand, as the following table indicates, there is strong evidence of parental preference for single-sex schools in this area, particularly for girls ...

<i>School</i>	<i>First choice applications</i>
Starcross (SG) school	163
Barnsbury (SG) school (<i>Islington South West</i>)	261
Sir William Collins (SB) school, St. Pancras (Holborn and St Pancras South)	188
Sir Philip Magnus (SB) school, Finsbury (Shoreditch and Finsbury)	165

(London County Council, 1965a)

Given that the girls outnumbered the boys slightly at Risinghill (by 562 to 551) in 1962, it would seem Risinghill was the exception to the rule. Either that or Islington parents were, as the RRG's research with the pupils had suggested, not particularly worried either way⁵⁸.

It is a pity that, when giving the number of places available (240) for Risinghill, the authors of the above report did not think it appropriate to provide the same data for Barnsbury, Sir Philip Magnus and Sir William Collins. Without these details, it is impossible to make any comparisons with Risinghill. The inclusion of Starcross in this table is also misleading as Starcross was not located in Islington. It came under the LCC's North West Division of schools whereas Risinghill and the other schools mentioned in the above table all came under the North London Division. The authors have more to say about this later.

C8.2 - How Popular (or Unpopular) was Risinghill?

By MacGowan's own admission, the fights in the school had, by January 1962, largely disappeared so this could not have been the reason for the closure; something the authors had considered as a possible cause for the decline in applications after 1960. Although no evidence was found to support this theory, it is worth looking at this issue nevertheless. The first thing to point out is that, in the 1960s, children often got into scraps, especially boys. The authors' memories were of the usual skirmishes (or 'bundles' as they were called) which happened in every street and every school playground. For the pupils, it was part and parcel

⁵⁸ We deal with this in Book 2.

of everyday life. Secondly, it is important to remember that, at Risinghill, there were no high brick walls separating it from the main thoroughfare; therefore everything that happened in the playground(s) was open to public view, leading the authors to assume that, whatever the local parents saw on their travels, did not deter them from sending their children to the school. It is, however, fair to say that, in 1960, there was a huge problem with bullying and children fighting, as has been discussed. Along with some of their fellow pupils, the authors remember the rumours that were flying around the school when it first opened — of gangs carrying bicycle chains and knives. There were several boys who caused trouble, but as far as the authors were aware, there was only one gang to speak of and it did not have a reputation for carrying weapons of any kind. For this reason, most of the pupils took all of the gossip in their stride. That said, some of the pupils surveyed did witness some horrific assaults:

*... I noticed another boy walk through the gate licking an ice cream cone .. suddenly a group of boys (5 or 6) dashed up behind him and beat 9 bells of s*** out of him. I will never forget seeing him laying there .. motionless .. blood everywhere ... That was some introduction to the new school ...*
(Peter H., 2005)

The rest of Peter's quote reads: "but looking back ... I would not have changed it for the world." This is probably as good a description as any of how the majority of pupils surveyed felt about the school. It should be stressed, however, that the research sample (seventy questionnaires) is relatively small, and that at the beginning, Risinghill was undoubtedly a scary place for some, and not necessarily just because of the gang fights:

So, in 1960, I walked out of a Victorian institution, where you were afraid to make eye contact with the headmaster, into a flagship for comprehensive education and the swinging 60s. I was terrified. I was frightened of the other pupils, the teachers and school practices, but most of all, the violence. I was the wrong child in the wrong school. I don't for one minute suggest that Mr Duane was not a most exceptional man; probably years ahead of his time, but my memories are very different from the picture painted by Leila Berg in her account published in 1968.
(Yvonne F., 2004)

In *The Waste Clay*, the teachers' and pupils' experiences and perceptions of the school are examined in more detail, enabling people to form their own opinions about this particular issue. What the authors found difficult to comprehend was why 403 parents would make Risinghill their first choice in the summer of 1960, when the fighting was at a height, but in subsequent years lose faith in the school when the gang fights had all but disappeared.

The removal of Corporal Punishment (CP) as a contributory factor in the school's declining intake was also considered, but again the authors did not find any evidence to support this. Their parents were happy that CP had been abolished and the RRG's research with the pupils shows that, with one or two exceptions, the children were delighted:

I had come from an all boys school prior to that – which I can only describe as almost HELL ... Many times I had received the cane or the “slipper” I was desperate to escape! (Young, 2006)

*Sorry I do some of the staff an injustice .. there were a few decent ones, but most seemed to get a real pleasure in beating the c*** out of you in front of your peers .. so you can imagine my reaction when I arrived at Risinghill to find that corporal punishment was not dispensed .. it initially felt like being in heaven. (Peter H., 2005)*

So, whatever the LCC might have claimed, there was no doubt in the minds of the authors that Risinghill was incredibly popular with parents. Its facilities were second to none, but more important children who had failed the 11+ examination were given another chance – to take the GCE and other vocational qualifications, such as the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), which did not happen in most other secondary schools where the norm was for children to leave at the age of fifteen to start work. In Risinghill's first year, sixty-nine pupils had opted to stay on. Six were studying for the 'A'-Level and the rest were spread across Engineering (twenty-eight); Commerce (thirteen); Needlework (eleven); and Photography (six). (London County Council, 1962c)

Moreover, Risinghill's Engineering Department was the envy of many schools in and outside of Islington. Philip travelled an extraordinary distance because it had such a good reputation:

Travel: Train from Earlswood in Surrey (near Redhill) to London Bridge, tube from London Bridge to Angel, with a short walk at either end. (It must have taken at least an hour each way.) (Lord, 2006)

The same could be said for the school's commerce department. Unlike other secondary schools in the area, the pupils did not have to share typewriters and/or rely on ancient equipment - assuming these schools were offering a commercial course of study, many were not. At Gifford, however, children in their fourth and final year of education were being given the opportunity to learn how to type albeit that the typing was being taught at another school in the area:

I cannot remember the teacher's name but he was the music teacher and he would accompany us to Laycock School for our typing class. Where a gramophone was set in motion and we had to type to the words spoken. It was a 76 in[ch]⁵⁹ record and sometimes the needle was missing and we could not do any typing. (Maria H., 2005)

Many of the authors' friends and relatives, who attended other secondary schools in Islington, were jealous because they did not have the same facilities and/or opportunities to try different things. By way of example Isabel and Lynn remember choosing carpentry and metalwork over sewing in their Third Year, and of sharing their cookery lessons with the boys. In their Fourth and Fifth Years, there were several boys in their commerce group too - learning shorthand and typing because they wanted to pursue a career in journalism. At the time, this was very unusual.

Having failed to find any evidence of parents being dissatisfied with the school, the RRG turned its attention to the local press reports of the period to see if there were any damning articles which would have put local parents off Risinghill. Here too the authors drew a blank. Both the *Islington Gazette* and *North London Press* were very supportive of Risinghill, reporting on its prize days, plays, musical concerts and sporting achievements with warmth and genuine enthusiasm. One reporter, who appeared to have understood the educational politics of the time, spoke very highly of the school and of Duane in particular:

⁵⁹ This must be in error or misremembered - 76" is enormous! Perhaps it should be a 7" ("EP") record or, more likely, an old 78rpm record?

My own contacts with the school were as a reporter on the local newspaper, the "Islington Gazette." I was fortunate enough to have an editor who was not prepared to let the prejudices of some of his readers blind him to the evidence of his own eyes. I remember on one particular occasion I went to the school to interview the headmaster, Mike Duane. To my surprise I was directed to a beaten-up bone-shaker dumped in an adjacent street. Lying on his back somewhere underneath the front axle Mr Duane was explaining the workings of the internal combustion engine to a group of fascinated pupils. The hold which he had on their attention convinced me that I was talking to someone who was prepared to teach where and at what level his pupils were able to learn. (Goodall, 1968)

C8.3 - On What Premise did Risinghill begin life?

Determining whether or not Risinghill was built to plan proved to be extraordinarily difficult. So many of the Risinghill files had been lost or destroyed, and the official minutes of EC meetings pre-1960 had been unhelpful.

It was not until the RRG started to look at the EC files for the period 1960-1964 that it made a breakthrough:

The Council on 1 February 1955 (p.10) approved estimate 6240 of liability on capital account of £137,000 for the acquisition of a site at Risinghill Street, Finsbury (Shoreditch and Finsbury), required for the first stage of a new county secondary school, since named Risinghill school. The school was completed in April 1960 and provides accommodation for 1,260 boys and girls. As part of the arrangements for future county secondary school provision in London the Council on 6 February 1962 (p.68) decided that Risinghill school should be permanently retained at its existing level of eight-form entry in place of the original proposal (London School Plan, p.74) to provide for a thirteen-form entry. (London County Council, 1962a)

The suggestion of a second stage of development tied in with the requirements of the LSP (to increase the capacity to 2000 once the school was fully comprehensive), but the first phase (to accommodate 1500 pupils) did not. The authors could not understand why the LCC had

built a school for just 1260 pupils when: (1) the LSP had stipulated a capacity of 1500; and (2) the combined rolls of Gifford and Ritchie alone were known to be in the order of 1000+. Nor could they see the logic of building a smaller school when there was obviously a demand for places. In May 1960, for example, the school roll stood at 1323 with 403 first-choice applicants waiting to join in the September. This demand was commensurate with a thirteen-form entry unit, making no sense of the LCC's decision to build something smaller. Moreover, this minute was somewhat ambiguous in that it did not state when (or why) the school was cut back to an eight-form entry unit.

Because the LSP was still in place at this time and no reference was made in this minute to it, the authors assumed that this was, indeed, the first phase of the advertised two-phase development i.e. 1500 to begin with, 2000 once fully comprehensive. Besides, they knew (from the MacGowan report of 1962) that the Fourth Year children were spread across ten forms and the Third and Second Years across nine forms. So Risinghill was clearly not an eight-form entry to begin with, begging the question: When, exactly, was the decision made to turn it into an eight-form entry? Was it before or after 1960? To confuse matters further, MacGowan's report had shown that, in the First Year (being the September 1961 intake) there were just seven forms, suggesting one of two things: the school had suddenly become *very* unpopular with parents or its intake had been curtailed even further.

The EC decision on 6 February 1962 to retain the school's "existing level of eight-form entry" was another mystery. On the face of it, the decision to build Risinghill as a smaller, eight-form entry unit had already been taken (in 1958 or thereabouts) but here was the main educational arm of the LCC rubber-stamping that decision four years later. At least this is how it appeared to the authors. The timing of this decision seemed rather convenient too: (1) because it coincided with Houghton's review of the LSP, which until now had not been mentioned in *any* of the EC minutes; and (2) was taken within days of a critical inspection of the school.

These and other questions about the LCC's committee structure and protocols prompted another search of the LMA archives, which led to the discovery of the report produced by Houghton in 1958, referred to earlier. According to this report the school was designed for 1350 pupils, not 1260 pupils so there is an element of confusion as to which figure is correct. It is probably the latter as formal committee minutes tend to be more reliable. Far more interesting, however, was the revelation in this report that Risinghill had indeed been scaled

back, not that Houghton stated this in so many words. Anyone reading the following could, for example, easily be forgiven for thinking that Risinghill had been planned as an eight-form entry all along:

This new school is designed for 1,350 boys and girls and will normally take an 8-9 form entry of pupils each year. In its early years, however, it will absorb a boy's secondary technical school (Northampton secondary school), a girls' secondary technical school (Bloomsbury secondary school), a girls' non-selective school (Ritchie secondary school) and a mixed non-selective school (Gifford secondary school). The number of pupils from these contributory schools will be about 1,500 and in order to accommodate them the school will, for the first few years, use an annexe at the Ritchie school premises, about a quarter of a mile away.
(Houghton, 1958b)

This report was presented to the EC's Staff Sub-Committee on 27 November 1958. Headed 'For members' information only – S.O.124' there is a question mark over when the EC saw this report, if at all. The S.O. number suggested this might have been a Standing Order, in which case protocol would have dictated that the EC discussed and approved the proposal; however, the RRG did not find any evidence of this happening, leastwise not in any of the EC or LCC minutes that it had looked at for the period 1957-1960. The first indication of the school being scaled back to an eight-form entry was in the EC minute mentioned above, and this was in 1962.

It was a quite a shock to discover that a conscious decision had been made to squeeze around 1500 children into a school that was far too small. As for the provision of an annexe at Ritchie, this was hardly a satisfactory solution to the overcrowding: the staff had enough problems ensuring that the children arrived on time for lessons in the main building, let alone get them to classes at a school a quarter of a mile away.

The most disturbing aspect of this report, however, was Houghton's prediction that Risinghill's roll would fall within three years and with it the number of teachers:

It is estimated that the Burnham group of Risinghill School will be XXI⁶⁰ in 1963. The roll will drop once the very large initial intake from the contributory schools has moved out of the school and the use of the annexe ceases. (Houghton, 1958b)

Perhaps the authors are being over sensitive, but their immediate reaction on reading this section of the report was one of disbelief. It seemed to them that the initial intake, bar the First Year pupils, was being written off as a short-term problem that would disappear in 1963. And they were not the only casualties of this madness. In much the same way that no thought was given to the effects of the overcrowding on the children, even less attention was paid to the chaotic conditions in which the teachers would be expected to operate in the interim:

Classrooms. Far too small for present numbers ... the crowded conditions make easy movement about the class by the teacher difficult when the class is large, and restricts the use of the room. (W. M. Duane, 1962a)

Staffing was a serious issue throughout the school's history, as has been discussed. The problem was compounded by a steady stream of supply and rookie teachers used, no doubt, as a stopgap while Houghton waited for the pupil numbers to fall:

And the stream of ever-changing supply teachers who did not know the names of the children and had no idea of the district upset the children, upset the permanent staff, and made things worse, ... Yet in fact, the supply teachers were never enough, and teachers were constantly taking two classes at once ... (Berg, 1968b, p101)

Disturbingly, the report gives no indication of how the next generation of Risinghill pupils was to be accommodated. Perhaps Houghton was reluctant to commit to paper the fact that future intakes would have to be curtailed if the school was to have any chance of surviving? What was being proposed here was, in effect, the running down of a new school before it had even opened. This was something that Berg had alluded to in her book, but was strongly denied by Houghton:

⁶⁰ Burnham scales refer to salaries for teachers applicable at that time.

Some people say that even as the school began to blossom it was already marked for cutting down. (Berg, 1968b, p117)

“It is untrue that an unofficial decision to close Risinghill was taken long before the official decision was announced,” said Mr Houghton.
(Houghton, 1968)

Up until now the authors had not taken this idea seriously as it seemed too far-fetched. They were, however, beginning to wonder if there was an element of truth to Berg’s claims. It certainly explained the rejection of so many first-choice applicants (117) in Risinghill’s first full school year along with other curious decisions that had been taken along the way, notably the cutting back of staff in 1960 when staffing was a serious issue, and in 1961 and 1962 the closure of whole departments.

In 1960 the number of children waiting to join the school (403) far exceeded those that were leaving in the summer. This must have presented a massive problem to Houghton, as did the numbers opting to stay on. The latter created the need for a Sixth Form, something else that he had failed to take into account when making his prediction that, after three years, the school roll would fall. Or had he simply decided then (in 1958) that this was a school that was destined for closure?

Unfortunately, the number of first-choice applications to the school in the period 1961-1963 is unknown: these figures do not appear in any of the LCC’s documents held at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), not that many documents on Risinghill have survived. It is, however, possible to establish from the MacGowan report the level of entry to the school, if not the number of applications, in September 1961. According to this report, there were 189 pupils spread across the seven First Year forms. (London County Council, 1962c) This was a significant drop on the 403 first-choice applications in the previous September yet this isn’t mentioned in MacGowan’s report at all. When one considers that Duane was warned, several times, about not creating what the officials considered to be a good image for Risinghill, it is odd that the catastrophic fall in first-choice applications to the school was never *once* raised with him, not even when, in September 1964, the roll had dropped to just 854. This ‘oversight’ will be discussed later when examining the events leading up to the closure of the school.

What is also interesting is that, in February 1962, when MacGowan produced his report, the school roll then stood at 1113. With just 189 children admitted in September 1961, this was a reduction of 147 on the 1260 capacity identified in the above EC report. It was even more (237) on the 1350 capacity featured in the Houghton report. Either way, the school was capable of taking at least another 150-200 pupils, suggesting the intake was still being cut back even though there was plenty of room. It can, of course, be argued that the school had (as Houghton claimed later) become very unpopular, but the authors doubt this – for the simple reason that Duane, who was regularly hauled over the coals for many inconsequentialities, was never held to account for the gravest sin of all, a plummeting school roll. What follows in this and the ensuing chapters must, therefore, be viewed against the backdrop described.

Although the authors could not find the reason(s) for why the school was scaled back, it is probably safe to assume that Houghton was simply bending to the political pressures of the time to develop smaller schools. Restrictions on funding might have been another factor as the Conservatives were in power then, and did not support the comprehensive model. Whatever the reason(s), it does not excuse his failure to share with Duane (or it would seem, even the EC) his strategy for Risinghill. It is for example hard to believe that the EC would have endorsed such a destructive policy for one of its flagship schools.

Duane certainly had his suspicions about the officials:

Especially during the last year it steadily dawned on me that the members of the Education Committee were almost totally unaware of, or misinformed about, what the officials were doing. None of them came to the school during the whole five years. Afterwards we learned that they had been dissuaded “because the school was having teething troubles and should be left free to sort itself out”. (W. M. Duane, 1985)

He was also somewhat naïve when it came to Party politics. But in those days people did tend to be more trusting of politicians and/or those who presumed authority. Much later in life, he would discover otherwise:

The thousands of lectures I was invited to give during the fifteen years following the closure of Risinghill enabled me to set some, at least, of the record straight and to pass on some of the political insights that I – a

hitherto unpolitical animal – had been forced to acquire. (W. M. Duane, 1985)

C8.4 – A political storm

By now (early 1964) Duane's relationship with Houghton's officers had become very strained and was about to take a turn for the worse.

In March 1964 there was an enormous political row at County Hall following the publication of the immigration article by Elspeth Huxley in *Punch* magazine. Entitled 'Bubble and Squeak'⁶¹ the article focussed on Risinghill's work with Islington's Greek community, but also talked about Duane's approach to CP. As had been promised, the school was not mentioned by name, nor was its head; however, Risinghill was the only school in Islington to have dispensed (publicly) with CP so it was not difficult to identify.

At a full LCC meeting, the Tory Whip, an Alderman Sebag-Montefiore⁶², seized upon that part of the article which related to the school's non-caning policy, and it was this, not the article, which caused the row. Berg (1968b) at pages 152-153 quotes extracts:

Even Narkover, Beachcomber's famous academy for young criminals, can't have beaten this school's record for delinquency – 243 appearances by its pupils in the juvenile courts in three years. Yes the Headmaster, himself an immigrant – his father killed in Ireland by the British and the survivors of his family fled from Black-and-Tans – observes one inflexible rule: no corporal punishment.

'You go through a period of sheer chance with each incoming batch,' he said. 'The children don't believe there's no cane. They have to test your statement. They shout and yell and fight and make life impossible. You have to stand there and let them call you all the four-letter words and every obscenity in the language. You've got to go on talking and whatever happens keep your temper. It's a nightmare for the teachers and some of them can't take it. I don't blame them. But it's the only way.'

⁶¹ This is cockney rhyming slang for Greek.
⁶² Harold H. Sebag-Montefiore

The next paragraph, which the Alderman omitted, reads:

‘When the children grasp the fact that there really isn’t any cane they calm down. In any case they get tired of chaos eventually and then you can start to talk to them like reasonable human beings’. It works in the end, the school was orderly – the children appeared to be usefully employed and not carving up each other or the Staff

This attack on the school happened in February 1964 in the run-up to the new Greater London Council (GLC) elections, scheduled for 9 April 1964. Therefore one does have to question whether this was about Risinghill or Party politics, and in particular the politics surrounding the comprehensive model.

When news of the Alderman’s accusations broke, the press, along with the BBC and ITV, contacted Duane, who, in defending Risinghill’s position, clarified the school’s ‘delinquency’ record for the period May 1960 through to March 1964. There were, as discussed earlier, 307 children on the books of the Care Committee at this time, many of whom were N.S.P.C.C. and Family Service Unit (FSU) cases with some (twenty-one) being the subject of Fit Person Orders⁶³:

Of the 222 children appearing in court, 112 were on the books of the Care Committee at the time of the offence and many of those families had been known to the Care Committee for many years before the children attended this school.

In May 1960, when the school opened, there were 98 children already on probation. Today there are 9 on probation.

Of the present school population, 307 children are from families on the books of the Care Committee and include N.S.P.C.C. and F.S.U. cases.
(W. M. Duane, 1964a)

The authors were astonished that a Council Whip could have made such irresponsible statements in a public setting, without first checking the facts. His chair, Mrs McIntosh, does

⁶³ An order committing a person to the care of a fit person. These were subsequently a “fit person order” - means an order under the Children and Young Persons Act (1969)

appear to have clarified the position regarding the 243 juvenile court appearances to the committee members, but the damage had already been done:

Mrs McIntosh did however inform the L.C.C. members that the figure of 243 juvenile court appearances in Risinghill's three years' existence included care and protection cases. (Berg, 1968b, p155)

The Alderman's electioneering tactics backfired in a way that must have surprised even him. Instead of picking up on the delinquency and Duane's 'dubious' family history, the media homed in on the school's abandonment of CP and the dramatic fall in children on probation which, over just four years, was a remarkable achievement. The *Daily Mirror* covered the story under the heading 'Wild School is Tamed by Love' while the *Mail* led with the question: 'Does Sparing the Rod Breed Crime?' A similar theme was taken up by the *Express*, the *Evening Standard* and the *Telegraph* who were also sympathetic. (Berg, 1968b) The same could be said about the BBC and ITV coverage, which on the whole was very good. Duane emerged from the row as a hero and from hereon would receive the support of the press. In 1965 this would prove to be invaluable, not that public opinion would alter the LCC's decision (or for that matter the Secretary of State's decision) to close the school.

