

*Post-primary education in West Ham, 1918-39.*

Kim Lorraine O'Flynn.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of PhD. Institute of Education.



For Kevin and Frances.

## **Abstract.**

This thesis is concerned with post-primary education in West Ham 1918-39, with particular reference to secondary education. The realities of local educational experience are set against a background of educational acts and economies. The economic difficulties of the 1920s and the Depression of the 1930s were keenly felt in West Ham despite the efforts of the predominantly Labour council to mitigate poverty. A gap sometimes existed between the educational opportunities Labour councillors wished to provide and those they were able to provide. Generally a pragmatic approach was taken and certainly a secondary education was not seen as essential for all.

Chapter One outlines West Ham's pre-1918 history and growth with reference to local politics and immigrant and religious groupings. West Ham's interwar history is told in greater detail. Chapter Two relates the difficulties encountered by the West Ham Education Committee in its decision to establish compulsory continuation schools, not least from the parents of West Ham. West Ham was one of the few areas in the country which succeeded in implementing compulsory continuation education albeit for a limited period. A section on technical education is also included in this chapter, although detailed treatment is hampered by a scarcity of records.

Chapter Three examines West Ham's secondary school scholarships in the context of the national situation. West Ham's higher elementary/central school scholarships are subjected to the same scrutiny. Each of West Ham's secondary schools shared a broadly similar curriculum and ethos. Chapter Four highlights these similarities but also points out differences. Of the five interwar secondary schools, two catered for girls, one for boys and two were mixed. Two of the secondary schools were Catholic institutions, although both accepted non-Catholic pupils. Three of the schools were aided and two municipal. A section is included on West Ham's higher elementary/central schools but records are less full than those for the

secondary schools. Chapter Five compares and contrasts West Ham's interwar secondary school system with that in East Ham, its sister borough. Chapter Six discusses both the economic and cultural factors underlying local attitudes to post-compulsory schooling. The main conclusions drawn relate to these attitudes which militated against any easy acceptance of such education as necessarily beneficial.

## Contents.

<u>Abstract.</u>	p.3
<u>Abbreviations.</u>	p.8
<u>Acknowledgements.</u>	p.9
<u>Illustrations.</u>	p.10
<u>Chapter One: West Ham and its educational provision from the nineteenth century to 1939.</u>	p.11
1.1 West Ham's early history; the roots of working-class culture.	p.14
1.2 Politics in West Ham both local and national 1830-1939.	p.28
1.3 Education in West Ham from the eighteenth century to 1939.	p.38
Conclusion.	p.58
<u>Chapter Two: Continuation education in West Ham 1918-39; '...they are all elementary school children'.</u>	p.66
2.1 The national debate concerning continuation education.	p.66
2.2 Reactions to the continuation education clause of the 1918 Education Act in West Ham.	p.68
2.3 West Ham's compulsory continuation institutes.	p.76
2.4 West Ham's voluntary day continuation institutes.	p.90
2.5 Other forms of post-primary education open to West Ham children 1918-39.	p.103
Conclusion.	p.108

Chapter Three: Selection for secondary school education '...the examination should be so framed as to ensure that every child who has been through the ordinary curriculum of the junior school shall have a fair and equal chance,...'. p.116

3.1 Post-primary education during the 1920s and 1930s; the national situation. p.116

3.2 The secondary school scholarship system in West Ham 1918-39. p.121

3.3 Scholarship papers and the provision for fee-paying places in West Ham secondary schools. p.144

3.4 West Ham's higher elementary/central school examination 1918-39. p.147

3.5 West Ham's intending teacher and university entrants 1918-39. p.151

Conclusion. p.156

Chapter Four: The secondary and higher elementary/central schools of West Ham 1918-39. p.163

4.1 West Ham's secondary schools prior to 1918. p.164

4.2 The 1918 Education Act and the secondary and higher elementary schools of West Ham. p.166

4.3 West Ham's secondary schools during the interwar period, similarities and peculiarities. p.167

4.4 The problem of early leavers. p.209

4.5 The relationship of the Schools with each other and the wider community. p.213

4.6 Girls and selective education in West Ham 1918-39. p.215

4.7 The higher elementary/central schools. p.217

Conclusion. p.220

Chapter Five: East Ham 1918-39; a comparison with West Ham. p.232

5.1 East Ham's early growth politics and educational provision. p.232

5.2 East Ham's post-war educational plans. p.236

5.3 Reorganisation and conflict in East Ham in the late 1920s. p.238

5.4 Selection for secondary education in East Ham. p.243

5.5 East Ham's secondary and higher elementary schools and scholarships.	p.256
5.6 Finances, curriculum and staffing.	p.258
Conclusion.	p.260
<u>Chapter Six: Conclusion.</u>	p.265
<u>Bibliography.</u>	p.281

**Abbreviations.**

TUC	Trade Union Congress.
LEA	Local Education Authority.
WEA	Workers' Educational Association.
NUWT	National Union of Women Teachers.
GWR	Great Western Railway.
NUT	National Union of Teachers.
PRO	Public Record Office.
WHHSG	West Ham High School for Girls.
ST. A	St. Angela's High School for Girls.
WHGSB	West Ham Grammar School for Boys.
MSS	The Municipal Secondary School.
PSS	Plaistow Secondary School.



## **Acknowledgements.**

I would like to extend my grateful thanks to the following for the assistance they have given me in this study:

The staff of Newham's Local Studies Library; the archivists of Brentwood Cathedral; Mr Frank Sainsbury; the late Mrs V Reid and Mrs Phyllis Gardner; Mrs Grace Glegg, Mrs Molly Fossey and Miss Mary Steeds. Shawn O'Flynn for undertaking the printing, layout and all associated works connected with this thesis.

I would like to extend my special thanks to Professor Peter Gordon, with whom I initiated this research but most particularly to Professor Richard Aldrich for the clarity of the help and guidance and the quality of the encouragement I have received from him.

## **Illustrations.**

Illustration 1 West Ham High School for Girls 1931.	p.170
Illustration 2 St. Angela's High School 1937.	p.177
Illustration 3 West Ham Municipal Secondary School 1930s.	p.182
Illustration 4 The Grove Central School 1930s.	p.219
Illustration 5 East Ham Grammar School for Boys 1960s.	p.235
Illustration 6 East Ham Grammar School for Girls 1960s.	p.244

**Chapter One: West Ham and its educational provision from the nineteenth century to 1939.**

He's bought up a marsh and a gasworks at least 7 miles out of town. We'll either go down with swamp fever or the whole ruddy workforce will drown.

(Comment by Henry Tate's nephew on the acquisition of land in South West Ham to build a sugar refinery, 1874).

This thesis is concerned with the provision of post-elementary education in a London borough during the period 1918-39. It examines the effect of local cultural, social and financial conditions whilst setting them in a national context. It studies the complexities of West Ham life and the multitude of factors that influenced educational provision and practice, including kinship ties, traditional work values and the poverty of the area. National educational innovations are discussed in their pure form and as they were translated and transformed for West Ham life. East Ham, West Ham's neighbouring and sibling borough is used as a comparison over the same period of time. With the implementation of Hadow reorganisation during the 1930s post-elementary education could also be accurately described as post-primary education with the institution of a break at the age of 11; although this was not universal even within West Ham by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Although education acts and movements were conceived at governmental level, frequently with the assistance of academics in the field, their implementation was at a local level and was adapted, voluntarily or otherwise, to the local setting. An understanding of the make-up, political, economic and cultural of interwar communities, is therefore vital to understanding the interwar post-primary education system since the variety of provision was by no means uniform across

the country or even in adjacent areas. A study of West Ham in this context is particularly important because the Borough introduced compulsory continuation education in 1921 one of the few local authorities to succeed in doing so and was, in this manner, out of step with neighbouring boroughs. In addition, West Ham's secondary school provision did not conform to the norm in that it possessed three aided secondary schools, in contrast to only two municipal secondary schools and could provide far greater numbers of secondary school places for girls than for boys. Further local studies are therefore relevant in this context because they often provide the most accurate account of how secondary and other forms of post-primary education were actually provided during the period 1918-39.

In studies such as Brian Simon's *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* much emphasis is placed on the detrimental effects on education of the country's economic condition between the two world wars:

The educational policy of succeeding governments depended directly on the prevailing climate. If economic or financial problems arose, one of the first areas turned to was education - an area unpopular as it was expensive - and only united opposition mitigated raids on a budget that, far from rising as necessary, remained virtually stationary. Since there was, in sober fact, no slack to take up, "economising" always meant a backward step.<sup>1</sup>

Olive Banks in *Parity and prestige in English secondary education* places stress on the role of the 'scholarship ladder' and social class:

A grammar school education has been sought not only for the formal educational qualifications necessary for many professional and administrative callings, but for the more subtle qualities of speech, dress, manners etc., which are equally desirable for the socially mobile...The working class boy, as a general rule, 'considers school and progress at school of rather less importance than the middle class boy', probably because the middle classes tend to show a greater concern for the education of their children.<sup>2</sup>

Statements such as these have been valuable in testing conditions in West Ham against national norms. A general picture of increased demand for a secondary school education marred by economic stringency emerges. This thesis sets out to interpret West Ham's interwar post-elementary school provision and assess how much of its form was moulded by national directives and local and national economic distress, and how much by the uniqueness of West Ham itself and by its classic working-class culture. To do so, interwar West Ham society itself has been studied. The culture and social structure of the Borough and the expectations and value system of the inhabitants naturally affected West Ham children's entry to an extended education as did the actions of West Ham's predominantly Labour Council. The prevalent employment patterns and the effect of mass unemployment during the 1930s have also been considered. The reality of a non-elementary education in the 1920s and 1930s is examined by surveying the types of schools that West Ham provided and the likelihood of an individual child obtaining such an education. West Ham's secondary schools are studied in the greatest detail, partly because of their superior status and importance, but partly due to the fuller records that remain for them. A more detailed enquiry into West Ham's higher elementary/central schools would have been valuable, as would a deeper exploration into the various trade schools provided, but the paucity of records

precluded this. The fullest records, in the form of governors' minutes, remain for one of West Ham's girls' secondary schools and the least for the municipal secondary schools. Few records remain for West Ham's other post-elementary schools although a 1968 MA thesis on West Ham's continuation institutes incorporates some oral evidence which has since been lost. Oral evidence has been used with regard to pupils and their access to a selective schooling, but this has been subject to the small numbers of remaining witnesses with a first-hand knowledge of a pre-war secondary or higher elementary/central school education.

### **1.1 West Ham's early history; the roots of working-class culture.**

West Ham was not always the heavily industrialised area it was later to become. From Saxon times until the beginning of the nineteenth century it was a centre for the raising of cattle and oxen, these enterprises aided by West Ham's geographical position, close to the River Thames and thus supplied with acres of marsh. The rural character of West Ham began to alter from the 1840s onwards when the area experienced the beginning of a period of phenomenal growth that was especially rapid between 1871 and 1901. In 1841, West Ham had a population of 12,738, but, in the following 60 years, over 204,000 additional inhabitants were added until in 1911, with a population of 289,000, West Ham was seventh in size amongst English County Boroughs.<sup>3</sup> The marsh land which had been so conducive to the raising of cattle was also the ideal site for the first main expansion eastward of the London dock system in the middle of the nineteenth century. The construction of these docks, good communications by road and rail and of course the attraction of an increasingly large supply of local labour, brought other large industrial concerns to West Ham, including the Thames Iron and Shipbuilding works, the huge Stratford railway works and the rubber works of H A Silver. In the space of a few years West Ham underwent a violent transition from a rural to an urban community, and industrial development proceeded at a speed almost without parallel anywhere else in the country.

**Figure 1.1 Population of West Ham 1801-1941.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population (In Thousands)</b>
1801	6,485
1811	8,136
1821	9,753
1831	11,580
1841	12,738
1851	18,817
1861	38,331
1871	62,919
1881	128,953
1891	204,903
1901	267,358
1911	289,000
1921	300,860
1931	294,278
1941	No Census

*Source:* Local Studies Notes No.2 L B of Newham.

**1.1.1 West Ham's main immigrant populations in the early twentieth century.**

By the end of the First World War, the dominant culture of West Ham was an overwhelmingly working-class one. West Ham had lost most of its middle-class inhabitants and had become an almost exclusively proletarian town. Politically, this homogeneity attracted union organisers and Socialists who gave the area a radical reputation although the successes of the non-Socialist Municipal Alliance before the Great War and the support it could command, even in opposition during the 1920s, points to Socialism holding an ambiguous position amongst voters. The various immigrant groups which had entered the area during the previous fifty years had mainly been assimilated into the ways of their neighbours. Although differences remained, as, for instance, between the religious practices of Catholics or Jews, the desire of second or third generation immigrants, whether originating from other parts of Britain or abroad, was to be seen as patriotic Englishmen and

women. The process and extent by which the various ethnic groups conformed owed much to how they were perceived by the indigenous population. In this respect, the predominantly Irish Catholics were the minority group most vocal in the defence of their rights and most disliked, both on the Council and by West Ham residents in general, for this trait.

Due to the wide variety of mainly unskilled and semi-skilled work West Ham could provide from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, the town had quickly become a magnet for those who could not find work elsewhere. A 1948 Labour Party publication made this clear: 'About East London the docks, wharves, mills and plants have drawn their hundreds and thousands of workpeople into the dwarfing vortex. Thousands of miles of mean streets cover the green land and raft out over the damp marshes'.<sup>5</sup> Conditions for newcomers in such a rapidly expanding town were difficult. Overcrowding increased year by year and, although by the end of the century, thousands of dwellings had been built for all income groups, supply never met demand. There was intense pressure on social amenities of every kind such as water and sewerage etc., and the educational services, too, were fully stretched. In addition to West Ham's indigenous population and migrant workers from other parts of England, Irish immigrants entered West Ham in some numbers, although the area never became as strongly colonised as parts of North and West London. In the early years of the nineteenth century, while West Ham was still a rural parish, Irish workers arrived each year for the seasonal work of picking potatoes and, as the century progressed, were employed as navvies during the construction of the expanding dock system; and finally as dockers and stevedores in the completed docks themselves. Irish immigrants brought their religion with them and, through great feats of fund-raising built Catholic churches and schools to serve their community.<sup>6</sup> There are no exact figures for Irish residents in West Ham but, in 1921, they were 1.4 per cent of the total population of England and Wales. If the English-born Irish are included and allowance is made for the greater concentration of immigrants in the capital, it can be estimated that ten per cent of the population were either Irish or of Irish descent. By 1921



therefore West Ham may have had an Irish population of between 25 and 30,000.<sup>7</sup> Politically, although Irish immigrants were often to be found in the emerging trade union movements at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, this did not always imply an adherence to Socialism. The influence of Catholic priests over their congregations tended to be strong and a distrust of radicalism with its overtones of Nonconformism was often preached, directly or indirectly. Indeed, it was in the south of West Ham with its heavy concentration of Catholics that the Labour Party sometimes found itself facing electoral difficulties, particularly if it offended religious sensibilities. Father Carless, Parish Priest of the dockside district of Custom House, wrote to the Bishop of Brentwood in 1930 suggesting that only mass meetings would ensure that Catholics received their full rights with regard to reorganisation.<sup>8</sup> These meetings did not occur and were, in the end, unnecessary due to reorganisation proceeding cautiously but Father Carless's words demonstrate the determination of individual priests and their parishioners to receive equal treatment from the predominantly Socialist West Ham Council, even if that meant acting against the party which was apparently most representative of their own class.

**Figure 1.2 The Irish born population of England and Wales 1841-1921.**

Year	Number	% Of Population
1841	289,404	1.8
1881	562,374	2.2
1911	375,325	1.0
1921	364,747	1.4

*Source:* Roger Swift. *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* (1990) The Historical Association p.12.

By the First World War West Ham had a fairly numerous Jewish community. It is not possible to state precisely how large this community was but the 1921 Census indicated that there were 358 Russian-born residents in the Borough, many of who would have been Jewish. There were also 362 German-born residents, some of who would have been Jewish.<sup>9</sup> If a rough figure of 500 Jewish heads of households, multiplied by five to include family members is taken, the Jewish population of West Ham from the First World War to the Second World War possibly numbered 2 to 3,000 although numbers may have been as large as 5,000. Many Jews had moved out of such areas as Whitechapel and Stepney as they became more affluent and settled into the Forest Gate area of West Ham. Synagogues were built but there seems to have been no pressure for the establishment of Jewish schools. This may have been because those who had relocated were the more anglicised members of the community who saw little necessity for an exclusively religious education. The Jewish community in West Ham, as opposed to the Irish Catholic community rarely entered into educational controversy with the local Education Committee. This may have been due to its small size but there may also have been a desire to appear self-effacing in order to avoid prejudice. The Education Committee, for its part, acceded to requests for scholarship candidates to take examinations on a day other than Saturday, for religious reasons although few other references to the Borough's Jewish minority appear in Education Committee records.

West Ham was also the area of settlement for non-Jewish German immigrants prior to the First World War, many invited over by industrialists setting up chemical factories in the Silvertown area. Their community was initially a thriving one but the First World War and the fierce anti-German riots which followed in West Ham naturally persuaded those who were German or of German descent to play down any outward sign of their heritage and the German community soon merged into that of the larger. By the 1920s even German surnames were generally no longer in evidence, their holders having anglicised them during the First World War. The small number of German-born West Ham residents in 1921 does not reflect the

pre-war situation and is a consequence both of the internment and repatriation of West Ham's German community during the years 1914-1918 and the fact that the younger generation was inevitably British-born and thus excluded from the figures. Occasionally Lascars from ships calling at the docks or itinerant Sikhs would settle in West Ham but numbers were never very large and individuals generally settled into the host community without special provision being made for them.

**Figure 1.3 The numbers of German and Russian residents in West Ham, 1921.**

<b>German</b>	<b>Russians</b>
362	358

Source: Census of England and Wales 1921 (1923) HMSO.

Prior to the First World War, West Ham did have a middle-class element, families who lived in the large houses situated in the Grove in Stratford or thereabouts, in addition to the lower middle-class commuting office workers who tended to live in Forest Gate and Upton Park. The poet Gerald Manley Hopkins was born in one of the Grove houses in 1844, although the family soon moved to the Hampstead-Highgate area.<sup>10</sup>

By the turn of the century, West Ham was very much an industrialised district and part of an immense port and the population was becoming increasingly homogenised and working-class. The extension of the railway network beyond West Ham meant that many City workers could live further away from the City itself. This was taken full advantage of by those who could afford to, depriving the Borough of its mixed population and thus ensuring that the inhabitants of West Ham would become even more exclusively proletarian.

### 1.1.2 Cultural norms in West Ham 1918-39.

In West Ham, during the 1920s and 1930s, the disruption of the Second World War and the putative break up of working-class families and communities had not yet occurred. Few families had lived in the area for more than 50 years but, despite the comparative newness of West Ham's expansion, the Borough inspired great loyalty in its inhabitants and a recognisable West Ham culture had grown up. Certain values were shared with working-class communities as distant as Yorkshire and South Wales. The extended family was accepted and valued. Black-legging in employment was despised. Education had to have some practical use. This statement is reinforced by an extract from R Hoggart's, *The uses of literacy* that refers to common working-class attitudes to education, on this occasion, from northern England:

...there is often a mistrust of 'book-learning'. What good does it do you? Are you any better off (i.e. happier) as a clerk? or as a teacher? Parents who refuse, ..., to allow their children to take up scholarships are not always thinking of the fact that they would have to be fed and clothed for much longer; at the back is this vaguely formulated but strong doubt of the value of education.<sup>11</sup>

This statement demonstrates that West Ham was part of the mainstream working-class culture of the country, although the Borough possessed some special features which had various major and minor effects on the community.

Each of West Ham's various districts had its own character and even the dockland districts were not identical. Silvertown was geographically and socially, almost an island; more so than, for instance, Canning Town. Custom House, too, was a fairly isolated dockside area. Such working-class areas sometimes had an exotic charm for members of the middle classes during the 1920s and newspaper men mounted

expeditions to West Ham as if to undiscovered foreign territory. One such, Thomas Burke of the *London Spy*, reported on Canning Town in 1922, stating that it was 'a bit of old untamed London; a whiff of Tudor Bankside; and although like all East End parishes, it has its Missions and Settlements it hasn't yet surrendered to them'. Burke also described the men of Canning Town as slow and elephantine and the girls as lusty and comely'.<sup>12</sup> Although rather over-written, Burke's article was probably a fair representation of the area with its docks, shops and many public houses. Silvertown, although no less working-class, was quieter, due perhaps to its lack of shopping facilities and to its almost total domination by industry. In another article, written in 1922, Burke described Cyprus-on-Thames, actually part of East Ham but, because of its isolation from the rest of the Borough, in many respects a very similar dockland community to that of Silvertown. Burke referred to the desolate atmosphere, the houses backing onto a 'wide but dismal prospect' (unused marsh land outside the dock walls) and the women 'faded by long toil with little appetite for life' and the 'heavy dejected men'.<sup>13</sup> The more prosperous areas of West Ham, such as Stratford and Forest Gate, did not conform to this picture and throughout the worst years of slump and depression parents, although, admittedly, not always West Ham parents, managed to find the finances to allow their sons and daughters to take up fee-paying places at West Ham secondary schools.

In West Ham, long hours of work or the limits on spending set by unemployment often resulted in local people remaining in their own area perhaps for their entire lives, marrying from within the neighbourhood and as far as possible, setting up home close to parents. Military service in the First World War may have expanded the ambitions of some but for the majority of men the need to be in work in order to support a family took precedence over most other matters. The influence of the Royal group of docks upon the lives of West Ham people should not be underestimated. Although most inhabitants of the Borough had never entered the docks, with their high, secluding walls, the coming and going of ships and seamen from literally all parts of the world gave the whole area a cosmopolitan feel and a

sophistication beyond the limits of formal education. West Ham's proximity to London and the City was another factor in ensuring that the residents of the Borough had experience of other ways of life. Boys and girls gained employment as clerks in renowned City firms, and girls were employed as sales assistants in Harrods and Selfridges. From these vantage points other values could be observed and possibly mimicked, although some middle and upper-class traits, particularly those connected with child-care, may well have been deplored rather than imitated.

It is possible to gain further insight into the interwar, working-class way of life by reference to the 1955 enquiry by M Young and P Wilmott into the kinship network of families in Bethnal Green, East London. Although by the 1950s East London culture had suffered a number of changes, including the disruption of war and an accelerated movement to the suburbs and new towns, family relationships remained essentially similar to those which existed during the 1920s and 1930s. It is true to say that Bethnal Green and West Ham were not precisely the same, either at the time of the Young and Wilmott study or during the interwar years. Nevertheless, the disparities between the two Boroughs were outweighed by their similarities and the essential culture remained the same into the 1950s. The family played an emphatic role in the lives of working-class people.<sup>14</sup> Young and Wilmott remarked that in working-class culture, when a man and woman married they did not break away from their existing relatives. Thus a wife had to 'reconcile her new obligations to her husband with her old obligations to her parents, and the husband likewise'.<sup>15</sup> In simple terms, 'In the East End, ..., the relatives were not excluded; the wider family still flourished; the wife had a mother by her as well as her husband'.<sup>16</sup> The implications of this for society in West Ham, as elsewhere in East London, were that a large network of family relationships existed which could and did impinge on choice of employment and political affiliation. During the 1920s and 1930s, factors such as the advice of senior members of the extended family rather than financial considerations, could decide whether or not a child was permitted to enter for the scholarship examination. If a boy, in particular, came from a family engaged in dock work, employment that was generally handed down

from grandfather to father to son, then the pressure would be for the child to conform to the family norm. This lack of choice was not generally resented by school-leavers. Children were often content to be relieved of a weary and worrying search for a job, and employment with relatives eased the transition from school to work. 'The need to work and the imperatives of working were a central part of the culture'<sup>17</sup> of West Ham, and in many families leaving school at 14 was a source of satisfaction rather than the reverse. In the typical family, children generally had some understanding of the state of parental finances and expected to contribute towards them sooner rather than later, in kind, if not with cash. The working-class family experienced its most extreme hardship just before the eldest child left school to go to work. It was at this stage that there were young children, the mother was tied to the home and expenses weighed most heavily against wages.<sup>18</sup> Older girls who had not left school would 'mind' baby brothers and sisters and would help with dusting and possibly ironing. Boys would run errands and, in families without daughters or where girls were younger siblings, would also have childcare responsibilities. Although fathers were nominally the main wage-earners and the heads of the household, West Ham society was overwhelmingly matriarchal and in many cases major decisions were made by the maternal grandmother. In this culture, where young adolescents had a full role to play in the continued well-being of the family it is not surprising that seemingly arbitrary decisions by the Government or the local Council to deprive the family of the services or wages of these children were so bitterly resented and, indeed, contested.

Young and Wilmott discussed the attitude towards education prevalent amongst East Londoners who had attended secondary school during the 1930s, paying special attention to the social disadvantage of doing so. 'They lost the friends who had formerly been their classmates. When they came home in the afternoon they were supposed to do homework instead of rushing into the street to play. They became different, lonely, 'sort of reserved', regarded as 'someone apart'. One girl remembered her school uniform, often the mark of the secondary school pupil,

with special distaste. 'All the children in the street would laugh at me. 'Rotten 'at' they shouted at me as I went by. I used to push the straw hat down to the bottom of my satchel. All the others went to an ordinary school and they didn't think much of us at all'.<sup>19</sup> It is a generalisation to claim that all scholarship winners were treated in this manner, but a distrust and a disregard for the supposed benefits of education tended to be the rule. Peer pressure of this kind was one factor in the common problem of early leaving from West Ham selective schools. Apart from parental decisions, voluntary or forced by family economics, to find work for a scholarship child, the discontent of the child itself at seeing contemporaries earning wages and taking an increasingly adult role, resulted in much wastage. In addition to the loss of wages inherent in keeping a child at secondary school, secondary school uniforms were a considerable expense in themselves, a large enough expense to cause some parents to consider refusing a secondary school place on that basis alone. In *The family from One End Street* published in 1937, Kate, aged 11 had won a scholarship place to the consternation of her mother.

I'm not one of these mothers what wants their children home and earning at fourteen, just when they're growing most and thoroughly tiresome all round; I'd far rather they was safe in school than working long hours in strange jobs or hanging about the streets with none - it's not that - it's the clothing of her! Coats and gym-tunics, special stockings and hats, not to mention boots and shoes - that's what it means; no more wearing of her sister's old clothes, but new ones all the time, and from all I've heard the government don't help much toward buying 'em;<sup>20</sup>



Mothers sometimes attempted to circumvent this difficulty with home-made measures, particularly since even elementary schools could strongly suggest that uniforms be worn.

My mother couldn't face the expense of buying a new uniform, so she made mine. She bought material for a gym slip. Now, she was handy with a needle but this was difficult, because you had to have three box pleats in front, and she didn't have enough material for three so she made two. Imagine my agony in going to school with only two pleats. Well, I had to sweat it out.<sup>21</sup>

In West Ham, small, but traumatic difficulties with proper clothing could be the deciding factor as to whether or not a scholarship was taken up. The prevalence of early-leaving from West Ham's secondary schools, usually to take up employment, again points to a secondary school education not being seen as an absolute advantage in obtaining a good post. Certainly, a university education sometimes appeared no more highly prized than the gaining of the School Certificate since, unless a child was exceptionally clever or fortunate the majority of children going on to third level education became teachers; entering a profession hard-working and ill-rewarded.

The economic Depression of the 1930s and the earlier Slump in the 1920s affected West Ham residents in differing ways according to a multitude of criteria. Families with large numbers of children, other than the small percentage of professional families resident in the Borough, were obviously at greater risk of experiencing poverty than smaller ones, as were families where the main wage-earner, generally the father, was absent. The majority of such children were those whose fathers had died in the Great War or who had succumbed to accident or disease. Much depended on the thrift and domestic skills of mothers since wise expenditure could not only ensure that children were fed and clothed sufficiently but could also make

the financial difference between accepting or refusing a scholarship. The extended family, whose general importance has already been discussed, often contributed in money or in kind towards the well-being of struggling family members. A network of friends and acquaintances might also help in a crisis or even on a more consistent basis. Indeed, it could be difficult to '...disentangle from one another the influences of family, home, and neighbourhood. It was not only that the neighbourhood rivalled family as a locus of sociability, but that the two overlapped and helped to constitute each other'.<sup>22</sup>

As has already been seen, West Ham had a concentration of very poor citizens. An extract from the autobiography of a West Ham worker emphasises this and the steps the West Ham Council took to alleviate it.

The West Ham Council, they inaugurated a scheme whereby they opened soup kitchens by the church. Poverty was very, very bad. You could go there and buy a penny bowl of soup and take a bit of bread with you, and that was your dinner. And the West Ham Borough Council inaugurated the scheme where they dug the Hollow Pond in Wanstead. For half a crown a day, a bloke could go and dig out this Hollow Pond, but you could only do a day's work.<sup>23</sup>

This extract illustrates the extremes of poverty faced by the parents of some children but, as in the rest of the country, the majority of children had fathers who were in work and suffered manageable degrees of financial stringency. Despite poverty and ill-health, home-life and family relations seem on the whole to have been a source of strength and support in a world where there were limited opportunities for more positive kinds of enjoyment.<sup>24</sup>

By 1934, economic recovery, despaired of in 1931, was beginning to be a reality in many areas of Britain. Unemployment, which was running at a level of 21.9 per cent in 1932 and 19.8 per cent in 1933 had fallen to 16.6 per cent in 1934, 15.3 per cent in 1935 and fell still further to 13.0 per cent in 1936.<sup>25</sup> In West Ham, despite economic and political difficulties, the Council had completed a number of large-scale projects by the outbreak of the Second World War. It had erected 1,200 Council houses, mainly under slum clearance schemes, and its record in this respect was second only to Bermondsey among the boroughs in greater London. Major engineering works had been undertaken in the Silvertown and Canning Town areas, making the former district more accessible to the rest of West Ham. The public health department had been greatly expanded, and from 1923 onwards the Borough's death-rate was lower than the average for England and Wales. In the field of leisure and recreation, large indoor baths were built at Stratford and open air baths at Canning Town.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, from 1936, national and international affairs begun to intrude deeper and deeper into the affairs of West Ham. The deteriorating prospect of world peace caused the West Ham Council to rethink their former policy on civil defence and preparations had to be made for the evacuation of school children in the event of war. The Borough had followed pacifist policies throughout the 1930s and were only persuaded to deviate from these by a combination of Government directives and public outcry. In the 21 years since the end of the First World War, despite the economic depression, West Ham Council had made some headway in improving facilities, educational and social, for the people.

## **1.2 Politics in West Ham, both local and national 1830-1939.**

### **1.2.1 West Ham's early political background.**

Prior to 1836 and the creation of the West Ham Union, West Ham comprised an individual parish under the authority of the vestry. The Union took over responsibility for poor relief and sanitary functions such as providing adequate sewers and drainage. In 1856, West Ham began to be administered by a local Board of Health with 12 elected members. Unfortunately, although not all were culpable, the Board became, for the next several years, associated with fraudulent behaviour and policies that were too often shown to be capricious and short sighted. The administration was always under strain, with a small staff by modern standards, which did not expand to keep pace with the huge growth of the town. The failure to employ staff in sufficient numbers and to pay them properly sprang from West Ham's chronic financial difficulties. Owing to the poverty of the area, the poor-rates and later also the school-rates were very high and the Board consequently had to beware of pressing ratepayers too hard. West Ham's sudden transformation from village to town had one important implication for the future. The vastness of the influx of newcomers meant that West Ham's earlier traditions were submerged. Existing landowners, such as the Henniker family, sold their lands off to the railways and for housing and left the district. The absence of gentry meant that councillors and other leaders of the community tended to be drawn from the lower middle classes and working classes and were popularly considered to be no better than those they governed. Local issues, due to this factor, were thus often more contentious than those with purely national implications.

The Municipal Borough of West Ham was formed in 1886 and the area became a County Borough in 1889. The Borough Council showed itself to be a more vigorous and effective body than the local Board. Among the original councillors

were several Progressives, notably J H (later Lord) Bethell, who were later joined by others and by Socialists, led by W J (Will) Thorne. In 1897, the Socialists and a proportion of the Progressives on the Council formed a Labour group with a policy including trade union wages for Council employees and the provision of Council houses. After the 1898 municipal elections this group won control and proceeded enthusiastically with all schemes for Borough improvement which were then at the planning stage. The Socialist tendency of the Council was alarming to many in the Borough and in 1899 the Municipal Alliance was formed. The Alliance consisted of Conservatives, Liberals and other non-Socialists and received strong support from the churches, especially the middle-class free churches, in an attempt to counter the Socialists on the Council. The Alliance won the municipal elections in the same year and retained control until 1910. During the First World War there was an electoral truce with the Municipal Alliance controlling the Council.

West Ham became a Parliamentary Borough with two divisions in 1885 and in that year returned two Liberals to Parliament. The first Labour MP, Keir Hardie, gained West Ham south in 1892 but lost it to a Conservative in 1895, after some falling away of local support. Will Thorne became a Labour MP in 1910 and West Ham south voted in a Liberal in the same year. This notable increase in Socialist activity in the 1880s and 1890s, culminating in the election to Parliament of the country's first Labour MPs must be attributed to West Ham's position as an expanding town, attracting labour from all over the British Isles and also from Europe. Such immigrants, often living in unsatisfactory conditions and exploited by employers with plentiful supplies of workers to choose from, could be converted to Socialism and union activity; although this was by no means a certainty. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, West Ham had lost some of the rawness that had marked the Borough during the previous 50 or 60 years. The area had acquired an impressive town hall, swimming baths, libraries and other public buildings and was, in addition, well-served by a local tram network. In social terms, as has already been reported, the Borough was divided into the more affluent districts of Upton Park and Forest Gate and the strongly

manual labouring districts of Plaistow, Canning Town, Custom House and Silvertown; these last two comprising the dockside districts of West Ham. Upton Park and Forest Gate tended to house shop-keepers, skilled men, railway workers etc., while semi-skilled and unskilled labourers, and particularly dock workers, generally lived in the southern Plaistow, Canning Town, Custom House and Silvertown areas. Stratford was less easy to categorise and was a mixture of residential commercial and industrial interests although some of the largest and grandest of West Ham houses were situated in the Grove, Stratford. It was also the administrative centre for the Council.<sup>27</sup>

### **1.2.2 National and local politics 1918-39.**

Nationally, in 1918, the Conservative Party formed the major part of the Coalition Government with the Liberals although Lloyd George, the Liberal leader, was Prime Minister.<sup>28</sup> By 1918 West Ham already possessed a Labour mayor and was divided into four constituencies: Stratford and Upton in the north and Plaistow and Silvertown in the south. In that year, Labour MPs had been returned for both southern constituencies and Conservatives for both northern, this broadly in line with the social divisions already described, although such gradations were not absolute and did not lead to rigid voting patterns. In 1919, the Labour group won complete control of West Ham Council, a victory called 'a day of dreams come true' for the Party's supporters in East London.<sup>29</sup> It also won control of the East End Councils of Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Stepney and Poplar, ensuring that West Ham was well supplied with Socialist allies. Almost all candidates mentioned education in their election literature. A Socialist candidate, W R Hughes, who had previously served for ten years as a councillor, made the improvement of education in the Borough the focal point of his appeal to the voters, stating that only by this means could any other social advances be accomplished. Hughes displayed a liberal view of what was necessary to ensure a good education, including the ideal that a child's environment must be a healthy one if conditions were to be optimal

for mental growth. In this, and in line with his Socialist views, Hughes was advocating that all children should enjoy the advantages possessed by 'well-to-do folk'. Hughes castigated his own colleagues, 'Our own muddling and impotence are largely due to the fact that we are all partially and wrongly educated in one way or another. We discuss our own conditions and troubles at great length and give far too little time and thought to improving conditions for the children'. Most Labour candidates included some reference to education in their election material, two using an identical form of words to insist that education should be free from elementary school to university, in their phrase, giving 'our class equality of opportunity'. Labour's Alliance opponents placed less emphasis on education, although one candidate, F W Wybrew, welcomed the 1918 Education Act as a means of improving current and future generations morally and materially, rather than counting on any likelihood of it causing a social revolution. Possibly the most touching reference to education by the candidates in that year, came from H Threadkell, 'The Ex-Service Man's Candidate', who professed a keen interest in the new Act since education had the power to 'affect vitally the children of his comrades who had made the supreme sacrifice'.<sup>30</sup> Among those who gained seats were Socialists known for their opposition to the First World War but, equally successful were Labour Ex-Servicemen,<sup>31</sup> this hinting at the delicate balance which existed between patriots and pacifists on West Ham's Council.

The 1919 Labour victory in the West Ham municipal elections was probably aided by the migration of the middle classes from West Ham. The building of suburbs into Essex and the extension of the District line to serve these suburbs gave lower middle-class City workers the opportunity of living further away from their place of work. Also the prestige of Thorne and other veteran Socialists, including J J (Jack) Jones, who, in 1918 was elected MP for the new Silvertown division, might have persuaded those who had not supported the Party before to vote Labour. In 1919, West Ham Council was faced with problems that were more difficult than those of 20 years earlier, since the population was larger and there was growing overcrowding in the older parts of the Borough. If the number of persons living at

a density of more than two to a room is taken as the criterion of overcrowding, then in this respect the position in West Ham worsened between 1921 and 1931; except for a few small towns, only certain Metropolitan Boroughs and the large towns of Tyneside and Durham had a larger proportion of their population living in overcrowded conditions. By 1931, the proportions living at densities of more than two persons to a room were: West Ham 17.45 per cent Barking 6.37 per cent and East Ham 6.23 per cent compared with 1.69 per cent in the nearby district of Ilford.<sup>32</sup> The intense overcrowding in West Ham was, of course, connected with the poverty and the culture of the area. It was common practice for families to sub-let and sub-let again their living accommodation to other families and, in addition, grandparents and unmarried aunts and uncles often lived with a married son and daughter, making overcrowding worse. West Ham remained a very poor borough. This impoverishment was heightened by the fact that many men were either unemployed or employed only on a casual basis, as in the case of many dock workers. Returning ex-servicemen placed an added strain on both jobs and housing and it is not surprising that the Council's plans to implement the provisions of Fisher's Education Act were neither universally popular nor universally understood.

In contrast to the slump confidently predicted after the Great War, there was a trade boom. High wartime wages and a shortage of goods had led to a degree of enforced saving which, with demobilisation gratuities, gave people a false sense of prosperity. For some 18 months after the war there was a spending spree during which manufacturers could sell products as fast as they could deliver them to the shops.<sup>33</sup> Reality intruded on the post-war world in 1921. Unemployment had reached two million in June of that year and it was not to fall below the million mark again until 1940. Domestic policies were henceforth largely directed towards attempts to deal with unemployment.<sup>34</sup> The Coalition government's efforts to reduce expenditure in the light of this new economic reality came under intense criticism, leading it to set up a Select Committee on National Expenditure, better known by the name of its Chairman, Sir Eric Geddes. It reported in 1922,



recommending savings of £75 million over the whole range of government activity, but selecting education as the subject of a particularly bitter attack.<sup>35</sup> Specific Geddes proposals included reducing the salaries of teachers and excluding children under the age of six from schools. These measures, after some debate, were considered too harsh and the eventual savings of about six and a half million pounds were achieved mainly by requiring teachers to contribute five per cent of their salary towards superannuation<sup>36</sup> and by a reduction in special services and the provision of school meals.<sup>37</sup>

Labour victories in West Ham's municipal elections from 1919 to 1924 did not reflect the national state of affairs. The country was governed first by a Coalition then a Conservative government and although the most striking feature of the 1920s was the sustained surge in popular support for the Labour party, this should not obscure the Conservative preponderance that so characterised the period. Indeed, during the interwar period the Conservatives formed or predominated in five governments and were, consistently, the largest party except during the 1929-31 government.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, between the First World War and the 1930s the Labour party transformed itself from the rather loose federal structure it had originally been into a substantial parliamentary party, supported by a strong central organisation and a comprehensive framework of regional and local branches and members.<sup>39</sup>

The 1920s were also a formative period for other elements within the electorate, such as the Irish. Though largely working-class, the Irish had generally shown a reluctance to vote Labour. The Great War shattered the Liberal/Nationalist alliance and, as early as 1919, the leading Irish politician in Britain, T P O'Connor, had begun to urge Irish voters to back the Labour Party. Wherever Irish working men were numerous, as in London, Liverpool and Glasgow, they came to be a bastion of Labour strength; but as Catholics rather than simply as working men. This could lead to unexpected difficulties when religion came into conflict with

political allegiance. The main transition from one party to another occurred during the early 1920s when Labour was a staunch Home Rule party, free from association with the suppression of the Easter Rising or the 'Black and Tan' policy,<sup>40</sup> a transitional period for West Ham's Labour councillors culminating in them acquiring an absolute majority on the Borough Council.

In West Ham, Municipal Alliance councillors, although increasingly in the minority, constantly scrutinised the Education Committee expenditure on education, Councillor W Crow of the Municipal Alliance being particularly voluble in this respect. Councillor Crow, who also served as a Borough alderman, was an important figure in 1920s West Ham politics. He had been born in 1858 and from the time he was elected to West Ham's first Borough Council as a young man until his defeat in the 1929 elections, 'hardly a week went by when his name was not mentioned in the *Stratford Express*'. In a memoir published privately his son recalls that 'while he fought strenuously against waste, nepotism and corruption in local affairs, he was equally determined to encourage wise expenditure'.<sup>41</sup> This was not always the conclusion reached by his Labour colleagues who sometimes pilloried him for his efforts. Councillor Crow represented Broadway ward, an administrative and residential area in the centre of Stratford and as such was a spokesman for the views of many of West Ham's remaining middle-class residents. On the other hand, party lines could be indistinctly drawn, as demonstrated during the Education Committee discussions following the Geddes Report in 1922. Councillor Crow told the meeting, in answer to Labour criticisms of the Report, that he believed it to be the height of folly to say that there was no room for economies in education, since West Ham's own expenditure was over three-quarters of a million pounds. Alderman D J Davies, Labour, in reply, said that he was surprised to hear an 'advanced man' like Alderman Crow should support the Geddes Axe since 'his party had a great deal to do with so-called free education. After all these years were they going back?' Alderman Crow replied in such strong terms to what he saw as a misrepresentation of Geddes, his party and worst of all himself that the Labour Chairman had to intervene in order to curb

further conflict.<sup>42</sup> The most striking feature of this incident is Alderman Crow's vehement reaction to Socialist taunts against the commitment of his party to education. Alliance councillors, no less than Labour, could not afford to have a political image opposed to educational progress, even if sections of West Ham's inhabitants sometimes came close to displaying such an attitude themselves.

### **1.2.3 West Ham's own brand of Socialism, 'labourism'.**

J Marriott has stated that there has been a tendency to believe that the achievements of the Labour party at national level were faithfully reproduced in local politics. In his opinion this not only misrepresents the situation locally, but nationally too.<sup>43</sup> The advance of the Labour party after the First World War was very uneven. Overall the gains of the war and the immediate post-war period were not consolidated. Raised expectations of an inevitable triumph as the Party continued to expand were never fully realised even in areas such as West Ham that had a strong industrial base.<sup>44</sup> Even by 1931, although hardly a major city remained under Liberal control, the Liberals still occupied, often in alliance with the Conservatives, an important place on many borough councils.<sup>45</sup> This was demonstrated again and again in West Ham where the Municipal Alliance, although never again the majority party after 1919, still mounted strong opposition to the Socialist majority.

Marriott argues that the predominant political culture in West Ham during the interwar years was not that of Labour but that of 'labourism', a concept he considers difficult to define. Put at its most simple it is a manifestation of working-class culture as distinct from Labour Socialism and the tradition of parliamentary representation. In this thesis, the use of the terms 'Labour' and 'Socialist' reflect the contemporary usage. To be a Labour supporter or even a Labour councillor in West Ham during the 1920s and 1930s did not necessarily

imply a complete acceptance of Socialist theory. Voters could support the Labour party whilst not agreeing with all of its policies. Something of this cultural identity may be seen in a speech made by the Labour mayor of West Ham, J J Jones, to a conference of class teachers held in West Ham in October 1924.

The Borough could not, of course, boast of the history of some of the great cities, but they could say that within the limits of the opportunities they had in the educational world, West Ham had done as well as most of them, if not better. West Ham was proud of their schools, proud of the teachers, proud of the scholars and proud of the parents...They in West Ham were Trade Unionists and made no apology on that account (cries of 'Hear,hear')...They would not allow blacklegging in their own professions if they could help it.<sup>46</sup>

The tone of this speech is not that of Labour party theory but of the solidarity of the working man. The threat to be feared was not necessarily Government or even the Conservative party but blackleg labour, which could undermine working-class unity. In West Ham and, indeed, in most working-class areas of the country, it was the gravest offence to undercut the wages of another, particularly since it could lead to wives and children going hungry. It was not commitment to Labour party ideals that were important but the neighbourly virtues of refraining from stealing another's livelihood. That West Ham teachers were included in this code of honour reflects the working-class background of the many masters and mistresses.

The nature of the Municipal Alliance, the main opposition to Labour in West Ham, places Labour's success in context. The Alliance, described by J Bush as '...a motley array of Liberals, Socialists and trade unionists united on a progressive reform platform',<sup>47</sup> had a pragmatic pre-First World War record, not dissimilar to that of Labour. This continued after the war, but during the 1919 Council elections the Alliance recognised that its seats were in danger from Labour

candidates and resurrected the old idea that Labour policies would be a burden on the rates. Labour's new education scheme appeared to many to prove this contention although it did not prevent Labour from gaining the majority of seats. Indeed, despite the Alliance advocating social reform and appealing to the common good, its narrow sectional base was reduced by controversy concerning unemployment. The Alliance's agreement with cuts in unemployment relief reduced its support so drastically that the ground it lost was never really recovered. By the end of the 1920s Labour 'dominated the formal political terrain'.<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 1.4 Unemployment in West Ham 1927-1938 compared to London and the rest of Great Britain as a percentage of the insured population.**

Year	% of West Ham	% of London	% of Britain
1927	16.8	5.0	9.6
1928	16.1	4.9	10.7
1929	15.8	5.6	10.3
1930	20.3	8.1	15.8
1931	27.5	12.2	21.1
1932	26.4	13.5	21.9
1933	23.8	11.8	19.8
1934	20.0	9.2	16.6
1935	18.2	8.5	15.3
1936	15.1	7.2	12.9
1937	12.5	6.3	10.6
1938	15.1	8.9	12.6

Source: John Marriott. *The culture of labourism* (1991) Edinburgh University Press p.124.

The industrial decline of West Ham in the interwar period had a dramatic effect on unemployment. Data from the Ministry of Labour shows that although movements in levels of unemployment followed closely those in the metropolis, overall levels were consistently higher than those of both London and the country as a whole. West Ham experienced levels of unemployment among insured workers that were

markedly higher than those for the metropolitan area and, indeed, for the whole south-east region, whose levels were very close to those of London. West Ham's poor record in this regard was attributable both to the underlying poverty of the area before the start of the Depression and to the high numbers of dock workers resident in the Borough dependent on work that was casual at the best of times. In spite of the success of labourism within formal political activity, support among the working-class electorate in West Ham was restricted. Labour activists repeatedly expressed concern at the persistent lack of interest in the party. To an extent this concern was well grounded. Polls at general elections, in West Ham, and the metropolitan constituencies, were significantly lower than might have been expected. They were lower than those of all neighbouring constituencies, including Poplar and Bethnal Green, which had electorates of similar social composition, and other Labour strongholds, such as Woolwich. In the 1924 General election, Poplar's poll was 72.1 per cent, Bethnal Green's was 68.4 per cent and that in Woolwich was 79.7 per cent, compared with an average of 65.3 per cent in West Ham.<sup>49</sup> The attitude of many West Ham voters towards politics during the interwar period can be summed up in Hoggart's words; 'in general most working-people are non-political in their outlook. The important things in life, so far as they can see, are other things'.<sup>50</sup> To be a Labour party voter or supporter was not necessarily to be a Socialist and accept Socialist theory.

### **1.3 Education in West Ham from the eighteenth century to 1939.**

#### **1.3.1 Early attempts at the education of the masses in West Ham.**

West Ham's first parish school was opened in 1723. During the next few years elementary education was provided mainly by the churches, until 1871 when a School Board, one of the first in the country, was formed. The creation of the School Board coincided both with the aftermath of the Elementary Education Act of 1870 and with the beginning of West Ham's period of intense growth. The

Board's initial report gave details of educational provision in the area. There was a stock of 27 schools of which the Church of England was responsible for 15, the Nonconformists for seven, the Catholics for three and the Great Eastern Railway and Ragged School Union for one each. Among the church schools was Sarah Bonnell's, later to become West Ham High School for Girls, but then a well-endowed charity school. The West Ham Board found that the schools combined had accommodation for only 8,183 pupils out of 14,512 children between the ages of three and 13 and immediately set out to remedy this deficiency. By 1903, the Board had built 42 elementary schools, a school for the deaf, one for physically and mentally handicapped children and two pupil-teacher centres. By this time, many of the voluntary schools had closed, including all those belonging to the Nonconformists, in response to the increasing public preference for the generally well-equipped and staffed public elementary schools. One new elementary school had been built by the Church of England and two by the Catholics, a reflection of growing Catholic confidence and population. A start had also been made in providing secondary type education. The Sarah Bonnell charity school had been refounded under a scheme drawn up by the Endowed Schools Commissioners and became a high school for girls in 1873. This transformation met a demand from West Ham's middle-class residents for an advanced and socially exclusive education for their daughters. In addition, the Carpenters' Company Technical school for boys had opened in 1891, preparing pupils for white-collar employment, both locally and in the City. St. Angela's High School, founded in 1862 and West Ham Grammar School for Boys, founded in 1875 were Catholic schools and both were providing secondary education by the beginning of the twentieth century for Catholic and non-Catholic pupils.

Higher education was provided by the Technical Institute, opened in 1898, which from 1900 was able to offer internal courses for the University of London's degrees in science and engineering, although most of its work was at a lower level. The concentration on science and technology was connected to the predominance of males undertaking courses and to West Ham's position as an industrial and

dockland town where such skills had immediate and practical application. For a short time West Ham sent its own junior secondary scholarship holders to the Carpenters' Company Technical school. The opening of the Municipal Secondary School in 1906 led to its redundancy and the school closed in 1905. After the closure, the Municipal Secondary School began to develop junior technical classes for those under 16, which overlapped those of the higher elementary schools. Also in 1906, the pupil-teacher centres in the Borough were re-opened as higher elementary schools.<sup>51</sup> The Education Act of 1902 had required West Ham, in company with the rest of the country, to 'take such steps as seem to them desirable to supply or aid the supply of education other than elementary and to promote the general co-ordination of all forms of education'. The opening of the Municipal Secondary School was a direct response to the Act, although the transformation of the Borough's pupil-teacher centres into higher elementary schools was somewhat against its spirit since its passing, according to E Eaglesham, 'helped to contain, to repel, and, in some respects to destroy the upward striving of the elementary school'.<sup>52</sup> By 1918, West Ham possessed 54 elementary schools, 11 denominational schools other than Catholic, six Catholic schools, a technical college, two higher elementary schools, four secondary schools and 11 other schools, including private establishments that did not fall into any of these categories.

**Figure 1.5 Educational Provision in West Ham in 1918.**

Type of School	Number
Secondary	4
Higher Elementary	2
Elementary	54
Technical (including colleges)	1
Denominational (excluding R.C.)	9
Catholic	6
Private	1-2
Other (including special schools)	7

Source: Local Studies Notes No 72 L B of Newham.



By 1939 a modest increase in educational provision can be seen. An additional secondary school had been opened and three extra elementary schools provided. A denominational school had closed and Hadow reorganisation had resulted in the establishment of 18 senior schools.

**Figure 1.6 Educational Provision in West Ham in 1939.**

Type of School	Number
Secondary	5
Central (Higher Elementary)	2
Senior	18
Elementary	57
Technical (including colleges)	1
Denominational (excluding R.C.)	8
Catholic	6
Private	1-2
Other (including special schools)	7

Source: Local Studies Notes No 72 L B of Newham.

