‘Building a community together’: past and present meanings of manual work at Kilquhanity School (1940-1996) and Wennington School (1940-1975)

A PhD Thesis by Emily Charkin at the UCL Institute of Education

I, Emily Charkin, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
Acknowledgements

This PhD thesis is dedicated to Gavin Aitkenhead, who died on 13 January 2020 while I was completing this work. Gavin was my first interviewee for this research five years ago. He gave a vivid and opinionated account of the story of Kilquhanity School where he was child, pupil, teacher, headteacher, steward, self-builder and ultimately died. His testimony is powerful and important, in spite of - or partly because of - his healthy scepticism about theories, archives and historical accounts.

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Abstract

This PhD draws on text, testimonial and images to reveal staff and pupils' lived experiences and attitudes towards manual work at two little-researched experimental schools, Kilquhanity (1940-96) and Wennington (1940-75). My focus on the often ignored or over-simplified practice of manual work reveals it as a significant and multi-faceted aspect of life at the two schools – which also casts light on the wider values and dynamics of the schools. By comparing this detailed, case-study research with accounts of manual work in other progressive, therapeutic, anarchist and radical schools and community experiments in this period, this work contributes new perspectives to the existing historiography on progressive and radical education. It questions the consensus that the better-known, libertarian Summerhill was 'more radical' and uncovers a neglected fault-line within the progressive movement relating to concepts of child-centred freedom and mixed-age community.

This thesis also brings the past into conversation with the present, exploring whether and how young people experience forms of manual work in contemporary settings, including at the author’s own initiatives at Wilderness Wood in East Sussex. The experiences and ideas in this research challenge and offer alternatives to academic and popular debates about education, which are often dominated by narrow and polarised accounts of liberal versus progressive or vocational versus academic ideas and practices. This work also contributes to wider debates about childhood and society by exploring the potential value of manual work for young people as a ‘beyond voice’ form of participation in community.
Impact

This thesis contributes to academic debates about progressive and radical education across different disciplines. It also contributes to academic debates about childhood, in particular children’s participation, spaces and relationships. This cross-disciplinary approach and a focus on uncovering the voice of the pupil through interviews and other primary sources is also relevant to methodological debates in the history and sociology of education and childhood. Material from this research has already featured in a recently published chapter in the Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics (2019). In the future, I also intend to publish articles on different aspects of this research in journals such as Ethics and Education, Environmental Education, History of Education, History Workshop, Oral History, Other Education, Paedagogica Historica. I will also give talks at relevant academic conferences.

Outside academia, this research has the potential to contribute to ongoing debates about education and childhood amongst policy makers, teachers, parents and communities. Particularly, in the context of the current covid-19, global pandemic, this work can help to challenge deep-rooted assumptions and offer alternative perspectives, as society is forced to reflect on new forms of learning outside the physical structures and routines of the previously taken-for-granted school system. I aim to follow up on my article about free schools in The Guardian (2011), which was based on my MA dissertation research, by creating articles based on this thesis research which speak to contemporary issues about childhood and education. I will extend the Wikipedia articles about the two case-study schools. I will also give talks to share the ideas with related communities of interest – for example, the London Anarchist Research Group, the Quaker Society, the Radical Education group.

At Wilderness Wood, the community woodland in East Sussex where I live and work, I have the opportunity to share ideas from this research with member families and individuals and a wider public who use the cafe and woodland. I have already facilitated discussion groups about this research over the past two years and intend to give a talk about the findings of the research in autumn 2020. I would also like to bring together stakeholders from the various historical and contemporary settings in summer 2021 to share experiences and discuss wider relevance to contemporary debates. This research has already influenced practices at Wilderness Wood in relation to young people’s involvement in manual work and it will continue to do so as we reflect on and develop our programme of inter-generational activities and ways for young people to participate – whether with or without school.
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Chapter 1

‘Not on-the-radar’: introduction and literature review

Introduction

In 1940 two experimental co-educational boarding schools were founded in rural areas of the UK, where pupils and staff worked together to create and look after the physical fabric of the buildings, equipment and land. This research draws on text, testimony and images to uncover adult and children’s lived experiences of and attitudes towards this manual work at the two schools; what kind of activities were involved; how their meanings varied over time and between the two schools; and how these activities supported or were in tension with the wider values and practices of the schools relating to learning, freedom, community, self-government and relations between adults and children.

By foregrounding what one ex-pupil calls the ‘nitty gritty of life’, this research contributes to filling in a ‘lacuna’ identified by Michael Fielding, the philosopher, in relation to the ‘key place of physical work’ in radical education and what the geographer, Peter Kraftl, calls the ‘usually unnoticed...mundane material practices’ in childhood studies. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of this manual work; maintenance or ‘useful work’, which formed part of the daily and weekly routine; craft subjects in the workshops which formed a prominent part of timetabled lessons; one-off building projects which emerged at specific moments in the lives of the schools. This structure complicates the tendency to treat ‘physical work’ as one homogenous activity and uncovers differences and similarities between these different aspects in terms of their purposes, meanings, associated adult-child relationships and underlying values.

1 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
2 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
These two schools were little-known at the time and have remained, as one ex-pupil describes, ‘not on-the-radar’, compared with more high-profile libertarian schools, in particular A.S.Neill’s Summerhill (1921- ). This work explores whether these schools deserve to be ‘on-the-radar’ in literature on the history and philosophy of education. By comparing the schools’ manual work practices with other settings at the time, this thesis considers whether that ‘radar’ should be the early twentieth century movement of progressive schools, with which they have tended to be associated, and/or the often neglected radical movement of therapeutic, anarchist and environmental education and community experiments. Experiences of manual work at the case-study schools also cast light on the existing historiography, questioning the consensus that Summerhill should be considered ‘more radical’ and drawing attention to a neglected fault-line within the progressive movement relating to concepts of child-centred freedom and mixed-age community.

In the contemporary context, this research uncovers whether and how ideas and practices relating to young people and manual work, persist – including at Wilderness Wood, where since 2014, the author and her family have been creating an educational and community experiment. I question whether apparently similar contemporary practices, such as are found as part of the popular Forest School movement, represent a continuation and widening of the same traditions as the case-study schools or whether they are an adult-led appropriation and ‘schoolification’ of manual and outdoor activities.

These alternative ideas and practices from past and present are used to challenge and offer ideas to ongoing debates about education, which tend to be dominated by a ‘loggerhead’ between liberal and progressive ideas and a ‘perennial battle’ between academic and vocational ideas. They also offer fresh perspectives to debates about children’s spaces and relationships – in particular, in the search for

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6 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
what Fielding calls ‘beyond voice’\textsuperscript{10} forms of participation and what David Kennedy calls the ‘reconstruction of relations between adults and children’.\textsuperscript{11}

This account of under-researched practices in forgotten schools and communities is offered as part of a wider critique in education research, as Judith Suissa, philosopher, argues for, ‘to challenge contemporary ideological positions...by articulating and documenting alternative educational ideas and experiments’.\textsuperscript{12} It is also offered as a source of potential ideas and perspectives with wider application, what Martin Mills and Glenda McGregor call ‘lessons from the margins’\textsuperscript{13} in their book on ‘learning from alternative schools’.\textsuperscript{14} The ideas and practices in this research speak not only to how to reform education or childhood settings, but to the wider task identified by historian John Gillis of creating ‘new mainlands configured to the needs of both adults and children’.\textsuperscript{15} This research explores what can happen when, instead of tinkering with curriculum, assessment or pedagogy, young people and adults set about the work of ‘building a community together’.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Background to Wennington and Kilquhanity Schools}

Kilquhanity and Wennington were both founded in 1940 and led by married couples; Wennington by Kenneth (1903-98) and Frances Barnes (-1969) and Kilquhanity by John (1910-98) and Morag Aitkenhead (1911-2007). Wennington was set up in rural Lancashire and moved to Yorkshire in 1945. Kilquhanity was located in rural Galloway. Both schools were set up in the upheaval of the Second World War and benefitted from an initial influx of evacuated children from cities. They navigated precarious early years in the immediate post-war period and went on to achieve relative stability during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in terms of pupil and staff

\textsuperscript{16} Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
numbers. Kilquhanity settled at between 30 and 50 pupils mainly between the ages of 10 and 16 while Wennington had around 100 pupils, between the ages of 11 and 18. Both schools faltered and closed shortly after their respective headteachers retired. Barnes retired in 1968 and the school closed in 1975. Aitkenhead retired in 1996 and the school closed in 1997.

Both schools were private and charged fees, albeit with considerable discretion applied for families for whom the fees would have been prohibitive. A documentary account of Wennington from 1962, explicitly claimed that ‘every income level’ was represented not just those ‘traditionally associated with boarding schools’. Barnes called himself a ‘bred-in-the-bone left-winger’ and in his *Proposal for a New School* (1936), set out to ‘admit children from all levels of society’ as part of a wider political aim to create a ‘classless society’. Parents selected the schools because of sympathy for their values and/or because their children had struggled in more conventional schooling with dyslexia or other kinds of academic or social difficulties. Both schools admitted a high proportion of children with learning difficulties, funded by the local authorities; for example, Robert Skidelsky claimed in 1969 that 25 per cent of pupils at Kilquhanity were in this category.

The ethos and practices of both schools were strongly influenced by the founder headteachers and their wives. Kenneth Barnes grew up with Quaker parents in what he described as the ‘exciting and instructive political climate of Battersea’. He won a scholarship to a grammar school and read chemistry at King’s College, London. Before founding Wennington, Barnes worked as a science teacher at the well-known progressive Christ’s Hospital and Bedales School (c.1930-40) where he was strongly influenced by the founder-headteacher, H.D. Badley. Both Kenneth and his wife, Frances Barnes were Quakers and explicitly drew on the philosophy of John Macmurray, who was chair of governors for the school 1950-67, and whose

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17 From 1940 to 1950, Wennington took pupils from age eight but then raised the starting age.
19 *The Schools*, BBC film.
‘personalist’ philosophy emphasised freedom through ‘community life’.\textsuperscript{25} Barnes echoed Macmurray’s philosophy in his own rhetoric about Wennington as he repeatedly claimed that ‘our school is a community not an institution…a community of persons in relationships…all the more usual concepts of education have been secondary’.\textsuperscript{26} Although the school was not advertised as Quaker, John Macmurray argued in 1968 that ‘the secret of its success’ lies in the fact that the school itself was a ‘society of friends’\textsuperscript{27} and Jonathan Adamson, ex-pupil, suggests that Barnes’ Quaker faith was a ‘bedrock’ to the school.\textsuperscript{28} Barnes was also known as the ‘preeminent spokesperson’\textsuperscript{29} and writer in Britain on sex education and published \textit{Sex, Friendship and Marriage}\textsuperscript{30} (1938) and \textit{He and She} (1958).\textsuperscript{31}

John and Morag Aitkenhead were pacifists and Scottish nationalists of working-class background. Aitkenhead, although less explicit about his philosophy than Barnes, set out his founding principles in his first published account of the school in 1962 for \textit{The Independent Progressive Schools} and claimed that: ‘we did not begin with definitions of education…’ but that we were ‘for peace, for love, for life, for nature. And, of course, for freedom – and maybe for community.’\textsuperscript{32} He concluded the chapter with the statement that ‘the best definition of education I know is Sir Herbert Read’s: “Education is the generation of happiness”’.\textsuperscript{33} In 1990, looking back on 50 years of the school, Aitkenhead reiterates this philosophy, calling it the ‘most profound statement’ and adds the nuance that it is ‘not the pursuit of happiness; it is the involvement in activities and relationships, the creative work that nourishes the human spirit’.\textsuperscript{34} He summarises the experience of the school as: we ‘worked together and learned to live together’ and ‘academic skills found their real level’.\textsuperscript{35}

Both headteachers challenged conventional and progressive accounts of the etymology of ‘education’, arguing that it should be taken from the Latin, ‘educare’

\textsuperscript{25} MacMurray, J. (1933) \textit{The Woodcraft Way Series}, no 19, 8.
\textsuperscript{26} Annual Report in School Magazine, 1967-8, 2.
\textsuperscript{27} MacMurray, J. (1968) ‘They Made a School’, private files of Michael Fielding.
\textsuperscript{28} Jonathan Adamson, interviewed 25 February 2016.
\textsuperscript{29} Sam Doncaster, group discussion 16 May 2018.
\textsuperscript{30} Barnes, K. and Barnes, F. (1938) \textit{Sex, Friendship and Marriage}, London: Allen and Unwin.
\textsuperscript{33} Aitkenhead (1962), 85.
\textsuperscript{35} Aitkenhead (1990), 8.
meaning ‘to nourish’\textsuperscript{36} rather than to train or to lead out based on the Latin ‘educere’. They resisted the traditional focus of schools on preparation for academic exams and future achievements – what Barnes called ‘the reaching of a distant peak’\textsuperscript{37} and Aitkenhead called ‘always jam tomorrow...never jam today’.\textsuperscript{38} However, older pupils took a few O’levels over the course of their time at the school. In the BBC film of 1968, Aitkenhead suggests that pupils were likely to take three or four rather than eight or nine and boasts that pupils are not ‘grey-faced exam passers’.\textsuperscript{39} At Wennington, pupils took O’levels – but again fewer – and, according to ex-pupil Pat Mitchell, ‘there wasn’t excessive pressure and exams could be taken when ready, regardless of age’.\textsuperscript{40}