To add to the Alderman's woes, Labour romped home to victory in the GLC elections, taking sixty-four seats to the Conservative's thirty-six.

Needless to say, the media's support of Duane infuriated Houghton's officers who, after insisting that Duane should bring back CP, now found themselves in the humiliating position of having to defend (publicly) Duane's abandonment of it. They were also in a very awkward position politically (because practically every school in London was still using CP to maintain discipline) and corporately (because the LCC's policy on CP was, to put it bluntly, not worth the paper that it was printed on), as has been discussed in Chapter B2.

In releasing the 'Children in Trouble' statistics, Duane had also driven a train, unwittingly, through Labour's 'grammar schools for all' slogan, soon to be launched on an unsuspecting public.

By September 1964, the children from the four contributory schools had, more or less, all moved out in line with Houghton's 1958 prediction(s). The school's intake had also been curtailed year-on-year, leaving the officials free to bring about the eight-form entry school

that they had planned from the outset. This change was, as has been reported elsewhere, approved by the EC in 1962 soon after MacGowan's so-called visitation of the school. It is important, however, to point out that the EC had sanctioned a smaller school, not a different one. The authors make the distinction because although they believe there was a plot to close Risinghill, possibly before it had even opened, they doubt very much that the EC was involved in any of the shenanigans.

One has to assume that Houghton's plan for a smaller, single-sex unit was quite advanced in the spring of 1964, but with so much interest now being shown in the school, it goes without saying that its closure was not going to be easy. Houghton's officers had always been somewhat paranoid about the press, berating Duane time and again for not creating what they considered to be a good image for the school, and they were now even more determined that he should toe the line. Duane, on the other hand, simply could not see why his defence of Risinghill against Sebag-Montefiore's attack was so wrong. As he pointed out in a letter to Houghton, the press had rallied in support of the school, and the BBC and ITV coverage had been good:

With the exception of some journalistic over-writing, the articles were full of praise for what the Staff was doing. The attitude of the reporters, as of the B.B.C. and the I.T.V., was that a very unfair attack had been made on a school which was doing a good job in difficult circumstances. (W. M. Duane, 1964b)

C8.5 – The 1964 Inspection

At around this time the LCC appointed Dr Payling as its new Chief Inspector. This was the same Dr Payling who, in 1962, had conducted a review of the LCC's new comprehensive schools, and was accused of 'grammarising' them when his report was published. Following the *Punch* row, Duane received a visit from him and was warned again about talking to the press. He (Duane) was also told that, because he had not created a good image for the school, he was to prepare for a full Ministry inspection. Payling, however, was under the impression that Risinghill had opened in 1956, not 1960; therefore it was not due an inspection. Moreover there seems to have been a complete breakdown in communications between him and the Ministry HMIs, notably HMI Munday, who had visited the school on several occasions, often with colleagues from the Ministry, all of whom were delighted with

Risinghill's progress. When Duane had shared with Munday and his colleagues MacGowan's findings, according to Berg the response was as follows:

... he had laughed and said, 'Oh, you don't need to bother about us. We won't be bothering you with an inspection for many years ... and that he would come back in June 1964 with one or two colleagues. (Berg, 1968b, p157)

Margaret Duane, when asked about this, confirmed that Berg's interpretation of this event was correct.

Payling was also completely unaware of the school's improving GCE-'O' and 'A'-Level results (confirmation of which can be found in file MD/5/5/57 at the IOE) but to quote Berg again "continued to say what he had come to say" – basically that an inspection of Risinghill was overdue and would take place immediately.

In a long, three-page letter to Houghton, Duane referred to Payling's visit as "a serious weakness in the chain of communication" (W. M. Duane, 1964b) and brought to Houghton's attention various other matters of fact; facts which probably antagonised Houghton even more. Duane, however, had reached the point where he was past caring. He was not afraid for Risinghill to be inspected formally; to the contrary he welcomed the prospect:

I would heartily welcome a full inspection by the Ministry, since it would offer the prospect of an objective analysis of the difficulties with which this school has been faced, and a more realistic assessment of our achievement than has hitherto been made. (W. M. Duane, 1964b)

Houghton's reply was short and non-committal:

I have received your letter of 24 March which I have read very carefully and the contents of which I have noted. I cannot help feeling that you must have misunderstood both the purpose of the Chief Inspector's talk with you and the particular points he was trying to convey. (Houghton, 1964a)

No mention is made in this letter of any forthcoming inspection so Duane could easily be forgiven for thinking that there had, indeed, been some misunderstanding. But Houghton was not about to give up so easily.

Two months later, just days before Munday's planned visit with some of his Ministry colleagues, Munday contacted Duane to inform him that he would be arriving with more HMIs than he had anticipated. Whether or not he gave Duane the full facts of the matter at this stage (that his visitation had been hijacked by the LCC) is unclear as when he arrived with seven LCC HMIs in tow, he was very uneasy. So too was Duane as this was clearly not an informal visit, but another full-scale inspection of the type undertaken by MacGowan. What follows has to be viewed in the context of: (1) the 'national system, locally administered' where heads (supposedly) were captains of their own ships; and (2) there being no Ministry inspection reports on Risinghill published by HMSO, even when the decision was made to close it.

As the senior HMI - and the only Ministry HMI present – it is not unreasonable to assume that Munday would have been the conducting HMI, especially when one considers that this was, to all intent and purpose, his visit. However, this inspection – for it was not a visitation - was headed by a Mr Leonard Clark, who was a local HMI attached to the LCC. Clark was renowned for his disapproval of the comprehensive school, and he was also known to be a strict authoritarian. In her book (at pages 157-160) Berg gives a detailed account of this inspection, which took four days to complete, and focussed purely on the academic side of things. On this occasion, verbal reports of the inspectorate's findings were provided afterwards, and in the presence of a very embarrassed Mr Munday:

Mr Munday was in charge, as 'the conducting inspector'. He prefaced the verbal report which was to be given by the remaining inspectors with what could only be described as an apology. He said that this was not a complete inspection; that they had, in fact, concentrated only on the academic side of the school; and that had they inspected all the school a very different picture would have emerged. (Berg, 1968b)

Much of the feed-back was a regurgitation of the LCC's 1962 visitation, which probably did not come as any great surprise to Duane. What did take him completely by surprise, however, was the tongue lashing that he received from Clark after all the HMIs had given their reports. He would, twenty-five years later, describe this meeting with Clark as one of the "worst experiences" of his teaching career. (Wade, 1990).

Duane had crossed swords with Clark over the Gifford affair, and Clark not only remembered this but seemed to know a lot about Duane's headship of Howe Dell, speaking out of turn about his (Duane's) 'dismissal' and other matters of a personal nature. In fact, Duane was asked, point-blank, by Clark if he (Duane) thought he was fit to be a teacher! During this exchange, Clark also made it very clear that he had no time for Duane's progressive methods and/or those who had appointed him. One must assume that, where the latter was concerned, Clark was referring to the Advisory Committee (AC) and/or the EC to whom he was ultimately accountable, through Houghton. However, as reported in Chapter C1, the lines of responsibility within the 'national system, locally administered' were somewhat blurred then, and here we see a prime example of this – of a local HMI adopting a stance that demonstrates, very clearly, whom he believed held the balance of power in this arrangement, and it was not the head, the AC, EC or even the central government.

The broad thrust of Clark's complaints was that there was a "lack of central direction and control in the school"; a "lack of guidance of younger members of the staff"; and that Duane "did not gain enough support from the staff." (W. M. Duane, 1964c). These were the same issues that had been raised by MacGowan in 1962, but six months after that visitation - when MacGowan and his team revisited the school - a positive report followed. Therefore one does have to question Clark's findings in the same light, along with his motives.

Duane was by no means the only member of staff to come under attack from Clark. While observing a lesson during the inspection, Clark openly criticised an English teacher⁶⁴ for using what he considered to be inappropriate material. At that time there wasn't a national curriculum and the teacher was using the ballad of 'Frankie and Johnny' from a school anthology of tough verse as a means of introducing the children to poetry. The class was attentive and enjoying the lesson – that is until it was rudely interrupted by Clark, who found the material to be inappropriate. He also considered poetry to be a waste of time on children who had yet to learn how to speak properly:

... The first priority should be given to speaking. These children live in an area where the quality of speech is poor. Their home backgrounds offer little opportunity of sustained or intelligent conversation and too few examples of clearly enunciated speech or good tone. (W. M. Duane, 1964d)

⁶⁴

This was Bob Dixon – Leila Berg called him Mr. Gwyn in her book.

For the teacher, Bob Dixon, this was obviously very demeaning. He too, was considered unfit to be a teacher, and worse – (See Berg, 1968b). Leaving aside Clark’s appalling conduct, and his offensive comments about the children’s speech and home backgrounds, the authors were amazed that an experienced HMI with knowledge of the district and the local dialect could have made such a suggestion. Did it not occur to him that, by teaching the children to speak differently, this would: (1) set them apart from their families and friends; and (2) destroy something precious in the process? The cockney dialect was, after all, part of their culture. Isabel does remember sitting in a class chanting “How Now Brown Cow” and “The Rain in Spain Falls mainly on the Plain” as part of a lesson so maybe the school was forced to do this.

Petty criticisms like these deflated morale across the school, leading to even more teachers deciding to look for other jobs. For them, this inspection was the final straw. By now it was clear to them that the LCC was gunning for the school, and they had no interest in what Duane had to say about the inspectorate’s findings, nor were they interested in the discussion document (‘The Problem Before Us’) that he had produced, highlighting the various complaints. (Berg, 1968b)

One particular claim by Clark stood out from all the rest. It was a claim that would prove to be completely false yet would later underpin the LCC’s decision to close the school:

... During the verbal report made to me by the H.M.I’s Mr Leonard Clark made certain statements about the ‘image’ of the school in the eyes of local parents. He alleged that he had been present when parents were being interviewed by a certain Head, and he alleged that the Head had taken certain actions following these interviews. I have now discovered that the incidents referred to by Mr Clark were a complete fabrication. He did not attend interviews with the Head referred to, nor did that Head take the action alleged. (W. M. Duane, 1964c)

The appeal that went to the Secretary of State from Risinghill’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA) against the closure in 1965 also referred to this incident, naming Clark along with the head in question:

In June, 1964 Mr Leonard Clark, H.M.I., in the presence of Messrs Munday, Bryer, Evans, Woodend and Miss Francis, his colleagues, stated that he had been present when Mr Peters, head of Robert Blair Primary

School, had found that no parent was willing to choose Risinghill. He further stated that Mr Peters had had to write to the Divisional Officer complaining of his inability to persuade parents to send their children to Risinghill. Mr Peters absolutely denies that Mr Clark was ever present when he was interviewing parents, or that he had ever sent a letter of the kind alleged. Mr Straker of Penton Primary School, and Mr Hogan of Winton Primary School, similarly deny ever having had Mr Clark present at interviews with parents. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

The 1964 visitation took place on 3 June, but it was not until 15 July, and only in passing, that Duane learned about a report that had been submitted to Houghton. Whether it was a written report or a verbal report is unclear, though the wording suggests that it was the former:

I have no doubt that you are as worried as we are bound to be by the problems of recruitment to Risinghill.

Her Majesty's inspectors have given to the Chief Inspector and myself in confidence some account of their findings during the recent visitation, and these have been passed to the Education Officer.

The Education Officer has asked the Chief Inspector and myself to see you to discuss these matters. Could you please arrange to come to see us in my room on Friday, 24 July at 9.30am. (Briault, 1964a)

The first paragraph of the above letter deals with Duane's repeated requests for more staff. Over the years, he had written several letters to the LCC about this, but up until now had not received a response. This, however, appears to have been the norm; Houghton's officers answering Duane's letters only when it suited them. No apologies (or solutions) are offered for the staff shortages, but that is by the by. It is Briault's failure to provide Duane with any written details of the inspectorate's "findings" that is of significance, as is the date of the meeting in July. Once again, this was scheduled for the last day of term, giving Duane no time to prepare for the showdown. Note also the use of the word 'visitation' which indicates that this was not a formal inspection by the Ministry albeit that "Her Majesty's Inspectors" are cited. When Duane received this summons, he was prepared for the worst. And he was not disappointed.

In a letter to Houghton, Duane described the gist of this meeting with Briault and Payling as follows:

During the last term the school was inspected by a group of H.M.I.'s – a much larger group having a different intent from that originally discussed with me by Mr Munday. The criticisms made are referred to later in this letter. On the last day of term I was interviewed by Dr Briault and Dr Payling. Dr Briault made it clear that, as a result of my 'failure to create a proper 'image' of the school among the parents of the neighbourhood' with the result that the intake of the school had fallen to a level that was far too low, 'top secret' discussions were then being held among not more than half a dozen senior officials about various possibilities of, it seemed, drastic reorganisation of Risinghill. (W. M. Duane, 1964c)

The full text of this letter is provided at Appendix A, including two short addenda Duane attached at the time.

Although these officers were not specific about any of their complaints, and this was the first time that Risinghill's low intake had been mentioned, the reference to parents was a clear indicator that Clark's claims had been taken at face value. Similarly, they did not go into the details of the "reorganisation" so Duane was left to ponder over the summer break whether he had a role to play in the reshuffle or not. He had, on several occasions, been told to think about teacher training when summoned to these meetings with Briault and Payling, though these comments, along with the comments about the reintroduction of CP and expulsion were denied when Berg's book was published. What is even more disturbing is that not one of these complaints (about Duane's 'poor' management of the school) was ever put in writing. It would seem that, in the 1960s, the principles of natural justice did not apply. Either that or these officers believed that they were above the law when it came to disciplining staff; however, Duane was not the type to sit back and take everything that was thrown at him. The opening paragraph of his letter (to Houghton) following this meeting reads:

If in this letter to you I speak in blunt terms it is not because I have any wish to cause offence but because the issues under consideration are far more important than my personal career with the LCC., and because I have reluctantly come to the conclusion during the course of the last three

years that for some reason not known to me I have failed to win the attention and support that the objective needs of the school would seem to warrant. (W. M. Duane, 1964c)

As for Clark, his appalling conduct was never investigated. Rather, he received the OBE in January 1966, presumably for his services to education.

C8.6 – Changing Tactics

Three days after being told that he had failed to create the right image for Risinghill, Duane received a warm letter from John Newsom (now Sir John Newsom) congratulating him on the excellent job that he was doing at the school:

... Seriously, you have obviously done an heroic job at Risinghill and should have a glow of satisfaction at having achieved such a success out of an unpromising situation” (Newsom, 1964)

Newsom appears to have been completely unaware of the “top secret” discussions being held at County Hall, but given the divisions within the LCC and within the ‘national system, locally administered’ itself perhaps this was not so surprising.

Things were to hot up in the following weeks. In the autumn of 1964 Duane was involved in an exchange of letters between *Today* magazine and the *London Schoolmaster*, a publication of the London Schools Association (LSA). He had written to the magazine in response to an article featuring the appeal of a headmaster in Liverpool, who was fined for caning a fourteen-year-old girl fourteen-sixteen times on both hands. The judge, who did not think the punishment was excessive, allowed the appeal on the basis of parents expecting teachers to maintain discipline through CP. Duane, in typical fashion, had made no bones about his views on this issue. In his letter, he also referred to a caning incident in an East End secondary school where practically the whole of a First-Year class of girls had been caned on the second day of term for failing to bring their PE kit to school. This upset the LSA, who complained to the LCC.

For Houghton, the LSA’s complaint was probably the last straw as this would have landed on his desk at around the same time as Duane’s blunt letter to him; a letter that proved, without a shadow of doubt, that the grounds upon which he might have been seeking to reorganise or close Risinghill were unsafe. Clark’s allegations had been denied, categorically, by the heads

of the primary schools concerned so he could not support the argument that Risinghill had become unpopular with parents. As for the removal of Duane, he had no evidence to support Duane's incompetence; there being no written warnings to suggest that the EC was dissatisfied with his performance. To add to his woes, Duane was gaining quite a reputation in educational circles *because* of his achievements at Risinghill and, as has been discussed, the Ministry HMIs were perfectly happy with him and with the school. He had also underestimated Duane, seriously. This was not a head that would go quietly.⁶⁵

It is here that Berg's conspiracy theory becomes quite interesting. The rest of this chapter and, indeed, chapters C9 through to C11 describe the events leading up to Risinghill's closure, which does seem to have been a forgone conclusion.

C8.7 - A Change in Direction

The proposed reorganisation of Risinghill moved swiftly on to a full-blown closure decision; the reasons for which bore no resemblance whatsoever to those outlined by Drs Briault and Payling at their meeting with Duane. Clark's report was also abandoned, never to be spoken of again, and so too was Duane's involvement in this sorry state of affairs. Risinghill was to close for 'administrative' reasons, which had nothing to do with its head. And the new chair of the EC, Mr James Young, was keen to explain this to Duane:

MR YOUNG - I want to make it perfectly clear that the question of Risinghill and the methods which the headmaster was using there have never been in question – never been in question....

MR HOUGHTON – We have taken the line throughout that it is a matter for the headmaster to decide on the methods he employs in conducting his school

(London County Council, 1965b)

This extract is taken from the minutes of a meeting in January 1965, convened specifically to inform Duane of the LCC's decision, and in all probability to contain him also. He was, at this time, receiving a lot of attention in the press; the reason(s) for which will become clear

⁶⁵ Duane's letter to Houghton and other correspondence relating to this aspect of the school's so-called demise can be found in the Duane archive at the Institute of Education (IOE) in files MD/5/4/2 and MD/5/4/29); Duane's letter to Houghton is given below in Appendix A.

when describing the events (political in flavour) of November 1964 through to January 1965, to be discussed later. Suffice to say here that, when the news of Risinghill's impending closure was leaked to *The Sunday Times*, the leak came not from Duane, who was completely in the dark about the decision, but the chair of the LCC's Secondary Schools Sub-Committee, Mrs Helen Bentwich.

Since the EC had never been provided with any reports on Risinghill, formal or otherwise, Mr Young was probably unaware of what had been going on behind the scenes⁶⁶, and being new to the role perhaps accepted Houghton's arguments for Risinghill's closure without question. These were:

- a. the urgent need to provide accommodation for the Kingsway College of Further Education by releasing the building intended for Kingsway College but temporarily occupied by Starcross Secondary Girls' School.*
- b. the need to find alternative accommodation for Starcross School when they have had to give up their present accommodation to Kingsway College.*
- c. The fact that the roll of Risinghill Comprehensive has steadily dropped from 1323 in September 1960 to 854 in September 1964.*

(London County Council, 1964)

Why the accommodation problems at Kingsway College should have impacted on Risinghill is a question that was asked by many - both at the time of the LCC's official announcement to close the school, and afterwards when the battle to save it began in earnest. It was argued that, if space was a serious issue, a more logical solution to the problem would have been to amalgamate Starcross into Risinghill. This, however, was rejected by Houghton on the basis of an argument that was becoming familiar. Note the use of his words "seems clear" in the following statement where he talks about Risinghill's falling roll, and the "growing evidence" of parental preference for single-sex schools:

⁶⁶ Young did not take over the chairmanship of the EC until March 1965.

... the roll of the school fell to 854 in September 1964. It seems clear, therefore, that many parents in the area no longer regard Risinghill as an acceptable school for their children. There are two further factors which must be taken into account:-

- a. The range of choices in other schools is likely to be greater rather than less next year.*
- b. The popularity of the nearby single sex secondary schools is increasing; this growing evidence of parental preference for single sex schools has, no doubt, contributed to the decline of recruitment to Risinghill School.*

(Houghton, 1964b)

The single-sex school argument was a new twist, and a clever one at that. It was sufficiently removed from Clark's unfounded allegations, but at the same time allowed the officials to fall back on their original claim that parents no longer wanted to send their children to the school. Risinghill's falling roll was, of course, due entirely to the LCC's Schools Inquiry Officer and Duane's deputy turning parents away from the school on the pretext that it was full. The likelihood of this being discovered or even proved then was remote, and for various reasons - some obvious, some not so obvious, as will be demonstrated in what follows.

Turning Risinghill into a single-sex school was a master stroke as first and foremost it solved the tricky problem of getting rid of Duane as Starcross was an all girls' school that could not be run by a male head. Second, it removed the problem of CP which, at this time, continued to dominate some sections of the press. Decisions made in haste, however, are often flawed, especially decisions that are not based on truth or fact.

This was a major reorganisation which, on the face of it, happened within the space of just four months; the announcement being made on 25 November 1964 in a confidential letter to Risinghill's GB. Several questions arise from this, which the authors have tried to answer in this chapter and chapters C9 through to C11.

On the same day, 25 November, Duane was summoned to the meeting with Drs Briault and Payling where, amongst other things, he was accused of making slanderous statements about

his deputy and members of the LCC. This was a veiled reference to Duane's letter to Houghton where he had made some comments about his deputy, and some of the officials, notably HMI Clark. The comments about his deputy were, in the opinion of the authors, more sensitive than slanderous, and were not made with any malice. As for Clark, Duane's complaints were justifiable. He (Clark) had behaved in an appalling manner, and had made statements that were blatantly untrue, not that Briault or Payling were interested in hearing Duane's version of events:

I have now discovered that the incidents referred to by Mr Clark were a complete fabrication. He did not attend interviews with the Head referred to, nor did that Head take the action alleged. In the course of my enquiries I found that Mr Clark is himself alleged to have committed certain indiscretions quite improper for an H.M.I. I am taking up these matters with the Minister through my Union solicitor. (W. M. Duane, 1964c)

At this meeting Duane was also castigated for making irresponsible statements to the press about CP in the LCC's schools (a reference to the LSA matter) and, most threatening of all, was told to think seriously about teacher training as a future career. When Berg's book was published, however, both of these officers denied making any such threats. But Margaret Duane, when asked about this, did confirm that the reinstatement of CP and teacher training (as a future career) had been put to her husband by these officers on more than one occasion. And she also elaborated on the confrontation with Clark, supporting Berg's account of this meeting.