### **1.3.2 West Ham and national educational innovations and economies; Hadow reorganisation and the May Committee on expenditure.**

In 1922, West Ham Council published an ambitious booklet as a guide to the facilities for education then available in the area. This publication, entitled *Forward, West Ham*, was produced to coincide with a festival week during which the work of the Borough's schools was on display to the public, providing an 'education in education'. One chapter described the divergence in the type of education offered at the age of 11, when children entered secondary school, if they passed the examination. A year later, pupils could enter the junior technical school or take a place at secondary school, with the intention of training as teachers. Far from considering such provisions adequate, the point was put that the great

majority of children left school at 14 which was a blot on the English educational system since it led, 'when guidance and inspiration are perhaps most needed', to children being forced to face alone 'the difficulties and dangers of the factory and the street'. The anonymous compilers of *Forward, West Ham* were thus setting forward ideals close to those expressed by Tawney in *Secondary education for all*, the Labour Party's policy statement, also published in 1922. In *Forward, West Ham*, the hope was that the existing narrow educational ladder would be transformed into '...wide stairways, up which the boys and girls could march together in great companies, and none be left behind'.<sup>53</sup>

The defeat of the Labour government in October 1924 did not put an end to the ideas expressed by Tawney; indeed, by the time the Hadow Report was published in 1926 it was quite clear that the reorganisation of secondary education had ceased to be a matter upon which the Labour party could claim a monopoly of purpose, although it is true that *Secondary education for all* was the clearest expression of the need for improved facilities and the best outline of how the problem should be handled. On the other hand, a policy for reform at the post-primary stage was adopted for the Conservative party manifesto in 1924, and there is no doubt that what became known as Hadow reorganisation was the policy of the Board of Education a year before the publication of the Report. In the Preface to their Report, the authors, one of whom was R H Tawney, set out the aims of reorganisation. The first of these was to report upon the organisation, objectives and curriculum of courses of study for those children who would remain in full-time education, but not in secondary schools, after the age of 15. The system finally envisaged by the Report was one of a variety of secondary schools in which the existing secondary schools would be known as grammar schools and would be establishments with a higher leaving age and a predominantly academic curriculum. It was suggested that both selective and non-selective central schools be known as modern schools whilst classes remaining within the elementary schools be termed simply, senior classes. The Committee believed that in post-primary schools other than secondary, the curriculum should not be the same

as in the grammar schools because the children's interests were different and likely to be more practical, more concerned with earning a living.<sup>54</sup> The Hadow Report deplored the fact that 55 per cent of children at school between the ages of 11 and 16 were still in elementary schools and that only 7.5 per cent were in secondary or junior technical schools.<sup>55</sup>

The Hadow Report raised important issues, particularly as the desirability of some degree of post-primary reorganisation had been generally accepted across all gradations of political opinions. The Board of Education published a pamphlet in 1928 applauding the Hadow recommendations and urging local authorities to adopt the principles laid down in it and to prepare public opinion for the change. Some authorities tried to implement the scheme in full; others began to open new senior schools and to create senior departments.<sup>56</sup> Naturally, the prospect of a break at the age of 11 changed the educational balance for West Ham's elementary schools. In May 1928, the members of West Ham Education Committee discussed the subject of reorganisation, generally reaching favourable conclusions as to the necessity for change. The dissenting voice of Alderman Crow asked his colleagues to consider the likely effect that reorganisation would have on the Borough's finances. He reminded the Committee of the difficulties encountered by the Council seven years earlier, when parents had objected to their children transferring from their original elementary school in order to provide space for continuation classes (See Chapter Two). Alderman Crow's peers chose to see his objections as evidence of his parsimonious attitude towards education and decided to set up a committee on reorganisation; albeit, and despite the waning power of the Municipal Alliance, with Alderman Crow as one of its members.<sup>57</sup>

After 'Many meetings were held and numerous reports and statistics prepared'<sup>58</sup> final proposals for reorganisation were submitted by the West Ham Education Committee to the Board of Education in April 1930. The plans, apart from imposing a general break at the age of 11, included provisos that there should be

no more than 40 children and 50 children per class for seniors and juniors respectively. Infants were to be retained in their existing schools and there was to be 'no immediate disturbance of non-provided schools'. The Committee recognised that West Ham possessed a deficit in school accommodation. In addition, since the Borough was not a homogenous entity but consisted 'of a collection of districts where the conditions vary considerably, and while some of these lend themselves to experimental re-organisation, the majority must await the provision of additional accommodation before being dealt with'.<sup>59</sup> The West Ham Education Committee was here referring to the social and geographical difference between different parts of the Borough. The Committee was sufficiently wise, in view of events eight years earlier during the continuation school controversy, not to attempt to reorganise schools which would result in younger children having to cross busy roads. There was also to be no attempt to reorganise schools that were in an isolated position and thus difficult to link to another, or to reorganise schools that lay close to schools to borough boundaries.

In the event, the Committee placed almost all its schools into one of three divisions, A, B and C, with sub-divisions within the larger categories. Division A was not to be reorganised immediately due to uncertainty over plans for the improvement of the Royal group of docks that lay within the area. Division B was also to be left out owing to a need to increase school accommodation first. Division C, therefore, was the only division to be reorganised in 1930, since the need for further school accommodation was less urgent. Division A consisted entirely of schools in the Canning Town and Silvertown districts. Division B consisted of a mixture of schools including some in Stratford, Canning Town and Forest Gate. The Division C schools were mainly situated in Upton Park and Forest Gate but with a number of schools drawn from Canning Town, Plaistow and Custom House. The Education Committee stressed that the allocation of pupils to the new senior schools at the age of 11+ was not to be regarded as final and the 'fullest possible opportunity of transfer at a later date from one course to another will be offered to any pupil who is likely to benefit by such a transfer'.<sup>60</sup>

At the end of 1930 the Council's inspectors, E W Hodges and C M Bott reported on the progress of reorganised schools in Division C. They considered that each of the reorganised schools had made a good beginning and that new conditions for the teaching staff led to new opportunities for teachers, who now dealt with pupils as individuals rather than in groups. The inspectors recognised that with reorganisation in its early stages it was far too early to pass judgement on the actual curriculum. They accepted that each school should have its own strategy for what should be included, but remarked on the fact that the children, drawn from a number of different schools, had merged together in 'a fine spirit of oneness'. Of greater importance for the Education Committee, than the attitude of teachers and children, in view of events in East Ham, (see Chapter Five) was that of parents, the inspectors specifically commentating that there had been no complaints on the change of schools.<sup>61</sup> In July 1932, the *Stratford Express* carried an article concerned with the continuing reorganisation in West Ham that also emphasised the importance of parental attitudes. The article dealt with the removal of the Borough's central schools to new buildings and the subsequent use of the old central school buildings for elementary schooling. The piece went into some detail on the facilities now available in elementary, senior and central schools and finished by saying that:

The fullest publicity should be given to the schemes and consequently parents' meetings are being held so that explanations may be given and questions answered. The Education Committee is enthusiastic about the schemes, and is confident that the public will realise and appreciate the value and extent of the educational services provided and will co-operate heartily with all concerned.<sup>62</sup>

This last comment stressing co-operation was an obvious reference to the East Ham Education Committee's travails which will be fully discussed in another chapter. As in West Ham, Hadow reorganisation was carried out, gradually, in the 1930s rather than the 1920s. The new building that accompanied Hadow reorganisation was aided by low interest rates that enabled local authorities to

borrow money very cheaply, thus the Depression of the 1930s created circumstances favourable to reorganisation.<sup>63</sup> A letter to the West Ham Education Committee from the Board of Education in April 1932 displayed an acceptance of the slow pace of Hadow reorganisation 'the Board of Education have had under consideration the rearrangements at certain Schools proposed by the Authority as a provisional measure pending the carrying out of full reorganisation when possible at some future date...'<sup>64</sup>

West Ham, initially, had few problems in implementing its reorganisation plans. By 1933, however, local feeling in the Silvertown area of the Borough had unexpectedly resulted in a deputation of parents attending a Committee meeting in order to protest against their children being transferred from their schools. A strike, reminiscent of the difficulty in East Ham was used to persuade the Committee to the parents' point of view. West Ham Council, far from acceding to the parents' requests, considered initiating prosecutions, although, as in the case of continuation school attendance 12 years earlier, none actually took place. As in East Ham, the main concern of parents was for the safety of their children, one parent being resolute against sending his children over a dangerous railway crossing. These anxieties were regarded with little sympathy by the Committee, who suggested that if it accommodated everyone in this way, the Borough's schools would be half full. Apart from these comparatively minor difficulties with the parents, West Ham in a depressed economic climate, was struggling with the financial aspects of reorganisation. Indeed, the West Ham Education Committee felt sufficiently aggrieved to complain that it had been induced to embark on a far-reaching scheme of reorganisation on the 'definite promise' from the Government of the day that there would be funds to meet the needs of such a commitment.<sup>65</sup> Hadow reorganisation remained to be completely accepted. Even by 1937, a Municipal Alliance councillor, Councillor S M Edwards, representing Beckton ward, could state that he '...did not worship at the shrine of Hadow...By transplanting children at the age of 11 he did not think they were adopting a wise plan'.<sup>66</sup>

In August 1931, the Labour government gave place to one of national unity. In March of that year, the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, had announced the appointment of Sir George May who was just about to retire from the post of secretary to the Prudential Assurance Company as Chairman of the Economy Committee. The main recommendation of the Committee was that unemployment benefit should be cut by 20 per cent, but the second largest reduction was to be in education, a cut of £13,600,000 with an additional £250,000 to be taken from grants to universities and colleges. The May Committee further recommended that the percentage grant should be replaced by a block grant and that all minor education authorities should be abolished, leaving only Counties and County Boroughs over which the Board could exercise supervision rather than control. All higher education was to be pruned and secondary school fees raised by 25 per cent. Free-places were to be terminated and fees were thus to be remitted only on a means test basis. In addition, teachers' salaries were to be cut by 20 per cent, affecting both elementary and secondary school teachers. The Labour government accepted all of the May Committee's recommendations, with the exception that teachers' salaries were reduced by 16 per cent rather than by 20 per cent and that plans to raise secondary fees and to introduce a means test for free-places were disregarded. The new National government, which took office at the end of August, appointed its own economy committee which advised that the bulk of May Committee proposals should be implemented, but considered that teachers' salaries should be cut by 15 per cent; the Cabinet itself refused to increase school fees due to a concern by Conservative members not to antagonise Tory voters by making their children's education a greater economic charge upon them. Circular 1413, issued on 11 September 1931 and headed 'Reductions in Educational Expenditure', set out the whole programme of economies, including a provision to withdraw the guaranteed 50 per cent minimum grant, a key clause of the 1918 Education Act. It also legalised, regardless of contracts, the reduction in teachers' salaries.<sup>67</sup> The teachers' protests at this action, by use of a massive publicity campaign, won much public sympathy and the news of the Naval mutiny at Invergordon decided matters for the Government, who announced, on 21 September, that cuts in salary would in no case exceed ten per cent.

An Education Committee report in March 1931, made it plain that Government economy measures had resulted in a 'serious setback' to West Ham's reorganisation plans and to other improvement schemes approved by the Council. The Education Committee had entered a 'strong protest' against the reduction in government grant and had decided not to initiate any building or other development work during the period 1932-33, on which less than 50 per cent of the cost would be payable by means of a grant. The Committee listed the works which had to be postponed for the time being; these included the fencing of one Council playing field and the levelling of another, the provision of handicraft and domestic science rooms in two schools, alterations and additions to one school, the provision of additional classrooms to another and the erection of a caretaker's house in another. It is, however, possible to argue that the projects that the Education Committee was able to complete were far larger in scale than those which were abandoned. Two senior departments for boys and two senior departments for girls were to be taken into immediate use and, in addition, new departments were added to both the Borough's central schools. A new elementary school was nearing completion and the Council had undertaken numerous small improvement works on other schools. West Ham's existing secondary schools were not mentioned in these economies although West Ham was not able to undertake the building of a new secondary school it had long planned for.<sup>68</sup>



The tables below show West Ham's educational budget for the years 1920-39. West Ham's expenditure on secondary and continuation schooling during the interwar period is also shown.

**Figure 1.7 The educational budget for West Ham 1920-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Budget In Pounds</b>
1920	638,657
1921	832,823
1922	922,141
1923	894,805
1924	869,960
1925	870,760
1926	856,500
1927	843,110
1928	863,680
1929	893,360
1930	880,056
1931	901,655
1932	954,874
1933	883,987
1934	865,908
1935	865,047
1936	884,667
1937	905,568
1938	909,685
1939	887,194

Source: West Ham Education Committee minutes 1920-39.



**Figure 1.8 The percentage of West Ham educational budget 1920-39 spent on higher (including secondary) education.**

Year	% of West Ham
1920	8.8
1921	10.6
1922	12.0
1923	12.0
1924	12.2
1925	12.9
1926	12.7
1927	13.4
1928	14.0
1929	14.1
1930	13.9
1931	14.4
1932	13.9
1933	15.6
1934	15.2
1935	15.3
1936	15.6
1937	15.7
1938	15.5

Source: West Ham Education Committee minutes 1920-39.

**Figure 1.9 The percentage of West Ham's educational budget spent on continuation education in selected years 1921-39.**

Year	Percentage
1921	1.0
1924	1.4
1928	1.6
1932	1.6
1936	1.1
1938	1.4

Source: West Ham Education Committee minutes 1921-39.

Although the 1939 budget was £887,194 compared with £638,657 in 1920, the peak years for expenditure were 1922 with a budget of £922,141 and 1932 with a budget of £954,874. The 1922 budget can be accounted for by large Labour party gains in the municipal elections of that year with Labour councillors redeeming promises made to increase funds for education. The 1932 figure demonstrates a less dramatic increase and is probably a result of the greater numbers of scholarship entrants and scholarship places available in West Ham in that year.

### **1.3.3 'The Catholic Question' in the country and Catholic education in West Ham.**

Although, by 1928, Catholics in England had enjoyed Emancipation for a hundred years, there remained in the country during the interwar period, a certain distrust of the beliefs and practices of what was considered by many to be a foreign church. The Catholic Bishop of Brentwood, Bishop Doubleday, said in November 1934 that the Church had two great enemies to contend with, the enemy of ignorance and the enemy of prejudice. The Bishop underlined these words by reference to a speech by a Protestant clergyman at the Chelmsford Conference who '...called us (Catholics) a foreign community of invaders'.<sup>69</sup> The fact that the majority of Catholics in England were Irish or of Irish descent did not aid their assimilation into English society since the life-style of Irish immigrants did not generally attract admiration. The controversy over the Church of England Prayer book in 1927 resulted in a backlash against all things papist. The whole affair arose from internal Anglican divisions between High and Low churchmen and the inclusion of certain Anglo-Catholic rituals into the canon of the Prayer book. Although these changes were in no way sponsored by the Catholic church, by the time that the Prayer Book measure had been piloted through the House of Lords by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Protestant Britain had been roused to an unexpected frenzy of opposition. The irrational, deep-seated prejudice against Popery, which had survived from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, suddenly resurfaced.<sup>70</sup> It is

possible that the antagonism which existed owed something to the expansionist tendencies of the Catholic church. Evidence for this view may be found in Seebohm Rowntree's survey of church attendance in York in 1935 as compared with church attendance in the same city in 1901. York was a notably Nonconformist town but, during the period in question, the Free churches lost seven per cent of their members while the Catholics had increased their adherents by ten per cent, a pattern that was not unusual in the rest of the country.<sup>71</sup> Catholic numbers were not only swelled by conversion and by expansion of the settled population but also by new immigrants. In 1925 St. Joachim's Catholic elementary school in the poor district of Custom House was enlarged to provide accommodation for 200 additional pupils, a product of further Irish immigration.<sup>72</sup> Facts such as these would not have endeared Catholicism or Catholics to many West Ham citizens.

West Ham was the home of a number of church missions, both high and low and so had experience of the rivalry which could exist between the two. In 1912, Canon Richard Pelly had founded the West Ham Evangelical Trust, promoting the teaching of the Protestant and Evangelical Party in the Church of England in the south of West Ham. The object of the Trust was to combat the strong Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic movements in the Borough.<sup>73</sup> There was still the remnant of a Catholic/Protestant divide amongst Committee members and West Ham residents as late as the 1920s and 1930s. In 1930, albeit in the neighbouring Borough of East Ham, a 'well-known antagonist of Roman Catholicism', Mr. J A Kensit, had presided over a noisy meeting on the subject of the pernicious influence of the Catholic church.<sup>74</sup> Possibly providing such extreme Protestant groups with ammunition, the Bishop of Brentwood, during the opening of a new church in the nearby district of Wanstead, had made it clear that the first duty of a Catholic was to the Pope rather than to the King of England.<sup>75</sup> The Bishop was referring to spiritual duty but made his claims in such terms that his words could easily have been misunderstood by any hearer.

The West Ham Education Committee had faced religious difficulties in the middle 1920s over the demand by Catholic parents that a priest should be allowed access to their children boarding at Fyfield special school, an establishment in Essex run by the Borough. The subject was still under discussion in October 1928, and some idea of the feeling this had induced can be seen by a statement from one of the councillors who had agreed to permit the pastoral visits on the grounds that 'There was no fear of Protestant children being contaminated'.<sup>76</sup> This remark was later withdrawn under pressure from fellow councillors. Nationally, the growing tendency, at the time, to accept that the public elementary schools provided an adequate religious education was aided by the fact that they were '...shown to be reassuringly Protestant by the absence, generally speaking of Roman Catholic children'.<sup>77</sup> The issue that arose in January 1929 was less narrowly sectarian and grew out of West Ham's desire to make all secondary education in the Borough free. Due to the prohibitive cost of abolishing fees for all five West Ham secondary schools, the Education Committee had decided to apply for free places only at its two municipal secondary schools. This was an understandable decision, particularly since West Ham High School for Girls, a non-Catholic institution, was also excluded from these arrangements.

In January 1929, this proposal was put to the West Ham Education Committee, meeting with the immediate and vehement opposition of Father C Carless, a Catholic priest whose parish consisted of the extremely poor district of Custom House. His main argument was that Catholic ratepayers contributed towards the upkeep of maintained secondary schools and were entitled to the same privileges in their own schools. Father Carless expressed his dissension in strong terms. 'To put forward free places for Council schools only is a piece of definite injustice ....a child of an unbeliever, a Turk or a Mohammedan ...could be admitted free, but not the child of a Catholic'.<sup>78</sup> This firmly placed the argument in terms of a religious divide and partially confirmed the contention of Raymond that 'It was the Roman Catholics who breathed fire into any religious controversy'.<sup>79</sup>

The reaction of Father Carless to the proposal had the effect of making the members of the Committee take sides. The lady member who had proposed the motion assured him that the Committee had no objections to Catholics or anyone else entering into the scheme, but informed him that if Catholic schools were to be included in the scheme the Church would have to hand them over to the Borough; an option that would not have been contemplated by the Catholic authorities. The influence of the Catholic church, continuing into 1929, can be attested to by the behaviour of Councillor G Doherty. Councillor Doherty was a Labour member and, although the records do not state it, was almost certainly a Catholic. The Councillor, plainly placing religion before politics, refuted the scheme and said that Catholics would fight every inch of the ground. He also went so far as to attack his own Party for what he saw as a wish to secularise the schools. He concluded his statement with the remark that many Socialists had fought the preceding election on the basis that they believed in 'fair play' for all, regardless of colour or creed, 'Now Catholics were asking them to put that into effect'.<sup>80</sup> A Protestant clergyman responded with the hope that the affair would not develop into a religious controversy, but hardly aided the cause of peace by adding that 'It is not true to say that Catholics helped to maintain the other schools of the Borough', a statement which was not accurate if West Ham possessed Catholic ratepayers, as, of course, it did. One councillor introduced a practical consideration. Since 50 per cent of pupils attending West Ham Grammar School were non-Catholic, in the event of secondary education in the Borough becoming free, the Education Committee would either have to find new schools for these children or reimburse the aided school.<sup>81</sup>

In February 1929, the Education Committee received preliminary approval from the Board of Education to make secondary education free in West Ham. Bowing to pressure from the aided schools, the Committee had reviewed its position to the extent that it now intended to allow free secondary school places to be taken up in any of the Borough's secondary schools, maintained or not. Perhaps fortunately, the Education Committee had not made a firm commitment to the schools

involved; indeed, in March 1929, St. Angela's was still sufficiently uncertain of the final outcome to write to the Committee urging that in the event of a free scheme being introduced, pupils attending or about to attend the Convent should be '...no less favourably treated'.<sup>82</sup> National considerations caused the final abandonment of the scheme. In the same month, West Ham Council was in receipt of a communication from the Board of Education informing the Borough that the time was inopportune for the freeing of secondary education, referring to the forthcoming General Election in May. The Education Committee, recognising the difficulty of their position, followed governmental advice and wrote to the school governors concerned to announce that it would not press for secondary education to be made totally free in West Ham at the present time;<sup>83</sup> a goal that was not finally achieved until after the 1944 Education Act.

Linked to this question of ensuring equal rights for Catholic schools in West Ham, was the multilateral alternative eventually chosen by West Ham's Catholic secondary schools. In 1938, the Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar and Technical High Schools, the Spens Report, was published. In its introduction, the Report was placed in the context of that which had preceded it, namely the Hadow Report, the Report that had '... laid down the broad lines for a new advance in the general scope of our national system of education'.<sup>84</sup> Discussing the question of multilateral schools, the Committee accepted that many benefits would accrue from children after the age of 11 being educated together in the same type of buildings.<sup>85</sup> It also stated that the general concept of multilateralism was very attractive. Notwithstanding these advantages, the Committee finally, if reluctantly, decided that it could not recommend a general policy on the adoption of the multilateral system. In West Ham, the two Catholic secondary schools made the unusual decision to adopt multilateralism towards the end of the Second World War. In the case of St. Angela's, a Governors' meeting was held in January 1945 to discuss the case for the change. Officials from the Education Committees of West Ham East Ham and Essex were also invited, all having an interest in the

matter. In her statement to the meeting the headmistress of St. Angela's said that although the school was organised into a two-form entry and provided grammar-school type education it had to be admitted that education with a more practical bias was probably more suitable for children in the second of the two forms.<sup>86</sup>

The reason for the proposed change was linked by the headmistress to Section 76 of the 1944 Education Act '...the Minister and local education authorities shall have regard to the general principles that so far as it is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training..., pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents'.<sup>87</sup> Since it was taken for granted that Catholic parents would wish to have their children educated in Catholic schools it was clear that St. Angela's and West Ham Grammar School for Boys (now called St. Bonaventure's) would have to be adapted to provide education for all Catholic children living in West Ham and East Ham. Some places were also to be reserved for children from Essex and surrounding districts.

The scheme did not find easy acceptance from the West Ham Education Committee and fired another religious controversy. Nationally, in 1938, the Labour Party had seen some merit in the multilateral system since it eliminated the disparities of status and conditions that had become associated with the different types of reorganised schools.<sup>88</sup> The West Ham Education Committee, although Socialist controlled, believed that St. Angela's in particular was being too precipitous with its plans, especially since the war was not yet ended and many potential pupils were still evacuated. The East Ham Education Committee, also with a majority of Labour Party councillors, was concerned to ensure that any scheme for girls also included boys and the Essex Education Committee expressed doubts that the academic standards of St. Angela's would be maintained if whole age-groups were allowed admission. Indeed, Essex threatened to omit St. Angela's from its list for scholarship holders if the scheme went through.<sup>89</sup>



There was a feeling on the part of the Catholic authorities that the West Ham Education Committee was not being fully co-operative in the matter of the new scheme. The Education Committees of East Ham and Essex, after their initial doubts, had raised less vehement objections. The cautious attitude of the West Ham Education Committee was understandable; the Borough had suffered heavy bomb damage to school buildings and with limited accommodation available was anxious that '...schools in West Ham should be filled with West Ham children'.<sup>90</sup> The scheme was approved both by the Catholic authorities and the Ministry of Education in April 1945. Wishing for unity of education, the Catholic Bishop of Brentwood said 'There was no question at present of a modern school for the Catholics of these areas...it was hoped that it would never arise...'.<sup>91</sup>

The headmistress of St. Angela's explained to the Bishop's representatives who attended a Governors' meeting to discuss the new scheme, that the meeting with the West Ham Education had not been so satisfactory as that with East Ham. The representatives suggested that immediate action be taken, that a resolution be passed and sent to the West Ham Education Committee and that if the reply did not give what the 1944 Education Act permitted, it should be forwarded to the Catholic Education Council, whose Chairman '...would take up the matter with Mr. Butler'. The final contention was that 'Our Catholic children had their rights' and that 'nothing should hold up the scheme'.<sup>92</sup> By September 1945, West Ham Education Committee and the schools had come to an understanding and had admitted their first multilateral intake. The difficulties encountered by the schools and the combative attitude of the church authorities demonstrate that the religious problems of the 1920s and 1930s had in no sense been obliterated by war.

## Conclusion.

West Ham, by the end of the First World War, was no longer the rural village it had been 100 years before, but was an industrial borough, part of the industrial East End. Politics in the area had, by 1919, settled on the course by which Labour was to be the dominant party. The Municipal Alliance, Labour's main political opponent, was at its strongest in opposition during the 1920s. By the 1930s its influence was in decline, due less to increasing support for the Labour Party than to apathy. Opposed to a view of West Ham residents as lumpen proletariat, incapable of action, was the evidence of vigorous parental protests at the Council's attempts to introduce unpopular educational innovations. Family life and family commitments were of paramount importance for the people of the Borough and, since many families lived in extremely close proximity to neighbours, sometimes sharing a house, neighbourly and neighbourhood ties also influenced the future employment of a child, particularly in the rougher, dockside areas of West Ham. The different areas of West Ham were unequally affected by the financial difficulties of the interwar period, with the poorer wards naturally suffering more. The brunt of organising family life fell upon the woman of the family and, as J Cole has stated 'The cramped, dark and overcrowded conditions, the lack of the most elementary household facilities...aged and exhausted these women not only physically but mentally'.<sup>93</sup>

The rapid growth of West Ham in the nineteenth century resulted in the Council having to expand its educational provision far beyond that which the churches and charitable organisations could provide. By the beginning of the twentieth century municipal secondary schooling was the norm in both East Ham and West Ham, although West Ham High School, St. Angela's and West Ham Grammar School for Boys were all providing secondary-type education for mainly fee-paying pupils. H A L Fisher's 1918 Education Act had a particular effect on West Ham in that the Borough was one of the few in the country to implement compulsory continuation education in its area. It was also one of the small number to run continuation

schools as voluntary institutions throughout the 1920s and 1930s and up to and beyond the outbreak of the Second World War.

Schooling for most West Ham children during the interwar period ended at 14; the norm for most of the country. This was not necessarily a cause for regret among parents and pupils since real life was popularly considered to begin with the taking up of employment. The Municipal Alliance, as typified by the forceful Councillor Crow, had an ambiguous attitude to increased expenditure on education. Generally, post-elementary school, non-secondary education found the least favour with the Alliance, as did educational experiments. There was, though, not always a clear divide between Municipal Alliance and Labour councillors. Labour councillors could sometimes be opposed, as much by personal inclination as political expediency, to any interference with the parents' right to put their offspring to work at the earliest possible opportunity. This widespread practice on the part of the mainly working-class parents of West Ham was not solely a product of neglect or ignorance. The culture of East London dictated that the best interests of a child could most usefully be served by placing him or her in as good an employment as could be secured. For boys as well as girls, a steady job and marriage were the ultimate aim, and prolonging the school-life of a child was not considered helpful in this respect.

The onset of the Great Depression was bound to affect West Ham, with its large number of manual labourers and dock workers. By 1927, West Ham already had two and a half times the number of unemployed as the neighbouring borough of East Ham and the trend continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The financial restraint endured by West Ham was not always due to the sheer poverty of the area. West Ham Labour councillors, as an expression of political principle or political expediency, could sometimes appear to be gratuitously wasting money; examples of which can be seen in further chapters. This liberality with ratepayers' money was not confined to educational projects. In 1926, West Ham's Poor Law

Guardians found themselves deeply in debt due to their policy of relieving beyond their means. Neville Chamberlain, then Minister of Health, suspended them from office, replacing them with a nominated board which greatly reduced expenditure.<sup>94</sup>

In general terms, a small degree of progress in educational provision is apparent when West Ham in 1939 is compared with West Ham in 1918. By 1939, West Ham had acquired an additional secondary school but Hadow reorganisation affected West Ham only gradually. Much of the south of the Borough was still unreorganised in 1939, due partly to the isolation of many of the dockland elementary schools. One of West Ham's non-Catholic denominational schools had closed in 1936. West Ham did not acquire new Catholic schools during the interwar period, despite increases in the number of Catholic schoolchildren. Catholic schools tended to expand to keep pace with larger numbers, sparing the Church the necessity of erecting expensive new buildings. Of West Ham's minority groups, only Catholics, very many of who were Irish, had sufficient numbers, and self-confidence to make representations to the West Ham Education Committee. The decision of the Borough's two Catholic secondary schools, at the end of the Second World War, to become multilateral, responded to a religious decision to educate all the Catholic boys and Catholic girls of West Ham and East Ham together. West Ham and, indeed, East Ham's, non-Catholic secondary schools had no need to, and did not, respond in this manner. West Ham lost almost all its private schools during the period 1918-39, as a result of economic pressures and the changing social composition of the Borough, which made them redundant. The rise in the number of special schools in West Ham is probably connected to an increased awareness of the needs of disabled children. West Ham was one of the small group of education authorities that actually implemented the continuation school clause of the 1918 Education Act, a distinction that was bound to affect the Borough's education services. The manner in which it did so is explored in the next chapter.

## Notes.

1. Simon, B. *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* (1978) Lawrence and Wishart p.307.
2. Banks, O. *Parity and prestige in English secondary education* (1955) Routledge and Kegan Paul p.240.
3. Sainsbury, F. *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) Council of the London Borough of Newham. p.9.
4. Peschek, D. & Brand, J. *Policies and politics in secondary education (case studies in West Ham and Reading)* (1966) The London School of Economics and Political Science. p.13.
5. Rainbow, W. *A view of commonman B C 80 to A D 1945* (1948) East Ham Labour Party and Trades Council p.24.
6. Peschek and Brand. *op. cit.* p.39.
7. Swift, R. *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* (1990) The Historical Association p.12.
8. *Archives of the Diocese of Brentwood, correspondence of Father C Carless* 15/1/30.
9. *Census of England and Wales* (1923) (County of Essex) HMSO p.82.
10. Sainsbury. *op. cit.* p.39.
11. Hoggart, R. *The uses of literacy* (1992) Penguin p.84.
12. Local Studies Notes. No 54. L B Newham.
13. *Ibid* No 43.
14. Benson, J. *The working class in Britain 1850-1939* (1989) Longman. p.45.
15. Young, M. & Wilmott, P. *Family and kinship in East London* (1974) Pelican. p.31.
16. Young, M. & Wilmott, P. *Family and class in a London suburb* (1971). The New English Library p.34.
17. Cole, J. *Women's role in the domestic and work spheres in West Ham 1920-1960* Polytechnic of East London. BA(Hons) p.16.
18. Benson, J. *The working class in Britain* (1989) Longman p.45.
19. Young & Wilmott. *op. cit.* p.176.

20. Garnett, E. *The family from One End Street* (1937) Heinemann. p.28.
21. *The Jewish East End* (1992) Education Pack Tower Hamlets Environment Trust p.21.
22. Cronin, J. E. *Labour and society in Britain 1918-79* (1984) Batsford Academic and Educational Press p.78.
23. Perry, W. *A West Ham life* (1984) Parents' Centre Publications p.18.
24. Cronin. op. cit. p.78.
25. Mowat, C. *Britain between the Wars 1918-1940* (1968) Methuen p.413.
26. Local Studies Notes. No 44 & No 47 L B Newham.
27. Sainsbury. op. cit. pp.78-99.
28. Lindsay, T. E. & Harrington, M. *The Conservative Party 1918-79* (1979) Macmillan p.27.
29. Bush, J. *Behind the lines. East London Labour 1914-19* (1984) Merlin p.236.
30. *County Borough of West Ham, municipal election material.* November 1919. W. R. Hughes, F. W. Wybrew, T. Scoulding, H. Rumsey & H. Threadkell.
31. Bush. op. cit. p.226.
32. *The Victoria History of the County of Essex Vol. V* (1966) Oxford University Press p.82.
33. McElwee, W. *Britain's locust years 1918-40* (1979) Macmillan p.51.
34. Lindsay & Harrington. op. cit. p.31.
35. Bernbaum, G. *Social change and the schools 1918-1940* (1967). Routledge and Kegan p.29.
36. Simon, B. *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* (1978). Lawrence and Wishart p.49.
37. Ibid p.54.
38. Pugh, M. *The making of modern British politics 1869-1939* (1982) Basil Blackwell p.241.
39. Ibid pp.241-251.
40. Ibid p.260.
41. Crow, A. *A Victorian gentleman and his family* pp.41-82.
42. *Stratford Express* 25/2/22 p.2.

43. Marriott, J. *The culture of labourism. The East End between the Wars* (1991) Edinburgh University Press p.9.
44. Ibid.
45. Peele, G & Cook, C. *The politics of reappraisal 1918-1939* (1975) Macmillan p.166.
46. *Stratford Express* 1/10/24 p.2.
47. Bush. op. cit. p.223.
48. Marriott. op. cit. p.67.
49. Marriott. op. cit. pp.54-164.
50. Hoggart. op. cit. pp.102-103.
51. Sainsbury. op. cit. pp.146-158.
52. Lawson, J. & Silver, H. *A social history of education in England* (1976) Methuen p.371.
53. *Forward, West Ham* (1922) West Ham Council p.34.
54. Bernbaum. op. cit. p.29.
55. Sanderson, M. *Educational opportunity and social change in England* (1987) Faber and Faber p.26.
56. Lawson and Silver. op. cit. p.393.
57. *Stratford Express* 16/5/2 p.2.
58. *West Ham Education Reports. No 25. April 1 1929-March 31 1930.* pp.19-20.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXVIII. 1/12/30.* p.25.
62. *Stratford Express* 9/7/32. p.2.
63. Sanderson. op. cit. p.29.
64. PRO ED 21/28650 26/4/32. To: West Ham Education Committee. From: Board of Education.
65. *Stratford Express* 20/9/33 p.4.
66. Ibid 24/4/37 p.2.
67. Simon. op. cit. p.172-177.

68. *West Ham Education Committee Reports. No 27. March 1 1931-March 31 1932* pp.11-12.
69. *Ibid.* 3/11/34. p.7.
70. McElwee, W. *Britain's locust years 1918-1940* (1979) Macmillan pp.152-153.
71. Raymond, J. *The Baldwin age* (1960) Eyre and Spottiswood p.145.
72. Cole, J. *The health and education of children in West Ham 1870-1939.* Polytechnic of East London BA p.45.
73. Sainsbury, F. *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) Council of the L B of Newham. p.114.
74. *Stratford Express.* 15/3/30 p.6.
75. *Stratford Express* 17/10/28 p.2
76. *Stratford Express* 10/10/28 p.2
77. Murphy, J. *Church, state and schools in Britain, 1800-1970* (1971) Routledge and Kegan Paul p.104.
78. *Ibid.* 16/1/29. p.2.
79. Raymond. *op. cit.* p.145.
80. *Stratford Express* 16/1/29 p.2.
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXVI* 9/3/29. p.275.
83. *Ibid.*
84. Bernbaum. *op. cit.* p.62.
85. *Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on the Education of the Adolescent* (1926). Board of Education. p.37.
86. *84th Governors' Meeting St Angela's* 16/1/45.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Parkinson, M. *The Labour party and the organisation of secondary education 1918-65* (1970) Routledge and Kegan p.49.
89. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XIII* 21/11/45 p.34.
90. *84th Governors' Minutes St. Angela's* 16/1/45.
91. *85th Governors' Minutes St. Angela's* 30/4/45.
92. *Ibid.*



93. Cole. op. cit. p.16.

94. Sainsbury. op. cit. pp.94-96.

## **Chapter Two: Continuation education in West Ham 1918-39; '...they are all elementary school children'.**

One feature which distinguished West Ham from its neighbouring boroughs during the interwar period was the implementation of continuation education in its area. Much conflict stemmed from the Education Committee's attachment to this ideal and although the percentage of the Borough's annual education budget spent on the institutes was very small it was believed at the time that the resultant financial commitment was a factor in the West Ham's fiscal difficulties at least during the period of compulsion. The following chapter is a survey of the history of West Ham's continuation institutes and gives an account of the local controversy they caused.

### **2.1 The national debate concerning continuation education.**

H A L Fisher's Education Act was, as Crowther has said one of the most '...ambitious and idealistic of all the reforming measures arising from the First World War'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, almost from the beginning, Fisher's proposals aroused national political opposition, some of it originating from the leaders of the Labour movement who complained that the Bill did not go far enough. As the war progressed, the Trade Union Council and the Labour Party had continued their earlier pressure for educational progress. Their main demands were that secondary education should become free and compulsory for all children up to the age of 16, with no exemptions for part-time employment, and that all schools, colleges and universities should become part of the public sector. The lack of enthusiasm for the Bill was underlined during the debates in the Commons. Labour MPs were frequently absent and did not always speak in favour of its acceptance. Some MPs gave consideration to aspects of the proposed legislation that were to have practical relevance in West Ham. H D King, Conservative, questioned the President of the Board of Education, Fisher, on the provision of sufficient teachers

and school buildings for the proposed continuation schools. Commander J C Wedgewood, Liberal, but later to be a Labour minister, made the point that the imposition of compulsory continuation education on working-class children would have the effect of depriving their parents of their potential wages, wages that were of vital importance for economic survival in many poor homes.<sup>2</sup>

As the *Times Educational Supplement* stated at this time, 'The chief danger (to the Bill) is and was the secret opposition of a power-group of employers who are determined to retain child labour for the industries in which they are interested'.<sup>3</sup> The argument against the Bill, and particularly against the provision of compulsory continuation classes, was that British industry would face many problems after the war and that it would be unwise to deprive it of its young labour force. This was of special importance in areas such as Lancashire where foreign competition in cotton textiles was very marked and where 30 per cent of the workers were under 18.<sup>4</sup> The religious settlement of 1902 was deliberately left undisturbed since Fisher was determined to avoid controversy lest a revival of bitterness jeopardise his reforms.<sup>5</sup> At first, Fisher contemplated an increase in the powers of the Board of Education so that reluctant local authorities could be forced to put the Act into operation. He also suggested merging some of the Part III LEAs in the county authorities. These proposals raised such opposition that he decided to abandon them and concentrate on the new schemes. Unfortunately, many of the clauses in the Act were permissive and not mandatory, a state of affairs which did not bode well for the future of the Act.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, certain features of the Act were permanent. These included the raising of the school-leaving age to 14, with LEAs empowered to further raise it to 15, although few of them did and West Ham was not in a financial or social position to do so. Possibly the most radical provision of the Act was the decision to establish part-time continuation schools that all children in the country would be compelled to attend unless they were already undergoing a 'suitable' form of alternative instruction. In a borough such as West Ham, predominantly working-class and where raising the school-leaving age was

considered sufficient government intervention in family finances, the institution of continuation education was certain to face some difficulty.

## **2.2 Reactions to the continuation education clause of the 1918 Education Act in West Ham.**

### **2.2.1 Professional and retail representations to West Ham Education Committee 1919-21.**

In October 1918, the West Ham Education Committee received a letter from the Board of Education fixing the appointed day for the raising of the school-leaving age to 14. This provision of the 1918 Education Act was destined to cause the Education Committee some immediate difficulties since the war had not yet ended and many male teachers were still in uniform and likely to remain so for some time to come. It is not surprising that in the following February, with the war recently ended, the West Ham Teachers' Association, the local branch of the National Union of Teachers, presuming that its members were in a position of strength due to shortage of teachers, felt sufficiently bold to put a number of points to the Council. The Association began its case with a reference to the co-operation of its members during the war years and then proceeded with its complaints. The first of these impressed upon the Authority the necessity of employing only fully qualified teachers in preference to the unqualified. The Association feared that scarcity of staff might tempt the Council into employing those with lesser qualifications, although the reason given for its stance was that uncertificated teachers had not covered the full range of psychological studies needful for the profession.<sup>7</sup> On the novel issue of continuation education, a deputation from the Association was received by the Education Committee during 1919. The initial attitude of the teachers was not encouraging. The Association stated that it opposed the opening of such establishments, both on educational and practical grounds since it was of

the opinion that continuation education tended to 'harass' teachers without benefit to either staff or students.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout 1919, the West Ham Education Committee received a number of deputations from interested parties concerned with the whole subject of juvenile employment, which was affected by the provisions of Fisher's Education Act. A deputation from the London and Provincial Newsagents' Association asked and was granted permission for the employment of paper-boys.<sup>9</sup> The Committee though, found itself opposed to a suggestion from local employers that 'works schools' be instituted as part of the Borough's provision of continuation education. The Committee believed that, since the main purpose of continuation schooling was to ensure the all-round development of the pupil and of his or her training in citizenship, it was only correct that these benefits should be imparted by the Borough and not left 'to any employer who might happen to be using the services of the young person at the time'.<sup>10</sup> These words do not tally with the Committee's assurance to the Board of Education in September 1920, that it had received 'no specific suggestions or criticisms from employers' on the subject of continuation education.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the Committee had declined to set up an Advisory Committee of employers and workpeople on the pretext that it was better to 'keep the schools away from the influence of employers',<sup>12</sup> an action which probably increased the dislike in which they were held by many such employers.

By April 1920 the West Ham Education Committee published a detailed scheme worked out under the terms of the 1918 Education Act. The outline of the scheme commenced with a general description of the Borough. The people of West Ham were described as mainly industrial workers employed in such occupations as railway and dock work. Factories producing jam and confectionery employed large numbers of women, and women were also employed in tailoring and dressmaking. The outline concluded with the statement, 'One noticeable feature of the industry of West Ham is that it includes an unusually large proportion of rough

and casual labour; this has reacted very unfavourably on the social life of the people, especially in the southern part of the Borough near the docks'.<sup>13</sup> The Committee made clear that the guiding principle of the new scheme was equality of opportunity although it was swift to explain that this should not lead to the same educational course being offered to all children. Diversity of ability and temperaments meant that varying types of opportunity must be provided. The equality towards which the West Ham Education Committee wished to move was that by which each child was '...helped to attain the fullest all-round development of his natural abilities, irrespective of any distinctions of class, wealth, or social function'. This was to be achieved by raising standards in terms of staff, equipment and curriculum until all schools met the general standards considered '...beneficial and necessary in secondary schools...'.<sup>14</sup> The Education Committee realised that these proposed changes would take some time, possibly 15 years, to complete but, in the event an impediment to reform was in place within months. In December 1920, after a year in which economic pressures on the nation had increased, it was evident to many members of the Government that the country could no longer afford ever-escalating expenditure on education. It therefore decreed that the introduction of new schemes should be allowed to lapse. This terminated the expansion of continuation nationally since only seven schemes had so far been put into action. Although Circular 1190 issued in January 1921, advised the authorities to continue to prepare new schemes, the Board of Education made it clear that only the most urgent of requirements would be considered and the erection of costly new buildings were forbidden. The Board warned that fees in secondary schools would almost certainly have to be raised and that the opening of nursery schools could not be entertained.<sup>15</sup>

### **2.2.2 Parental and religious disquiet 1920-21.**

It is possible that the predominantly Socialist members of West Ham Council believed that the working-class inhabitants of the Borough would give complete

support to the Council's new scheme. In the event, there was almost immediate controversy although, initially, it was the plan to establish nursery schools that caused the most consternation. This was due to the conviction of many that such schools, freeing women from childcare, would lead to the break up of the family; as has already been explained, a unit of great importance in working-class culture. During a Council meeting held in September 1920, a Catholic priest, Father Deady, had recounted that at a meeting in the south of the Borough there had been a unanimous vote against nursery schools on the grounds that they were 'undermining the parenthood of the nation'.<sup>16</sup> This opposition emanating from Silvertown was a foreshadowing of greater problems to come with West Ham's continuation institutes. By the end of 1920, the Council had received a number of petitions on the subject of nursery schools. Some, like that from the Forest Gate branch of the Women's Temperance Association, echoed the message of Father Deady and protested on the grounds of fear of the destruction of family life and undue expenditure. Others, as the petition received from a group of 109 parents, asked that nursery education be omitted from the scheme in preference to an effort from the Council to provide more housing,<sup>17</sup> part of a national trend where this was a more critical local issue than education.<sup>18</sup> These difficulties were also present in Council deliberations. During a discussion concerned with the proposed establishment of nursery schools, the talk progressed to the matter of West Ham's continuation institutes. Councillor T Groves, Labour and representing New Town ward, stated that the opposition Alliance party had countered '...everything in West Ham. If it were not nursery schools, it would be continuation schools',<sup>19</sup> a prophetic remark. Alderman Crow defended his party's reputation vigorously and Councillor Groves eventually apologised, not for his strictures on the Municipal Alliance but for hurting Alderman Crow's feelings,<sup>20</sup> demonstrating once again, that Council members could sometimes rise above political considerations. Councillor Groves was later to be elected to Parliament as a West Ham MP.

The Council dismissed complaints, both internal and external, against nursery education but since, due to financial constraints, nursery schools were omitted

from the scheme, serious trouble was avoided. This, however, was not the case with the five compulsory continuation schools that had been opened in January 1921. Throughout 1921, West Ham's local newspaper, the *Stratford Express*, had extensive reports on the opposition to continuation education, both inside and outside the Council. In January, the paper carried articles on the reaction of Silvertown and Plaistow parents to the removal of younger children from Silvertown school so that it could be used as a continuation institute, and also on the supposed refusal of employers to employ children obligated to attend these schools. The reports of the opposition of the Silvertown parents referred to the 'wicked injustice' of using the Silvertown school as an institute while Plaistow parents presented a petition to the Education Committee protesting at the blight placed upon their children's chances of employment by compulsory attendance at a continuation institute.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the interested parties already mentioned, the religious need for Catholic children to attend schools of their own denomination was to cause West Ham Council some short-lived anxiety. Prior to the opening of the Borough's continuation institutes, the managers of three Catholic elementary schools, St. Anthony's, St. Margaret's and St. Helen's, had written to the Education Committee asking it to approve, under Section 4 of the 1918 Education Act, the establishment of non-provided compulsory continuation schools in premises in Forest Gate and Canning Town. This proposal was refused in September 1920 since the Education Committee was more concerned with the costs of hiring premises for its existing institutes than with creating new ones.<sup>22</sup> In the event, only 12 out of an expected 39 Catholic children from three Catholic schools attended their designated institute<sup>23</sup> and it is certainly correct to attribute these low numbers to religious objections. Catholic parents would have been loath to expose their children to institutions that were non-Catholic in ethos, and the Catholic church, too, must have been uneasy at relinquishing control of the faithful at an impressionable age. It was probably only the brief life of the compulsory institutes which prevented the Catholic church from mounting a campaign to obtain its rights. It is also



interesting to note that it was in the south of West Ham where Catholic influence was at its strongest that the most vehement opposition to continuation education originated.

### **2.2.3 Political disagreement on West Ham Council during 1921.**

There was far from unanimity inside the Council on the subject of continuation education even among members of the same Party. During a meeting held early in 1921, Alderman R Mansfield, a Labour member, announced that he had from time to time shown his opposition to day continuation education because 'he could see the danger', this danger the potential discontent of parents which had in fact already occurred. Councillors J Wood, and T Groves, both Labour members, disagreed with their colleague and attributed any difficulties to a plot by Whitehall to abolish West Ham's scheme 'lock, stock and barrel'. Political reasons lurked behind this plan, they alleged, due to 'the lying statements of people in high office that the country had not sufficient money to educate the children of the working-classes'.<sup>24</sup> Diversity of opinion within the local Labour Party could not always be attributed to purely theoretical disagreements. Councillors representing vulnerable wards had to consider local factors if they were not to risk loss of office, and this concern could sometimes dictate the words and actions of individual Council members. Despite this, Councillor Wood represented Plaistow ward, one of the poorer parts of West Ham and an area where the financial inconvenience of continuation education was soon to be most strongly felt. The Silvertown by-election in 1922 was to prove this point, when the Municipal Alliance candidate came within 13 votes of unseating his Labour opponent,<sup>25</sup> a result directly attributable to the dislike in which the Silvertown continuation institute was held.

By the end of January 1921, matters had deteriorated to the extent that education reports in the *Stratford Express* included comments made by G Groot, a Labour councillor, in introducing a deputation of Silvertown parents opposed to continuation schools. Councillor Groot, taking the parents' part, pointed out that, at a recent protest meeting, 800 or 900 people had filled the hall, with 200 or 300 outside. The councillor explained that the people of Silvertown had two major complaints. Parents believed that the scheme would lead employers to discriminate against their children in favour of those from neighbouring boroughs that had not introduced compulsion. An important problem in the dockside area of Silvertown with its heavy traffic to and from the port, was parents' anxiety for the safety of younger children, forced to cross perilous roads because of their removal to new schools.<sup>26</sup> Councillor Groot represented the Custom House and Silvertown ward and it is not surprising, personal inclinations aside, that he felt obliged to support his constituents in their cause. In June 1921, when the West Ham Education Committee was contemplating taking action against those parents who refused to allow their children to attend the institutes, the *Stratford Express* printed the mutinous remarks of an unnamed but, almost certainly Labour, alderman. He said, displaying the ambiguity towards continuation education that must have been felt by many on the Council, '...behind closed doors, it has been said time after time there shall be no prosecutions. I told the parents of ten children to let them go to work and they should never be prosecuted. If prosecutions do take place I shall come in for it'.<sup>27</sup>

The Municipal Alliance was not automatically opposed on principle to every innovation proposed by the predominantly Labour West Ham Council. When there was opposition, it tended to be on grounds of cost and practicality rather than merely to score a party political point, although the Alliance councillors were not above using this ploy on occasion. At the end of 1920, before the opening of the continuation institutes, the minority Alliance Party had submitted a suggestion to the whole Council that the new scheme be reconsidered and adapted. The Alliance had taken this attitude towards the Borough's continuation schools because it

believed that, due to the difficult state of local and national finances, the full implementation of the Council's proposals would be impossible.<sup>28</sup> The misgivings of the Alliance were ignored by the larger party and, by the summer of 1921, Labour's Municipal Alliance rivals were, indeed, able to make political capital from the majority party's discomfort. During a Council meeting, Councillor G Bush, an Alliance member and representative of Park ward, stated that, although the Labour party had been keen to introduce continuation education to West Ham, it was less keen on applying compulsion, particularly when it met with opposition from the parents. Councillor Bush considered that West Ham had rushed into the implementation of continuation education without a thought of what surrounding authorities might do, and that unless national, compulsory education was introduced such a system in West Ham would have no chance of success. During a meeting held two weeks later, Councillor C E Stephens, also a member of the Municipal Alliance and representative of Park ward, asked the Council to recognise that continuation schools were extremely unpopular with the people of the Borough and that their introduction was looked upon as '...a farce and a costly experiment'; this fact having been demonstrated during a recent Council election in West Ham. The Councillor believed that it would be better to compel parents to send their children to evening schools. This met with opposition from his colleagues who considered it unfeeling to expect children to endure compulsion after 12 hours' work. Councillor Stephens replied that he had attended evening classes himself after the working day. Finally, Councillor Wordley of the Municipal Alliance and representing the generally affluent Forest Gate ward, moved the whole scheme be deleted, adding that the current debate was not a Party matter.<sup>29</sup>

## **2.3 West Ham's compulsory continuation institutes.**

### **2.3.1 The compulsory institutes open.**

Before the appointed day, the Board of Education commented on some of the deficiencies in the accommodation designated for West Ham's institutes. In a number of the premises, classrooms were either too large, big enough for two or three classrooms, or too small, incapable of housing more than half a class. The Board's report went on to state that the proposed premises although 'on all decent pre-war standards, far from satisfactory...were fit for temporary recognition'.<sup>30</sup> Sanitary accommodation was also a problem and indeed, other than in the Silvertown building, no additional provision had been made for the staff. Emphasising these difficulties, the Board went on to say that 'All the buildings except Barclay Hall and Silvertown give an impression of cheerlessness, due to the need for extensive redecoration'.<sup>31</sup> The Board had been kept informed of the proposed curricula of the institutes and deprecated the intention of West Ham's Education Committee to give instruction in science, first aid and handicraft, all in the space of two hours. The Board mitigated this criticism by stating that it realised that these subjects would not be taken by all students. The Board was also not fully in agreement with the stipulated two hours' physical work each day, even if some of it was not strictly physical, but 'attached little importance to these details believing that it is the intention of the LEA to draw up time-tables experimentally, on the broad outlines given, leaving much to the initiative of the headteacher'. The Board approved of the Education Committee's decision on the hours of attendance for the institutes since 'The eight hours in one day arrangement is intended to divorce the schools from connection with employment'. The Board noted that the institute teachers were each to teach four hours a day and to give one hour to evening instruction. The Board expected there to be some competition for teachers willing to take up posts in continuation schools, since it reported that the West Ham Education Committee was relying both on being 'very early in the field'

and having 'exceptionally strong' elementary school staffs, which would ensure that all vacancies were filled.<sup>32</sup>

West Ham opened five continuation institutes in January 1921, and approximately 1,500 children who had left school at the end of the previous Christmas term were therefore under an obligation to attend classes from that date. The Committee estimated that about the same number of children would become eligible for continuation education at each quarter during the following two years and that, at the end of the period, the schools should contain 12,000 pupils. It was proposed that attendance should be for one eight-hour day per week but, where this was difficult to arrange, two days could be substituted. To ensure continuity and to ease the transition for pupils, children from any single elementary school would be permitted to attend the same continuation institute.