Instead the headteachers both claimed that their aims related to individuals flourishing within community. Barnes wrote explicitly in the \textit{New Era}, a journal of progressive education, in1946 about Wennington as an experiment in creating the ‘conditions of community’.\textsuperscript{41} In 1980, he reflected on his intentions for the school: ‘what we were trying to do was to enable adults and children together to discover what it would mean to have life abundantly, to be fulfilled, to live creatively’.\textsuperscript{42} Similarly, Aitkenhead described the Kilquhanity school aims as ‘abundant life’ and ‘social responsibility’.\textsuperscript{43} Their methods were based on learning-by-doing and incidental education linked to activities and relationships in a community setting, as Aitkenhead put it, ‘living the day to day’.\textsuperscript{44} This philosophy translated into an emphasis on practical activities in the timetable and an informality of relationships between staff and pupils. This informality and Barnes’ interest in sex education did not mean that sexual relations were permitted at the school; however nude

\textsuperscript{38} John Aitkenhead (1968) cited in ‘Kilquhanity House School’, \textit{Anarchy}, 92 (8) 10, 321.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Four Heads in a Row} (1968), BBC documentary by Trevor Philpot.
\textsuperscript{40} Pat Mitchell, email to Emily Charkin 28 November 2019.
\textsuperscript{42} Barnes, K. (1980), 59.
\textsuperscript{43} Kilquhanity Appeal leaflet February 1959, National Records Office in Edinburgh.
\textsuperscript{44} John and Morag Aitkenhead, interviewed 21 January 1998 in Millenium Memory Bank at British Library.
swimming was a tradition at Wennington and ex-pupils claim that ‘sexual going ons' went on but ‘were not aired'.\textsuperscript{45}

In spite of the power of the founder-headteachers, which is criticised by some ex-pupils as ‘autocratic'\textsuperscript{46} and a ‘democratic dictatorship',\textsuperscript{47} there were many other adults and young people who were influential in the life of the schools, suggesting that power was, to some extent, distributed. In both cases, the wives of the headteachers were significant figures in the schools. Kenneth Barnes endorsed A.S.Neill's suggestion that ‘our wives did all the work and we got all the kudos'.\textsuperscript{48} And many ex-pupils suggest that Morag Aitkenhead had a crucial pastoral role at the school. Gavin Aitkenhead, John Aitkenhead’s son who attended and taught at the school, claims that when there was a ‘good group of staff and older pupils, the whole thing would swim'.\textsuperscript{49} Richard Jones, Mike Todd and Gavin Aitkenhead were also key members of staff, particularly in relation to manual and creative work.

At Wennington, Brian Hill, an English teacher (1955-73) and Roger Gerhardt a French teacher (1953-75) were both extremely influential and much referred to by ex-pupils with Brian Hill taking over as headteacher when Barnes retired in 1968. In terms of manual work, Louise Jones in the art room (1940-75), Frank Burgess in the workshop (1940-75) and John Swift, the engineer responsible for major infrastructure projects at the school (1957-72) were all key figures. There were also many pupils at both schools who were influential at the time and sometimes returned as staff to the schools or took proactive roles in the ongoing communities of ex-pupils.

In terms of a more formal distribution of power to the wider school community, both schools experimented with structures of self-government, although the practice of whole-school weekly meetings became far more firmly established at Kilquhanity than Wennington. Aitkenhead, writing in 1968, described the weekly meeting, as the ‘strongest tradition in the school'.\textsuperscript{50} Ex-staff and pupils also emphasise its importance, for example, Irma Wood, staff 1948-50, describes the meeting as the

\textsuperscript{45} Richard Schofield, interviewed 11 July 2017.
\textsuperscript{46} Jonathan Adamson, group discussion at Wennington Archive Week 14 May 2013.
\textsuperscript{47} Adam Booth, interviewed 29 September 2017.
\textsuperscript{49} Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
‘engine room of the social machine – unforgettable’;\(^{51}\) Andrew Pyle, pupil in the 1960s, claims that ‘the meeting was the most important thing about living together’;\(^{52}\) and Richard Jones, teacher in the 1970s, calls the weekly meeting ‘the highlight of the week’.\(^{53}\) By contrast, at Wennington, Barnes admitted that an attempt at self-government at the beginning of the life of the school was a ‘failure’ and later in the life of the school, the idea of a whole school meeting of 100 pupils became ‘unwieldy’,\(^{54}\) so that a representative Senate was set up. This Senate also, according to Barnes, had its ‘ups and downs’\(^{55}\) and ex-pupils claim that it had ‘no teeth’ and ‘limited decision-making’.\(^{56}\)

Both headteachers placed great importance on manual work as a physical aspect of participation in the community life of the school. Appendix 1 and 2 give an overview of how manual work formed part of the daily life in the schools and key dates in the history of the physical infrastructure of the schools. This research investigates staff and pupil experiences of maintenance, craft and building work - and how they cast light on the wider aims, values and power dynamics at the schools, as described above.

The following Literature Review explores how the schools and the theme of young people’s involvement in manual work have been positioned in literature to date. There are no dedicated full-length books or academic articles about the case-study schools, apart from *Energy Unbound* (1980)\(^{57}\) by Barnes himself. However there are several accounts of the schools in overviews of progressive, libertarian, therapeutic and alternative education; for example, W.A.C. Stewart gives a fairly detailed account of Wennington in his historical overview of *The Educational Innovators: Progressive Schools 1881-1967* (1968);\(^{58}\) Robert Skidelsky, an American commentator, includes Kilquanity in his account of *English Progressive Schools* (1969) based on ‘spending about a week’\(^{59}\) at the school; Maurice


\(^{52}\) Andrew Pyle, interviewed 25 January 2015.

\(^{53}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.


\(^{55}\) Barnes (1962), 161.

\(^{56}\) Jonathan Adamson, group discussion at Wennington Archive Week 14 May 2013


Bridgeland includes a detailed description of Wennington and passing mention of Kilquhanity in *Pioneer Work with Maladjusted Children* (1971); John Shotton includes Kilquhanity in his historical account of *Libertarian Education and Schooling in Britain 1890-1980* (1993); and Kraftl includes Kilquhanity as a case-study in his relatively recent *Geographies of Alternative Education* (2015). This detailed primary research contributes important new pupil perspectives to these overviews, which tend to be treated as definitive by contemporary researchers, for example, John Howlett’s relatively recent account of *Progressive Education: A Critical Introduction* (2013) calls Skidelsky’s book the ‘key pioneering discussion’ of progressive education.

This Literature Review also sets out accounts of progressive and radical education, with which the case-study schools are compared; the wider intellectual and cultural contexts of manual work at the historical case-study schools and in contemporary settings, where these practices persist; and ongoing debates about education and childhood to which the work contributes. The experiences at the historical and contemporary settings are offered as a contribution to a growing body of contemporary research literature on radical education, alternative education, informal education, and social pedagogy, which is still, as Kraftl suggests ‘quite patchy’ and with ‘much more to be done’. This work also draws on and casts light on writing by geographers, philosophers and ethnographers on children’s spaces, participation and inter-generational relationships.

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The progressve tradition

This research explores whether commentators and historians have been right in their tendency to position the case-study schools as part of the tail-end of the progressive movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These progressive schools were also known as ‘Modern Schools’ or ‘New Schools’ as part of a wider international New Education Movement. Roger Selleck, an historian of progressive education, calls this group of schools a ‘loosely united band’ which ‘shared not a dogma or a doctrine but a tendency of thought’.69 This ‘tendency of thought’ is often characterised as primarily ‘the rejection of some of the ideals of the conventional Public School system’,70 as by the editor of the Modern Schools Handbook (1934), a collection of chapters written by headteachers of private, progressive schools.

More positive characteristics of the progressive movement are harder to generalise. In its early phase, it was often associated with the application of the new science of psychology and child development, as in the work of scientist-educators Susan Isaacs (1885-1948) and Maria Montessori (1870-1952).71 In the 1920s, Helen Parkhurst (1886-1973), an American teacher closely connected to Montessori, developed and introduced the Dalton Plan to Britain, a curriculum experiment in which individual pupils followed their own work plan with no whole class instruction. The historians Maria del Mar del Pozo Andrés and Sjaak Braster have uncovered the successful spread of this innovation in Britain in the 1920s as a ‘well-known and desired pedagogical product’.72 However, according to Piet van der Ploeg, by 1930 ‘it had all but disappeared’.73 In philosophical terms, the progressive movement tends to be closely associated with the American pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey, often interpreted as learning-by-doing and child-centred learning, partly based on his much quoted metaphor from School and Society (1935) of the ‘child as

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71 Selleck (1972), 97.


the sun about which the appliances of education revolve'.\textsuperscript{74} The historian of educational ideas, John Darling has described Dewey’s influence as ‘massive’.\textsuperscript{75}

In more practical terms, progressive education in Britain was also influenced by the prolific and vivid writing of A.S. Neill and his libertarian practices at Summerhill School, founded in 1921, which ex-pupil of Kilquihanity, Deedee Cuddihy, describes as ‘the famous one’.\textsuperscript{76} He was influenced by the new science of psychology and his aim was to produce ‘happy children’. In 1934, he wrote that the ‘child is born good’ and ‘we can leave the child alone’ and that the ‘freedom of the child’\textsuperscript{77} is paramount. He was hostile to the idea of children working, arguing that they should be ‘left free to live through [their] play period’\textsuperscript{78} until the age of about eighteen. In fact, in 1934, he wrote that ‘work’\textsuperscript{79} was only used as an occasional punishment, set by the weekly meeting.

Contrary to Neill’s position, manual work has been positioned by philosophers and historians of progressive education as an important aspect of the movement. Dewey advocated for the importance of the child participating in ‘household occupations’ and ‘workshop life’.\textsuperscript{80} Skidelsky positions manual work as part of a shared fundamental idea that ‘education is concerned with much more than class-work’.\textsuperscript{81} He also, as part of a wider critique of the progressive movement, characterises manual work as a ‘palatable’ alternative to ‘competitive games’ for the vague ‘socialist aspirations’\textsuperscript{82} of the progressives and follows Neill in calling manual work a form of ‘cultural evangelism’.\textsuperscript{83} Stewart positions manual work more pragmatically as a ‘sheer necessity’ of the war-time context.\textsuperscript{84} Mark Kidel, in his account of the progressive Dartington School, explores some aspects of the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{74} Dewey, J. (1915, first pub. 1899) \textit{School and Society}, University of Chicago Press, 34.
\bibitem{76} Deedee Cuddihy, interviewed 19 May 2017.
\bibitem{79} Neill, A.S. (1934), 117.
\bibitem{80} Dewey, J. (1915, first pub. 1899) \textit{School and Society}, University of Chicago Press, 35.
\bibitem{82} Skidelsky (1969), 35.
\bibitem{83} Skidelsky (1969), 43.
\end{thebibliography}
‘contradictions’ of manual work in relation to other practices in child-centred or libertarian progressive schools.

Over the course of the twentieth century, progressive educational ideas were, to some extent, adopted into mainstream primary schools in Britain, reflected in the Plowden Report of 1967, and even in secondary state schools in terms of the reduction of class sizes, the elimination of corporal punishment and a greater focus on the individual child, as charted by historians of education Peter Cunningham and Roy Lowe. The historian, John Rae, has also traced changes in the traditional public schools in the post-war period, with an ‘improvement in physical comfort’ and in the 1960s and 1970s, an ‘easing of compulsions’. In 1962, H.A.T. Child, in the Independent Progressive Schools (a ‘follow up’ to The Modern Schools Handbook (1934)) admitted that many distinctive progressive characteristics had been adopted by mainstream secondary schools, although he suggested that progressive schools were still distinct in terms of being ‘more concerned with the child as he is here and now’ and encouraging a ‘more intimate relationship between adults and children’. This work explores whether the various aspects of manual work identified at the case-study schools were continuing and distinct characteristics of the progressive movement over the period of the lives of the schools.

Historians and commentators have tended to position Kilquhanity and Wennington as part of this progressive ‘band’ and sharing these ‘tendencies’. Both schools were referenced next to each other in an Observer article (1963) entitled ‘Who’s Who in Progressive Schools’, described as ‘war-baby’ schools. In 1968, Stewart included Wennington as part of the ‘last innovating group’ and an ‘example of several radical community schools which were formed in the stress of the Second World War as a gesture both of survival and idealism’. In the same work, he makes passing mention of Kilquhanity as an ‘approximate’ of Summerhill. Skidelsky includes

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89 Child (1962), 10.
92 Stewart (1968), 302.
Kilquanity as one of the eight schools which he visited and positions Aitkenhead as a ‘disciple’\textsuperscript{93} of Neill. In 1972, Royston Lambert, headteacher of Dartington School, published a speech criticising many of the early progressive schools for compromising their initial values and joining ‘the public schools to which they were originally set up in opposition and are now virtually indistinguishable’.\textsuperscript{94} He makes an exception for Kilquhanity and Wennington, which he claims are part of only six schools, who ‘still pursue the full, unadulterated progressive ethic’.\textsuperscript{95}

More recently, Bob Cuddihy, ex-pupil of Kilquhanity and journalist, in an obituary of John Aitkenhead, described him as the ‘last of a small group of educational pioneers - Lane at Little Commonwealth; Curry at Dartington; and Neill at Summerhill’\textsuperscript{96} and claimed that he shared a ‘common belief in freedom in education and the happiness of children’.\textsuperscript{97} Shinichiro Hori, progressive educator, lecturer, admirer of Aitkenhead’s work and head of a group of Japanese schools which own the Kilquhanity site, positions Aitkenhead as part of the progressive tradition of ‘great pioneers’\textsuperscript{98} – claiming that he ‘combined elements’ of the progressive philosophy of Dewey and Neill.\textsuperscript{99}

To some extent, both Aitkenhead and Barnes accepted this ‘progressive’ tag as a reasonable description of their aims and values. Both headteachers wrote chapters for the \textit{Independent Progressive Schools} (1962). Barnes advertised Wennington in the progressive \textit{New Era} magazine and attended progressive conferences such as the colloquy at Dartington in 1965. In \textit{Energy Unbound} (1980), he positioned Wennington in the same ‘category’ as Frensham Heights, Bedales, Dartington, St Christopher, Summerhill and Monkton Wyld.\textsuperscript{100} He makes frequent references to the influence of his teaching time at Bedales, claiming that he ‘enjoyed [it]

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{95} Lambert (1972), 7.
\bibitem{97} Cuddihy (1998).
\end{thebibliography}
enormously' and that Wennington was 'not founded in the spirit of reaction'.