Houghton's letter to Risinghill's GB outlining the LCC's proposal to close the school is a strange document. While in parts it strives to be of a consultative nature, it is obvious that the decision has already been taken. As will be seen later, subsequent letters and reports from the LCC about this matter would be couched in a similar vein, leading to Berg's claim that the closure was a foregone conclusion. While Berg was not in possession of all the facts when she wrote her book, she did support her allegations along the lines of the authors. She also referred to a job advertisement for a deputy head (placed by Duane in the spring of 1964) to replace his deputy, who was retiring towards the end of the year. This advertisement was never activated, as has been discussed. (Divisional Education Officer, 1964)

Although the authors were sceptical at first of Berg's claims, they began (slowly) to come around to her way of thinking. The single-sex school argument, though clever, was flawed. Also, the accommodation problems at Kingsway College did not stand up to scrutiny. As the LCC itself had pointed out, the college had been expanding since 1954 so if Starcross *was* occupying these premises on a temporary basis, its relocation to another site and/or its amalgamation with another school must surely have long pre-dated Risinghill? In fact, the three LCC sub-committees responsible for the proposal to close Risinghill confirmed this to be the case:

The Prospect Terrace premises at present occupied by Starcross school for girls, St. Pancras (Holborn and St. Pancras South), were opened in 1959, and were built as day-college premises to be used temporarily for secondary school purposes as a contribution to peak secondary-school requirements consequent on the post-war bulge. It was clearly understood, however, that with the passing of the bulge and the falling of secondary school requirements to a minimum in about 1965 the opportunity would then be taken of releasing the Prospect Terrace premises for the purpose for which they were built(London County Council, 1965d)

Some questions arise from these minutes. First and foremost, they do not chime with the LSP where, to remind the reader, Starcross was earmarked to become part of a *mixed* comprehensive in Somers Town, not what was suggested here. Second, there are twenty-five photographs at the LMA of the opening of Starcross in Kingsway compared to just four photographs of Risinghill, taken not on the day that Risinghill opened, but two months previously - when the Bloomsbury girls were taken on a tour of their new school. Looking at these photographs with the claim(s) made in the above minutes very much in mind, notably that Starcross was occupying space in Kingsway on a temporary basis, the authors were puzzled as to why the LCC would have celebrated the opening of a school that was in transitory accommodation, but not one that was purpose-built, and on a permanent site that was destined for expansion.

The June 1964 inspection was something else that the authors could not reconcile. What was the point of this exercise when, by the looks of things, plans were afoot then to reorganise the school. This was a complex reorganisation involving two schools directly (Risinghill and Starcross) and one indirectly (Sir Philip Magnus) that could not, in the authors' opinion, have

been cobbled together in the space of just five months. Or was it? Could it be that, when the 1964 inspection failed to deliver Duane as an incompetent head, another route had to be found to get rid of him? It seemed rather convenient too that the accommodation problem(s) at Kingsway became critical at around the same time as Duane's letter to Houghton, challenging not just the 1964 inspection, but a host of other issues. While the authors acknowledge that plans might well have been in place, possibly for years, to relocate Starcross, they are inclined to believe that, if this was the case, it was probably Starcross that had been earmarked for closure and not Risinghill. To add to their suspicions, the Principle of Kingsway appeared to be unaware of the need to free up space in Kingsway (as will be discussed in the next chapter) so how urgent a problem was this for the LCC?

In a bid to save the school, Duane offered his resignation, but this was refused. It is not difficult to understand why. His resignation would have caused a furore in the press, inviting embarrassing questions that the LCC would have found difficult to answer. He also offered to work under the Starcross head if this would keep Risinghill intact, and at the time suggested a new name for the school (Star Hill) but this offer and suggestion was also declined, probably for the same reason(s). What the officials really wanted was a school that could be seen to be on a par with the grammar, and Starcross was a perfect choice in this respect. It had a smart, grammar- school-style uniform, a good academic record and above all there were no embarrassing issues with CP.

To close a school in order to get rid of its head might sound far-fetched, but MD was probably not the first head to be disposed of in this way, and would certainly not be the last. Reviewing the *Schools on Trial*' book (Fletcher *et al.*, 1985), the reviewer noted:

... that their highly publicised cases are only the tip of the iceberg – during the “trials” the schools got plenty of messages of support from teachers in many other schools with similar tales to tell. (Makins, 1985)

Chris Searle, former head of Earl Marshal comprehensive in Sheffield, who lost his school in 1995 in circumstances that were very similar to Risinghill, has been described as a modern-day Michael Duane. Bob Dixon, who knew Searle, passed on to the RRG one of his (Searle's) books, from which the following extract is taken:

During the 1970s in our east London school, we, the teachers, would scout the streets, billiard halls and markets of Poplar searching for truanting students to bring them

back to our classrooms. To remove or exclude even the most difficult, troublesome or demotivated students from our school we saw as not just an admission of institutional failure but has human betrayal – an act of denial of the fundamental right of a child for which teachers like ourselves in the previous generations had organised and campaigned. It was there, clear and unambiguous in Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Rights of the Child; that every child had the right to a free, compulsory education alongside his or her peers in a state school – an education that ‘promoted understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups’. Britain had been among the first nations to pledge to address that basic need.

(Searle, 2001)

There have, of course, been many other school closures since 1995, and, no doubt, many other displaced heads, not that the authors have looked at this in any detail. However, they are strongly of the opinion that the effort should be made by someone as such a study would throw some much needed light on the ‘failed’ schools of yester-year, and the so-called ‘failing’ schools of today.

CHAPTER C9 – Consultation, 1964 – 65

‘There are people who, instead of listening to what is being said to them, are already listening to what they are going to say themselves.’

Albert Guinon (1863-1923)

There followed a period of consultation during which the LCC was obliged (legally) to seek the views of those directly involved with the reorganisation. This included the heads, staffs and governing bodies (GBs) of the respective schools, but surprisingly not the parents:

The first that parents knew, officially, about the proposals to close Risinghill was a letter, dated 27 January 1965, notifying them of the decision already taken by the L.C.C. No attempt has been made to seek the views of the parents on the proposals before the decision was made. This, in our view, is a denial of the letter and the spirit of the Act. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

C9.1 – Section 76

The rights of parents and the duties of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in this regard can be found in Section 76 of the 1944 Education Act. While the intention of the legislation seems to have been to offer parents a choice of school primarily on religious grounds, many LEAs, including the LCC, believed that it also gave parents a right to express a preference for a particular type of school i.e. single sex or co-education. Section 76, however, does not refer to selection in these terms; faith schools are not mentioned, neither is any other type of school. In fact the language used is so ambiguous that parental choice can be interpreted to have a much wider application:

In the exercise and performance of all powers and duties conferred and imposed on them by this Act the Secretary of State and local education authorities shall have regard to the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. (Butler Education Act, 1944)

As with many other parents of that era, the Risinghill parents took Section 76 at face value. They firmly believed that this gave them a right to choose how their children should be educated. Implicit in that choice was a right to be consulted about the LCC's proposal to close their school. The LCC, however, appeared to have had a very different view of its responsibilities to parents under the Act. First, it seemed to have taken the view that it did not have a statutory duty to parents beyond offering a school of their choice, within reason. Second, the manner in which it engaged with the Risinghill parents regarding the reorganisation suggested it considered this to be an administrative matter, and so did not fall within the scope of Section 76. At a meeting with the parents:

Why did you come here if you have already decided? called out someone; and Mrs Helen Bentwich answered, 'Because we wanted to be polite. We didn't come to hear from you. We simply came to tell you.' She shook an admonishing finger at a mother who kept asking questions – 'I've heard quite enough from you!' (Berg, 1968b, p195)

While the LCC's interpretation of the legislation might well have been the intention of the policy makers when drafting Section 76, once again this is far from clear; there being no mention of parental choice and/or parental consultation in the circumstances described.

It was not until the mid-seventies - after a flood of parental appeals to the Secretary of State under the 1944 Act - that the meaning of Section 76 was clarified by Lord Elwyn-Jones in the House of Lords:

The courts have established that Section 76 does not confer any rights on parents, or imposes any specific duties on the Secretary of State or the local education authorities. It merely lays down a general principle to which he and they must have regard along with other relevant considerations in each particular case. [Hansard, 1974]

So while the 1944 Education Act did, in theory, give parents more power, in practice those powers were limited. What is interesting is that, although Section 76 has now been replaced with Section 9 of the 1996 Education Act, the 1944 wording has not been altered to reflect the above ruling. Those who have challenged the decisions of LEAs on the premise that "pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents" will, for example, know that the law on parental 'choice' and 'consultation' is not quite what it seems.

C9.2 – Section 68

Section 68 of the 1944 Education Act gave parents a right of appeal to the Secretary of State to prevent unreasonable exercise of functions. It still does. But as is the case with Section 76, this is another legal minefield. For a complaint to succeed, it has to be shown that a LEA has acted improperly or so unreasonably in arriving at its conclusions that its decision is perverse. In law the test of ‘reasonableness’ is extremely difficult to satisfy so intervention by the Secretary of State is rare. In 1965 it was probably even rarer because the ‘national system, locally administered’ was still in place then, making it very difficult for the central government to interfere in the affairs of the LEAs. It was not until the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher’s government took control of the curriculum that the system for the delivery of education changed, not that this made the appeal process any easier for parents. The political changes post 1965 will be examined in more detail in *The Waste Clay*.

C9.3 – Consulting the Staff

The first round of official discussions with the stakeholders took place on 30 November 1964. This was with the Risinghill staff. In opening the meeting Dr Briault emphasised that “no decision had yet been taken” (Briault, 1964c) and that the purpose of the meeting was to establish the views of the staff so that these could be fed back to the three Education Committee (EC) sub committees responsible for the initial proposal to close the school.

It is clear from this meeting that the staff had grave concerns about the LCC’s proposal, not least because of the impact it would have on the more vulnerable pupils:

Has consideration been given to the effect on disturbed, unstable and maladjusted children in transferring to other schools mid-course. The staff in this school care about the children. It would be a tragedy to destroy this. (Briault, 1964c)

The teachers were also of the opinion that there was a need for a mixed school in the area, and that it would make more sense to close Starcross and bring it into Risinghill:

We are concerned in this area of the need for co-education. It was tragic to consider this becoming a single sex school. Starcross should be closed, not Risinghill. (Briault, 1964c)

Their arguments were dismissed by Briault on the basis that Starcross was more successful. Unfortunately he did not qualify this statement, but from the discussion that followed it is clear that, because Starcross had a better intake of pupils in the higher ability groups, who were likely to stay on and continue their education, this made Risinghill the more vulnerable for closure:

Dr Briault pointed out that the quality of the intake in recent years indicated that the maintenance of strong fifth year courses would be a very uphill battle. (Briault, 1964c)

What Briault did not take into account was that, when Risinghill opened in 1960, no provision was made for a Sixth Form. Consequently, Fifth Year pupils who had passed the GCE and wanted to stay on, were forced to leave school early to start work or continue their education elsewhere; James M being a prime example of this, as has been noted in chapter C4. It was not until the beginning of the 1962 academic year that Risinghill was given a Sixth Form, and it is against this backdrop that Briault's response must be viewed. His remarks about the quality of the school's intake were, in the authors' opinion, equally patronising - for reasons that will be explained later in this chapter. As for comparing Risinghill's intake with that of Starcross, there is another important point to bear in mind here: Starcross came under the LCC's North West Division of schools, which included the affluent suburbs of Hampstead from which many of the Starcross girls were drawn. Risinghill was in a different division all together, the North London Division, which included Islington – a deprived area that was predominantly working class and so had a completely different mix of pupils.

Another key factor that was not taken into consideration by Briault, and was not discussed with the stakeholders, was that secondary school rolls were declining nationally at this time. This was particularly the case in London where, according to Berg, around 32000 secondary school places were going begging. (Berg, 1968b). These figures were contested by the LCC in 1968 when challenging the authenticity of Berg's book, not that it really matters whether the figure was 32000 or 5000 as the LCC claimed. What is important is that, at the time, this trend was not considered to be even partly responsible for the school's declining intake. And whether the LCC cared to admit to it or not, secondary schools' rolls were, indeed, declining in London and significantly, giving credence to the 32000 figure cited by Berg:

But the LCC Education Committee (still Labour controlled) recognised by the early 1960s that the 1947 London School Plan was now out of date and in need of significant revision for two important reasons. First, the plan had envisaged a higher school population in the capital than there actually was . . . (Berg, 1968b)

Even Duane, in his letter to the Secretary of State, touched on this aspect of Risinghill's 'decline' though when he wrote this letter he was unaware that Risinghill was actually bucking the national trend. The number of first choice applications to the school in 1960, and the numbers that were rejected thereafter on account of the school (allegedly) being full bears testament to this fact. Had Duane known (or had proof) of the latter, he might well have constructed a very different appeal to Crosland, not that the authors believe this would have made any difference.

The problem of falling rolls was, in any event, short-term; the expectation being that the numbers would rise again within four-five years when the bulge in the primary schools moved into secondary education, as Duane pointed out:

This present period of low numbers can be viewed constructively as a time for the intensification of work directed to the cultivation of these values and of training of Staff to deal with the "bulge" that will shortly leave the junior schools. This the LCC has failed to comprehend. (W. M. Duane, 1965d)

The rejection of so many applications to the school in the period 1961-1964 is something that will be dealt with separately when looking at the appeals process. For the time being, let us assume that Risinghill's falling roll *was* attributable to a general decline in the secondary school population, and move on to Duane's argument about using this period constructively for the recruitment and training of staff. What he said was of relevance. Pupil numbers might have been falling, but secondary school classes were huge then because of the shortage of qualified teachers. This was particularly the case at Risinghill, which never had a full complement of staff, and this had a devastating effect on the teachers and the children. As one former pupil pointed out:

At one time, a maths teacher was taking three classes, totalling 80, together. We couldn't take all the subjects we wanted because there just wasn't the staff. (Guardian, 1968b)

Labour had, for years, been criticising the Conservatives about the teacher:pupil ratio in state schools compared to the grammar and independent schools, but on coming to power did very little, if anything, to address the imbalance. In fact class sizes in the state sector are still being talked about today, in the same vein and with the same passion:

In a report analysts also warned that the gulf between state and independent schools in the UK was wider than in most other countries. Classes for 5-11-year-olds in the private sector were around half the size of those in government-funded schools. (The Daily Telegraph, 1969)

It is suggested that small classes can be a valuable educational initiative right through school, but could be particularly targeted at lower attaining pupils at secondary level.” (Blatchford et al., 2008)

Thankfully class sizes in state schools are smaller these days, but in comparison to the grammar and independent schools, are still large at around thirty to forty.

C9.4 – Awkward Questions

At the meeting with the staff Dr Briault was asked some pertinent questions about the school's development, also the quality of its intake; questions that the authors, too, had found baffling:

Puzzled by some aspects of the administration. Why was the school ever allowed to be established in the way it was[?].

Are we quite powerless to do anything about recruitment[?]. (Briault, 1964c)

His (Briault's) response was quite revealing:

The decision was a Committee decision. We are not powerless on recruitment, but our powers to disregard parental choice are limited. (Briault, 1964c)

The underlining of the word ‘Committee’ by the minute-taker, and the shortness of the answer, suggested Briault was irritated - not so much with the teacher who had asked the question, but with the committee that had decided to build Risinghill as a mixed school in the first instance. The authors are not absolutely sure what committee Briault was referring to but can hazard a guess that it was the same committee, Advisory Committee, (AC) that had overruled his CEO, W Houghton, on other key issues relating to the school’s development. To recap, there were disagreements between Houghton and his officers and the AC about:

- Where Risinghill should be built
- What schools should be included in it
- Whether it should have been a thirteen-form or eight-form entry unit.

Briault’s irritation is all the more intriguing when one considers this was a man who, twenty-five years later, would claim that these arguments were “constructive” and “valuable” elements of the delivery system. (Chitty, 1989)

What also came across very strongly in Briault’s response was the LCC’s implied duty to parents under the Education Act. The Authority’s inability to “disregard parental choice” was a clear reference to the officials’ assertion that Islington parents preferred single sex schools, not that Briault provided any evidence of this to the staff. More interesting, however, was his statement about the LCC’s powers on recruitment. Duane was charged on more than one occasion by Briault and others in the Education Department (ED) for not creating a good image of Risinghill in the eyes of local parents; the evidence of which, according to these officers, lay in the school’s failure to attract children in the higher ability groups. It was the ED, however, that was responsible for the spread of abilities at Risinghill, also its intake, not Duane. This responsibility was clearly demonstrated in an interview, which the Starcross head gave to the press in 1968, three years after moving into the Risinghill premises:

That “they were allowed for the first two years a higher IQ quota than the other secondary schools in the area to give them a good start”. (North London Press, 1968)

Risinghill was, therefore, either very unlucky with its ratio of pupils in the higher ability groups or the ED’s Schools Inquiry Officer was totally incompetent. (The authors almost

wrote ‘had a warped sense of humour’). To remind the reader, of the 403 first choice applications to the school in 1960, it would seem this officer was only able to find five in the top two ability groups, and none in 1961. This pattern (of a handful of applicants in Groups I and II) continued throughout the school’s short history. Although the number of first and second choice applications to Risinghill in the period 1960-1964 is unclear, what *is* known is that the school always had less than 1% of children in the higher ability range and, more worrying, a disproportionate number bordering on ESN.

C9.5 - The Response to the Consultation

Of the sixty teachers who attended the staff meeting, forty-seven signed a petition to keep the school open. This petition was sent to the EC, also to Risinghill’s GB.

Starcross was equally adamant about not accepting the LCC’s proposal. Following a visit by a group of Starcross teachers to the school, the Risinghill staff passed a resolution “deploring the closing of Risinghill School on educational and social grounds”. (W. M. Duane, 1965f) The Starcross governors were also unanimous in their rejection of the reorganisation albeit for slightly different reasons:

...it is quite clear that they are not willing to move into this building and neighbourhood because they see that they will be unable to draw girls from Hampstead as they have done so far and that, inevitably, they will become a neighbourhood school taking the vast majority of their girls from immediately round the school, as we have done, with the result that the balance of their ability groups will swing towards what ours has always been. (W. M. Duane, 1965b)

Insofar as Kingsway was concerned, the college appears to have been unaware of the urgency to free up space. Besides, it did not find the vacation of the Starcross premises to be helpful:

Starcross will be nowhere near big enough for us, in any case. We are actually going to have to lay on buses to shunt people regularly from Gower Street and back. (Berg, 1968b, p172)

The authors did find at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) a consultation document containing the views of the interested parties. (London Education Committee, 1964). Under the Kingsway comments section, the Principal had indicated that “he hadn’t had time to

consider the proposal” so how urgent a problem was this for the LCC? What the authors found really surprising was the absence of a comments section in this document for Risinghill. Yet on 30 October 1964 Duane had received an undertaking from Briault that he would be included in any discussions about the future reorganisation of the school:

I can assure you that if there should be any proposals for reorganisation involving your school, you will be fully consulted about them before any decisions are taken by the Education Committee. (Briault, 1964b)

Duane was not involved in any consultations about the proposal. He was even asked to leave a special meeting of Risinghill’s GB when this matter came up for discussion. (Risinghill Governing Board, 1964a)

According to the GB minutes, Duane’s removal came at the suggestion of a newly appointed co-opted governor attending his very first meeting. (Risinghill Governing Board, 1964a) Why any GB that was about to fold would bother to co-opt someone new was a mystery, but perhaps the authors were reading too much into this. Suffice to say the appointment and the motion came as a surprise to them, and that the motion was carried (seemingly) without any argument.

Even more astonishing was the appearance of MacGowan at this gathering. Risinghill was not being closed for reasons of poor academic performance – at least not according to the LCC’s official statement - so there was no reason for any HMIs to be present, and especially one that had not set foot in the school for over two years.

Unfortunately the minutes of this meeting gave no indication of what was discussed and/or how the GB arrived at its decision. One can only assume that, as the meeting started at 2.00pm and finished at 3.30pm, the governors did not put up much of a fight:

After further discussion it was

RESOLVED unanimously that the Governors accept the necessity to close Risinghill School with deep regret.

The headmaster rejoined the meeting and was informed of the Governors’ resolution. (Risinghill Governing Board, 1964a)

The words “with deep regret” were omitted from both the LCC press announcement and the proposal that went to the Secretary of State later, putting an entirely different spin on the resolution all together:

We could not ignore the very sharp fall in first choice pupils to Risinghill in just a few years and the fact that the Governors had unanimously accepted the need to close the school. (Prentice, 1965)

How any meaningful discussion could have taken place about Risinghill in just one hour and in the absence of its head is beyond comprehension. It would be interesting to know whether the same protocol (of excluding the head) was applied when the Starcross GB met to review the LCC’s proposal. Somehow the authors doubt it.

So far the consultation had resulted in Starcross being firmly opposed to the move, Kingsway non-committal and the Risinghill governors seemingly coerced into a decision that they would have preferred not to take. Starcross eventually had to give way, recognising that it had been presented with a *fait accompli* and was unlikely to get any further. By the looks of things, certain promises were made to sweeten the pill, and a higher IQ quota for the first two years was just one of them.

With the consultation over, the results now had to be referred back to the three EC sub-committees responsible for the proposal. These, in turn, were required to bring this matter to the attention of the EC so that a formal decision could be made either way. Providing the EC supported the proposal, the next step in the proceedings was to notify the Secretary of State of the LCC’s intentions. He (Anthony Crosland, the new Secretary of State) would make the final decision on whether or not Risinghill should close. This procedure, however, was breached when news of the sub-committees’ decision was leaked to *The Sunday Times*. This is how Duane, the staff and the parents found out that their school was to close:

MR. HOUGHTON - I had from the staff yesterday a letter protesting about the way they had heard the news and I believe Mr Duane also protested – and let me say I don’t blame him – that he should hear first from the newspapers. Let me make quite clear that we went to very great lengths to avoid this happening. We sent a letter immediately following the meeting of the Sub-Committees to all Governors, all heads. We deliberately held back the press release until noon on Thursday, so that the letters would

have been received, as far as it was humanly possible to ensure that they would be received – and one newspaper clearly had got information and broke the story. The Chairman and I were got up in the middle of the night – half past one in the morning, to comment on it. This is how it happened to our very great distress. There was no discourtesy whatsoever intended, to you or the staff or the Governors. (Houghton, 1965, p5)

Since Duane was excluded from the consultation process, presumably on the instructions of Houghton, his name, in all probability, was omitted from the circulation list for the letter in question. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the originator of this letter and the secretary or typist both failed to give Duane any thought. If this wasn't bad enough, the final decision was taken before any attempt was made to seek the views of the parents and/or the EC.