**Figure 2.1 West Ham's continuation institutes in 1921.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>
Faraday	Silvertown School Silvertown	150 Boys 150 Girls
Livingstone	Congregational Hall Balaam Street Plaistow	150 Boys 150 Girls
Newton	Conference Hall and YMCA West Ham Lane Stratford	150 Boys 150 Girls
Raleigh	Fairbairn Hall Barking Road Canning Town	150 Boys 150 Girls
Shakespeare	Barclay Hall Green Street Upton Park	150 Boys 150 Girls

Source: J. Morton. 'The day continuation institutes of West Ham' (1968) University of Manchester MA p.38.

There was no lack of patriotism in 1920s West Ham and the new institutes were consequently named after famous Englishmen: Faraday, Livingstone, Newton, Raleigh and Shakespeare. The Committee had almost Utopian hopes for the benefits that the new, compulsory institutes would bring to the Borough. They were to be developed with the emphasis on general education for citizenship and self-government. The Committee, despite the information it had supplied to the Board of Education, was vague as to the detailed curricula of the institutes, stating that the actual studies and activities would vary according to the scheme developed by each member of staff, but the Committee members agreed that the time-table should include the study of English, mathematics, physical training and some practical work if possible. In addition, it was proposed that encouragement should be given to out-of-school activities, particularly in the field of social events and athletics, and that pupils should be urged to continue their studies beyond the courses offered in the institutes.<sup>33</sup> The neighbouring LCC, in its own 1920 scheme, had planned for 22 compulsory day continuation schools, the first of which, as in West Ham, opened in January 1921. Pupils were to attend for eight hours a week in two sessions of four hours each, this, too, similar to the arrangement in West Ham.

In his 1907 study *Continuation schools in England and elsewhere* Michael Sadler stated the aims of the evening continuation classes then in operation. The first of these aims was to make good citizens and the second was '...the training of skilled artisans and workers, including in the latter term clerks and business assistants'. Indeed, Sadler stressed 'the desirability of keeping in touch with local industries' and considered that this could be accomplished even in schools which were 'mainly recreative in character'.<sup>34</sup> In West Ham the emphasis of the interwar continuation institutes was on good citizenship rather than usefulness for future employment although with the inclusion in the curriculum of physical training, the institutes were very much in line with Sadler's thinking. In encouraging a healthy social life outside and inside school hours the West Ham Education Committee was echoing a trend found in most of the continuation schools run by other authorities. Edith

Waterfall, in her 1923 study of the day continuation schools of England, remarked that the West Sussex, York and Wallesey schemes all recommended that pupils in the new schools needed to develop a social awareness, in addition to extending their studies. There was a recognition that students in continuation classes should no longer be considered to have identical requirements to those in elementary schools, that their rapid development posed greater 'risks to health and character' and that, in view of these perils, a definite corporate spirit should be established. Waterfall also noted the beneficial effects on the morale and attitude of continuation school pupils achieved by a change in nomenclature from school to institute. Kent, West Sussex and West Ham had all so named their classes, thus 'recognising the feeling of enhanced status which wage-earning brings'.<sup>35</sup>

### **2.3.2 The difficulties experienced by the five compulsory institutes.**

During a meeting held in January 1921, on the day after the opening of the Borough's continuation institutes, the West Ham Education Committee discussed initial reactions to the new scheme. Staff had expected 280 children to enrol in the various institutes and, in total, 189 pupils were in attendance throughout the first week. There were few cases of unpunctuality and some pupils were awaiting admittance from as early as 7.30 a.m. The Committee, however, had to admit that although nearly 70 per cent of those notified arrived at their correct institute, there had been 'special opposition' from two sources, the Silvertown parents in particular and Catholic parents in general. Despite these potentially damaging disappointments, the overall tone of the report was positive. The Committee concluded that the children who had attended appeared happy and keen to begin their studies, finding the atmosphere of the new establishments a welcome change from school.<sup>36</sup> The Committee admitted that only 11 per cent or so of those entering the classes were present on the days on which they were not obligated to attend. A small footnote to the opening of the institutes demonstrated the extremely clannish attitude prevailing in the dock area of West Ham; Mr. Child, the

headmaster of the Raleigh Institute, had asked the Committee for permission to accept boys from his previous elementary school, Custom House. The Committee could not agree to any transfers since it believed that such a concession would lead to confusion and irregular distribution of scholars amongst the institutes;<sup>37</sup> a valid fear in view of the loyalty that attached itself to specific areas of the Borough.

Despite these hopeful beginnings, West Ham was almost immediately affected by the repercussions of national economic difficulties. On 12 January 1921, the Education Committee reported on a letter received from the President of the Board of Education, Fisher, stating that he was unable to commit the Board, with regard to the calculation of increased salary expenditure incurred by local authorities, without further consultation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Austin Chamberlain. The President was, therefore, forced to reserve his decision until he had formed some idea of the financial effect of the adoption of the Standing Joint Committee's recommendations. The West Ham Education Committee, recognising that it would be impossible to implement increased salary scales without the economic assistance necessary to supplement Borough finances, decided that the adoption of such scales must be subject to the Board agreeing to the increased expenditure.<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly, for a borough that was not yet a complete Socialist stronghold, the issue of teachers' salaries soon became a matter of political controversy. Councillor Crow, whilst not exonerating the Conservative government from blame for cutting down on grant aid in the first place, considered that some fault lay with the Borough itself for 'Playing up to the teaching profession'. In the opinion of Councillor Crow, the Labour Party had made a private arrangement with the teachers on the matter of salary scales, in order to facilitate an improved salary nationally. This statement was refuted by Mr C J Mann, one of the Labour members and representative of Forest Gate ward and there the matter was permitted to rest.<sup>39</sup>



During the early months of 1921, the Education Committee received a number of delegations from those who feared that the worsening economic situation might harm West Ham's commitment to increased educational provision, especially in the field of continuation education. The Borough's continuation institutes were the subject of praise from the National Federation of Women Teachers and the Stratford branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, who expressed both pleasure at their establishment in West Ham and the hope that other authorities might follow suit and found similar schools; the delegates using such praise to encourage the Borough to stand firm in its new venture.<sup>40</sup> Much less optimistic in tone were resolutions forwarded to the Committee from the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). These resolutions, first formulated by the Labour-controlled Durham Education Committee and afterwards adopted by the Association, were concerned with the damage to education caused, in the opinion of the WEA, by the Government's decision to withhold the advantages of Fisher's Education Act from the children of England. The Association considered these actions to be unconstitutional and thus to be resisted. It had approached West Ham in order that the, mainly Socialist, Council could have the opportunity of taking part in this resistance. An identical resolution had been sent to the miners' and teachers' organisations, as well as to the local authorities, and the resolution was plainly meant to appeal to a borough that had sent the first Socialist MP to the House of Commons.<sup>41</sup>

In an even gloomier manner, the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT), described by Simon as 'an important and militant organisation at this time in the wake of the suffrage movement',<sup>42</sup> made clear its own forebodings about educational progress and the damage which could be done by current demands for economy. The Union considered that the 1918 Education Act itself had been only a meagre beginning towards repairing the damage done to education by four years of war.<sup>43</sup> Earlier, the NUWT had protested vigorously against the proposal for mixed continuation institutes, on the grounds that co-education should commence at a far younger age. The Union also decried the appointment of five male heads

for the institutes, but reserved their real resentment for the plan to pay men teachers at a higher rate than women. A woman head was subsequently appointed at one of the Borough's institutes. In April 1921, the Education Committee received a submission from the West Ham Advisory Committee on education. All these representations indicated a widespread apprehension about what 'National Economy' would mean for education in West Ham. Ironically, in March 1921, the Committee had been sent a letter from Fisher who had recently visited the institutes, congratulating the Council members on the promising beginning that had been made with continuation classes. Fisher had gone on to say that he was particularly pleased to find that attendance had been, generally, good, since this showed that there '...is a widespread realisation of the benefits that the young people will derive from the continuation schools'. He stated, finally, that he was sure that West Ham would never regret 'having taken this notable step forward and that longer experience (would) only confirm the Borough in its adherence 'to the policy it had adopted'. This reading of Fisher's letter was received with a lack of comment from the members of the Committee, apart from one Alliance councillor who asked whether the visit was a surprise or rehearsed one and was informed by the Labour chairman that no notice had been given.<sup>44</sup>

In May 1921, the increasingly ambiguous position of West Ham's day continuation schools was underlined by a letter sent to the Education Committee from the Board of Education. This letter notified the Committee that children in attendance at the Borough's continuation institutes were not eligible for school meals since these schools were regarded as falling outside the scope of the Provisions of Meals Act, a minor warning of troubles to come.<sup>45</sup>

**Figure 2.2 Attendance at West Ham's continuation institutes during May and June 1921.**

<b>Week ending</b>	<b>13th May</b>	<b>27th May</b>	<b>3rd June</b>	<b>10th June</b>
<b>Expected attendance</b>	2,680	2,680	2,659	2,650
<b>Actual attendance</b>	1,100	995	974	984

Source: *Stratford Express* 19/6/21 p.2.

The above table demonstrates the decrease in numbers at the institutes during May and June 1921. The slight increase in numbers which occurred in the middle of June was not sufficient to avert the review of policy which followed.

### **2.3.3 West Ham Education Committee responds to public and political pressure.**

The decision of the West Ham Education Committee, arrived at by a mixture of considerations of financial and political expediency, to convert the Borough's continuation institutes from compulsory to voluntary establishments, was the subject of much controversy and some secrecy. The Committee meeting of 4 July, the meeting during which the change in status of the institutes was being debated, was held partially *in camera* at the behest of the Chairman, Councillor W Hughes. In the Borough's 1919-23 election material, Councillor Hughes had pronounced himself of Socialist inclination but not yet a member of the Labour Party and that, indeed, there was 'too much Party, even in the best of Parties'.<sup>46</sup> Once the press and public had withdrawn, the Chairman informed fellow members of the Committee of an informal meeting he had had with an official of the Board of Education, talks connected with West Ham's continuation institutes and the

problems they were facing. The Board, recognising the Borough's financial needs, had been unable to commit itself to any definite plans but had requested that West Ham submit modified proposals for the maintenance of the institutes. At a meeting on 16 July 1921, Councillor G Bush, who had already shown himself to be an opponent of continuation classes which were not part of a national scheme, stated that, although the continuation institutes had commenced with good pupil rolls, numbers had quickly dwindled and when he had paid a visit to an institute in June, only 40 per cent of those who should have been present were in attendance. For Councillor Bush, the '...iniquity of the thing' was that each institute possessed a headteacher and full staff.<sup>47</sup> Councillor Bush represented Park ward, one of the more affluent parts of the Borough, although it did not follow that his voters were more likely to support the existence of West Ham's continuation institutes. The vigour of all these discussions could be attested to by the fact that during the Committee meeting of 18 July, Councillor Hughes attempted to resign on a point of principle over the altered plans for continuation education in the Borough, and was only persuaded to reconsider by a vote of confidence from his colleagues.<sup>48</sup>

A part of the 18 July meeting was also held *in camera* and reported on an interview a Council deputation from West Ham had had with Fisher. The Borough had placed before him plans for the retention of West Ham's continuation institutes as voluntary establishments that hinged on the agreement of the Board to pay 50 per cent of the expenditure involved. The Board, for its part, while intimating a willingness to consider a definite scheme, stated that it was unable to give its approval in advance. In addition, the Board wished the Education Committee to give special attention to what lay behind the failure of the original scheme, namely the 'amount of expenditure involved in relation to the results that might be expected', and also to the problem of securing regular attendance in a modified and voluntary scheme.<sup>49</sup> It has been argued by D W Thoms, that had Fisher given wider publicity, in the post-war period, to the link between economic success and technical education, he would, perhaps, have enhanced the prospects of day continuation schooling.<sup>50</sup> As it was, his emphasis upon the spiritual, moral and

psychological benefits of a non-vocational education met with a degree of incomprehension from parents and employers, the interests groups which had to be convinced of their practical value. It is likely that these interest groups would not have been impressed by a further aim by which efforts would be made to ensure that the continuation schools trained their adolescent pupils to become good citizens. Indeed, the demand for the schools came mainly from middle-class professionals who were searching for '...an educational panacea which would cater for adolescent workers with respect to their age and class in such a way as to contribute towards a reconciliation of the conflict between the classes.'<sup>51</sup> The extension of the franchise to almost all adults after the First World War made this objective appear especially urgent although it may have seemed an esoteric one to struggling families dealing with the potential loss of a 14 year old son or daughter's wage.

Fisher himself came to favour voluntary rather than compulsory continuation classes. He encouraged the LCC, West Ham's neighbour, in this policy, a policy supported by the London electorate in the 1922 Council elections.<sup>52</sup> In West Ham, continuation education was far from universally welcomed. Parents in the poorer areas of the Borough were generally the most vociferous in the defence of their children's right to work, free from further compulsory education. Since the 1918 Education Act had raised the school-leaving age to 14, it probably seemed to parents that sufficient had been done to extend the education of children who would follow a manual career for the whole of their lives, and that attendance at a continuation institute was an unwarranted interference with earning a living. Local factors, such as those that occurred in Silvertown, where elementary school pupils were forced to make way for continuation school students, inflamed the existing sense of grievance, and it is likely that the status of continuation education in West Ham never really recovered from these early difficulties.

By 21 July, the Education Committee had presented detailed plans for its modified scheme: three schools were to be allowed to continue on a voluntary basis, the Faraday, the Livingstone and the Shakespeare. Pupils were to attend for one, two or three days per week, under a definite arrangement, but once employment was obtained, this attendance would be revised to two half days, subject of course to the agreement of the employer.<sup>53</sup> The termination of the compulsory scheme did not only affect the children and their parents. The Committee was forced to give notice to the entire staff of the institutes, both head and assistant teachers, who were told, in a telling phrase, that they were held in no way responsible for the 'non-success' of the original scheme. That the Committee felt a sense of responsibility towards the displaced staffs of the institutes, was illustrated by its decision to ask Borough inspectors to report on the question of finding suitable employment in West Ham's elementary schools for those who had lost their posts. In addition, the Committee asked that it be made plain to teachers that any further appointments required for day continuation institutes would have to be made from ex-continuation school staffs.<sup>54</sup> The LCC managed to keep its compulsory schools open until the summer of 1922. In June of that year, the Council sent a deputation to discuss the growing national financial crisis and its implications for continuation education in the London area. With Fisher's encouragement, they were substituted with a scheme for ten continuation colleges, operated on a voluntary basis.<sup>55</sup>

**Figure 2.3 The fate of the continuation institutes.**

Name	When opened	When closed	Re-opened as voluntary institute?
Faraday	Jan. 1921	Aug. 1921	Yes
Livingstone	Jan. 1921	Aug. 1921	Yes
Newton	Jan. 1921	Aug. 1921	No
Raleigh	Jan. 1921	Aug. 1921	No
Shakespeare	Jan. 1921	Aug. 1921	Yes

Source: J. Morton. 'The day continuation institutes of West Ham' (1968) University of Manchester MA p.38.

By August 1921, with the future of continuation education in West Ham settled, the Education Committee inserted an advertisement in the local paper, calling on the parents of the Borough to 'give the lads and girls a chance' and enrol them into one of the newly-made voluntary institutes. The Committee asserted that all good parents would want to help their children equip themselves '...as fully as possible for life'; a form of moral blackmail to which the majority of West Ham parents showed themselves to be immune. The advertisement assured parents that the Committee did not intend to enforce attendance and ended with the phrase, 'All social advance will be impossible without the help of better education'.<sup>56</sup> In July 1921, a report from an Education Committee meeting gave, indirectly, one of the reasons for the terminal difficulties that had afflicted West Ham's compulsory continuation schools. The report dealt with a suggestion from one councillor for an increase in opportunities for intending-teachers to take a university course. This was refused on the grounds that West Ham was 'practically bankrupt' and that the Borough had asked the Government for aid with unemployment.<sup>57</sup> It is not unreasonable to suppose that the difficult financial situation West Ham faced was the deciding factor in the transformation of the unpopular compulsory institutes into voluntary classes.

#### **2.3.4 West Ham's experience of compulsory continuation education compared with the experience in other areas.**

The failure of the West Ham's compulsory institutes can be placed in context against similar disappointments in other areas of the country. Stratford-on-Avon, a town widely differing from West Ham in terms of size and industrial development introduced compulsion in April 1920. Stratford-on-Avon initially needed to provide only 200 places, a contrast with West Ham's estimated provision of 5,250 for the year 1921-2. Stratford-on-Avon possessed a small local industry mainly concerned with agricultural requirements, a brewery and a number of small trades<sup>58</sup> whilst West Ham, as already explored was a metropolitan Borough containing a number of large industries including, of course, the Royal group of docks, part of the great Port of London. Swindon with its estimated provision of 805 compulsory continuation places in 1921-22, differed from West Ham not only in size but also in employment. The Locomotive and Carriage Works of the Great Western Railway Company (GWR) provided most of the employment for the town and the support of the GWR for Swindon's continuation schools initially ensured that they were established.<sup>59</sup>

Despite dissimilarities, factors akin to those which forced the closure of West Ham's compulsory institutes occurred in areas such as Stratford-on-Avon and Swindon. The two main objections were that children were being discriminated against by prospective employers because of their attendance at the schools and that the curriculum itself was irrelevant.<sup>60</sup> The first objection held true in West Ham although it was Alliance councillors rather than parents who generally took exception to the curriculum of the continuation institutes. Parents on the whole disliked the compulsory nature of continuation education and relegated the content of the curriculum to secondary importance. The lack of co-operation over the matter of continuation education by West Ham's dockside parents was a product,



not only of concern regarding the employment of their older children but of anxiety for the safety of their younger children.

**Figure 2.4 Initial attendance in percentage at continuation schools in four areas over three terms.**

Location	Opening	2nd Term	3rd Term
London	85	79	73
West Ham	72	55.2	13.9
Swindon	85	67	60
Stratford	80.4	n/a	56

Source: W. Silto. 'Compulsory day continuation school, their origins, objectives and developments, with special reference to HAL Fisher's 1918 experiment' (1993) University of London PhD p.398.

The table above gives an indication of the special nature of West Ham. A smaller percentage of West Ham pupils than those from London, Swindon or Stratford-on-Avon attended their designated continuation institute on opening and the percentages in attendance at West Ham institutes proceeded to fall far more rapidly than in the other areas, until, by the third term, approximately four times as many London students as West Ham students were in attendance. There are a number of explanations for the unusual strength of non-attendance at West Ham institutes. Firstly, as Silto states, '...it would be difficult to envisage a scenario less suitable for the establishment of such schools. The financial climate both nationally and locally was hostile, there was little or no support from public opinion'.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, indifference or hostility from West Ham employers meant that West Ham parents could oppose compulsion without fearing that they were putting their own employment at risk. In addition, there was not one single industry that predominated in the Borough, such as was the case in Swindon and the GWR.

Dock work, one of West Ham's main industries, was open only to men over the age of 21, an age at which compulsory education of any kind certainly no longer applied.

## **2.4 West Ham's voluntary day continuation institutes.**

### **2.4.1 The institutes 1922-29.**

In *Forward, West Ham*, published in 1922, the Education Committee reported on the Borough's three remaining day continuation institutes, the Faraday, the Livingstone and the Shakespeare, having on roll, at that time, approximately 3,000 West Ham children. The booklet gave an optimistic view of the institutes, stating that they had had 'an exciting history' and had, furthermore, developed into 'an astonishingly successful type of school'. The booklet did not mention the public outcry against the compulsory institutes but hinted at difficulties by saying that 'Unfortunately a large number of (students) have had to leave their course unfinished when they have obtained employment and could not get time allowed to complete them'. The booklet urged that all West Ham employers allow young people to attend the institutes for one day a week. *Forward, West Ham* stated that the West Ham institutes were organised on the model of secondary schools; this referred to the division of students into 'Houses' rather than to a comment on the curriculum. The opportunities for self-government afforded by the institutes were considered to give them 'A high tone and character of their own' and the Board of Education was said to be watching the progress of the West Ham institutes with the greatest interest. The piece was ended with an exhortation for all West Ham citizens '...to crown this pioneer work with full success.'<sup>62</sup> The positive tone of West Ham publications was not always matched by the stance of the Board of Education or, indeed, by the voters of West Ham.

The West Ham Education Committee sent an application to the Board for the continued recognition of its institutes after March 1922. The Committee had already studied a report from the Borough inspectors on the progress of continuation education since West Ham's scheme had been altered to a voluntary one. The inspectors on the whole reported optimistically although attendance was always a problem, particularly in the winter months of 1921, when illness had resulted in small classes.<sup>63</sup> Since that period, attendances had improved and, in the five weeks from 13 January 1922 to 10 February 1922, average daily attendance at the Faraday had actually risen.<sup>64</sup> The inspectors were not only concerned with statistics but with the ethos of the institutes. The point was made that fewer than 20 out of 1,000 pupils who had enrolled left for reasons other than their inability to continue on obtaining employment. The inspectors discovered that several old scholars of the institutes on losing their jobs, had immediately re-enrolled, demonstrating that the institutes were held in some regard, at least by their students. The popularity of the institutes is not surprising when one considers the range of extra-curricular activities offered to adolescents who would have had fewer opportunities for enjoyment otherwise. In addition to the normal school day, each institute conducted an evening club for one night a week and games of netball, football and other sports were played on Saturdays and on light evenings. Possibly of even greater importance, were the activities of 'Old Boys and Girls' who, notwithstanding the short period of time the institutes had been in existence, had already joined together to form 'Old Student' sections.<sup>65</sup>

In April 1922, the Education Committee received a reply from the Board of Education on the subject of the continued recognition of the Borough's institutes. The Board agreed to allow this provided West Ham reduced its expenditure to £8,000 per annum. This figure was later revised to £12,000 on the direct intervention of Fisher.<sup>66</sup> It is not surprising that Fisher intervened in this manner. West Ham was one of the few authorities outside the LCC, which had been able to implement continuation education even on a voluntary basis, and Fisher, who had actually visited the Borough's institutes, was deeply interested in their progress.

Despite this personal intervention, in June 1922, the West Ham Education Committee experienced difficulties with the Board of Education on the matter of funding for the remaining continuation institutes. In July the Council received a letter from the Board, referring again to the conditions it had set for West Ham to continue to receive grant aid; in short, that attendance should be good and that efforts should be made to keep expenditure within the limits previously laid down. The Board's contention was that, not only were attendance figures steadily decreasing, but that expenditure was increasing.<sup>67</sup> The Board wished West Ham to furnish it with some explanation for its failure to meet the required conditions, but the Committee tarried until August before doing so. The probable reason for this delay was to enable the Borough to put up a good defence before the Board. In a long apologia, the Education Committee gave a justification for the continued existence of the institutes and its own failure to cut expenditure, although, in fact, spending on post-primary education, as a whole had been reduced from £109,950 in the year 1921-2, to £109,350 for 1923-24.<sup>68</sup> The Board, under a Coalition government, appeared to have a high opinion of West Ham's new scheme, including its continuation schools, as a scheme of 'ideals' but a lower estimation of it as a practical proposition. West Ham was regarded, rightly, as a 'necessitous area'.<sup>69</sup>

West Ham Education Committee continued to defend its expenditure. The Council informed the Board that, since January 1921, 2,000 pupils had attended the institutes on a voluntary basis, with a further 2,000 in attendance during the seven months of compulsion. The Education Committee believed that children who had received instruction at the institutes had benefited not only educationally but socially since, due to labour depression, unemployed young people might have been forced to spend their time in 'enforced idleness and mental stagnation'.<sup>70</sup> It is not likely that arguments which stressed the social role of the institutes were the correct ones to put to Board officials, particularly in view of public concern about their precise role, although there were 180 pupils in regular attendance at continuation classes because their parents, apparently recognising the value of the

education offered, preferred that they should delay seeking employment. The Committee was able to enlist the actions of employers to show that there was support for the retention of continuation education; 99 of the institutes' students were actually at work and attending by permission of their employers; in a further testimonial, employers showed their appreciation for the work of the institutes by frequently applying to them for new recruits.

The Committee reported on the curriculum of the institutes; 50 minutes per week were spent on sport and physical exercise, a less vigorous regime than formerly decided upon, whilst the majority of the week was devoted to general education and practical work; the former including English, calculation, drawing, history, geography, civics, French, shorthand and book-keeping. The latter included science, first aid, infant care and various handicrafts for boys and girls. The Committee emphasised that the institutes provided continued education in every sense of the phrase, since pupils were given assignments of work exactly suitable for their level of attainment; thus a Standard III or Standard VIII child had the chance of following on from the point where work was dropped when elementary school was left.<sup>71</sup> The Committee once again went on to cite the social work of the institutes, using activities such as choral singing, drama, literary and debating clubs as examples of the thriving character of continuation education in the Borough. As has already been stated, using examples of this kind to enhance the reputation of the institutes was probably counter-productive since it was often these very social events that aroused the disquiet of parents, employers and the Board itself. Parents, in particular, sometimes came to the conclusion that their children were being asked to forgo an income 'to attend lessons that were not strictly relevant to their employment'. Indeed, Robert Blair, the Education Officer of the LCC, had informed one of his Council officers in October 1921, in connection with the Finsbury day continuation school that, although he was not against the schools having a social life, it appeared to him that this was the only side that received general enthusiasm '...or at any rate whose enthusiasm is apparent to the public'. The reply of the officer, 'I have never ceased impressing upon the Principals and

teachers that we must get results which employers can recognise',<sup>72</sup> is an indication of the dichotomy of view as to the function of continuation education, held even amongst educationists themselves.

Having completed its plea on educational and social grounds, the Committee turned to the crux of the matter, financial considerations. The Committee stated that it had made every effort to conform to the wishes of the Board in achieving savings in the area of continuation education and, in its own defence, assured the Board that the institutes were being maintained as economically as possible. The Committee pointed out that although the institutes had only been open for a short period of time, they already formed an important part of West Ham's educational system. The Committee further believed that, at the age of 14, children were not completely prepared for life and employment and that thus the institutes served the purpose of allowing children the chance to mature in an educational environment. Finally, emphasising this point once again, the West Ham Education Committee warned the Board that the closure of the institutes would offer pupils no alternative but to swell the ranks of the unemployed.<sup>73</sup>

The Board did not reply until March 1923 and then imprecisely. It said that whilst it had no objection in principle to the institutes it could not commit itself to exactly how much they would be allotted for the year 1923-24, a lack of clarity that may have made the members of West Ham's Education Committee feel uneasy. The Board did, however, put forward a specific criticism. It calculated that during the year 1922, the average attendance at the institutes was 290. During that time the teaching staffs consisted of three headteachers and 23 assistant teachers, a pupil-teacher ratio that the Board considered too liberal.<sup>74</sup> The opening phrases of the Committee's reply are indicative of the mood of its members. The Committee stated that it was 'gratifying to hear from the letter from the Board of Education...that the Board are not opposed to the continuance of our Day Continuation Schools. The expression "not opposed" appears however to infer a

rather reluctant consent. This is not a generous view to take of the efforts of the Committee in their attempt to carry out the aims of the Act of 1918 in face of untold difficulties'.<sup>75</sup> This statement made it clear that West Ham Council, at least, was determined to keep the spirit of Fisher's Act alive, even if those at the Board were set on emasculating it. The Committee defended itself against the charge of overstaffing by insisting that due to the duplication of posts, i.e. headteachers, staff were not responsible for only 12 children each, as first appeared the case. Teachers at the West Ham institutes were working considerably longer hours than had been envisaged when the scheme had been set up in 1920. In that year, it had been calculated that teachers would undertake 20 hours' teaching per week and a further five hours sport and social activities; by 1923, teachers were actually working between 31 and 32 hours per week (sometimes including Saturdays), and the three headteachers had each served an average of 36.5 hours of registered attendance each week.<sup>76</sup>

By October 1923, the continuation institutes of West Ham had received a reprieve. The Board, responding to the defensive attitude of the Committee earlier in the year, had sent a convoluted letter to the Borough, saying that it would 'not refuse to recognise expenditure during the year up to £12,710' whilst making no further mention of cutting back on teaching staff.<sup>77</sup> In *The book of West Ham*, published that year, a section on education mentioned the Borough's day continuation institutes, stating that 'much controversy had attended their opening', but attributing the difficulty to West Ham and London being the only two authorities in the south of England to implement continuation education. The section gave brief details of the curriculum of the institutes, adding that visits were often paid to places of interest as part of the teaching,<sup>78</sup> a questionable claim to make in view of the conservatism of many parents. January 1924 was to see the election to office of the county's first Labour government and the predominantly Socialist West Ham Education Committee, having already managed to preserve continuation education in the area, despite the change in status and closure of two out of the five original

institutes, was able to feel a degree of security in the permanence of this experiment in education.

The initial months of 1924 indicated a suspicion of mixed fortunes for West Ham's continuation institutes. The headmaster of one, the Livingstone, had been driven by lack of recruits to write to the Education Committee asking permission to erect a notice board advertising his school and, hopefully, attracting the potential pupils necessary for continued support from the Board of Education.<sup>79</sup> The headmaster of the same institute had requested the Committee to pay the examination fees of pupils who could not afford to do so themselves, enabling students to sit examinations in book-keeping and shorthand;<sup>80</sup> vocational subjects that would certainly have impressed both parents and employers. A further directive was sent out by the Education Committee in April 1924, insisting that the headteachers of certain elementary schools in the area of the Shakespeare Institute in Forest Gate should ensure that leavers visited the Institute so that they might consider undertaking attendance at the end of their compulsory education.<sup>81</sup> It is difficult to decide precisely what lay behind this seeming reluctance of headteachers to expose their pupils to the advantages of continuation education. It may have been a result of local parental pressure, although the Shakespeare served one of West Ham's more affluent areas; or, since the West Ham records give no reasons for the disinclination, it may have been due to neglect. Growing youth unemployment made attendance at a continuation institute a less attractive prospect than taking a secondary course and, indeed, at least one parent of a child who had reached the end of compulsory schooling, requested that his daughter be admitted to the Municipal Secondary School as a free-place pupil, in preference to her enrolling in a continuation institute. This request was refused because the child had been in attendance at an elementary school for the preceding two years and was therefore only qualified for a continuation course;<sup>82</sup> a regulation that probably came as no surprise to the hopeful parent.



From early 1924 until the summer of 1926, there are few references to the continuation institutes in the West Ham records but in June 1926 with the Labour government long since having left office, the West Ham Education Committee was being forced to take issue with the Board of Education over its suggestion that the Borough's continuation institutes should reduce their hours of attendance from seven to six per day (excluding lunch). The Board advocated this change, ostensibly because it believed that a seven-hour day was too tiring for pupils and also left them with inadequate time to prepare homework. The Board considered that shorter hours of attendance would ensure that staff were employed to better advantage and that the curriculum of the institutes would then have a wider range of compulsory subjects. The West Ham Committee, in answer to these points, stated that the continuation institutes had been in operation in West Ham for over five years with no evidence that the school day was unduly tiring for pupils. The Committee reminded the Board that, in the West Ham institutes, by no means were all of the seven hours spent 'poring over books' and that considerable time was given to physical exercise and to handicrafts. The West Ham Committee, indeed, saw positive gains in retaining the longer school day. A seven-hour day, it believed, would be a better preparation for a 'business life' and would allow pupils who could only attend for between one and three days per week to derive maximum benefit from their studies; a consideration still more important for those young people who were released from employment merely for one day a week. The Committee claimed that the majority of the institutes' staffs preferred that matters should remain as they were and went on to take issue with the Board on the particular subject of homework.

Explaining West Ham's special social circumstances, the Committee replied to a suggestion from the Board that homework should be set for continuation school pupils with the assertion that such a demand indicated 'a lack of knowledge of the conditions existing in many West Ham homes.'<sup>83</sup> In general, parents were making financial sacrifices to keep their children in attendance at a continuation institute and the imposition of homework was considered unreasonable since it would have

entailed the loss of the physical help around the house which older children were generally required to give after school hours. The Committee refuted the Board's suggestion that homework assisted a pupil in the habit of independent study, claiming that students at the Borough's institutes were already practising this art by use of the Dalton Plan, an educational philosophy from America that encouraged self-regulated activity and responsibility amongst children.<sup>84</sup> It was made clear that the Committee did not object to homework as such; some pupils had requested that they be set work for after school and teachers had complied with homework for individuals. The objection of the Committee lay in making homework compulsory, a development which would cause enormous problems for children who only attended continuation classes because their parents were agreeable. The institutes were no longer compulsory in character and it was most necessary that they had the support of the community if they were to survive.<sup>85</sup> Homework was routinely set in the Borough's secondary and higher elementary schools but the different public perception of these schools and the fact that entry to them was dependent on pupils passing a competitive entrance examination made the setting of homework a more acceptable part of their child's education to parents. Earlier, in 1925, Council Inspectors had reported to the Education Committee on the desirability of allowing some pupils at the Borough's higher elementary schools to do homework whilst under supervision at school. Committee members agreed to the scheme because they understood the pressures under which children often worked at home.<sup>86</sup> Nationally, the question of homework was a matter of some debate during the interwar period particularly since reorganisation was beginning to result in the new senior schools aspiring to enter pupils for public examinations.<sup>87</sup>

By October 1926, the West Ham Education Committee was itself discussing possible modifications to the institutes. The reason behind this move was poor attendance at the Livingstone Institute in particular, but with similar problems occurring in all three remaining schools. As a response to this non-attendance, the Council inspectors had been asked to prepare a report as to whether travelling

distance for students from each site was a factor in the difficulties the institutes were facing. The Borough was divided into the areas serving each of the three schools and the addresses of pupils plotted; but the inspectors found no exact correlation between bad attendance and distance travelled. The inspectors, however, did discover another explanation for the attendance problems. They reminded the Committee that the attendance return presented to them, the return that had initiated the investigation, had been for the first week in September, a period notorious for bad attendance. The June to September months included several weeks of holiday and parents frequently failed to enrol children who were past compulsory school-age until the holiday season was over. In addition, the figures had not taken into account the fact that September was an important hopping month and that many children, who would otherwise have been in attendance at the institutes, were busily engaged, with their entire families, 'Hopping down in Kent'. Often grandparents, parents and children, as well as other members of the extended family, worked together on hop-farms, picking hops for brewing and living in whatever basic accommodation the farmer chose to provide. Whole neighbourhoods were associated with particular parts of Kent and travelled down together on special hopping trains, and the experience was generally treated as an annual holiday, although low standards of hygiene could result in children returning home with nit and lice infestations.

Recognising that this exodus was only seasonal, the inspectors drew comfort from the fact that the Board had carefully scrutinised the expenditure on West Ham's institutes since their opening in 1921, and had made no further mention of over-staffing; indeed the Board had found the schools to be 'both educationally and socially a success'. The inspectors believed that the solution to the attendance problems of the institutes was to advertise them more fully and suggested that such an advertisement might be placed in the *Stratford Express*. The Committee, after some discussion, declined to allow the placing of such an advertisement and insisted instead, as it had done many times before, that headteachers should publicise continuation education by ensuring that all of their pupils visited the

appropriate institute in the term preceding that in which they reached the age of 14. Posters with the same message were to be displayed throughout the Borough and a copy of the pamphlet on the institutes was to be given to every elementary school-leaver.<sup>88</sup>

In March 1928, Councillor Crow, who was coming to the end of his public service career, took part in a debate on the continuing decline in the numbers at the Borough's continuation institutes. He asked if there was any explanation for the decrease and it seemed likely that he might use the occasion for an attack on foolhardy expenditure. Pre-empting this, Councillor E White, Labour representative for the fairly affluent Park ward, stated that the institutes appeared to be more successful than Labour Exchanges in securing employment for their students although 'of course the schools could not make jobs'. Councillor Crow then made a statement of support for the institutes, apparently quite out of character with his former disparagement. He said that, having seen the day continuation institute students, if he had not known he would have believed that they 'came from West Ham Secondary School or the Municipal College - if parents only knew that they could get an education of this sort without any expense or bother he was sure they would do more to get the young people to avail themselves of the facilities offered'. Instead of accepting Councillor Crow's endorsement of the institutes, a Labour member, and councillor for West Ham ward, Councillor J Vincent, said, 'The old Tory converted at last', leading Councillor Crow to reply with his usual assertiveness, 'I think that is a most insulting remark and only shows your utter ignorance of the history of the continuation schools and your little mindedness'.<sup>89</sup>

#### **2.4.2 The institutes during the 1930s.**

References to West Ham's continuation institutes become progressively fewer and fewer from the late 1920s onwards. In 1931, the Faraday Institute was moved from Silvertown into the Congregational Church rooms at Plaistow. By December 1931, it had been decided to terminate these arrangements and remaining pupils were sent to the Livingstone Institute. The amalgamated school was given a new name, the Lister.<sup>90</sup> By the autumn of 1934, it was apparent to the Education Committee that not even two separate institutes could now be supported and in February 1935, the Borough set up a sub-Committee to advise on the suitability of amalgamating the institutes. The discussion of the councillors, understandably, centred both on the educational value of the institutes and on their costs particularly since they now had on roll less than 300 pupils. Councillor C. Ward, Municipal Alliance and councillor for Upton ward, said that the total estimated cost of the institutes was £10,000 which for 290 students could be worked out as an expenditure of 16s 7d per week for each child. The councillor compared this expenditure, unfavourably, with the costs of the Junior Instruction Centre, which he believed to be a similar type of school, other Committee members shouting 'No' to this. Councillor Ward went on to state that the estimated costs per child at the Junior Instruction Centre were 4s 6d per week. He said that he realised that the argument in favour of the institutes was that they catered for a different type of child who needed different coaching - but he did not agree. Councillor Ward went on to state: 'They are all elementary school children'.<sup>91</sup> The debate continued into 1936 when Councillor Reed, Labour, offered a vigorous defence of the institutes: 'The schools had done particularly good work. They had catered for children who could not pass scholarship examinations at the age of 11, but who had developed later'.<sup>92</sup>

In February 1937, the remaining institutes were finally merged into one, the Lister, and in October 1937 the Education Committee was considering the staffing of the

Institute. The Lister Institute continued to provide tuition, mainly for children who had left elementary school, and the curriculum was largely practical in nature, being designed to prepare students for a commercial or industrial career. Special courses could be arranged to suit the needs of employers who were willing to release their juniors for that purpose and, in 1937, two groups of young employees from the London Co-operative Society attended the institute for six hours per week during the working hours; the Committee recognised that there was scope for similar arrangements to be made with other commercial firms. For those young persons who were not employed, attendance at the day continuation institute was accepted as a continuance of registration at an Employment Exchange, both for notification of employment and for receipt of unemployment benefit. Unemployed juveniles, considered likely to gain from the courses of instruction provided were then able to attend the Lister Institute rather than the Junior Instruction Centre.

The Lister offered, at this time, instruction in commercial and technical subjects. These included shorthand, touch typing, book-keeping, business methods, French, geography, English and arithmetic, wood and metal work, technical drawing, workshop calculations, science and mathematics. Dress-making, including embroidery, millinery and machining, were also offered, and there was a course for those wishing to enter for the Junior Civil Service examinations. The Institute also offered a general education course; this included applied art, literature, cookery, hygiene and infant care, together with physical training and games. Parents were consulted prior to the entry of pupils in order that they could help select a suitable career for their particular child. Close co-operation was maintained with the Juvenile Employment officers and every effort was made to place students in good employment. The Institute had built up a connection with the businesses and, indeed the demand from employers for the recruitment of juniors from the institute always exceeded the supply. As had been the case since the inception of the institutes, the curriculum was tailored to the needs of the students' future employment, even if this was not always apparent to the general public.

In 1937 pupils gained successes in the Civil Service examinations and in the tests conducted by the Royal Society of Arts and the London Chamber of Commerce. The chief examiner, in his report, stated that, from the inception of the day continuation institutes, the number of teachers employed had been based on a maximum staff ratio of one to 20 in class subjects and practical instruction. The pupil numbers on roll were highest at the beginning of each term but there was a general falling-off towards the end of term as students obtained posts. The staff consisted of ten men, including two responsible for wood and metal work, and six women, including one teaching domestic subjects. The Institute was open for ten three-hour sessions per week. Each teacher taught for eight sessions weekly and shared in the supervision of social evenings and other out-of-school activities. The purpose of this survey appeared to be to reduce expenditure on the Institute, possibly by decreasing the overall teacher-pupil ratio from one to 15.6, to one to 18.<sup>93</sup>

## **2.5 Other forms of post-primary education open to West Ham children 1918-39.**

In the interwar period, West Ham Council supplied post-elementary education other than secondary, higher elementary/central and continuation. The Municipal College housed, in addition to departments providing degree courses for the University of London, a number of distinct schools, the details of which are shown in the table below.

**Figure 2.5 West Ham's technical and trade schools 1918-39.**

Name	When founded	Boys/girls
West Ham School of Commerce	1906	mixed
West Ham Trade School for Girls	1912	girls
West Ham Engineering School for Boys	1913	boys
West Ham Junior school of Arts and Crafts	1914	mixed
West Ham Junior Technical School for Boys	1914	boys
West Ham Junior Technical School for Girls	1914	girls

Source: F. Sainsbury. *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) Council of the London Borough of Newham pp.160-161.

The above table shows the schools in order of their foundation. In the text, however, the schools are dealt with in accordance with the quantity of records that remain for them.

Technical education in England and Wales during the interwar years was specifically designed by the Board of Education not to be of a secondary type. Such education was typified by the junior technical school. The rate of progress of these schools was slow. The schools had to 'provide for the continuance of the moral, intellectual and physical education given in public elementary schools'. Inevitably they tended to accept as pupils those children who had not gained a secondary scholarship place and the length of the course tended to be short. The majority of such schools were housed in technical colleges or allied institutions and were usually under the control of the technical college principal,<sup>94</sup> as was the case in West Ham. According to the Board of Education, junior technical schools were 'primarily vocational', but they included subjects such as English, history and geography as well as craft and technical subjects. The inclusion of a foreign language in the curriculum was not encouraged except where it could be shown to



be of 'direct vocational value'. There were no general examinations for junior technical school pupils although most schools set their own leaving examination and some granted a leaving certificate.<sup>95</sup>

In West Ham the Municipal College housed a number of different technical and trade schools. Apart from a Trade School for Girls, a Junior Engineering School for Boys and a Junior School of Art and Crafts, there were two full-time technical schools which gave boys and girls from the age of 13 to 16 a continued general education, combined with a definite preparation for future employment. Few records remain for any of these establishments, possibly because of the relatively small numbers of children involved but also because vocational education did not have the glamour that was attached to secondary education and consequently, had a tendency to be under-reported. In addition, as was the case with other West Ham schools many records were lost, either during the Second World War or during post-war reorganisation or, indeed, during the upheavals accompanying the introduction of comprehensive education in the 1970s.

Alterations to the standard of entry for the School of Commerce were reported in Education Committee minutes during the 1920s and 1930s. This was possibly because the School combined the requirement of excellent entry qualifications with a course that was fully vocational, a matter of great importance in an era of job scarcity when a girl might be the sole breadwinner in a family. In May 1929, the West Ham Education Committee was discussing the possibility of increasing numbers of pupils at the School of Commerce. The School already provided a three-year course for students entering at 16+. This was to provide both a good general education and specialisation in subjects useful for business and secretarial employment. Entry to the course was by examination in English, arithmetic and French and was open to both boys and girls. Since there remained sufficient accommodation and equipment for greater numbers of students, the Education Committee contemplated opening the course to children who had left elementary

school at the age of 14. The Committee did not expect the same standard of work as the older students achieved but believed that, after a three-year training he ex-elementary school pupils could be expected to obtain good posts in commerce.

The Committee recommended that the senior course in commerce should be permitted to continue but that the Council should award 20 scholarships per annum to ex-elementary school pupils, with maintenance allowances at a rate of £15 a year for those children whose parental income did not exceed that laid down by the Council. This determination to fill vacant places was connected both with a concern that if resources were not fully utilised the Board of Education might terminate funding and with the recognition that the three-year course, at whatever level, was a valuable training for future clerical work.<sup>96</sup> The reorganisation of the School of Commerce continued into the early months of 1932, with four places being reserved for East Ham pupils and four for fee-paying students, subject to their passing the examination for scholarship holders. In April 1932, the Board of Education made clear its disquiet at the admittance of fee-payers. The Board believed that West Ham should aim at securing the best qualified students both for the post-elementary and post-secondary course and that it was inconsistent with this principle to earmark places for fee-payers.<sup>97</sup> West Ham acceded to these suggestions. In 1936, the arrangements for the School of Commerce were altered yet again, to allow the entry of children at the age of 13 for a three-year course and this situation continued until the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>98</sup>

In West Ham's outline to its 1920 new Education scheme, the Education Committee stated that, of the total child age-group in any one year, a small number of children entered the Borough's junior technical schools for a two-year course in preliminary trade training, combined with a general education. The schools provided boys and girls from the age of 13 to 16 with a continued general education, combined with preparation for some industrial employment. There were courses in engineering, commerce, dress-making and art. The brevity of these

statements reflects, in fact, the small amount of material available on these schools, both in terms of contemporary records and, indeed, of records that have survived to the present day. A 1922 HMI report, answering West Ham's plan to abolish the girls' Junior Technical School, a plan probably linked to the Education Committee's determination that its continuation institutes should be properly supported with pupils, insisted that such an abolition 'would leave a marked gap in the scheme of education for girls of artistic and constructive ability'. This would cause particular difficulties in view of the large number of West Ham girls who gained employment in skilled industries such as dressmaking, millinery and book-binding, not only in West Ham but in the LCC area as a whole. The demand for the existence of such a school was demonstrated by one set of figures, the 157 girls who competed for 40 scholarship places in 1920 alone.<sup>99</sup> A similar plan, in the same year that involved the abolition of the boys' Junior Technical School was similarly overruled, with the HMI suggesting that it be reorganised as a real school and not as '...a convenience for filling up the time of a Technical College staff'.<sup>100</sup>

The girls and boys' Junior Technical Schools, under guidance from the Board of Education, were rerieved, a wise decision considering the premium placed on practical education by the many of West Ham's parents. Indeed, the School of Arts and Crafts provided courses not in Fine but in Industrial Art, preparing students for careers in interior decoration, commercial art, lithography, cabinet making etc., this illustrating precisely the link between education and employment that these schools were expected to make. In addition, students attending the Senior Engineering course were able, by further study, to register as internal students of the University of London in preparation for a B.Sc. degree.<sup>101</sup> With so few records, it is extremely difficult to judge, in detail, the impact that the schools housed within the Municipal College had on West Ham's educational system except to state that all six were still in existence by the outbreak of the Second World War. In contrast, of the five West Ham continuation institutes that had opened in 1921, only one remained by 1939.

## Conclusion.

In West Ham, during 1920, the combination of the provisions of the 1918 Education Act and a new Labour majority on the Council made continuation education appear a viable proposition. Nationally, the concept of continuation education had met with a mixed reception that, as the country's economic situation became increasingly precarious, grew increasingly adverse. In West Ham, the demise of compulsory continuation education, after only six months, was linked to protests at its imposition from parents and employers. West Ham was particularly unfortunate in that the establishment of a day continuation institute in the Silvertown area necessitated the removal of younger children to other schools, a serious inconvenience for an isolated community and one that met with vigorous opposition. It was this specific issue which weakened the compulsory institutes almost from their inception, although there is some evidence of the beginnings of Catholic agitation for continuation schools of their own, a potentially divisive matter that was forestalled by the ending of the compulsory scheme. Finance in a 'necessitous area', a phrase that is over and over again repeated in Board of Education and Education Committee references to West Ham, was obviously a major factor, as was the generally negative attitude of employers. Opposition from non-Socialist members of West Ham Council had an effect, less by convincing Labour members to accept their point of view than by using the discontent of Borough residents to threaten the ruling group with electoral defeat.

The decline in attendance at compulsory continuation institutes in West Ham was more rapid than in other areas, such as Swindon and Stratford-on-Avon where the dropping away in student numbers was more gradual. Unlike Swindon, whose major employer the GWR supported the compulsory schools, and Stratford-on-Avon, a more rural and more feudal area, West Ham parents were under pressure to conform from no single employer and thus were probably more

independent in this matter, particularly with a Labour majority on the Council, whose members had to be careful not to antagonise working-class voters.

Labour had a majority on the West Ham Council for the entire interwar period but Labour councillors, through both pragmatism and conviction, could demonstrate widely differing viewpoints as to how far the Borough should go in extending education past the age of 14 for the majority of West Ham children. Some Socialist councillors in the early 1920s actually championed parents who refused to send their offspring to West Ham's compulsory institutes, partially to avoid electoral disappointments but partly from a genuine belief that the world of work was the best education for most working-class children and that attempts to block the seeking of employment, even for reasons of extending a child's educational life, could only work to the detriment of such children. The prevalent working-class culture of the time abetted this attitude. Municipal Alliance policy on education was not precise and tended to shift according to the stance of individual councillors, but it included a dislike of undue expenditure on the rates and the implication that those who wished to improve their education beyond the normal school-leaving age should do so in their own time and at their own expense.

The voluntary continuation institutes served what can only be described as a minor function in West Ham from the autumn of 1921 onwards. The Education Committee always closely monitored attendance figures and fought hard with the Board of Education to ensure the continued existence of the schools. Despite this, their history was one of decline rather than expansion, with periodic school mergers. The institutes appealed only to a minority of parents and employers, although parents occasionally chose the institutes in preference to sending their children to work; this may have been an enforced preference in view of the endemic youth employment of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1928, a Municipal Alliance councillor had favourably compared continuation school students to secondary school students, but by 1935 a member of the same party had termed such children

as 'elementary', this perhaps indicates a certain falling-off in the status of the institutes. On the other hand, the schools did not simply provide a meeting place for unemployed youth; pupils studied a range of practical subjects and took external specialist examinations, such as those for the Civil Service. Technical and commercial education was insufficiently novel to cause controversy in West Ham during the interwar period and West Ham Education Committee's contribution in this field was to alter the conditions of entry to its School of Commerce. Continuation education, as has already been seen, could not command the benign interest and respect generally accorded to secondary schools in the Borough and it is not surprising that the annual examination for secondary school entrance aroused so much publicity and debate, particularly over the fine details of selection. Attention of this type was, of course, not confined to West Ham but was a feature of the 1920s and 1930s throughout the country, the examination having a dominating force even in elementary schools. The course and content of this attention in the Borough in question is the subject of the following chapter.