Similarly, Aitkenhead accepted the progressive category, describing Kilquhanity as 'a tiny progressive school'.

In his writing and speaking, he tended to associate himself very closely with Summerhill and Neill. For example, he suggested that he had swallowed 'hook, line and sinker' Neill's theories and that 'but for him and his example, there could never have been this free school in Scotland at Kilquhanity'.

He even called Kilquhanity a 'Summerhill in Scotland'.

In spite of this general tendency to describe the case-study schools as part of the progressive movement, there are also tensions and contradictions relating to this positioning. Some commentators have distinguished the case-study schools from this wider progressive movement altogether. For example, the Quaker historian, David Lewis, has suggested that Wennington be understood as an 'audacious experiment in Quaker education'. Shotton seeks to 'differentiate Kilquhanity from 'the progressive tradition where in the main [it has] languished, being lumped together with highly authoritarian schools'. He positions it, instead, as one of the 'two surviving libertarian private school adventures' alongside Summerhill while also arguing that 'for too long John Aitkenhead has lived in Neill’s shadow both as an educational thinker and practitioner'.

Barnes explicitly challenged the 'label progressive'. In an article written in 1956, he criticised the 'non-sensical progressive who thinks that a child needs only to be let alone to become free'. He also distanced himself from the 'pure Rousseau', 'slack discipline' and 'unreal freedom' that he associated with the more

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103 Aitkenhead (1962), 76.
107 Shotton (1993), 69.
113 Wennington Annual Report, 1957, 6, Wennington Archive.
libertarian, progressive schools such as Summerhill. John Aitkenhead did not explicitly reject the progressive label and maintained a strong personal loyalty to Neill. However, his son, Gavin Aitkenhead, seeks to distance Kilquhanity from the child-centred ‘educational theory’ of the progressive movement and ex-pupils reject the close association of Kilquhanity with Summerhill, claiming that Summerhill is ‘anarchic’ and ‘Lord of the Flies’.

Neill himself claimed in 1967 that we ‘differ in a friendly way’ from other progressive schools and that ‘we have more freedom than they have’. Many commentators have followed Neill’s analysis. According to The Modern School Handbook (1934), Summerhill ‘is held...to represent the extreme of the experiment’ and Skidelsky (1969) called it ‘the extreme libertarian wing of the progressive school movement’. Commentators and ex-pupils tend to compare the case-study schools with Summerhill and other progressive schools on a ‘radical or libertarian continuum’. Stewart claimed that Barnes is ‘not as permissive, as truly anarchic as Neill’ and that ’at present [Wennington] can reasonably be placed to the right of Summerhill and rather less to the right of Dartington and probably to the left of nearly all the other schools we have considered’. Albert Lamb, ex-pupil of Summerhill and editor of The New Summerhill (1992), describes Summerhill as a ‘full-fat experiment in freedom’ in comparison to schools such as Kilquhanity and Wennington, which he claims had a ‘confusing, puritanical streak’. Ex-pupils of both case-study schools also tend to support a view that Summerhill was ‘far more radical’.

115 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
116 Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
117 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
119 Neill (1967), 103.
122 Sam Doncaster, as part of group discussion, 14 June 2014.
125 Albert Lamb, group discussion at Wennington Archive Week 16 May 2018.
This research casts light on these views by comparing the experiences of staff and pupils of manual work at the case-study schools with other schools in this 'band' – drawing on overviews of the progressive movement, as described above but also lesser known overviews by William Boyd and Wyatt Rawson (1965);¹²⁸ and Willem van der Eyken and Barry Turner (1975).¹²⁹ This work also draws on accounts of: individual private progressive schools in the UK, such as Abbotsholme (1889-);¹³⁰ Bedales (1893-),¹³¹ King Alfred School (1898-), Summerhill (1921-),¹³² Dartington (1926-87),¹³³ Forest School (1929-38),¹³⁴ and Monkton Wyld (1940-82);¹³⁵ international examples such as Workshop School in Holland (1926-);¹³⁶ and Black Mountain College (1933-57)¹³⁷ in America; and experimental schools in the state sector in the UK, particularly Prestolee led by Teddy O’Neill (1918-53), where there was a strong tradition of pupil involvement in construction, which has been researched and written about by Catherine Burke, historian of education and Mark Dudek, architect.¹³⁸ I have explored how images of the case-study schools compare with images of other progressive schools, drawing on the work of Burke

and, historian, Ian Grosvenor on the ‘progressive image’\textsuperscript{139} and the photographer John Walmsley’s images of Summerhill (1969).\textsuperscript{140}

These comparisons cast light on whether the case-study schools should be ‘on the-radar’ as part of this ‘loosely united band’ of progressive schools; whether they shared its philosophical ‘tendency’;\textsuperscript{141} whether manual work is a neglected or undervalued ‘tendency’ of this group; whether the case-study schools deserve Lambert’s approval for maintaining the ‘full, unadulterated progressive ethic’\textsuperscript{142} in the post-war era while other schools compromised; and whether the whole idea of a distinct ‘progressive ethic’\textsuperscript{143} is brought into question by the uncovering of new differences between the case-study schools and other progressive schools with which they have been ‘lumped together’\textsuperscript{144}.

\textbf{The Radical Tradition}

This research draws on the manual work experiences of staff and pupils to explore whether the case-study schools should be considered as part of the radical tradition of education – and how experiences at the schools cast light back on debates about overlaps and differences between progressive and radical traditions. The term ‘radical’ has often been used to apply to all or part of the progressive movement and often interchangeably, as in Howlett’s recent introduction.\textsuperscript{145} Maurice Punch, sociologist and journalist, writing about progressive education in 1977, argued that Kilquhanity and Wennington were part of a ‘subgroup’ of progressive schools, which he called ‘radical’ because of their ‘rejection’ and ‘rebellion’ against conventional society.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{143} Lambert (1972), 7.
However, Michael Smith, an historian, has argued that ‘radical education was not just progressive education writ extreme’ but a ‘recurring position’ which was ‘distinct’ from the progressive educational movement because of its emphasis on ‘practical education’. The historian, Richard Johnson, describes an earlier movement of ‘radical education’ in his article “Really useful knowledge”: radical education and working-class culture, 1790-1848’, as ‘the springs of action which owed little to philanthropic, ecclesiastical or state provision’ and explores the eductive networks of the radical press, families, neighbourhood and place of work with the purpose of ‘changing the world’ and creating a ‘more just social order’. He hints at future manifestations of this radical tradition in his description of William Cobbett, the radical politician and farmer, as the ‘original de-schooler’. Suissa and I have also argued for a related distinction between radical and progressive education based on the idea that radical educational experiments share a ‘utopian impulse’ to challenge and improve upon dominant social and political values through the creation of educational alternatives.

Radical ideas about education were articulated with particular energy in the 1960s and 1970s in America by writers and activists, often with anarchist leanings, who argued for a fundamental demolition of the existing institutional school system – what Ivan Illich (1926-2002) called *Deschooling Society* (1971). In its place, these radicals proposed various overlapping alternatives: Paul Goodman (1911-72) advocated for the idea of ‘incidental education’ within the context of an ‘interesting reality’ and a ‘community to grow up into’. John Holt (1923-85) campaigned for families to home-educate, as expressed most clearly in his book *Instead of Education*; and George Dennison (1925-87) argued for ‘free schools, mini-schools or store-front schools’, as described in his account of the experimental First

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150 Johnson (1979), 77.
151 Johnson (1979), 78.
Street School, *Lives of Children.* These kinds of ideas were also articulated in the UK, where writers and activists proposed radical alternatives not only to mainstream schooling but also to the child-centred progressive school tradition, for example; in Leila Berg’s article (1972) tracing a radical tradition in the twentieth century, *Moving towards Self Government* and in Lambert’s *Alternatives to School* (published in 1972 and based on a speech made in 1971), in which he argued in favour of the temporary ‘centre’ built by the mixed-age community of the Vai Tribe as the ‘ideal, flexible, educational setting’.160

In the 1960s and 70s, these radical ideas in education were closely connected to social anarchist ideas and the developing field of environmental education. In the UK, Colin Ward frequently wrote about radical educational experiments, as part of his wider work to celebrate examples of anarchy in action. He was an enthusiast for experimental schools, but was particularly drawn to the ideas of the de-schoolers such as Goodman, for example, his chapter on education in *Anarchy in Action* (1973) is called ‘Schools No Longer’.161 In the 1970s and early 1980s, Ward edited the monthly *Bulletin of Environmental Education* for teachers, which was premised on the idea that ‘our real education is gained from the physical and social environment’162 and the ‘whole environment as an educational resource’.163 These ideas were also developed by the geographers Roger Hart in *Children’s Experiences of Place* (1979) and Robin Moore in *Childhood’s Domain* (1986), which document and advocate for children creating and shaping their own environments. Moore calls his work a ‘close relative’ of Ward’s *Child in the City* (1979).164 Ward, in return, acknowledged these researchers and activists as ‘the young lions’ of the environmental education movement.165

Both Aitkenhead and Barnes were sympathetic to these kinds of radical ideas about education, childhood and society. Barnes argued that Illich’s *Deschooling Society* 

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(1969) was a ‘necessary disturbance’ and ‘deserves the closest attention’.\textsuperscript{166} He positioned Wennington as the kind of ‘place of learning’ which Illich would describe as ‘convivial’.\textsuperscript{167} Aitkenhead claimed that ‘the message of the de-schoolers is going across or filtering through…the warehouse school, the store-front school…Kohl, Kozol, Goodman, Holt, Reimer, Dennison are beginning to be known…speak to the instincts and hearts of people’.\textsuperscript{168} John and Morag Aitkenhead visited Holt and Dennison in their trip to America in 1972, ‘met Holt again in Glasgow’ in the 1980s\textsuperscript{169} and hosted Dennison and his family at Kilquhanity in 1975.\textsuperscript{170} Bob Cuddihy explicitly compares Aitkenhead with Goodman in terms of ‘attitudes to literacy’.\textsuperscript{171}

Barnes and Aitkenhead also articulated a broad sympathy with wider anarchist ideas, although they did not explicitly self-identify as anarchist and some ex-pupils are hostile to the idea, for example, ex-pupil and staff, Steve Winning (1960- ) says ‘get your hands off you anarchists’.\textsuperscript{172} Aitkenhead draws on anarchist values to describe the founding spirit of Kilquhanity as ‘against authority’ and ‘for freedom and community’\textsuperscript{173} and explicitly compares it to a ‘working model’ of the Pioneer Health Centre with its ‘strict anarchy’.\textsuperscript{174} He also frequently quoted the anarchist Herbert Read’s definition of education as the ‘generation of happiness’.\textsuperscript{175} Richard Jones suggests that John Aitkenhead was ‘anarchist in relation to the authorities and that was a good thing’.\textsuperscript{176} The journal \textit{Anarchy} published two favourable articles about Kilquhanity.\textsuperscript{177} In Kraftl’s account, an ex-pupil and current teacher suggests that ‘I don’t think John or Neill would directly associate themselves [with anarchism]. But I think we could.’\textsuperscript{178}

Wennington was not picked up by the anarchist press in the same way as Kilquhanity. However, Barnes also had some sympathy with anarchist ideas. He

\textsuperscript{167} Barnes (1980), 211.
\textsuperscript{169} John Aitkenhead letter to Leila Berg on 1 November 1985, Leila Berg archives at Institute of Education, LBE/5.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{The Broadsheet}, no 284, 27 October 1975.
\textsuperscript{171} Obituary of John Aitkenhead, \textit{The Times}, 13 August 1998.
\textsuperscript{172} Steve and Liz Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
\textsuperscript{175} Aitkenhead, J. quoted in ‘50 Years Young’, \textit{Radical Scotland}, 47, October/November 1990.
\textsuperscript{176} Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
was highly critical of all forms of authority: ‘I am...temperamentally set against authority, whether it is the authority of organisations, governments, the authority of ideas or the authority of tradition’. Ex-pupils suggest that Barnes and other members of staff would not have called themselves anarchist, but that there were connections through individuals to aspects of the anarchist movement, for example, Roger Gerdhardt, French teacher, is referred to by many pupils as anarchist. Ex-pupils also suggest that anarchist values played out at the school. Richard Schofield, ex-pupil and member of the London Anarchist Research Group, describes the school as ‘upstairs downstairs with anarchism poured into it’ and Lewis writes that as a pupil at the school he ‘learnt that Anarchy was a practical possibility as well as a political theory’.

