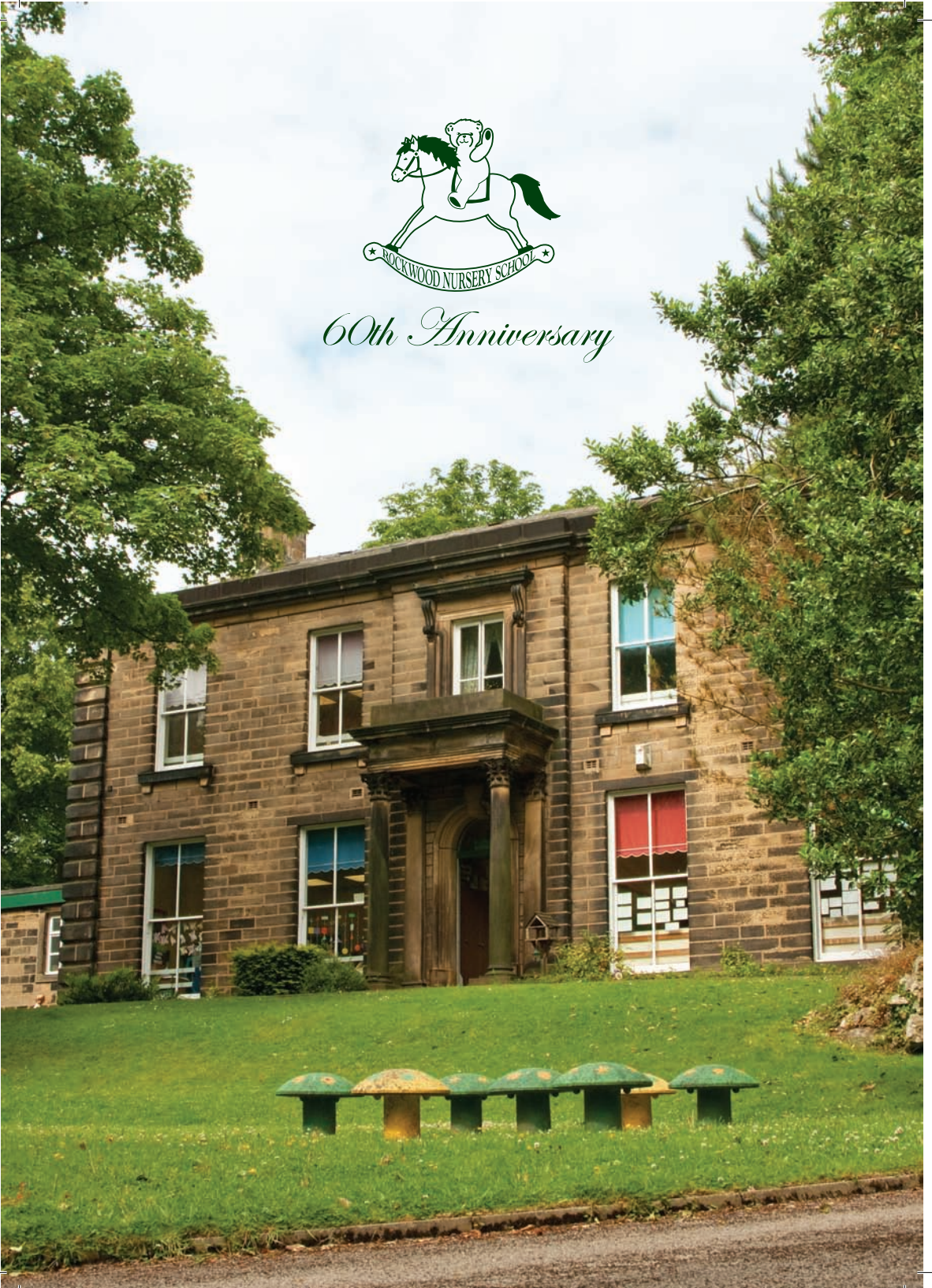




60th Anniversary





Rockwood Nursery School 2009



The History



It was because of the cotton industry that the house of Rockwood was built. It was also because of the cotton industry that Rockwood became a nursery.