## Notes.

1. Crowther, A. *British social policy 1914-1939* (1988) Macmillan p.35.
2. *Parliamentary Debates Commons* 1917 Vol. CLL 6/8/17.
3. Bernbaum, G. *Social change and the schools 1918-1944* (1967) Routledge and Kegan p.23.
4. Ibid.
5. Cruickshank, M. *Church and state in English education* (1964) Macmillan p.14.
6. Bernbaum. op. cit. p.21.
7. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee* Nov. 1918-April 1919 17/2/21 p.2.
8. Ibid *Vol. XVIB* p.526 and pp.640-41.
9. Ibid pp.640-664.
10. Ibid p.526.
11. PRO ED 120/162 5/10/20. To: Secretary of the Board of Education H A L Fisher From: West Ham Town Clerk G Hilleary.
12. Ibid.
13. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee*. Appendix. pp.367-8.
14. Ibid p.369.
15. Simon, B. *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* (1978) Lawrence and Wishart p.30.
16. *Stratford Express* 22/9/20 p.2.
17. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIII* 1/12/20. p.101.
18. Thoms, D. W. 'The emergence and failure of the day continuation experiment' *History of Education* Vol. 4 No 1 1975 p.40.
19. *Stratford Express* 22/9/20 p.2.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid 19/1/21 p.2.
22. Morton, J. 'The day continuation institutes of West Ham' (1968) University of Manchester MA. p.38.

23. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIA* 11/1/21.  
p.162.
24. Ibid p.7.
25. Ibid 21/10/22 p.5.
26. Ibid 22/1/21 p.2.
27. Ibid 22/6/21 p.2.
28. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIIA* 1/12/20.  
p.101.
29. *Stratford Express* 16/7/2 p.2 and 30/7/21 p.2.
30. PRO ED 120/162 158856 12/11/20 To: West Ham Education Committee.  
From: West Ham inspectors H. Madden and A. M. Ware.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIB* p.526.
34. Sadler, M. *Continuation schools in England and elsewhere* (1907) University  
of Manchester pp.241-42.
35. Waterfall, E. A. *Day continuation schools in England* (1923) Allen and  
Unwin p.104.
36. *Stratford Express*. 11/1/2. p.2.
37. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIIA* 11/1/21.  
p.162.
38. Ibid 12/1/21 p.172.
39. *Stratford Express* 19/3/2 p.2.
40. Ibid.
41. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIIA* 8/2/21  
p.232 and 14/3/2 1 p.280.
42. Simon. op. cit. p.35.
43. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIA*  
1/12/20-8/2/21 p.232 and pp.280-81.
44. *Stratford Express* 19/3/2 p.2.
45. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIIB* 3/5/21.  
p.441.



46. *County Borough of West Ham, municipal election material 1918-23.*
47. *Stratford Express* 18/7/2 p.2.
48. Ibid 18/7/2 p.2.
49. Ibid.
50. Thoms. op. cit. p.41.
51. Hendrick, H. 'A race of intelligent unskilled labourers: the adolescent worker and the debate on compulsory part-time day continuation schools, 1900-1922' *History of Education* 1980. Vol. 9 No. 2 pp.168 and 172.
52. Gordon, P., Aldrich, R., Dean, D., *Education and policy in England in the twentieth Century* (1991) Woburn Press p.52.
53. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIIB* 21/7/21. p.705.
54. Ibid. p.707.
55. Maclure, S. *A history of education in London 1870-1990* (1990) The Penguin Press p.121.
56. *Stratford Express* 6/8/2 p.4.
57. *Stratford Express* 7/7/21 p.2.
58. Silto, W. 'Compulsory day continuation schools. Their origins, objectives and development, with special reference to H A L Fisher's 1918 experiment' (1993) University of London PhD p.382.
59. Ibid pp.379-380.
60. Ibid p.390.
61. Ibid p.379.
62. *Forward, West Ham* (1922) Council of West Ham p.52-3.
63. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVIIIIB* 11/2/22 p.176.
64. Ibid p.177-78.
65. Ibid p.153.
66. Ibid p.177 and 4/4/22 p.410.
67. Ibid 11/7/22 p.549.
68. Ibid *Vol. XXA* 5/12/22 p.67.
69. PRO ED 120/162 158856 6/3/22 HMI B S Cornish reports.

70. Ibid.
71. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXA* 15/2/22 p.67
72. Thoms. op. cit. p.41.
73. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee. Vol. XXA.* 5/12/22. p.69.
74. Ibid 13/3/23 p.217.
75. Ibid p.215.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid *Vol. XXB* 9/10/23 p.500.
78. Ward and Farley. *The book of West Ham* (1923) Official Publication Bureau p.98.
79. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXLA* 11/3/24 p.214.
80. Ibid p.215.
81. Ibid 8/4/24 p.256.
82. Ibid *Vol. XLA* 1/6/20 p.377.
83. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XLA* 1/6/26 p.378
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid *Vol. XXIIB* 8/9/25 p.520.
87. Gordon, P. 'Homework: origins and justifications' *Westminster Studies in Education* 1980 Vol. 3 pp.36-7.
88. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XLA* 12/10/26 p.561.
89. *Stratford Express* 24/3/28 p.2.
90. Morton. op. cit. pp.83-4.
91. *Stratford Express* 23/2/35 p.2.
92. Ibid 25/4/36 p.2.
93. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee. Vol. XXXIVB* 4/10/37 pp.520-21.
94. McCulloch, G. *The secondary technical school - a usable past?* (1989) Falmer Press p.31.
95. Ibid pp.32-33.

96. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXVB 7/5/29*  
pp.312-313.
97. *Ibid Vol. XXIXA 4/4/32* p.257.
98. *Ibid Vol. XXXIIIB 25/5/36* p.341 and *Vol. XXXVI 27/3/39* p.233.
99. PRO ED 120/162. 158856. 6/3/22 Notes by HMI Miss Cunnington.
100. *Ibid.*
101. Sainsbury, F. *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) Council of the London Borough  
of Newham p.161.

**Chapter Three: Selection for secondary education, '...the examination should be so framed as to ensure that every child who has been through the ordinary curriculum of the Junior School shall have a fair and equal chance....'.**

**3.1 Post-primary education during the 1920s and 1930s; the national situation.**

The popular demand for secondary education increased enormously after the First World War, beyond the capacity of local education authorities to supply it. According to Olive Banks, 'The resulting competition for free-places destroyed all hope of a secondary education for the 'average' elementary schoolchildren, except as a fee-payer.'<sup>1</sup> Evidence given by the Departmental Committee on Scholarships and Free Places in 1920, further indicated that educational facilities for all children 'capable of profiting' by an extended education were insufficient and that the base for recruitment into secondary schools was too narrow. In a Socialist manifesto published in 1924, R H Tawney called the period after the age of 14, for most children, 'an educational desert, with a few small and scattered oases'.<sup>2</sup> Although the number of free-place pupils had increased dramatically in comparison to the pre-war years, the percentage of children with free-places had remained fairly constant. The secondary schools, in practice, continued to select only the ablest working-class children, while providing the sons and daughters of the middle classes with a secondary education at much below cost price.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for the universal popularity of the secondary school in the interwar period varied from district to district but in many could be summed up by the word: security. This was particularly the case in areas of heavy industry where a secondary school education offered the best chance of escape both from manual labour and insecurity of employment.<sup>4</sup> 'Its importance grew since it opened the door to social and financial advancement through education. The educational ladder led to material rewards, which many working-class families were eager to gain for their children'.<sup>5</sup> In 1926, the same year in which the authors of the Hadow Report published their

findings Kenneth Lindsay, a young Labour Party supporter, published his own work, *Social progress and educational waste*. This was a study of the free-place system. Lindsay's particular area of interest was the 'educational ladder', the theoretical ladder which enabled elementary school children to cross over to the secondary school system. Lindsay researched into how far the ladder was effective or whether it was merely a greasy pole, terminating in nothing. He calculated that of the 550,000 children who left elementary school each year 9.5 per cent of the age-group proceeded to secondary school, one-third exempt from fees and two-thirds fee-paying, while only one in a thousand children reached university. In addition, of 2,800,000 adolescents in England and Wales, 80 per cent were not in full-time attendance at school. Lindsay used these figures in conjunction with others to calculate that at least 50 per cent of pupils in elementary school could profit by some form of post-primary education.<sup>6</sup>

In 1928, the Board of Education published a Memorandum on *Examinations for scholarships and free places in secondary schools* whose main purpose was to make suggestions for the improvement of the free-place examination. The Memorandum made it clear that it was not part of its brief to discuss whether or not the free-place examination was the best method of selecting children for secondary education. Since the number of candidates exceeded the available provision, selection by examination was the only method which local education authorities in general believed commanded public confidence. The Memorandum discussed the prevalence or otherwise of voluntary and compulsory examinations. The investigation discovered that, of 75 areas used as part of the study, in 45 the free place examination was compulsory. In the remaining 30 'various measures are adopted to bring the examination and opportunities for higher education to the notice of the parents'.<sup>7</sup> The age limits set by various authorities and the format of the examinations were also examined. The vast majority of areas set an age limit of 12. Some examinations were conducted in a single stage whilst others were held in two or more stages, although there was no apparent connection between the number of entrants for the examination and its organisation in one or two

stages. The examination subjects were also reviewed. In 1927, the majority of local authorities confined their written tests to English and arithmetic although a small number of authorities included test papers on history and geography.<sup>8</sup>

In *Ability, merit and measurement*, G. Sutherland refutes the statement made by O Banks on the subject of intelligence tests that 'By the outbreak of war in 1939 the use of intelligence tests and standardised tests of English and Arithmetic with appropriate age allowances had been adopted by almost every local authority, in an attempt to ensure the maximum efficiency in the selection of children for the places available'. G Sutherland states that during the interwar period, of the 146 LEAs responsible for secondary education, over half but under three-quarters 'used something they called an intelligence test in their eleven-plus selection process'. The use of these tests was intermittent and, indeed, some of these tests would not have been acceptable to contemporary specialists. The 1928 *Memorandum* confirms this hypothesis in its statement that in only 21 out of 75 examinations were intelligence tests used and that of the 21 only four or five were accepted standardised tests.<sup>9</sup> Oral tests, too, were subject to great variation and their use ranged from being an integral part of the examination, through being used to discriminate between border-line cases, and conducted independently by the secondary schools, to not being used at all. School records were used as a more constant forecast, with two-thirds of authorities requiring elementary school headteachers to report on candidates. The consideration of this report could be either a mere formality or an essential part of the examination, depending on the area. Age allowances could be catered for either by setting a separate examination for younger candidates or by allotting extra marks.<sup>10</sup>

A supplementary memorandum, published in 1936, reviewed the 1928 conclusions. The 1936 Memorandum decided that the purpose of the scholarship examination was to select children able to profit by secondary education. Accurate selection was 'vital' but, at the same time, 'the free development of the Junior School must

not be jeopardised and the taking of the examination must not be looked on as the aim and end of the education given there'.<sup>11</sup> The framers of the Memorandum wished each child to have a fair and equal chance of success and emphasised the dangers both of intensive scholarship coaching for individual children and of competition between schools to gain the greatest number of free or special places. Comments such as these recognised the existence of almost universal coaching, either by class teachers to classes in general, or, amongst the more affluent, by private tutors to individual children, to ensure scholarship success. Little mention is made in West Ham records of this practice because it was so widespread and so accepted. Teachers of scholarship age children would have found it almost impossible not specially to prepare classes for the examination, in view of pressure from both parents and headteachers. In 1921, Sir Graham Balfour, Director of Education for Staffordshire, told his Education Committee 'What we seek to avoid is allowing children, for payment or otherwise, to receive a special preparation to enable them to outwit the examiners and to outstrip their less fortunate rivals - not by ability but by mark catching'.<sup>12</sup> These laudable sentiments were likely to be thwarted by teachers whose scholarship gaining record might well be the subject of promotion interviews. The 1936 Memorandum concluded that only attainment tests in English and arithmetic should be set for the scholarship examination and that, since evidence 'has accumulated which suggests that the value of what is known as intelligence tests is higher than had been supposed' they too should be included in the examination.<sup>13</sup> Thus, although 'the teaching of psychologists about assessment form a very important strand in the interwar years, they had comparatively little influence on the free place examination',<sup>14</sup> the theory and the practice intruding little upon each other.

**Figure 3.1 Annual total intake to grant-aided secondary schools and annual intake of pupils holding free places in England and Wales 1919-38.**

School year	Total intake	Free-places	% of total intake
1919-20	96,283	28,539	29.6
1920-21	95,561	33,254	34.8
1921-22	90,601	28,829	31.8
1922-23	80,754	26,116	32.8
1923-24	80,340	27,191	33.8
1924-25	84,567	32,161	38.0
1925-26	86,908	33,743	38.8
1926-27	88,946	37,056	41.7
1927-28	89,253	38,097	42.7
1928-29	84,385	37,014	43.8
1929-30	86,119	39,079	45.4
1930-31	89,682	43,823	48.8
1931-32	96,342	46,946	48.7
1932-33	92,652	43,865	47.4
1933-34	92,490	41,106	44.4
1934-35	94,456	42,304	44.8
1935-36	93,850	42,327	45.1
1936-37	97,115	45,957	47.3
1937-38	98,820	46,707	47.3

Source: G. Sutherland. *Ability, merit and measurement* (1984) Clarendon Press p.293.



### **3.2 The secondary school scholarship system in West Ham 1918-39.**

#### **3.2.1 Secondary education and West Ham's new scheme 1920.**

In addition to its decision to implement compulsory continuation education which was dealt with in the preceding chapter, West Ham's new scheme, framed in the aftermath of the Great War, dealt with proposals to extend secondary education in the Borough. As a general principle, the West Ham Education Committee committed the Council to the provision of more secondary schools. In 1920, West Ham provided 460 secondary school places for boys and 1,076 places for girls within the Borough's secondary schools. Provision for girls noticeably outnumbered that for boys in a ratio greater than two to one. This unusual situation was due to West Ham possessing only one all-boys secondary as opposed to two secondary schools for girls. The figures for secondary school places were made slightly inaccurate by some places at West Ham schools being filled by out-borough children and by West Ham children attending outside secondary schools. Those who gained a secondary school scholarship received a free-place irrespective of parental income. The Committee was able to calculate that the number of West Ham children likely to be receiving a secondary education at that rate of provision was less than ten per cent of those between the ages 11 and 16. To rectify this shortfall, the Education Committee proposed to take the first steps towards building a large new secondary school on the Cumberland Farm property in the south of the Borough. It was proposed that the school should be mixed, mainly because such an arrangement had been most successful at the Municipal Secondary School. Due to the need for additional places for boys, to counter-act the bias in favour of girls, it was decided that entry should be in the proportions 250 girls to 500 boys. It was hoped that a further mixed secondary school would be built three years after the first and the Committee went so far as to commence working out the curriculum of the future school;<sup>15</sup> demonstrating their faith in their ability to achieve its opening.

In the same year, West Ham's neighbour, the LCC, had published its own draft scheme under the 1918 Act. The scheme provided for an increase in the number of secondary school places from 18,315 to 21,000 for boys and from 18,772 to 20,217 for girls. These figures fell short by about 1,500 and 2,300 respectively of the estimate of one place per 100 of the population laid down by the Board of Education but, as in West Ham, this was put forward as a minimum programme that could be upgraded in the future. By the early 1920s, the LCC was offering 1,600 secondary school scholarships and 5,000 to central schools.<sup>16</sup> These very large numbers contrast with figures in West Ham for secondary scholarships of between 85 and 250 during the 1920s and 1930s. It is thus easy to understand why the West Ham Education Committee often sought the advice of officials from its larger neighbour in most educational matters, also synchronising the opening of its compulsory continuation schools to coincide with those of London. The relationship with London was not, though, without rivalry. One councillor, Councillor Luscombe, Municipal Alliance, referring to West Ham's proposed raising of the school-leaving age in 1927, agreed with granting permission for some children to leave school to take up employment before the end of term because he did not wish '...the LCC to crib all the positions before our boys and girls get a chance'.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.2.2 West Ham Education Committee and the modifications and attempted modifications of its scholarship system during the 1920s.**

The West Ham Education Committee did not always act according to the educational conventions of the time but sometimes took a progressive stand of such impracticability that it almost forced the intervention of the Board of Education. In 1922, the Education Committee had written to the Board in so vague a manner as to leave it uncertain as to whether the Borough proposed that entry to its secondary schools should henceforth be by qualification or on demand. The situation was later clarified and West Ham was, indeed, shown to intend

applying '...no qualifying test for admission to secondary or intermediate schools but to supply places in such schools to all who ask for them'.<sup>18</sup> The Board wasted little time in disputing the merits of this proposal but simply stated that there should be tests of both attainment and intelligence; a recommendation that was acceded to without further argument. At the same time, the Borough proposed making maintenance allowances available to all who remained in school beyond school-leaving age, whether scholarship holders or not. The Board refused these proposals, stating that it would '...cost a lot of money'.<sup>19</sup>

The period 1924-28, in West Ham, marked an intense time of interest and enquiry into scholarships and free-places, far more intense than in the immediate post-war era. In January 1924, the West Ham Education Committee received a letter from the Board of Education stating that it intended to begin a detailed investigation into the examinations used by the Borough to allot free-places.<sup>20</sup> By the beginning of February, the Board's inspectors had completed their enquiries into the conditions under which the scholarships were granted, who controlled the examinations, what type of tests were set and who marked them. The attention of the Board was not confined to West Ham but formed a part of a general survey of the manner in which scholarships were awarded. The main concern of the Board was to ensure that successful candidates who obtained over 60 per cent in the examination should have their names published in the examination list. The reasoning behind this was to demonstrate to parents and the public at large that the scholarship examination was competitive rather than qualifying and to give parents and candidates the mixed pleasure of knowing that their work would have warranted inclusion in the free-place lists '...if no limit to the number of awards existed'.<sup>21</sup> The nature of scholarship examinations in West Ham was not unusual. In many areas what had originally meant to be simply a qualifying test had become, by the 1920s, 'murderously competitive'.<sup>22</sup> The Board of Education commented that West Ham had no mechanism for excluding candidates with little chance of success from the examinations, although it recognised the 'awkward' position such a screening procedure would place headmasters in. Indeed, the Board stated that it realised a

refusal to recommend a child for secondary education, the system for entry to the examination, could lead to '...trouble with the parents'.<sup>23</sup> West Ham used the NUT Examinations Board to set scholarship examination during the interwar period. Sutherland states that although the NUT Examinations Board's conduct of attainment tests in English and arithmetic was considered competent, 'the Inspectorate adopted a distinctly wary tone in commenting on examinations in which the NUT was involved'.<sup>24</sup>

The West Ham Education Committee, with the aim of avoiding trouble with West Ham's very forthright parents, decided not to alter existing arrangements but agreed instead to publish the results list, including the addition, under 'honourable mention', of the names of all candidates achieving 60 per cent or more of total marks. Acting on the recommendations of the Board, the Committee met in December 1924, to consider the introduction of a preliminary examination for all children of scholarship age. The preliminary examination would be used to select those children who could go on to take the competitive examination for scholarships and had the advantage of, at least, appearing to give all children the opportunity to gain a scholarship place. Even at the time of the Hadow Report only ten per cent of children were actually entered for the scholarship examination and it was one of its aims that all children should take the test to present the possibility of a free place to parents and children who might not expect it.<sup>25</sup> Locally, it was particularly important for the West Ham Education Committee to give an impression of strict fairness, in view of the complaints which had been received from parents about the publicity given to the scholarship examination. At a meeting held in December 1924, the Committee defended itself against such inferences stating that in past years the examination had been advertised by means of posters and that, in 1924, every child of scholarship age had been given a form to be filled in by his or her parents and sent to the Education Committee, headteachers, additionally, having the power to submit a form independently of whether the parents did so. The Chairman of the Committee ended his report with the words 'He hoped that in future they would not hear so much about children not

being given the opportunity of entering for scholarships',<sup>26</sup> an indication that such complaints had been heard in the past.

Although the Board officials had referred specifically to secondary scholarships, the Committee saw no reason why a preliminary test could not be adopted for the higher elementary examinations. The difficulties in agreeing to such a system were obvious. The Committee estimated that some 13,000 pupils between the ages of ten and 11 and some 6,000 pupils between the ages of 12 and 13 would be eligible for testing; this compared with a mere 1,275 candidates who sat for one or the other of the scholarship examinations in 1923. The Committee made the comment that, not only would the preliminary examination be an additional test, some children being required to take both, but it would be an examination on a far vaster scale since all 19,000 eligible children would have to sit it. The Committee recognised that the practical difficulties involved in implementing the new examination would be immense. To ensure fairness, the examination questions would have to be uniform and, in addition, the conditions and conduct of the examination would have to be precisely the same in each school, an expensive and elaborate procedure. There would need to be not only the presence of a special invigilator during the examination but, also, a group of markers who would need to confer to ensure equality of assessment. The work of children other than those sitting for scholarships might be disrupted since by no means were eligible children in all schools grouped together conveniently in one class.<sup>27</sup>

Concerned by the potential trouble and expense and believing that the introduction of a preliminary examination '...would be of no material assistance in securing better boys and girls as exhibitioners' than was currently the case, the Committee decided that such an examination should not be introduced at that time. Another suggestion of the Committee was that the form certifying candidates for post-primary education which headteachers had to sign be amended to one advising only as to the punctuality, attendance and moral character of each child.

After further discussion, the Committee came to the conclusion that modifying this form was not desirable because parents might take exception to reports on their children's moral character. Instead, the Committee agreed to inform headteachers that they were to forward to the Town Clerk all forms received by them from children of scholarship age, with or without a recommendation as to their suitability for secondary or higher elementary education. To this end headteachers were to be further directed that a form of application should be given to all children of scholarship age, in order that all children might compete for scholarships in accordance with the wishes of their parents.<sup>28</sup>

### **3.2.3 West Ham's secondary scholarship results 1918-39.**

From 1925, in response to suggestions from the Board and to public opinion, the Education Committee used its Council inspectors to prepare detailed reports on the results of the various scholarship examinations held in that year. Less full statistics were available for previous years. Details of West Ham's secondary school scholarship results for 1918-39 are given in tables. Numbers of entrants are given by gender, with scholarships available in brackets.

**Figure 3.2 West Ham secondary school scholarship examination candidates 1918-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1918	333 (43)	312 (42)
1919	390 (42)	301 (41)
1920	320 (41)	263 (41)
1921	319 (44)	265 (41)
1922	328 (42)	269 (41)
1923	285 (43)	249 (41)
1924	364 (54)	284 (52)
1925	1054 (54)	920 (51)
1926	815 (73)	723 (70)
1927	788 (68)	756 (66)
1928	834 (65)	628 (65)
1929	755 (135)	649 (65)
1930	1155 (116)	914 (116)
1931	1393 (125)	1229 (125)
1932	1624 (143)	1350 (143)
1933	1138 (125)	1274 (125)
1934	1089 (125)	1079 (125)
1935	1044 (125)	990 (125)
1936	2164 (125)	2171 (125)
1937	2124 (125)	2060 (125)
1938	1914 (125)	1841 (125)
1939	1766 (125)	1752 (125)

*Source:* West Ham Education sub-Committee records 14th to 35th Reports of the work of the Education Committee 1918-39 (Number of scholarships available are given in brackets).

**Figure 3.3 The chance of a West Ham scholarship candidate gaining a secondary school scholarship 1918-39 .**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1918	1 in 7.7	1 in 7.4
1919	1 in 9.2	1 in 7.3
1920	1 in 7.8	1 in 6.4
1921	1 in 7.2	1 in 6.4
1922	1 in 7.8	1 in 6.5
1923	1 in 6.6	1 in 6.0
1924	1 in 6.7	1 in 5.4
1925	1 in 19.5	1 in 18.0
1926	1 in 11.1	1 in 10.3
1927	1 in 11.5	1 in 11.4
1928	1 in 12.8	1 in 9.6
1929	1 in 5.5	1 in 9.9
1930	1 in 9.9	1 in 7.8
1931	1 in 11.1	1 in 9.8
1932	1 in 11.3	1 in 9.4
1933	1 in 9.1	1 in 10.1
1934	1 in 8.7	1 in 8.6
1935	1 in 8.3	1 in 7.9
1936	1 in 17.3	1 in 17.3
1937	1 in 16.9	1 in 16.4
1938	1 in 15.3	1 in 14.7
1939	1 in 14.1	1 in 14.0

*Source:* West Ham sub-Committee records 14th to 35th Reports of the work of the Education Committee 1918-39.



**Figure 3.4 Alternatives figures for the chance of a West Ham scholarship candidates gaining a secondary or central school scholarship 1932-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1932	1 in 6.5	1 in 5.4
1933	1 in 4.9	1 in 5.5
1934	1 in 4.7	1 in 4.6
1935	1 in 4.5	1 in 4.3
1936	1 in 9.4	1 in 9.4
1937	1 in 9.2	1 in 8.9
1938	1 in 8.3	1 in 8.0
1939	1 in 7.6	1 in 7.6

*Source:* West Ham sub-Committee records 14th to 35th Reports of the work of the Education Committee 1918-39.

In 1918, approximately 650 boys and girls competed for 85 secondary scholarship places and a similar pattern continued in West Ham until 1925. The number of entrants and scholarships were small and, indeed, in 1923, only 534 candidates vied for 84 places although this may have been due to increased financial difficulties within families as a result of the post-war Slump. Male candidates for secondary school scholarships had, on average, a one in 7.6 chance of gaining a scholarship during those years and female candidates a one in 6.5 chance of being successful. The number of female candidates for places was always lower than male candidates and the number of places girls competed for were smaller too, reflecting this.<sup>29</sup> In 1925, there was a vast increase in numbers of entrants, both male and female, for the secondary school scholarship examinations. This was a direct response to the Education Committee's efforts to publicise the examination more widely and was also related to a national surge in entrants for scholarship examinations. This was related to an increased recognition of the social and financial benefits of secondary education, already mentioned. In 1925, 1,054 boys entered for 53 West Ham

secondary scholarship examinations thereby reducing their chances of success to one in 19.8; in the same year, 920 girls competed for 51 scholarships, reducing their chances of success to one in 18.<sup>30</sup> The new system introduced that year of publishing the names of candidates deserving of honourable mention, showed that more boys than girls were placed in this category, by a ratio of 125:24. A report produced by Council inspectors dealt in some detail with the result of the secondary examinations. The inspectors recognising that with so many candidates there was bound to be a large spread of ability, complained that quantities of children were not sufficiently advanced in their studies to cope with a competitive examination, which the inspectors themselves considered difficult. The report of an examination supervisor, who found that one candidate was unable to read the examination paper was cited, as were a number of cases where papers were handed in with 'little or no matter written upon them'.<sup>31</sup> The only explanation for the entry of these manifestly unprepared candidates was that of personal or parental ambition since the policy of the Borough did not encourage the participation of weaker pupils.

By 1926, matters had improved in favour of the candidate, with 815 boys competing for 73 secondary school places and 723 girls competing for 70 secondary school places, boys thus having a one in 11.1 chance of success and girls having a one in 10.3 chance of gaining a place.<sup>32</sup> In 1927, the headmaster of the Municipal Secondary School reported to the Education Committee on the statistics for secondary education in the Borough '...secondary school accommodation in West Ham has been for years below the accommodation provided by a large number of Authorities. Whereas such accommodation has been below 6 per 1,000 of the population, it appears that the average for London is 7.6 per 1,000, for English Counties 9.4, and for County Boroughs 9.1.'<sup>33</sup> The Education Committee believed that the decline in numbers of entrants was due to fewer children reaching the standard required for entry to the examination although it may also have owed something to subtle discouragement towards weaker candidates from their schools. In 1927, 788 boys entered for 68 scholarships and 756 girls entered for 66

scholarships giving them a one in 11.5 and one in 11.4 chance of success respectively. There appears to have been a vast improvement in the quality of scholarship work submitted, since 982 children obtained half marks or more in the examination compared with 591 examinees the previous year.<sup>34</sup> It is possible that teachers, alerted by detailed comments on the answers to the questions circulated after the previous examinations, were becoming more adept at coaching their pupils although even intensive coaching seems not to explain the size of the improvement. A degree of selection before the examination may have been operated by headteachers and teachers but this would have had to be very carefully done to avoid antagonising parents.

West Ham Education Committee records dealing with post-primary education are sparse for early 1928, the only item of note the report from the Council's inspectors on the 1928 secondary scholarship examination; this report a routine event in itself. In 1928, 834 boys and 628 girls had competed for 65 scholarships each, giving boys a one in 12.8 and girls a one in 9.6 chance of success.<sup>35</sup> The decline in female candidates for secondary school scholarships is an indication that West Ham's particular economic circumstances as a borough with a high proportion of unskilled casual labourers, was causing parents to make educational sacrifices where they believed it would do the least harm; that is with regard to the post-primary education of their daughters. The numbers of male entrants for the examination had actually risen. The 1929 secondary scholarship examination showed a decline in the number of male candidates and a small increase in the number of female, this probably accounted for by a drop in the birth-rate and by the predominance of girls in the general population. In 1929, 755 boys and 649 girls had competed for 135 and 65 scholarships respectively, giving boys a one in 5.5 and girls a one in 9.9 chance of success.<sup>36</sup> The large discrepancy between numbers of awards for boys and girls was not due to anti-female bias but to an attempt by the Education Committee to equalise secondary school places available for the sexes at the newly opened Plaistow Secondary School.

Much of 1929 was taken up with West Ham's proposal to make secondary education free and the religious controversy which followed, the implications of which have already been discussed in detail. By the beginning of 1930, the West Ham Committee was embroiled in preparations for that year's scholarship examinations. The Committee approved the proposition that parents should be allowed a choice of secondary school on the application form, but wished it to be clearly stated that in the event of any difficulties the final decision would rest with the Education Committee.<sup>37</sup> The Education Committee encountered difficulties with this proposition due to West Ham's aided schools feeling unable to grant the Council the number of scholarship places it had requested. The problem was eventually resolved with a maximum of 12 Council scholarships being permitted at West Ham High School and St. Angela's with 16 at West Ham Grammar School.<sup>38</sup> In 1930, the numbers of entrants for secondary scholarships, both male and female, increased considerably. There were 1,155 male entrants and 914 female entrants for 116 scholarship places each, giving boys a one in 9.9 and girls a one in 7.8 chance of success.<sup>39</sup> The large increase in both male and female candidates can be accounted for, yet again, by a wider acceptance of the benefits of a secondary education and by fear of prevalent youth unemployment. The figures for 1931 showed an increase but on a smaller scale, with 1,393 boys and 1,229 girls competing for 125 scholarship places each, giving boys a one in 11.1 and girls a one in 9.8 chance of success.<sup>40</sup> The reasons behind this further rise, in addition to those mentioned previously, were probably connected with the actual increase in the number of scholarships, this possibly encouraging candidates to come forward. Reorganisation was also having an effect on education in West Ham, the break at 11 making it more natural for children to proceed directly from elementary to secondary school, rather than wait another year in senior school and then apply for a place at a central school.

In September 1931, the Education Committee was in the process of implementing new arrangements for the Borough's secondary examinations similar to those proposed, but not used in 1924. These were far reaching in that the Committee

had decided that in January each year there should be a preliminary examination for all children attending elementary school, the only exceptions to this rule being those children whose parents had indicated, on a prescribed form, that they did not wish them to participate. There were differences of opinion amongst local authorities as to whether the scholarship examination should be of a compulsory or voluntary nature. By 1928, it had been calculated that, nationally, the number of children taking a compulsory rather than a voluntary examination was in the ratio of five to one. The main reason for encouraging the policy of compulsory entry was to ensure that children did not miss their chance through parental neglect or by a headteacher's obstruction.<sup>41</sup> Since in West Ham parents could still excuse their children from the scholarship examination this argument could not be used to give credence to the need for a preliminary test and the new scholarship scheme did not immediately meet with the approval of those such as the Borough's headteachers, who were closely involved in the scholarship process. The headteachers were opposed to the scheme because they believed it might 'drive children to the examination'.<sup>42</sup> West Ham's chief inspector countered this point by claiming that the purpose of requiring all children to take the preliminary examination was to 'get additional "better" children in the higher schools'.<sup>43</sup> It is possible that the objections of the headteachers were less on grounds of hounding children to the examination room and more on those of safeguarding their own positions since many teachers, at the time, believed that if whole age-groups were entered for the examination, the results could be used to assess the efficiency of individual schools. Some authorities dealt with this situation by imposing a preliminary examination that eliminated the poorer candidates and allowed the remainder to compete for secondary school places;<sup>44</sup> a step West Ham was to take. The Education Committee, after some debate, settled that for forthcoming examinations, those eligible for entry would be between the ages of ten and 11 in the January preceding the term of entry. Children in attendance at private schools were eligible to enter for these examinations and the content of the paper would consist of two papers each in English and arithmetic. The final examination to be held in May was for candidates who gained approximately 50 per cent of the marks in the preliminary examination. Headteachers would be required to supply a report on each child,

although these records were to be used only in the event of a border-line case.<sup>45</sup> Administratively, there would no longer be separate examinations for secondary and central school scholarships and Education Committee records give numbers for all entrants, not separated into secondary and central school candidates. Any figures for scholarship entry in the following years reflect this new method of reporting to the Committee. In 1932, 1,624 boys and 1,350 girls competed for 143 scholarships each, the largest number of scholarships West Ham was ever able to offer. Boys had a one in 11.3 and girls a one in 9.4 chance of success.<sup>46</sup> This increased opportunity did not meet with the approval of all sections of West Ham society. In the February preceding the introduction of the new system, the Education Committee had received a letter from the Plaistow branch of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers stating that there was no good reason for entering all children of scholarship age for the preliminary examination, a view which the Committee chose to ignore.<sup>47</sup>

In 1933, 1,138 boys and 1,274 girls, 2,412 children in all, took the preliminary examination for secondary school competing for 125 scholarships each.<sup>48</sup> This figure showed a decrease of 382 compared with that of 1932, a result of a falling birth-rate and economic depression. The chief examiner presented statistics dealing with the percentage of eligible pupils who had taken the preliminary examination. These percentages ranged from 12 to 88 per cent in the boys' departments and from 11 to 100 per cent in girls'.<sup>49</sup> This discrepancy in the number of entrants from school to school was probably due to the poverty or relative affluence of the area the schools were situated in. Boys that year had a one in 9.1 and girls a one in 10.1 chance of success, although a one in 4.9 and one in 5.5 chance respectively of gaining a scholarship place of some kind, if central school scholarship places are taken into account. Reporting the results of the 1934 scholarship examination followed a format similar to that in other years. The chief examiner stated that although there were 5,356 children of the prescribed age eligible to enter the preliminary examination, of these only 2,168 actually took the test. Entrants formed a small proportion of those who were eligible, 40.3 per cent

in the case of boys and 40.5 per cent in the case of girls,<sup>50</sup> a definite decrease, both in percentages and numbers, on the figures for 1931 and 1932. The reasons behind this decline were almost certainly financial, although the Borough records make no specific statement to this effect. The chief examiner stated, however, that given the choice, parents continued to prefer to send their children to a secondary school rather than a central school but to a central school if a secondary school place was not available,<sup>51</sup> a preference which was quite normal throughout the country. In 1934, 1,089 boys and 1,079 girls entered for the secondary school examination,<sup>52</sup> giving boys a one in 8.7 and girls a one in 8.6 chance of success, although, once again, if all scholarships are included, the odds increased to one in 4.7 for boys and one in 4.6 for girls.

In September 1935 the Education Committee was again discussing the examination results for the year. The number of children who had taken the examination had fallen to 2,034 as opposed to 2,168 in 1934 but, since the size of the year-group had also decreased from 5,356 to 4,899, the difference was more than accounted for. In 1935, 1,044 boys and 990 girls had sat for the scholarship examination, competing for 125 scholarships each.<sup>53</sup> Boys thus had a one in 8.3 and girls a one in 7.9 chance of success or, using the alternative figures already explained, a one in 4.5 and one in 4.3 chance of gaining a scholarship of some type. By 1936, it is true to say that the worst effects of the Depression had manifested themselves. By the middle 1930s, the demand for secondary schooling continued to outstrip the supply and consequently the process of selection for the available places became of critical importance.<sup>54</sup> In 1936, there was a large increase in both male and female candidates in West Ham. In that year 2,164 boys and 2,171 girls entered for 125 secondary scholarships each,<sup>55</sup> giving boys and girls a one in 17.3 chance of success or, a more reassuring, one in 9.4 chance each. In May 1936, the chief examiner submitted a further report also dealing with the scholarship examinations. The examiner stated that the spread of marks in the first examination was, as might be expected, wide. This was not an indication of low educational standards but of the examination having been '...designed necessarily for other people'. The report went

on to pose the natural question as to why children should be included in a test they were certain to fail but explained its decision to continue the policy of open entry by stating that any attempt to exclude children would place 'an invidious duty upon the teacher and would make it difficult to calculate proper age allowances'. The examiner used examples to justify the use of three examinations. These included one girl who, although ranked fourth by her school, scored only 61 marks in the first examination and was, consequently, well down below the 500th place, necessary for entry into the second examination. In each of her subsequent examinations she scored 93 marks and it was on this average that she was placed 174th on the final list. A boy, similarly ranked fourth out of 71 candidates by his school, scored 66.5 marks in the first examination. On grounds of his high school ranking he was referred to the second examination in which he scored 96.5 and in the third examination he scored 92.5, the average of his two highest scores placing him within the range of those eligible for awards. The chief examiner went on to give more specific statistics with regard to the examination, these mainly technical and to do with probability and distribution curves.<sup>56</sup> That the Committee was still taking seriously the necessity of taking strenuous precautions to ensure that the examinations were conducted with all fairness, was demonstrated in a report made in December 1935 which saw the advantages of 'broadening the basis of the selective examination to increase the reliability of the results'. This suggested that intelligence tests could be used in addition to the normal English and arithmetic papers and also that a test at 13+ be introduced to detect those children whose academic capacity had not been correctly assessed at 11.<sup>57</sup> The use of examinations in selection for secondary and central school scholarships was the subject of a discussion between Education Committee members in the summer of 1936. Alderman W J Reed, Labour, stated that the Borough held three separate examinations in order to give '...everyone the opportunity of seeing whether they were able to pass the test' and that, with regard to the reports headteachers were required to make on their pupils, in many cases the results of the examination mirrored those of the reports. A Labour colleague, Alderman C R Blaker, replied simply that 'he was not a believer in exams and would abolish them if he had his way, relying on school reports'.<sup>58</sup>



In October 1937, the Education Committee decided to adopt the December 1935 report, referred to above. The local Examination Board had suggested that a number of amendments to the existing examination be considered. These included some minor alterations to the English papers and a charge placed on headteachers to grade candidates from their schools into four categories, A, B, C and D, the numbers in each category to be the same and pupils' names to be placed in alphabetical order within each category; simplifying the existing system of headteacher assessment. In the case of candidates summoned to two further examinations, their final mark would be the average of their two higher marks.<sup>59</sup> The scholarship report for 1937 reinforced the growing feeling, not confined to West Ham, that factors other than purely academic ability could influence success in the scholarship examination. The chief examiner admitted that the variability of performance shown by any one pupil could be due to a number of 'personal, physical or domestic causes quite beyond the control of the candidate'. In his opinion this justified the protracted series of scholarship tests prescribed by the Borough because each child was thereby given his or her chance. The chief examiner pronounced himself well pleased with the new system of grading candidates by letter according to their school record before the examination and remarked that so accurate did he feel these judgements to be that broader and simpler categories of grading might justifiably be introduced.<sup>60</sup> In 1937, 2,124 boys and 2,060 girls entered for the scholarship examination, competing for 125 scholarship places each.<sup>61</sup> Boys had a one in 16.9 and girls a one in 16.4 chance of success or, if central school scholarships are included, a one in 9.2 and one in 8.9 chance respectively of gaining a secondary or central school scholarship.

In January 1938, the Education Committee was debating further amendments to the scholarship examination. Slight revisions had been made to the vocabulary test and, in keeping with the Council's policy, sample papers were to be sent to schools, for practice working, before the examination. This, of course, was a practice that made coaching for the scholarship examination almost inevitable. The subject of the transfer of pupils aged 13+ from elementary to secondary or central school had

been left somewhat in abeyance but, in the same month, the Education Committee discussed proposals to reserve places in the Borough's secondary and central schools for such pupils. The Committee decided that this was not an acceptable proposal but did ask that elementary headteachers be required to submit reports on suitable candidates and recommended that parents be made aware of the possibility of transfer at 13+.<sup>62</sup> In July 1938, the Education Committee discussed the report on that summer's scholarship results. The chief examiner stated once again that the procedures for the examination were protracted but felt that it was difficult to see how else justice could be done to individual candidates. 'Children of whom their schools thought well did badly in some cases in the First Examination; they had another chance to justify their schools' good opinion. Some children of whom little was expected did well in the First Examination; they had another opportunity of showing whether their performance or their schools' judgement was the more reliable guide'.<sup>63</sup> The chief examiner considered that the grading of candidates by their schools under group letters had proved successful in reducing the labour of marking. An analysis of the final examination list showed that of the first 100 places on the girls' list, 98 were occupied by candidates graded A, the remaining two places being taken by B candidates. On the boys' list, the situation was similar with 96 of the first 100 scholarship places secured by A candidates and the remainder by Bs. In 1938, 1,914 boys and 1,841 girls competed for 125 places each,<sup>64</sup> giving boys a one in 15.3 and girls a one in 14.7 chance of success or, alternatively, a one in 8.3 and one in 8.0 chance. Few changes of note occurred during the remaining year of peace. In 1939, 1,766 boys and 1,752 girls entered for 125 scholarship places each, giving boys a one in 14.1 and girls a one in 14.0 chance of success, increased to 7.6 for boys and girls if central school scholarships are included.<sup>65</sup>

The statistics for West Ham's secondary school scholarship examinations are, at first reading, evidence for a decline in opportunity for working-class children between the First and Second World Wars. In 1918, West Ham boys who entered for the examination had a one in 7.7 chance of gaining a scholarship and girls who

entered, a one in 7.4, this compared with a chance of success for boys of one in 14.1 and girls of one in 14. in 1939. These figures do not include other relevant facts. In 1918, only 333 boys and 312 girls actually entered for the examination, compared with 1,766 boys and 1,752 girls in 1939, although, admittedly, the 1939 figures are for entrants to the combined secondary and central school scholarship places. This still shows a vast increase, at a time of declining birth-rate, in candidates. Furthermore, the number of scholarships offered rose from 43 for boys and 42 for girls in 1918 to 125 each for boys and girls in 1939, girls gaining more from the increase because from 1930 onwards they received equal treatment to boys. In addition, if the figures are handled in a different manner, that is, if the central school scholarships are added to the secondary school scholarships since there is no way of differentiating between entrants for the two types of school, in 1939, male and female candidate had a one in 7.6 chance of success almost identical to their chances in 1918. These figures are all subject to a major variable; from 1918-39, the number of scholarship candidates never represented the entire age-group. Certainly, in an average year, no more than 50 per cent of eligible children entered for the examination, although in one exceptional year this figure rose to 94 per cent with nothing to account for the increase. Therefore the real likelihood of a West Ham child gaining a scholarship during the interwar period depended not only on the number of scholarships offered and the number of entrants in that year, but also on the number of children in the scholarship age-group.

The tables below demonstrate the chances of success in the secondary school scholarship examinations of the entire scholarship (10-11 years) age-group in selected years in West Ham irrespective of whether or not entry to the examination was made. The interwar decline in the West Ham birth-rate was not entirely consistent; in 1932, for example, there was an increase, compared to 1927, this probably due to greater numbers of births in the years after the First World War due to the return of ex-servicemen. By the middle 1930s, however, there were more than 1,000 fewer children in the age-group 10-11 years than there had been

in 1919 and, by 1938, more than 2,000 fewer. This decline, coupled with an increase in actual secondary school places and greater numbers of secondary scholarship places, resulted in an improvement in opportunity for West Ham children. In 1919 a West Ham boy of scholarship age had a 1 in 81.8 chance of gaining a secondary school scholarship compared to a 1 in 21.6 chance in the middle 1930s and a 1 in 16.3 chance in 1938. A West Ham girl of scholarship age had a 1 in 80.6 chance of gaining a secondary school scholarship in 1919 compared with a 1 in 21.3 chance in 1934 and a 1 in 15.8 chance in 1938. On the other hand, since a scholarship place could not be gained if entry to the examination was not made or, indeed, if sufficient secondary school places were not available, figures for the success of actual entrants to the secondary school examination remain valid. The percentage of the age-group gaining a secondary school scholarship increased more than fivefold for both male and female pupils from 1919 to 1938 due once again, to a combination of factors including the fall in the birth-rate and the increase both in secondary school places and secondary school scholarships. The discrepancy between the number of available West Ham secondary school places and the percentage of West Ham children attending secondary school, either with a free or special place or as a fee-payer, is accounted for, in the case of the aided secondary schools, by the existence of numbers of out-borough pupils, from both East Ham and parts of Essex, attending all three aided schools.

**Figure 3.5 Number of pupils of scholarship age (10-11 years) in selected years in West Ham 1919-38.**

Year	Male	Female	Total
1919	3438	3305	6743
1927	2860	2760	5620
1932	3383	2872	6255
1934	2702	2664	5356
1938	2043	1976	4019

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1919-38.

**Figure 3.6 The chance of a West Ham child of scholarship age (10-11 years) gaining a secondary school scholarship in selected years 1919-38.**

Year	Male	Female
1919	1 in 81.8	1 in 80.6
1927	1 in 42.0	1 in 41.0
1932	1 in 23.6	1 in 20.0
1934	1 in 21.6	1 in 21.3
1938	1 in 16.3	1 in 15.8

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1919-38.

**Figure 3.7 Percentage of West Ham pupils aged 10-11 years gaining secondary school scholarships in selected years 1919-38.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
1919	1.2	1.2	2.4
1927	2.3	2.3	4.6
1932	4.2	4.9	9.1
1934	4.6	4.6	9.2
1938	6.1	6.3	12.4

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1919-38.

**Figure 3.8 Number of West Ham children of scholarship age (10-11 years) to each secondary school place in selected years 1919-38.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1919	42.9	20.7
1927	26.0	13.9
1932	24.6	13.4
1934	20.0	12.3
1938	15.0	8.8

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1919-38.

**Figure 3.9 Percentage of public elementary school pupils in England and Wales aged 10-11 on 31 March of previous year admitted to secondary schools.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1920	9.5
1921	9.7
1922	9.5
1923	-
1924	8.4
1925	9.0
1926	9.3
1927	10.6
1928	11.2
1929	13.2
1930	12.9
1931	10.3
1932	10.5
1933	10.8
1934	11.9
1935	12.6
1936	12.9
1937	13.6
1938	14.3

*Source:* B. Simon. *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* (1974) Lawrence and Wishart. p.366 (No statistics were issued covering 1923).

During the late 1920s and 1930s, although much educational discussion on the subject of free and special place examinations, inevitably referred to the use or non-use of intelligence testing, most of the scholarship places offered tended to be based on attainment tests. The form which they took varied from authority to

authority, but four main patterns could be discerned. The most common test was two obligatory papers in English and arithmetic; some authorities in addition, attempted to discover general ability as well as testing acquired knowledge, by setting a general paper; an oral test was sometimes included, either for all candidates or for border-line cases; some authorities set papers in additional school subjects and, as a supplement to the English test, an oral reading test was given to candidates. In West Ham, the only change proposed for 1940, was a suggestion from the Borough's chief examiner that only pupils graded A by their schools and placed in the first 600 of the preliminary examination should be allowed to proceed to the second examination; this on the grounds of reducing candidate numbers and also avoiding subjecting children to an experience acknowledged as being extremely stressful.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.3 Scholarship papers and the provision for fee-paying places in West Ham secondary schools.**

A copy of the 1928 free-place scholarship English examination paper for West Ham High School for Girls exists and is reproduced below. The paper provides an interesting contrast between a degree of creative writing, albeit in a restricted form, and exercises in grammar. No details regarding time allowed or the number of questions to be answered survive.



**Figure 3.10 West Ham High School Entrance Examination for Free Scholars  
1928.**

*ENGLISH*

1. If you did not live in England, in which country would you most like to live? Why would you choose it? (in about 20 lines).

*OR*

Describe the house (inside and outside) that you would like to live in . (Write about 20 lines)

2. (a) What would you mean, in speaking to a friend, by the following movements? - putting a finger on your lips: knitting your brows: nodding your head to right or left: making a movement with your foot: pointing with your finger.

(b) Write out the following passage, supplying a good word in each of the spaces.

'He wore a long coat, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the holly leaves; his hair \_\_\_\_\_ to his \_\_\_\_\_ ; but both were as white as \_\_\_\_\_ and he had the \_\_\_\_\_ of one who had led a life, and known no care nor \_\_\_\_\_'.

3. Write about 12 lines describing the most interesting shop window that you know.

4. Arrange these sentences in three columns headed Subject. Predicate (or Verb). Object.

- (a) I heard a beautiful song.
- (b) Under the roof ran a leaden gutter.
- (c) Violets and primroses carpet the ground.
- (d) The king of the country came to his palace.
- (e) A shaded lamp stood in the tiny drawing-room.

Source: Local Studies No 11/9/102 L B of Newham.

Each of West Ham's five secondary schools provided for fee-paying pupils, in addition to those who had gained a scholarship. A 1928 leaflet from St. Angela's gives details of what was expected from candidates in both categories. Applicants for scholarships had to have been attending an elementary school for at least two years prior to entering the School. They had to be recommended by the headteacher of their current school as being '...well-conducted and likely to profit by the educational advantages offered'. They had, of course, to reach the required standard in an examination with papers in English and arithmetic, although an oral examination might be required for those placed highest on the candidate list. Parents or guardians had to be residents of the boroughs of West Ham or East Ham and had to sign an agreement to keep their children at school for the full five-year course. Fee-payers could include those who had failed to reach the required standard for the award of a scholarship but who had performed at a satisfactory level. Fees, in 1928, were £9 9s (exclusive of text-books) for West Ham pupils or for children who lived outside the Borough but whose parents occupied business premises in West Ham. Fees for East Ham pupils were £6 15s per annum (the reasons for this will be set out in a subsequent chapter) and children from areas other than these were only admitted in special circumstances. Parents of fee-payers were also required to sign an undertaking not to remove their child from the School before the end of the five-year course.<sup>67</sup>

Inspections by HMIs in 1922 and 1934 give general statistical information about West Ham's secondary schools. From this information any differentiation between free-place and fee-payers can be noted. By 1922, St. Angela's and West Ham Grammar School all required parents of free-place and fee-paying pupils to sign school-life agreements; the Municipal Secondary School imposed identical conditions. A proposal for West Ham High School to introduce an agreement for fee-payers as well as free-place holders was introduced in that year. The fact that the three aided secondary schools all possessed preparatory schools meant that fee-payers tended to be admitted from these departments, although this was no guarantee of academic or other excellence. In the 1922 HMI report, there is the

following comment: 'No doubt the Authority regard St. Angela's Preparatory School as efficient...; probably they look upon it as the preparatory department of the St. Angela's High School, as in fact it is. This preparatory department is not recognised as efficient by the Board'.<sup>68</sup> Any undue bias in favour of fee-payers was reduced by requiring them to pass the scholarship examination at a certain standard but, as in the case of coaching for the free-place examination, parents might attempt to ensure that their child received a fee-paying secondary education by enrolling them in a school's preparatory department beforehand.

### **3.4 West Ham's higher elementary/central school examinations 1918-39.**

Alongside the secondary school scholarships, West Ham held an annual examination for entry to its higher elementary, later central school scholarships. A comparison of these examinations with those for secondary school scholarships shows that, from 1918 until 1924, the numbers of entrants for secondary and higher elementary scholarships were very similar in terms of numbers, although the quantity of higher elementary school scholarships offered was between two and three times higher. In 1925, a year when there was a nation wide increase in interest in secondary education, the numbers of entrants for West Ham's secondary examinations were subject to a vast increase.

**Figure 3.11 West Ham's higher elementary/central school scholarships candidates 1918-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1918	372 (111)	351 (81)
1919	351 (76)	305 (115)
1920	312 (96)	314 (75)
1921	395 (110)	294 (80)
1922	361 (115)	260 (156)
1923	359 (105)	329 (720)
1924	347 (105)	280 (73)
1925	672 (108)	622 (144)
1926	559 (102)	482 (102)
1927	504 (102)	461 (68)
1928	522 (102)	473 (102)
1929	423 (102)	380 (102)
1930	403 (102)	356 (102)
1931	377 (102)	342 (102)
1932	1,624 (105)	1,350 (105)
1933	1,318 (105)	1,274 (105)
1934	1,089 (105)	1,079 (105)
1935	1,044 (105)	990 (105)
1936	2,315 (105)	2,297 (105)
1937	2,124 (105)	2,060 (105)
1938	1,914 (105)	1,841 (105)
1939	1,766 (105)	1,752 (105)

*Source:* West Ham Education sub-Committee records 14th to 35th Reports of the work of the Education Committee 1918-39 (Number of scholarships available are in brackets).