This research explores the relationship of the case-study schools to this radical tradition by comparing experiences of ‘useful work’, craft and self-build with radical settings such as anarchist schools, utopian communities, therapeutic communities, self-build communities and adventure playgrounds. These comparisons shed light on whether the case-study schools can be considered, in respect of manual work, to be examples of ‘incidental education’, ‘therapeutic education’, ‘environmental education’ and ‘anarchy in action’. They also shed light on overlaps and differences between radical and progressive movements – and reveal surprising connections between manual work practices in the radical movement and practices in traditional communities.

Experiences of manual work at the case-study schools are compared with anarchist schools from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Faure and Robin’s experimental schools in France, which were influenced by the anarchist, political ideas of Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) including the importance of valuing manual work, as advocated for in his 1890 article ‘Brain Work and Manual Work’. These schools are described by Smith in a chapter on ‘integral education’, in Victor Acker’s account of influences on the French educator Célestin Freinet, in

180 Richard Schofield, interviewed at Wennington Archive Week June 2015.
Paul Avrich’s historical work on *Anarchism and Education* (1980)\(^{185}\) and in Suissa's philosophical work.\(^ {186}\) As well as anarchist schools, I also compare the case-study schools with anarchist and utopian communities, drawing on accounts by historians of the movement, Denis Hardy (2000) and Christopher Coates (2001).\(^ {187}\) These books describe numerous intentional communities set up in the first half of the twentieth century, with socialist, pacifist and Quaker connections and, as Hardy characterises them, a ‘back to the land’ or ‘return to nature’ emphasis.\(^ {188}\) These accounts do not reference the case-study schools. However, Hardy devotes a section to Dartington School and its founders, the Elmhirsts, with their wider vision for rural regeneration of the estate but concludes that Dartington was a ‘utopia manqué’ as a ‘place of privilege’ rather than ‘an important social experiment’.\(^ {189}\) This research examines whether and how the case-study schools should be understood as part of this tradition of utopian communities or whether, like Dartington, they were ‘utopia manqué’.\(^ {190}\)

The lens of manual work also sheds light on ways in which the case-study schools were similar to the therapeutic community movement, as described by historians Maurice Bridgeland (1971)\(^ {191}\) and David Kennard (1993).\(^ {192}\) These therapeutic communities developed alongside the progressive movement in the early part of the twentieth century. Homer Lane pioneered the idea of self-governing communities as a treatment for young offenders at the Little Commonwealth in Dorset 1913-18 and became the ‘archetype’\(^ {193}\) of this approach. David Wills, a Quaker like Barnes, further developed these ideas and practices with The Q-camps in the 1930s, The Barns Experiment in the 1940s and Bodenham Manor School in the 1950s which he set up, led and wrote about.\(^ {194}\) Bridgeland mentions the case-study schools in


\(^{189}\) Hardy (2000), 157.

\(^{190}\) Hardy (2000), 157.


**Pioneer Work with Maladjusted Children** (1971) as examples of therapeutic settings. For example, he describes Wennington in some detail and claims that its characteristics made it ‘particularly appropriate for disturbed or poorly adjusted children’ and includes Kilquhanity in a chapter on ‘The Scottish Scene’. Tony Weaver, anarchist and radical educator, in an article in *Anarchy* (1964), also positioned Wennington and Kilquhanity firmly within this therapeutic tradition as examples of *progressive schools* which act as therapeutic environments – because of the characteristics of ‘shared responsibility’, ‘arts and creativity’ and ‘work’ (estate or farm), see Figure 1.1.

![Figure 1.1: Tony Weaver’s schema, 1964.](image)

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196 Bridgeland (1971), 252.
197 Bridgeland (1971), 311.
Testimony from ex-staff and pupils of the schools also suggests that there were various personal connections with the therapeutic community movement. Aitkenhead cites George Lyward, founder and head of the therapeutic Finchden Manor (1930-73), as a ‘sponsor’ of Kilquhanity\(^{200}\) and in a *Broadsheet* article quotes with approval Lyward’s suggestion that ‘the structure of the day is four square meals a day.’\(^{201}\) John Wilson, ex-staff, who later in his career set up a therapeutic community, claims that John Aitkenhead was inspired by Homer Lane.\(^{202}\) Margaret Cox, who sent her children to Kilquhanity, grew up at The Mount Camphill, a land-based therapeutic community in East Sussex. Barnes was taught by Lyward in the sixth form\(^{203}\) and called him a ‘welcome visitor and adviser to Wennington’.\(^{204}\) The depositing of Wennington’s archives at the Planned Environmental Therapy Trust in 1998 by the Wennington Association, suggests a view that the school fits, albeit loosely, within this thread of the radical tradition. However, other members of the community claim that it was definitely not ‘therapeutic’.\(^{205}\) Similarly, Bob Cuddihy questions the idea of positioning Kilquhanity within the therapeutic tradition, claiming that in terms of psychiatric approaches, Aitkenhead had ‘no truck with that kind of thing’.\(^{206}\) Experiences of manual work are drawn on to cast light on these debates about similarities and differences between the case-study schools and therapeutic communities.

The construction of buildings by adults and children at the case-study schools is contrasted with the kinds of developments in post-war construction of schools and playgrounds, as described by Burke\(^{207}\) and the historian of architecture, Andrew Saint.\(^{208}\) Instead, this process is compared to the community self-build movement which emerged in the 1960s, as a critique of modern architecture and a search for radical alternatives, as described in Bernard Rudofsky’s *Architecture without*...
Architects (1965),\textsuperscript{209} Christopher Alexander’s \textit{Pattern Language} (1977)\textsuperscript{210} and \textit{Production of Houses} (1985)\textsuperscript{211} and in a special edition of \textit{The Architecture Journal} about Walter Segal (1986).\textsuperscript{212} Alexander argued for a self-build process where ‘at the core…is the idea that people should design for themselves their own houses, streets and communities’.\textsuperscript{213} This movement had close connections to anarchism and radical education. This research explores whether pupil experiences of involvement in construction suggests that ‘schools’ could be added to the list of what people can ‘design for themselves’. And, indeed whether the case-study schools are examples of Alexander’s de-schooling vision of ‘schools and yet not schools dotted among the living functions of the community’.\textsuperscript{214}

Pupils’ experiences of building their own dens and huts unsupervised in the woodland surrounding the case-study schools is compared with young people’s experiences of the post-war adventure playground movement, which began in Copenhagen in 1943 with the setting up of the Endrup Junk Playground. The movement burgeoned in the UK in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s so that by 1980, Paul Wilkinson, a play psychologist, wrote that ‘adventure playgrounds are widespread throughout Europe and Great Britain’.\textsuperscript{215} These adventure playgrounds were celebrated by anarchists and environmental educators, as revealed by the use of an image of the Crawley Adventure Playground as the frontispiece for Burke and Jones’ edited collection, \textit{Education, Childhood and Anarchism: Talking Colin Ward} (2014).\textsuperscript{216} This research draws on literature by those involved in the movement such as Joe Benjamin’s \textit{In Search of Adventure} (1961)\textsuperscript{217} and his ‘extension’ of that work in \textit{Grounds for Play} (1974)\textsuperscript{218} and Jack Lambert’s \textit{Adventure Playgrounds} (1974).\textsuperscript{219} It also draws on Avid Bengtsson’s \textit{Adventure Playgrounds} (1972),\textsuperscript{220} which draws together accounts, photographs and drawings of adventure

\textsuperscript{211}Alexander, C. (1985) \textit{The Production of Houses}, Oxford University Press.
\textsuperscript{212}‘The Segal Method’, \textit{The Architectural Journal}, 5 November 1986, 35.
\textsuperscript{220}Bengtsson, A. (1972) \textit{Adventure Playgrounds}, London: Crosby Lockwood Staples.
playgrounds in different countries in Europe. This research explores whether pupils’ hut-building in the woodland areas near the case-study schools offered a kind of rural corollary of these urban adventure playgrounds.

**Ongoing debates in education and childhood**

The ideas and practices relating to young people’s participation in useful work, craft and self-build are traced into the present by exploring whether and how these practices persist in the contemporary context, exploring whether manual work is part of Claire Cameron’s recently elaborated (2018) ‘red thread’ of ‘creative and practical opportunities for young people’ and whether the architect, Kelvin Campbell (2018) is right that for advocates of self-build and de-schooling from the 1960s and 1970s, ‘their time is now’.

The historical case-studies and contemporary examples are used to cast light on continuing debates in education and childhood. In debates about education, there is a widespread feeling amongst commentators from across the political spectrum that as Mills and McCluskey suggest, ‘there is something broken in the system’ and that it needs, as Ken Robinson argues in his much-cited Ted Talk, a ‘radical rethink’.

Meanwhile in debates about childhood, Caitlin Moran’s article (2017) in *The Times* encapsulates the hand-wringing mood with her description of contemporary young people as ‘a generation of anxious, self-harming, depressed children’ and her criticism that it is a ‘deep, deep shame’ for society.

Experiences at the historical and contemporary settings are used to explore the validity of criticism of progressive education, by both philosophers of education and more populist critics; for example, Toby Young, founder of a free school, has described progressive education as a dangerous ‘blob...pedalling...Romantic gobbledegook’; Robert Peal, teacher and research fellow at the right-wing think-

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tank Civitas, has called it a ‘bad idea’ and a ‘dumbing down’,\(^{227}\) which has ‘proven to fail’.\(^{228}\) Even sympathisers have criticised small-scale, rural, private school experiments, such as the case-study schools, for being, as Punch described in 1969, an ‘isolated rural environment cut off from the wider society’\(^{229}\) or, as Jonathan Kozol, a radical American educator, criticised, a ‘dangerous exodus to the woods’ since it ‘reinforces the structure of oppression’.\(^{230}\)

Critics of progressive education have tended to rework and reinforce the ‘loggerhead’ dichotomy between progressive and liberal education. Darling has shown how this ‘loggerhead’ manifested in the 1960s and 1970s with philosophers’ critique of progressive education and defence of liberal education, for example, R.F. Dearden’s ‘Education as a process of growth’ (1972);\(^{231}\) R. S. Peter’s ‘Education as Initiation’ (1965);\(^{232}\) and Paul Hirst’s ‘Liberal Education and the defence of knowledge’ (1972).\(^{233}\) In the present, Peal acknowledges that his attack on progressive education and call for a return to traditional subject learning: ‘is not a scrap between, for example, Sir Ken Robinson and Michael Gove...it is a conversation that dates back at least to the nineteenth century...generations have fought these battles’.\(^{234}\)

Related to this ‘loggerhead’ between progressive and liberal ideas, Richard Pring, the philosopher, in his \textit{Closing the Gap} (1995) has criticised a ‘perennial battle’\(^{235}\) between ‘liberal and vocational’, ‘education and training’ and ‘thinking and making’, which he claims is ‘deeply rooted in our culture’.\(^{236}\) The historian Michael Sanderson has also charted a persistent ‘engrained prejudice against vocational education’\(^{237}\) and a tendency towards ‘excessive reverence for liberal education’\(^{238}\)

\(^{228}\) Peal (2014), 266.
\(^{236}\) Pring (1995), 55.
in the post-war period. Experiences of manual work in the case-study and contemporary settings are drawn on as a way to explore whether Pring is right that these are ‘false dichotomies’ [my italics] and whether it is possible to ‘broaden’ both the liberal and vocational concept of education without rejecting either or whether, as philosopher of education David Carr has criticised, Pring’s attempt to have the ‘best of both worlds’ is ‘too good to be true’.

This work also side-steps the ‘loggerhead’ or ‘perennial battle’ of liberal versus progressive altogether by foregrounding instead radical ideas from the 1960s and 1970s, questioning Robin Barrow’s philosophical dismissal of these ideas as ‘huff and puff’ and exploring their potential relevance as alternatives in contemporary debates about education. This exploration of radical ideas casts light on other attempts to revive these ideas, such as, M. Andrew Holowchak’s criticism of a ‘neglect’ of Goodman’s work and Kelvin Campbell’s, urban design theorist, claim that for advocates of self-build and de-schooling from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Alexander and Illich ‘their time is now’. In so doing, I seek to contribute lived experiences and perspectives to an emergent contemporary revival of anarchist and environmental educational ideas, reflected in collected works such as: Anarchist Pedagogies (2012); Education, Childhood and Anarchism: Talking Colin Ward (2014); The Radicalization of Pedagogy (2016); and The Handbook of Anarchism (2019).

This research also seeks to contribute to the work of geographers, sociologists and anthropologists of childhood, many influenced by Ward’s influential accounts of The

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Child in the City\textsuperscript{249} who have explored how children can be active agents in their physical environment and have advocated for its importance for their well-being and development, for example, Roger Hart’s Children’s Experiences of Place (1979),\textsuperscript{250} Robin Moore’s Childhood’s Domain (1986),\textsuperscript{251} David Sobel’s Children’s Special Spaces (1993)\textsuperscript{252} and Stuart Aitken’s Putting Children in their Place (1994).\textsuperscript{253} In particular, I draw on Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ (1992), Figure 1.2, a metaphor which Hart borrowed from from an essay on adult participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969) which has become widely referenced in work on young people’s participation. This ‘ladder’ orders children’s participation ascending from ‘manipulation’ to ‘child-initiated, shared decisions with adults’\textsuperscript{254} – my research uses the ‘ladder’ to cast light on the experiences of the young people and vice versa.

Figure 1.2: Roger Hart’s ladder of participation from Children’s Participation (1992).