The news of Risinghill's impending closure was splashed right across *The Sunday Times*' front page alongside a photograph which had been taken from outside of the school. An avalanche of publicity followed by practically every national newspaper, bar *The Times* and the *Daily Worker*, taking up the story:

Throughout the whole affair, they did not even once, to Mr Duane's knowledge, send their able – and, I would guess, friendly – educational reporter to the school to find out what was happening. (Berg, 1968b, p174)

The Times was a fierce opponent of the LCC's educational policy and at this time was running a vicious campaign against Kidbrooke, London's first comprehensive school. However, for some reason, it chose to steer clear of the Risinghill story; hence the cryptic comment (above) from Berg. It has to be said that, at the beginning, when the RRG was struggling with the political aspects of the Risinghill story, it had not understood this either. Nor had it appreciated fully the barb from Berg. But when one considers *The Times*' coverage of Kidbrooke (to be discussed in more detail later) in tandem with the politics of the time, and 'The Great Comprehensive Debate' in the House of Commons in January 1965, Berg's sarcasm is less puzzling. Here is an extract from *The Times* coverage of Kidbrooke, which began in November 1964:

A music teacher in Kidbrooke, a South London girls' comprehensive school, speaking not at a public meeting but to a professional group of other music teachers, said she

had difficulty in applying her academic methods to the girls in the school who had poor backgrounds, girls whom she described as ‘the sisters and girl friends of some of the unpleasantest gangs in London’. This meeting would normally have been reported in the quiet, professional pages of the Times Education Supplement; but someone saw the sensational political possibility, and grabbed it for the next day’s Times, splashing it at the top of its main news page: ‘Comprehensive Schools a Failure’. (Berg, 1968b, pp169-70)

In stark contrast, the media (local and national) rallied in support of Risinghill. The focus was very much on Duane’s non-caning policy, probably because of the press coverage earlier in the year, and the fact that eight local Probation Officers had signed an open letter in support of the school:

We have known children who hated school and were persistent truants who have become deeply attached to Risinghill and hated leaving.
(Probation Officers of Clerkenwell Court, 1965)

The authors have reproduced the Probation Officers’ letter in full in Appendix B.

The press, unsurprisingly, was linking Risinghill’s closure to Duane’s refusal to use the cane, and the LCC was being asked some very awkward questions as a result. Its officials, namely Drs Briault and Payling, denied any such connection vehemently, pointing out that the school was being closed purely for reasons of accommodation and economy. Few, however, believed this and the speculation rumbled on.

What the press didn’t know was that around £100,000 was about to be spent on moving the Risinghill children out and the Starcross children in, and no expense was to be spared on making Starcross comfortable:

The Headmistress of Starcross School has told her own staff and the staff of Risinghill that she had been given complete freedom to request any alterations she required, and that economy was no object. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

This level of expenditure (estimated to be £1.8m in 2017 terms) was hardly in keeping with the requirements of Section 76 insofar as the “avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure”

was concerned. It also made a mockery of the LCC's justification for closing Risinghill and refusing, throughout its short history, to carry out even the simplest of repairs. Both points were made in the PTA's letter of appeal:

This would seem to contradict the L.C.C. claim that the decision to transfer Starcross to Risinghill was based on the need for economy. It also makes a nonsense of the refusal to make so many important but minor alterations to Risinghill on the grounds that there was no money for this purpose. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

The authors do not know when the Starcross parents were consulted about the move, or if they were asked for their views at all. But the Risinghill parents had to wait until February 1965 before they could have their say. Meanwhile Duane was being blamed (yet again) for talking to the press when, by Houghton's own admission, the leak had come from County Hall. By now Duane was becoming increasingly frustrated with Houghton and his team:

This note is simply to put in writing what I said to Mr Turner and the Press Officer today, viz. that I had not given permission to The Sunday Times to take photographs of the school. What I had said, in reply to a telephone request, was that while I, as Head of the school had no objection to photographs being taken during the dinner hour, they would have to get the permission of the Press Officer or of yourself before this could be done. I also made it clear to the Press Officer, first that I objected to his opening assumption that I had given the permission requested, and second, that the onus for refusing permission lay with either himself or with yourself. (W. M. Duane, 1965c)

Houghton's annoyance with Duane over the press activity comes across very strongly in the minutes of the 29 January 1965 meeting (with the chair of the EC, Mr James Young, Houghton and Duane) mentioned earlier, and below. As far as he (Houghton) was concerned, the closure of Risinghill had been decided (although at this stage the EC had yet to be consulted formally) and in the light of this Duane was ordered not to talk about the school in public:

And I am putting this fairly bluntly – the time has arrived when this should cease, as the decision has now been taken. (Houghton, 1965)

Even Young believed the matter to be closed:

A decision in essence has been made and I do not think any change will take place at the Education Committee. I just want to make that clear.

(London County Council, 1965b)

One wonders what purpose the EC served if it could be dismissed so easily. In 1962 it had ratified, seemingly in retrospect, the proposal to turn Risinghill into an eight-form entry school and here was another major decision that, on the face of it, was being taken before the EC had met and given its approval. While the EC's sub-committees probably had delegated powers, even so the authors were surprised that a special meeting of the EC was not convened to discuss and/or ratify the proposal.

C9.6 – Consulting the Parents

It is clear from the parents' meeting, which Berg attended, that the LCC had no intention of taking the parents' views into account. The decision had been made, and this meeting had been organised simply to tell them what was going to happen to their children when the school closed. The parents, however, had no intention of rolling over and tried desperately to claim what they believed to be their rights under the Education Act, that being the right to choose how their children should be educated. They were told, in no uncertain terms, that it was too big a matter for them to decide, and they were treated appallingly:

When the parents said they would appeal, the L.C.C. spokesman said 'Good luck to you. You have the right to appeal. That is our glorious English tradition. But it won't get you anywhere – it's all settled. You'd do much better to make up your minds to it and settle your children at new schools.' I came away thinking a lot of thugs had got together in the power position and democracy was not working at all. (Berg, 1968b, p196)

The parents had every right to feel aggrieved, and not just because of the manner in which they were spoken to. A law that permits the closure of a school on the premise of parental choice on the one hand, but openly fails to consult the parents on the other is, in the authors' opinion, perverse - whatever the reason.

According to Berg, around two-hundred-fifty parents turned up to voice their concerns about the closure. One of the parents, Bob Redrupp, was an Islington councillor at the time, and

was also a former chair of Risinghill's PTA. Redrupp, when interviewed by the authors, remembered the events of 1965 clearly. He told them that, at a borough council meeting, around ten people turned up to hear about twelve million pounds being spent on rates, but the LCC did not consider the two-hundred-fifty-strong parents' meeting to be of relevance. Redrupp, now sadly deceased, features in Berg's book, and his daughter, a former pupil of Risinghill, has completed one of the RRG's questionnaires.

Yet the joint report of the Schools Planning Sub-Committee (of which Miss Murray was chair), the Secondary Schools Sub-Committee (of which Mrs Bentwich was the chair) and the Further Education Sub-Committee (of which Mrs Margaret Cole was chair) stated, amongst other things, that the wishes of parents had been included in their findings? Their report is dated 26 January 1965 – before the Risinghill parents' meeting had even taken place – so this was an odd statement to make. Here is an extract from their report:

We have been concerned to ensure that these arrangements shall be based on the best interests of the pupils, on parental wishes, and on the best use of the accommodation available. To this end, we arranged for confidential discussions to take place with the heads, staffs and governing bodies of the schools and college concerned about the best arrangements which might be made, and in reaching our decisions we have taken their views fully into account. (London Education Committee, 1965)

As with the initial proposal, the language used throughout this document is very odd. While it strives, valiantly, to appear consultative, it is clear that not only has the decision already been taken, but it has been taken independently of the EC, which is not mentioned in the report at all. Again, the authors could not believe that the EC had been side-lined in this way:

Against this background we have decided, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, that Risinghill school shall be closed in July 1965. (London Education Committee, 1965)

With the exception of the Principal of Kingsway, who had been too busy to look at the proposal and therefore had not expressed a view one way or the other, all of the parties consulted had given a resounding 'No' to the closure proposal so the sub-committees' conclusions defy belief. Duane, as stated, was not included in any of the "confidential discussions" and this was, in the authors' opinion, another aspect of the sub-committees'

findings that were flawed. As for the parents, while this report cleverly does not state that the parents were consulted formally - or make the distinction that its authors were referring to Islington parents generically - any reasonable person, on reading this report, would assume that its findings were based on, or at least included, the wishes of those parents directly involved.

Notwithstanding this deception, for any meaningful parental dialogue to take place with Islington *en masse*, the LCC would have had to set up separate consultative meetings across the borough, which did not happen⁶⁷. A less effective, but nonetheless acceptable, form of consultation with the community as a whole would have been through the elected councillors sitting on the EC who, as far as the authors were able to establish, were not consulted formally either. The EC did not meet until after the statutory notices were posted.

The only other way in which the chairs of these three sub-committees could have reached such a conclusion was through a detailed analysis of the number of first and second choice applications to *all* of Islington's secondary schools. A sample of just four, which included one that was not even in the borough, was, in the opinion of the authors, disingenuous.

In her book, Berg sums up this sorry state of affairs beautifully:

Less than a week later, Mr James Young attacked Roy Nash of the Daily Mail for saying that the Risinghill parents were not consulted. 'They were consulted' said Mr Young. Furthermore, he said, he had no evidence whatever that the majority of the parents objected. (Berg, 1968b, p197)

C9.7 - Parental Consultation Today

Although parents have been given more of a say in the running of their schools through greater representation on GBs, nothing much has changed on the consultation front in that their views continue to be ignored, and seemingly with the same impunity:

I was the most vocally sceptical of all of us, for a number of reasons, but mainly because the conversion was forced on the county council, then the education authority, and the school, by diktat from Westminster, with no

⁶⁷ This state of affairs might be attributable to the fact that Section 76 does not give parents the right to be consulted directly, even now.

pretence of consultation with either the community at large or its elected representatives. (Bailey, 2011)

The above quote is taken from a local newspaper In Bedfordshire where a public consultation (of sorts) on the County's proposal to move from a three-tier system of junior, middle and secondary schools to a two-tier system of junior and secondary schools resulted in parents opting, overwhelmingly, to keep the middle tier. The general consensus in Bedfordshire, however, is that in the not too distant future middle schools will disappear as the central government prefers a two-tier system. In fact some parts of the County have already moved over to a two-tier system as this is the carrot for funding.

The arguments 'for' and 'against' middle schools are compelling on both sides, as are the arguments for today's free schools and academies, not that there has been any meaningful parental consultation in Bedfordshire (or anywhere else) about the latter:

And I oppose the establishment of a free school for exactly the same reason, that it is a cosy arrangement between a self-appointed local clique, and the DfE and their proxies at the New Schools Network.
(Bailey, 2011)

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, parental consultation is an illusion. This is something that will be examined in more detail in *The Waste Clay* - when looking at the politics that have driven all the different secondary schools currently sitting under the one 'comprehensive' umbrella. All of these schools have been introduced on the back of parental choice, including the free school and the city academy without any meaningful consultation with parents or the community as a whole. So much for parents having a say in how their children should be educated.

CHAPTER C10 – Death of a School

*‘O, what a tangled web we weave
when first we practice to deceive’*

*Sir Walter Scott,
('Marmion, Canto VI. Stanza 17', 1808)*

With the consultations over and the appropriate public notices posted (required under section thirteen of the Education Act) all that remained was for the Secretary of State, Anthony Crosland, to be notified of the LCC's decision. He would have the final say on whether or not Risinghill should close. This notification was probably drafted jointly by the chairs of the Schools Planning Sub-Committee, Primary and Secondary Schools Sub-Committee and Further Education Sub-Committee on or immediately after 27 January 1965; this being the date on which this joint committee met to discuss the outcome of its consultations with those directly involved in the reorganisation.

The RRG carried out an extensive search of the London archives to see if it could find the LCC's notification to the Secretary of State as it simply could not believe that a school could be closed in the circumstances described. Not one of the LCC's arguments for the closure had stood up to scrutiny and the consultation process – if it could be described as such - had shown that this was a much-loved and well-respected community school, which the people of Islington did not want to see shut. The hundreds of letters that had poured into the school, along with the numerous petitions and deputations that were sent to the LCC and to the Secretary of State direct, all bore testament to this fact. This was also a school that was fast becoming a place of considerable interest educationally. Robin Pedley, the principal of Exeter University, was one of many eminent educationalists to have visited the school and applauded what was being achieved there. The famous Quaker, Kenneth C Barnes, founder of Wennington School, was another:

Yes, Kenneth Barnes was one of the first people to invite Michael to go up to his school in Yorkshire to speak about Risinghill. And Mike thought they were terribly broad minded for Quakers, he was absolutely thrilled. (M. Duane, 2006)

Risinghill also had the support of the press, something that was very unusual in the 1960s: an example of this being the media's response to Alderman Sebag-Montefiore's attack on the

school in March 1964, as described in chapter C8. And the same thing happened in January 1965 when the proposal to close Risinghill was leaked to the *Sunday Times*. The media coverage then was on a scale that equalled, if not surpassed, the coverage in March 1964. As can be seen from the following extract taken from one of many press cuttings of the time, there was huge support for the school with many of the national newspapers expressing serious doubts about the LCC's reasons for closing it – this from The Sun:

Duane tried an unorthodox approach. He banned caning from Risinghill – a pretty brave move – and ran the school on the motto: “Love conquers all.”

His methods seem to be working. Delinquents are far fewer. Academic standards are higher. And now, just when a hard battle seems to have been won, the L.C.C. are thinking of turning Risinghill into a girls' comprehensive school. They say it is part of a reorganisation of schools in the district.

The L.C.C. will have to provide a lot more facts and arguments if the public are to be convinced that their only object is reorganisation. And if Risinghill becomes a girls' school, Mr Duane must be offered another job as headmaster. Otherwise many people will suspect that the L.C.C.'s real motive is dislike of Mr Duane and his methods. (Chapman 1965)

While the press appeared to have recognised that Duane was no ordinary head, running an ordinary school, Crosland seems to have been oblivious to this fact. The authors were puzzled by this as had Crosland taken even a passing interest in Duane he would have seen that this was a man who, aside from making great strides in education, was being invited to sit on some of the country's most prestigious committees, including a government working committee on the 'Study of the Psycho-Social Aspects of Drug Taking' (chaired by Professor Carstairs). Duane had also addressed a committee of MPs at the House of Commons about Risinghill's work with Islington's immigrant community; something that Crosland would have been aware of as he was a Labour MP at the time. He was also a champion of the comprehensive, sharing (or appearing to share) the same, educational values as Duane, thus making his decision not to intervene in the affair all the more bewildering.

It was because of Crosland's somewhat equivocal approach to Risinghill's closure that the authors began to question if there had been another, more compelling, reason for closing the school, one that the LCC and the Secretary of State had not wanted to make public. With this in mind, they revisited a document in the Duane archive at the IOE which, in the early days of their research, had discarded on account of it being a draft letter that had probably not been sent, also because it contained a spurious allegation that could not be substantiated. However, if said allegation had had even a grain of truth to it, then here was a legitimate reason for closing Risinghill in the circumstances described:

Mr W⁶⁸, a Governor of Starcross School, told me last month that when the Starcross Governors were informed about the proposal to move Starcross into the Risinghill building, certain hints were dropped about a report by HMIs that could not be published because it would cause a scandal, and reference was made to 'sexual irregularities' at Risinghill. (W. M. Duane, 1965a)

The above gathering appeared to have been a formal consultation meeting of the type undertaken with the Risinghill staff and Risinghill's GB on 30 November 1964 and 4 December 1964 respectively, so the authors decided to explore this allegation further. Apart from W, who is named in the document, no other individual(s) is mentioned. One must assume, however, that whoever was responsible for dropping these hints was a senior LCC officer. Who else would be in a position to talk about a HMI report that could not be published and/or have the authority to consult the Starcross GB on its move into the Risinghill premises?

Whether or not the Starcross governors took these hints seriously is difficult to say. The RRG is of the opinion that some probably did as this was not the first time that Risinghill had been subjected to smears of this nature. Unfortunately the authors were unable to establish, categorically, whether Duane took this matter up with *The Times*; there being no evidence in the MD archive at the IOE to suggest this. They are of the opinion that he did not, largely because of *The Times*' sustained attack on Kidbrooke at this time, to be discussed later in this chapter. Suffice to say here that, if handled incorrectly, this claim, unsubstantiated though it

⁶⁸ His full name editorially omitted here. This is a draft letter and the authors do not know why MD did not send it.

might have been, had the potential to cause serious damage to Risinghill, and possibly to Kidbrooke also.

Because W was named in this letter and his contact details (home and work telephone numbers) provided for *The Times* to follow up with him direct, the authors were fairly confident that the anecdote was genuine. Besides they could not think of any reason why W would have said such a thing to Duane as he (W) did not appear to have anything to gain by this. They also reasoned that, if the school was closed for irregularities of the type described, there would be some indication of this – either in Duane’s notes of his meetings with the LCC officials and/or the minutes of the consultation meeting with Risinghill’s governing body (GB), as discussed in chapter C9. With regard to the latter, it is important to remember that, when Risinghill’s closure came up for discussion, Duane was asked to leave the room in order to facilitate a “freer” exchange; therefore it is possible that the subject of ‘sexual irregularities’ was discussed then, but not recorded in the GB minutes. However, the authors do not believe this to be the case – for the simple reason that the chair of Risinghill’s GB in November 1964, Mrs Evans, was loyal to Duane, and would not have kept something like this from him.

The authors did ask Margaret Duane if she was able to throw any light on this draft letter; however, she was not aware of it, nor was she aware of *any* irregularities at Risinghill, sexual or otherwise, not that her husband was in the habit of discussing school business with her. That said, she was confident that, had he been questioned by the LCC about irregularities of this nature, he would, in all probability, have confided in her. Duane was very meticulous in his record-keeping, and there is nothing in his correspondence about this either. For the authors, the most compelling evidence of there being no truth to this allegation can be found in the notes of Duane’s meeting with the chair of the EC, Mr James Young, and Mr Houghton on 29 January 1965; notes that, for the record, were produced by the LCC and not Duane. These notes make it very clear that the closure of Risinghill was due entirely to the accommodation problems at Kingsway College, nothing else:

I want to make it perfectly clear that the question of Risinghill and the methods which the headmaster was using there have never been in question – never been in question. This matter is entirely over this problem of Further Education, and this building at Star Cross was built for that purpose, as a Further Education establishment. (Houghton, 1965)

Indeed this was the official line throughout, even when Berg's book was published in 1968. It is also useful to point out here that, although the MacGowan report (London County Council, 1962c) contained a catalogue of complaints about the school, 'sexual irregularities' was not one of them. Nor was this issue raised by Clark during his visitation in June 1964. However, Clark was alleged to have given a report of his visit to Houghton, so this could have been the HMI report referred to by W. As stated elsewhere, it is unclear whether this was a verbal report or a written one, but the authors strongly suspect that it was a verbal report as they did not find any evidence to suggest otherwise. As has been demonstrated, Clark was not one for mincing his words, and it is the authors' contention that, if he had been given even a hint of such irregularities at Risinghill, he would have taken this up with Duane. The authors were, therefore, forced to conclude that this was probably a last-ditch attempt by Houghton's officers to get Starcross on board, and quickly: it had rejected (unanimously) the reorganisation proposal and, equally disturbing for the LCC, was supporting the Risinghill teachers in their quest for a public inquiry:

Still on the same day, the head and eight members of the staff of Starcross visited Risinghill to see it for themselves; on their return, the Starcross staff voted against accepting the 'proposals', and also passed a resolution deploring the closing of Risinghill School which they said had accomplished so much educationally and socially.

On the same day the governors of Starcross unanimously rejected the 'proposals'. (Berg, 1968b, p172)

In the circumstances, a scandalous HMI report that could not be published seemed, from the authors' perspective, to be a perfect solution to what was fast becoming a very difficult situation for the LCC. First it scuppered any thoughts Starcross might have had of Risinghill (and by implication itself) getting a reprieve, and second, the nature of the allegation was such that it guaranteed absolute secrecy. Had W not said anything to Duane, nobody would have been any the wiser, including the EC. And even if the lie had been exposed, it is hard to see how Duane could have challenged it publicly without damaging the school.

There is one other issue that is worth exploring here as it does link in to the 'sexual irregularities' claim, and this is about Risinghill's (alleged) pregnancies. This rumour started almost from the day that the school opened, as witnessed by Mrs Elsie Heron, the chair of

Risinghill's PTA at the time of the closure (1965). Heron joined the PTA specifically on account of these stories. This would have been in September 1961 or thereabouts; 1961 being the year in which Heron's eleven-year-old daughter, Cathy, joined the school:

... as the impression was that the school was out of control, and I heard stories, about large numbers of girls becoming pregnant, from the other parents, although I didn't know any at that time, myself, but that was why I joined the PTA. To find out for myself what created the rumours. (Heron, 2005)

At around the same time as the hints that were being dropped to the Starcross governors about the 'sexual irregularities' at Risinghill, a Mr Chalkley, MP, wrote to Duane to ask about Risinghill's pregnancies, suggesting rumours of a sexual nature were, indeed, being spread (albeit surreptitiously) about the school. This was Duane's response:

Informal enquiries among my colleagues suggest that the number of our pregnancies is certainly not higher, pro rata, than those in local girls' schools, and may well be, and compared with Barnsbury Girls' School quite clearly is, lower. (W. M. Duane, 1965e)

Heron also wrote to Duane about this matter, expressing concern that the announcement to close the school had set tongues wagging all over again:

Dear Mr Duane,

Congratulations on vindicating the school, and the methods you have used. Unfortunately the publicity has encouraged the scandalmongers to recreate old ghosts, and pass around tales of unbelievable trash. I have heard these stories, as have other parents, who have asked me about them.