**Figure 3.12 The chance of a West Ham scholarship candidates gaining a higher elementary/central school scholarship 1918-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1918	1 in 3.3	1 in 4.3
1919	1 in 4.6	1 in 2.6
1920	1 in 3.2	1 in 4.1
1921	1 in 3.5	1 in 3.6
1922	1 in 3.1	1 in 1.6
1923	1 in 3.4	1 in 4.5
1924	1 in 3.3	1 in 3.8
1925	1 in 6.2	1 in 4.3
1926	1 in 5.4	1 in 4.7
1927	1 in 4.9	1 in 6.7
1928	1 in 5.1	1 in 4.6
1929	1 in 4.1	1 in 3.7
1930	1 in 3.9	1 in 3.4
1931	1 in 3.6	1 in 3.3
1932	1 in 15.4	1 in 12.8
1933	1 in 12.5	1 in 12.1
1934	1 in 10.3	1 in 10.2
1935	1 in 9.9	1 in 9.4
1936	1 in 22.0	1 in 21.8
1937	1 in 20.2	1 in 19.6
1938	1 in 18.2	1 in 17.5
1939	1 in 16.8	1 in 16.6

*Source:* West Ham Education sub-Committee records 14th to 35th Reports of the work of the Education Committee 1918-39.

As with the figures for West Ham's secondary school scholarships, the Borough's higher elementary/central school scholarship figures are subject to alteration when the entire 10-11 year old age-group rather than scholarship entrants only are used.

**Figure 3.13 The chance of a West Ham child of scholarship age (10-11 years) gaining a higher elementary/central school scholarships in selected years 1919-38.**

Year	Male	Female
1919	1 in 45.2	1 in 28.7
1927	1 in 28.0	1 in 40.5
1932	1 in 32.2	1 in 27.3
1934	1 in 25.7	1 in 25.3
1938	1 in 19.4	1 in 18.8

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1919-38.

**Figure 3.14 The percentage of West Ham pupils aged 10-11 years gaining higher elementary/central school scholarships in selected years 1919-38.**

Year	Male	Female
1919	2.2	3.4
1927	3.5	2.4
1932	3.1	3.6
1934	3.8	3.9
1938	5.1	5.3

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1919-38.

### **3.5 West Ham's intending teachers and university entrants 1918-39.**

Apart from West Ham's secondary and higher elementary/central school scholarships, the Borough provided an annual intending-teacher examination. Intending-teacher scholarships had been instituted in 1914 because the West Ham Education Committee had been unable to attract sufficient teachers to maintain the staffs of the Borough's elementary schools. By providing these scholarships West Ham was able to retain a sufficient supply of teachers, both by absorbing all bursary holders who wished to take up employment, in addition to inviting applications from other teachers to fill vacant posts.<sup>69</sup> Prior to 1926, intending-teacher students had been chosen between the ages of 13 and 14. Due to the Board of Education's refusal to give any priority to intending teachers with regard to admission to secondary school and to the Board's view that the 'earmarking of candidates for the teaching profession at so early an age as 13 is open to objection',<sup>70</sup> the age of taking up a bursary had been altered. By 1926, pupils who had completed three years at secondary school competed, at the age of 16, for a two-year scholarship. One year of this period was to be spent in secondary school, with the other year of student teachership. During this time, one day per week was spent in secondary school, whilst the other four days consisted of a placement in an elementary school. This preliminary training was then followed by either a two or four year course at a college, after which the trained teacher could take up employment. The West Ham Education Committee recognised that the intending-teacher scheme was not ideal. They accepted that teaching could be an exhausting experience for such young students and that further difficulties were created when pupils tried to study and teach simultaneously. In addition, it was not easy to fit part-time pupils into the normal timetables of the secondary schools.<sup>71</sup>

The Committee also believed that the moral and intellectual development of intending-teachers would be better served by pupils remaining at secondary school

with opportunities for responsibility and leadership and, after some discussion, decided to modify the Borough's existing scheme rather than completely abolishing it, a possible option. Children selected for bursaries were to teach only for a total of four weeks in total during their two-year studentship. The teaching placements were to be in a block of a fortnight immediately after the summer holidays. Although the Committee recognised that this would necessitate pupils losing that amount of secondary school work in September, it believed that the loss would be fully compensated for by the benefits accruing from full-time attendance at secondary school for the remainder of the year.<sup>72</sup>

While the teaching profession as a whole was spared the deprivations of mass unemployment, new entrants to the profession in the 1930s, as in the 1920s, found it extremely difficult to obtain posts. In 1929, 1930 and 1931, an exceptionally large number of students had entered the training colleges, in expectation of the raising of the school-leaving age and the Board of Education had provided a special grant of £70,000 per annum to the colleges, to enable them to increase accommodation. By the autumn of 1931, with the economic crisis deepening, it was clear that there would be no increase in the number of teachers employed, even though larger numbers had been trained. In order to avert still greater teacher unemployment, the Board tried to dissuade students from entering the training colleges but, by September 1931, all places were filled and very few of the accepted candidates were ready to withdraw. The Board announced that it intended regulating college admissions for the year 1932-33 so that the total number of students in training would be 1,200 less than in 1932, there being, in December 1932, 1,100 newly qualified teachers who were without posts and, indeed, unemployment persisted amongst newly qualified teachers until as late as 1938.<sup>73</sup> The repercussions of the Board of Education's actions directly affected West Ham pupils in March 1932. The Education Committee discussed the fact that several bursary students who had won West Ham scholarships had been unable to obtain admission to training colleges for the reasons given above. The Education Committee's solution was to allow pupils to transfer their awards to



'ordinary' university courses, provided they gave an assurance that they would apply for admission to a training college as soon as possible.<sup>74</sup>

Exact figures for the numbers of entrants for intending-teacher bursaries are not always available but in general the number of scholarships awarded to girls tended to be greater than those awarded to boys, this reflecting the large preponderance of women in the profession. In 1918, boys were granted 15 bursaries and girls 25,<sup>75</sup> with female candidates outnumbering boy candidates in a ratio of more than 2:1. Between 1919 and 1921, boys and girls were granted roughly equal numbers of scholarships, between 11 and 15, although girls made up the bulk of candidates.<sup>76</sup> In 1922, not only did male/female candidate numbers almost equalise but boys were allotted 20 bursaries, compared with 8 for girls.<sup>77</sup> The worsening economic conditions could partly account for this break with custom by the West Ham Education Committee. It may have seemed fairer to Committee members to allow boys to go forward in a poor job market. Alternatively, since the number of intending-teacher scholarships granted were tailored by the Committee to fit their projections of teacher vacancies in future years, a need for more male teachers was an even likelier explanation for the disparity. In 1923, with the immediate crisis receding, 45 boys and 46 girls competed for 15 and 11 bursaries, respectively.<sup>78</sup> During the following two years until 1925, smaller numbers of pupils (19 boys and 32 girls in 1924 and 24 boys and 41 girls in 1925) gained 13 and 21 places for boys and girls respectively in 1924 and 18 and 24 places respectively in 1925.<sup>79</sup>

The alteration in the age of competition for the intending-teacher bursaries in 1926 made little difference to the numbers of those coming forward to be examined. The situation continued, broadly, throughout the remainder of the 1920s, with 1927 a representative year in which 24 boys competed for 17 scholarships and 32 girls for 16 scholarships.<sup>80</sup> From 1931 to 1933, despite the difficulties facing newly qualified teachers, which are described below, West Ham awarded over 20 bursaries to male candidates each year and between 11 and 23 bursaries to female

candidates.<sup>81</sup> It is difficult to account for this apparent discrepancy, particularly since, in some cases, pupils of both sexes were unable to enter training colleges at the end of their secondary course. The only explanation is that West Ham Council's estimates for the future staffing needs of its schools were inaccurate or that the Education Committee was unwilling to make cuts in any area of its scholarship provision. By the mid to late 1930s, bursary numbers had fallen again,<sup>82</sup> proving, perhaps, that West Ham Council anticipated stable levels of staffing and also that candidates were disinclined to commit themselves to teaching because of the difficulties inherent even in gaining entry to training college. The intending-teacher bursaries, unlike the secondary and central school scholarships, were thus directly attributable to local market forces in teacher employment, even if West Ham Council sometimes chose to ignore these realities. The number of candidates for intending-teacher bursaries during the interwar years tended to be small, rarely more than in a 3:1 or 2:1 ratio to the number of scholarships the West Ham Education Committee allotted in any one year. As was to be expected, the number of female candidates often outnumbered those of boys. This situation reflected the greater number of women teachers in the profession.

The award of an intending-teacher bursary was an achievement for a boy or girl during the interwar period, independent of whether or not employment was easy to find at the end of the course. Elementary teaching, with the prospect, at least before the 1930s, of an increasingly liberal college education, was naturally an attractive prospect, particularly for girls, who might otherwise have faced poorly-paid and repetitious office, factory or other manual work.<sup>83</sup> Such students naturally often regarded themselves as now occupying a different social strata from those they taught, even if their own origins were working-class. This is illustrated by the following extract from Plaistow secondary school's 1937 school magazine:

'During the summer holidays a number of pupils served a period of pupil teaching in the Elementary Schools. The boy said 'Please, Sir, how do you spell mouse? 'Mouse? What do you want that for? You don't want that word when you are writing your name and address'. 'Yes, Sir, I do. You see, Sir, I live in Custom Mouse'.<sup>84</sup>

The difficulties encountered by West Ham bursary holders in gaining a place at a training college were a major factor in persuading the Education Committee to institute four-year university scholarships for various professions which could, indeed, include teaching.<sup>85</sup> By this means, West Ham pupils who had not been immediately successful in entering training college were able to transfer their awards to other courses, often with the provision, as detailed above, that the candidate would return to teaching when the opportunity arose. From the autumn of 1932, West Ham Council awarded 18 university scholarships annually, the majority of these intending-teacher candidates. The Borough also awarded so-called Special scholarships as in the case of one boy who had been attending the Municipal Secondary School. When he gained a History exhibition worth £40 at Peterhouse, Cambridge, West Ham Council agreed to make his income up to £200 per annum during his university career.<sup>86</sup> It is probably true to say that during the 1920s and 1930s, full-time higher education was largely restricted to the upper classes although, as documented above, this did not prevent the occasional ambitious and determined working-class boy or girl from gaining a university place. Much depended on the local financial situation as perceived by the relevant Education Committee and also on the political complexion of the local Education Committee itself.<sup>87</sup> In West Ham, apart from 18 year old school-leavers, teachers already employed by the Council were encouraged, and sometimes given financial assistance, to undertake further study.

## **Conclusion.**

During this period the secondary school system in West Ham remained essentially unchanged despite the Borough's 1920 new scheme. By the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, public and educational opinion had evolved to the extent that the West Ham Education Committee could bring in regulations encouraging all children to take the scholarship examination. This is not to say that parents universally wished for a secondary or central school education for their children but that hostility to post-elementary education was diminishing. This was partly due to a recognition by parents that a secondary school course in particular could improve the prospects of their children finding employment, a matter of supreme importance in a time of economic depression. There was also an increasing acceptance in society in general that working-class children who demonstrated 'ability' were worthy of an extended academic education. That continuation education never met with the same degree of approval from working-class parents or from many sections of the Labour Party was probably due to its lack of status and not merely that, in its compulsory form, it deprived children of employment.

Although the percentage of the age-group who sat for the preliminary examination rarely reached 50 per cent some children, entered by their parents rather than by their school, were necessarily ill-prepared for papers which were repeatedly described as competitive rather than qualifying. Even children capable of passing such a rigorous test were competing against children of roughly equal ability for increasing, but still small numbers of scholarship places. The alteration of free-places into special places in 1932 resulted in protests from some Labour councillors and trade unionists in West Ham, almost as a matter of course. In practice, it is unlikely that the change in regulations caused additional hardship to any but a small group of scholarship winners since many families would have been exempt from payment of fees under the new, as well as the old, regulations.

There was a considerable growth both in the number of secondary school scholarships offered by West Ham Council and in the number of candidates competing for the scholarships offered during the interwar years. In 1918, only a total of 87 secondary school scholarships were available but, by 1939, this figure had risen to 250, almost a three-fold increase. In 1918, 645 candidates had taken the scholarship examination and, in 1939, the number of candidates had risen to 3,518, providing more than five times the number of candidates, remarkable in an era of falling birth-rate. Larger numbers of candidates, persuaded to enter by factors such as the introduction of West Ham's preliminary examination, greater publicity given to the examination itself and a more widespread recognition of the benefits of a secondary education, resulted in candidates having an almost identical chance of gaining a secondary school scholarship in 1939 as in 1918. Against this apparent lack of progress must be put the facts that not only were three times the number of scholarship places being allotted to West Ham children in 1939, as opposed to 1918, but that, also, many more children were being given the opportunity to compete for a secondary school scholarship, perhaps facing disappointment when they were not successful but, at the same time, gaining benefit from the experience and the potential widening of their horizons. Younger siblings, too, might find their own chances of a secondary education enhanced by the participation of older brothers and sisters in the scholarship examination because new possibilities had been brought to the attention of parents.

It is reasonable to suppose that the onset of economic depression during the late 1920s and the 1930s, would lead to a noticeable drop in candidates for secondary scholarships. In the case of male candidates, 755 boys competed for scholarships in 1929, compared with 1155 candidates in 1930, 1393 candidates in 1931, and a total of 1624 candidates in 1932. The 1932 increase is accounted for by the introduction of West Ham's preliminary examination in 1932 which encouraged larger numbers of candidates to come forward and by the inclusion of higher elementary school candidates in with the figures for secondary school candidates from that year and in the following years. Candidate numbers dropped to 1,089 in

1933, often considered the low point in the Depression years, and continued to drop in 1934 and 1935 but were subject to very large rises in 1936 and 1937 when over 2,000 boys competed for 125 scholarship places. There was a relatively small decline in male candidates for secondary school scholarships in 1938 and 1939 but this, too, was accounted for by variations in the birthrate. Figures for girl are similar to those for boys and, indeed, while in 1929, 649 girls took the secondary scholarship, figures rose to 914 in 1930, 1,229 in 1931 and 1,350 in 1932. In 1933, 1,274 girls entered for the examination compared with 1,089, the only year, other than 1936, when the number of female candidates outnumbered those of male. It is difficult to account for these two uncharacteristic years and the explanation may simply be one of chance. Large numbers of female candidates entered for scholarships in 1936 and 1937, with a relative decline in 1938 and 1939, subject to the same explanation as figures for boys.

West Ham provided higher elementary/central school scholarships in addition to its secondary scholarships and, until the late 1920s and the 1930s, provided them in greater numbers, 111 higher elementary compared to 43 secondary scholarships for boys in 1918 and 81 compared with 42 secondary scholarships for girls in the same year. Throughout the 1920s, the number of candidates for higher elementary scholarships continued to be smaller than those for secondary scholarships and, during the 1930s, the numbers of central school scholarships for both sexes stabilised and were surpassed by the number of secondary scholarships. West Ham's intending-teacher scholarships graduated from awards offered to 13 year old elementary and secondary school pupils to four-year university scholarships awarded to 18 year old school-leavers during the interwar years. Although, at first consideration, this transformation appears connected with an improvement in teacher qualification during the era, it was, in fact, more closely allied with increasing teacher unemployment and the inability of intending-teachers to enter training colleges during the early 1930s. The effects of the national economic Depression, educational innovation and Board of Education directives on the secondary schools themselves will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Notes.

1. Banks, O. *Parity and prestige in English secondary education* (1955) Routledge and Kegan Paul p.69.
2. Kazamias, A. *Politics and society and secondary education in England* (1943) Oxford University Press p.258.
3. Banks op. cit. p.69.
4. Dent, H. *1870-1970 Century of growth in English education* (1970) Longman p.10.
5. Ibid.
6. Lindsay, K. *Social progress and educational waste: being a study of the free-place and scholarship system* (1926) London p.1.
7. Board of Education. *Memorandum on examinations for scholarships and free places* (1928) p.6.
8. Ibid.
9. Sutherland, G. *Ability, merit and measurement* (1984) Clarendon Press pp.189-190.
10. *Memorandum* (1928) op. cit. p.17-18.
11. Board of Education. *Supplementary memorandum on examinations for scholarships and special places in secondary schools* (1936) p.4.
12. Gordon, P. *Selection for secondary education* (1980) Woburn Press p.216.
13. *Memorandum* (1936) op. cit. pp.5-7.
14. Roach, J. 'Examinations and the secondary schools 1900-1945' *History of Education* (1979) Vol. 8 No 1 p.45.
15. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XVLA Appendix 28/4/20* p.370.
16. Maclure, S. *A history of education in London 1870-1990* (1990) Penguin pp.118-119.
17. *Stratford Express* 16/2/27 p.2.
18. Ibid.
19. PRO ED 120/162 158856 6/3/22 To: The Board of Education. From: District and expert inspectors B S Cornish, A Harris and E W E Kempson.

20. Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIA 8/1/24 p.97.
21. Ibid 5/2/24 p.149.
22. Dent. op. cit. p.94.
23. PRO ED 120/162 158856 17/2/23 To: West Ham Education Committee.  
From: The Board of Education.
24. Sutherland. op. cit. pp.245-246.
25. Sanderson, M. *Educational opportunity and social change in England.*  
(1987) Faber and Faber p.27
26. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIIIA* 12/12/24  
p.49.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid p.50.
29. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 14th to 20th.*
30. Ibid 21st.
31. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIIB* 18/9/25  
pp.518-519.
32. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 22nd.*
33. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIVA* 11/1/27  
p.100.
34. Ibid *Vol. XXIVA* 14/6/27 p.43.
35. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 24th.*
36. Ibid 25th.
37. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXVIII A* 17/11/30  
p.13.
38. Ibid *Vol. XXVI* 14/1/30 p.155.
39. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 26th.*
40. Ibid 27th.
41. Gordon. op. cit. p.216.
42. *Stratford Express* 14/10/31 p.2.
43. Ibid.
44. Gordon. op. cit. pp.211-212.



45. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXVIII B 28/9/31*  
p.561.
46. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 28th.*
47. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIX A 1/2/32*  
p.138.
48. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 29th.*
49. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXXI A 27/11/33*  
pp.49-50.
50. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 30th.*
51. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXXL B 1/10/34*  
pp.541-542.
52. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 31st.*
53. *Ibid 32nd.*
54. Bernbaum, G. *Social change and the schools 1918-44* (1967) Humanities  
Press p.73.
55. *Reports of the Work of the West Ham Education Committee 33rd.*
56. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXXIII B 25/5/36*  
pp.341-342.
57. *Ibid Vol. XXXIII A 4/12/35* p.71.
58. *Stratford Express 20/6/36* p.2.
59. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXXIV B 4/10/37*  
p.519.
60. *Ibid Appendix Vol. 34 B 31/5/37* p.350.
61. *Reports of the Works of the West Ham Education Committee 34th.*
62. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee 31/1/38* p.157.
63. *Reports of the Works of the West Ham Education Committee 35th.*
64. *Ibid 36th.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*
67. Local Studies L B of Newham St Angela's Ursuline Convent School, Forest  
Gate, Award of scholarship H/9/104.

68. PRO ED 120/162 158856 6/3/22 To: The Board of Education. From: The district inspectors. B S Cornish, A Harris and E W E Kempson.
69. PRO ED 53/693 XCI156556 16/1/23 To: The Secretary of the Board of Education H A L Fisher. From: West Ham Town Clerk G Hilleary.
70. Ibid 27/2/23.
71. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIIIB* 12/1/26 p.310.
72. Ibid p.311.
73. Tropp. A. *The school teachers: the growth of the teaching profession in England and Wales from 1800 to the present day* (1957) Heinemann pp.225-226.
74. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIXA* 14/3/32 p.225b.
75. *Reports of the Works of the West Ham Education Committee 14th.*
76. Ibid *15th to 17th.*
77. Ibid *18th.*
78. Ibid *19th.*
79. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIIB* 9/6/25 p.373.
80. Ibid *Vol. XXIVB* 14/6/27 p.343.
81. PRO ED 53/693 XCI56556 12/1/34 Memo to inspectors.
82. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXXII* 26/11/34 p.63.
83. Widdowson, F. *Going up into the next class (women and elementary school training 1840-1914)* (1980) Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications p.79.
84. *The Plaistovian* Vol. 2 No. 1 Autumn 1937 p.11.
85. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIXA* 28/9/31 p.557.
86. PRO ED 53/693 XC156556 12/1/34 Memo to inspectors.
87. Gordon. P., Aldrich. R. and Dean. D. *Educational policy in the twentieth century* (1991) Woburn Press pp.235-236.

#### **Chapter Four: The secondary and higher elementary/central schools of West Ham 1918-39.**

West Ham, during the interwar period, had an uneven distribution of secondary schools, with a bias towards single-sex and Catholic schools. The presence of an endowed school for girls, West Ham High School for Girls, in addition to St. Angela's, accentuated the excess of places for girls although both schools admitted fee-payers whose method of entry was outside the scholarship system. West Ham Grammar School for Boys was a Catholic institution but, since at least half of its pupils each year were non-Catholic, it also served as a reliable source of secondary school places for the local authority, the more so because West Ham Grammar School for Boys was the sole single-sex school for boys in the Borough. The two Council secondary schools, the Municipal Secondary School and later Plaistow Secondary School, were mixed, and the Education Committee was able to use a quota system in favour of boys to even out the distribution of places. West Ham High School for Girls, St. Angela's and West Ham Grammar School for Boys all gained direct grant status by the 1930s. The terms direct grant and aided have been used interchangeably to describe these three schools. The unusually strong presence of Catholic secondary schools was due more to coincidence and good fortune than to an exceptionally strong Catholic minority in the Borough; Silvertown was the area of West Ham where Catholics, who were mainly poor and Irish, tended to congregate but Silvertown only possessed a Catholic elementary school. In 1918, West Ham could thus provide secondary school places at West Ham High School (Sarah Bonnell's) and the Municipal Secondary School in Stratford and in St. Angela's and West Ham Grammar School for Boys (St. Bonaventure's) both in Forest Gate. In addition, the Russell Road and the Water Lane Higher Elementary schools provided post-primary education, as did the West Ham Municipal College. The Borough contained a number of private schools, 11 in 1918, which were recognised by the Board of Education, but not all of these could be termed secondary schools and the West Ham Education Committee had minimal control over them.<sup>1</sup> In a report on secondary school accommodation in its

area, published in 1919, the LCC made the point that many private schools more closely resembled primary than secondary schools and therefore could not be included in figures for secondary school places per head of population.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 4.1 West Ham's secondary schools 1918-39.**

Name	Founded	Location	Boys/girls	Approx size
West Ham High School for Girls (Sarah Bonnell's)	1766	Stratford	Girls	300-450
St. Angela's High School	1862	Forest Gate	Girls	300-450
West Ham Grammar School (St. Bonaventure's)	1875	Forest Gate	Boys	150-250
The Municipal Secondary Stratford School	1906	Stratford	Mixed	550-650
Plaistow Secondary School	1926	Plaistow	Mixed	550-650

Source: F. Sainsbury. *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) pp.146-163.

#### **4.1 West Ham's secondary schools prior to 1918.**

West Ham High School for Girls, or Sarah Bonnell's, was opened in 1766 by the will of Sarah Bonnell, a lady who owned considerable property in West Ham and the surrounding area. When the school opened it accommodated 40 poor girls born in West Ham or the adjacent districts. In 1886, Sarah Bonnell's, as it was then called, was educating 110 girls as free scholars in reading, writing and arithmetic. The parents of the pupils were described as belonging to the labouring classes. Under a scheme of 1873, drawn up by the Endowed Schools

Commissioners, Bonnell's became the West Ham High School for Girls. A secondary curriculum was instituted and fee-paying pupils admitted. The School did not apply for grant-aid under the 1902 Act since the school governors could not raise the necessary finance to install laboratories. In 1909, a new scheme was drafted fixing the age-limits of pupils from seven to 18 years of age. In 1918, West Ham High School was still independent, remaining so until 1921 when it agreed to accept a fixed number of pupils from West Ham and from East Ham and Essex.

St. Angela's High School was founded by the Ursuline order of nuns in 1862. The sisters had acquired a semi-detached residence in Forest Gate, which was then a rural village, and began to teach the children of the parish in converted cottages. The following summer, the headmistress used part of the convent outbuildings as a school, and a boarding establishment was started. In 1872, work began on building a new wing, giving the school further classrooms and a dormitory. In 1882, an additional wing was added and, in 1904, St. Angela's became one of the first Catholic secondary schools in the country to obtain recognition from the Board of Education. In 1918, the school was already accepting West Ham pupils, amongst others, in arrangement with the Education Committee.<sup>3</sup> Gillian Avery, in her general study of girls' independent schools, remarked on the nineteenth-century school that 'by setting up an elementary school, in addition to a high school and a boarding school, the nuns were creating a three-tier structure 'to satisfy the requirements of the highly sensitive Victorian class system...met in other church foundations'.<sup>4</sup>

West Ham Grammar School for Boys was founded in 1875 by the Franciscan order of friars as a private school. From 1890 or earlier, it was called St. Bonaventure's Grammar School. It was recognised by the Board of Education as a secondary school in 1904. There were then 154 pupils, including 28 in the preparatory department but only three were over 16 years of age. In 1908 the school altered its name to West Ham Grammar School and, by 1918, had arrangements with West

Ham and the surrounding boroughs similar to those entered into by the two girls' secondary schools.<sup>5</sup> West Ham Municipal Secondary School was opened in 1906 with an initial intake of 369; these including pupil teachers from two centres opened by the school board in 1894. The last pupil teachers were selected in 1909 and, from 1912, bursaries were granted to intending-teachers who followed a secondary course. Plaistow Secondary School was opened in 1926. Russell Road Higher Elementary School was opened in 1906 in the former pupil teacher centre. Water Lane Higher Elementary School was opened in the same year in the buildings of the Borough's other pupil teacher centre. The Municipal College, which was then described as a technical institute, opened in 1898 with departments in science, engineering, art and a women's department. At first, the institute offered many apprenticeship classes but, as early as 1900, it was also providing courses in science and engineering, recognised for the award of University of London degrees. Shortly before the First World War junior technical classes were started.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4.2 The 1918 Education Act and the secondary and higher elementary schools of West Ham.**

In West Ham, the main consequence of Fisher's Education Act was the establishment of five continuation schools requiring the compulsory attendance of 14 year old school leavers. The Borough's new scheme under the terms of the Act, included plans for the advancement of secondary and central school education. Under the terms of the scheme, dated April 1920, West Ham's secondary schools were encouraged to prepare a 'good proportion' of their pupils to remain at school until the age of 18 and then proceed to university. No mention, at this stage, was made of the need for additional finance from government sources to underwrite these proposals, just as there was no discussion of maintenance allowances. Entrants to secondary school were to be selected by ability and not on parental ability to pay, although fee-payers were to be admitted. West Ham Council

negotiated this difficulty by announcing that fee-payers would have to meet the same standard of entry as scholarship holders to ensure entry. Two large projects were to be initiated in the near future. The Borough intended immediately to provide a new mixed secondary school on the Cumberland Farm property in the south of the Borough and, some three years later, to start work on a second mixed secondary school in the Carter Road area. Before going on to expound its plans for higher elementary education, it was explained that West Ham Council realised that it would take 'a considerable period of years' to ensure that all children remained at school until they were 16. Meanwhile, for those children whose parents, with the assistance of maintenance allowances, would be able to support them until this age but for whom a secondary course was neither available nor suitable, central schools were to be provided. These schools were to select pupils at the age of 11 from surrounding elementary schools and pupils were to be obligated, subject to the payment of a penalty by their parents, to remain at school until 16 at least. West Ham's two existing higher elementary schools were to be converted into these establishments and approximately four additional central schools were to be provided at some point.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4.3 West Ham's secondary schools during the interwar period, similarities and peculiarities.**

It is possible to place West Ham's secondary schools during the period 1918-39 into a number of overlapping categories. These include girls' schools, boys' schools, mixed schools, independent schools, maintained schools and Catholic schools. A comparison between and across categories with regard to finance, ethos, staffing etc., to include the impact, if any, of the economic restraints of the era, both locally and nationally, is also possible and can be used to set in context developments and disappointments in the field of secondary education. The five schools will be dealt with in order of their foundation, with West Ham High School for Girls, the oldest school, founded in 1766, first and Plaistow Secondary School,

founded in 1926, last. There are wide variations between the schools in the quantity and type of records that remain. The archives of West Ham High School for Girls which are with Newham Local Studies library include governors' minute books and other, more general papers, such as prospectuses from the 1920s and 1930s. Records relating to St. Angela's, including governors' minute books and staff registers for the interwar period, existed until the mid 1980s or later. Recent upheavals in the School's history centring on a large rebuilding project have resulted in the loss of all pre-1960 records. I have thus relied on information gathered for my 1986 MA dissertation that contained sections on St. Angela's, in addition to PRO and Borough records, for references to the School in the present study. This material included governors' minute books, school magazines and a staff register. West Ham Grammar School records for the period consist of one governors' minute book and a small number of photographs and papers. Few records and no governors' minute books remain for the Municipal Secondary School and Plaistow Secondary School for the interwar period, apart from some school magazines and newscuttings from the local paper.



**Figure 4.2 West Ham's secondary schools.**

Name	Controlled By	No. Sixth Form	Prep	Average no. on roll	No. Free-Places Per annum	No. Fee-Paying Per annum
West Ham High School.	Endowed/ Independent	20-30	Yes	300-450	10-50	20-60
St Angela's High School.	Catholic	20-25	Yes	300-450	10-30	40-60
West Ham Grammar School.	Catholic	10-15	Yes	150-200	10-20	15-25
The Municipal Secondary School.	Municipal	40-50	No	550-650	30-50	50-70
Plaistow Secondary School.	Municipal	40-50	No	550-650	30-50	40-60

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1918-39.

Illustration 1 West Ham High School For Girls 1931.



#### **4.3.1 Finances.**

During the interwar period West Ham High School for Girls, St. Angela's High School and West Ham Grammar School controlled their own budgets whilst the finances of the two municipal secondary schools and the higher elementary/central schools were under Council control. From the 1920s or earlier each of the independent schools accepted financial aid from West Ham, and adjacent local authorities and the maintained schools were, of course, dependent on the Council finances for their needs; thus each of the schools was to a greater or lesser extent shaped by what the Borough - or, indeed, boroughs, could provide, although Government finances were the ultimate source of help or hindrance for West Ham's schools. Poor local authorities, such as West Ham, often found themselves trapped in a vicious circle. Impoverished populations and houses yielded low rateable values and net revenue. High unemployment levels entailed much of that rate revenue being spent on local unemployment relief. This left less for expenditure on education and particularly for building further secondary and technical schools.<sup>8</sup> The West Ham Education Committee was able to build only one new secondary school during the period 1918-39 and had to abandon plans to build a further school, as outlined in the 1920 scheme. The percentage of West Ham's population without work was always two or three times the rate for London as a whole and always exceeded that for Great Britain in its entirety. Since unemployment relief had to be a priority for the Council, it could not afford to spend on education as if it had no other commitments.

The table below gives the average gross cost per pupil at each of West Ham's secondary schools in the mid 1930s. West Ham High School required the least expenditure per pupil presumably because the income from the School's endowment was not included in the calculations but contributed towards costs. St. Angela's costs were probably lowered by savings inherent in having religious teachers. It is difficult to account for the higher expenditure per pupil for West

Ham Grammar School since pupil and staff numbers were low. The large average expenditure per pupil for the Municipal Secondary School reflected its position as the flagship secondary school for West Ham Council, with Plaistow Secondary School's reduced costs per pupil a consequence perhaps of its more recent foundation.

**Figure 4.3 Costs per pupil for the five West Ham secondary schools in the year 1935-36.**

Name Of School	Average Gross Cost Per Pupil Per Annum
West Ham High School.	£26 1 1
St. Angela's.	£30 14 6
West Ham Grammar School.	£32 4 0
The Municipal Secondary School.	£36 10 8
Plaistow Secondary School.	£31 5 1

*Source:* West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXXIVB 4/10/37 p.520.

West Ham High School for Girls, then independent of Council control, began 1918 in a financial crisis. A governors' meeting discussed the details of these difficulties. The School was seeking a bank overdraft to meet the accounts for February to April.<sup>9</sup> In May of that year the governors agreed to approach the Essex Education Committee for a grant in aid to overcome these difficulties<sup>10</sup> and by June, the School's bank balance had improved to the extent that it was £256.15.6d in credit.<sup>11</sup> The concern of the governors for the future viability of the School had increased and it was decided once again to send a deputation to Essex to ask for a grant on the basis that 50 per cent of the School's pupils were drawn from the Essex area. The School was slow to make economies to improve its financial position and engaged a new gym teacher to take classes, paying her at an hourly rate and reimbursing her travelling expenses, although she was instructed, whenever possible, to obtain second-hand apparatus for her work.<sup>12</sup> In September,

with the refusal of the Essex Authority to accede to the governors' request for grant aid, the School was applying to the bank for a further overdraft, although the governors authorised £20 being spent on books for prize-giving.<sup>13</sup> In November 1918, the School's overdraft was over £500 and, in view of the stance taken by the Essex Authority with regard to grant aid, the governors agreed to raise fees for pupils resident outside West Ham.<sup>14</sup>

During 1919 and into 1920, West Ham High School's finances continued to be a cause of concern for the governors. In April of 1920 the School had a bank balance in its favour but, by September, possessed an overdraft of £1,024 2s 8d.<sup>15</sup> The governors had already sent a delegation to the West Ham Education Committee, setting out the School's financial position and enquiring as to whether the Council would consider taking over the running of its monetary affairs. These discussions continued into October 1920 when a deputation from the School again met with the West Ham Education Committee to discuss its inclusion in the Borough's new scheme. Committee members had already visited the School and had been favourably impressed and West Ham was willing to consider this possibility but, in return, required an undertaking that Essex pupils were henceforth to be excluded from the School. The Education Committee hoped by this means to gain an additional 150 secondary school places for the Borough, and the West Ham High School governors made it clear that they would be willing to agree to these terms in return for a deficiency grant.<sup>16</sup> Fees were raised to £4 4s 0d in November 1920 but despite this the School possessed an overdraft of £780 5s 5d in January 1921.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately for the joint plans of West Ham High School's governors and West Ham Education Committee itself, the Board of Education was unable to agree to proposals to exclude Essex representatives from the governing body of the School and considered the provision against the admission of Essex children 'unnecessary'.<sup>18</sup> West Ham High School's governors countered this by immediately

initiating discussions with West Ham on the possibility of the School being run by the Borough.<sup>19</sup> Essex, concerned at the prospect of its children being excluded, invited the School governors to a conference on the matter, with West Ham Education Committee also being allowed to send representatives<sup>20</sup> but no agreement was arrived at and in June East Ham children were refused entry to the School's admission examination because of the Borough's failure to allot the School a deficiency grant.<sup>21</sup> West Ham's Town Clerk wrote to the School in September suggesting that fees be raised to £9 9s 0d, with West Ham subsidising its pupils' fees by a third.<sup>22</sup>

In September 1922, demonstrating that, despite the efforts of the past years, the School had still not been able to resolve its difficulties, the bank was asked to sanction a large overdraft of £1,200 for the ensuing six months.<sup>23</sup> The School's finances were not aided by the decision of the Essex Education Authority to exclude children resident in the Barking area from West Ham High School since a new secondary school had been opened to serve the district and the Essex Authority had no wish '...to subsidise West Ham whilst there were vacancies in the Barking school'.<sup>24</sup> It is probably true to say that West Ham High School's financial difficulties were caused in some measure by inefficiency, instanced in August 1926 during an audit when there was some confusion as to whether fees had been paid into the School's bank account or not.<sup>25</sup> West Ham High School was spared one financial concern in February 1927 when the nearby borough of Ilford agreed to pay a deficiency grant for its pupils.<sup>26</sup>

That West Ham High School was beginning to supplement its income in howsoever small a manner, is shown by a fair held in aid of school funds in May 1928.<sup>27</sup> Such fund-raising became increasingly necessary because, in July, the governors negotiated a loan of £4,525 at five per cent interest from West Ham Council in order to erect additional buildings for the school, although shortly afterwards the governors decided that the first sum was insufficient and that the

sum borrowed would have to be £5,150.<sup>28</sup> The School had taken this step despite the fact that the senior department had a deficit that year of more than £2,000 on its income.<sup>29</sup> From the records there is sometimes a sense of extravagance in small matters as well as in large, by the School authorities. As was the case in the Borough's central schools, West Ham High School provided tea to those who were staying late; but since Dr Barnett, the headmistress, considered that this concession necessitated the employment of additional help in the kitchen, it seems likely that tea at West Ham High School was a more lavish affair than that consumed either at the Grove or the Russell.<sup>30</sup>

The audit for 1929 showed that the School's financial position had worsened on the previous year, with the senior department's deficit having risen to £2,738 14s 7d.<sup>31</sup> The School was still spending beyond its means, this demonstrated by the governors querying the refreshment bill for the staff in July 1929. The high cost of these refreshments is not surprising since provisions were ordered from Selfridges but the matter was settled by Dr Barnett agreeing to take greater care in future.<sup>32</sup> These financial problems intensified during 1931 and the audit for that year showed that the senior department's deficit was more than twice that of 1928, standing at £4,613 17s 5d, even the School's preparatory department that had formerly managed to make a profit, had made a small loss.<sup>33</sup> Demonstrating the effects of nation-wide economic difficulties, West Ham High School learnt, in June 1932, that of the four free-places allotted by the School to Essex pupils, Essex was prepared to sanction three. In the same month, the audit for the senior school showed a deficit of over £3,000 although the preparatory department had managed to make a small profit.<sup>34</sup>

The School responded to the difficulties encountered during the early 1930s in various ways. In November 1932, Dr Barnett had laid before the governors an enquiry she had made into parental incomes; this a response to the transformation of free-places into special places. The form used for this purpose was a simple

one, enquiring only into the income of the parents, the number of children in the family and the rent and rates payable each week; it did not have to be signed.<sup>35</sup> In January 1933, Dr Barnett informed the governors that, as some of the School's scholarship holders were in needy circumstances, she was providing such pupils with free school meals and pupils also participated in the milk in schools scheme.<sup>36</sup> By 1934, the general financial situation of the School had improved and the senior department possessed a deficit of only just over £890 but the preparatory was giving some cause for concern since it had a deficit of £116 5s.<sup>37</sup>

The persistence of the governors in applying to the Board of Education for permission to relinquish direct grant status appeared to be rewarded in February 1934. The School received a reply agreeing to the proposal, providing that the following conditions were met: 1) That the whole of the income arising from the School's endowment should be applied to the repayment of the loan taken out for school buildings and 2) that the preparatory school should be entirely self-supporting. The governors, naturally, did not immediately agree to these conditions but referred them for further consideration.<sup>38</sup> Undermining the prospect of new security for the School, the governors learnt in March 1934 that, although Essex was prepared to meet the costs of its pupils on a deficiency basis it could no longer guarantee to West Ham High School a fixed number of pupils in the future as 'new schools were being built in the county that would have to be filled'.<sup>39</sup> In the same month the governors received a letter from the Board of Education postponing the School's change from direct grant status.<sup>40</sup> The years 1936-39, were financially uneventful ones for West Ham High School although, demonstrating that need amongst pupils continued, in February 1938 Dr Barnett reported to the governors on the milk in schools scheme, 290 girls receiving free milk every morning<sup>41</sup> and 140 qualifying for a free hot lunch.<sup>42</sup>



Illustration 2 St Angela's High School 1937.



West Ham Borough records give some information on the financial position of St. Angela's during the interwar years. For the year ending March 1928, the School's total expenditure amounted to £9,824.9s.1d compared to its income of £7,113.6s. There was thus a deficit of over £2,500 to which West Ham Council contributed a sum of almost £1,500. In the same year West Ham High School for Girls had a deficit of approximately £2,000 that was fully paid by the West Ham and Essex Authorities jointly.<sup>43</sup> By 1930, St. Angela's expenditure was £11,091 1s 8d set against an income of £6,932 14s.11d. West Ham only paid a little over £1,900 towards the deficit of more than £4,000. West Ham High School for Girls, on the other hand, had its entire deficit of almost £4,000 paid for by West Ham.<sup>44</sup> St. Angela's did have recourse to the East Ham and Essex Education authorities for contributions towards its deficit but, without access to the School's detailed financial records it is not possible to discover whether or not the deficit was fully covered by the contributions of the three Authorities. It is likely that St. Angela's received donations from the Catholic Church, with Parishes contributing towards the upkeep of pupils from their area, in addition to direct grant aid from the Board of Education. The School authorities, however, were anxious to guard the future finances of St. Angela's. In March 1930, a governors' meeting discussed the detrimental effect that the proposed building of a new central school on nearby land would have on the School. The main fear of the headmistress was that if, as West Ham Council wished, the new central school later became a secondary school this would '...endanger the prosperity of St. Angela's'.<sup>45</sup> This was a valid concern because St. Angela's recruited from the general population and not just from Catholics and such a school in close proximity might certainly have an unwelcome effect. The central school was not built and thus the proposition was never put to the test.

By August 1933, St. Angela's had relinquished direct grant status.<sup>46</sup> The School's deficit was approximately £3,700 for the year ending March 1934, West Ham's contribution to the payment of which was slightly over £1,600.<sup>47</sup> In 1935, the headmistress and governors of St. Angela's were in dispute with the West Ham

Education Committee over the payment of fees for pupils of 16+ who wished to undertake a commercial course at St. Angela's. West Ham Education Committee had decided that it could not grant remission of fees for such pupils since a similar commercial course was taught at the Municipal College. St. Angela's considered that girls who left school to undertake such a course at the Municipal College would '...thus lose the good Sixth Form training' they would experience at St. Angela's.<sup>48</sup> From 1936 to early 1939 St. Angela's was involved in a dispute that had arisen primarily between the East Ham Education Committee and the West Ham Education Committee. East Ham contended that since the number of East Ham pupils at St. Angela's had fallen below the agreed minimum of 110, the Borough's account should accordingly be reduced, despite St. Angela's admitting East Ham children at a preferential rate.<sup>49</sup> The West Ham Education Committee initially tried to persuade St. Angela's to negotiate with the East Ham Committee but the School decided that the matter was one for settlement between the two Authorities only.<sup>50</sup> The difficulty remained unresolved until 1939 when the matter was decided to the satisfaction of all parties. The relationship between St. Angela's and the East Ham, West Ham and Essex Education Committees had stabilised by the late 1930s. Each of the Committees met to discuss the way in which financial assistance could be given to St. Angela's in the future. It was decided that each of the three Authorities should accept financial responsibility for the cost of the education of the average number of approved pupils admitted to the School from its area.<sup>51</sup>

In May 1919, the governors of West Ham Grammar School were discussing the fact that West Ham Council inspectors required an explanation as to why the School had raised its fees, contrary to regulations, since no notification had been sent to Whitehall.<sup>52</sup> By January 1920, the governors had under discussion a number of innovations concerned with the School's relationship with the West Ham Education Committee. These included the proposal that the School should further increase fees for pupils from outside West Ham and that preference for entry should be given to West Ham children.<sup>53</sup> The governors agreed to these

suggestions and, in June 1921, decided to apply to the East Ham and Essex authorities for aid to meet increased expenses.<sup>54</sup> At the beginning of the next month the governors received a letter from East Ham promising to submit proposals for grant aid for the School to its Education Committee.<sup>55</sup> In November 1921, the governors received a letter from the Essex Education Authority refusing the School grant aid in respect of Essex pupils and, in the same month, a new scale of fees were set, these being £3 3s 0d per term for West Ham boys and £4 4s 0d for outside pupils.<sup>56</sup> The governors decided to protest to the East Ham and Essex authorities for their '...unequal treatment' of St. Angela's and West Ham Grammar School and also to ascertain the exact number of boys attending the School who lived in East Ham or Essex so that the School could renew its application for grant aid to the two Authorities'.<sup>57</sup>

Like West Ham High for Girls, West Ham Grammar School experienced financial difficulties during the 1920s and had to apply to the bank for an overdraft when it was refused grant aid at the end of 1921. The governors also decided to apply again to West Ham for grant aid, explaining that East Ham and Essex had refused to help.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile the governors were drawing up detailed information on the number of extra-district pupils in the school, to impress upon the East Ham and Essex authorities the governors' intention of excluding their pupils from the school if no financial provision was made for them.<sup>59</sup> By February 1922, the school had decided to admit no further East Ham or Essex boys. These measures did not immediately cause the Authorities in question to accede to the governors' request, since the East Ham Council refused West Ham Grammar School grant aid, at least for the year 1922-23.<sup>60</sup>

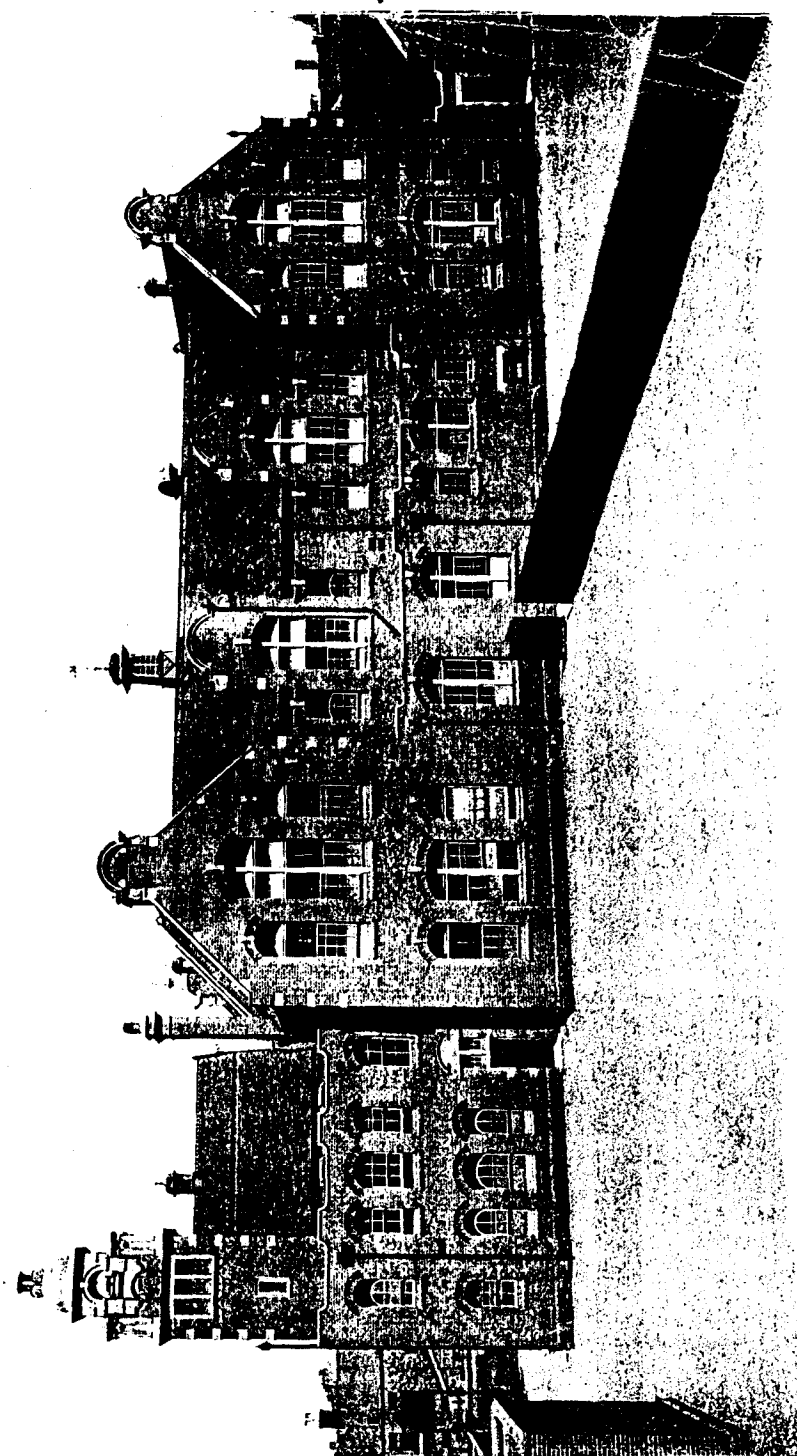
With the need to supplement school finances even more pressing, the governors agreed to increase fees to £18 per annum from 1922. Recognising that such a large rise might impose hardship on current pupils, the governors stated that any such difficulties would be sympathetically dealt with.<sup>61</sup> In the autumn, West Ham

Grammar School received the welcome news that East Ham had decided to allow grant aid towards the costs of its pupils on the condition that it was permitted to choose a representative to sit on the governing Board.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, these measures did not halt a decline in pupil numbers which continued throughout 1923. This decline must have been largely due to the very high fees charged by the school, a marked contrast with the maintained secondary schools and also with the two girls' schools.

At the end of 1923, the governors had negotiated a further overdraft with the bank, West Ham Grammar School finding itself in a similar financial position to West Ham High School.<sup>63</sup> In July 1925, the governors discussed approaching the East Ham Education Committee for increased financial aid for their pupils.<sup>64</sup> East Ham agreed to consider this and, in return, asked, in February 1926, for details of the qualifications of the staff and for inspectors' reports. The governors furnished them with these details. In September 1927, the governors had discovered that the Essex Authority intended partially to reimburse the London and Middlesex Authorities for the fees of Essex pupils in attendance at schools in these Authorities. The governors decided to send a letter to the Essex Education Authority asking that Essex enter into a similar arrangement with West Ham.<sup>65</sup>

In October 1933, the governors discussed a proposal to relinquish direct grant status but decided that, as the school drew pupils from East Ham and Essex, as well as West Ham, this would not be possible, since the School could not surrender the financial security direct grant gave.<sup>66</sup> The governors' minutes contain few items of note during 1934, 1935 and 1936. The minutes are quite brief and the governors only met two or three times a year. Indeed, for the remainder of the pre-war years, 1937, 1938 and 1939, the only reports which were regularly made were on the number of boys in attendance at school, which ranged from approximately 204 to 215, with occasional mentions of entrants for public examinations and the staging of school plays.<sup>67</sup>

Illustration 3 West Ham Municipal Secondary School 1930s.