\textsuperscript{250} Hart, R. (1979) Children’s Experience of Place, New York: Irvington.
\textsuperscript{253} Aitken, S. (1994) Putting Children in their Place, San Diego State University.
Many researchers have observed with concern children’s increasing segregation from their environment and community over the twentieth century. The historian, Mathew Thomson, describes society’s increasing anxiety about children and nostalgia for the ‘lost freedom’ of childhood, as exemplified in the decline of independent outdoor play.255 The sociologists Martha Gutman and Nina de Coninck-Smith offer a compelling image of the ‘islanding’256 of children in designated spaces under the supervision of professional adults. They claim that this development is ‘detrimental and destructive’.257

This kind of academic analysis is also reflected in more popular debates about the over-protection of ‘bubble wrap’ children in the context of a risk society, as explored in the work of sociologists such as Ulrich Beck (1992)258 and Anthony Giddens (1998),259 and in relation to children, in Tim Gill’s No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Averse Society (2007)260 and in Frank Furedi’s Culture of Fear (1997) and Paranoid Parenting (2008) in which he claims that a ‘culture of paranoia dominates twenty-first century childhood’.261 There is also a concern in popular debates about a breakdown of relations between adults and children, for example, Furedi’s account of how child protection policies are ‘poisoning the relationship between the generations’.262

Experiences of manual work in this research support a revisiting of the relationship of children and work, one aspect of this wider story of the segregation of adults and children. Colin Heywood, historian, has described the development that ‘school’ replaced ‘work’ as the ‘essential feature of modern childhood’263 and Peter Stearn, historian, has claimed that this change meant that ‘the basic purpose of childhood

257 Gutman and de Coninck-Smith (2008), 5.
was redefined’. Virginia Morrow, sociologist, has described the same phenomenon as young people moving from ‘earners’ to ‘learners’. My work contributes to questioning and complicating dominant accounts of this development as a wholly positive liberation for children from exploitative labour. Instead this research recognises what the historian of childhood Harry Hendrick has called the ‘ambivalence of exclusion from child labour’ and contributes to debates amongst geographers such as Michael Bourdillon and radicals such as Goodman, Holt and George Orwell about the potential positive value of work and its relationship to play and education.

In terms of the segregation of children from their physical environment, historians have described significant changes in young peoples' relationship with their material and physical belongings and buildings. Since the post-war period, children have become less likely to make their own equipment or toys and even less likely to build their own infrastructure, due to industrialisation, consumerism and changing attitudes towards and expectations of young people, as reflected in social histories of childhood, such as Paul Feeney’s *Childhood in Pictures* (1950), Gary Cross’s chapter on ‘Play, Games and Toys’ and Daniel Cook’s chapter on ‘Children as Consumers’ in the *Routledge History of Childhood* (2014).

The settings and experiences in this research contribute to debates about the continued potential relevance of craft and making activities in spite of this changing context; as discussed by the philosopher, Richard Sennett in *The Craftsman* (2008), the mechanic-writer Matthew Crawford in *The Case for Working with Your Hands* (2009), and the cabinet-maker-writer Peter Korn in *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters* (2013). They also contribute historical and local perspectives...
to anthropological comparisons of Western children’s passive consumption of toys compared to children’s active creation of their own toys, in more traditional societies. For example; by the radical architect, Rudofsky (1978) in his critique of the ‘block lust’\textsuperscript{274} of Western children and more recently, Jared Diamond in his populist \textit{The World Until Yesterday} (2012)\textsuperscript{275}

Young people’s experiences of collaborating with adults in the hands-on work of building their schools or community spaces, contribute to debates about school building and children’s participation – casting light on contemporary discourse which emphasises ‘user participation’\textsuperscript{276} and ‘designing with children’\textsuperscript{277} but which has been criticised by Horton and Kraftl as ‘transformational policy discourse’\textsuperscript{278} resulting in what Kraftl and Mills describe as ‘rather formulaic, narrow, adultist forms of participation’.\textsuperscript{279} The research highlights the existence of a continuing counter-narrative about the value of participation in the building process, as reflected in some of the projects described by Christopher Day (1990)\textsuperscript{280} and Blundell Jones \textit{et al} in \textit{Architecture and Participation} (2005)\textsuperscript{281}

In terms of disconnection from the \textit{natural environment}, in popular debates, there are particular concerns about the decline in children’s freedom to roam in nature, as reflected in Louv’s much cited \textit{Last Child in the Woods} (2005) with its coining of the idea of ‘nature deficit disorder’.\textsuperscript{282} This development has also led to a decline in activities such as den-building, as described in much recent research, such as the \textit{Natural Childhood Report} (2012)\textsuperscript{283} Many researchers from different disciplines have argued for the continuing psychological importance of this kind of activity;

\textsuperscript{283} Moss, S. (2012) ‘Natural Childhood’, report from the National Trust.
Sobel, education writer, calls it the ‘creation of self’; van Manen calls it, ‘the formation of personal identity’, and the writer-environmentalist, Robert Macfarlane, claims that the resulting unsupervised, private spaces are where ‘children learn how to grow up’. The examples in this research cast light on these claims and raise questions about whether the contemporary rise of adult-organised outdoor activities through Forest School and Nature Connection programmes, reflected in an extensive literature on the subject, is similar to hut-building traditions at the case-study schools or represent a very different kind of adult-led and ‘schoolified’ paradigm.

Overall, the uncovering of manual work at the contemporary and historical settings, contributes ideas and experiences to a wider contemporary preoccupation with what the *Handbook of Child Well-Being* (2014) calls ‘creative social participation’. Amongst radical educators, there is a keen concern about ‘student voice’ which, according to Fielding is, at an ‘interesting crossroads...[with] important choices to make about where we direct our energies’. This work contributes lived experiences to a growing critical literature concerned with the ‘problematic sides’ of citizenship education, as explored by Gert Biesta, professor of public education. It also fleshes out philosophical accounts of what David Kennedy calls, ‘adult-child forms of life’ and the possible benefit of bringing together different kinds of adult roles into the school space, as described by philosopher, Richard Davies, in relation to youth workers and teachers sharing the school space.

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In the epilogue of Gutman and de Coninck-Smith's book, Gillis responds to their critique with an analysis of the need to tackle this 'islanding' by the creation of a 'new mainland'. This thesis explores whether and how the historical and contemporary settings in this work can be seen as examples of the kinds of 'everyday utopias' and 'promising spaces' as explored by Davina Cooper, researcher in law and political theory or the 'grounded utopias', as described by anarchist theorist Laurence Davis, which could help us navigate to and set about shaping this new 'mainland'.

**Summary of the thesis**

The research questions explored through the historical case-study schools, contemporary examples and literature, as described above are:

- what was the rhetoric and reality surrounding experiences of different aspects of manual work at the case-study schools and how did they change over time and relate to other characteristics and values at the schools?
- what light do these ideas and experiences cast on the positioning of the case-study schools in relation to traditional, progressive and radical ideas and settings?
- what is the relevance of these ideas and experiences to contemporary debates and practices in education and childhood?

Chapter 2 explores the methodological challenges and opportunities in uncovering lived experiences and using these experiences to cast light on debates in literature about education and childhood, as described in the Literature Review (Chapter 1). Chapter 3 is focused on pupils’ experiences of looking after the physical fabric, both buildings and land, referred to as ‘useful work’ and ‘community work’; Chapter 4 explores the role of arts, crafts and invention in the workshops and laboratories; and Chapter 5 centres on school construction projects in groups with staff and hut-

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building *without* staff in the surrounding woodland. Chapter 6 explores whether, the practices and meanings of manual work, as experienced at the case-study schools, continue into the present in schools, families, therapeutic and land-based community projects – including the author’s own experiment at Wilderness Wood. Chapter 7 draws conclusions about the significance of manual work for understanding the case-study schools, the history of progressive and radical education and for contemporary debates about education and childhood.
Chapter 2

‘Close to the trees’:¹ methodological issues and challenges

Since 2006, I have been researching and writing about young people’s experiences of radical educational ideas and practices – and the implications of those experiences for historical and philosophical debates about education and childhood.² I observed a theme amongst the schools and communities which I researched; they were often situated in derelict or unfinished buildings and included young people in the hands-on work of making, building and looking after these spaces. I also noticed that literature about these schools and communities tended to focus on ‘voice’ and ‘self-government’ rather than ‘hand’ and ‘self-build’.

In 2010 my husband, Dan Morrish, and I took our children (aged 6 and 5) out of school and set out to look for a place where we could put some of these ideas into practice in our own educational experiment. In April 2014 we took over Wilderness Wood, a 60-acre working woodland in East Sussex.³ Since then we have attempted to create a community in which young people work and play alongside adults while looking after the woodland and creating the timber structures which the community needs, motivated by John Holt’s proposition that ‘we can best help children learn by making the world, as far as we can, accessible to them.’⁴ This thesis about the meanings of manual work in radical education, therefore, brings together the academic and practical aspects of my work. I draw on my own experiences and observations at Wilderness Wood as part of Chapter 6 on contemporary practices. In turn, the ideas generated by the thesis, challenge, inspire and influence practices at Wilderness Wood – and help position our practical and small-scale work as part of wider debates.

² For example, research on children’s experiences of the St George’s-in-the-East school (1945-55), Peckham Health Centre (1935-50), colonies for Basque Refugee children (1937s), Whiteway Colony (1930s and 1940s), anarchist collectives during the Spanish Civil War (1930s), Leila Berg’s ideas and networks (1996-2012) and Edmondsham Kindergarten building site (2012).
In recent decades there has been considerable concern amongst the research community about the need for reflexivity on researcher ‘insider/outsider’ positioning, particularly in research about ‘alternatives’.\(^5\) Aitkenhead reflected on this challenge when he wrote in 1990 that he was ‘too close to the trees to see the wood, too busy in the life of the school to stand back and write about it’.\(^6\) In this research, I seek to stand back from my own ‘trees’. In the ‘spirit of criticism’, advocated as a researcher ‘virtue’\(^7\) by Richard Pring, I work to uncover the tensions, challenges and contradictions within these ‘alternatives’ as a balanced contribution to debates about education and childhood in the past and present. This chapter explores the methods which I use to tread the line, as described by the cultural historian, Ludmilla Jordanova, ‘navigating between the polarities of objectivity and subjectivity’ with the resulting duty to ‘combine open recognition that we are interested parties in our studies with a clear sense of how to make the resulting knowledge as judicious as possible’\(^8\) - in other words, methods to help me ‘see the wood’.

**Overview of methods**

This thesis uses historical and ethnographic methods to uncover ideas and experiences related to young people’s participation in manual work in historical and contemporary settings. These ideas and experiences are used to cast light on philosophical debates in the past and present about education and childhood. This approach is cross-disciplinary in its methods and subject matter. It is influenced by ideas about ‘mixed methods’ in the social sciences as a way to ‘extend the range of insights and knowledge produced’\(^9\) and by anarchist thinking about research

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methods which, as described by John Ferrell, challenge disciplinary conventions and boundaries in order to ‘create progressive social knowledge’.\(^{10}\)

I have adopted a case-study approach to the historical work, focusing on two schools, as the most appropriate method for exploring, as Robert Yin suggests, questions which require ‘extensive’ and ‘in-depth’ description.\(^{11}\) While it is not valid to make generalisations about the significance of manual work in progressive and radical education on the basis of only two case-studies, it is possible to raise questions about and offer new perspectives on these traditions, since, as Giovanni Levi, the social historian, has suggested, this kind of ‘micro-history' can offer a ‘privileged place from which to observe the incoherencies, the loop-holes and the crevices’.\(^{12}\)

Through an initial survey of literature, as described in the Literature Review in Chapter 1, I identified Wennington School (1940-75) and Kilquhanity School (1940-97) as two under-researched experimental schools, in which manual work was an important feature. The chronological period of the two historical case-studies allowed for an exploration of their relationship to the progressive movement of the first half of the twentieth century and the radical movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Identifying two historical case-studies founded in the same year allowed for the possibility of exploring commonalities and differences in how the experiences of manual work played out over time in two different settings. My preliminary enquiries into these schools established that, although these schools have been little written about in secondary literature, there were a number of promising avenues in terms of both existing contemporaneous sources and potential interviews with ex-staff and pupils which would help me develop, as Clifford Geertz described in relation to anthropological accounts, a ‘thick description’\(^{13}\) of the two case-studies including staff and pupil perspectives.

For the exploration of contemporary practices, I have drawn on around twenty
different settings, which allows for a broad scoping of the theme of young people’s
participation in manual work in the present and a more in-depth analysis of
experiences at Wilderness Wood. I identified these projects and communities
through ex-pupils and staff of the case-study schools; local and national networks;
press; conferences; books and articles. The examples were drawn from a range of
settings and projects, mainly in the UK, in which manual work is still a significant
activity for young people. I have drawn on examples from: mainstream schooling
such as The Ancient Technology Centre at Cranbourne Middle School and a
playground built by pupils and craftspeople at Moulescoomb Primary School;
alternative schools such as Michael Hall Steiner School, King Alfred School,
Bedales and Trefoil Montessori; home-educating families and groups such as A
Place to Grow and Free to Grow; therapeutic communities, such as Camphill and
Wilderness Camp; land-based and community projects such as El Warcha;
contemporary adventure playgrounds; and Wilderness Wood. These settings are
described in brief in Appendix 3.

This combination of an overview of a number of relevant settings and projects
alongside a more detailed self-ethnography of experiences at Wilderness Wood
allows for an exploration of continuities and changes in relation to young people’s
participation in manual work compared to the historical case-studies. Working with
both historical and contemporary examples presents challenges but also, as Molly
Andrews, narrative researcher, has argued, ‘offers more vantage points from which
we view phenomena…[so that] the richer and more complex our understanding [is]
of that which we observe.’