They and I have spent a lot of time justifying your methods, and denying the vileness of the stories. (Heron, 1965)

While some in the RRG, notably Isabel and Lynn, were aware of these rumours when they joined Risinghill in 1960, they could not, in all honesty, say that they knew of anyone in the school who was pregnant when they were there.

Whether or not Crosland was aware of, or persuaded by, any of these stories is difficult to say as the authors did not find the official notification from the LCC to him seeking his approval to close the school. This was very frustrating as they were keen to establish what, if any, evidence had been provided by the LCC in support of its claim(s) that the school had become unpopular. They were also keen to establish whether a HMI report had featured in the notification, as had been suggested by Houghton and his team.

In addition to the LMA, the RRG contacted the IOE; DfES; Ofsted; and the Mayor's office in London. All of these bodies were very helpful, giving the authors other leads to try, but these leads often led them back to LMA where they had started. All was not lost, however, as Crosland's reply – or to be more precise his deputy's reply - to the PTA's appeal did provide a reasonable idea of the grounds upon which the LCC had sought the Secretary of State's approval to discontinue its maintenance of Risinghill. These grounds were consistent with the proposal discussed with the Risinghill staff and the Risinghill GB, suggesting the school had, to all intent and purpose, been closed for the reasons advertised.

C10.1 – Anthony Crosland

Before looking at the Secretary of State's response to the PTA's appeal, it is useful to examine the politics that were driving education in the spring of 1965, and in particular the politics of Anthony Crosland. There is one important date (21 January 1965) to keep in mind. This was when Crosland's famous 10/65 Circular (about the reorganisation of secondary education in England and Wales) was debated in the House of Commons. The outcome of this debate had serious repercussions for the comprehensive school as it was envisaged then - a single secondary school of the type identified in the *London School Plan 1947*. Some people might disagree with this analogy as there were, and probably still are, differences of opinion about what constitutes a comprehensive school. The authors, however, can only offer an opinion based on what was happening in London in the 1960s, not what was happening elsewhere, or what has happened subsequently.

For an ardent supporter of the comprehensive model, and a self-confessed socialist to boot, the authors have to say that they found Crosland's politics somewhat confusing. This was a man who was credited for once having stated that he wanted to “destroy every fucking grammar school in the country” but within months of coming to office destroyed a comprehensive instead. Some of Crosland's colleagues, notably the Labour politician, Roy Hattersly, have expressed doubts that he ever made such a statement; however, if Crosland's

second wife, Susan Crosland, is to be believed he did, indeed, say this. And he said it with conviction:

If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to destroy every fucking grammar school in England. And Wales and Northern Ireland. (S. Crosland, 1982)

That Crosland favoured the integration of the grammar into the comprehensive is also clear from a bullish interview that he gave to the *Times Education Supplement* (TES) in March 1965. Here he makes no bones about what he thought of the role of the grammar and independent schools within the state system:

... these schools exercised a profoundly divisive influence on our whole system of social relations, and were a major cause of social inequality. It was no accident that Britain, the only country in the world with this stratus of private and privileged education, so utterly divorced from the state system, was also by common agreement the most class-conscious, snobbish and stratified country in the world. (A. Crosland, 1965b, p761)

The date of this interview (12 March 1965) is significant. At the time, Crosland was considering: (1) certain amendments to Circular 10/65; (2) the LCC's proposal to close Risinghill; (3) the PTA's appeal; and (4) a poignant letter from Duane, begging him to intervene in the closure.

Taking Duane's letter first, this raised issues that Crosland was undoubtedly familiar with, and was probably also very sympathetic, to:

In your new post, Risinghill may offer you the chance to begin "to burn down the Victorian prejudices" in education. I have been trying to do this all my teaching life but without the necessary authority or influence. However, as headmaster of a school just sentenced to death by the L.C.C., I must report to you that the disintegration of this living community began the moment the decision of the Sub-Committee, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Helen Bentwich, was leaked to the press on 27th January. (W. M. Duane, 1965d)

Here are some more extracts from Duane's letter:

Please act firmly and quickly to stop this rot, before so many of our children, already burdened by social handicap, become even more embittered against a society that has failed to convince them that it cares...

Before you make the irrevocable decision, come and see the school for yourself. Meet the children and the ordinary parents and look at the neighbourhood. (W. M. Duane, 1965d)

Because this letter fell in what was described by Crosland as a statutory two-month period during which local government electors (the authors take this to mean the people of Islington) were allowed to submit to him their objections to the LCC's proposal, it would seem that protocol did not permit a visit of this kind:

There is now a period of two months during which local government electors may submit to me their objections to the Authority's proposal. At the end of this time I shall consider the case put to me by the Authority and all the objections which have been made to it, and after a thorough examination of all the facts and arguments I shall reach a decision whether or not to approve the Authority's proposal. This is a procedure laid down by Parliament in the Education Act. It would not be proper for me to visit the school, as you suggest, at the present time. (A. Crosland, 1965a)

Visiting the school later – when the decision had already been made – seemed, to the authors, to be a complete waste of time. However, it was Crosland's commitment to consider all the facts and arguments before making a decision that is of relevance. In this, he fell short (by a mile) and for the following reasons. But first some background information. When Crosland wrote this letter to Duane, Circular 10/65 had been debated in the House of Commons, and he was making certain amendments to it; one of which would preserve the status of the grammar school within the state system. On 12 March 1965 – the date of his 'controversial' interview with the TES - the comprehensive school was, effectively, dead in the water or soon would be; hence the authors' confusion with his politics. However, one has to consider the frame of mind that he was in at the time, and ask: Was this his way of distancing himself from the

debacle that was about to follow? And could this also be the reason for his equivocal approach to Risinghill?

C10.2 – Circular 10/65

Labour had won the General Election in November 1964, but only just. With a four-seat margin it was not in the best of positions to be making any radical changes to the secondary school system, and especially where the amalgamation of the grammar into the comprehensive was concerned. As has been discussed, the Labour Party itself was divided on this issue so the likelihood of the comprehensive school becoming a reality seemed to be as remote as it had ever been. In its Manifesto for the 1964 General Election, Labour had, however, promised to remove selection (the 11+) and introduce a comprehensive system of secondary education so it had to be seen to be doing something:

Labour will get rid of the segregation of children into separate schools caused by 11-plus selection: secondary education will be reorganised on comprehensive lines. (Gillard, 2011)

Circular 10/65 appears to have been the first, tentative step in this direction.

While Anthony Crosland had made no secret of his desire to bring the grammar into the comprehensive, Harold Wilson, on becoming Prime Minister, had made it clear that he would see grammar schools abolished over his dead body. But at the last Party Conference, according to Tony Benn, he (Wilson) had been making speeches of a very different kind, as was seen in Chapter C7.

C10.3 – Broken Promises

It has been said that ‘The Great Comprehensive Debate’ of 21 January 1965 changed the shape of education. This is when Circular 10/65 was debated in the House of Commons. The authors were at a loss to understand what, exactly, changed after this debate as the education system looked much the same to them as it had always been, that being a two-three tier system of grammars, secondary moderns-cum-comprehensives and technical schools with the latter slowly disappearing over the horizon. But they are not educationalists and provide here the gist of what happened immediately before and after this debate, leaving people to make up their own minds about whether or not Circular 10/65 changed anything dramatically.

It is helpful to explain first what was happening on the ground in relation to Risinghill and Kidbrooke. In the lead up to this debate in the House of Commons, the LCC, in an unprecedented move, announced its intention to open up eight of its showpiece comprehensives to the press and to the public. The Open Day was scheduled for 15 January 1965. Although Risinghill is reported in some publications to have taken part in this exercise, the authors know that it did not. Given the publicity surrounding the school at this time, this was the last place that the LCC would have wanted the press poking around. (Kerckhoff *et al.*, 1996). There was another, equally compelling, reason for Risinghill's exclusion from this exercise. As will be seen later, 15 January 1965 was also the date upon which the Risinghill teachers, parents and pupils launched their protest campaigns, which began with a public demand (by the teachers) for a government inquiry into the closure and ended with a march (by the pupils) on Downing Street to petition the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, direct. While the parents had not yet drafted their appeal to the Secretary of State, their intention to do so was announced on this day in the *Evening Standard*, who later covered the pupils' march on Downing Street, as did the *Daily Mail*, the *Express*, the *Islington Gazette* and the *North London Press*.

The press coverage of Risinghill was hugely embarrassing - for the LCC and for the new Labour government in office; a government that was about to do a U-turn on the comprehensive. Instead of a single secondary school for all, the comprehensive was to become a 'grammar school for all', which probably did not come as any great surprise to some in the Labour Party as this had been Wilson's intention all along. On 15 January 1965, however, the 'Great Comprehensive Debate' on Circular 10/65 was still to come, and it is in this context that the attack on Kidbrooke by *The Times* must be viewed, also its decision to give Risinghill a wide berth.

C10.4 – The Times and Kidbrooke

Whereas Kidbrooke was taking a battering in the press (mainly from *The Times*) Risinghill was riding on the crest of a wave of publicity that was unprecedented for a school of this kind. Throughout the spring and early summer of 1965 it was constantly in the news with Duane becoming something of a celebrity as a result.

As stated earlier, *The Times'* campaign against Kidbrooke started towards the back end of 1964 and peaked just a week or so before the debate in the House of Commons, suggesting very strongly that its attack on the school was politically motivated. This campaign appeared

to be aimed more at discrediting the LCC's educational policy to build comprehensive schools than it was Kidbrooke *per se*, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. Suffice to say here that *The Times*, along with the *Daily Worker* continued their boycott of Risinghill, as did *The London Schoolmaster*, a publication of the London Schools Association (LSA). This was the same body that, three months earlier, had made a formal complaint to Houghton about Duane's outspokenness on CP, but now had nothing to say on the subject: hence the reason for Berg's gibe earlier.

While the focus of the press reports was very much on Duane's refusal to use the cane, some of the images in the press (of Islington's dilapidated streets and housing) were highlighting, albeit subliminally, issues of deprivation and inequality that had never before been reported on such a grand scale: explaining, no doubt, why *The Times* and the *London Schoolmaster* were choosing to steer clear of what was fast becoming a very passionate and public debate. While CP touched every child, regardless of class, it goes without saying that the beating of poor and/or troubled children from broken homes was probably something that even readers of *The Times* and *The London Schoolmaster* would have found hard to stomach. Simmering in the background was the fight for the retention of the grammar, inextricably linked to the comprehensive, and thereby Risinghill - a school that could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as a 'grammar school for all' and as such was making headlines (in the eyes of some) for all of the wrong reasons.

Falling out of 'The Great Comprehensive Debate' in the Commons was an important amendment that retained the grammar school as a separate entity, putting an end to the comprehensive dream forever. Nothing had changed, but the public was about to be fed one of the biggest lies in the history of education:

The idea of promoting comprehensive schools as 'grammar schools for all', with the clear implication that a grammar school curriculum could now be made more widely available, was enshrined in the introduction to Circular 10/65 which made reference to a motion passed on 21 January 1965 in which government policy had been endorsed by the House of Commons. (Chitty, 1989)

C10.5 - The Hypocrisy

In April 1965, *The Times* ran a series of informative articles (nine in total) on the country's new comprehensive schools. The arguments 'for' and 'against' the comprehensive system were presented in a surprisingly balanced way. It would seem that, now that the grammar had been given a reprieve, *The Times* could afford to be magnanimous. Kidbrooke was the first school to be featured in the series and was given the accolade of being the "most publicized, most famous of Britain's comprehensive schools" (*The Times*, 1965a). For *The Times* to have had the gall to even mention Kidbrooke after running such a vindictive campaign against it was astonishing. Even more bizarre was its denial of Risinghill. Its readers must have wondered why, when every other national newspaper was covering Risinghill's brave fight for survival, not one single column in this series was given over to the most famous comprehensive of all. Duane, perhaps, had the answer:

It is an indictment of social hypocrisy, of those whose personal interests are invested in the status quo, of those who, pinching their delicate nostrils to exclude the stench of that hypocrisy, seek to divert attention away from the main problems ... (W. M. Duane, 1968c)

When Circular 10/65 was introduced in July 1965, LEAs were 'requested' rather than 'required' to submit plans for reorganisation on comprehensive lines, leaving the door ajar for the grammar. The status quo had been maintained by giving the comprehensive a new image, one that it did not have a hope in hell of living up to. It would remain a secondary modern school with all the attendant problems of staff shortages; suitably qualified teachers; huge classes; and a dearth of children in the higher ability groups, children who, nonetheless, would be expected to perform to the same academic standards as their grammar school counterparts.

Some educationalists have called Circular 10/65 a 'missed opportunity' while others appear to have accepted it as a reasonable compromise. For schools like Risinghill, however, where the teacher:pupil ratio bore no resemblance whatsoever to the grammar, and where the majority of children were in the lower ability groups, this move towards the grammar school model was a disaster. Risinghill was one of the first, but would not, by any means, be the last casualty of this madness. The authors have more to say about this when bringing the politics of education up to date in the second part of their story, *The Waste Clay*. For now, it is important to return to Risinghill and to Duane.

C10.6 – The politics within and the battle to save the School

After the LCC's Open Day, a small group of Risinghill teachers, speaking in the name of the Common Room Council, suddenly became very interested in the publicity surrounding the closure. In their view, this was having an adverse effect on them and the children. In a letter to Duane they made a rather cheeky request that he refrain from talking to the media:

It is the Council's understanding that you may shortly appear on television and speak on radio.

The Council requests that as of the present time you undertake to abstain from further discussion of Risinghill School in these ways. Further, since your public image is firmly established as headmaster of this particular school, the Council requests that you also abstain from discussions of general educational problems in public. (W_____ and Constable, 1965)

These instructions ended with a demand for Duane to give such an undertaking to the Council in writing, and within 24 hours of the time and date of delivery of the letter. The letter was signed by a Terence Constable in his capacity of Secretary of the Common Room Council, and another teacher (anonymised here as W_____), who signed as President. The latter was later prosecuted for gambling away school funds, not that the authors wish to dwell on this. What they will say is that Duane supported this teacher throughout his ordeal, and he (Duane) also made good the missing funds:

Mike told me that he did not want him to be prosecuted and to lose his job. He said he is young and he has a young family. I think he was a gambler and was hoping to put it back. Mike got this telephone call at home and he had to go to one of the big main line stations because there were all these children about to go on a trip with this chap and Mike paid the money out of his own pocket so that the kids could go. (M. Duane, 2006)

Michael D, whom the authors have mentioned in previous chapters, recalled putting bets on for this teacher who was, as Duane had suspected, a compulsive gambler:

He knew I was interested in racing and gambling because he used to see me in the bookies; he was gambling all the time... I put three or four bets on for him. He had fiver bets, which was a lot of money then. (Michael, D 2005)

It is Terence Constable, however, whom the authors are more interested in. Constable joined Risinghill as Head of Modern Languages on 1 January 1965. (Risinghill Governing Board, 1964b) He had, therefore, been in the school for barely a fortnight before starting to throw his weight around. Margaret Duane remembered him without any prompting:

Terence Constable, yes I did meet him. He arrived after that odd visit to close the school and he was a right menace. I think he was planted there; he was anti Mike before he even set foot in the door. (M. Duane, 2006)

According to Bob Dixon, the Common Room Council was on the verge of collapse by the time Constable arrived. It had five or six members at the most. Many of the teachers had already left and/or were looking for jobs by this time, and those that remained had lost interest in the Council long ago. In Dixon's opinion it was not a body that was representative of the Risinghill staff, as will be shown later in this chapter and in chapter C11.

Surprisingly (or perhaps not so surprisingly) the LCC took the demands of the Council very seriously, far more seriously than the forty-seven strong petition signed by the majority of teachers following Dr Briault's consultation with them. Four days later, on 29 January 1965, Duane was summoned to the meeting with Messrs Young and Houghton when he was ordered to cease all communication with the press immediately. Not long afterwards the Risinghill GB issued its own gagging order. It would seem that the governors also believed that the media's support of the school was having a damaging effect on the staff and the children. (Risinghill Governing Board, 1965, Item 12)

At the parents meeting, Constable was one of just three teachers who spoke out against the school, much to the astonishment of the parents and staff present:

'Corporal punishment is a red herring. The teachers are concerned with the future of the school. I've only been here less than a term. I'm concerned with the future. The L.C.C. says the prestige of the school is doing down; and therefore the school must be closed. I agree with them.'
(Berg, 1968b, p186)

Constable's acceptance of the Risinghill job was, for the authors, surprising and for two reasons. First, they found it extremely difficult to understand why, at a time when teaching jobs were at a premium, a head of modern languages would choose to join a school that was

under threat of closure. Second, why would anyone with his qualifications choose to work for a headmaster to whose policies they did not subscribe? This was not something that Constable discovered after accepting the job as the RRG's research with some of the former teachers of the school (discussed in *The Waste Clay*) shows that Duane made a point of meeting new staff to explain his policies in full. In the next chapter the authors have more to say about Constable who, despite spending so little time in the school, less than two terms in fact, claimed (in his paper, *The Risinghill Myth*, 1968) to know so much about it.

Despite the LCC's efforts to divert attention from the school by gagging Duane, the press coverage continued unabated with *The Mail* putting the LCC's announcement on its front page, positioning the headline 'Risinghill WILL Be Shut' right across the top of a huge photograph of Winston Churchill's flag-draped coffin on its way to Westminster. It was a powerful image, demonstrating how strongly the newspaper felt about the closure. And *The Mail* was by no means a lone voice in this respect, as has been reported in the previous chapters.

Because of the press activity, hundreds of letters began to pour into the school - from all over the country and from different parts of the world. Some of these letters were copied to the newspapers, to the LCC and to Anthony Crosland direct. The RRG has seen some of the correspondence and know that Crosland was sent copies. There were deputations from the High Commission of Pakistan; from the different immigrant organisations; from Social Services; and from the London Teachers Association to name but a few. An 'open' letter from the Probation Service was printed in the *Guardian* (Probation Officers, 1965) and another was sent to Houghton. An extract from the *Guardian* is provided here:

He is a really remarkable man and has been able to solve the problems of many difficult children within the school without their having to come on probation. I had one boy on probation who had been caned for continual truancy at two previous schools. He went to Risinghill, where Mr Duane had him in his room for coffee, and talked to him sympathetically after he went truant. He never did it again. (Probation Officers of Clerkenwell Court, 1965)

Note the full letter to Houghton is provided in Appendix B, as stated earlier.

The people of Islington were also putting their names to petitions that were organised by the pupils, the parents and also the parents of children attending the local primary schools. But these, along with the five-hundred-plus letters of support received in the school, all appear to have been ignored by Crosland. On 17 March 1965 the PTA wrote to Crosland appealing against the closure of Risinghill. (Risinghill PTA 1965) This would have been at around the same time as his ‘controversial’ interview with the TES. A full transcript of the appeal can be found at Appendix C, making even less sense of his politics and his decision to close the school.

C10.7 - The Secretary of State’s Response to the PTA’s Appeal

The PTA’s appeal highlighted several flaws in the LCC’s argument for discontinuing its maintenance of Risinghill, notably its acceptance of the fictitious statements made by HMI Clark upon which it appeared to have based its claim that local parents did not want to send their children there. As has been discussed, the primary school heads cited by Clark to have made these statements denied, categorically, that they had made any such comments and, equally disturbing, said that Clark had not been present at any of their parental interviews.

At its press conference in 1968, the LCC, now replaced by the ILEA, seems to have got itself in a pickle on this issue when defending itself against the allegations made in Berg’s book:

ILEA staff yesterday maintained that closure was caused simply by the rundown in the school’s intake. There was “no evidence” to suggest that primary heads had been warning parents not to send their children there.
(Guardian, 1968a)

If the above statement is correct, it does beg the question: Why then was Duane summoned to County Hall immediately after Clark’s visitation, and told that his job was on the line because he was not creating the right image for Risinghill? And why would Houghton state, publicly, that the reason for Risinghill’s closure was because “whatever its achievements, social and academic, a majority of Islington parents did not want to send their children there?” (North London Press, 1968)

Insofar as the “rundown in the school’s intake” is concerned, this issue was raised at the parental consultation meeting with Dr Briault and Mrs Bentwich with the parents offering to put their complaints (about being turned away from the school on the basis that it was over-

subscribed) in writing to the chair of the EC. But these offers were refused. One of the parents in question was part of the deputation that was invited to the House of Commons to discuss the appeal with Reg Prentice who, for some reason, deputised for Crosland. In Berg's book, this parent is referred to as Miles's mother, who, when raising this issue with Prentice, did not get an answer:

... Miles's mother once again talked of the 'two-year wait', and said 'The man seemed embarrassed'. (Berg, 1968b, p198)

This element of the appeal appears to have been aimed at satisfying the test of 'unreasonableness' under Section 68 of the Education Act. However, this too does not appear to have been given any house room by Prentice or Crosland. Bob Dixon, who was part of this deputation, and who provided the RRG with his copy of the appeal, told the authors that, in addition to the points raised in this document, Prentice was informed of many other issues where the LCC had failed in its duties to the school. He confirmed that Berg's record of this meeting with Prentice was correct:

I felt we were being very politely listened to by a man whose mind wasn't on it because he knew the issue had been decided long ago. He was simply listening all the time for the division bell. (Berg, 1968b, p197)

So although Crosland promised to carry out a thorough examination of all the facts and arguments before reaching his decision, he did not fulfil this obligation. The decision had, as Berg had always suspected, been decided long ago, and was one that even the Secretary of State seemingly could do nothing about. Here (again) one sees the 'national system, locally administered' operating in a way that is unfathomable.