### **4.3.2 Staffing.**

No staff records remain for West Ham Grammar School, the Municipal Secondary or Plaistow Secondary School for the interwar period but both the archives of West Ham High School and St. Angela's contain some details of mistresses and their qualifications. By the middle 1930s, West Ham High School employed 41 teachers, including Dr Barnett. Of these, 24 possessed at least a first degree and among the graduate mistresses, nine held a B.Sc. in science, 11 a BA in an arts subject and one an arts and science qualification. Three mistresses held a higher degree. Of the non-graduate mistresses, seven had obtained Teachers' Certificates or Diplomas from various training colleges and, of these, one had obtained a Board of Education Teachers' Diploma in Domestic Science and a Diploma in needlework. One member of staff had been a pupil teacher at West Ham High School from 1900-1902 and was continuing her unbroken service. Two mistresses held the Teachers' Certificate of the National Froebel Union and four mistresses had been trained in Bergman Osterberg Training colleges and held the Bergman Osterberg Diploma. The School also employed, on a temporary basis, four teachers to cover staff absences (including, as has already been seen, Miss Ellis) in addition to three visiting music mistresses. There was a preponderance of unmarried women on the staff of West Ham High School. No male teachers were employed and of the 41 female teachers only four had the title 'Mrs'. Dates of birth are given for 33 of the staff and of these 23 were aged 40 or under. Since married women were discouraged by both custom and legislation from working as teachers during the period, the composition of the staff was not at odds with the national situation.<sup>68</sup>

St. Angela's employed 23 members of staff by the middle 1930s of whom 13 held a degree. Four mistresses had obtained a science or mathematics degree, seven an arts degree and two a higher degree. There were ten non-graduate mistresses. No details or qualifications are given for two of these ladies but, of the eight for whom

such details are recorded, one possessed an Art Teachers' Certificate, one a Certificate of Proficiency in French, one a Chelsea College of Physical Education Diploma and one a Domestic Science Diploma. Of the other four members of staff for whom details are given, one had obtained an Elementary School Teachers' Certificate and the remaining three had passed various local examinations. The records make no distinction between mistresses who were members of the Ursuline Order and lay-staff but, of 23 members of staff, only one had the title 'Mrs', nine having 'Miss' and the remaining 13 had no title.<sup>69</sup>

No local records remain for the staffs of West Ham Grammar School for Boys, the Municipal Secondary School or Plaistow Secondary School. Board of Education reports, however, give some idea of the relative merits of the schools' staffs. West Ham Grammar School had difficulty with the quality of some of its staff but the staff of the Municipal Secondary School were considered excellent to good and those of the Plaistow Secondary near to this level of ability. With regard to the two girls' schools, although pupil rolls were approximately equal and both possessed preparatory departments, it is surprising that West Ham High School for Girls maintained a staff of 41 compared to St. Angela's 23 teachers. The impression of West Ham High School for Girls, with an average pupil roll of 400, being somewhat overstaffed is strengthened by a consideration of the number of teachers employed at the Borough's other three secondary schools during the mid 1930s. West Ham Grammar School, with a pupil roll of approximately 200, employed nine full-time and two part-time teachers, while the Municipal Secondary School, with almost 650 pupils, retained 34 full-time teachers plus one visiting. Plaistow Secondary School, with a pupil roll of almost 550 employed 26 full-time and two part-time teachers.<sup>70</sup>

The official policy of economy affected security of tenure for teachers in two ways, both of which could lead to the displacement of school masters and mistresses. First, the standard of qualification of staff could be lowered and secondly, the



raising of fees in secondary schools could lead to a fall in the number of pupils and a subsequent reduction in the number of teachers employed. The policy imposed serious hardship on the individual selected for dismissal since if a teacher could not obtain a new position on the open market he or she would probably face unemployment and, in addition, pension rights would be imperilled. The most notorious tenure case during the interwar years occurred in Haverfordwest Grammar School in Pembrokeshire. The governors gave notice to five members of staff in order to initiate curriculum changes and, despite the disapproval of the local Education Committee and representations from teachers' unions, including the NUT, the governors of the endowed grammar school remained adamant and the teachers remained dismissed.<sup>71</sup>

Governors' minutes for West Ham High School mention staff mainly in the context of increases and decreases in salary although, as will be seen, a serious conflict, similar to the Haverfordwest affair, did occur between teachers and the school authorities during the period 1918-39, reaching the attention of a teachers' union and the West Ham Education Committee. In 1924, the headmistress of West Ham High School, Miss Atkins decided to retire and in February of that year, Dr Barnett was chosen as her successor. The new headmistress commenced a series of curricular innovations, one of which, the engagement of additional science teachers in June 1925, precipitated the dissension referred to above. Miss Ellis, a geography teacher of long standing at the school, was asked to leave at the end of term in order that a science teacher could be engaged in her place. This decision was made with no regard for the feelings or future prospects of the teacher concerned and, not surprisingly, Miss Ellis declined to be summarily dismissed and requested a meeting with the governors.<sup>72</sup> The meeting was set for October 1925 and Miss Ellis attended with the Secretary of the Association of Assistant Mistresses, who proceeded to put her case to the governors. It was stated that Miss Ellis, who possessed only a pass degree in geography, would experience difficulty in obtaining another post because honours degrees were increasingly in demand. This argument left the governors unmoved, as did the fact that Miss Ellis,

who was then at the top of her salary scale, might be considered too expensive to employ by another school; indeed, this was possibly one of the reasons she was chosen for dismissal in the first place.<sup>73</sup> The remaining staff wrote a letter to the governors in support of their colleague suggesting that they reconsider their decision and asking, specifically, that Miss Ellis be permitted to keep her post if she had not found alternative employment by Easter.<sup>74</sup> This united front had some effect on the governors because they agreed to extend Miss Ellis's contract until July 1926. That the governors were displeased at being so pressurised is demonstrated by their reply to the staff which stated that they wished to '...convey to the staff that it must be distinctly understood that the subject will not again be re-opened and the concession is only made on the understanding that the organisation and discipline of the school is not impaired during the extended period.'<sup>75</sup> In March 1926, the staff, unabashed by these strictures, once again applied to the governors on behalf of their colleague, asking that they use their influence to secure a post for Miss Ellis at the new Plaistow Secondary School. There is no evidence that the governors did intervene in any way and, indeed, Miss Ellis, with only four years left before retirement, remained unable to secure further employment and the School governors, admitting partial defeat at the hands of their staff, agreed to employ Miss Ellis as a 'supply' teacher for as long as pupil numbers merited it.<sup>76</sup> In this case, it appears that the solidarity of the staff was a factor in persuading the governors to reconsider their attitude to Miss Ellis, although a concern not to lose West Ham free-place scholars may also have been an influence.

In early 1930s, Dr Barnett was again experiencing difficulties with a member of staff. The headmistress had approached the governors, accusing Miss Davidge, a PE teacher, of insubordination and demanded that she be required to hand in her notice.<sup>77</sup> Miss Davidge's insubordination consisted of writing to a HMI against the wishes of her headmistress.<sup>78</sup> After a hearing of the governors, Miss Davidge was permitted to apologise and keep her post.<sup>79</sup> Surprisingly, in view of her earlier travails, Miss Ellis was still being employed as a supply teacher in 1932 but, by

March of the following year, Dr Barnett and the governors were discussing plans to reorganise the preparatory school. The reorganisation was in response to the decreasing profit made by the department and the savings were to be made on teachers' salaries by employing non-graduate rather than graduate staff, as was then the practice. Miss Ellis was employed in the preparatory department at that time. By May, the governors had dismissed all three members of the preparatory staff and replacement teachers were already being interviewed.<sup>80</sup> The School was not allowed to dismiss its entire preparatory staff with impunity. West Ham Education Committee wrote to the School stating that at a meeting of the Elementary Education sub-committee, the matter of the dismissed teachers and their 'long-service' had been brought up and the Council wished to be informed of the reason for the actions of the governors.<sup>81</sup> In addition, the Association of Assistant Mistresses in Secondary Schools also wrote to the School asking for the reinstatement of the teachers.<sup>82</sup> Even this pressure did not, on this occasion, result in the reversal of the governors' decision, perhaps because Miss Ellis, at least, was not qualified to teach younger children and also because all three ladies had been paid at secondary school rates despite the fact that they taught in the preparatory department.<sup>83</sup>

The lack of detailed records for St. Angela's make it difficult to discover if the convent staff ever found themselves in conflict with school authorities as in the case of Miss Ellis and West Ham High School for Girls. There is no mention of such difficulties in such records as remain and the likelihood of disagreements is small due to a number of factors unique to St. Angela's. Although staff records do not make distinctions between teaching nuns and lay mistresses, the majority of the staff of St. Angela's during the 1920s and 1930s were members of the Ursuline order. The religious discipline of the time emphasised obedience and teaching staff who were also nuns would not have questioned School authorities lightly. Lay members of staff, too would have been constrained by similar considerations. Surplus staff would not have produced the same financial pressures at St. Angela's as they did at West Ham High School for Girls. Teaching nuns no longer required

at St. Angela's, the Mother House, could easily transfer to one of the Order's other convent schools at Ilford, Greenwich or Wimbledon. Such movement between schools was, in any case, common practice, remaining so until the present day.

### **4.3.3 Curriculum.**

Each of West Ham's five secondary schools during the interwar period naturally adhered to a secondary school curriculum. The 1904 'Regulations for Secondary Schools' had defined very clearly the curriculum to be followed by secondary schools provided by the local authorities. They required that science be taught and that provision had to be made for a minimum of four and a half hours a week for the study of English, history and geography, three and a half for one language and six for two languages, and seven and a half for science and mathematics.<sup>84</sup> Although this essential curriculum, English, maths, history, geography etc., was common to each of the schools, there were subject inclusions and exclusions specific to various schools. The reason for a subject such as German being included in the curriculum of one school but not another was generally due to a headteacher's enthusiasm or to the availability of a specialist teacher. The two girls' schools added to the general curriculum subjects thought suitable for girls, such as domestic science, homecraft and, in the case of West Ham High School for Girls, child care. These subjects were not open to boys. Schools varied in the attention allotted to various subjects and this too could be subject to headteacherly whim or to the competence or otherwise of subject teachers.

West Ham Council's 1923 publication, *The book of West Ham* gave curriculum details for three of the four secondary schools. Plaistow Secondary School had not yet been built and the particulars of West Ham Grammar School had not arrived by the time the book went to print. The Municipal Secondary School provided a liberal education suitable for those who would follow a professional, official or

business career on leaving school. The Upper Fifth form was split into two divisions. One course prepared pupils for the General Schools or Matriculation examinations of the University of London. The other was for pupils who wished to follow a commercial career and who took Civil Service and RSA examinations. Pupils were able to take Higher Schools examinations in Modern Studies, two years after matriculation. West Ham High School provided a good general education for girls up to the age of 18. The curriculum included the study of science, two languages, mathematics, class singing, art, needlework and gymnastics. In connection with the English teaching, much stress was laid upon pupil's private reading, in order that they might be able to '...discriminate between good and bad literature'. Pupils were prepared for the London Matriculation and London General School examinations. St. Angela's provided an advanced course in Modern Studies (English, French, history, Latin and mathematics), enabling pupils to stay at school until the age of 18 and take the London University Higher certificate, exempting from Inter Arts. Pupils were also prepared for London University Inter Science.<sup>85</sup>

In an HMI's report of 1932, St. Angela's was reputed to have a recognised course in Modern Studies, the subjects studied being English, History and French. Geography, Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics were taken to Higher Certificate. Biology was taken in the Fifth Form. The Headmistress, Mother Mary Angela, according to the HMI, believed that syllabuses were too much dominated by a curriculum necessary for university entrance and would have been '...satisfied with English, Music, Drawing, Needlework, Botany for a School Certificate'. The HMI's report on West Ham Grammar School, made at the same time, commented that all the boys in the Sixth Form took a course leading to the Higher School Certificate, most studying English, Latin, French or Mathematics. The 1932 HMI's report on the Municipal Secondary School stated that in the Sixth Form there were two recognised courses leading to the Higher School Certificate, one consisting of Science and Mathematics and the other of English, History, French and Latin. The study of German was being introduced into the Sixth Form. One Fifth Form did

not take Science or Mathematics, other than Arithmetic, but studied Shorthand, Bookkeeping, Office Routine and Typewriting. The report made on Plaistow Secondary School was less full because the building had only been completed in 1930 and the first candidates entered for the General School Certificate in 1931. The School had a four form entry and Latin was taught in the A form and German in the B form.<sup>86</sup>

In the following table curriculum details for West Ham's secondary schools are shown. WHHS stands for West Ham High School for Girls, ST. A for St. Angela's, WHGS for West Ham Grammar School, MSS for the Municipal Secondary School and PSS for Plaistow Secondary School.

**Figure 4.4 Curriculum details for West Ham's secondary schools 1918-39.**

Subjects	WHHS	ST. A	WHGS	MSS	PSS
English	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
History	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
R.E.	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Geography	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mathematics	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
French	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
German	no	no	no	yes <sup>a</sup>	yes <sup>a</sup>
Latin	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Spanish	no	no	no	no	yes
Music	yes	yes	no	no	no
Needlework	yes	yes	no	yes <sup>b</sup>	yes <sup>b</sup>
Domestic science	yes	yes	no	yes <sup>c</sup>	yes <sup>c</sup>
Housecraft	yes	no	no	no	no
Handicraft	no	no	yes	yes <sup>d</sup>	no
P.E	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Child care	yes <sup>e</sup>	no	no	no	no
Office skills	yes <sup>f</sup>	yes	no	yes	yes
Art	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Chemistry	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Physics	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Biology	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

a) From early 1930s; b) For girls; c) From mid 1920s; d) For boys;

e) From mid 1920s; f) From mid 1920s.

*Source:* Schools' records and West Ham Education Committee records 1918-39.

Between 1918 and 1939 the curriculum for all five secondary schools was basically similar. West Ham High School for Girls and the two municipal secondary schools introduced a number of new subjects into their curricula during the 1920s and 1930s, generally languages and practical subjects, but the curriculum in the two Catholic schools remained slightly more conservative. From the mid 1920s, under Dr Barnett the curriculum at West Ham High School became broader with the introduction of domestic science and childcare subjects. Dr Barnett's new science scheme, drawn up at the end of 1924, was never a complete success and in January 1931, the Board of Education asked the School for an explanation for the small numbers of pupils taking the advanced course in Science and Maths.<sup>87</sup> This was an urgent matter for the Board because in February of the same year it contacted West Ham High School to make it clear that unless numbers for the Advanced course increased, recognition might cease.<sup>88</sup> The decline continued and, in February 1933, the Board withdrew recognition for the course and modern studies was substituted in its place.<sup>89</sup> The failure of this course was probably influenced by the perceived lack of suitability of Science and Maths as subjects for girls to study, current at the time and continuing to the present day.

By the 1930s, each of the five schools entered pupils for School Certificate and Higher School Certificate, and the curriculum reflected the influence of these important examinations. The School Certificate was based on a general curriculum taken by 16 year old pupils and the Higher School Certificate, taken two years later, examined on a more specialised curriculum, chosen from one of three groups of subjects: Classics, Modern Languages, Science and Mathematics.<sup>90</sup> Surviving governors' minutes sometimes give brief details of these examinations but generally only when there was some exceptional success or disappointment to report. In 1922, five girls from West Ham High School took the London Matriculation examination and four passed.<sup>91</sup> In 1927, eight girls passed the same examination and one pupil gained the Higher School Certificate.<sup>92</sup> In 1934, ten pupils gained exemption from matriculation and one girl passed the Higher School Certificate.<sup>93</sup> In 1936, nine pupils matriculated but of three entrants, only one was successful in



the Higher School Certificate though she was awarded a State Scholarship.<sup>94</sup> In 1937, 13 pupils matriculated and two out of three candidates gained the Higher School Certificate.<sup>95</sup> In 1939, a pupil gained an open scholarship to the Royal Holloway College and received a letter of congratulation from the governors.<sup>96</sup>

St. Angela's examination results for the period are only given in any detail for 1935 and 1936. In 1936 from unspecified numbers of candidates, 22 girls passed the General Certificate and four girls the Higher Certificate. In 1935 pupils had taken and passed the Association of Convent Schools Religious Certificate Examination, a religious examination particularly for Catholic convent school girls. Pupils took various secretarial examinations. In 1936 ten girls passed in Pitman's Theory and 12 in Pitman's Speed, 14 pupils passed London Chamber of Commerce Typewriting examinations and nine Royal Society of Arts Book-keeping.<sup>97</sup>

West Ham Grammar School records are sparse and give minimal information about examination successes. As was the case with West Ham High School, details tended to be given when exceptional results were obtained. In September 1927, 82 per cent of those presented for the Cambridge Certificate examination passed, 23 out of 28 pupils being successful.<sup>98</sup> In September 1929, the governors described the results of the London General Certificate as very satisfactory, with 20 out of 26 candidates passing, seven with matriculation.<sup>99</sup> In September 1937, of 20 candidates for the General School Certificate, 17 were successful, ten with matriculation.<sup>100</sup> Records for the Municipal Secondary School and Plaistow Secondary School are very incomplete and, although such HMI and Borough reports as do exist, as well as hearsay evidence, confirm that the Municipal Secondary School in particular enjoyed a very high reputation and excellent academic results, there are a few detailed examples of this fact. Plaistow Secondary School has fragmentary records, unfortunately undated, which suggest that, probably during the 1930s, the School achieved a record number of

matriculations for any school in the country, 41 out of 81 candidates being successful.<sup>101</sup>

#### **4.3.4 Pupils and parents.**

West Ham's five secondary schools drew the majority of their pupils from West Ham, with additions from East Ham and Essex in the case of the aided secondary schools. In 1922 an HMI reported on the social composition of the schools. The Inspector noted that at the Municipal Secondary School almost all the pupils were ex-elementary school pupils. Fee-paying pupils, as was the general rule in most secondary schools of the period, tended to be those who came next below children who gained free-places in the scholarship examination. West Ham's three other existing secondary schools admitted pupils from attached preparatory departments, leading the Inspector to imply that standards in these schools, for fee-payers, were unlikely to be equal to that of free-place pupils. The use of preparatory departments to fill places could lower standards. Despite these comments, the Inspector considered that there was '...much evidence of good quality of pupils' admitted to each of the schools and that a fairly high standard was set for the scholarship examination.<sup>102</sup> This situation was not an unusual one. Kenneth Lindsay, in 1926, calculated that of half a million children who left elementary school each year, only 9.5 per cent proceeded to secondary school. Of this 9.5 per cent only one third were non-fee-paying working-class children.<sup>103</sup>

Few references are made to individual parents in the school records which remain. Those that do exist are mainly concerned with the efforts of governing bodies to recover unpaid fees from parents or with correspondence from parents seeking to obtain a remission of fees for their children, due to absence for illness or the financial difficulty of the parents. As can be seen in Figure 4.13, in 1920 almost 32 per cent of new entrants to West Ham secondary schools were in receipt of

free-places and this rose to over 46 per cent by 1926. This does not imply that the remainder of the Borough's secondary pupils were fee-payers since West Ham secondary schools accepted scholarship holders from other areas such as East Ham and Essex. It can be roughly estimated that, with out-Borough pupils, during the 1920s the proportion of pupils whose parents paid no fees could range from 40 to 50 per cent. During the 1930s the proportion was probably 75 to 80 per cent. This increase could be attributed to the opening of Plaistow Secondary School that was operating at full capacity and with a large majority of free-places by the early 1930s. West Ham was also supplying more than twice as many scholarship places during the 1930s as it had in the years immediately after the Great War and this influenced the figures. West Ham's records give little or no information on the financial contribution made by parents when the free-place system was replaced by special places. It is likely that many scholarship holders qualified for completely free education since in a poor area such as West Ham a general requirement to pay fees or part-fees would have led to public consternation and to many more instances of scholarships being refused solely for financial reasons.

During 1935, nine girls left West Ham High School due to the inability of their parents to pay school fees.<sup>104</sup> The Governors of West Ham High School had sometimes to exercise charity to individual pupils. In 1937 the Governors authorised the purchase of a new uniform for one pupil and, indeed, the School could be both realistic and compassionate with regard to the payment of overdue fees from pupils who had left without official sanction, at one point writing off all moneys outstanding previous to Christmas 1936.<sup>105</sup> As late as February 1938, 290 girls still received free milk each morning from a school roll of 434. Thus 66 per cent of West Ham High School for Girls pupils were deemed eligible for this concession.<sup>106</sup> These examples show that the Depression years of the 1930s were difficult ones for all sections of West Ham society, for the parents of scholarship holders but also for those who had to pay full fees for their children. In the 1930s, the replacement of the free-place system by special places whereby parents were required to contribute towards fees on the basis of income eased the finances of

LEAs, but resulted in better-off working-class parents having to pay fees, a situation they had not faced during the 1920s.<sup>107</sup> In West Ham too, this, combined with increased unemployment undoubtedly caused difficulties for some families as demonstrated by the practical help West Ham High School was forced to extend to pupils, particularly during the 1930s. Pupil numbers at the schools though, remained fairly constant throughout the decade, and, indeed, at the end of the 1930s West Ham High School was educating approximately 100 more girls than it had at the beginning of the 1920s. Pupils at St. Angela's were also sometimes required to leave school because of financial difficulties at home. During 1936 six pupils left for this reason.<sup>108</sup> Despite this, although detailed records are not available it is clear that St. Angela's, too, possessed a larger pupil roll by the outbreak of the Second World War than at the end of the Great War. An increase in pupil numbers also occurred at West Ham Grammar School, although on a small scale, with the School roll consisting of 180 boys in 1918 and 215 in 1939. Numbers at the Municipal Secondary School also rose slightly over a period of ten years. Plaistow Secondary School's numbers rose due to additional year-groups joining the School from its opening in 1926. These figures are an indication that the efforts of both the West Ham Education Committee and the schools themselves were ensuring that increasing numbers of pupils were both gaining and retaining secondary school places during the 1930s despite the extreme economic difficulties of the time. It is difficult to analyse the attitude of parents to secondary education since, as in most areas of the country, West Ham residents displayed varying opinions. It is true though to say that West Ham's introduction of a preliminary examination met with little opposition and that 40 to 50 per cent of parents permitted their offspring, even those with little chance of success, the opportunity to compete for a secondary scholarship.

**Figure 4.5 West Ham High School for Girls pupil rolls 1918-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1918	321
1919	304
1920	368
1921	361
1922	362
1923	303
1924	348
1925	367
1926	360 (estimated)
1927	408
1928	400 (estimated)
1929	399
1930	400 (estimated)
1931	394
1932	400 (estimated)
1933	400 (estimated)
1934	400 (estimated)
1935	444
1936	435
1937	438
1938	434
1939	430 (estimated)

*Source:* West Ham High School for Girls' records 1918-39.

**Figure 4.6 St. Angela's High School pupil rolls 1918-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1918 to 1935	350-380 (estimated)
1936	363
1937	370
1938	400 (estimated)
1939	400 (estimated)

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1918-39.

**Figure 4.7 West Ham Grammar School for Boys pupil rolls 1918-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1918	180 (estimated)
1919	180 (estimated)
1920	180 (estimated)
1921	180 (estimated)
1922	184
1923	172
1924	164
1925	160 (estimated)
1926	160 (estimated)
1927	160 (estimated)
1928	160 (estimated)
1929	171
1930	180 (estimated)
1931	236 (highest on record)
1932	227
1933	210 (estimated)
1934	210 (estimated)
1935	215
1936	210
1937	204
1938	210 (estimated)
1939	215

*Source:* West Ham Grammar School for Boys' records 1918-39.

**Figure 4.8 The Municipal Secondary School and Plaistow Secondary School pupil rolls 1923, 1932 and 1936.**

School	1923	1932	1936
The Municipal secondary	627	646	624
Plaistow secondary	N/A	535	573

*Source: The book of West Ham Official Publications Bureau (1923) pp.96-97 and PRO ED 53/693.*

West Ham secondary school records give an indication of the social factors which influenced selection for secondary education. As is apparent from the figures below, throughout the interwar period the percentage of the age-group attending secondary school in West Ham was far below the national average. In 1920, 5.2 per cent of West Ham 11 years olds attended a secondary school compared with an average for England and Wales of 9.5, and the disparity continued in 1938 with figures of 8.5 and 14.3 per cent respectively. Since the number of candidates for places at West Ham's secondary schools always exceeded places available the low proportion of entrants cannot be explained by lack of demand for a secondary school education but was attributable to scarcity of accommodation both for scholarship pupils and for those who would acquire a secondary education by paying fees. Pupils from other boroughs attended West Ham schools and West Ham pupils were enrolled in outside secondary schools, notably those controlled by the LCC, indeed, at times, even the West Ham Education Committee was uncertain as to how many of its schoolchildren were being educated beyond West Ham and thus slightly more West Ham pupils may have been undergoing a secondary education from 1920-38 than are accounted for in the figures below. The opening of Plaistow Secondary School in 1926 was a response to this difficulty in providing sufficient accommodation, as was the proposal to found additional new secondary schools in the Borough, none of which was ever built.



In 1920 the percentage of secondary school boys in West Ham who were free-place scholars was 41.1 compared with a figure of 22.7 for girls. This apparent inequality may be explained by the fact that, whilst boys and girls were allotted identical numbers of scholarships that year, 41 each, West Ham's vast excess of places for girls compared with those for boys meant that places at the two aided girls' schools in particular were filled by outside scholars and fee-paying pupils. Free-place pupils from other boroughs were not, of course, included in West Ham's free-place figures and thus the total number of free-place scholars attending West Ham's girls' schools was probably higher than shown. By 1932 the percentage of West Ham girls awarded special places was greater than that for boys, as was the case in 1938. In addition, the secondary school places for girls at Plaistow Secondary School were almost all free and this increased the percentage of free-places for girls overall.

**Figure 4.9 A comparison of the percentage of boys/girls who obtained free or special places in West Ham secondary schools in selected years from 1920-38.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
1920	41.1	22.7
1926	52.1	41.1
1932	74.1	84.1
1938	69.4	73.5

Source: West Ham Education Committee records 1920-38.

**Figure 4.10 The percentage of free-places amongst new entrants at West Ham secondary schools in selected years 1920-38 compared with figures for England and Wales.**

Year	West Ham	England and Wales
1920	31.9	30.3
1926	46.6	38.8
1932	79.1	48.7
1938	71.45	47.3

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1920-38 and B. Simon. *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* (1974) Lawrence and Wishart p.364.

In 1920 the percentage of West Ham free-places at West Ham's aided secondary schools was 25 per cent in all cases as opposed to 57 per cent at the Municipal Secondary School. By 1926, with the opening of Plaistow Secondary School, the Municipal Secondary School had been allotted slightly less free-places and the aided secondary schools more, leading to greater equality in the distribution of free-places between the five schools. The large proportion of free-place entrants at the Borough's two municipal secondary schools throughout the late 1920s and 1930s may be compared with the smaller percentages both at West Ham High School for Girls and St. Angela's and can be explained by the Schools' status as aided institutions for girls. The fact that the overwhelming percentage of 11 year olds attending West Ham Grammar School from the late 1920s onwards were free-place scholars may be attributed to the West Ham Education Committee's decision to reserve 50 per cent of the School's annual entry for its free-places. This coupled with additional free-places awarded to the School for its own use resulted in extremely high numbers of non-fee paying pupils. The figures for all three aided schools are complicated by the fact that the Schools also accepted free-place scholars from East Ham and Essex thus increasing the actual numbers of free-place pupils admitted each year, not accounted for in the Figure 4.11 below.

**Figure 4.11 Average proportions of free place/fee-payers new entrants for each of West Ham's secondary schools during selected years 1920-38.**

School	1920	1926	1932	1938
WHHS	25/75	37/63	53/47	53/47
ST.A	25/75	37/63	45/55	45/55
WHGS	25/75	37/63	90/10	90/10
MSS	57/43	56/44	74/26	85/15
PSS	-	50/50	79/21	83/17

*Source:* West Ham Education Committee records 1920-38.

Although the Catholic population of West Ham accounted for only about ten per cent of the whole, as can be seen from Figure 4.12 entrants to the two Catholic secondary schools combined in 1920 were one-third of the total for that year. St. Angela's admitted non-Catholic girls, although there are no figures available as to how many, and also took pupils from neighbouring boroughs. There were roughly 15-18 West Ham scholarships tenable at the School each year and these, in fact, made up approximately 5 per cent of the available secondary school places, with entrants to West Ham Grammar School comprising the other 4-5 per cent. St. Angela's in particular consistently complained throughout the period that it was not being allotted sufficient numbers of scholarships to ensure fairness. By 1926 the percentage of entrants to West Ham's Catholic schools had dropped to 25 per cent of entrants to all West Ham secondary schools and by the 1930s to 21 per cent. This was not due to an exodus of Catholics from the area but to the founding of Plaistow Secondary School which supplied additional secondary school places, whilst the number of new entrants the two Catholic schools could accept remained approximately the same as in the period shortly after the First World War.

**Figure 4.12 The percentage of entrants to Catholic/non-Catholic secondary schools in selected years 1920-38.**

Denomination	1920	1926	1932	1938
Catholic	33	25	21	21
Non-Catholic	67	75	89	89

*Source:* Schools' records and West Ham Education Committee records 1920-38.

None of West Ham's five secondary schools has preserved complete pupil registers for the period 1918-39 but Education Committee reports give addresses of scholarship winners and thus an indication of which areas of the Borough were most successful in producing secondary school pupils. Although it might be reasonable to suppose that candidates from West Ham's more affluent districts, such as Forest Gate and Stratford, gained more free-places than children living in the dockside neighbourhoods, this, from samples taken from Committee records at intervals during the years 1918-39, was not necessarily the case. In 1918, 20 boys and girls from Forest Gate gained free-places as opposed to 26 children from Plaistow<sup>109</sup> one of West Ham's poorer quarters, and this pattern was repeated in 1923, when 21 children from Forest Gate gained free-places compared to 23 boys and girls from Plaistow.<sup>110</sup> By 1933, Forest Gate was producing only 26 scholarship winners compared to Plaistow that had gained 38 such places.<sup>111</sup> These figures do not prove that children in the Plaistow area of West Ham were academically more able than those in Forest Gate and the other socially aspiring areas of the Borough. Plaistow contained a greater population than, for example, Forest Gate, by a ratio, during the period of approximately 3.5:1 because of the habit of letting and sub-letting any single dwelling. Thus larger numbers of children resided in the area, producing a greater volume of candidates for scholarships and a greater likelihood that Plaistow schoolchildren would gain a free-place. If populations were made equal the relative failure of Plaistow children

to gain scholarships is made clear. Since, in 1918, 20 Forest Gate children gained a secondary school place,<sup>112</sup> at least 60 Plaistow children should have been successful; in fact, only 26 Plaistow candidates gained a scholarship.<sup>113</sup> By the 1930s, Plaistow candidates were gaining more scholarships but were still not achieving the volume of scholarships their greater numbers required. In 1918, only nine children from Silvertown gained a secondary school place compared with 20 children from Forest Gate, a district comparable in population terms. These small numbers may be attributed to some extent to the deprivation of the area and to its relatively low population, since Silvertown was a small residential enclave in a sea of docks. By 1933, Silvertown candidates were gaining more secondary scholarships than those from Forest Gate,<sup>114</sup> a fact not easy to explain. This may have been due to increased confidence and opportunity afforded to children in the dockside areas and to the fact that, in theory, all West Ham children were encouraged to sit for a scholarship. On the other hand, the most likely explanation was simply that Forest Gate parents were prepared to pay for the education of their boys and girls and entered their children for secondary school places as fee-payers or enrolled them in one of the handful of private schools in the Borough.

**Figure 4.13 Relative populations of West Ham districts in 1921 (a representative year).**

Districts	Population
Stratford	51,849
Forest Gate	19,445
Upton Park	18,244
West Ham	33,344
Plaistow	68,686
Canning Town	28,382
Silvertown	16,015 (estimated)

*Source: Kelly's Directory of Essex 1921 p.288.*

West Ham records give little information on the extent of refusal of scholarship places by pupils who had been awarded them. The Education Committee compiled detailed statistics on the numbers in attendance and reasons for leaving of students at its continuation institutes, but gave only brief mention of children who refused a secondary place outright, generally confining itself to stating that the rejected places had been allotted to children next on the scholarship list. The Council supplied one breakdown of such refusals in 1938, refusals of secondary school places and central school places being combined.

**Figure 4.14 The reasons for refusal of secondary school special places and central school places in West Ham in 1938.**

Reason	Boys	Girls
Migrated to other areas	11	6
Deceased	1	0
Accepted Governors' special places and fee-paying places	14	28
No reason given	17	22
Total	43	56

*Source:* West Ham Education sub-Committee records Vol. XXXVB 3/10/38 p.518.

The migration of scholars to other areas was a common event in West Ham during the 1920s and 1930s. Its occurrence was connected with the expansion of suburban London and with the perception of West Ham as an almost exclusively working-class town, from which those who aspired to an improved social standing were likely to move. In June 1932 three secondary school scholars transferred from West Ham secondary schools to those in East Ham, Ilford and Croydon.<sup>115</sup> Secondary school scholars did move into the West Ham area, three in that month, but the majority came from the LCC and formed part of the drift from the old inner city areas already remarked upon in Chapter One. In September 1933 this

migration was still more marked with 18 pupils leaving West Ham for secondary schools in East Ham, Ilford, Barking, Dagenham, Romford, Essex, Leyton, Golders Green, Laindon, Westcliff and Somerset. Three secondary school scholars from East Ham and Essex entered West Ham secondary schools in the same month.<sup>116</sup> The figures for 1938 above indicate that the dispersal of families into the suburbs was continuing. The tragic death of one pupil before he could take up his scholarship is a very sad reminder of the fact that diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria and pneumonia were all prevalent in West Ham during the interwar period and were frequently killers of children. Children also died by the agency of road and swimming accidents. Governors' special places were additional free-places offered at West Ham's aided secondary schools and were sometimes chosen by pupils in preference to a place at one of the Borough's municipal secondary schools. The reason for this preference may have been the wish for a Catholic or single-sex education or a desire for both combined. It is probable that pupils who had taken up fee-paying places in West Ham secondary schools had been unsuccessful at obtaining special place entry to secondary school but had qualified for a place at central school. The refusal of such central school places and a willingness to pay fees points to a recognition amongst parents of the educational and social advantages inherent in a secondary as opposed to a central school education. No reason was given for the refusal of 17 boys and 22 girls to take up secondary school scholarship places in 1938, and it is difficult not to infer that financial constraints on the part of parents were the cause. The West Ham Education Committee, having been sufficiently interested to compile these statistics did not order any further investigation into the matter but only stated that the vacant awards had been accepted by candidates next in order on the examination list.<sup>117</sup>

West Ham secondary school pupils generally entered employment at the end of their course. Small numbers of pupils, possibly between one and four pupils a year from each school, went on to university, usually aided by West Ham's own university maintenance scheme detailed in Chapter Three. Occasionally pupils

gained state scholarships to university. This national scholarship system had been instituted with the award of 200 scholarships in 1920 and by 1936 360 scholarships were being awarded. Competition for these scholarships was intense and by the 1930s only one candidate in every 14 to 18 was successful.<sup>118</sup> The *Stratford Express* reported some of these exceptional successes. In December 1929, under the heading 'From school to university', an article described how Charles Collins, who was not yet 17, had won an open scholarship of £100 to Balliol College, Oxford from the Municipal Secondary School.<sup>119</sup> In January 1930, the same paper reported the success of Robert Barnes, a close friend of Charles Collins and also a Municipal Secondary School pupil, who had gained a scholarship worth £40 per annum to St. Catherine's College, Cambridge. This was reported as 'Another example of a ladder going from the elementary school to the university by means of the facilities offered by the West Ham Education Committee'.<sup>120</sup> West Ham's other secondary school pupils also achieved entrance to university. In 1936, a West Ham High School for Girls pupil won an open scholarship to the Royal Holloway College and, in acknowledgement of her achievement, the School was granted an extra day's holiday by the governors.<sup>121</sup>

Pupils from St. Angela's, West Ham Grammar School for Boys and Plaistow Secondary School all gained university entrance during the period, but almost no records remain for individual pupils and their successes. Many St. Angela's pupils who remained at school beyond the age of 16 entered the School's 'Modern VI' course from which girls went on to gain good posts in offices. The importance of clerical work as a regular means of employment for West Ham school leavers is shown by the measures taken by West Ham Council in 1932 when such employment was beginning to be in short supply. In addition to compiling a register of ex-pupils of the Borough's two municipal secondary schools (pupils from West Ham's aided secondary schools were not included in the scheme) the Council ensured that local firms were canvassed and that pupils were informed of examinations for posts in the Civil Service and with the LCC etc.<sup>122</sup> Records are scarce as regards the future careers of pupils from West Ham's secondary schools.



In addition to school leavers who took up clerical employment, some became teachers and, as reported above, a small number went on to university each year. In December 1933, the Principal of King's College, London presented the prizes at the Municipal Secondary School and '...paid tribute to the excellent students sent from West Ham and East Ham'.<sup>123</sup> Reports in the St. Angela's School magazine during the mid 1930s give some idea of careers followed by ex-pupils. At least two 'Old Brownies' (a nick-name for pupils which referred to the School's brown uniform and which was used by both staff and girls at St. Angela's) had become nuns, one was an anaesthetist at the Royal Free Hospital, another was reading English at London University, with two more training as teachers at Avery Hill and Goldsmiths' colleges. At least 28 girls were employed in some type of clerical work. Others, too, were married.<sup>124</sup> This balance would probably have held true for West Ham High School for Girls and for female pupils at West Ham's two municipal schools. Boys from West Ham Grammar School, the Municipal Secondary School and Plaistow Secondary School would have become teachers, doctors and clerical workers but they would also have been represented in scientific and engineering areas of employment, a situation that was extremely rare amongst the girls.

#### **4.4 The problem of early leavers.**

It would have been surprising, in a poor borough such as West Ham, if secondary schools had not experienced a continuing problem with early leavers. This trait would not have been confined to free or special place holders but would also have been a difficulty with fee-payers, whose parents sometimes either could not or did not wish to continue expenditure on fees. The parental dilemma was exacerbated by the circumstances of juvenile employment at the time. Due to anomalies in the insurance system virtually the only workers who could be fairly certain of employment in the 1920s and 1930s were 14 to 15 year olds. This was because insurance contributions did not begin until the age of 16. This made 14 to 15 year

olds especially cheap, not only because wages were low but because the employer faced no liability for insurance stamps.<sup>125</sup>

Many local and school authorities implemented a rule that parents should sign an undertaking agreeing to allow their child to remain at school for the full course up to the age of 16.<sup>126</sup> In November 1921, West Ham High School was advised by a visiting HMI that parents of children entering the School should be required to sign a form agreeing to keep their child at school until the age of 16, the existing form used at the Municipal Secondary School being taken as a model.<sup>127</sup> For West Ham High School the problem of early leaving was intensified by the ease with which girls obtained employment, relative to boys and adult men and women. Work in shops, offices and factories was considered suitable for females and West Ham could provide many posts in shopping centres such as Stratford and, for factory work, in Silvertown with its immense sugar refinery. West Ham High School enforced a penalty clause for unauthorised early leaving and, on some occasions, placed the matter in the hands of a solicitor when parents refused to pay.

The reporting of incidents of early leaving intensified during the 1930s and, as in June 1934, the refusal of parents to answer letters requesting the payment of the penalty clause inspired the School to take further action.<sup>128</sup> Sometimes early leaving was forced upon pupils, as in the case of a German refugee girl who the School authorities decided would have to leave if her fees were not forthcoming.<sup>129</sup> The girl eventually withdrew on grounds of bad health although the School questioned the authenticity of this illness.<sup>130</sup> In the case of another girl who had left school without official sanction to take a clerical post with the London Co-operative Society, the School felt sufficiently strongly to write to the manager of the Society demanding that he henceforward cease from employing pupils from West Ham High School unless they had full permission to leave school. The manager replied that the Co-operative Society refused to admit to any 'wrongdoing' in employing girls under the School's leaving age.<sup>131</sup> In addition to

the problem of early leavers, the School also had difficulties, during 1936 in particular, with girls taking leave of absence during term time. The reasons for pupils being absent in this manner ranged from carrying out domestic duties at home to practising for and taking part in a dancing show.<sup>132</sup> In September 1937 alone, 17 pupils under the age of 16 failed to return to school after the summer holidays.<sup>133</sup> This problem with irregular leavers continued throughout the years 1937-39. It may have been the improving economic situation and the greater likelihood of gaining employment that led to the increased incidence of early leaving among West Ham High School pupils during the mid to late 1930s.

St. Angela's experienced some difficulties with early leavers during the late 1930s. During 1935 six pupils left the School before their 16th birthday for 'financial reasons', due to parental unemployment. In addition three girls left for reasons of ill-health and nine girls moved out of the district or left to attend other secondary or boarding schools.<sup>134</sup> In 1936, there were five early leavers, three girls who transferred to other secondary schools and one child allowed to leave school early on medical grounds.<sup>135</sup> In 1937 there were 12 early leavers, six transfers to alternative secondary schools and one to an elementary school.<sup>136</sup> In 1938 there were a large number of early leavers, 22 in total, with three transfers and three withdrawals on medical grounds. The problem was not considered a major one by the School authorities since the normal leaving age of pupils was described as 'definitely above the average' for the country.<sup>137</sup>

West Ham Grammar School records are sparse and there are few references to individual boys in the governors' minutes, almost the only archive material which survives, and thus little on the problem of early leavers. In April 1935, the School governors were discussing the unauthorised early leaving of four or more boys and recorded a decision to enforce the £5 penalty, although the governors' minutes do not make it clear whether this sum was received from any of the parents.<sup>138</sup> The Municipal Secondary School records are even less complete, although, from time

to time the subject occurs in Education Committee minutes, generally connected with requests by scholarship holders to leave school for some form of recognised employment, requests which were not always acceded to. With regard to Plaistow Secondary School, an ex-headmaster, Mr H Priestly, published a book on the School in the 1970s and in it gave some details of school life for pupils - and of parental attitudes, during the late 1920s and 1930s. As was the case with West Ham High School for Girls, there was a homework preparatory class with tea provided. With reference to the problem of early leavers, Mr Priestly recognised that

Some parents who have no doubt swelled with pride at their offspring "winning a scholarship"...began to lose their enthusiasm when they realised that higher education meant homework - perhaps involving turning down the radio, keeping the younger children quiet etc. A development which "worried us greatly and undermined all our efforts was the tendency for boys and girls to leave school before the expiry of the full five year course. For this so-called breach of contract, parents were fined £5, and many of them willingly paid it to get their children off to work".<sup>139</sup>

In a separate archive book, various subjects with some connection to the School were discussed. The Chairman of the governors made a speech to his colleagues explaining that '...even twopence a day stood in the way of some parents agreeing for their children to accept a scholarship after they had won it'.<sup>140</sup>

Discipline problems were rare at the Borough's five secondary schools throughout the interwar period. Entry was by fiercely competitive examination and most children were content to conform, at least until they were able to leave school. During the 1920s and 1930s at West Ham High School, there were few cases of indiscipline. During the late 1930s, there were no expulsions and only one

suspension from the School, this on the grounds of '...exceptionally unruly behaviour in regard to all school regulations'.<sup>141</sup> St. Angela's, too, had almost no problems in this area. In 1935 a Sixth Form girl was asked to leave because of unspecified misconduct<sup>142</sup> and in 1936 a special place pupil was asked to withdraw due to repeated serious offences.<sup>143</sup> Once all the attendant circumstances of this case had been discussed the pupil was allowed to return to school and there were no further suspensions or expulsions from the School for the remainder of the 1930s.<sup>144</sup> There are few occasions of indiscipline amongst pupils in West Ham Grammar School for Boys' brief records and, with regard to the West Ham's secondary schools, pupils who were required to leave generally did so because of academic difficulties and thus transferred back to Council elementary schools.

#### **4.5 The relationship of the Schools with each other and the wider community.**

Of West Ham's five secondary schools in the period 1918-39, it was the two municipal schools which had the closest links with each other. This was due to the basic similarity of the schools, since both were mixed and both were controlled by the Council and, indeed, Plaistow Secondary School had been modelled on the highly successful older School. The headmaster of Plaistow Secondary School commented that 'Between Plaistow's elder brother, the West Ham Municipal Secondary School and itself (there was) nothing but the most friendly rivalry'.<sup>145</sup> This generally summed up the feelings of staff and pupils from each of the schools to each other. St. Angela's and West Ham Grammar School for Boys, as Catholic institutions, had strong links, less, perhaps, in the day to day running of the schools than between headteachers and governors who tended to join forces to ensure that Catholic children received the same treatment as their Protestant contemporaries. West Ham High School for Girls, it could be said, possessed no natural allies and School authorities were sometimes concerned to ensure that they received equal treatment with regard to scholarship entrants. Many of the girls who sat for West

Ham High School free-places also sat for places at the Municipal Secondary School and St. Angela's and, since West Ham High School could not announce its lists of successful scholars until West Ham had decided how many scholarships it intended awarding to the School many of the 'best candidates' proceeded to accept places at rival schools. West Ham High School would have found it particularly urgent to pre-empt St. Angela's due to that School's accepting Protestant as well as Catholic girls. The governors advised Miss Atkins, the headmistress who preceded Dr Barnett, to telephone the Education Offices and 'hear privately' which girls had gained a scholarship,<sup>146</sup> an interesting piece of advice, possibly emanating from one of the councillors with a place on the Education Committee.

Although West Ham's secondary school pupils generally acquired status from attendance at such selective institutions, this was not always the case. At a West Ham Rotarian dinner the views of one Rotarian were strongly expressed. Rotarian Tucker Williams asked the qualifications for membership of the Higher Education Committee. When he had required boys for his office his request was treated as if it were a d... nuisance. 'When I have had the opportunity of seeing some of these magnificent specimens of early manhood turned out by West Ham' he added 'with all the thousands of pounds spent on them, they have struck me as a most weevily, insect-looking lot of children, without manners or deportment and totally lacking in the understanding of the dignity of service. He had not a single boy in his office who was educated in West Ham. He wanted only the best and, as far as he could see, West Ham did not produce them. They had not the physique, certainly not the manners and as far as he could see, neither the brains nor the personality'. Countering this view, Rotarian Cully, West Ham's deputy Education Officer replied that the secondary schools of West Ham were not training schools for clerkships, and other Rotarians who had employed West Ham boys claimed that their performance had been very satisfactory.<sup>147</sup>

#### **4.6 Girls and selective education in West Ham 1918-39.**

Girls in West Ham tended to enter for both secondary and higher elementary/central school scholarships in lower numbers than boys. This numerical bias was the result of a number of factors, including a view, widespread amongst many sections of society at the time, that an extended academic education was of greater practical use to a boy, rather than a girl. Many, and possibly most, West Ham residents shared this opinion and West Ham councillors, both Labour and Municipal Alliance, often inclined towards the same beliefs as those they represented, so that the smaller numbers of girls entering for Borough scholarships was not a matter of constant concern. Indeed, female councillors were very much in the minority in West Ham. During the late 1920s, of 48 West Ham councillors at any one time, only eight were women, ten years later, immediately prior to the Second World War, the number of lady councillors had risen to ten.<sup>148</sup> Occasionally, as a West Ham Committee meeting held in June 1928 showed, councillors, generally prompted by a female colleague, brought up the question of this gender difference. That year, 834 boys as opposed to 628 girls had taken the secondary school scholarship examination, although figures for the higher elementary examination, with 522 boy entrants and 473 girl entrants, were nearer to equality. Since the numbers of male and female in the age-group were roughly equal, the only explanation for the divergence, in the view of some councillors, was that girls were not getting their fair chance. Councillors put forward several reasons in explanation of the problem, including a major one, already mentioned, that parents did not yet think that girls required a secondary education to the same extent as boys. The differentiated curriculum in elementary schools was also blamed for the shortfall in female candidates and a woman councillor attributed the generally disappointing performance of girl candidates by reference to their out-of-school domestic duties. A male councillor attempted to reassure his colleague by saying 'We are not claiming the results of the exam are due to the natural superiority of the male animal',<sup>149</sup> although it may have seemed very much to his female colleague that he was. In 1923 the Board of Education had published

a report on the Differentiation of the Curriculum for Boys and Girls in Secondary Schools. This Report examined the supposed differences in ability between boys and girls and came to the conclusion that the current secondary school curriculum was modelled too much on boys and was, indeed, too competitive for girls.<sup>150</sup> It is possible that the mainly male councillors on West Ham Council, whatever their political opinion, saw no harm and some advantages in pupils being channelled off to study different areas of the curriculum by gender.

There was, nationally, by the 1920s, an established secondary school system for girls, fee-paying or accessible by examination success. West Ham was part of this system and, although girls entered for secondary and higher elementary/central school scholarships in smaller numbers than boys, in line with general trends, the Borough's great surplus of secondary school places for girls gave them the advantage, at least in gaining a fee-paying place. In addition, by the middle 1930s, the even-handedness of the West Ham Education Committee in allotting equal numbers of secondary school scholarships to boys and girls, with smaller numbers of girl entrants, meant that girls had the advantage in securing a scholarship place. Nationally, the NUWT relentlessly protested against the countless 'insidious forms of sex favouritism' apparent in the interwar education system. These included the allocation of local authority secondary scholarships to far fewer girls than boys.<sup>151</sup> As has been seen, West Ham practised this form of discrimination during the 1920s although, since girl entrants for scholarship places were less numerous than boys, this did not usually put those girls who entered at a disadvantage. The energies of the Union were directed at changing the domestic education which perpetuated the sexual division of labour and which denied girls training for a variety of employment; a source of difficulty for girls which began at scholarship level or earlier and which was identified by the West Ham councillor in 1928.



#### **4.7 The higher elementary/central schools.**

By 1936, the Special Place examination had become a national institution. It divided elementary school children into 'three distinct classes. The best of all (rarely more than 5 per cent) go to secondary schools; the second best (roughly 15 per cent) go to some such institution as a central school, or a technical school; the remaining 80 per cent stay on at the senior elementary school'.<sup>152</sup> Simon describes central schools as 'a long-standing, second-best alternative to full secondary schools'<sup>153</sup> and, certainly, in West Ham and nationally, the schools were not the first choice of parents or pupils. On the other hand, the more practically biased curriculum added to the fact that entry, like that to secondary school, involved sitting a scholarship examination, meant that the Borough's central schools fulfilled a real need for vocational education, based on business and industry, which the secondary schools, with their highly academic curriculum were not designed to meet.

**Figure 4.15 West Ham's higher elementary/central schools.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Founded</b>	<b>Where located</b>	<b>Boys/girls?</b>	<b>Approx Roll</b>
The Russell	1906	Plaistow	Mixed	500-600
The Grove	1906	Stratford	Mixed	500-600

*Source:* F. Sainsbury *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) Council of L B of Newham pp.146-163.

There remains very little on record concerning West Ham's two higher elementary/central schools, other than details of the number of entrants for the scholarship examinations, due to the fact that both closed during the Second World

War evacuation period. Nevertheless, an entry in the Russell School magazine of June 1933 displays the devotion the School inspired in its pupils:

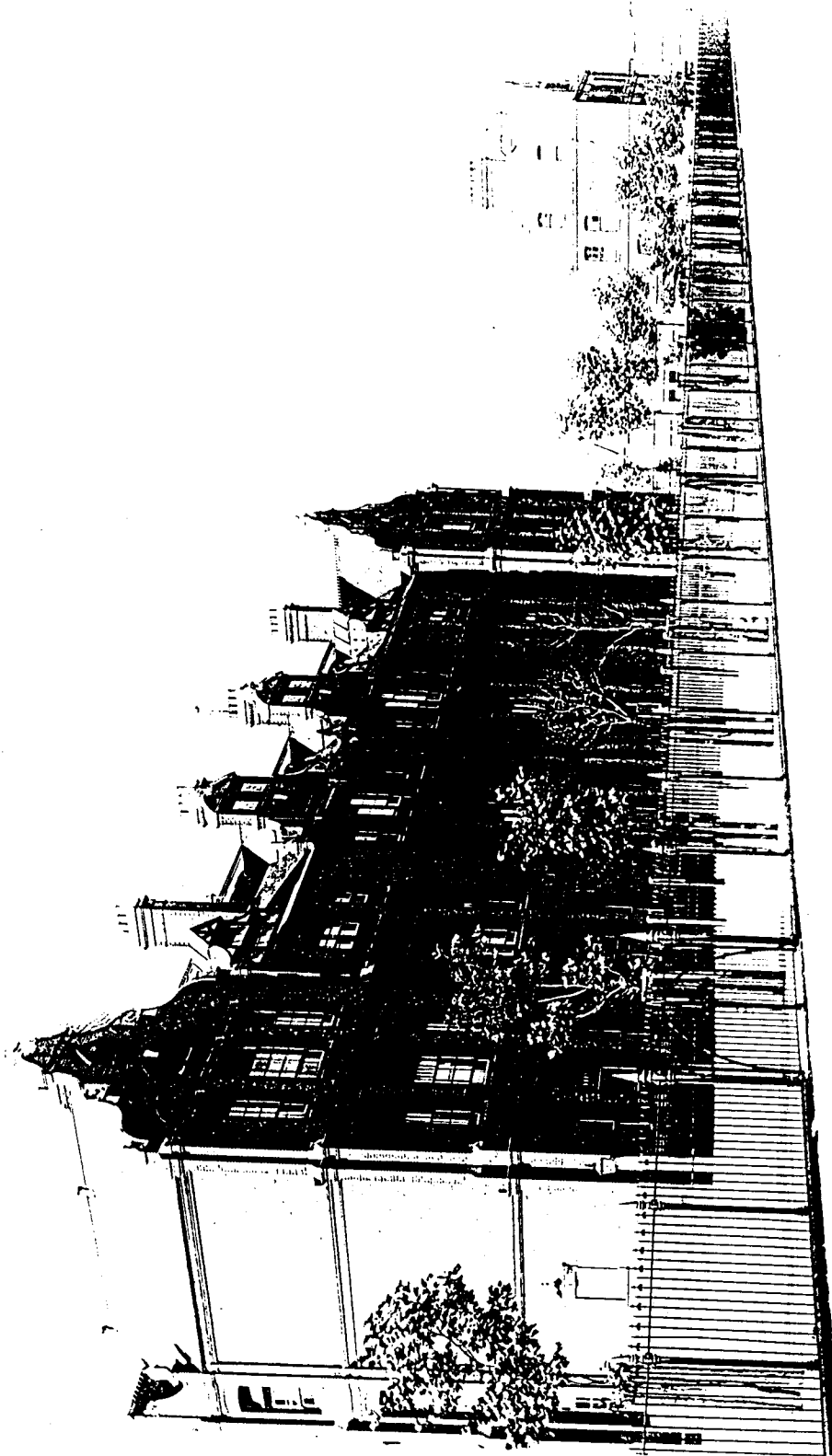
**The vows of a new Russellite.**

I am a little Russellite, and only twelve years old.  
I've sworn to do my homework, and do as I am told.  
I'll never 'sauce' my masters but always will obey,  
Whether in the form room or in the field of play.  
I always will be honest, in both my work and play,  
I'll execute the duties that I'm asked to do each day.  
And then, when I grow older, a bright smart lad I'll be,  
And other junior Russellites can grow up just like me.  
And when I leave the Russell School, I'll have a fine career,  
It will not be a dirty one, with both a stain and smear,  
And when I join the outside world, to do my daily toil,  
I'll bear the name of Russell, which no one yet can spoil.