The area of land lying between Todmorden Road, Huffling Lane and Brooklands Road could be called the 'Mill Owners Triangle', for here their great houses were built; Fir Grove, Park View, Oak Mount and, in 1868, Rockwood.

Spinning & Weaving

The cotton industry had first settled itself in Lancashire because of the damp atmosphere necessary in the spinning and weaving process, and started as a cottage industry. Then, inventions by Lancashire men, such as John Kay's Flying Shuttle and James Hargreaves' Spinning Jenny revolutionised the industry and as a result the great mills were built. All this and the coming of the railways, which aided the transport of coal from the Lancashire mines to the mills, where it was needed to provide heat for the great steam engines, caused Lancashire to become the greatest cotton spinning and weaving area in the world. Most of the cotton cloth was taken abroad and a popular quote of the time stated that, "What Burnley wove before breakfast was for the home market and what it wove for the rest of the day was for export."

The mills, however, needed workers, who, in turn, needed houses and those in the Burnley Wood area, near our nursery, were built between 1855 and 1910. They were laid out in a grid pattern, row after row of terraced houses, so as to permit easy drainage from the toilet and sink to be found in each house. The result of two Improvement Acts passed in 1846 and 1854 meant that each house built was supplied with piped water, drains and sewers. Streets had also to be lit, roads and pavements laid and new services such as libraries, public baths, parks and schools provided.

These houses were palaces compared to the back to back slums in the centre of the town, but nothing in comparison to the mill owners' mansions. Rockwood was no two up and two down dwelling.

Rockwood Nursery School

A large Victorian mill owners' house built in 1868 is the setting for Rockwood Nursery School.

There are four main rooms within the building on two floors. Teddy's Playgroup uses one of the downstairs rooms.

The building stands in extensive grounds with lawns, trees, play dens, balance beams to the front, sand box, fixed climbing frames with slides to the sides and a hard surfaced play area to the rear for bikes, prams and other wheeled toys.

Rockwood provides a happy, friendly, safe and secure environment where every child feels valued and is encouraged to develop in confidence and self-esteem, to be independent, caring and respectful to others.



Rockwood

It is possible that Rockwood was originally named Rookwood because of a colony of rooks that lived in the trees around the house. If and why the name changed is hard to say. William Witham, who lived for most of his life at Rockwood, and his brother Francis owned a spinning mill on Finsley Gate, now the property of Lambert Howarth, and a weaving shed on Plumbe Street.

William, who was known locally as *'Smiler Witham'*, was a bachelor and, by all accounts, a delightful man to know. As a diabetic he was the first man in Burnley to benefit from insulin. He was a member of the Mechanics Institute for over fifty years, part of this time being spent as a director. He represented Burnley Wood ward as a conservative and became a Justice of the Peace in 1903. He and his brother donated money for an operating theatre at Burnley General Hospital. He was also a member of the Burnley Literary and Scientific Club and, through his love of the countryside, bought a farm at a place called Bridgefield. It was here he was knocked down by a motorcyclist and died shortly after at Rockwood on 5th November 1930 aged 80. In his obituary in the Burnley Express he was described as, "...one of the best known men in the town."

In his will he left his house to his brother, Francis, who lived at Fir Grove. He gave Rockwood to one of his daughters, Edith, who moved into the house after her marriage to M. J.S. Wilson a poultry farmer. Here their only child, a daughter named Jean, was born on 5th May, 1932.

The family lived at Rockwood until 1947. For most of this time they employed a gardener and three maids. The maids "lived in", sleeping in the attic or the small upstairs room at the back of the house to the right of the stairs. These rooms had easy access to the back stairs which ran down under the attic stairs emerging in the dining room where there is now a cupboard.

The other three upstairs rooms were all bedrooms and the small room over the porch was Mr. Wilson's dressing room, with a door leading from it into one of the front bedrooms. What is now the staff toilet was a bathroom and the room next door to it Jean Wilson's bedroom. The stairs boasted a red carpet and the banister provided excitement for the children who enjoyed sliding down.

Downstairs there was a kitchen, now the cloakroom, a dining room, now the small playgroup room, a drawing room and a family living room, the latter two being made into one big room when the house was turned into a nursery. The drawing room, which overlooked the front garden, was used only for children's parties and for drinks after church on Sundays.