The two-month period in which local government electors were permitted to raise their objections to the LCC's proposal might have been a statutory requirement, but for all the notice that was taken of the many letters, deputations and petitions from the people of Islington, Crosland could have put everyone out of their misery and upheld the LCC's decision straight away. And this was by far the most damaging aspect of the consultation process. A school that is under threat of closure loses its staff very quickly: the mass exodus resulted in many of the children making their own exits with some not even bothering to turn up for their exams.

It is ironic that, at a time when the government was committed to providing further education for young people between the ages of fifteen and eighteen - which is why Starcross (allegedly) had to move out of Kingsway - the equivalent of a whole Sixth Form dropped out of Risinghill during this so-called period of consultation.

C10.8 – The End of an Era

In his farewell address to the younger children, Duane reminded them that concern for each other was more important than examination results, and that how they behaved in future would determine how they were treated in life:

You will go into other schools and meet good teachers and bad teachers. But how you behave will not depend on them; it will depend on you. I hope you will take from the good teachers you have had here the understanding that respect for other people, and for other people's ideas – whether you agree with them or not – is the main thing that matters. (Berg, 1968b, p231)

To the older pupils, who he addressed separately, because he knew they were feeling resentful and were talking about smashing up the school, he asked that they accept the decision with dignity:

We now have to show we can accept it, and not let it affect ourselves. Sometimes a man is killed by another man. Sometimes if he is a friend of ours we are so angry we want to kill the murderer. But perhaps we discover that the man who killed him is sick. What he has done is bad, but to do an evil thing like striking a sick man would be even worse. All the people share the responsibility. Stupidity, ignorance, prejudice, sheer spite have been at work. But we don't start lashing out, hurting other people because they have done that to us. (Berg, 1968b, p231)

Risinghill does seem to have been a political fiat in every sense; one that even Duane would not have thought possible. He was right about one thing, however: stupidity, ignorance, prejudice and sheer spite were all contributory factors in the closure of the school. He forgot to add hypocrisy, the glue that held it all together.

The children did as Duane asked. There were no reprisals and the school closed quietly. Alan remembers the unusual silence that pervaded the school on the last day. Everyone was devastated. His lasting memory is of Duane loading his belongings into the back of a red van before driving off for the last time:

He was surrounded by a vast number of pupils, teachers, parents and the odd onlooker, the strange thing was the relative quietness, nobody seemed able to speak, all they could do was stand and stare.

The authors have shown in this and other chapters that the closure of Risinghill was inevitable. But their story does not end here. Before moving on to the aftermath (in chapter C11) it is worthwhile mentioning Risinghill's GCE results for 1963 and 1964. In 1963, fifty-nine pupils were entered for the examination and thirty-four passed. In 1964, eighty pupils were entered and forty-two passed (in one to six subjects) with three pupils taking the A Level examination, two of whom went on to university. (Berg, p211) While these results might not, on the surface, appear outstanding, they have to be viewed in the context of a school that: (1) was situated in a poor, run-down part of Islington with some very challenging pupils; (2) had a chronic shortage of suitably qualified staff; and (3) had a hostile Education Department breathing down its neck. That it made any progress at all is nothing short of a miracle.

C10.9 – Examinations

The new Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), designed primarily for those in Group 2 who were not thought capable of taking the GCE, had been approved in 1963 and was about to be introduced in 1965. This examination would be used in the comprehensive and secondary modern schools, thus enabling the less-able child (representing around 75% of the secondary school population) to obtain qualifications, which up until now had not been possible. A grade 1 CSE was equivalent to an 'O'-Level pass, not that too many children in 1965 were capable of achieving this. See the Newsom Report: (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1963)

While Risinghill could never have become a 'grammar school for all' it did have the potential to become a good comprehensive school where every child was given an opportunity to develop skills more suited to their needs and/or interests. A small proportion of the children did have the ability to follow a more academic path – as the GCE results show – but the

majority did not. Many of the children did, however, take vocational qualifications, such as the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) which gave them a route into the world of commerce. Engineering was another discipline that opened many doors, particularly for the boys. For the less able, who were not considered 'bright' enough to take the GCE or CSE, there were courses in art, dress-making, tailoring, woodwork and metalwork at which they often excelled. It was this type of education that was needed, not one that led to a grade 1 CSE pass. But the politicians were not listening. They are still not listening today.

CHAPTER C11 - Aftermath

'The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.'

John F Kennedy,

(Address at Yale University, June 11, 1962)

Through Leila Berg, Bob Dixon was the first teacher to make contact with the RRG. He was given the name 'Mr Gwyn' in her book to protect his identity. Another teacher, Chris Lymbourides, was given the alias 'Mr Colinides' for the same reason. In fact, most of the people interviewed by Berg for *Risinghill: death of a Comprehensive School* are described simply as 'A Man' or 'A Woman' in her book:

I talked to many people in the last days of Risinghill. Here are some of the things they said. When I first wrote them down, people said I must have invented them; this is because people rarely listen to other people, particularly if they speak with a different accent. I have therefore given a brief description of each speaker, enough to establish their reality. (Berg, 1968b, p247)

In *The Waste Clay*, the authors provide more extracts from Berg's interviews with some of the staff, also the RRG's research with those teachers it managed to contact after forty years or more.

C11.1 - Margaret Cole

Margaret Cole, in her letters to the press, challenged the authenticity of Berg's interviews with the teachers, parents and pupils vigorously:

... I should very much like to know why nothing of the kind appears in the mass of Mrs Berg's tape-recorded interviews – which probably induced in some innocent readers and reviewers a belief in its "authenticity." These interviews contain nothing from the teachers, so despised by Mrs Berg, who found Risinghill difficult or impossible to work in, nor anything from the heads of primary schools (whom Mrs Berg comprehensively accuses,

without giving any evidence, of being part of the “conspiracy” which she declares exists against the school from its start); not even some contribution from one of the dissatisfied parents, which might help to explain the unquestioned fact that the applications for entry declined so disastrously. Did it not occur to her to ask any single one of them?

I hope that your readers will not accept anything quoted from this book as correct without further investigation. (Cole, 1968a)

The RRG’s research with the pupils and the teachers, however, tends to support Berg’s recollections of the time with Alan laying claim to ‘Roger’:

I found myself in the book, I am Roger on pages 250 and 251. (Foxall, 2004)

Here Berg refers to “A mother, talking in her council flat. Her husband is an engineer.” Alan remembered Berg visiting his home, and he also recalled the following conversation between Berg and his mother, who spoke about his (Alan’s) desolation at the closure of the school:

He’s fourteen now, Roger. He said I’m not going to any new school.’ The children all felt that with the bad publicity they would have a bad deal. But Mr Duane helped an awful lot to get the children to accept the move. Roger came home and told me about it, that they weren’t to go with malice, and to show that Risinghill could breed gentlemen. (Berg, 1968b, p251)

In fact, Alan recalls talking to Berg himself.

Bob Redrupp, described as a “father” and “potato-seller” in Chapel Market (Berg, 1968b, p253) also appeared in this section of the book. The authors can confirm that he was a costermonger in the market, and that he did sell potatoes from his stall. They also know, from Chris Lymbourides, who was given the pseudonym ‘Mr Colonides’ in Berg’s book, that Duane did attend his wedding (Berg, 1968b, p259). Bob Dixon (Mr Gwyn) was another teacher to confirm that Berg’s interviews and accounts of what happened at Risinghill were authentic. In fact he often responded to Cole’s letters in the press to make this point:

MARGARET COLE, in complaining (Tribune, June 28) of a lack of evidence from opponents of Michael Duane in the book, Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School, should note that Leila Berg drew a complete blank on applying for information to three teachers who were against the headmaster (page 189). It is relevant, too, to note the farcical difficulties encountered by the author in her attempts to speak to London head teachers (pages 200-206) and the fact that sociologists employed by the authority were instructed not to talk to Leila Berg (page 233).

In spite of such problems, however, are comments in the book from those criticising the school – for example, on page 271. Also, documents, reports, etc. are quoted throughout and readers are at liberty to draw their own conclusions

Margaret Cole lays great stress on “first-hand” information without saying quite what that means, in a case like this. No-one can be everywhere. I did teach at Risinghill, however, and therefore was in the best place, I suggest, for assessing the merits of the school from an educational point of view. (Dixon, 1968a)

Dixon was also in the best position to talk about the deputation that was invited to the House of Commons to discuss the PTA's appeal. He was there, Cole was not. Cole was, however, involved with the closure of Risinghill through her chairmanship of the Further Education Sub-Committee, as has been discussed. She was, therefore, in a better position than most to talk with some authority about the school, and the authors were puzzled as to why she chose not to advertise this fact. Cole died in 1980 so cannot answer this question and others that remain a mystery. By way of example the authors were surprised that, when talking about the “heads of primary schools” and “dissatisfied parents”, Cole pursued a narrative that was remarkably familiar, that being the fictitious claims made by inspector Clark in 1964, but were dropped like a hot potato by the LCC when Berg's book was published. To remind the reader, at its press conference in April 1968, the LCC had declared that there was “no evidence to support that primary heads had been warning parents not to send their children to Risinghill” (Goodall, 1968) but Cole, in her letter to the *Tribune*, two months later, appears to have been ignorant of this fact. The authors also found it difficult to believe that, given Cole's

involvement with the consultation process, she had not been given access to the PTA's appeal in which the heads of the primary schools had denied, categorically, Clark's claims:

Mr Peters absolutely denies that Mr Clark was ever present when he was interviewing parents, or that he had ever sent a letter of the kind alleged. Mr Straker of Penton Primary School, and Mr Hogan of Winton Primary School, similarly deny ever having had Mr Clark present at interviews with parents. (Risinghill PTA 1965)

As for her assertion that many parents had been dissatisfied with Risinghill, the PTA appeal shows that, from 1960 through to 1965, only two parents had withdrawn their children from the school. This was a matter of fact, not conjecture. Another, equally important, point that seems to have escaped her attention is that, at the consultation meeting with the Risinghill parents, presided over by her colleague, Mrs Helen Bentwich, not a single parent, of the two-hundred-fifty present, expressed any dissatisfaction with the school. At that meeting, a number of parents had complained about being turned away from the school on the basis that it was full - when this was clearly not the case – and were fobbed off when they offered to put their complaints in writing to the EC. Cole was, therefore, either not informed or misinformed of the events as they unfolded at the time, or, along with her LCC colleagues, chose to ignore what did not suit. Insofar as her claim about the decline in applications to the school is concerned, this was not, as has been discussed in detail in chapter C8, an “unquestioned fact” as neither she, nor any of her LCC colleagues, provided *any* evidence on this front. Cole's criticisms of Berg, and in particular her criticism of Berg accusing the primary school heads of being part of the conspiracy, are so off the mark that one does have to question, seriously, if she had even read Berg's book:

Mr Clark also said that he had been to an Islington primary school when the head had been interviewing parents about secondary schools, and that the parents had refused to send their children to Risinghill; that the head as a result had written to the Divisional Office, complaining about the school and about Mr Duane. But this head told me later, ‘there is no truth in it whatsoever’; he had never written such a letter, never criticized Risinghill to parents, and Mr Clark had never been present at his interviews with parents. (Berg, 1968b)

While the authors accept that their assumption of Cole having access to the PTA's appeal might be incorrect, they are of the opinion that, at the very least, she ought to have been aware of the outcome of the consultation meetings, of which she was very much a part, and in particular the meeting with the Risinghill parents presided over by her colleagues, Mrs Bentwich and Dr Briault.

C11.2 - The Public's Response to 'Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School'

If, as it seems, the purpose of Cole's letters to the press was to cast doubt on Berg's account of the affair, this did not happen. The press, sensing that there had, as it had suspected in 1965, been a conspiracy to close the school, resurrected all the old arguments about CP, and the debates about Risinghill continued. There was, however, one article *Beyond the dustbins of Risinghill* (Anon, 1968a), penned by someone who wished to remain anonymous, which the RRG found interesting. The author claimed to be "well acquainted with the principal characters in Berg's book and was in a good position to know what took place at Risinghill" with s/he selecting a theme that was not dissimilar to Cole's:

One gets so swept along by this current of prose (Nell Dunn grafted onto Gertrude Stein) that one tends to forget that Leila Berg had never heard of Risinghill until 1965 when it was about to close. It follows that her story must very largely be based upon the recollections of Mr Duane. These are no doubt as accurate as he can make them but they can hardly be considered unbiased. He may not have been looking back in anger but his views must inevitably have been coloured by the situation in which he then was. The same goes for Leila Berg's interviews with parents, children and teachers ...

One paragraph from this article stood out from the rest, largely because it had a familiar ring:

The LCC said repeatedly (and Dr Briault is still saying) that they did not ask Mr Duane to introduce corporal punishment. They were not opposed to his decision not to use the cane. Their concern was that he should run an effective school, a school where there was a framework of order and that was not continuously rent by staff dissention. A Head must carry his staff with him. (Anon, 1968a)

Whoever penned this article was, indeed, someone with good connections to the school or should we say the LCC. The complaint about Duane not carrying his staff with him has been addressed in the relevant chapters, notably those relating to the LCC's quasi inspections of the school.

Unfortunately, the author of this article appears to have had little or no contact with the Ministry HMI's, who clearly had a very different view of the school and of Duane. To recap, Mr Munday, the Ministry HMI, believed Duane "was doing the job as well as anyone could and possibly better than most" (as reported in Chapter C6) so people will have to draw their own conclusions about Duane's competence in this regard.

C11.3 – More Interviews

In addition to the teachers, Berg interviewed a number of parents. Here are extracts from just two of her parental interviews:

A mother. An artist. Herself child of two university lecturers and educationists. They were atheists, she herself is religious; her daughter is religious too, and enjoyed Risinghill's humanist assemblies.....

I always get involved in the troubles of the kids in the district, because I like kids, and, having a better accent than most, parents think I can cope. This particular kid was called Paul, a very bright boy He got to grammar school but was terribly teased there; he was very small, with glasses, and always studying, just the kind who is often picked on by the others. Someone said to him 'You'd better behave yourself, or you'll get kicked out.' So he started to try to get kicked out because he was unhappy. He stopped working. He got into trouble with the police. Eventually he was going to court once a fortnight ... By now he was playing truant because on Tuesday if he went to school, he'd have to explain why he hadn't been at school on Monday; and on Monday he'd been at court. Well, he did get thrown out of his grammar school, and he was sent to Risinghill.

Mr Duane said to him, 'Come in, and get your mark. After that, you can go into the library, and you can type. If you really can't bear it, come and

tell me and I'll let you go home; but come in and get your mark so that you get into no further trouble.' He even went into the class where Paul was, and asked if any child was friendly with him. One boy said he was. This boy was in trouble with the police. Some of the staff thought this was a mistake. But Mr Duane said no. He believed responsibility of the right kind helped a child. He said to the boy 'Try and help Paul to like the school, to see it's worth while.'

When I saw this man would take so much trouble for one child, I said this is the school for my own children. (Berg, 1968b, p247)

Chapel Street Market had two popular cafes. The son of one of the owners was a talented musician, who later became quite famous:

He'd been playing the piano-accordion since he was about seven. We knew nothing then about opportunities for kids, like people think you can't go to universities without lots of loot. We found the accordion wasn't recognized; he'd have to play something else to get into college. So he went on to the clarinet...

And for his audition for the National Youth Orchestra, Mr Strong not only accompanied him – some kids don't do very well, you know, with an accompanist they're not used to – but he actually wrote something for him to play, and that's really something, you know. This teacher and Mr Duane gave him every possible encouragement. Why, once when he wanted to get into an orchestra, Mr Duane spent days telephoning for him, and in the end took him round to the place himself ...

Joe started at Risinghill in its second term. I'm glad he had the opportunity to work under a bloke like Mr Duane ... If it'd been as bad as they said, we'd have taken Joe away, wouldn't we? We went to see our Member of Parliament. He was one of those blokes who had the art of speaking sewn up tight; he never left a gap between phrases for you to get a word in. That was the first time I've ever been to see a Member of Parliament and it's the last. I'll never go again ...

Mr Duane sent a kid here for a good meal – to my café here. He'd found the kid hadn't had anything to eat for three days. He phoned me through, said, 'Look after him. I'll pay you for it tonight, Sam.' Nothing was too much for him to do for a kid. He was round these streets at seven in the morning and again at eleven at night. Nothing was too much.

Quoted in Berg (1968b, pp249-250)

Although Cole did not mention the social workers and Probation Officers whom Berg spoke to - possibly because they were not parents and so did not have a direct bearing on the argument(s) that she was pursuing - it is useful to record here some of their comments too:

I have sent unhappy deprived children who have got into trouble to Risinghill, and they have become happy. Children on probation come to me. 'How's school?' 'All right.' 'Happy there?' They hit you a lot. For nothing.' But a Risinghill schoolchild comes in: 'How's school?' 'It's smashing. I like the head. Treats you all right.'

Lip-service is paid to doing something about delinquency. When someone really does something about it, and tries to make people look clearly at uncomfortable facts, they don't like it at all

Given time, people would have come from all over the world to see what he had done. I think a lot of children would get over their maladjustment, given warmth, without having to have special schools. That is why Michael Duane was so wonderful. (Berg, 1968b, p275 et seq)

While public opinion appeared to favour Berg's version of events, there was one issue on which the authors agreed with Cole:

Finally, I have read every word of Mrs Berg's book, of which I had far more criticisms than I have ever had space to make. One is of the quite ridiculous description of the Risinghill children as coming from "down-trodden slums." I mention this because she repeats this insult to many of the Islington parents in her letter to you. I do not suppose that she had access to the names and addresses of those who made up the roll in 1960,

as she had never heard of the school until 1965; but I can assure her that this slapdash description is very wide off the mark. (Cole, 1968a)

Berg, it has to be said, did paint a uniform picture of deprivation (amongst the children) and discontent (amongst the teachers) when this was not the case. *Beyond the dustbins of Risinghill* raised similar concerns, as did one or two other articles of the day.

Taking the children first, the authors, along with many of their fellow pupils, were disturbed by Berg's vivid descriptions of their homes and families. The overall impression was one of extreme poverty; of people living in rat-infested hovels with ceilings that were falling down; streets filled with garbage and so forth. Most of the pupils who contacted the RRG and had read Berg's book also found these descriptions offensive; in fact it was the impetus for many of them completing the RRG's questionnaire. When Isabel and Lynn interviewed Berg, they did ask her about this:

Isabel: ... the first time I read the book there were so many facts, so many things in there to absorb. Also as a Gifford Street child, I felt quite affronted – because of the description of the streets of Islington, the slum children ... and I think, to me, that was the general feeling that you were getting ... that perhaps Authority's perception of you was that, because you came from a slum area or a rough area, that you were somehow deprived intellectually. And that, for all of us, has been a real issue ... But what we were interested in, as children at that time, we were not aware of any of this.

Leila: Well no, no, you see I was born and brought up in Salford and only when I took my first boyfriend back to Salford – and he was a working class bloke, he wasn't posh by any means – he said in wonder: "I never realized you were brought up in a slum." And you see, to me, it wasn't a slum, it was where I lived, you know. So I know that quite well. But it was ... I mean it was a decaying area at that time. I mean, since then, it has been poshed up.

Lynn: ... You know when I first read it, I really could not identify with us as poor and I read it in 1980 and I just thought, this isn't me, this has nothing to do with me or my experience at all, nothing to do with me. Yes we were

in a two bedroom flat with four kids, but we always had books and we were always spoken to, so it was those things. It felt like it was the overwhelming picture and I wondered if that came from people you interviewed, particular people you interviewed. (Berg, 2004)

Berg, understandably, felt embarrassed by these questions and because of this was somewhat evasive. When pressed, she did say that she formed her opinions by walking around the area, not by going into too many homes. There is no doubt that some of the areas that she visited were grim, but in the 1960s there were bomb sites and bomb-damaged buildings all over London; therefore it was not unusual for people to be living next door to, or even in, houses that had been damaged in the Blitz. This was especially the case in depressed areas like Islington where the majority of people were working class, and so did not have a lot of choice in the matter. Despite these conditions, the majority of pupils who participated in the research for RR did not think their accommodation was bad, nor did they consider themselves to be poor or deprived. This part of the research, however, was aimed at eliciting a specific response from the pupils about how they felt *at the time*, not what they thought later in life. It is, therefore, possible that, had the RRG asked this question in a different way, it might well have ended up with an answer that was not dissimilar to that offered by Berg. Many of the Risinghill pupils would probably consider themselves to be more affluent now, possibly even middle-class, and in this respect Berg's response was perhaps not so unusual. So although the authors might not have agreed with her descriptions of the pupils as slum children, this is probably how they were perceived at the time.

The main reason for Cole's attack on Berg, however, was because of the flamboyant, almost fictional, style in which her book was written:

Leila: It was quite deliberate, I have always tried, whatever it is I am writing, to make my work very accessible to everyone, not academic at all. I loathe books that are written academically. (Berg, 2004)

Having struggled themselves to write something that would appeal to a wider audience, the authors can appreciate Berg's dilemma. By implication the messages in RR are political, and who, but the academic, wants to read about the politics of the comprehensive? The writing of RR has been a huge challenge in this respect.

Insofar as Berg's portrayal of the teaching staff is concerned, the authors have, as indicated at the beginning of this chapter, devoted a full chapter to the teachers in *The Waste Clay*. What follows provides a flavour of their views about Duane and the school, taken from material published at the time (1965-1968).

C11.4 – The Backlash

Berg's approach with the teaching staff was not dissimilar to that taken with the pupils. The good teachers were, in the main, lumped in with the bad and this annoyed some of them intensely:

..... As former members of the teaching staff of Risinghill, who spent a considerable number of years at the school, we suggest that no experienced educationalist could really take seriously the picture presented of Mr Duane in the book as a kind of brave Sir Galahad doing battle with a host of enemies within and without the school...