In both the historical and contemporary examples, I have drawn on a range of
existing sources including documentary, photographic, interviews, films and
websites – some in an archive, many not. I have also created new oral testimony
by interviewing ex-pupils, staff and project leaders. Combining different types of
sources helps reveal different perspectives and raise new questions. In particular, I
have sought to uncover the perspectives of the pupils themselves, which is

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surprisingly rare even amongst literature on progressive and radical education celebrating the importance of the view of the child. For example, Kraftl admits that his book on the geographies of alternative education ‘has not paid as much attention to the voices and experiences of children and young people as I would have liked’. This lack of attention is partly due to practical challenges such as: an absence of sources; that the sources if they still exist are not often all together in archives; and that the people with the memories of the relevant experience can be hard to find. And there are more epistemological challenges such as whether it is possible to ‘understand how children experience anything at all?’, as questioned by the phenomenologists, Max van Manen and Bas Levering and whether ‘there can be no authentic voice of childhood’ because the ‘adult world dominates that of the child’ as posited by Jordonova. While recognising these cautions, this PhD draws on writing and drawing by pupils at the time and interview data to offer a view, albeit partial, of children’s experiences and attitudes, based on a similar assumption to the ethnographer Vered Amit’s, that ‘children are not simply the objects of adult interventions but neither do they operate in a world without adults’.

**Documentary and visual sources**

I draw on various different kinds of written documents: from official reports by inspectors and annual reports by headteachers; to published articles in books by the headteachers and contemporaries; to articles and drawings by pupils; to media articles; to written testimonials by pupils. Written sources from the past – whether in a box in an archive or in an ex-pupil’s sitting-room – hold a certain authority and bestow the historian with the feeling that one is engaged with what the feminist and cultural historian Carol Steedman has called, ‘the foundational and paradigmatic activity of historians’. However, individual documents and collections of

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documents in archives need to be treated with the same critical view as any other source or testimony. They not only tell a story about the past but also, as the historian of archives, Antoinette Burton, has suggested, are ‘already a story’\textsuperscript{20} embodied in what has survived and, importantly, what has not survived for the historian to read. These documents also carry their own particular bias and purpose; as Paul Thompson has argued in \textit{The Voice of the Past}, there is always a ‘social purpose behind the creation and subsequent preservation of documents and records’.\textsuperscript{21}

The reality of intentional and accidental bias within what remains, does not mean the end of the ‘document’ or the ‘archive’ but rather that historical interpretations of these documents need to acknowledge ‘what can and cannot be known’\textsuperscript{22} so that, there is no assumption that the documents remaining are the whole story. I adopt the historian of education, Philip Gardner’s approach based on the idea that ‘a document belongs to the moment of its original appearance, in which it was shaped and created; but it also belongs to the present moment in which we hold it in our hands’.\textsuperscript{23} Therefore, I simultaneously recognise the need to ‘read behind the text’ and respect the meaning that it would have had at the time for its author, while also being concerned with ‘reading in front of the text’\textsuperscript{24} to understand the meanings that others have made of it and the meanings which it brings to the account which I tell in this thesis.

As well as documents, I have drawn on the large number of photographs in the Wennington Archive, a smaller number of photographs of Kilquhanity and illustrations by pupils, and film footage of both schools. In historical research, photography has become established as an ‘important form of historical evidence’,\textsuperscript{25} as described by Peter Burke, who claimed that it brings the historian ‘face-to-face

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with history’. In the History of Education, there has also been a well-documented ‘visual turn’ reflected in: substantive articles such as Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor’s on the ‘progressive image’; methodological accounts in a History of Education Special Issue (2001); Ulrike Mietzner et al’s Visual History: Images of Education (2005), and Ines Dussell’s The Visual Turn in the History of Education (2013). There has been some debate about the value of these visual sources with some educational historians sceptical about how much photographs can add beyond ‘peripheral conclusions’ or critical of what Burke calls the ‘temptations of realism’ or Susan Sontag calls the ‘universal aura’ of the photographic image. However, as Penny Tinkler has suggested in a recent book on Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research (2013) it is possible to be somewhere ‘between the extremes’ of realism and constructivism by recognising that each photograph is ‘shaped by the photographer’s point of view’ but also that they do ‘offer some evidence of what was in front of the lens’. Film footage is subject to similar issues. These visual sources are treated in combination with other sources as a way to help, as Burke put it, ‘give new answers or to ask new questions.’

**Oral testimony**

As well as documentary and visual sources, this thesis makes extensive use of oral testimony – both existing interviews and new interviews which I have conducted. Interviews can help, as described by The Popular Memory Group, ‘make available

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elements of lived culture and of subjectivity not easily reached otherwise’. In creating testimonies after the event through oral history interviews, the historian is drawn into the challenges of working with memory, narrated through ‘personal mythologies’, ‘silences’ and ‘shaped accounts’ as described by advocates of oral history, Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson. This research embraced these dimensions of oral history interviews as a way to ‘take us closer to past meanings’ rather than as a problem to be ignored or overcome. As in the case of visual sources, there is a danger that, as Peter Cunningham and Philip Gardner describe, interviews can ‘generate a sense of authenticity which can seem irresistible’. However, this danger is mitigated by using them ‘in conjunction’ with other available sources, as advocated by the historian John Tosh (2006).

I conducted around 20 individual interviews with ex-staff and pupils of Kilquhanity in order to gather a range of perspectives and to collect the testimony of influential figures on the subject of manual work and the school as a whole. For Wennington, I conducted fewer individual interviews (around 10) partly because there were already a number of interviews recorded and accessible as part of the archive and also because I was able to access pupil perspectives as part of group discussions during the Wennington Archive Weeks which I attended in May 2013, May 2014, May 2015 and June 2018.

These interviews with ex-pupils and ex-staff gave me the opportunity to explicitly explore how ideas and practices relating to manual work played out in adults’ and children’s experiences of the schools – and whether and how they continue to play out as part of their adult lives and indeed the lives of their own children. I mainly selected ex-staff and pupils with some interest or experience of the manual work aspect of life at the schools in order to generate rich material about this theme. However, I was aware of the bias in this sample and made sure that I also conducted interviews for each school with ex-pupils who were negative or ambivalent about this aspect of life at the school.

37 Samuel and Thompson (1990), 13.
The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews which explored the following aspects of the interviewee’s experiences:

- the wider story of the interviewee’s childhood and adult life
- his or her significant memories of experiences and people at the setting
- his or her memories of manual work projects and activities
- views on how these experiences may have influenced subsequent actions and attitudes

The interviews were not just a one-way data-collecting process but were also, as Gardner describes oral history interviews, ‘a joint production of conversational exchange’. 40 The combination of my questions, research background and active involvement in creating an educational experiment, offers the possibility of a mutual discussion of ideas as well as data collection about the interviewee’s experiences. Throughout the conversations, as Alessandro Portelli, the oral historian, has observed, ‘people give their opinions as well as their facts’. 41 At points in the interviews, we move into a different mode which could be called ‘philosophical dialogue’ in which the researcher conducts ‘active interviews with their respondents in order to generate public conversation about societal values and goals’. 42 This kind of conversation occurred in many of the interviews, but perhaps particularly with those interviewees who in their adult lives have continued to work with these practices and ideas: for example, Claire Cameron, ex-pupil of Kilquhanity, has become professor of social pedagogy at UCL, has been closely involved with the Cambridge branch of Woodcraft Folk and has an explicit interest in the ‘red thread’ from Kilquhanity to contemporary social pedagogy practices; Richard Schofield, ex-pupil of Wennington, has worked as a designer-builder, convening the London Anarchist Research Group and involved with Forest School Camps; Sam Doncaster and Pat Mitchell, have worked in schools and outdoor education and have a key role in the Wennington Association. The ideas and interpretations offered by the

interviewees, in some cases, became a valuable part of the final analysis – without removing my responsibility, as the researcher and author of the work, to situate and make sense of those interpretations within their wider contexts.

Where possible, interviews were recorded on a small digicorder with the permission of the interviewees. Shortly after the interviews, I used the approach, common in ethnography, of writing detailed notes on the experience of the interview, impressions and reflections on the process. Subsequently, I transcribed relevant sections of the interviews, partly to facilitate close attention and interpretive thinking and partly to allow easy reference to exact words.

**Interpretation and analysis of data**

In analysis, I have followed the approach of many historians and social researchers in triangulating the different types of sources; a process which is vividly described by Samuel as ‘splic[ing] together different classes of evidence or us[ing] one to expose the silences and absences of the other’. Each setting and each person’s experience has unique and common elements. It has therefore been important, in analysis, to recognise the diversity of experiences, perspectives and meanings – what Thompson has called, the ‘original multiplicity of standpoints’. I have also attempted to recognise the problem of ‘heads telling their own tale’ by drawing on the full range of other existing sources and seeking to acknowledge alternative perspectives and power dynamics within the settings – what the historian of ideas Quentin Skinner has called ‘the battle behind apparent certainties’.

I have analysed these multiple sources and perspectives in an open response to the data both in terms of what people have said or written or drawn and also, using the

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approaches of narrative and discourse analysis, how people represent their experiences. This ‘how’ aspect draws attention to ‘underlying assumptions’ and ‘questions of power relations’, as Erica Burman and Ian Parker have argued in *Discourse, Analytic, Research* (1993). I have also drawn on the ‘iterative’ analytical approaches common in ethnography in which there is ‘continual movement between data and analysis’. As the research progressed, I identified significantly distinct types of manual work, which tend to be bundled together, but offer very different perspectives on manual work at the case-study schools and across the wider field of progressive and radical education: ‘useful work’ and maintenance; craft and invention; and building work – both co-construction with adults and unsupervised den-building. I began to use these categories explicitly as part of interviews and discussion groups and as a way to organise existing materials for the PhD into chapters.

In analysis, I have explicitly positioned each of these aspects of manual work at the school in relation to accounts and images of this characteristic – or its absence – in other experimental schools and communities, drawing on primary and secondary accounts outlined in the literature review. In this approach, I challenge a tendency to treat such schools as isolated experiments and support Cunningham’s, call for historians to explore the ‘connections’ between various educational experiments and thereby contribute to an emerging ‘prosopography’ of progressive, radical and informal education. This contextual work casts light back on the meanings of manual work at the case-study schools and challenges and enriches our understanding of the history of progressive and radical education.

In conclusions, I have also sought to explore the relevance of the experiences at the case-study schools for contemporary debates about education and childhood – contributing to the ‘joint task’ proposed by Martha Gutman and colleagues for ‘history, ethnography, sociology to cast light on the Western model of the good childhood’. I have also sought to work across what the philosopher David Bridges

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calls the ‘empirical/philosophical divide’ and ‘embracing an intellectual world in which the two constantly inform and challenge each other’. In drawing on historical research to explore contemporary questions, I am seeking to respond to the philosopher Paul Standish’s criticism of the historian’s tendency to ‘defer direct engagement indefinitely’ while remaining aware of the dangers of what the historian Sam Wineburg, has called ‘mind-numbing presentism’. By exploring the implications for wider debates – albeit without the possibility of final conclusions – I also seek to respond to Richard Smith’s criticism of educational research more generally for an ‘inward turn’. I take inspiration from the work of writers such as Richard Sennett and Ken Worpole whose work draws on different fields of knowledge and speaks from the past to the present so that, as Worpole writes, ‘we might do things differently’.

Sources about Wennington

Wennington School as a historical subject benefits from having had a headteacher who also spent time photographing, drawing and writing about his ideas, influences and experiences at the school. Barnes wrote about the school at various different points in its history. For example, Barnes and his wife wrote a proposal for the school in 1936 which offers a valuable and unusual insight into their joint intentions for the school. It is also the last time that Frances Barnes’ name appears as official co-author. For this reason, the thesis tends to attribute ideas and intentions to Kenneth Barnes in spite of claims that Frances was the ‘silent force behind...
Kenneth'. Barnes published two short articles in *New Era* (1946 and 1956) and a 12-page chapter for Child’s *The Independent Progressive Schools* (1962) which offers a useful summary of ideas, practices and sense of the school’s relationship to the wider progressive movement in its first decades. In 1980, after the school had closed, his book *Energy Unbound* was published with a subtitle claiming that it is: ‘the story of Wennington School’[my italics].

*Energy Unbound* inspires a sense that what Barnes writes is what happened – reflecting Barnes’ influential role at the school and his confidence as a writer. It is an invaluable record of Barnes’ ideas, influences and, to an extent, how they played out in reality with 200 pages of text and numerous photographs, illustrations and anecdotes from across the decades. However, ex-pupils are critical of his account. Alan Island offers a vehement critique of *Energy Unbound* as part of a wider critique of Barnes and the school. He argues that it displays ‘a cavalier attitude to the truth...by interweaving fantasy with the facts I supplied for the passage about me, he takes a liberty that is suggestive of a proprietorial attitude to former pupils.’ Other ex-pupils more gently criticise the text by nicknaming it ‘Energy uncredited’ or ‘Energy unacknowledged’ suggesting that Barnes did not sufficiently recognise the role and contribution of other members of the community. Information from interviews also raises questions about the accuracy of some parts of Barnes’ account. These alternative perspectives have alerted me to the need not to fall prey to the authoritative tone of the text and treat it as a ‘sacred history’ of what really happened at the school – but instead as a valuable but partial insight into Barnes’ hopes and dreams for the school.