In the grounds around the house were stables, a boiler house by the back wall and a wash house. There was a small cottage adjoining the side of the house next door. All these buildings were demolished and the stones used to build the toilet block of the nursery.

In the back yard wall was a gateway, near to where the oil tank is now situated, which led to stone steps, that can still be seen, which, in turn, led to the area of land behind the nursery which was part of Rockwood's garden. Here, as well as lawns and flower beds, there was a tennis court.

Throughout the War Years

During the war the house was used as a billet for soldiers who slept in one of the front bedrooms. Mrs. Wilson, her daughter, and one maid remained at the house throughout the war years, living mainly in the back living room which was heated by a coal fire during the cold weather. The central heating could not be used as there was only a limited amount of fuel.

By 1947 Mr. Wilson had bought a farm at Coniston in the Lake District and the house was put up for sale. As this was the time just after the second world war selling was difficult and eventually it was the Burnley Corporation who bought the house for around £1,800.

For many years the cotton industry had suffered a decline due to overseas competition and two world wars. In 1946, after the second world war, a shortage of cloth saw a boom in the industry, but also a call on wives and mothers to help with this sudden revival.



Staff at Rockwood

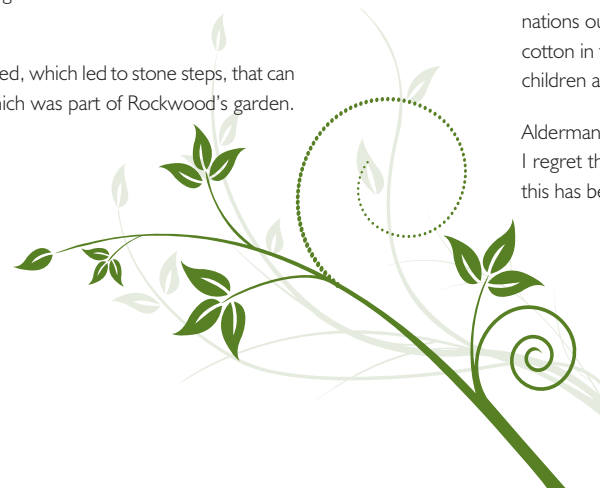
Mothers, however, could only work in the mills if their children could be cared for and Burnley led the way in nursery care for the working mother. So it was that Burnley Corporation decided to convert Rockwood into a nursery. It was the fourth one in the town to be opened with plans for another thirty-six to be built. The final total was, in fact, thirteen.

The opening ceremony on 20th June, 1949 was attended by Councillor Mrs. Battle, Alderman T. Maxfield, Alderman E. Sandy, Miss. Wood the nursery superintendent, Dr. W. Howarth the Director of Education, Alderman R. Bushby the Deputy Mayor, Counillor H. Hartly and Alderman E. Broderick who performed the opening.

There were, however, critics of the day nurseries and those at the opening replied to them stressing "...the vital part the nurseries were contributing in allowing mothers, who wished to go out to work, to leave their children in the best possible care and to enjoy amenities which parents could not be expected to buy."

Alderman Broderick stated, "I think we all know and realise that if this country is to take its place as a leader of nations our experts must not only be maintained but increased, and we in Lancashire know the importance of cotton in the export trade." He also added that, "...it was the Education Committees Function to look after the children and we are determined to carry that out as well and as fully as we possibly can."

Alderman Sandy commented, "It is easy for people to take sides and see no good in the other's point of view. I regret the need that makes mothers go out to work, but owing to the wages paid in this part of Lancashire, this has become a necessity."





Nursery Schools preferred to child minding

The 22nd June, 1949 issue of the Burnley Express reported on the opening ceremony. The nursery was described as being "... formerly a mansion which has been adapted at a cost of several thousand pounds. It has playrooms, rest quarters, a kitchen, which might be the envy of an American housewife, and all the toys dear to the hearts of youngsters - swings, see-saws, roundabouts and slides. The colour theme is blue, cream, green, brown, red and white.