We should first like to make one point clear: the initial problem of Risinghill – the catchment area from which the pupils were drawn, the nature of their home and family backgrounds – are in no way different from the problems of any school situated in a working class area where there is a considerable amount of poverty and where the housing conditions are often deplorable

Any claim to exceptional circumstances such as that made in the book must, therefore, we feel, be ruled out. (Aspinall et al., 1968)

On the issue of CP, it was pointed out that the “vast majority of teachers at Risinghill were opposed to the use of the cane and to any form of corporal punishment” and this was obviously true: Duane would not have been able to abolish CP without the support of his staff. Moreover, it is important to remember that this decision was made within weeks, not months or years, of the school opening, and at a time when every other school in the country was using CP to instil discipline. It was an incredibly brave move on their part, demonstrating their faith in Duane, and this does not come across in Berg's book.

What the authors cannot agree with, however, is the notion that Risinghill was not an exceptional case. If the statistics are to be believed, and the authors have no reason to doubt

these, Risinghill had a disproportionate number of difficult children and slow learners. This coupled with a dire shortage of experienced teachers made the situation worse. Similarly, the suggestion that sex education was common place then was fanciful to say the least, especially when one considers that, to this day, it remains a problem for many schools:

Nearly every teacher of secondary school pupils is at some time or other called upon to discuss sexual questions in their broadest connotation (biological, emotional and moral) with his or her pupils. There is nothing new in this concept, although, it's true, most of us do not take verbatim records of these discussions. (Aspinall et al., 1968)

The teachers, of course, were not privy to any of the discussions that took place between Duane and the LCC officials so one must assume that, until reading Berg's book, they were as much in the dark about the politics of the closure as Duane was at the time. The authors do know, from Duane's response to this public letter, that he thought very highly of the teachers who had put their names to it – in particular Mrs Goody and Miss Stegall – whom he described as being “the best teachers I have ever met” even though he was fully aware that they were not always in agreement with him. (W. M. Duane, 1968b) They also know, from Margaret Duane, that she and her husband had a lot of respect for Margot Coates, another signatory to the letter in question:

But Mike had the greatest admiration for her; he thought her house was the most well run. She was very supportive of Mike's policies. We thought she was absolutely fantastic. (M. Duane, 2006)

From the authors' perspective, the majority of teachers that they came into contact with at Risinghill were good. Some were better than others, but is this not the case in most schools? In *The Waste Clay*, the pupils are invited to comment on their teachers, and the majority did not have anything bad to say about them. But there were, of course, some exceptions.

The most detailed rebuttal of Berg's account of the Risinghill story, however, came from Terence Constable. The picture that he painted of the school was wildly different to the authors' memories of it, and the memories of some of their fellow pupils. More worrying, his recollections of life in the school do not chime with those of his colleagues, eight of whom have provided the RRG with information about their experiences of the school, and these teachers were at Risinghill for a much longer period than Constable. Here is an extract taken

from Constable's paper, *'The Risinghill Myth'* (1968), which deals with the events of 15 January 1965:

... To these more dramatic events I might add, from my own experience, in January 1965: a girl who came running downstairs with her hair on fire – someone had put a match to it “for fun”: the boys who were bombing children in the playground below with bottles of milk; and the groups of children running screaming round the “teaching block,” smashing replacement plate-glass windows before the glaziers could even put them into place. The intensity of the disorder reached a peak when, at about 2.00pm on 15 January 1965, many children were to attempt a mass break-out.” Mr Duane ran white-faced from exit to exit, then tried to calm them by appeals over the public address system

In the room next to mine, children set fire to the heaps of litter which filled the desks in the presence of a terrified supply teacher who found himself powerless to stop them. Duane's publicity work, in an attempt to get support from outside, seemed a major cause of the continuing excitement among the children. (Constable, 1968)

The whole article is, in fact, an attack on Duane. In many ways it regurgitates the arguments put forward by Cole. For example:

A headmaster of a state school is not captain of his ship to the extent that he can pick and choose his entire crew The essence of his job is to weld these people into a cohesive group dedicated to common purposes It seems odd that Duane, who went to such lengths to “break through” with children, apparently gave up so early any attempts to communicate with his teachers.... Duane was not chosen as a clinical psychologist or as an assistant probation officer; he was appointed the professional and administrative head of a school of some 1,400 places.... In his own revolt against the authoritarianism he had known in the days of his Catholic upbringing, Duane appeared not to see that he was going too far in allowing children to feel that there was no place for authority at all. (Constable, 1968)

As stated earlier, this teacher joined Risinghill on 1 January 1965; a detail that has been overlooked by those who have taken *The Risinghill Myth* to be an accurate account of what happened in the school. Leaving aside the fact that not one of these hair-raising events was mentioned by any of the pupils surveyed or indeed any of the teachers whom the RRG contacted, Constable himself did not raise any of these events at the time (1965) when he spoke out at the parents meeting. His argument then, as recorded by Berg, for supporting Risinghill's closure was based on the same 'prestige' argument put forward by the LCC. (Berg, 1968b, p186).

The bombing of children with milk bottles surprised the authors, largely because milk was consumed in the Houses under close supervision, and the Houses were located in single-storey units that did not look down on any playgrounds. The only building where anything could have been thrown from a height was the main teaching block, in which Duane's office and the office of his deputy was situated. Both offices looked down on what could loosely be described as a playground, but was more of a paved thoroughfare, connecting the Donegal Street and Risinghill Street entrances/exits. It goes without saying that, if this 'bombing' was common-place, Duane and/or his deputy would have heard the sound of smashing glass and seen the victim(s), if not the culprits. As stated, none of the pupils or teachers surveyed mentioned this in their questionnaires or anecdotes, and the RRG members have no recollections of this either. If this did happen, then it was probably an isolated incident. The same can be said for all the other incidents described by Constable, though the authors have serious doubts about any of his claims. His more personal comments (about Duane's 'revolt' against his Catholic upbringing) are, for example, both curious and disturbing. Given the information provided in chapter B1 of Duane's childhood and early schooling, the authors leave the reader to draw their own conclusions about this and about Constable's motives.

Where the date (15 January 1965) is concerned, this was certainly a memorable day for Risinghill. This was when the children marched on County Hall and Downing Street with their banners and petitions, and when the teachers and parents announced, through the press, that they were planning their own protest campaigns. However, the nearest any newspaper got to a 'revolt' at Risinghill was with the parents and teachers, not the pupils. Some headlines in the press for the day in question:

'Revolt of Risinghill parents, teachers appeal to Wilson – Keep him!'

(*Daily Express*)

‘Teachers demand school probe’ (*Express*)

‘Parents plan massive protest campaign to save our school’ (*North London Press*)

‘Risinghill boys plan mass march to Council’ (*Islington Gazette*)

‘Children march to Downing Street’ (*Evening Standard*)

What Constable witnessed at 2.00pm on this day was, in all probability, a line of children at the Donegal Street and Risinghill Street exits with their placards and banners before setting off on their marches. While some might have been noisy and/or over-excited, this was hardly a “mass break-out.” And if Duane was seen running “white-faced from exit to exit” one does have to question why this image was not captured by any of the reporters camped outside, waiting to take their photographs. Both exits were open to public view so Duane would, without doubt, have been seen. He does not appear in any of the press reports for 15 January 1965, which, in addition to the pupils’ marches on County Hall and Downing Street, covered the teachers demand for a public inquiry, and the parents’ appeal to the Secretary of State.

But this was also a memorable day for the LCC, explaining perhaps why Constable was able to recall the date three years later and with such clarity. This was when the LCC opened up eight of its showpiece comprehensives to the media in the lead-up to ‘The Great Comprehensive Debate’ in the House of Commons, and when Risinghill rained on its parade; the media paying far more attention to what was happening at the school than it did to the LCC’s Open Day. To add insult to injury, the Risinghill pupils, who were dressed in a mismatch of uniform, carrying scribbled, miss-spelt slogans on homemade placards on their marches to County Hall and Downing Street, projected an image that was so far removed from the ‘grammar school for all’ that it was laughable – another slap in the face for the LCC, and, arguably, an even bigger slap for the new Labour government in office.

C11.5 – A View from the Other Side

On the same day an article, entitled ‘My nightmares of Risinghill by a teacher’, appeared in the *Daily Mail* which, surprisingly, did not include a contribution from Constable:

A woman teacher at Islington's tough Risinghill comprehensive school said last night she had nightmares about it. She told the school parent-teacher association: "I sometimes don't sleep for night after night."

The teacher, Miss Beryl Bride, read a statement on behalf of 40 colleagues demanding that the whole truth about the school be made public. She said: "I refute reports that teachers have not been attacked. There have been attacks. I have been attacked."

On Monday the Daily Mail published an interview with the ban-the-cane headmaster, Mr Michael Duane, 49, ex-Tank Corps major, in which he denied that teachers had been assaulted by the children. Miss Bride continued: "The only nightmares I ever have are about this school. "There are groups of staff against other groups of staff on every subject."

Miss Bride said she had been asked to emphasise that the teachers did not want to see the school closed...

Mr John Lavery, an assistant teacher said: "I was shot in the playground last summer. These attacks are not as antiquated as people say." Mr Duane said that the boy who shot Mr Lavery had since been removed to a special school. His father died of cancer and his mother had three times attempted to commit suicide. (Daily Mail, 1965)

Beryl Bride was one of the three teachers who, at the parents' meeting, joined Constable in speaking out about the school. She is mentioned in Berg's book, though not by name:

Teacher: After school this afternoon, the common-room staff met and agreed on the following statement:

'We are firmly in favour of comprehensive education in this area, because we think it fulfils the educational and social needs in this district. We think any of these changes proposed ... would be educationally harmful to the children and the staff. We believe that very much good has been done in this school ... But we are not satisfied. We are disturbed about the question of the first-choices of children who come into the school. They

have fallen. We feel that this is because the school has an unenviable reputation. The press has not helped us ...' (Can't make out if this is staff statement or if she is speaking off her own bat. L.B.) It is not true that no teachers have been attacked. They have been attacked, and I have been attacked. (Shouts.) I sometimes don't sleep for nights. I have nightmares about the school. (Shouts. Parents are very confused. L.B.) ... The Common-room Council decided to ask this meeting, for the sake of the children's education, the children and the staff, to call for a public inquiry into the school, conducted by the Ministry of Science and Education. (Parents confused. Some clap and cheer ...). (Berg, 1968b)

The messages in the *Daily Mail* article were equally mixed so the authors were not surprised that the parents were confused. Was Bride speaking off her own bat, as Berg put it, or the forty-strong deputation that she claimed to have been representing? Presumably this was the same deputation that had rejected the LCC's proposal to close the school, and had signed a petition to this effect? Or was she speaking solely on behalf of the Common-room Council, of which Constable was the Secretary, and which comprised half a dozen members, if that?

Berg also referred to a 'Teacher (Man)' in her book who, at the parents' meeting, claimed to have been "shot with a slug-gun in the playground". This was later reported to have been a shot-gun, something altogether different. It might help to explain that, in the 1960s, boys did play with slug and pellet guns, also air rifles. These were used to shoot at cans and bottles, sometimes pigeons, and on occasion the windows of derelict buildings. Most of the shooting(s) took place on the bomb sites away from view, but in the school holidays and at weekends Risinghill's huge plate-glass windows were sometimes used for target practice, and not necessarily by the Risinghill boys; there being many other youths in the district with guns of the type described.

Insofar as the incident in question is concerned, the authors cannot remember *any* shooting incidents in the school; however, that is not to say this did not happen. They are merely pointing out that, if a teacher was shot, it was probably by accident, and with a slug or pellet gun as an air rifle would be hard to conceal on one's person. Berg did try to make contact with these teachers in a bid to establish the facts:

In July, when I decided to write a history of the school, I wrote to these three teachers, pointing out very mildly and politely that I had come on some discrepancies (for instance, surely it had originally been an air-gun not a shot-gun, and hadn't the teacher been misreported?) and suggesting a meeting. From two of them there was complete silence. My letter to the third – the teacher who claimed he had been shot – was answered by a solicitor. (Berg, 1968b)

It seems odd to be talking about guns as play-things today, but in the 1960s boys carried slug and pellet guns around in their pockets in the same way that they carried catapults and pen-knives, even though these, along with air rifles, were banned.

Despite all the problems, it would seem the teachers (as a whole) did not want to see the school closed. They would not have fought for a public inquiry otherwise. Duane was equally keen to have this and said so on more than one occasion.

In responding to Constable's article, Duane makes some valid points:

The argument shifts to a series of suggestions that Leila Berg is inaccurate; a quick return to the theme of the LCC's generosity; back to an attack on Leila Berg's judgement, and then, at the very centre of the whole case, a new theme – Duane's rejection of the concept of external authority – a phrase that had a curiously familiar ring about it, but whose import escaped me until I remembered the famous Visitation Report, where the central theme in the attack on the headmaster was that of "lack of central direction and control." A phrase written originally by MacGowan, inspector for modern languages, now finds, by a most unusual coincidence, a parallel theme composed by Constable, a specialist in French....

The article has all the marks of a joint effort. Constable, with all due respect, has not the kind of ability to construct such a well-planned effort with its interweaving pattern of attack, defence, flattery and denigration. The group with whom he was most closely associated during the last few months of Risinghill was that section of the communist group most actively hostile to my policies...

As Leila Berg has shown in her book, the resistance to my rejection of all authority not based on reason and democratic participation produced strange bedfellows, so it should not be a matter of surprise that Constable should find himself defending those whom he most appeared to dislike.
(W. M. Duane, 1968a)

Margaret Cole, on the other hand, welcomed Constable's "interesting and very temperate article" which, in her opinion, provided an "important correction to the wild, emotional contents of Leila Berg's book." In closing her letter, Cole, unsurprisingly, referred once again to Duane's failure to connect with his staff:

Her book bears out Mr Constable's statements about the lack of staff consultation and discussion (save on corporal punishment); nothing of the kind is even mentioned until a memorandum by the head written in March 1964, when he had already been five years in one post. (Cole, 1968a)

Her reference to "a memorandum" was of interest to the authors, largely because this was the document (entitled 'The Problem Before Us') that Duane had produced for his staff following the June 1964 inspection; a document that the staff had no interest in discussing, but three years later found its way to Cole, on the face of it an impartial observer with no links to the LCC or to the school?⁶⁹.

Bob Dixon, in his public reply to Constable and, no doubt, to Cole, had this to say on the subject:

... Although in general sympathy from the beginning towards Michael Duane's attitudes and beliefs, it was not until the last few months that I became sure of my own stand on the extremely complicated and important issues that finally came to the surface during the crisis. In this, I differ very much from Terence Constable (13 June) who had come to his own conclusions within about a fortnight of his arrival at the school.

I presume he joined the staff with his eyes open, as I did. My first contact with Risinghill was through the fairest advertisement of a teaching post

⁶⁹ The authors believe this is the document entitled 'The Problem before Us' produced by Duane, which the staff had no interest in discussing as by now most of them had found other jobs or were looking elsewhere as they knew the LCC was gunning for the school.

that I have ever seen. It was made quite clear that the school was in a difficult area and was beset by social problems. This was followed up by a long discussion with Duane, as a preliminary to the interview. From this discussion I was left in no doubt as to the head's approach to his task. During the time I was at the school I was always given, without formality, all the time at Duane's disposal when I wished to discuss some problem with him. Facilities such as these were available to Constable as to other teachers...

No account of Risinghill is complete without its obligation of horrors and Constable provides his quota. I found work at the school hard but I was never attacked, "bombed," shot, stabbed or even threatened...

There is a lot here that seems to have escaped Constable and it is far from mythical. (Dixon, 1968b)

There were, of course, differences of opinion all around with some members of the public accepting Constable's version of events, and others questioning his motives:

Terence Constable's article is especially valuable in that it comes from the pen of a man who experienced the school and at the same time would hardly be classified as an ossified authoritarian.....

Duane needed counsellors, or social workers or psychologists to carry out the "therapy." In their absence he opted wholeheartedly for the role of "therapist" himself. But in filling this role completely he effectively abdicated from the essential role of the head as the provider and representative of structure and "authority," in the best sense, for children and staff alike. Many other heads would make the opposite choice in similar circumstances, but might delude themselves that they can still be counsellors. Duane's failure has shown that one cannot be both. (Lytton, 1968)

An alternative view:

The real core of the problem around Risinghill seems to lie in Constable's whole endeavour to discountenance Michael Duane and ignore the basic argument and educational dialogue. He gives this away in the phrase "Although he needed, and could not succeed without, teacher social workers he plunged into his experiment with a team inevitably containing many teachers of a much older and more rigid tradition." The students in revolt in many parts of the world at the moment have also not bothered to wait for these ideal conditions under which experimentation is best conducted. Indeed, it is arguable that if such conditions were a prerequisite of all such social and educational experimentation then there would no progress at all, let alone experiment. Surely the real problem for Constable to help us solve is how precisely such experiment, reappraisal, research and reassessment can be achieved in British educational structure. (McGraw, 1968)

Needless to say the ILEA as it was now called had its own supporters, all of whom were in favour of CP, so their allegiance to the ILEA was perhaps not surprising:

The Inner London Education Authority have taken the unusual step of publicizing resolutions passed by three London teachers' associations. The move becomes less surprising on discovering that the resolutions are all expressing continued support for the I.L.E.A. and are criticizing the recently published Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School.....

The three teachers' associations which have sent their resolutions to County Hall are the London Head Teachers' Association, the Inner London Teachers' Association (N.U.T. county association) and the London Schoolmaster's Association. All three had members on the teaching staff at Risinghill School. They have dissociated themselves from the attacks made in the book on the education officials and teachers. The L.H.T.A.'s resolution said that the book contained "scurrilous and unwarranted attacks". (Times Education Supplement, 1965)

In Dixon's papers, the authors found the full resolution from the *London Schoolmaster* from which the following text is taken:

The Executive at its last meeting passed a resolution deploring the statement and attitudes in the recently published book “Risinghill – the death of a comprehensive school.” Many headteachers hold dear the same objectives as the erstwhile head of Risinghill – viz. the banning of corporal and other forms of aversive punishment from their schools. They do, however, not seek the blaze of publicity. On two occasions I had to go to County Hall on behalf of Islington colleagues with magazine articles published after an interview with Mr Duane

I have not heard of similar complaints made by other headteachers of secondary schools in the area. Durkheim, one of the founders of modern sociology, states,

“A social fact is normal, in relation to a given social type and at a given stage in its development, when present in the average society of that species at the corresponding stage of its evolution.”

What Mr. Duane found was not a normal social fact – it was not present to a marked degree elsewhere....

(Anon, 1965)

To discover that the Risinghill children were part of an abnormal social fact (whatever that means) was bad enough, but Constable had an even better offering:

Although utilitarian education (for white collar or for blue overall) might not be the most desirable feature of the secondary curriculum, when a single school drops out it makes the gesture at the expense of its pupils. In this respect the children of Islington were the “waste clay” of the experiment. (Constable, 1968)

Suffice to say here that the “waste clay” of Islington survived and prospered beyond the dustbins of Risinghill, no thanks to the plotters and the bureaucrats who conspired to close the school.

Do the authors believe *Risinghill: death of a Comprehensive School* is an accurate account of what happened in the school? On balance, they have to say ‘yes’. The evidence is so

overwhelming that it is impossible to arrive at any other conclusion. Do they believe Berg was guilty of sensationalising the lives of the Rasinghill children for her own ends? This is a more difficult question, but again, on balance, the authors have to say ‘yes’, though the end did justify the means. The question they asked was this: Would people still be talking about Rasinghill today if Berg had written about poor, but happy, children, living in homes that sometimes bordered on the inhabitable, but were clean and well-fed nevertheless? And would the same people have been as outraged about the beating of a child that came from a poor, but loving, family as they would an abused child that was regularly battered at home? Probably not.

C11.6 - Leaving Rasinghill School

At this point the authors leave Rasinghill, picking up the story in *The Waste Clay*, where they take a closer look at the teachers’ and pupils’ views of Duane and the school, using a detailed questionnaire and other materials to establish the facts as far as is possible. Where the pupils are concerned, they were particularly interested to know: whether Rasinghill had had a positive or negative effect on them; how they had fared in life; what they thought were the most important things that a child needs to learn at school; and what they thought about education today. Many of the pupils provided anecdotes, which have been used freely throughout RR. Those used in *The Waste Clay* are of particular interest as they provide a fascinating insight into life in the school and life for the average working-class child growing up in post-war Britain.

In *The Waste Clay*, the authors also pick up Duane’s story from 1965 through to his retirement in 1980, and his death in 1997: his autobiography would probably make a very interesting book or film. They also provide details of their interviews with Margaret Duane and Leila Berg, which includes a piece written by Berg for inclusion in RR. In bringing RR to a close, the authors take a brief look at the educational landscape post-Rasinghill and ask one final question: What has changed since 1944?

Appendices

Appendix A: Michael Duane's letter Houghton.

The authors provide below the full text of Michael Duane's letter to Houghton following the 1964 school inspection, including two appendices that Duane attached.

Private and Confidential

Risinghill School,
Penton Street,
N.1.
27 October 1964

Dear Mr Houghton,

If in this letter to you I speak in blunt terms it is not because I have any wish to cause offense but because the issues under consideration are far more important than my personal career with the L.C.C., and because I have reluctantly come to the conclusion during the course of the last three years that for some reason not known to me I have failed to win the attention and support that the objective needs of the school would seem to warrant. (A chapter – “Administration – the receiving end” – in the book I hope soon to complete and of which I shall send you a copy before publication – makes this clear by comparing with more favourably placed schools the number of unanswered letters, the speed with which repairs are executed, etc.)

During last term the school was inspected by a group of H.M.I.'s – a much larger group having a different intent from that originally discussed with me by Mr Munday. The criticisms made are referred to later in this letter. On the last day of term I was interviewed by Dr Briault and Dr Payling. Dr Briault made it clear that, as a result of my “failure to create a proper ‘image’ of the school among the parents of the neighbourhood” with the result that the intake of the school had fallen to a level that was far too low, ‘top secret’ discussions were then being held among not more than half a dozen senior officials about various possibilities of, it seems, drastic reorganisation of Risinghill. During this term my staff has been disturbed

by rumours about the impending closure of the school, coming, it appears, from “Evening Institute sources” so that the staff is worried and I cannot feel that either my Chairman or myself have been treated with the frankness that the situation demands.