As well as these published writings about the school, I have benefitted from access to an extensive archive of photographs, film footage, annual reports, school magazines, minutes of the senate meetings, inspector reports and testimonials

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62 Pat Michell, group interview 19 November 2002, Wennington Archive Week.
67 Sam Doncaster, interviewed 16 May 2018.
which were deposited at the Planned Environmental Therapy Trust in 1998. The archive has been further developed over the subsequent period through annual working parties organised by the Wennington Association at which ex-pupils and archivists work together to organise the existing material, create new testimonial and engage in discussion of related contemporary projects and debates.

Barnes’ perspective, as in published writing about the school, dominates aspects of the archive, reflecting both his powerful position in the school, but also his tendency to document. For example, he edited the school magazines and authored the Annual Reports. In 1962, he claims that the report ‘is not a means of filling the shop-window but of sharing assessments and reflections’. And in Energy Unbound he suggests that ‘annual reports were research documents and attempts at assessment rather than morale boosters’. It is true that the reports appear to acknowledge challenges and doubts as well as success and celebration. However, these reflections still sit within a framework of Barnes’ strong feeling of ‘total personal commitment’ and as crafted communication to parents and stakeholders who were effectively customers and prospective customers of the school. There is no fundamental criticism of aims and values.

Barnes was also responsible for the majority of the extensive number of photographs of the school, which are held in the Wennington Archive. Sam Doncaster, ex-pupil, calls them ‘the best photographic archive of any progressive school ever’. The photographs certainly offer a rich visual source for this work. Many of the photographs are of pupils involved in activities rather than posing for an official school photograph. As with the written sources, the view of Kenneth Barnes is still dominant. Richard Schofield claims that ‘Kenneth was his own sort of self-appointed official pictorial record taker of the school...the fact is that the greater number of pictures that survive are actually pictures that Kenneth Barnes took of his own pupils in his own school and therefore show the way that Kenneth wanted the

70 Barnes (1980), vii.
71 Sam Doncaster, group interview at Wennington Archive Week 19 November 2002, Wennington Archive.
school to look’.72 The photographs therefore also form part of the ‘official’ record of the school. Barnes also took film footage in the 1950s to mid-1960s and added a voice-over in the 1980s. Other film footage also exists – taken by Roger Gerhardt, staff, in the mid to late 1960s and by third parties in 1962 and 1963.73 These films offer valuable additional views of the school, although Richard Schofield criticises Incurably Human claiming ‘the flavour does not come across...cut-glass accents...you’d have thought that was some public school that was being filmed’.74 And Barnes acknowledges in Energy Unbound that there is a tendency in film to ‘capture the happy moments’.75

Existing interviews and testimonials from ex-pupils, conducted and written after the school closed, are also a very significant part of the archive – offering an insight into different perspectives and experiences from those of Barnes and other more official accounts of the school. These interviews were mainly conducted in 2010 and 2011 as part of a wider oral history project at the Planned Environmental Therapy Trust entitled ‘Other Peoples’ Children’. These interviews were in some ways of limited value because they did not address my specific questions and area of interest but they were also valuable for the same reason – reminding me of other aspects of pupil experience and putting the experiences of manual work in the wider context of experiences at the school.

I have added to these existing sources through my own interviews with individuals and group discussions at the Wennington Archive Weeks. I interviewed Belinda Swift, ex-pupil and daughter of John Swift, a member of staff and influential figure in the history of construction and maintenance at the school; and Eleanor Pease, ex-pupil and second wife of Kenneth Barnes. In terms of ex-pupils, the Wennington Archive Weeks were a rich source of both one-to-one pupil interviews and group discussions. The group discussions were in some ways very helpful for encouraging reminiscences as memories are triggered by other peoples’ memories.

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72 Richard Schofield, group interview at Wennington Archive Week, 19 November 2002, Wennington Archive.
73 The Schools, BBC documentary by Richard Cawston, BFI, London; Incurably Human (1983), A Meeting Point Film by John Morris and Peter Hamilton.
74 Richard Schofield, group interview at Wennington Archive Week, 19 November 2002, Wennington Archive.
and the culture of the school is almost recreated in the conversation. However, there was also the possibility for myths to be reinforced and minority voices to struggle to be heard. The archive weeks were very helpful in allowing me to follow up specific questions and ideas prompted by the archives with ex-pupils – involving them as I worked to interpret the sources. I was also able to receive feedback on my ideas as they developed, for example, I discussed various chapter drafts with Pat Mitchell and Sam Doncaster as part of the 2018 Wennington Archive Week and with Richard Schofield as part of an interview in London.

**Sources about Kilquhanity**

Initially the task of researching Kilquhanity appeared more challenging than Wennington. The absence of an official archive, published history or ex-pupil association in some ways makes the researcher’s job harder. John Aitkenhead was berated by his friend and fellow Scottish radical educator Robert Mackenzie who told him that by not writing: ‘you’re only doing half the job’. However, Gavin Aitkenhead defends the absence of book and archive on philosophical grounds as ‘too final and fixed’. As researcher, this absence allows more diverse voices to be heard and a less dominant official story to be deconstructed.

In spite of this absence of an archive, it is possible to piece together Aitkenhead’s opinions and ideas – albeit in less detail than Barnes’. Aitkenhead wrote an article in *New Era* in 1947, a 10-page chapter in *The Independent Progressive Schools* (1961), which he later described in his preface to *Kilquhanity Jubilee* (1990) as the ‘first published statement of any length about the school...’ and claims that it ‘provides an authentic background for these memories of former pupils and staff members’. He also articulated his ideas in numerous editorials for the home-spun magazine, *The Broadsheet*; in interviews for external publications and short films;

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76 Pat Mitchell and Sam Doncaster, interviewed, 16 May 2018.
78 *The Broadsheet*, 5 June 1976, 300
79 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
and in a lengthy life history interview with him and his wife, Morag, held at the British Library and recorded in 1998.

In terms of uncovering the wider story of the school, there are plenty of sources available through individuals who were involved with the community. The Broadsheet was a regular and vibrant school magazine written and illustrated and often edited by the pupils themselves – with articles also by staff and Aitkenhead. Together these expressive newspapers offer an invaluable insight into the life of the school from many different perspectives. Aitkenhead described it as ‘the regular picture of K., warts and all, and that’s what’s good about it’.81 Mackenzie himself admits in the celebratory 300th edition that this ‘chronicle of the kids’ substitutes admirably for a more ‘official Kilquhanity story’.82 I was able to examine around 200 editions of The Broadsheet which had been kept by a parent to whom it was distributed.83

Instead of a monograph about the school such as Energy Unbound, Claire Cameron, an ex-pupil, compiled, edited and published a collection of memories from ex-staff and pupils as a celebration of the jubilee of the school in 1990 – with a preface by John Aitkenhead in which he described the book as ‘not the Kilquhanity Story’ but the ‘composite statement of the Kilquhanity experience’.84 Cameron also celebrates the diversity of perspectives in this approach: ‘I was keen to include every shade of opinion about the school and not merely to produce a glorious commendation of the practice of progressive independent schools.’85 She also claims that she has ‘tried to be a minimalist editor’.86 This ‘minimalist’ editing has resulted in a very valuable resource for the historian.

There are also numerous articles about the school based on visits by third parties – more so than Wennington; for example, a journalist wrote a four-page article for the Times Educational Supplement in 1966 and draws attention to the benefit of writing about first impressions because of the ‘clarity...which may be lost over a lengthier

81 Editorial, The Broadsheet, no 344, 1979, 1.
82 The Broadsheet, 5 June 1976, 300.
83 Lent to me from Claire Cameron and Ed Booth’s private collection.
acquaintance. A detailed and lengthy article in *Anarchy* based on a visit in 1968 offers an anarchist-sympathising perspective and a detailed snapshot of life at the school, including the weekly meeting and manual work. These accounts are certainly very helpful in their sharing of relatively open-minded first impressions and ‘food for thought’ with the contemporary researcher. The official inspector reports – and related correspondence – are held at the National Records Office in Edinburgh – and provide an insight into the nuanced relationship of the school with officialdom, although unfortunately the final report at the end of the life of the school is not available.

In terms of visual sources, there is no central source of photographs. No one seems to have taken on the role of official photographer in the way that Barnes did at Wennington. However, ex-teacher Mike Todd describes himself as a keen photographer and claims that he has hundreds of photographs of life at the school, frustratingly, on slides in South America. I was able to access some visual images of the school: from the newspaper articles described above; *Kilquhanity Jubilee*; Facebook site for the school; and in ex-staff and pupils’ private records, which were often shared during interviews. *The Broadsheet* also contains many hand-drawn illustrations of buildings and activities. Three short films about the school – a BBC documentary in 1968, a film made by Jordan Teacher Training College in 1968 and another short film made by Ed Booth, ex-pupil and film-maker, in 1986 are also rich sources of visual images of the school.

In the absence of an archive, my interviews of ex-pupils and staff at Kilquhanity were perhaps even more essential than for Wennington. My first interviews for Kilquhanity school were *in situ* at the school in January 2015. I interviewed Andrew Pyle, pupil in the 1960s, who is now head of the school in its current configuration as a base for summer camps for Japanese pupils and researching material for a book about John Aitkenhead, based partly on his private correspondence. Andrew Pyle was able to offer information and views on his own experiences but also to give a wider perspective on the past and present of the school. During this same visit, I conducted an interview with Gavin Aitkenhead, who was also able to offer multiple

perspectives as: son of John Aitkenhead; pupil in the 1950s and 1960s; member of staff in the 1970s and 1980s; briefly head of the school after his father retired; teacher for the Japanese groups; and resident on site in a house that he self-built. Many of the interviewees at Kilquhanity had held these kinds of multiple roles in relation to the school which further enriched the interview material and reflects a wider fluidity in the structure and hierarchy of the school.

In terms of ex-staff, I interviewed Richard Jones, who was an immensely influential woodwork teacher; led the building of a new workshop and art studio in 1969; became deputy head of the school for its last few years; and with his wife, Vivien Jones, who was an art-teacher at Kilquhanity, set up his own small progressive school after Kilquhanity closed. I also interviewed Mike Todd, another key ‘maker’ adult in this period. He was known as Toddy, and had trained and practised briefly as an architect before developing an interest in alternative education and communities. He arrived at the school to teach science but ended up being the person to ‘do repairs around the site’ and ‘making things with the kids’.90 Both these interviews were long, around three hours, and contributed important insights on the role of manual work at the school – and the resulting types of relationship between adults and children.

In terms of ex-pupils, I found that it was helpful to interview a number of different members of the same family who were involved with the school. I interviewed Claire Cameron and Ed Booth, who met at the school in the 1970s and are now married with three children – their ongoing debates about the meanings of the school were revealing. I interviewed the three Booth brothers and found that their different perspectives were very valuable in casting light on different interpretations of similar experiences. Interviews with three siblings in the Cuddihy family, who as orphans were divided between Kilquhanity and Summerhill, cast valuable light on comparisons between the two schools. In the case of the Cox family, I was able to interview three generations involved with the school: Margaret Cox who sent her son Gem Cox to the school in the 1960s and was a teacher there for a short period; her daughter, Margot Gibbs, who was a pupil at the school; and her granddaughter,

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90 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
Camilla Cox, who attended the school in the 1990s. The perspectives of the different generations added another dimension to the interview data in terms of tracing changes and continuities of experiences.

**Terminology**

I use ‘staff’ and ‘pupils’ to refer to adults and young people at the case-study schools as the most specific way to describe them. However, I am aware that this language is in some ways inappropriate for these schools, since as Michael Bartholomew wrote in his article about Kilquhanity, ‘I use the term “kids” because everybody at Kilquhanity – children and adults – uses the term and because “children” or “pupils” would seem out of place.’

For staff and pupils, I use first name and surname, again for specificity and respect, rather than first names or nicknames which would have been how they referred to each other at the time. Published writers such as the headteachers, John Aitkenhead and Kenneth Barnes, and ex-pupils, Bob Cuddihy and Claire Cameron are referred to by just their surnames, following the convention of academic writing in relation to author names except where necessary, for clarity, to include both names.

**Sources for chapter on the contemporary context**

Sources for the contemporary examples are drawn from publicly available materials such as websites, promotional leaflets, articles, films and written accounts by those involved, for example: John Mansfield’s book about the history of Michael Hall School, *A Good School* (2014); Stephen de Brett’s, the head of design and technology at King Alfred School, account of an annual self-build project; Jake

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Keen’s account of the creation of the Ancient Technology Centre, which he led, and other related projects.\textsuperscript{94}

This written material was enriched, where possible, by visits and interviews with adult and young people involved with the settings – and practitioners in relevant fields who were able to offer an informed view on both their own project and the wider context of young people and manual work. I recorded interviews and wrote detailed notes after visits, drawing on ethnographic methods. This chapter also draws on the more detailed data collected at Wilderness Wood: my journal ‘The Lives of Children at Wilderness Wood’ handwritten regularly since our family began work at Wilderness Wood in 2014; 11 copies of Wild Times, a ‘zine published three times a year with articles by adults and children and interviews with participants; photographs taken by different photographers (never me or Dan, my husband) each year of the project and compiled into annual scrapbooks; notes taken at three discussion groups about different aspects of the PhD research; and two visitor books written in by people who participate at the wood.