On 4th July, 1949 the school opened its doors for the first time. Seven children attended on that day under the care of Miss. Wood, the superintendent, one teacher, three nursery nurses, a domestic help and a caretaker. By October two



Staff at Rockwood

more nursery nurses had been employed and on 16th November the cook began work.



Playing in the Yard

On a fine day the morning play was spent outdoors playing with bikes, prams, balls and a slide. Indoors they played with a dolls' house, a "Wendy" house, sand, water, jigsaws and bricks. All children were encouraged to help put the toys away.

After lunch each child settled down to sleep on a canvass bed with one blanket. Each blanket was embroidered with a different motif. The children knew their own picture which was also on their own hook in the cloakroom.

One member of staff stayed with the sleeping children while the others ate their lunch. This quiet time was used for repairing toys and equipment.



Playing in the Yard

Medicals were held twice a year and the school nurse attended for routine inspections. According to the log book, the doctor also made. "...nutrition surveys," and "...examined children with defects." In 1950 and 1951 when the school closed for July holiday, numbers were as low as four out of forty children due to a measles epidemic.

A report by school inspectors, who visited on the 8th May, 1955, stated the following, "...after a somewhat chequered start the school has settled into its present pattern. The playrooms provide good space for play and the well set up environment offers scope for lively activities. Meals are appetising and arrangements for sleeping and toilet facilities are adequate. There is a delightful garden, although the stretch of concrete from flags to the perambulator shed is in a dangerous condition. The drains do not appear adequate for the down flow from spouts and the grates over them need more efficient protection. Equipment has been accumulated through the years and is generally adequate... The programme is wisely planned... Ventilation is difficult when the wind is in the east as the windows are mainly on that side... Apart from these matters the school is well organised and maintained. It is a happy place, though it is a rule of entry that the mother is out at work, therefore, other children, who would benefit by its facilities, can only be admitted in very special circumstances."



Children and Staff

This report also recorded the number of children on roll in 1955, this being thirteen two year olds, sixteen three year olds and eleven four year olds.

The first superintendent, Miss. Wood, retired in December, 1958. She was succeeded by Mrs. Enid Tate, who took up her duties on 6th January, 1959. In August, 1988 Mrs. Tate retired. By this time the school admitted fifty children at both the morning and afternoon sessions, which ran from 9.00am to 11.30am and from 12.30pm to 3.00pm. The staff consisted of a head teacher, two assistant teachers, two nursery nurses and a cleaner-in-charge.

Mrs. Lesley Handley became the third head teacher at Rockwood. She left the post in July, 1994.

The school is now under the headship of Mrs. Ruth Donnachie who started in January, 1995.





Rockwood Nursery School Today

All the staff at Rockwood Nursery School and Teddy's Playgroup are fully qualified Teachers or Teaching Assistants and are very experienced at helping young children learn about themselves and the world around them.

The school building is bright and spacious with an excellent range of educational equipment.

The children play outdoors every day and wear fleece lined, waterproof suits when it is wet or muddy!



Blue Room
Believed to be the 'Dining Room'



Red Room
Believed to be the 'Front Parlour'



Pink Room
Believed to be a 'Bedroom'



Green Room
Believed to be a 'Bedroom'

OFSTED

Rockwood Nursery School was inspected by OFSTED in March 2009

The Report states:-

"Making sure that every child is nurtured and exceptionally well cared for is at the very heart of the school."

and

"Children thrive in an extremely happy, warm, caring and nurturing setting, so that they achieve well academically and make outstanding progress in their personal development."

Stuart Mitchell Presents to Rio Nadin



On 3rd July 2009, Rockwood Nursery School celebrated the 60th anniversary of the opening of the school. Mr Stuart Mitchell, who was one of seven children who attended on the opening day in 1949 presents Rio Nadin the youngest child in Nursery with his commemorative mug.

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Anniversary Celebration

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Nursery, a fancy dress fun day with entertainment and party food was held within a marquee on the front lawn. A tree was planted by Chair of Governors, Mrs Diane McKinley, commemorative mugs were presented to the children by Mr Stuart Mitchell and Mrs Marlene Hurrell who were pupils at the Nursery in 1949 and local radio station 2BR broadcast from the school.



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