A Shaw.<sup>154</sup>

West Ham's 1922 publication, *Forward, West Ham*, compared the schools with those providing secondary education, 'up to the limit of the handicap imposed upon them'; this handicap consisting of the impediment to finding employment created by the word 'elementary' in the Schools' title and also an age limit of 15 which 'left education sadly incomplete'. The curriculum included, 'besides the usual school subjects, physics and chemistry, practical as well as theoretical. Advanced geometrical and machine drawing were also offered, as were commercial subjects such as shorthand (with speed of up to 90 words per minute), typewriting, book-keeping and general business training. The Schools were organised into houses, ensuring that they resembled secondary schools still more closely.<sup>155</sup>

Illustration 4 The Grove Central School 1930s.



## Conclusion.

Entrance, either free or at a discounted rate, to West Ham's five secondary schools and two higher elementary/central schools during the interwar period was by scholarship examination only, although varying percentages of fee-payers were admitted to West Ham's secondary schools. Fee-payers generally had to pass the same test as scholarship holders but not to so high a standard. The situation in West Ham was comparable to that in the nation as a whole and the attitude of West Ham councillors of all political opinions tended towards the support and protection of selection for secondary and higher elementary/central schools and the support and selection of the schools themselves.

Surviving governors' minutes for West Ham's secondary schools indicate a certain amount of internal conflict resulting from local and national economic austerity. West Ham High School for Girls governors' minutes consistently report a deficit in school finances, the profit made by the School's preparatory department being used to supplement the funds of the senior school. Despite these difficulties, neither staff nor governors appeared to have undertaken any remedial plan to reform school finances, although the help of pupils' Home Education Committees was sought on a regular basis. Short-lived economy campaigns in the 1920s, such as the turning down of the heating in the School and the pruning of staff refreshments, were attempted but these frugalities were sometimes balanced by new projects requiring increased expenditure. Issues of school or Council finances naturally intruded very little into the lives of pupils, although parental fiscal problems did. The payment of school fees was a considerable hardship for some parents and correspondence on the subject is one of the constant themes in West Ham High School's governors' minutes. Perennial difficulties with early leavers could be attributable to this cause but, since West Ham High School was a school for girls, the departure of some pupils before the end of their course, might be due to both parental dismissal of the need for even secondary school girls to remain at school

beyond the age of 14 or 15 and to a feeling by the girls themselves that the advantages of a completed secondary education were outweighed by the disadvantages of continuing to be a school girl. It is difficult to judge St. Angela's financial situation during the interwar years because of the lack of detailed records. From the material which remains, it is certain that the School's reliance on deficiency grants from West Ham, East Ham and Essex was a cause of difficulty during the 1930s when the number of East Ham pupils in attendance dropped and East Ham subsequently sought to decrease its financial commitment to the School. The reason for this decline in East Ham pupils was linked to the opening of East Ham Grammar School for Girls in 1932. The situation was eventually amicably resolved but is an example of the financial reliance of the aided schools on continuing popularity, and on Council fees.

West Ham Grammar School for Boys, too, was afflicted by financial problems during this period. Unlike West Ham High School, the details of these difficulties are not recorded but reference is made to the West Ham Grammar School governors applying to each of the local education authorities which had pupils in attendance at the School for grant aid. The School was not as popular as its confreres and this may have been partly due to the School's habit of raising its fees out of proportion to those charged by other West Ham secondary schools. There is almost no information on the finances of the two municipal secondary schools and these schools were, of course, fully administered by the Borough and thus not subject to the same monetary rises and falls as the independent schools. No financial information remains for West Ham's higher elementary/central schools.

Malcolm Seaborne gives figures on the expansion of secondary school provision in Leicester during the period 1923 to 1939 which may usefully be compared with the position in West Ham. Leicester had a smaller pupil roll throughout the period than West Ham, approximately 500 children less in any given age group but the two towns had roughly similar child populations. In 1923 West Ham could

provide approximately 1,400 secondary school places at four secondary schools while Leicester provided 2,730 places at the same number of schools. From 1923 Leicester improved its provision considerably compared to West Ham, supplying 4,235 secondary school places at seven secondary schools compared with West Ham's 2,242 secondary school places at five schools. In addition Leicester improved its provision of free-places from 150 per annum in 1923 to 300 per annum in 1939. During the same period West Ham increased its provision from 84 secondary school scholarships in 1923 to 250 secondary school scholarships in 1939. The reason for this difference must be considered a financial one since West Ham was affected by the Depression more severely than the average whilst Leicester was less affected than other towns.<sup>156</sup>

West Ham's Education Committee's 1920 new scheme for education in the Borough did not affect the secondary or higher elementary/central schools. Plans were put forward for two new secondary schools but these were to operate on similar lines to the existing municipal schools and certainly no radical changes were discussed. The five continuation institutes opened by the Borough in 1921, although an innovation, did not compete in terms of status or for pupils with West Ham's selective schools and, in any case, were transient in their compulsory form. The Hadow reorganisation which took place in West Ham mainly during the 1930s, also had minimal effect on the secondary and higher elementary/central schools although the break at 11 possibly encouraged greater numbers of candidates to come forward to take the scholarship examination for these schools.

Since each of West Ham's five secondary schools had been opened to fulfil a particular need, it is not surprising that, despite many similarities, each had its own character. West Ham High School for Girls, the oldest of the five was also probably the most socially prestigious, although St. Angela's vied for this position. Indeed, the reputation of the convent was such that non-Catholic parents sometimes chose to enrol their daughters because of the School's ethos and

because of the emphasis placed on ladylike accomplishments such as needlework and music. West Ham Grammar School for Boys was the least popular of the five schools, possibly due to its cramped accommodation and small staff. Of the two Council secondary schools, the Municipal Secondary School was prized for its academic excellence with Plaistow Secondary School striving to emulate that reputation. The higher elementary/central schools were certainly popular enough but, as often stated by the West Ham Education Committee, were always the second choice of parents who, if given the choice, opted for a secondary school education for their children.

It could be concluded that the majority of children who gained entry to a West Ham secondary school during the period 1918 to 1939 were members of the Borough's tiny middle-class elite. Figures for the percentage of pupils at West Ham secondary schools who held a free or later special place appear to deny this since from 1920 to 1939 between one third and three-quarters of new entrants to the Borough's secondary schools paid no or reduced fees and were presumably from working-class families where income was limited. The two aided girls' schools took, throughout the period, greater numbers of fee-payers than either the Catholic boys' secondary school or the two municipal secondary schools (although the information given in Figure 4.11 is rendered slightly incorrect because it does not include free-place scholars from other areas) but on average 50 per cent of scholars from both schools paid no or reduced fees and, as was the case with West Ham's other secondary schools, the majority of new scholarship holders came from public elementary schools although, in the case of the three aided schools, the attached preparatory schools provided both free-place and fee-paying pupils. It is difficult to compile figures on the social origins of pupils' parents since records of this sort were not kept by West Ham Education Committee, but West Ham's social composition indicate that the majority of parents were working-class although it is possible that greater numbers of the children of upper-working-class parents attended secondary school compared with those from the lower working classes, a situation common throughout the country and connected to financial and cultural

reasons. J L Gray and P Moshinsky in their study covering the year 1933-4 showed that there was a striking positive relationship between the social origins of able children and their chance of entry to a secondary school<sup>157</sup> and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this held true for West Ham's almost homogeneously working-class society, with the upper, middle and lower working classes taking the place of the more usual national gradations of upper class, middle class and lower class.

Interwar economic difficulties, particularly those of the late 1920s and early 1930s, affected West Ham High School and West Ham Grammar School most immediately because the schools were largely dependent on fees, in addition to governmental and local authority grants for the payment of running expenses. The prevalence of early leaving in all five secondary schools, especially during the 1930s, appears to point to adverse family circumstances preventing pupils from completing the full secondary school course. Instances of early leaving increased during the middle to late 1930s, when nationally and locally, the economy was improving. This must indicate that, with employment becoming easier to find and family finances generally improving, the first choice of many families was not to keep a child at school but to allow or even encourage him or her to go to work; a mode of behaviour which appears to be totally in keeping with the ethos and culture of West Ham during the interwar years. R H Tawney states that

The hereditary curse upon English education is its organisation upon lines of social class...When the boys and girls of well-to-do parents attain the great age of thirteen to fourteen, no-one asks whether - absurd phrase - they are "capable of profiting" by further education. They continue their education as a matter of course, not because they are exceptional but because they are normal, and the question of "profit" which they succeed in deriving from it is left, quite rightly, to be answered later. Working-class children have the same needs to be met,



and the same powers to be developed. But their opportunities of developing them are rationed, like bread in a famine, under stringent precautions, as though, were secondary education made too accessible, the world would end - as it is possible, indeed, that one sort of world might.<sup>158</sup>

## Notes

1. Sainsbury, F. *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) Council of the L B of Newham pp.158-159.
2. Campbell, F. *Eleven plus and all that* (1956) Watts p. 31.
3. O'Flynn, K. *The impact of war on secondary education for girls in East and West Ham 1935-1946* (1986) University of London MA. pp.5-7.
4. Avery, G. *The best type of girl (A history of girls' independent schools 1886-1986)* (1991) Andre Deutsch pp.157-8.
5. Sainsbury. op. cit. pp.158-159.
6. Ibid p.160.
7. *Records of the West Ham Education Committee 28/4/20* pp.370-371.
8. Sanderson, M. *Educational opportunity and social change in England* (1987) Faber and Faber p.33.
9. *West Ham High School for Girls Governors' minutes 29/1/18* p.254.
10. Ibid 28/5/18 p.262.
11. Ibid 25/6/18 p.263
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid 24/9/18 p.268.
14. Ibid 26/11/18 p.280.
15. Ibid 27/4/20 p.302.
16. Ibid 26/10/20 p.319.
17. Ibid 25/1/21 p.325.
18. Ibid 14/2/21 p.333.
19. Ibid p.287.
20. Ibid 15/3/21 p.328.
21. Ibid 21/6/21 p.346.
22. Ibid 27/9/21 p.350.
23. Ibid 26/9/22 p. 380.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid 5/8/26 p.492.
26. Ibid 15/2/27 p.524.

27. Ibid 15/5/28 p.46.
28. Ibid 17/7/28 p.46.
29. Ibid p.57.
30. Ibid 20/1/28 p.67.
31. Ibid 18/6/29 p.99.
32. Ibid 16/7/29 p.101.
33. Ibid 30/6/31 p.180.
34. Ibid 21/6/32 pp.229-230.
35. Ibid 15/11/32 p.241.
36. Ibid 17/1/33 p.33.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid 20/2/34 p.45.
39. Ibid 20/3/34 p.49.
40. Ibid p.50.
41. Ibid 22/2/38 p.175.
42. Ibid p.176.
43. *West Ham Education sub-Committee records Vol. XXVB 10/7/28 p.438.*
44. Ibid *Vol. XXVIIB 1/7/30 pp.480-481.*
45. *St. Angela's 45th Governors' meeting 1930.*
46. *West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXXIA 7/2/34 p.221*
47. Ibid *Vol. XXXIB 1/10/34 p.536.*
48. *St. Angela's 57th Governors' meeting 1935.*
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid *66th meeting.*
51. Ibid.
52. *West Ham Grammar School records 16/5/19 p.323.*
53. Ibid 6/1/20 p.35.
54. Ibid 1/6/21 p.40.
55. Ibid 6/7/21 p.401.
56. Ibid 2/11/21 p.42.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid 30/11/21 p.43.

59. Ibid.
60. Ibid 10/5/22 p.46.
61. Ibid 3/3/21 p.46.
62. Ibid 18/10/22 p.49.
63. Ibid 19/12/23 p.58.
64. Ibid 22/7/25 p.85.
65. Ibid 19/9/27 p.72.
66. Ibid 26/10/33 p.90.
67. Ibid 10/7/37 p.97 and 7/7/39 p.104.
68. *Staff register West Ham High School K29 1891-1944.*
69. *Staff register West Ham St. Angela's High School No. 349 Forest Gate (Girls).*
70. PRO ED 53/693 XCI56556 12/1/34 Memo to HMI F W Chambers.
71. Gosden, P H J H. *The evolution of a profession (A study of the contribution of teachers' associations to the development of school teaching as a professional occupation)* (1972) Basil Blackwell pp.172-173.
72. *West Ham High School for Girls Governors' minutes 23/6/25 p.452.*
73. Ibid 27/10/25 p.464.
74. Ibid 15/12/25 p.469.
75. Ibid 23/2/26 p.475.
76. Ibid 23/3/26 p.477.
77. Ibid 21/10/30 p.149.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid 20/1/31 p.161.
80. Ibid 25/5/33 p.15-16.
81. Ibid 20/6/33 p.19.
82. Ibid p.19-20.
83. Ibid 21/3/33 p.11-12.
84. Lawson, J. and Silver, H. *A social history of education in England* (1976) Methuen p.373.
85. Ward and Farley. *The book of West Ham* (1923) Official Publications Bureau pp.96-97.
86. PRO ED 53/693 XCI56556 12/1/34 Memo to HMI F W Chambers.

87. *West Ham High School for Girls Governors' minutes* 20/1/31 p.161.
88. Ibid 17/2/31 p.164.
89. Ibid 21/2/33 p.57.
90. Dent, H. C. *1870-1970 Century of growth in English education* (1970) Longman p.95.
91. *West Ham High School for Girls governors' minutes* 26/9/22 p.381.
92. Ibid 20/9/27 p.11.
93. Ibid 18/9/34 p.68.
94. Ibid 22/9/36 pp.192-193.
95. Ibid 28/9/37 p.162.
96. Ibid 13/6/39 p.215.
97. *St. Angela's 62nd Governors' meeting* 1936.
98. *West Ham Grammar School records* 19/9/27 p.72.
99. Ibid 23/9/29 p.8.
100. Ibid 24/9/37 p.97.
101. *Log book Plaistow Secondary School* 1926-1972 p.56.
102. PRO ED 120/162 158856 6 /3 /22 Reports of district inspector B S Cornish and expert inspectors A Harris and E W E Kempson.
103. Sanderson. op. cit. p.20.
104. Ibid 21/4/35-19/7/38 pp.88-189.
105. Ibid 14/12/37 p.167.
106. Ibid 22/2/38 p.175.
107. Sanderson. op. cit. p32-33.
108. *St. Angela's Governors' meeting* 1937.
109. *Records of the West Ham Education Committee* 1918-33.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid.
115. *West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIXB* 6/6/32 p.346.
116. Ibid *Vol. XXXB* 4/9/33 p.478.

117. Ibid *Vol. XXXVB* 3/10/38 p.518.
118. Lawson and Silver. op. cit. p.402.
119. *Stratford Express* 28/12/29 p.2.
120. Ibid 25/1/30 p.2.
121. *West Ham High School for Girls Governors' minutes* 26/5/36 p.112.
122. *West Ham Education sub-Committee Vol. XXIXA* 4/2/32 p.150.
123. *Stratford Express* 6/12/33 p.6.
124. *The Uptonian Vol. 13* Easter 1935 pp.62-63.
125. Sanderson. op. cit. p.32.
126. Leese. J. *Personalities and power in English education* (1950) E J Arnold and Son p.278.
127. *West Ham High School for Girls Governors' minutes* 22/11/21 p.358.
128. Ibid 5/6/34 p.60.
129. Ibid 4/6/35 p.94.
130. Ibid 26/5/36 p.121.
131. Ibid 4/6/35 p.92-95.
132. Ibid 7/7/36 p.128.
133. Ibid 28/9/37 p.163.
134. *St. Angela's Governors' minutes 59th meeting* 1935.
135. Ibid *65th meeting* 1936.
136. Ibid *66th meeting* 1937.
137. Ibid *67th meeting* 1938.
138. *West Ham Grammar School records* 7/4/35 p.93.
139. Priestly. H. '*Plaistow sec*'. *The story of a school* (1976) p.6.
140. *Plaistow Secondary School. The Archives 1926-1937. Vol. I* 69/21 unpaginated.
141. *West Ham High School for Girls Governors' minutes* 8/3/38 p.178.
142. *St. Angela's Governors' minutes 57th meeting* 1935.
143. Ibid *61st meeting* 1936.
144. Ibid *62nd meeting* 1936.
145. *Plaistow Secondary School. The Archives 1926-1937 Vol. I* 69/21 unpaginated.

146. *West Ham High School for Girls Governors' minutes 27/9/21* p.377.
147. *Plaistow Secondary School. The Archives 1926-1937 Vol. I 69/21* unpaginated.
148. List of members of the Council 1929-30 and 1938-39 County Borough of West Ham.
149. *Stratford Express 23/6/28* p.2.
150. Gordon, P. and Lawton, D. *Curriculum changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (1978) Hodder and Stoughton pp.25-26.
151. Lawn, M. and Grace, G. *Teachers: The culture and politics of work* (1987) The Falmer Press p.42.
152. Gordon, P. *Selection for secondary education* (1980) The Woburn Press p.216.
153. Simon, B. *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* (1974) Lawrence and Wishart p.117.
154. *The Russell School magazine 1933-36 Nos. 1-5 June 1933 Vol. I No. 1* p.19.
155. *Forward, West Ham.* op. cit. pp.50-51.
156. Seaborne, M. *Recent education from local sources* (1967) Routledge and Kegan Paul pp.61-77.
157. Silver, H. (ed) *Equal opportunity in education* (1973) Methuen p.153.
158. Ibid pp.51-53.

## **Chapter Five: East Ham 1918-39; a comparison with West Ham.**

East Ham, now incorporated with its neighbour into the London Borough of Newham, was throughout the period in question a separate but sibling borough to West Ham. Some features of West Ham's educational provision from 1918-39 can be considered unique, namely the introduction of continuation education but in general East Ham may be used as a mirror to the larger borough, reflecting similarities as well as differences and identifying the issues which they shared as part of either a national or local trend or, indeed, as peculiar to West Ham or East Ham alone. As can be seen from Figure 5.1, during the interwar years, the population of East Ham was always approximately half that of West Ham. In the decades preceding the First World War, the difference in population between the two boroughs had been far greater, with West Ham inhabitants outnumbering those in East Ham by 12 to one. By the 1930s West Ham's population started to drop slightly, due to the drift to the suburbs and a general decline in the birth rate. The area of East Ham County Borough in 1921 was 3,324 acres and its rateable value £638,966; in the same year, West Ham County Borough consisted of 4,558 acres of land, 125 of inland and 236 of tidal water and 67 of foreshore, with a rateable value of £1,461,558.<sup>1</sup> West Ham, with approximately twice East Ham's population possessed only approximately 1.3 times East Ham's habitable land, a contributory factor in the greater level of overcrowding in West Ham.

### **5.1 East Ham's early growth politics and educational provision.**

Like West Ham, East Ham underwent unprecedented growth in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The modern industrial development of East Ham began in the 1870s when Beckton gasworks and its ancillary works manufacturing chemical by-products was opened. Beckton became one of the largest employers for a large area and was able to draw thousands of workers from



the whole surrounding district. Indeed, Beckton was more accessible from West Ham than from most other parts of East Ham. This pattern was repeated with the docks. The Royal Albert Dock, which opened in 1880, lay mainly in East Ham but drew much of its labour from West Ham.<sup>2</sup> Industrial development progressed on a far smaller scale than in West Ham. By the early years of the twentieth century, the area possessed acres of residential accommodation and the Borough was popular as a dormitory town for the City commuters who could also be found in West Ham.

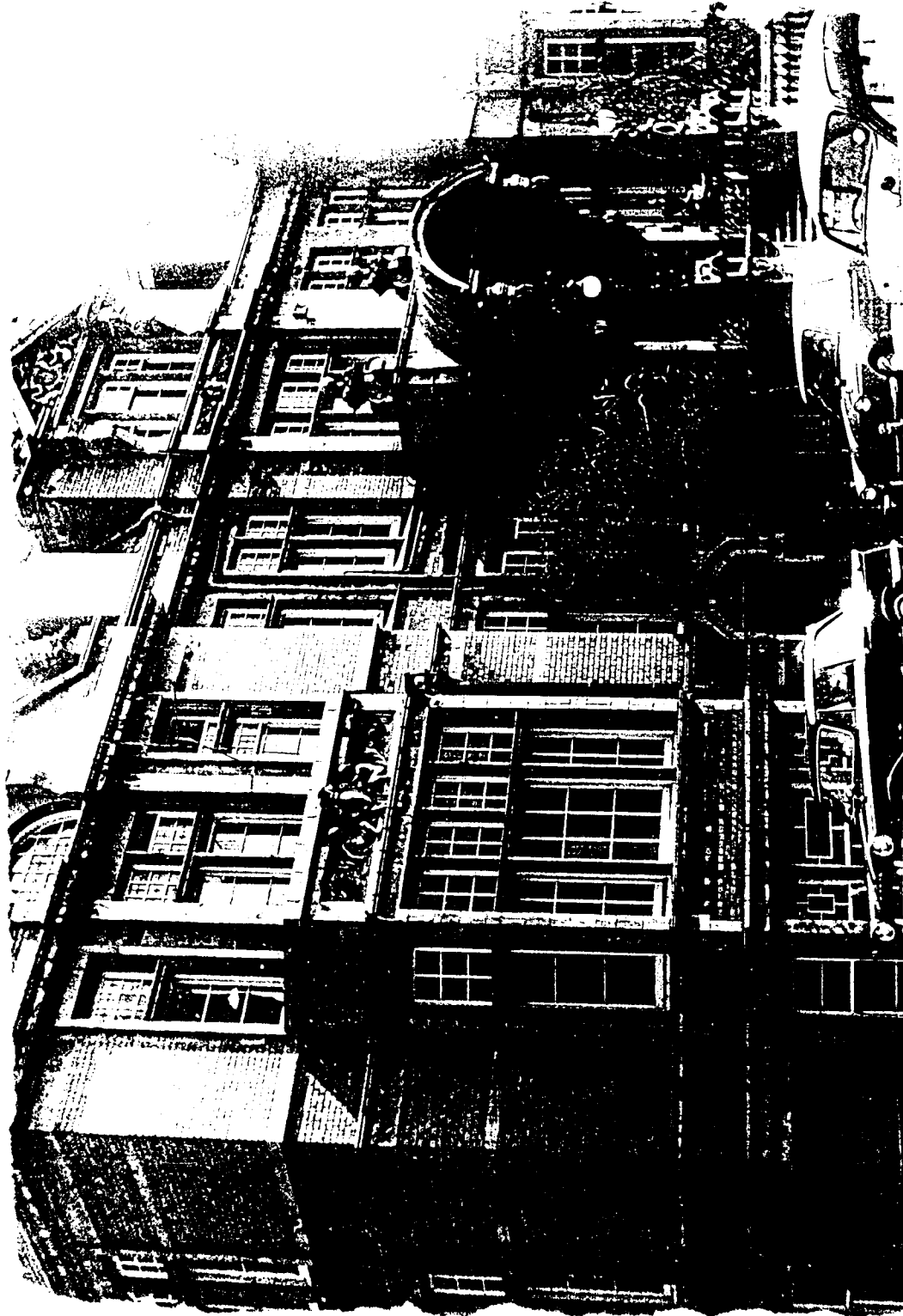
**Figure 5.1 Population of East Ham compared with that of West Ham 1801-1941.**

Year	East Ham	West Ham
1801	1,250	6,485
1811	1,306	8,136
1821	1,511	9,753
1831	1,658	11,580
1841	1,650	12,738
1851	1,737	18,817
1861	2,858	38,331
1871	5,009	62,919
1881	10,706	128,953
1891	32,718	204,903
1901	96,018	267,358
1911	133,487	289,000
1921	143,246	300,860
1931	142,394	294,278
1941	No Census	No Census

*Source:* Local Studies Notes No 3 L B of Newham.

The reasons for this growth were similar to those which accounted for the expansion of West Ham. Migrant workers of many nationalities were attracted to East Ham by job opportunities in the gasworks and the docks. Until 1879, local government was principally by the parish vestry. In 1879, an East Ham local Board was formed, although there appears to have been no specific political groupings until the election of John Bethell, a Progressive and member of West Ham Council, in 1888. The lack of credible political opposition in East Ham is demonstrated by the fact that Thomas Matthews, a local farmer and landowner, was elected to the Council for 13 years in succession between 1879 and 1892, no other candidate standing against him. Until the First World War, local politics were largely divided between the Moderates and the Progressives, with minimal Labour party representation on the Council.<sup>3</sup> East Ham's proximity to West Ham, particularly in the south of the Borough, meant that the South West Ham Labour Party became 'a virile source of propaganda with great influence, through its members, on politics in East Ham',<sup>4</sup> thus exporting West Ham's more radical policies. With regard to educational provision, prior to 1874 and the establishment of East Ham's first Board school, elementary education was provided by two charity schools, one of them run for a time by the prison reformer, Elizabeth Fry, and a Church Sunday school.<sup>5</sup> By 1918, the Borough contained 21 elementary schools, three of these Catholic, a selective higher elementary school, a mixed secondary school and a technical college. As in West Ham, some children travelled across borough boundaries to attend outside secondary schools.<sup>6</sup>

Illustration 5 East Ham Grammar School For Boys 1960s.



**Figure 5.2 Educational provision in East Ham in 1918 and 1939.**

Type of School	1918	1939
Secondary	1	2
Higher elementary	1	2
Elementary	18	19
Technical (including colleges)	1	1
Denominational (excluding R C)	0	0
Catholic	3	3
Private	0	1
Other (including special schools)	1	1
Senior	0	14

*Source:* Local Studies Notes No 72 L B of Newham.

### **5.2 East Ham's post-war educational plans.**

In East Ham, the first significant Labour gains on the Council were made in the 1919 municipal elections and it was the Sunday opening of cinemas rather than education and housing that was the major issue in the campaign. Labour representation was increased to 16, including East Ham's first woman councillors. During the interwar period East Ham Council had between one and four or five women councillors on a council of 24 members compared with between two and ten women councillors on a council of 48 members in West Ham during the same period.<sup>7</sup> There was a Labour collapse during the 1921 municipal elections and, by 1927, the position on the Council was Independents (with Rate payer support) 25 and Labour 15. The 1928 elections resulted in considerable Labour gains and the beginning of a Labour majority on the Council which lasted until the Borough merged with West Ham in 1965.<sup>8</sup> After the First World War the East Ham Education Committee was faced with the same necessity of implementing the

changes implicit in the 1918 Education Act as the West Ham Education Committee. By November 1919, the Committee was in the process of preparing for the proposed introduction of continuation education into the Borough, the principles of which the Council accepted. As in West Ham, local employers were quick to make representations concerning this innovation in education, and the East Ham Committee received a letter from the Gas Light & Coke Company in December 1919, offering to establish a day continuation school for boys between the ages of 14 and 16, this a matter of some significance since the Company was one of the largest local employers.<sup>9</sup> The East Ham Education Committee resolved to adopt 27 October 1920 as its appointed day for compulsory attendance at a continuation school but, by April of that year, was already urging caution, having decided that further consideration of the matter be delayed until the Board of Education issued regulations regarding the financing of the schools.<sup>10</sup> Between September and October 1920, the East Ham Education Committee did, as West Ham had done in April, set out its new scheme for education in the Borough but there is a contrast between the two documents in tone and manner, East Ham displaying a more measured attitude towards the new opportunities continuation education presented. East Ham, probably prompted by external forces, was, by the end of 1920, having grave doubts about the feasibility of implementing the continuation clause of the 1918 Act, due to signs that the '...introduction of compulsory part-time attendance of young persons at day continuation schools is not meeting with the whole-hearted support of employers'.<sup>11</sup>

As 1920 progressed, the probability of East Ham providing continuation schools of its own receded. Lack of finance was the major reason behind the East Ham Committee's decision, finally, not to attempt to provide continuation education in its area. East Ham's realisation that it could not go ahead with such a scheme coincided with the Board of Education's order that no more appointed days should be fixed.<sup>12</sup> There was little feeling against the principles of continuation education itself among the East Ham councillors and the Borough immediately entered into negotiations with authorities which had introduced continuation education in order

that East Ham children could enjoy their benefits. Naturally, East Ham preferred to pay as little as possible for the use of these facilities and it was considerations of finance which made the Education Committee decline the opportunity of placing pupils in West Ham's institutes in 1922.<sup>13</sup> East Ham also attempted to gain free places for its pupils at the LCC continuation schools. The East Ham Education Committee stated that since the majority of East Ham pupils employed in the London area were working for the government, the government should pay the LCC for their upkeep at London continuation schools. The attitude of the Board of Education and through it the Government, can be gauged by a letter from the Board in October 1921, suggesting that, from the next educational session, East Ham should concentrate its efforts and its finance only on projects of '...approved value and assured prospects',<sup>14</sup> thus excluding experiments in continuation education for the foreseeable future.

### **5.3 Reorganisation and conflict in East Ham in the late 1920s.**

As has been seen, West Ham experienced few problems with its reorganisation plans but this was not the case in East Ham. A comprehensive scheme for the reorganisation of elementary education in East Ham had been adopted as early as 1925. The scheme, anticipating the Hadow Report, had resulted in all the schools in the south of the Borough undergoing reorganisation by August 1927 without major trouble, although there had been a few protests. During 1929, when the Committee introduced a similar plan of reorganisation for schools in the more prosperous north of the Borough, parents banded together to impose a school strike, objecting in most cases on grounds of safety (crossing dangerous roads etc.) and distance from home. Children who had been allocated to a new school persisted in their attempts to attend their old one, causing the Authority to 'lock-out' pupils.<sup>15</sup> In West Ham, the members of the Education Committee, although stating that it was the policy of the Borough to acquaint parents with new schemes before putting them into action, said that they were not sympathetic to the

behaviour of the East Ham parents. The Chairman of the West Ham Committee declared that he did not admire the parents' protest in East Ham since he believed that the East Ham Committee stood *in loco parentis*.<sup>16</sup> It is likely that this support for the East Ham Committee was due to a desire to discourage resistance to its own plans for reorganisation rather to an adherence to legal principle. Notwithstanding the opinion of the West Ham Education Committee, matters in East Ham continued to deteriorate. The parents of the locked-out East Ham children gained the support of a Council member, Alderman H Osborn, an Independent and he set forward his views very strongly. He saw, he said, no reason 'Why East Ham should be the dumping ground of these schemes' and, indeed, almost incited parents in the reorganised south of the Borough to mutiny by stating that they too had a grievance, not having been consulted prior to reorganisation taking place.<sup>17</sup>

On 21 September 1929, angry parents attended a meeting of the East Ham Education Committee, in a protest similar to that organised against continuation education by West Ham's Silvertown parents eight years earlier. Present was the Chairman of the Committee, Councillor J J Pope, a councillor for South ward, in the dockside area of East Ham and one that had already been reorganised. The Chairman stated that there would be no public discussion of reorganisation and that councillors would meet *in camera* to look further into the subject. Alderman Osborn attempted to bring the matter up, to cries of support from parents, but was accused by various colleagues of playing, literally, to the gallery, since it was in the gallery that the parents were seated. The displeasure of the parents was so noisily expressed that the majority of councillors, led by Councillor Pope, retired to a private room to continue the meeting. The parents, unconcerned, made a number of impassioned speeches and then, having made their point, left in an 'orderly manner'.<sup>18</sup> The difficulties in East Ham rapidly became a point of first local, then national interest. The *East Ham Echo*, East Ham's local paper, called, by the middle of September 1929, for 'an end to this nonsense', citing an article in *Everybody's Weekly*, (a journal described as having no educational or political axe

to grind) which termed strikes by schoolchildren as iniquitous. The *Weekly* made its position clear. 'This deplorable practice was begun a few years ago, and now, for the least real or fancied wrong, out come the children. The 'strikes' are increasing in number. Last week there were four, one at East Ham, one in Cheshire, one in Bradford, and one in Swansea - and goodness knows where they are going to stop'. In the opinion of the *Weekly* the East Ham Education Committee had been elected to govern or to go, even at the risk of alienating constituents.<sup>19</sup> The East Ham Education Committee itself responded to the continuance of the strike by stopping meals to needy children involved in the protest. This action was countered by a deputation of parents who made representations to Susan Lawrence, the Labour MP for East Ham north. Miss Lawrence, born of wealthy parents, had had a distinguished career at Cambridge and was an outstanding mathematician. She also had excellent radical credentials having been sentenced, like George Lansbury, to a prison term for refusing to levy the rate precept of the LCC and Metropolitan Board.<sup>20</sup> Not only was Susan Lawrence the constituency's MP but she was, in addition, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, A Greenwood, and the parents asked that she take up the case of the cancelled meals with her colleagues in order that they be restored. Miss Lawrence replied to this request in a letter, part of which stressed 'how anxious' recent developments in the dispute had made her. Miss Lawrence made it clear that 'parents who feel aggrieved by the reorganisation have a perfect right as citizens to bring their views to the notice of the Education Committee and to take what actions they please as citizens and voters', although, in her opinion, the children should not have been used in the dispute.<sup>21</sup> The East Ham Education Committee, after some prompting from the Board of Education, made meals available to children involved in the school strike. Susan Lawrence probably experienced dual loyalties at this time and her main contribution to the controversy was to act as an unsuccessful peace-maker. Indeed, the fact that Miss Lawrence lost her seat to a Conservative at the 1931 General Election may have been due to her inability to intervene effectively in the dispute.<sup>22</sup> The affair in East Ham reached the King's Bench Court and the attention of the national newspapers; and although the ruling went against the parents and reorganisation was not halted in East Ham,



the grounds on which parents had brought an action against the local authority, those of insufficient consultation, were a warning to West Ham to proceed carefully with its own reorganisation. That West Ham parents did not exhibit the same degree of resistance to reorganisation as those from certain areas of East Ham was not an indication of greater social and political militancy in the smaller borough. Rather it shows that West Ham Education Committee's cautious approach combined with a relatively slow rate of change, particularly in the Silvertown area, did not interfere with the domestic arrangements of parents to the extent that they saw strike action as the only way in which to proceed.

The East Ham protest was of a type which took place in the interwar years. The majority of these school strikes occurred as a protest against the process of centralisation and rationalisation promoted by the Hadow Report, and the events in East Ham, of course, were a reaction to these changes. Some commentators have seen this recourse to strike action as a response to the failure of the local authorities to consult parents or to consider their needs prior to the implementation of reorganisation plans. In rural districts, the dismay felt by parents at the prospect of their children making round trips of many miles to school each day was obvious, particularly in view of the deprivation suffered by children in distressed farming areas. In towns and cities, the main issues which tended to provoke militant action were the excessive distances and danger from traffic to which children were exposed in attending reorganised schools. In addition, the transfer of children from neighbourhood schools disrupted the domestic arrangements of the working-class family, as long distances made it difficult for children to return home for a midday meal and restricted the time and energy available for part-time jobs.

Although the number of parents and children involved in these strikes often dwindled when local Education Committees commenced prosecutions for non-attendance (in East Ham school-strikers quickly fell from 1,000 to just under 250), direct action in both rural and urban areas often won concessions from the

authorities, such as the provision of free dinners and bus services and occasionally resulted in official submission to the strikers' demands. These strikes could be seen as the result of a degree of class conflict where the working-class community had become alienated from the state system of schooling. Indeed, as in the *East Ham Echo*, the contemporary press tended to see strikes in this light, as expressions of a growing conflict between the local community and the school authorities and there was widespread concern that militant action by working-class parents would encourage children to follow in their example of determined resistance to authority, which might have disastrous consequences. Hence the East Ham dispute which extended over three months, involved hundreds of parents and over 1,000 children and was only finally resolved through central government intervention.<sup>23</sup> Contradicting the impression that the East Ham strike was a radical one, the parents of the locked-out children refused the aid of the Teachers' Labour League, an organisation affiliated to the Labour Party, nationally and locally and with supporters such as R H Tawney, on grounds of the 'political character of this body'.<sup>24</sup> Supporting this contention, during a protest meeting held by the parents, the Labour Party agent for East Ham, W. S. Rainbird, was not only debarred from speaking but, with his supporters, was edged out of the hall where the meeting was being held and the doors shut against him.<sup>25</sup>

West Ham had been the scene of a major teachers' strike in 1907 when the ratepayer group on the Council decided on new salary scales for teachers, with diminished increments and lower scale points. This dispute, which eventually led to the dismissal of 57 teachers, like the East Ham pupils' strike, was provoked to some extent by conflict between authority and local cultural values. In the case of West Ham the right to 'operate unions', in this case the National Union of Teachers, and to provide improved municipal educational services for the Borough was set against a determination by the political representatives of the small number of middle-class ratepayers in West Ham to keep the rates low. Significantly, the NUT in this dispute had the support not only of the local Labour party and Socialist councillors but also a 'natural source of allies...the parents of the

working-class elementary children' <sup>26</sup> demonstrating, as in the matter of the East Ham school strike, a solidarity rooted in the framework of working-class life rather than in the ideals of party politics.

#### **5.4 Selection for secondary education in East Ham.**

In the years immediately following the First World War, the East Ham Education Committee, without the complicating factor of having implemented continuation classes, was determined to increase secondary school accommodation in its area. In this matter a marked difference between aspiration and reality can be seen by contrasting the West Ham and East Ham Education Committees. East Ham, the smaller Borough, with approximately half the number of children in any one age-group than its larger neighbour, aimed to provide 2,700 secondary school places whilst the West Ham Education Committee could only hope, by doubling its current provision, to supply 3,000 such places. The West Ham Committee stated its dependence on Government assistance in being able to implement even those comparatively modest proposals and appeared to be imbued with a spirit of great optimism, assuming rather than ascertaining, that the necessary funds would be forthcoming. The East Ham Committee, on the other hand, had worked out provisional financial tactics in the eventuality of its initial proposal not being accepted.<sup>27</sup>

Illustration 6 East Ham Grammar School For Girls 1960s.



**Figure 5.3 The percentage of East Ham's budget 1920-39 spent on secondary education compared with that of West Ham.**

<b>Year</b>	<b><i>East Ham</i></b>	<b><i>West Ham</i></b>
1920	13	8.8
1921	5.2	10.6
1922	15.3	12.0
1923	8.3	12.0
1924	18.7	12.2
1925	16	12.9
1926	16	12.2
1927	12.5	13.4
1928	7.7	14.0
1929	12.0	14.1
1930	7.6	13.9
1931	31.2	14.4
1932	13.1	13.9
1933	9.3	15.6
1934	20.3	15.2
1935	23.2	15.3
1936	28.5	15.6
1937	12.7	15.7
1938	12.7	15.3
1939	10.6	16.1

*Source:* East Ham and West Ham Education Committee minutes 1920-39.

East Ham secondary scholarship records are not as full as West Ham's, the smaller borough often reporting only the number of scholarship winners and not the total number of entrants in any one year. The reason for this lack is probably connected with the 1965 amalgamation, with the smaller Borough merging into the larger and

with sheer ill-fortune in the matter of the preservation of records; because of this difficulty, some figures have had to be estimated and are marked with an asterisk(\*).

**Figure 5.4 East Ham's secondary school candidates 1918-39.**

Year	Male	Female
1918	196 (16)	196 (16)
1919	256 (16)	168 (16)
1920	224 (30)	192 (30)
1921	280 (30)	182 (30)
1922	327*(30)	327*(30)
1923	327 (29)	327 (31)
1924	622 (29)	550 (26)
1925	350*(30)	350*(31)
1926	450*(28)	450*(32)
1927	450*(30)	450*(30)
1928	450*(34)	450*(33)
1929	407*(44)	407*(45)
1930	525*(48)	525*(48)
1931	474*(90)	474*(90)
1932	398*(129*)	398*(129*)
1933	550*(135*)	550*(135*)
1934	554*(135*)	554*(135*)
1935	453*(135*)	453*(135*)
1936	642*(123*)	642*(122*)
1937	561*(136*)	561*(137*)
1938	601*(136*)	601*(136*)
1939	601*(107*)	601*(108*)

*Source:* East Ham Education Committee minutes 9/11/1917-15/5/1939 (Number of scholarships available are given in brackets).

**Figure 5.5 The chance of an East Ham scholarship candidate gaining a secondary school scholarship 1918-39.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1918	1 in 12.2	1 in 12.2
1919	1 in 16.0	1 in 10.5
1920	1 in 7.4	1 in 6.4
1921	1 in 9.3	1 in 6.0
1922	1 in 10.9	1 in 10.9
1923	1 in 11.2	1 in 10.5
1924	1 in 9.2	1 in 11.1
1925	1 in 11.6	1 in 11.2
1926	1 in 16.0	1 in 14.0
1927	1 in 15.0	1 in 15.0
1928	1 in 13.2	1 in 13.6
1929	1 in 9.2	1 in 9.0
1930	1 in 10.9	1 in 10.9
1931	1 in 5.2	1 in 5.2
1932	1 in 2.9	1 in 2.9
1933	1 in 4.0	1 in 4.0
1934	1 in 4.1	1 in 4.1
1935	1 in 3.3	1 in 3.3
1936	1 in 5.2	1 in 5.2
1937	1 in 4.1	1 in 4.0
1938	1 in 4.4	1 in 4.4
1939	1 in 5.6	1 in 5.5

*Source:* East Ham Education Committee minutes 9/11/1917-15/5/1939 (\* from 1922 all figures are subject to estimate).

As can be seen by the figures for the growing numbers of scholarship candidates already quoted, pressure for accommodation on East Ham's only secondary school

mounted throughout the 1920s. At the beginning of the school year 1919-20, 9,000 potential entrants were excluded from grant-aided secondary schools in England due to lack of accommodation<sup>28</sup> and the situation in East Ham was part of that trend. As an answer to the problem the East Ham Education Committee contemplated the building of a new secondary school for girls. Some East Ham children, denied a secondary school place in the Borough, attended schools outside the local area. As was the case in West Ham, the East Ham Education Committee was, in 1921, attempting to discover how many of its children were thus being provided for. The final figure was found to be 164.<sup>29</sup> Since the East Ham Education Committee only allotted 60 scholarships each year, there was plainly a need for increased provision in East Ham if almost three times that number of children crossed borough boundaries to be educated. In May 1922, the Education Committee received a letter from the East Ham Trades Council and Central Labour Party, requesting that more secondary school places be provided. The letter stated that no more than three per cent of children of secondary school age were accommodated within East Ham, although this contention was partially refuted by the Education Committee. It reminded the framers of the resolution that there were two central schools in East Ham which could also provide advanced instruction for boys and girls aged 12 to 15 years of age<sup>30</sup> and which must be included in the figures.

Those intimately involved with the secondary school system also communicated with the East Ham Education Committee. In July 1922, the parent of a potential fee-payer at the East Ham Secondary School wrote protesting to the Committee at the insufficient secondary accommodation in the area. Pressure of this kind resulted in East Ham writing to the Board of Education asking permission for East Ham pupils who were unable to secure a place at an East Ham secondary school to accept a place outside the local area.<sup>31</sup> In February 1923, the Committee received a letter forwarding a resolution passed at a public meeting, protesting against the '...exorbitant fees now in vogue for East Ham pupils at secondary school outside the Borough'. The letter went on to demand that secondary school



accommodation be provided locally for all East Ham children who were academically able for it. This constant clamouring for increased secondary provision did not persuade the East Ham Education Committee to provide more places in East Ham but, instead, the Committee reserved more places for its pupils outside the Borough. Initially, the Committee allotted ten places for East Ham pupils at each of the following schools: Raine's Foundation (boys), St. Angela's (girls), West Ham Grammar School (boys) and Cooper's Company (boys). Most of these schools were also patronised by West Ham pupils. The Board of Education agreed to these measures by the East Ham Education Committee, stating that candidates should take the entrance examination of each individual school and that the school should report the results back to the Education Committee. To ensure that secondary school resources were used to their fullest extent, the East Ham Education Committee resolved that if parents of scholarship candidates did not sign an undertaking to keep their children at school for the required four years, the children themselves would not be permitted to sit for the examination.<sup>32</sup>

In January 1924, the East Ham Education Committee, still not having solved the problem of the shortfall in secondary accommodation, approached the Barking Education Authority asking if it would allow East Ham pupils entrance to the Abbey Secondary School.<sup>33</sup> Pressure from the local Labour party continued and, in March 1924, the Committee received a letter from the Greatfield ward of the South East Ham Labour party which expressed the urgent necessity of providing more secondary school places in the Borough.<sup>34</sup> The Board of Education encouraged East Ham's efforts and, in October 1924, the Committee itself estimated that if its aim was to secure an increase in secondary school accommodation of 20 places per 1,000 of the population, East Ham ought to be providing approximately 2,900 places, a figure it was very far from achieving.<sup>35</sup> In January 1925, the East Ham Education Committee was considering the conditions under which central school pupils could be transferred to the Borough's secondary school on completion of their course.<sup>36</sup> In June of that year, these conditions were

presented: that candidates for a free-place should pass the Oxford Junior local examination (honours class) and should receive a satisfactory report from the principal of the central school.<sup>37</sup> Demonstrating that secondary school places remained highly valued commodities, the Education Committee received letters from parents of children who had been unable to sit the previous year's scholarship examination. The parents requested that the age limit currently in force be waived to allow their children another opportunity. The Committee could not accede to this suggestion but contemplated instead the holding of a special examination for over-age candidates.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this offer East Ham children continued to have their chance of educational advancement curtailed by lack of secondary school places. Mrs V Reid, who was born in 1914, remembers not being permitted to take the scholarship examination due to the alteration in age limits for candidates mentioned above. Mrs Reid's sister was even more unfortunate having taken and passed the scholarship two years previously but losing her chance of a secondary education due to lack of accommodation.<sup>39</sup> In November 1926, the East Ham Education Committee received approval from the Board of Education for its efforts to increase the number of secondary school places for its pupils by the use of outside secondary schools. The Board reminded the Committee that the scheme had only been approved on the basis that the Borough would assist those parents '...who would have sent their children to secondary schools in East Ham if sufficient accommodation had been available, and that it is doubtful whether assistance given to pupils in attendance at the City of London School comes within the scope of the scheme'. The Board also warned East Ham to be certain that financial assistance was extended solely to needy parents rather than in general fashion. This echoed the Board's strictures to West Ham on the necessity of using a means test in the allotment of maintenance allowances. In the same month, coincidentally, the Committee received a letter from the East Ham Rent and Ratepayers' Association, protesting against the Committee's action in not fixing an income limit for the award of free-places at the Borough's secondary school.<sup>40</sup>

In January 1930, the East Ham Education Committee received resolutions from the local branch of the Labour Teachers' Association urging the Committee to abolish fees in its secondary school at the earliest possible opportunity. West Ham had begun to consider taking this step in the previous year. The East Ham Committee set up a sub-Committee to investigate the subject, meanwhile requesting that particulars be sought of other authorities which had abolished fees, together with those which provided maintenance allowances.<sup>41</sup> In May 1930, having completed its research, the Education Committee stated its intention of informing the Board of Education that, as from 1 September 1931, no fees would be charged for East Ham pupils in the Borough's secondary school. The new scheme only applied to those children admitted after 1 September 1931, current pupils would have to adhere to existing arrangements and, in addition, the Committee no longer proposed to pay maintenance allowances to children under 14.<sup>42</sup>

The decision was, unfortunately, extremely badly timed in view of the economic crisis which was fast developing both nationally and internationally. In September 1930, one year before the proposed abolition of fees, the Board of Education wrote to the Education Committee stating that the plan to free East Ham's secondary school must be deferred until the Board could reconsider the proposal in the early part of 1931.<sup>43</sup> By April 1931, the Committee received the Board's reply. The Board said that the Borough had made an insufficiently good case for fees to be completely abolished. In return, the East Ham Education Committee sent a deputation to the Board of Education. One East Ham councillor reiterated the fact, in contrast to West Ham some years before, that East Ham selected pupils for secondary school by means of an entrance examination and '...solely on grounds of capacity'.<sup>44</sup>

The Board replied that it had given sympathetic hearing to the Borough's case and declared that it had found itself in agreement with the Committee on many points, but went on to say 'The Government do not intend to adopt, as a policy, the

abolition of secondary school fees and the application received from the Education Authority for permission to cease charging fees cannot be granted'.<sup>45</sup> The East Ham Education Committee was reminded that an Economy Committee had recently been set up. The Board here referred to the May Committee, constituted under the Labour government. The attitude of the East Ham Education Committee to the economy measures which followed can be shown by reference to its agreement to a resolution forwarded by the WEA which deprecated the proposals to reduce educational expenditure in the supposed interests of economy.<sup>46</sup> In the matter of securing outside secondary school places for its pupils, if not in that of freeing such education completely, the East Ham Committee was assisted by one particular social trend. With the building of the suburbs in the 1920s and 1930s, came the movement of the middle classes from the old areas of towns, including those of London. New secondary schools were built to provide for local scholarship winners and also for children from outlying authorities.<sup>47</sup> East Ham, too, was to be affected by this movement from the built-up areas just as it was affected by the fall in the birth-rate. East Ham children were thus able to obtain places not only in the gradually depopulating inner secondary schools but also in the new suburban schools.

In February 1932, the East Ham Education Committee received a letter from the East Ham Head Teachers' Association on the subject of the scholarship examination. The Association suggested that the standard of the examination be raised so as to give '...a greater difference between the best and the other children'. The Association offered practical advice on how to accomplish this raising of standards but the Committee declined to put them, in their entirety, into operation. The Committee appeared preoccupied, less with modifications to the scholarship examinations than with the projected opening of the new secondary school for girls which had been fixed for September 1932.<sup>48</sup> The Committee discussed a suitable name for the new School, two suggestions being the 'Borough High School for Girls' and the 'Municipal High School for Girls'.<sup>49</sup> Eventually the name, 'East Ham

Grammar School for Girls' was decided on, whilst the old School was to be renamed 'East Ham Grammar School for Boys'.<sup>50</sup>

As was the case in West Ham, Circular 1421 caused protests, both from local and outside bodies, to be forwarded to the East Ham Education Committee. The Committee received letters from local branches of both the Amalgamated Society of Wood Workers and the NUWT, protesting at what they saw as a curtailment of educational opportunity, this viewpoint repeated in a resolution sent to the Committee by the Burnley Education Committee and the London Railway Clerks' Association.<sup>51</sup> From a different perspective, the Committee was in receipt of a letter from the Board of Education expressing disagreement with the Borough's estimated income scales for complete exemption from secondary school fees. The Board believed that East Ham, by allowing all incomes under £300 per annum to attract total exemption regardless of family size, was granting aid too liberally.<sup>52</sup> Despite the opinion of the Board, in the 1930s, as in the 1920s, East Ham children continued both to receive and to be denied a post-primary education. Mrs Phyllis Gardner, who was born in 1923, did not sit for the 1934 secondary scholarship examination despite being recommended for secondary education by the headmaster of her elementary school. She was forced to miss her chance because of financial difficulties at home. Mrs Gardner later moved out of the Borough with her parents and left school at 14 to work in a tobacconist shop.<sup>53</sup> Mrs Grace Glegg and her brother were more fortunate. They took the scholarship examination in 1934 and gained places at Wakefield Street Central School. Mrs Glegg recollects the excellence of her teachers who were all university educated, and of the curriculum which included typing, shorthand and French taken to Royal Society of Arts standard. Both Mrs Glegg and her brother left school in 1939, Mrs Glegg to take a secretarial course and her twin to enter the Royal Navy.<sup>54</sup>

The difficult economic situation affected East Ham, as it did West Ham. In September 1933, the Education Committee discussed Circular 1430 in connection

with the number of students permitted to go forward for teacher training. The Board had decided to make a further reduction of eight per cent in such students, except for those in handicraft and domestic subjects.<sup>55</sup> As tended to be the pattern in East Ham during the period, secondary education remained at the forefront of Education Committee members' thinking. In February 1934, the Committee was informed by the Board of Education that it was prepared to agree to a proposal from the governors of St. Angela's that the School should cease receiving direct grant in return for Borough support. This support would emanate from East Ham, West Ham and Essex authorities who would receive, in return, an undertaking from the School, that only children from their areas would be accepted as pupils. On a similar theme, the Committee received a letter from the Board in the same month, stating that it was prepared to agree to a suggestion from West Ham High School's governors that it too would relinquish direct grant status on the condition that the whole income of the School's Foundation be paid towards the repayment of a loan on the building, and that the School's preparatory department be entirely self-supporting.<sup>56</sup> These examples demonstrate how inter-connected were the two boroughs of East Ham and West Ham, the Board needing to inform East Ham of the change in circumstances of West Ham secondary schools because of the movement of pupils across borough boundaries, generally from East Ham to West Ham.