At the interview with Dr Briault and Dr Payling I was so taken aback by the nature of the criticisms made that I said I would prefer to write rather than to comment on the spot. The major criticisms made were so contrary to my own experiences that I required to find out how such conclusions had been reached. During this term, and especially within the last few days some light has been shed on them.

1. The ‘image’ of the school and the low intake.

During the verbal report made to me by the H.M.I.’s Mr Leonard Clark made certain statements about the ‘image’ of the school in the eyes of local parents. He alleged that he had been present when parents were being interviewed by a certain Head, and he alleged that the Head had taken certain actions following these interviews. I have now discovered that the incidents referred to by Mr Clark were a complete fabrication. He did not attend interviews with the Head referred to, nor did that Head take the action alleged. In the course of my enquiries I found that Mr Clark is himself alleged to have committed certain indiscretions quite improper for an H.M.I. I am taking these matters up through my Union solicitor.

At the beginning of this term I discussed with my primary school colleagues the difficulties that we find in common in this area. In particular I referred to the low intake for Risinghill and the possible reasons for this. All the Heads gave me the same reasons, viz. the generally low level of primary output; the predominant tendency to choose single-sex schools (of which there are many in this area); the tendency for immigrant families with ambition, having spent the first few years with friends or relatives in this ‘bridgehead’, to move away for better jobs and houses at about the time of the child’s transfer to secondary school; and finally, since this would obviously affect us as the largest neighbourhood school here, the tendency for parents to wish to avoid sending their children to the school likely to be attended by the children who were well-known problems in the primary school. Not a single Head referred to any prejudices against Risinghill as such.

At the meeting with my Governors on Monday 19 October I reported on the low intakes and the reasons given to me by the Heads of the primary schools. Mr Wales, our

D.O⁷⁰. was present throughout this meeting. When he was asked to comment on my report he confirmed the reasons I had given and added that there was a general ‘westward drift’ from the Division without a corresponding inflow. He did not then, nor has he ever referred to any unfavourable views held by parents. I may add that I have found Mr Wales far more sympathetic to and understanding of our problems than his predecessor.

2. The alleged lack of support from my Staff.

After the work done during the past four years by my Staff this allegation would be ludicrous did it not come from a group of H.M.I. In my report to the Governors on 18 November 1963 I analysed the ‘holding power’ of the school on Staff on the assumptions used in the Newsom Report. Up to July 1965 the index of holding power was 63% for men and 52% for women – surprisingly close to the national figures of 65% and 58% for an area of this kind. In that July I lost eight of our best and most senior Staff, one to retirement, three to Deputy Headships of schools and the remaining four to Headships of large departments in other schools.

When the H.M.I.’s asked me to comment on this allegation I said that I was confident in the support of the majority of the Staff. I pointed out that there had been disagreements between Miss A⁷¹ and myself in the past, but not more recently. I did not press this matter because Miss A had already indicated to me that she would be retiring in December of this year. Since, however, the results of this visit by the Inspectors is being pressed far beyond anything that seems normal, and far beyond what Mr Munday had outlined to me when he first planned this visit, I must make the position clear. If all these difficulties can be resolved without upsetting Miss A’s last few weeks of service I shall be pleased, but I am not prepared to see plans for a major reorganisation on other than purely educational lines, without protest.

Miss A was appointed as Deputy without an interview and without any opportunity of our meeting or getting to know each other. Briefly she has not the intellectual calibre, the experience or the temperament to function well as a Deputy in a school of this kind, and certainly not so as to carry out the policy that I am pursuing. Over the four years, I have been compelled to restrict the work she does to those areas which, administratively, have the least impact on the school, because of the mistakes made by her in the past. Even now I am

⁷⁰ District Officer

⁷¹ The Deputy headmistress. Note she has been anonymised in this transcript.

constantly having to pacify members of Staff who though younger are better qualified and more appreciative of the place they fill in the school as a whole.

Because of her lack of experience of big schools she cannot envisage any form of direction or control other than that to which she had been accustomed at Ritchie School. She finds it impossible to act as Chairman at large meetings of Staff, particularly when the purpose of the meeting is to explore new ideas or suggestions and when, therefore, there may be vigorous debate.

My Chairman of Governors has long been aware of my difficulties in this matter, but we agreed that, in view of Miss A's impending retirement, it would be unkind to do very much about it.

After the visit of the Inspectors I spoke individually to all the Staff. All except Miss A denied having discussed, or having been asked to discuss myself or my policies with the Inspectors. Miss A admitted having discussed her fears about central control and direction; about the guidance of younger Staff; her doubts about Staff support for my po[sition]. She admitted, too, that she had discussed these not only with Mr Munday on previous occasions, but with Mr MacGowan and other L.C.C. Inspectors, all of whom had known and, I gather, respected her as Head of Ritchie.

There is a very important factor in the school that has made, until I insisted on a radical change in the form of advertisements for Staff, for much frustration among Staff appointed to teach to advanced levels, particularly in the academic subjects. This is, quite simply, that we have never had in the school more than 0.6 of⁷² 1% of ability in Group 1, 12% of children in Group II and we have always had at least 42% in Group V. Our present first year contains 0.7 of 1% Group 1, 2.2% of Group II, 15.6% of Group III, 38.8% of Group IV and 42.7% of Group V. This has meant that our A forms have always had a number of Group III children and our present 1A has several Group IV children. When, within the first year I realised what the pattern would be I began to urge on the Governors the desirability of appointing more teachers of general subjects with an emphasis on their qualities as stable personalities. This was bitterly opposed by Mrs Chaplin, Mrs McGregor and Miss Murray who have, quite obsessively, insisted on high academic qualifications in newly appointed

⁷² i.e. 0.8%.

Staff, and have, too often, swayed the balance of the Governors, especially when Mr Harper was Chairman.

This factor has been complicated further by the high proportion of children from broken and disturbed homes, especially among the children who are very slow learners. The Staff appointed to teach to a high level can cope with the occasional disturbed child in a large group of pretty normal children. But where disturbed children form the majority, as they do in many classes, the problem becomes a radically different one. I have attached at Appendix A a quotation from Dr Winnicott's book 'The Child, the Family, and the Outside World' that exactly points the qualitative differences required from teachers of normal and of disturbed children.

3. The 'image' of Risinghill at County Hall.

I need hardly refer to the difficulties created by our having a D.I. (Mr MacGowan) so unsympathetic to our point of view and so unaware of the objective needs of the children. Unhappily, the impressions then created have never been corrected. The difficulties arising from this position were reinforced by the fact that Mrs McGregor, herself unable to appreciate the emotional and social needs of the children and placing an inordinate emphasis on the need for academic success and the wearing of school uniform, was a close personal friend of Mrs McIntosh, as I found out on those occasions when I was entertained at Mrs McGregor's home.

The difficulties were even further complicated by the appointment as Chairman of Mr Harper, whose almost total lack of contact with your colleagues and with members of the Council, arose from the heavy burden of his work, as he often explained when I wished him to discuss our more pressing problems. I, personally, found Mr Harper understanding and intelligent. He supported me to the full in my rejection of the conclusions of the Visitation Report, but his own background militated his deep involvement.

4. Other views of Risinghill.

(a) Parents are constantly in and out of the school discussing their children with Heads of House or myself. This local acceptance of the school is reflected in the numbers that attend Open Days, concerts, meetings of parents to discuss Fourth Year courses. It is reflected in the growing membership of the P.T.A. and in the number of voluntary transfers from other

schools of children with socially active parents. Recent additions of⁷³ other well-established schools because their parents preferred what we are doing. Within this last month a member of the Finsbury Council made some critical remarks about this school. He was, I am told, assured by members who defended the school and overwhelmingly out-voted his proposal.

(b) Staffs of Training Colleges who send their students here have made it clear that although this school is not easy for the average student, they find something stimulating, even exciting, about it. See, for example, the extract from Miss Kemp's letter at Appendix B.

Other visitors, many of them with very wide experience, have made similar favourable comments. John Newsom himself understands what been achieved here. Only on Friday last George Veldsman, Head of a school in Cape Town, expressed himself in terms that were similar to those used by Mr Aldrich.

All this does not mean, of course, that we are satisfied with all that goes on in the school. Far from it. It does, however, mean that there are conflicting views about the value of our work, and that we not the total failure that Dr Briault gave us to believe.

(c) As a result of our work here, particularly with difficult and very backward children, I have been twice asked to help organise conferences arranged by the National Association of Mental Health and attended by head teachers, school medical officers and psychiatrists. This term I was asked to lecture at the Royal College of Nursing with Dr Dalzell-Ward and Mrs Ruth Hasker. I was also invited to serve on the Working Committee for the Study of Psycho-Social Aspects of Drug Taking under the chairmanship of Professor Carstairs. I have also been invited to read a paper to the Royal Society of Medicine in December on The Therapeutic Function of the School.

(d) As a result of our work with immigrant children I was invited to give evidence to a committee of M.P.'s at the House of Commons. The Central Office of Information sent a representative to the school and is now preparing (or was until the trouble developed in Cyprus) a booklet for that country. The Greek language news, To Vema, last year devoted a long article to reporting our work with approval. Immigrant families seek our help for other than school business and the local departments of social services in the boroughs; the almoners in the local hospitals; the F.S.U.; the N.S.P.C.C.; the C.A.B.; as well as, of course,

⁷³ This should read "from".

our own Care Committees, often ask for our help with immigrant families. All this has brought the immigrant communities closer to the Staff and the school.

(e) Mr Munday, H.M.I., in the presence of Mr Craddock and Miss Morecombe, his colleagues, after a two-day visit in April of last year, told me that whereas in the early days he had had considerable reservations about what I was doing, he was now completely convinced that what I was doing was sound.

Several of your own Inspectors have drawn attention to the fact that the achievements of the school within this first generation and in such an area, could have come about only because the Staff were united and reasonably happy, and because they had begun to have a vision of their function in this society bigger and with greater impact than is normally possible in a school.

This letter is already longer than I would have wished it to be. All I can say, finally, is that we believe that we have achieved more success than is accepted by your colleagues. We are now in a position, because of what has already happened in the last four years, to go even further in the socialising of the children. We are not averse to constructive criticism. If, on educational and social grounds, it would be in the interests of the children to bring about a drastic reorganisation of the school, then we will gladly co-operate to the full, but we naturally ask that the grounds for any change be made available to us and open to discussion and suggestion from the experiences we have accumulated in this neighbourhood.

Yours sincerely,

Headmaster.

Dr Winnicott, The Child, the Family, and the Outside World

Chapter 30: Educational Diagnostics

“In any group of children there are those whose homes are satisfactory and those whose homes are unsatisfactory. The former naturally use their homes for their emotional development. In their case the most important testing out and acting out is done at home, the parents of such children being able and willing to take responsibility. The children come to school for something to be added to their lives; they want to learn lessons. Even if learning is irksome, they want so many hours a day of hard work which will enable them to get through examinations, which lead to eventually working in a job like their parents. They expect organization of games, because this cannot be done at home, but playing in the ordinary sense of the word is something which belongs at home, and the fringe of home life. By contrast, the other children come to school for another purpose. They come with the idea that school might possibly provide what their home has failed to provide. They do not come to school to learn, but to find a home from home. This means that they seek a stable emotional situation in which they can exercise their own emotional lability, a group of which they can gradually become a part, a group that can be tested out as to its ability to withstand aggression and to tolerate aggressive ideas.

Teachers find themselves by temperament more suitable to one or other type of management. The first group of children cries out for teaching proper, with the emphasis on scholastic instruction, and it is with children living in their own satisfactory homes (or with good homes to go back to in the case of boarding-school children) that the most satisfactory teaching is done. On the other hand, with the other group of children without satisfactory homes, the need is for organized school life with suitable staffing arrangements, regular meals, supervision of clothing, management of children’s moods and of their extremes of compliance and non-cooperation. The emphasis here is on management. In this type of work

teachers should be chosen for stability of character, or because of their own satisfactory private lives, rather than because of their ability to put across arithmetic. This cannot be done except in small groups; if there are too many children in the care of one teacher, how can each child be known personally, how can provision be made for day to day changes, and how can a teacher sort out such things as maniacal outbursts, unconsciously determined, from the conscious testing of authority?"

Appendix B

Letters about Risinghill to W. M. Duane

From John Newsom (Personal letter – extract)

“Seriously, you have obviously done a heroic job at Risinghill and should have a glow of satisfaction at having achieved such a success out of an unpromising situation.”

From Dahlia Lowenstein – teacher/psychologist sent by the Israeli Government to study new developments in this country. This is a copy of a letter sent to the British Council.

“Mrs N Davies
British Council

23.7.1964

Dear Mrs Davies,

I am writing to thank you for all the help you have given me with my visit to England. It has been most interesting and helpful to see your educational methods.

After completing your programme I visited a comprehensive school (Risinghill School, Kings Cross) on the recommendation of a friend from Israel. This school’s problems are very close to the problems in many of our schools. The problems facing the headmaster are immense and I was very impressed by the effort and devotion of the headmaster and his staff, and the fantastic enthusiasm of that difficult type of child for their school.

It was clear from our talks with many of the children that they had been physically punished in their previous schools. The staff has to face an enormous problem of freeing these children from fear and from a deep hatred of society. The amount of delinquency that is

evident in the neighbourhood shows clearly the emotional disturbance from which these children suffer.

For these reasons I strongly recommend you to include this school in your list of interesting educational experiments for the benefit of visitors to your country.

Yours gratefully,
D. Lowenstein.”

From Miss N. M. Kemp, Lecturer at Gipsy Hill Training College.

“We were glad to be at Assembly with some of your pupils and felt much indebted to your Staff for talking with us about the work they are doing. I think a great deal about your school. One cannot but be aware that something fine is stirring somewhere and somehow.”

From Mr Nelson Aldrich, American teacher from New York.

“It was one of the most enjoyable and informative days I have spent since coming to Europe, and I hope you will not think it impertinent if I also that I felt very much at home there.

The experience was also, I may add, rather chastening. It will certainly come as no surprise to you that teachers in New York – and especially in the “under-privileged” areas such as Harlem – do spend much of their time bitching about the hardness of their lot: too much paperwork; too many extra-teaching duties; the intractability of the kids; the unwillingness to learn, etc. As a first year teacher it always seemed to me that there was little enough truth in these complaints as it is. But after seeing the work – and the dedication and energy put into that work – of some of your staff, the grumblings in New York appear positively ludicrous.

One other contrast was also striking. After meeting four of your 4th year leavers, I was much impressed by the optimism with which they seemed view their future. They seemed not so much to be leaving school (“What good will it do me?”), as going out toward real opportunity. I am reasonably sure this hopefulness is not wholly justifiable, but on the other hand attitude seemed far better for them than the morose, sullen and apathetic negativity of

our high school “drop-outs”. The latter leave not because the “world” offers them so much, but because school offers them so little.”

Appendix B: The Probation Officers letter in support of Risinghill.

The following is a transcript of the full letter, dated 1 January 1965.

1st January, 1965

The Education Officer,
County Hall,
Westminster Bridge,
LONDON, S.E.1

Dear Sir,

The signatories of this letter are probation officers from Clerkenwell, North London and Old Street Juvenile Courts and although we are not writing officially, we have all had on probation to us pupils at Risinghill School.

We have heard with regret that the school may be closed as a mixed, comprehensive establishment. We have been aware of the difficulties this school passed through in the early stages, not unconnected with the special problems of the area, created by –

- a. The large Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities, many of whom spoke little English
- b. The large number of other immigrants, and
- c. The fact that Islington and Kings Cross had for a long time been the centre of gang warfare amongst teenagers.

Despite these difficulties we consider that the improvement in the last two years has been outstanding in every respect.

We have been most impressed by the understanding shown by the Headmaster and his staff for our difficult boys and girls and we can all testify to the improvement in their attitudes to school and in the community to a large degree as a result of the interest in and concern for them shown by their teachers. We have known children who hated school and were persistent truants who have become deeply attached to Risinghill and hated leaving.

We have always had a sympathetic hearing from the Headmaster and his staff and we know that this has been the experience of our clients and their parents. Despite their nuisance value they have never been passed over as being too much trouble or of too little account.

The very good racial relation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, the West Indians and the native children have also been conspicuous at Risinghill.

We would all deeply regret the possibility of this progressive comprehensive school closing down as we consider it is meeting the needs of many of the children in this area and would be very much missed by pupils, parents and social workers.

Yours faithfully,

Appendix C: The Parent Teacher Association Appeal to Mr Crosland.

The following is a transcript of the full PTA appeal text, dated 17 March 1965.

Risinghill Parent-Teacher Association

Objections to the L.C.C. decision to close Risinghill

The reasons given by the L.C.C. for their decision to close Risinghill include statements about the drop in the school roll; statements suggesting that parents do not like to send their children to the school; and statements about the need for economy.

1. At a meeting of the Parent-Teacher Association on 14th January 1965, several parents stated that they had been advised against choosing Risinghill for their children by heads of primary schools which their children were then attending, and that they knew other parents who had accepted that advice.
At the meeting of parents called by the L.C.C. to inform parents of the decision already taken to close the school, and addressed by Mrs Bentwich and Dr Briault, parents repeated these statements and undertook to put their statements in writing to the Chairman of the Education Committee.
2. Only two parents have withdrawn their children from Risinghill during the period 1960 – 1965, except for reasons of removal to other districts. Many, in fact, continue to send their children even after such removal.
3. It is clear from the local electors – including parents of children at primary schools - who have signed the petition against the closing of Risinghill, that the school has been established in the eyes of local people.
4. (a) The fall in the roll has been given as the reason for the closing of the school, but since the local grammar schools, of which there are several, still maintain 100% intake, and if, as the L.C.C. says, there is a preference for single-sex schools, though our experience and knowledge casts doubt on this, it is clear that, in the context of the big fall in the secondary school population over the last four years, mixed sho[ols] have to bear the brunt of that fall.
(b) We have been informed that, by 1970 at the latest, the ‘bulge’ now in the primary

schools will have moved into the secondary schools and the now vacant places will have to be filled up again, even if Risinghill remains as it is.

(c) Many parents who wished to transfer their children to Risinghill over the past year and more have been told by a member of the Divisional Officer's staff, by the Deputy Head of Risinghill at that time, and by the School Inquiry Officer that the school was full, and that there was a waiting list of over two years, that there was hardly standing room in the workshops, and so on. These parents formed the impression that this was being done so as to limit the intake to the school.

5. In June, 1964 Mr Leonard Clark, H.M.I., in the presence of Messrs Munday, Bryer, Evans, Woodend, and Miss Francis, his colleagues, stated that he had been present when Mr Peters, head of Robert Blair Primary School, was interviewing parents about their choice of secondary school, and had found no parent was willing to choose Risinghill. He further stated that Mr Peters had to write to the Divisional Officer complaining of his inability to persuade parents to send their children to Risinghill.

Mr Peters absolutely denies that Mr Clark was ever present when he was interviewing parents, or that he had ever sent a letter of the kind alleged.

Mr Straker of Penton Primary School, and Mr Hogan of Winton Primary School, similarly deny ever having had Mr Clark present with parents.

These statements by Mr Clark were repeated, we understand, to Dr Briault and Dr Payling, Chief Inspector of the L.C.C., and by them passed to the Chairman and Members of the Education Committee.

6. The plans now being worked on by the L.C.C. for alterations to Risinghill and Sir Philip Magnus school premises will cost many thousands of pounds. Structural alterations, not only to re-house the workshops, but to create a new suite of rooms and to build many new, will take months of work. The Headmistress of Starcross School has told her own staff and the staff of Risinghill that she had been given complete freedom to request any alterations she required, and that economy was of no object. This would seem to contradict the L.C.C. claim that the decision to transfer Starcross to Risinghill was based on the need for economy. It also makes a nonsense of the refusal to make so many important but minor alterations to Risinghill on the grounds that there was no money for this purpose. Such requests as the provision of secure cloakrooms; of toilets accessible from the playground; of an efficient way of securing windows[;] of adequate fencing . . . have not been yet been met after nearly five years, and when the need for these things

has been amply demonstrated. One child had fallen from a first-floor window and broken his wrist before on such request was met.

7. The decision to close Risinghill will have the following effects if put into operation:
 - (a) that the choice of parents who wish their children to attend mixed schools will be even more limited.
 - (b) that those parents who wish for an assurance that corporal punishment will never be used have, so far, found such assurance at Risinghill, and will in future, have no such assurance. One parent has already been told by the Divisional Officer that he could give no such assurance for any school other than Risinghill.
 - (c) that many children in their fourth and fifth years will leave school at the end of this summer term, although they are preparing for public examinations, having been persuaded, against strong domestic and social pressures, to remain at school because they showed promise.
 - (d) that all children in the school will have had their normal schooling seriously disturbed for nearly a whole year. They have already been upset since January and continue to be so as staff find new posts. They will take at least a term to settle down in their new schools.
 - (d) ⁷⁴that the large number of children in need of special help – those already deemed E.S.N. or maladjusted, and those awaiting examination – many of whom have been in the school for over a year because there are no places available for them in Special Schools, will be set back, having by now found a measure of security and stability in a school organised to have special regard to individual needs.
 - (e) That the large number of children of low ability (45% in Group V) who already find that the complexity of a large school is as much as they can manage, with plenty of personal help and encouragement, will have to start afresh in new surroundings and with different staff.
 - (f) That the staff, now familiar with the special needs of the children in this neighbourhood, and accepted by the local people because they have done so much and are still prepared to do so much beyond the limits of their duties in helping children, will be dispersed and a useful team rendered inoperative.
8. The first the parents knew, officially, about the proposals to close Risinghill was a letter, dated 27 January 1965, notifying them of the decision already taken by the L.C.C.

⁷⁴

NB The repeated sub-numbering “(d)” is in the original.

No attempt has been made to seek the views of the parents on the proposals before the decision was made. This is, in our view, a denial of the letter and the spirit of the Act.

W.M.Duane

17 March 1965.

Chairman,

Risinghill Parent-Teacher Association.

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