By the later 1930s, in East Ham as in West Ham, the procedure for scholarship entrance had been modified with the entire age group being permitted to take the examination and with subsequent examinations for borderline cases and those who were ill on the day.<sup>57</sup> As in West Ham, headteachers were required to submit a report on each candidate and this report was used to highlight any discrepancy between the expected and actual result. Candidates who failed to perform as well as expected were able, in company with those numbered 201 to 300 on the examination list, to be re-examined for the remaining 45 places at East Ham's central schools.<sup>58</sup> The East Ham records make numerous mention (from January 1937 to January 1938 there were 56 cases) of migratory scholars;<sup>59</sup> that is, pupils

leaving East Ham to live in other areas. The records make no comment on this movement but it was probably connected with the drift to the suburbs earlier described. It may be that this pupil movement accounts, together with the opening of the girls' secondary school, for the lessening of East Ham's preoccupation with the acquisition of additional secondary and other post-primary places which is noticeable from the early 1930s onwards.

In October 1937, the Education Committee published a report which dealt with its hopes for future educational progress in East Ham. It was proposed that a new secondary school for boys be built and the existing School's former building be converted into a junior technical school. The central school in Wakefield Street was to provide for 640 pupils and eight additional senior schools for boys and girls were to be established.<sup>60</sup> There is no mention of how, financially, these projects were to be accomplished. Indeed, the Committee was concentrating its efforts on adapting its scales of maintenance allowances for pupils over 16 years of age who had completed the normal school course, with due allowance made for size of family. The grant of a maintenance allowance was dependent on a pupil passing School Certificate and on parents signing an undertaking to keep their child at school for at least a year. If a child remained at school for a further year, a higher rate of maintenance allowance would be payable.<sup>61</sup>

The Borough's report for the year 1937-38, held disappointing news. Due to the 'heavy cost' of East Ham's reorganisation scheme, the proposed new grammar school for boys would have to be set aside and the junior technical school housed, instead, in the new technical college the Committee hoped to erect on a prominent site in the centre of East Ham.<sup>62</sup> The deteriorating state of world affairs must have been brought home to members of the Education Committee and its teaching staff and pupils by the presence of refugee children in East Ham schools. The East Ham Education Committee agreed in co-operation with the London Education Authority, that German Jewish refugee children be admitted to East Ham

secondary schools at the full £9 9s provided that it left '...sufficient margin of accommodation to enable British children who may move into the Borough to be admitted'.<sup>63</sup>

### **5.5 East Ham's secondary and higher elementary schools and scholarships.**

There are few primary local sources for East Ham's secondary and higher elementary schools due to their loss during the evacuation period or during comprehensivisation. The East Ham Education Committee had wished to establish a separate girls' secondary school since 1912 but had been unable to do so owing to financial pressures. In 1923, the Committee had written to the Board of Education with the complaint that there were 316 East Ham children attending secondary schools outside the Borough, with 455 pupils attending the East Ham secondary school.<sup>64</sup> The new school for girls was opened in 1932, ironically one of the worst years in a decade of depression. The £42,000 cost of the purpose-built building was mitigated by the fact that its construction gave employment to local workmen and also by the intention of the Education Committee that the School should be used by East Ham residents after school hours for evening classes.<sup>65</sup>

The East Ham higher elementary/central school scholarship records are more problematical than those for secondary school, since numbers of entrants and even numbers of scholarships are not always recorded. As with the East Ham secondary records, estimated figures will be marked thus \*. In 1918, East Ham provided 30 scholarships each for boys and girls. With a rough figure of 300\* boy and 300\* girl entrants, boys and girls had a one in 10.0 chance of success.<sup>66</sup> In 1919 and 1920, with approximately the same number of entrants, boys and girls continued to have a one in 10.0 chance of success.<sup>67</sup> In 1921, 72 scholarships for boys and 62 scholarships for girls were provided, with 121 each offered in 1922, no figures on the number of entrants being available. It has not been possible to trace figures for



1923 but, in 1924, 160 scholarships for boys and 158 scholarships for girls were available and, from 1925 to 1935, figures have been proved impossible to trace. By 1936, 1,284\* boys and girls competed for 245 central school scholarships.<sup>68</sup> In 1937 and 1938, there were 160 scholarships places available with no figures for entrant numbers.<sup>69</sup> As in West Ham, the number of children of scholarship age 10-11 years, compared with the number of secondary school places and secondary school scholarships available should also be used to calculate the opportunities open to East Ham pupils in the interwar period. Unfortunately, due to influences already described, East Ham records are less detailed than those of West Ham and only very fragmentary statistical evidence survives. Rainbird gives an indication of the number of children, male and female, in the 10-11 age-group in 1931, approximately 2,477, less than half of those in the comparable West Ham age-group.<sup>70</sup> Since throughout the 1930s the East Ham Education Committee was able to offer East Ham candidates more secondary school scholarships than the West Ham Education Committee offered its candidates and the East Ham scholarship age-group was much smaller than that of West Ham, it is correct to infer that East Ham children of 10-11 years had a vastly better chance of gaining a secondary school scholarship than pupils in West Ham. In the early 1930s thus, whilst West Ham children, male and female, each had a 4.2 per cent chance of gaining a secondary school scholarship, the figure for East Ham children, male and female, was approximately 10.5 per cent. East Ham Council not only offered places for its pupils in its own secondary schools but also maintained places for its pupils at West Ham's three aided secondary schools.

**Figure 5.6 East Ham's secondary and higher elementary/central schools.**

Name of school	Location	When founded
East Ham Grammar School for Boys	East Ham	1905
East Ham Grammar School for Girls	East Ham	1932
Wakefield Street	East Ham	1910
Sandringham	East Ham	1921

*Source:* Local Studies Notes No 72 L B of Newham.

### **5.6 Finances, curriculum and staffing.**

Little information on East Ham Grammar School for Boys' staff exists but its composition would have been similar to that of the girls' secondary school with masters in place of mistresses. East Ham Grammar School for Girls, by the late 1930s, employed 22 full-time mistresses and three part-time teachers. Of the 22 full-time staff, 18 were graduates, eight holding an arts degree, seven a science or mathematics degree and three a higher degree. Of the three part-time mistresses, all were graduates, two possessing an arts degree and one a mathematics degree. Of the four non-graduate mistresses, one held a qualification from the Royal College of Music, one a diploma from an Art College and two mistresses unspecified qualifications in PE and commerce.<sup>71</sup> East Ham Grammar School for Girls' staffing level can be compared with that for West Ham secondary schools during the same period. By the late 1930s West Ham High School for Girls and St. Angela's, each with a pupil roll similar to that of the East Ham school, employed 41 and 23 full-time members of staff respectively. Mention has already been made of West Ham High School for Girls' comparative over-staffing but it is clear that East Ham Grammar School for Girls had a staffing level very similar to that of St. Angela's. Of the mistresses employed at West Ham High School for Girls' during the middle to late 1930s, 65 per cent possessed a first or higher

degree, compared with 56 per cent with a degree at St. Angela's and 81 per cent at East Ham Grammar School for Girls, compared with a national average of 64.9 for women secondary school teachers at the time. The large proportion of graduate mistresses at East Ham Grammar School for girls may be attributed to a desire by the Education Committee to ensure that the new School was excellently staffed. 'East Ham had a particularly active Education Committee, (councillors) were very enthusiastic that East Ham should have a first class education system'.<sup>72</sup>

The curriculum studied at East Ham Grammar School for Girls and at East Ham Grammar School for Boys was normal for a secondary school of the period and essentially similar to those in place at West Ham's secondary schools. Subjects taken included the usual English grammar and literature and maths. Science at East Ham Grammar School for Girls was '...only a form of nature study - no chemistry or biology' and this contrasted with the science taken at West Ham's secondary schools which tended to be split into the components of chemistry, physics and biology or botany. There is no obvious explanation for this difference between the boroughs particularly since the staff of the East Ham School had almost as many science graduates as arts. It could have been due to a view of nature study as being more suitable for girls than the separate sciences, although there is no evidence for this in Education Committee records. Girls studied Latin and French and, in the Sixth Form, French literature and Russian, the inclusion of this last unusual subject almost certainly being due to the presence of a Russian language specialist on the staff. Pupils studied history, geography, domestic science, needlework, cookery and art. Typewriting was taken in the Sixth Form.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion.

The preceding chapter demonstrates that East Ham, West Ham's near neighbour, was, at the same time, akin to and a completely separate entity from the larger Borough during the interwar period. East Ham was certainly less Socialist-dominated than West Ham, due to a preponderance of owner-occupier members of the upper working class amongst its citizens, but the political and social differences between the two boroughs were slight and not readily detectable by the outsider. The decision of the East Ham Education Committee not to impose compulsory continuation education upon its school-leavers was arrived at by a mixture of financial caution and tardiness in submitting the relevant scheme to the Board of Education. In view of subsequent events in East Ham connected with reorganisation, it is likely though that East Ham parents, too, would have firmly protested against any attempt to hinder the employment prospects of their children by the imposition of continuation education, just as, in West Ham reorganisation would have resulted in more than a minor flurry of protest if the West Ham Committee had disrupted its inhabitants' domestic lives. The methods used in selection for secondary and higher elementary/central school education in East Ham were essentially identical to those used in West Ham and the patterns of entry (by numbers and gender etc.) were also similar. The boroughs differ in the quantity and type of educational records retained from the period 1918-39, this due to unhappy accident and, possibly, East Ham's position as the smaller partner in the 1965 merger.

During the 1930s, Greer Garson and Kathleen Byron, later to become British film actresses, attended East Ham Grammar School for Girls and the School was plainly a source of pride to local councillors. A former pupil indicates the feeling of community which existed 'I can't think of any cases where girls left for economic reasons as I'm sure there would have been assistance in these cases'.<sup>74</sup> East Ham's Labour MP, Susan Lawrence, introduced the practice of children receiving free

milk in school as she '...maintained children could not learn if they were not properly nourished'<sup>75</sup> and East Ham was no less solicitous than its larger neighbour in ensuring the welfare of its schoolchildren. With regard to access to a secondary education, in 1918, a West Ham candidate had a one in 7.7 chance of gaining a secondary school scholarship compared with a one in 12.2 in East Ham. West Ham's superiority continued throughout the 1920s but with the opening of East Ham Grammar School for Girls, the smaller Borough often surpassed the larger. By 1939 when West Ham candidates, using the adjusted figures set out in a previous chapter, had a one in 7.6 chance of gaining a secondary school scholarship, East Ham pupils had a one in 5.6, this difference not being attributable to a lack of candidates from the smaller Borough.

## Notes.

1. *Kelly's Directory* 1921 p.275 and p.288.
2. *The Victoria History of the County of Essex* Vol. VI (1973) The Oxford University Press p.16.
3. Local Studies Notes No 22 L B of Newham.
4. Rainbird, W. *A view of commonman BC 80 to AD 1945* (1948) East Ham Labour Party and Trades Council p.4.
5. Local Studies Notes No 72 L B of Newham.
6. Ibid.
7. *Kelly's Directory* 1921 and 1939.
8. Ibid No. 22.
9. *Reports of the East Ham Education sub-Committee* Nov. 1919-25th Oct. 1920 3/12/19 p.70.
10. Ibid 11/4/21 p.260.
11. Ibid 27/9/20 p.709 and 4/10/20 p.710
12. Ibid 11/4/21 p.260.
13. *Reports of the West Ham Education sub-Committee* Vol. XVIII 14/2/22 p.229.
14. Ibid 10/10/21 p.372.
15. *Newscuttings re Schools Dispute* Sept-Nov O/E/EAS 1929.
16. *Stratford Express* 9/10/29 p.1.
17. *East Ham Echo* 6/9/29 p.1.
18. Ibid 21/9/29 p.2.
19. Ibid 18/9/29 p.1.
20. Local Studies Notes No. 19 L B Newham.
21. *East Ham Echo* 21/9/29 p.2.
22. *Kelly's Directory* op. cit. p.25.
23. Booth, A. and Coulby, D. *Producing and reducing disaffection* (1987) Open University p.25.
24. *East Ham Echo* 27/9/29 p.15.
25. Ibid.

26. Lawn, M. *Servants of the state. The contested control of teaching 1900-1930* (1987) The Falmer Press pp.28-34.
27. *East Ham Education Committee records* 22/10/19 p.709, 27/9/20 p.709 and 4/10/20 p.711.
28. Sanderson, M. *Educational opportunity and social change in England* (1982) Faber and Faber p.26.
29. *East Ham Education Committee records* 14/3/21 p.276.
30. Ibid 24/5/22 p.6.
31. Ibid 3/7/22 p.20.
32. Ibid 14/2/23 p.309.
33. Ibid 16/1/24 p.197.
34. Ibid 12/3/24 p.375.
35. Ibid 1/10/24 p.841.
36. Ibid 14/1/25 p.150.
37. Ibid 17/6/25 p.605.
38. Ibid 10/2/26 pp.367-370.
39. Written notes Mrs V Reid 24/9/91.
40. *East Ham Education Committee records* 17/11/26 pp.36-37.
41. Ibid 15/1/30 pp.157-158.
42. Ibid 14/5/30 p.441.
43. Ibid 10/9/30 p.622.
44. Ibid 17/4/31 p.374.
45. Ibid p.516.
46. Ibid 30/9/31 p.724.
47. Campbell, F. *Eleven plus and all that* (1956) Watts pp.37-38.
48. *East Ham Education Committee records* 18/2/32 p.264.
49. Ibid 11/5/32 p.440.
50. Ibid 15/6/32 p.505.
51. Ibid 11/5/32 p.440.
52. Ibid 22/1/32 p.67.
53. Conversation with Mrs Phyllis Gardner 12/9/91.
54. Conversation with Mrs Grace Glegg 12/9/91.
55. *East Ham Education Committee records* 6/9/33 p.574.

56. Ibid 7/2/34 p.221.
57. *East Ham Committee Final Report* 13/1/34-12/10/35 p.19.
58. Ibid 13/11/34-15/10/35 p.22.
59. Ibid 10/3/37 p.26, 14/4/37 p.33 and 16/11/37 p.28.
60. *East Ham Education Committee Final Report* 11/11/36-12/10/37 p.3.
61. *East Ham Education Committee records* 22/9/37 pp.606-607.
62. *East Ham Education Committee Final Report* Nov. 37-Oct 38 p.31.
63. *East Ham Education Committee records* 5/4/39 p.27.
64. O'Flynn, K. 'The impact of war on secondary education for girls in East and West Ham 1935-1946' (1986) University of London MA. p.10.
65. Ibid pp.11-12.
66. *East Ham Education Committee records* 9/11/17 - 25/10/18 p.307.
67. Ibid 9/11/18 - 22/10/19 p.278 and 10/11/19 - 25/10/20 p.374.
68. Ibid 9/11/20-17/10/21 p.502 and p.615, 14/11/21-18/10/22 p.153, 9/11/23-20/10/24 pp.649-650 and 11/11/36 - 12/10/37 p.393.
69. Ibid 15/11/37 - 11/10/38 p.356 and 14/11/38 - 17/10/38 p.17.
70. Rainbird. op. cit. p.36.
71. Written notes Miss Harper and Miss Broan, mistresses East Ham Grammar School for Girls 1935.
72. Written notes Mrs Molly Fossey, pupil, East Ham Grammar School for Girls 1930s.
73. Written notes Miss Mary Steeds, mistress, East Ham Grammar School for Girls 1930s.
74. Written notes Mrs Molly Fossey, pupil, East Ham Grammar School for Girls 1930s.
- 75 Ibid.



## **Chapter Six: Conclusion.**

How and to what extent the progress of post-primary education in West Ham was influenced by economic stringency during the interwar years is a complex one and cannot be answered by mere reference to financial facts nor even to educational statistics. National politics, national finances and national educational movements naturally comprise some of the overall picture of West Ham's post primary provision during the period 1918-39 but the details are essentially local and the factors which influence them are manifold and include the special nature of West Ham itself, its population, its political representation and the type and number of secondary schools provided by the Borough Council and by the voluntary bodies.

West Ham's history has been one of change and growth, a situation not dissimilar to that occurring in many towns and cities in Great Britain during the past century. West Ham's geographical position and social composition however, gave it unique features which modified the policies and practice of educational progress in the area and which must be highlighted to put educational events into context. West Ham's status as a town attracting new labour is of vital importance. From the 1870s onwards West Ham's indigenous inhabitants were joined by newcomers, initially mainly men but soon accompanied by wives and families, who placed the infrastructure of the area under some pressure. Educational provision was not, at that time, adequate to cope with so many additional pupils and, although, over the next 20 or 30 years, the School Board attempted to provide for all, it is not surprising that in the early years their efforts failed, possibly providing West Ham with a folk-memory background of non-attendance at school which came to the fore during the period of compulsory attendance at the Borough's continuation institutes. Historians of class formation and cultural developments have begun to offer systematic analysis of how urban educational institutions became a site of struggle between class factions with different objectives.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that such conflicts as described above, notably in the matter of compulsory

continuation education continued to occur in West Ham during the interwar period, despite the area's Labour dominated Council. This was attributable not, on the whole, to class differences, since many Council members were of working-class origin, but, again as stated above, to a dichotomy of opinion between parents and those charged with the local administration of education, as to the purpose of education.

The make-up of West Ham's population from the beginning of its period of growth until the end of the 1930s affected the character of the area. West Ham, unlike Whitechapel or Kilburn, was not associated with any particular ethnic group but housed representatives of most countries and many faiths. By the 1920s and 1930s, the inhabitants of the Borough had settled into a homogenous working-class whole with little to distinguish an individual from his English neighbours, except, perhaps, a foreign surname or atypical religious practice. Indeed, in the case of West Ham's thriving pre-First World War German community, the majority of its second and third generation members had completely assimilated with the native population even prior to 1914. The anti-German feeling arising from the Great War persisted throughout the 1920s and intensified during the 1930s and caused some, who had not already done so, to anglicise a German surname into a more acceptably British one. West Ham culture was patriotic, royalist and conservative and there were few in the Borough who did not conform to this shared norm. During the First World War over 2,000 West Ham men were killed whilst serving in the Forces and many of the Borough's fathers and male teachers during the interwar period were ex-servicemen who sometimes passed on an ideal of total commitment to one's country which mitigated against criticism of anything British, even the inequalities of the British class system.<sup>2</sup>

Family and social life in West Ham from 1918-39 was in principle patriarchal but in practice matriarchal. In most families mother not only ran the household but also

controlled the family budget and made fundamental decisions concerning the education and welfare of her children, the opinion of grandmother sometimes even overriding that of her daughter in these matters. This tradition of powerful women possibly had an effect on the attitude of the family and girls themselves, to continued education. To become a wife and mother was a position of some power and influence, far more attractive than a life as an assistant teacher or years working as a junior office clerk or employment in a factory. Boys were generally spared the family preoccupation, common in mining areas of Wales and the North of England, of saving at least the youngest male, from the hard work and dangers of physical labour. Dock work, one of the major means of employment in West Ham, was undoubtedly perilous at times but, unlike work in the pit, offered the possibility of perks in the form of contraband from ships in dock. In addition, the entry and departure of shipping, seamen and goods from all parts of the world added excitement and a sense of savoir faire to the lives of working men. The casual nature of dock work, although an absolute disadvantage in terms of finance and security, resulted in enforced rest days when tired bodies could recuperate, even if minds were preoccupied with short wages.

Although the docks were an important part of the West Ham economy, dock work was by no means the only employment open to West Ham boys. Indeed, since a young man had to be 21 before being allowed on the books of a docking company, a variety of trades and jobs were tried in the preceding years. Boys worked as delivery lads, as labourers, in shops and in bakeries. For those boys who were not 'fortunate' enough to follow fathers, uncles and grandfathers into the docks, West Ham offered other employment; in Beckton Gasworks itself or in the Harland and Wolff ship-building factory or in one of the numerous other factories situated in Silvertown, whose work generally lay open to women too. If a child, boy or girl, showed ability, efforts might be made to ensure that a secondary school place was taken up or that the child remained in education until the age of 16, but the reasoning behind any decision of this nature was intensely practical and, in essence, could be summed up in the question, was there any point, financially or spiritually,

in an extended education? If there was no point in these terms, families tended not to waste time and resources on upstaging neighbours who would, in any case not be impressed by an arbitrary decision to condemn a son or daughter to five years of useless schooling.

The comparative lack of agitation in West Ham for equality of educational opportunity for all during the period in question may be due to the phenomenon of 'relative deprivation' described by W G Runciman in 1966. Relative deprivation can be understood to be a syndrome by which a working man compared his level of poverty or affluence, not against upper-class or middle-class members of society but against the standard of other working men. Runciman believes that the sense of relative deprivation was high at the end of the First World War because expectations of social change among working men were heightened. The Depression 'reduced rather than heightened the magnitude of intensity of relative deprivation because few of its victims felt it to be obviously avoidable'.<sup>3</sup> As already described, working men compared the conditions under which they and their families lived with those of other families in the area, people whose standard of living was readily visible and tended to be less concerned with the lifestyle of their 'social superiors' who, in any case were infrequently encountered by most working-class men and women. This situation occurred in West Ham, both socially and educationally. In social terms, although, by the 1920s and 1930s, West Ham still retained a small minority of middle-class inhabitants, in practice they were representatives of the lower middle class and, as such, were objects of disparagement rather than envy to the working classes. Educationally, a similar process applied. Since nine out of ten children did not receive a secondary school education, there was a feeling that the schooling of the majority was not only the norm but was also the more valuable. Secondary education had its place for the few but was irrelevant to the many.

West Ham Council's relationship with its local electorate could be somewhat stormy. West Ham's position as a nineteenth century 'new town' attracted Socialist activists anxious to unionise the workers. West Ham retained some middle-class inhabitants, and, indeed, continued to do so into the twentieth century, and this section of West Ham society on the whole deplored West Ham's increasing image as a Socialistic stronghold. The Municipal Alliance was formed to counter Labour tendencies in the Borough and remained active during the 1920s and 1930s when the Labour Party had gained a majority on the Council, a majority it was not to subsequently lose. The Alliance councillors, and in particular Councillor W Crow, far from fading away, proceeded to harry their Labour colleagues, with special reference to the majority party's educational policies. It cannot be said that this alone resulted in a reversal of specific decisions made by the Council. When such decisions were made, such as during the change of status of West Ham's compulsory continuation schools to voluntary establishments in 1921, financial considerations and the attitude of the Board of Education counted for considerably more than the hostile attitude of fellow councillors. The Alliance though, was able, in its position as opposition party, to focus the dissent of Borough residents against unpopular educational innovations and to use this discord to gain, short-lived electoral advantage. In general, however, although members of the Alliance might be individually powerful and hold key positions on the Education Committee, they were not able to dictate, or even to modify policy.

Reflecting the views, instinctively or by design, of many West Ham parents, some councillors gave only very limited approval to the extension of the school life of the average child and the Labour Council as a whole, whilst giving support to the ideal of a school-leaving age of 16, stated quite clearly that an academic style of education was neither suitable nor desirable for all children; this stance reflecting average parental views. But all parties agreed that the standards of elementary education had to be raised, and that, though secondary education of the grammar-school type should be made much more accessible, it would always remain a minority provision. The major differences were over the speed and extent

of reform, rather than over its direction.<sup>4</sup> In West Ham it is probable that human factors, such as Labour councillors not wishing to lose face, led to the continued existence of the continuation institutes in the face of fierce local protest. The extension of the life of continuation education in West Ham into the late 1930s, when the national Labour Party had long since abandoned the concept, points to the probability that the remaining institute with its small number of students was fulfilling a need for the tiny minority of West Ham pupils who attended it, possibly connected with the desire of a few West Ham parents to acquire an extended education for their children which necessitated neither the passing of scholarship examinations nor the payment of fees.

West Ham by the end of the First World War, was a populous, crowded Borough with a new Labour Council which might have been expected to introduce sweeping reforms into its educational system. Its inhabitants were overwhelmingly working-class although, as was the case in most boroughs, there were gradations in status between different named areas of West Ham, with the dockside districts, naturally being placed at the foot of the imaginary ladder. The people of West Ham conformed to a fairly rigid pattern of behaviour and of life, with men often being involved in heavy manual labour and women running the home, but the division between the two was not absolute and great numbers of women combined household duties with part-time or casual work, although such work was always subordinated to the needs of the family and was in no way a career. West Ham voters could appear passive and conservative and, by the end of the 1930s, many no longer bothered to vote. Despite this appearance, and sometimes to the shock and consternation of local councillors, residents could be moved to great feats of protest if their home life or the safety or livelihood of their children was put at risk and it is probably true to say that the inhabitants of West Ham saw themselves on terms of equality with all those charged with deciding their fate, whether headteachers, councillors or MPs, although this independent spirit was sometimes hidden by a conventional posture of deference.

Set against this cultural and social background, the difficulties the West Ham Education Committee experienced in 1921 with regard to its compulsory continuation institutes becomes at once more understandable and more important. From the point of view of many West Ham parents the entry of a 14 year old into employment marked the stage when a child could contribute money, in addition to help in kind, to the family budget. Indeed the raising of the school-leaving age to 14, although generally accepted, had entailed sacrifices for some families and it would seem only fair that, having coped with the additional year of enforced schooling, that the school leaver be permitted to take a job, unencumbered by educational ties.

The introduction of compulsory continuation education, an untried concept, caused immediate problems with employers, many of whom who were small local firms and who could see little benefit and some disadvantage to themselves in releasing young employees. This reluctance was transmitted to parents who, as has already been explained, had a material interest in the continued employment of their children. The lack of support from employers was not the sole reason behind parental revolt during the summer of 1921. An important cause was a perceived unfairness.

Working-class life relied heavily on an ideal of fairness. Although life obviously was not fair, as demonstrated by the huge differences in wealth between the poorest and the most affluent, relative unfairness akin to relative poverty, could usually rouse the inhabitants of West Ham to some form of action. Continuation education being made compulsory in West Ham and not in surrounding districts was an example of relative unfairness. Parents believed that their children were being discriminated against in employment compared with children in other boroughs. Continuation education was therefore seen as a disadvantage rather than advantage and it was thus unfair of the West Ham Education Committee to impose it on West Ham children. That the Education Committee displayed a

degree of arrogance, unfeelingness and disrespect in requiring younger children in Silvertown to be removed from their school in order that it be used as a continuation institute was a direct affront both to fairness and to working-class ideas of childcare. West Ham parents, on the whole, wanted their children to attend schools in the immediate neighbourhood, Silvertown parents, living isolated on a near island, the more so. A form of education that injured the working-class family both economically and in its social structures could not have the support of the working-class family.

Compulsory continuation education in West Ham was both short-lived and involved small numbers of pupils. Its importance lies in what the reaction to its imposition indicates about working-class priorities. Parents were driven to attend meetings and to lobby local councillors, these actions seeming to imply not apathy or ignorance but a reasoned opposition to a form of education considered more destructive to working-class life than a selective education. Andrews states '...the economic crisis of the early 1920s arrested the development of the majority of the continuation schools; as a result it has never been possible to assess their worth as schools and their potential contribution to educational progress'.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not parents were correct in their assessment of continuation education is less important than the fact that they had the confidence to oppose it. West Ham had untaught and prejudiced parents but the opposition to the Borough's continuation institutes had its own logic and appeared based on preserving a way of life which had advantages for all family members.

Conversely, secondary education posed no such threat to the working-class support system. Parents could, even after the introduction of the preliminary examination, choose whether or not to enter their children and, if a child were successful could turn down a place if acceptance would entail difficulties of any kind. Added to this, a child had to pass an exceedingly competitive examination in order to be offered a secondary school place and most children were not in danger



of achieving this. Certainly, both entrants for secondary school scholarships and the number of scholarships themselves increased during the interwar period, indicating that West Ham Education Committee was keen to expand its provision and also that parents were keener for their children to take advantage of the possibility of a secondary education than previously. This change in attitude may have been connected to the fall in the interwar birth-rate resulting in smaller families for whom parents could have greater educational aspirations. In the period 1901-31 'proletarian birth-rates in Britain were reduced by one-half, tending to converge with middle-class birth-rates just prior to the Second World War'.<sup>6</sup> Thus West Ham, too, experienced some of the 'enormous increase in the public demand for secondary education during and after the First World War' which had 'concentrated attention on the secondary school to the exclusion of other forms of post-primary education'.<sup>7</sup> This does not indicate that there was a mass demand from the people of West Ham for the selective and academic type of secondary education for their children which was then being offered. West Ham parents encouraged by the West Ham Education Committee, allowed greater numbers of their children to enter for the secondary school scholarship examination, possibly because the opportunity existed and possibly without thought of the consequences of success. This is borne out by the figures that exist for the refusal of secondary and central school places in 1938. In that year 39 children refused a scholarship place, with no reason given. The striking fact about these figures is that the 39 scholarship winners entered in the first place, with the permission of their parents, not all of whose financial situations could have altered so radically in the space of one or two months.

Children who gained a secondary, or indeed, a higher elementary/central school scholarship, were in such a small minority that their achievements figured only briefly in the consciousness of parents, teachers - and contemporaries who had not gained a scholarship. With the small numbers of scholarships available each year it was by no means certain that every school in the Borough would produce even one successful candidate and, with Hadow reorganisation not achieved in West Ham by

the outbreak of World War Two, the majority of children, at least during the 1920s, completed their education in the same school, with the same classmates with whom they had started. The departure of a school fellow or number of school fellows for one of West Ham's selective schools at the age of 11 would have held only passing interest for the rest, and possibly by the time school-leaving approached many pupils would not have envied scholarship holders remaining at school for further years. Also it is important to realise that being selected for secondary education was by no means an assurance of ultimate success. Some scholarship holders found that they could not cope with the academic or social aspects of attendance at a secondary school and were returned to elementary schools. Some pupils were removed when family finances deteriorated. Some children simply lost interest in an extended education. Staying on in the Sixth Form and, even more so, going to university, were privileges acquired by a minuscule number of working-class pupils and thus even for children who gained a scholarship and completed the course, there was little prospect of rising from the class into which they were born. The academic nature of West Ham's interwar secondary schools, with their highly qualified staffs would have distanced them still further in outlook from the majority of the Borough's population. In many cases both ex-elementary and ex-secondary school children continued to live in West Ham in adult life, perhaps with the former employed in a manual and the latter in a clerical capacity, but living in the same Borough for all that. Indeed, a non-secondary school education did not automatically preclude one from a clerical occupation. As David Fowler has stated '...there were no fixed rules on the types of boys and girls required for office work. The educational requirements varied depending on the individual employer: "Some employers prefer boys and girls from Elementary Schools at 14 years of age, whilst others prefer older boys and girls from Central and Secondary schools." <sup>18</sup>

West Ham's pre-war secondary schools were an unbalanced mixture and this, of course was a major factor in the opportunities open to West Ham children. The Borough's secondary schools could only offer a finite number of places and these

were further prescribed by gender and religion, although both Catholic secondary schools admitted non-Catholics. Thus entrants had not only to suit the schools in terms of academic performance but had also to satisfy these other criteria. West Ham itself provided two mixed, non-sectarian secondary schools by 1926 but the Borough, in order to supply the scholarship places it required, had to deal with the three aided schools. For West Ham pupils, and most especially for boys, secondary school places, even for fee-payers, were not over-abundant and out-Borough places had sometimes to be sought. If any attempt had been made to provide greater numbers of secondary school places or, indeed, secondary education for all, existing provision would have had to have been taken into account particularly in the case of the two Catholic schools. If more municipal secondary schools had been provided, West Ham Grammar School might have had difficulty in attracting sufficient Catholic scholarship holders to remain viable, in view of the fact that the West Ham Education Committee for most of the era in question used 50 per cent of the School's first year places to accommodate its own scholarship holders.

The prospect of West Ham being able to establish greater numbers of municipal secondary schools during the period 1918-39 remained a remote one due to international, national and local economic difficulties. In 1920 councillors had planned to open at least one secondary school additional to Plaistow Secondary School but this proposal was never put into practice. The Borough made increasing use of scholarship places at the aided secondary schools thus saving itself the considerable expense of erecting new buildings and funding a full secondary staff. In this manner fee-paying pupils and the aided schools' own finances were used to subsidise West Ham's secondary provision. This was balanced by the aided schools' dependence on Council grants. There was thus a system of secondary education provision comprised of aided and municipal schools in West Ham during the period 1918-39 which was unique to the area. Other districts in London and throughout the country used a mixture of aided and Council provision but the precise amalgam which existed in West Ham was

unlikely to be replicated exactly. Therefore the chance foundation of denominational secondary schools and moneys left by Sarah Bonnell in her will, together with West Ham's financial situation and the attitude of its councillors, determined the opportunities for access to a secondary education of West Ham children as surely as did the nation's economic health, Education acts and Board of Education regulations.

The ethos of the schools themselves could seem esoteric compared to the working-class culture in which they operated. The fact that entry to West Ham's secondary schools was by competitive examination and that success was confined to 'clever' children, immediately set the schools apart as institutions, particularly as compared to the elementary schools which took all comers. The admittance of fee-payers did not undermine this sense of specialness because fees could only be paid by those who were socially selected. The generally impressive qualifications of West Ham's secondary school staffs of necessity conferred an atmosphere of academic distinction upon school proceedings although of course, success at university did not necessarily imply teaching ability. Pupils who left school before taking School Certificate and might subsequently take up fairly lowly employment, had still been taught by graduates of Oxford and Cambridge an experience which might colour the course of their lives. And, indeed, such staff had not gained employment in West Ham by mistake. West Ham Council took pride in their secondary school staffs, particularly those from the two municipal secondary schools and in the academic achievements of pupils, funding advanced courses for members of staff and rewarding with generous maintenance grants those pupils who won places at university. The aided schools too employed excellent staffs and it is interesting to note that one of the grounds on which West Ham High School attempted to dismiss Miss Ellis may have been due to her possessing a Pass rather than Honours degree.

The curriculum of West Ham's secondary schools included subjects such as Latin and other languages not included in the timetable of the elementary schools. With minor differences, each of West Ham's secondary schools followed a similar curriculum, which was itself part of a nation-wide pattern for the selective secondary school. In this West Ham's schools taught a timetable that had little to do with the culture from which most of its pupils came. Parents could identify with the schooling of their children in attendance at elementary school because subjects were familiar from their own schooldays, but the academic secondary curriculum geared to School Certificate was often less comprehensible. Secondary schools, therefore, with due reference to the idiosyncrasies of individual schools across the country would often share an ethos as well as a common curriculum and type of staffing. West Ham's secondary schools differed from each other, not generally in terms of curriculum or staffing, but in terms of whom the schools were designed for. West Ham High School for Girls and St. Angela's contrasted with the two mixed municipal schools and with West Ham Grammar School because they were schools founded specifically to meet the needs of girls, although St. Angela's did allow very small boys into its preparatory department. The presence of these two large aided girls' schools meant that the education of girls in West Ham was by no means of an inferior importance than that of boys. Both headmistresses of St. Angela's during the interwar period held influence with West Ham Council and with their own Church authorities and the impressive qualifications of West Ham High School for Girls' second interwar headmistress meant that the interests of girls were not overlooked, despite the fact that West Ham conformed to the national norm in that for much of the period 1918-39 girls entered for secondary school scholarships in lower numbers than boys.

A comparison with the neighbouring Borough of East Ham usefully explains the attitude of the average West Ham residents. The two boroughs shared many similarities, including poverty, although the smaller Borough was the richer, and both were endowed with redoubtable parents. In matters of provision the fact that East Ham possessed two municipal secondary schools meant that there was not the

tension which sometimes existed between the aided schools and West Ham Education Committee. On the other hand, some East Ham pupils attended West Ham secondary schools and so shared many of the influences which affected West Ham pupils. East Ham differed from West Ham in that it housed a greater percentage of aspiring inhabitants than West Ham. Those who aimed at a higher social position or more genteel work saw a secondary education as a ready escape route, possibly leaving the entanglements and obligations of working-class family life behind. For those in West Ham, and many in East Ham, such an escape was neither possible nor desirable and thus a secondary education had to be valued for itself alone, without trappings of social and personal advantage. It is not surprising, given the unlikely prospect of a child gaining a scholarship in the first place and then winning through to Sixth Form and university, that the majority of parents and children simply discounted the entire concept and concentrated instead on what could, indeed, with some difficulty be achieved; employment; and, if possible in an era of often great unemployment, steady employment.

Unemployment and poverty in West Ham during the period 1918-39 were serious problems compared with other London boroughs and numbers of children experienced real privation. Undoubtedly children who would have passed the scholarship to secondary school were never allowed to compete, and children who entered failed to take up a scholarship due to the poor state of family finances. Others, who had first accepted a scholarship place were forced by family pressures to leave school before completing the full secondary course. This thesis does not try to minimise the effect of poverty and the wastage which resulted but holds that it does not completely explain the low esteem in which an extended education was regarded by many in West Ham during the interwar period. The lack of agitation in West Ham for an increase in secondary school provision during the 1920s and 1930s was not attributable to timidity or servility but to the fact that, for the most part, West Ham residents inhabited a universe where a secondary education was generally neither possible nor necessary, where the survival of the family was paramount and where the provision of post-primary education in the diverse and

fragmentary manner in which existed in West Ham and, indeed, across the country, could only have minimal effect upon the lives of the majority of schoolchildren.

## Notes.

1. Goodenow, R. and Marsden, W. *The city and education in four nations.* (1992) Cambridge University Press p.27.
2. Richards, R. 'Civil defence and society (A social study of West Ham at war 1939-1945)' (1989) The Polytechnic of East London Dissertation for the degree of Independent Study p.63.
3. Runciman, W. A. *Relative deprivation and social justice* (1966) Routledge and Kegan Paul p.60.
4. Barker, R. *Education and politics 1900-1951* (1972) Clarendon Press p.49.
5. Andrews, L. *The Education Act, 1918* (1976) Routledge and Kegan Paul p.88.
6. Burgess, K. 'Education policy in relation to employment in Britain 1935-45: a decade of 'missed opportunities?' *History of Education* 1993 Vol.22 No.4 p.369.
7. Banks, O. *Parity and prestige in English secondary education* (1955) Routledge and Kegan Paul p.123.
8. Fowler, D. *The first teenagers. The lifestyle of young wage-earners in interwar Britain* (1995) The Woburn Press p.28.



## **BIBLIOGRAPHY.**

### **Primary sources.**

#### **a. Manuscript.**

##### **Public Record Office Education Files.**

120/163, 21/28650, 53/693

##### **Greater London Record Library.**

LCC Education Committee records 1918-39.

##### **Local Studies Library LB of Newham.**

East Ham Education Committee records 1918-39.

West Ham Education Committee records 1918-39.

County Borough of West Ham Municipal Election material 1918-23.

Sarah Bonnell's (West Ham High School for Girls) archive material.

Plaistow Secondary School archives 1926-39.

The Russell School magazines 1933-36.

##### **Brentwood Cathedral.**

Archives of the Diocese of Brentwood. Correspondence of Father C Careless  
1918-38.

##### **Written notes.**

Mrs M Fossey, Miss M Steeds, Miss Harper, Miss Broan, Mrs V Reid.

##### **Interviews.**

Mrs P Gardner and Mrs G Glegg.

**St. Bonaventure's Secondary School, Forest Gate.**

St. Bonaventure's (West Ham Grammar School) Governors' minutes 1918-39.

**b. Printed.**

**Newspapers.**

The Stratford Express 1918-39.

Newscuttings re: Schools dispute East Ham 1929 O/E/EAS/370.

**Local studies Notes L B of Newham.**

No. 13. Notes on the Silvertown Explosion.

No. 19. Labour representation in East and West Ham.

No. 22. Local government and politics in East Ham.

No. 29. Reminiscences of Mr Patterson (East Ham).

No. 35. West Ham Technical Institute and library.

No. 39. History of the modern town.

No. 42. Reminiscences of Mr Rose (Canning Town and docks).

No. 43. In the streets of Cyprus-on-Thames.

No. 44. The Silvertown Explosion (a description from Women's Dreadnought).

No. 46. Memories of Mr Betts.

No. 47. Roll of Honour of the Silvertown Explosion.

No. 49. Reminiscences of Mr Hammond (Custom House and docks).

No. 54. Canning Town.

No. 56. Easter Holiday in East Ham.

No. 65. A walk through the Victoria and Albert docks 1914.

No. 66. Girl labour in West Ham 1914.

No. 69. County Borough of West Ham Civil Defence brief summary etc.

No. 71. A brief historical survey of Manor Park.

No. 72. The history of education in East Ham.

### **Central Records.**

Parliamentary Debates. Commons Vol. XCVIL 1917.

Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on the Education of the adolescent (1926) Board of Education.

Memorandum on examinations for scholarships and free places (1928) Board of Education.

Supplementary memorandum for scholarships and special places in secondary schools (1936) Board of Education.

Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools (1938) Board of Education.

### **Local Records.**

County Borough of West Ham List of members of the Council (1920-42).

Kelly's Directory, 1921, 1926.

Census of England and Wales (1923) County of Essex HMSO.

Victoria History of the county of Essex Vol. V (1966) and Vol. VI (1973).

The Jewish East End (1992) Educational pack Tower Hamlets Environmental Trust.

Forward, West Ham (1922) County Borough of West Ham.

The book of West Ham (1923) Official Publications.

### **Secondary.**

#### **a. Books.**

Aldrich, R. *An introduction to the history of education* (1982) Hodder and Stoughton.

Andrew, L. *The Education Act, 1918* (1976) Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Armytage, W. H. G. *Four hundred years of English education* (1964) Cambridge University Press.

Avery, G. *The best type of girl (A history of girls' independent schools 1886-1986)* (1991) Deutsch.

- Banks, O. *Parity and prestige in English secondary education* (1955) Routledge and Kegan.
- Baron, S, Finn, D, Green, M. and Johnson, R. *Unpopular education and social democracy in Britain to 1944* (1981) Hutchinson.
- Barker, R. *Education and politics 1900-1951. A study of the Labour Party* (1972) Clarendon Press.
- Batho, G. *Political issues in education* (1989) Cassell Educational.
- Benson, J. *The working-class in Britain 1850-1939* (1989) Longman.
- Bernbaum, G. *Social change and the schools 1918-1944* (1967) Routledge and Kegan.
- Bird, J. (ed) *The way we were. Memories of East and West Ham* (1994) Stratford City Challenge Community History.
- Booth, A. and Coulby, D. *Producing and reducing disaffection* (1987) Open University.
- Bryant, M. *The London experience of secondary education* (1986) Athlone.
- Bush, J. *Behind the lines* (1984) Merlin.
- Butler, D. and Butler, G. *British political facts 1900-1985* (1986) Macmillan.
- Campbell, F. *Eleven plus and all that* (1956) Watts.
- Cole, G. D. H. and Postgate, R. *The common people 1746-1946* (1987) Methuen.
- Craft, M, Raynor, J. and Cohen, L. *Linking home and school* (1980) Pelican.
- Cronin, J. E. *Labour and society in Britain 1918-79* (1984) Batsford Academic Press.
- Crow, A. *A Victorian gentleman and his family* (undated).
- Crowther, A. *British social policy 1914-1939* (1988) Macmillan.
- Cruickshank, M. *Church and state in English education* (1964) Macmillan.
- Curtis, S. J. *History of education in Great Britain* (1967) University Tutorial Press.
- Dent, H. *1870-1970 Century of growth in English education* (1970) Longman.
- Douglas, J. W. B. *The home and the school: a study of ability and attainment in the primary school* (1964) MacGibbon and Kee.
- Garnett, E. *The family from One End Street* (1937) Heinemann.

- Goodenow, R. and Marsden, W. *The city and education in four nations* (1992) Cambridge University Press.
- Gordon, P. and Lawton, D. *Curriculum changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (1978) Hodder and Stoughton.
- Gordon, P, Aldrich, R. and Dean, D. *Education and policy in England in the Twentieth Century* (1991) (The Woburn Press).
- Gordon, P. *Selection for secondary education* (1980) The Woburn Press.
- Gosden, P. H. J. H. *The evolution of a profession (A study of the contribution of teachers' associations to the development of school teaching as a professional occupation)* (1972) Basil Blackwell.
- Gosden, P. H. J. H. *The development of educational administration in England and Wales* (1966) Blackwell.
- Graves, J. *Policy and progress in secondary education 1902-1943* (1943) Nelson and Sons.
- Hoggart, R. *The uses of literacy* (1992) Penguin.
- Humphries, S. *Hooligans or rebels?* (1981) Blackwell.
- Kamm, J. *Hope deferred: girls' education in English education* (1965) Methuen.
- Kazamias, A. *Politics and society and secondary education in England* (1966) Oxford University Press.
- Lawn, M. and Grace, G. *Teachers: the culture and politics of work* (1987) Falmer Press.
- Lawn, M. *Servants of the state. The contested control of teaching 1900-1930* (1987) The Falmer Press.
- Lawson, J. and Silver, H. *A social history of education in England* (1973) Methuen.
- Leese, J. *Personalities and power in English education* (1950) Arnold and son.
- Lindsay, K. *Social progress and educational waste: being a study of the free-place and scholarship system* (1926) London.
- Lindsay, T. E. and Harrington, M. *The Conservative Party 1918-79* (1979) Macmillan.
- Lowndes, G. A. N. *The silent social revolution* (1969) Hodder and Stoughton.
- Maclure, S. *A history of education in London 1870-1990* (1990) Penguin.

- Marriott, J. *The culture of labourism. The East End between the Wars* (1991) Macmillan.
- McCulloch, G. *The secondary technical school - A usable past?* (1989) Falmer Press.
- McDougall, D. ed. *Fifty years a borough 1886-1936* (1936) County Borough Council West Ham.
- McElwee, W. *Britain's locust years 1918-40* (1967) Routledge and Kegan.
- Mowat, C. *Britain between the Wars 1918-40* (1968) Methuen.
- Murphy, J. *Church, state and schools in Britain 1800-1970* (1971) Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Parkinson, M. *The Labour Party and the organisation of secondary education 1918-65* (1970) Routledge and Kegan.
- Pearce, R. *Britain: industrial relations and the economy 1900-39* (1993) Hodder and Stoughton.
- Peele, G. and Cook, C. *The politics of reappraisal 1918-1939* (1975) Macmillan.
- Pelling, H. *Modern Britain 1885-1955* (1960) London.
- Perry, W. *A West Ham life* (1984) Parents' Centre Publications.
- Peschek, D. and Brand, J. *Policies and politics in secondary education (Case studies in West Ham and Reading)* (1966) The London School of Economics and Science.
- Pugh, M. *The making of modern British politics 1869-1939* (1982) Basil Blackwell.
- Rainbow, W. *A view of commonman BC 80 to AD 1945* (1948) East Ham Labour Party and Trades Council.
- Raymond, J. *The Baldwin age* (1960) Eyre and Spottiswood.
- Runciman, W. *Relative deprivation and social justice* (1966) Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Sadler, M. *Continuation schools in England and elsewhere* (1907) University of Manchester.
- Sainsbury, F. *West Ham 1886-1986* (1986) Council of the London Borough of Newham.

- Sanderson, M. *Educational opportunity and social change in England* (1987) Faber and Faber.
- Seabourne, M. *Education from local sources* (1967) Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Silver, H. *Education and the social condition* (1980) Methuen.
- Silver, H. (ed) *Equal opportunity in education: a reader in social class and educational opportunity* (1973) Methuen.
- Simon, B. *The politics of educational reform 1920-1940* (1974) Lawrence and Wishart.
- Simon, B. *Education and the Labour movement* (1965) Lawrence and Wishart.
- Stevenson, J. *Social conditions in Britain between the Wars* (1977) London.
- Stokes, A. *From Village to County Borough. History of East Ham* (1933) Wilson and Whitworth.
- Sutherland, G. *Ability, merit and measurement* (1984) Clarendon Press.
- Swift, R. *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* (1990) The Historical Association.
- Taylor, A. J. P. *English history 1914-1945* (1970) Pelican.
- Tawney, R. H. *Secondary education for all* (1924) Allen and Unwin.
- Tropp, A. *The school teachers: the growth of the teaching profession in England and Wales from 1800 to the present day* (1957) Heinemann.
- Waterfall, E. A. *Day continuation schools in England* (1923) Allen and Unwin.
- Widdowson, F. *Going up into the next class (women and elementary school training 1840-1914)* (1980) Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications.
- Wright, A. *R H Tawney* (1987) Manchester University Press.
- Young, M. and Wilmott. P. *Family and class in a London suburb* (1971) The New English Library.
- Young, M. and Wilmott. P. *Family and kinship in East London* (1974) Pelican.

**b. Articles.**

Bartle, G. F. 'Surviving in central London: problems of a boys' public day school between the wars'. *History of Education* 1991 Vol.20 No.4.

Brooks, J. R. 'Labour and educational reconstruction, 1916-1926: a case study in the evolution of policy'. *History of Education* 1991 Vol.20 No.3.

Burgess, K. 'Education policy in relation to employment in Britain 1935-45: a decade of "missed opportunities"?' *History of Education* 1993 Vol.22 No.4.

Cunningham, P., Gardner, P., Wells, R. & Willis, R. 'McNair's lost opportunity: the student-teacher scheme and the student-teacher's experience'. *History of Education* 1995 Vol.24 No.3.

Gordon, P. 'Homework: origins and justifications'. *Westminster Studies in Education* 1980 Vol. 3.

Hendrick, H. 'A race of intelligent unskilled labourers: the adolescent worker and the debate on compulsory part-time day continuation schools, 1900-1922'. *History of Education* 1980 Vol. 9 No 2.

Higginson, J. H. 'Establishing a history of education course: the work of Professor Michael Sadler, 1903-1911'. *History of Education* Vol. 9 No 245-255.

Swinnerton, B. 'The 1931 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School: tensions and contradictions'. *History of Education* 1996 Vol.25 No.1.

Roach, J. 'Examinations and the secondary schools 1900-1945'. *History of Education* 1979 Vol. 8 No 1.

Thoms, D. W. 'The emergence and failure of the day continuation experiment'. *History of Education* 1975 Vol. 4 No 1.



c. Theses and dissertations.

Cole, J. 'Women's role in the domestic and work spheres in West Ham 1920-1960'. Polytechnic of East London. BA (Hons) dissertation.

Cole, J. 'The health and education of children in West Ham 1870-1939'. Polytechnic of East London. BA.

Crow, A. 'A Victorian gentleman and his family'. Local Studies Library. L B of Newham.

Morton, J. 'The day continuation institutes of West Ham' (1968) University of Manchester. MA.

O'Flynn, K. 'The impact of war on secondary education for girls in East and West Ham 1935-1946' (1986) University of London. MA.

Silto, W. 'Compulsory day continuation schools. Their origins, objectives and development, with special reference to H. A. L. Fisher's 1918 experiment' (1993) University of London. PhD.

Richards, R. 'Civil defence and society (A social study of West Ham at war 1939-1945)' (1989) Polytechnic of East London. Dissertation for the degree of Independent Study.