Researching one’s own experiment – or self-ethnography – is fraught with methodological challenges relating to the different and sometimes conflicting ‘duties’ of researcher and practitioner. However, my experience of writing a short ethnographic account of a previous self-build project in Dorset had given me some experience of the balancing act of the practitioner’s practical and emotional commitments towards the project with the ethnographer’s more detached role in relation to the observation of a setting.\textsuperscript{95} This position as ‘awkward insider’ brought, as the ethnographer Colic-Peisker has described in working on her own ethnic community, ‘satisfaction as well as awkwardness, advantages as well as pitfalls’.\textsuperscript{96} The main ‘pitfall’ was that my position could obscure certain perspectives, for example people could feel uncomfortable offering critical opinions. The advantages were that people felt at ease with me and I was able to observe and hear

conversations, debriefs and reflections over time and after the activities. I found that the ‘pitfalls’ can to some extent be mitigated by explicitly asking questions about negative aspects and noting children’s silences or disengagement.

**Ethical considerations**

The research has been conducted according to British Educational Research Association’s statement of ethical practice (2011) and, in respect of oral history interviews, according to the guidelines of the Oral History Society (2012). The proposed research methods have been scrutinised by the UCL Institute of Education review process (January 2015). The nature of the research was explained at the earliest point of communication with the research participants and permission granted to use material such as interviews, photographs etc in the dissertation (Appendix 4). The recordings, notes and transcripts have been stored in locked files in my study and under password control on my computer.

On the whole, this research does not focus on a particularly sensitive or emotional aspect of people’s experiences. However, in any research – particularly involving interviews and observation – there is, of course, the possibility of emotional upset or overly influencing participants’ behaviours or responses. These dangers have been mitigated by using a semi-structured interview format so that interviewees can avoid areas which are uncomfortable and take the conversation in the direction that is most meaningful for them, while also contributing to the research questions.

In terms of writing up the research, for the historical and contemporary case-studies, I have used real names, unless participants have requested otherwise, as a transparent and respectful acknowledgement of the interviewees’ contribution. In the contemporary chapter, I have anonymised children’s identities, to an extent, by using only first names. It is, however, unrealistic to conceal the names of the actual sites since there are so few in the UK.
For both adults and young people, there is the possibility that the final interpretation and analysis challenges some of the ways in which the interviewee or participant has understood and represented his or her experiences. As I have become closer to the individuals and communities of ex-pupils and ex-staff connected to the historical schools and contemporary examples, I have felt increasingly uncomfortable about the idea of upsetting them with a ‘critical’ and academic interpretation of their experiences and ideas. Where feasible, I have shared my emerging analysis in order that people can contribute their responses. However, as Martyn Hammersley has suggested in relation to ethnography, there is an inevitable, and perhaps healthy tension, ‘between trying to understand people’s perspectives from the inside while also viewing them and their behaviour more distantly’. A critical account which acknowledges tensions, contradictions and power dynamics is part of doing justice to the range of experiences and perspectives in any setting – and makes a more meaningful and useful contribution to ongoing debates than a one-sided and rose-tinted account. In this sense, I have set out to conduct research which has an ethical purpose as well as ethical methods – based on the conviction that understanding the ‘wood’ better will also be good for the ‘trees’.

Chapter 3

‘Straight out of a gulag’ or ‘finding a freedom’: useful work at Kilquhanity and Wennington

Introduction

The case-study schools’ old rambling buildings and extensive grounds meant that there was plenty of work to do in looking after and maintaining the physical fabric, including food growing and preparation, cleaning and repairing buildings, tidying and mending belongings. Both headteachers claimed that this work was shared by staff and pupils with no dedicated domestic or grounds staff and minimal paid help in the kitchen and garden. At Kilquhanity, this kind of activity was timetabled as ‘useful work’ and, at Wennington, as ‘community work’ or ‘outdoor work’ or ‘duties’ (Appendix 1 and 2). In this chapter, I adopt the Kilquhanity term of ‘useful work’ to refer to this kind of activity. My analysis of the sources casts light on whether all pupils were involved; how far pupils initiated, co-operated with or resisted this kind of work; how practices and meanings changed over time; and differences and similarities between the two schools.

The headteachers at both schools celebrated pupils’ involvement in ‘useful work’, as not only a practical necessity because of their ‘shoe-string’ budgets, but also as an empowering form of participation in the school community, and a challenge to the denigration of this kind of work in wider society. Some historians and commentators have adopted this positive perspective; for example, John Shotton describes ‘useful work’ as an example of Kilquhanity’s spirit of ‘togetherness and co-operation’.

However, other historians and commentators have highlighted its more pragmatic, exploitative or puritanical aspects. For example, David Lewis describes maintenance work at Wennington as ‘cheap labour’ for ‘community survival’, Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.


Cuddihy describes ‘useful work’ at Kilquhanity as ‘straight out of a gulag’;⁷ and Robert Skidelsky follows A.S.Neill in criticising this kind of work as a form of ‘cultural evangelism’.⁸ I draw on pupil and staff experiences to offer new perspectives on these interpretations.

Comparison of experiences of ‘useful work’ with other mainstream, progressive and radical schools and communities in the twentieth century raises questions about whether Barnes and Skidelsky were right to claim that this practice ‘distinguished’ Wennington and Kilquhanity from ‘all other schools’⁹ and whether they were, in this characteristic, closer to anarchist schools and therapeutic communities. This comparison also sheds light on whether ‘useful work’ was, as Shinichiro Hori suggests, simply a ‘Deweyan addition to Neill’s ideas about freedom’¹⁰ or whether it reveals significant differences of attitudes towards freedom and community between the case-study schools and Summerhill.

‘Doing is belonging’:¹¹ pupil involvement in ‘outdoor work’ at Wennington

Barnes placed considerable and consistent rhetorical emphasis on the value of pupils’ involvement in the manual work of maintaining the physical fabric of the school – in both its physical locations. In 1949, in one of his Sunday Evening Talks to the whole school community, he positioned this kind of manual work as fundamental to the identity of the school by suggesting that ‘if there ever came in this school a time when we thought that this work should be done by someone else and not by ourselves, then this school would cease to be Wennington’.¹² And in 1980, in *Energy Unbound*, he again set out his views on its importance to the school:

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⁷ Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.
¹¹ Len Clarke, group discussion 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
¹² ‘Sunday Evening Talk’ by Kenneth Barnes, 22 January 1949, Wennington Archive.
The sharing of community work is the sharing of the basic tasks of physical existence, and to do anything to diminish their importance would have been to give in to the educational pressures the School had resisted from its foundation and to break the unity between thinking and doing.\textsuperscript{13}

These statements show how Barnes positioned pupils' involvement in maintenance and domestic work as part of a wider critique of a narrowly academic education system and a society which tended to denigrate the work of the hand and value ‘thinking’ over ‘doing’. W.A.C. Stewart quoted Barnes' commitment to the ‘sharing of every kind of work’ in his overview of progressive schools.\textsuperscript{14} Barnes claimed that this kind of maintenance work was not only an ‘ideal’ but ‘rooted in necessity’\textsuperscript{15} and explicitly connected this ‘necessity’ with his wider political agenda for social change and equality in the Sunday Evening Talk (1949) on the subject:

We felt when we started this school that we should do some of the work ourselves so that we did not think the work was in any way beneath us or not fit for us, as well as to get over the fact that we could not afford to get others to do it...there are in this country, people whose jobs make them as an inferior group...the fact that we do our own cleaning work means that we accept men like these for the work they do in the world as our personal equals....\textsuperscript{16}

The rhetorical language and repeated use of ‘we’ suggests a political and intellectual rally – rather than a practical aspiration. However, Barnes also sought to practise these ideals in his own actions. He offers a vivid example of balancing ‘thinking and doing’ in his autobiographical account of having to ‘turn away from writing at any moment to solve a problem of bricks-and-mortar or to listen to an anguished child, and turn back to complete the sentence’.\textsuperscript{17} One female ex-pupil's, 1960-66, first memory of arriving at the school was of seeing a man working in the

\textsuperscript{16} ‘Sunday Evening Talk’ by Kenneth Barnes, 22 January 1949, Wennington Archive.
\textsuperscript{17} Barnes, K. (1969) \textit{The Involved Man: Action and Reflection in the Life of a Teacher}, London: Allen and Unwin, 10.
garden and finding out that, rather than a groundsman, it was the headteacher Barnes. Richard Schofield, pupil 1966-69, also suggests that Barnes was a ‘doer’ who ‘gardened, woodworked and painted’ – as well as an ‘intellectual’. 

This valuing of manual work is also evident in Barnes’ published accounts of the school. In *Energy Unbound*, he gives ‘community jobs’ equal billing to ‘class-work’ in a chapter title. He also punctuates the story of the school with events such as the fuel crisis in the severe winter of 1949 when pupils rose to a ‘remarkable’ fire-wood challenge. He positions this kind of work as a ‘manifestation of responsibility’. He values the contribution of pupils to the management of the estate as an alternative to academic or classroom contribution, for example, he describes a boy who ‘looks cheerfully vacant’ during classes but ‘put him on a tractor and he is absolutely reliable as also in many other jobs round the school estate’. He includes numerous photographs of pupils helping with manual work in the Annual Reports and *Energy Unbound*, for example, Figures 3.1-3.13. He argued that the practice of pupil involvement in maintenance work was a successful way of getting necessary work done. In a bulletin of 1942, he claimed that ‘the scullery has reached a standard of order higher than it ever reached under staff control’. In 1950, he wrote that ‘through energetic direction and wise use of our man-power, we have done most of the overdue repairs and decoration’.

Pupil testimony often reinforces Barnes’ account of the value attributed to this kind of work - as part of a wider emphasis on responsibility to the community. Richard Pemble, pupil 1959-60, described the school as a ‘can-do place. It was organised in such a way that you had to take part in doing things...if you broke something, you fixed it’. Pat Mitchell, pupil 1955-59, describes the work as part of a ‘do-it-yourself policy with everybody doing something of everything...related to an understanding of

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18 Anonymous female pupil at Wennington, interviewed 8 October 2015.
22 Barnes (1980), 42.
26 Richard Pemble interviewed by Frances Meredith 19 May 2010, Wennington Archive.
the community’s needs’. Belinda Swift, pupil in the 1950s, describes how she ‘lapped up’ what Barnes said about community and responsibility. Andrew Peers, pupil 1966-73, recalls a school report in which he was called ‘a valued member of the community’ and interprets this as because ‘maintenance work was valued – not just academics’. Eleanor Pease, pupil in the 1940s, also contrasted the valuing of ‘necessary’ work with a more ambivalent attitude towards academic activity that it ‘doesn’t matter if [you] can do Latin or not...’

However, other testimony from ex-pupils raises some questions about the consistency of Barnes’ valuing of this kind of manual work. In spite of his rhetoric about equality and the value of domestic work, ex-pupils claim that he was ‘autocratic’ and ‘never spoke to kitchen staff’, although others defend this behaviour as because he was ‘awkward’ and ‘shy’. Alan Island recalls outdoor work being used as ‘punishment for trivial “offences” (I did six straight Thursday afternoons of sawing down trees for being caught drinking cider)’. Similarly, Ernie Thomas, pupil 1957-61, recalls ‘coke shovelling as a punishment’ for ‘not doing much in classroom’. Belinda Swift, who is generally very positive about the school, recalls tensions between her father, John Swift, the site manager, and Barnes’ use of outdoor work as a punishment: ‘Sometimes the children had to do a job for a punishment. Because he [John Swift] enjoyed doing practical jobs, he wouldn’t want to impose it as a punishment...that possibly – the philosophy possibly clashed. I just remember something like that.’ This use of manual work as a punishment suggests tensions between Barnes’ rhetoric and practice – perhaps an underlying negative view of manual work in spite of or alongside his positive protestations.

28 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
29 Andrew Peers, interviewed 16 May 2018.
30 Eleanor Pease, interviewed 10 May 2018.
32 Richard Pemble, group discussion 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
33 Pat Mitchell, email to Emily Charkin, 23 July 2019.
36 Ernie Thomas, group discussion 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
37 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
Barnes claimed considerable success in establishing the ideal of pupil involvement in this kind of work as an accepted practice at the school. In 1942, only two years after the school had opened, he boasted in the school bulletin that pupils’ involvement in practical jobs and chores is one of the ‘major aims of the school’ and that in this aim ‘we are succeeding’.\(^{38}\) He endorses this claim 40 years later by quoting this bulletin in *Energy Unbound* (1980).\(^{39}\) In the daily routine, time was allocated to jobs such as potato peeling, cleaning toilets, gardening as part of ‘morning duties’ and in the weekly routine, there were two-hour ‘outdoor work’ periods twice a week (Appendix 1). Beyond this timetabling of domestic and maintenance work, there were also times when seasonal tasks such as clearing the swimming pool ready for the summer term or fire-wood processing in the winter, might replace scheduled academic lessons. For example, Eleanor Pease recalls how in the severe winter of 1949, classes had a double period off each day to either chop wood and bring it back up to the boiler and saw it up into bits for hot water…[or] sledge down the drive and collect provisions’.\(^{40}\) A government inspection report from 1959 also reinforces this view of the importance of this kind of work in the school routine; ‘groups of pupils also participate in maintenance work throughout the school…they work hard at their domestic tasks, at their maintenance and construction estate duties’.\(^{41}\)

Photographs and film footage support the idea that this kind of physical work for the community was a regular and significant part of daily routines alongside studying and playing. There are many images of pupils involved in various different aspects of looking after the physical fabric of the school and grounds, for example, Figures 3.1-3.13. These images must, of course, be treated with caution. They were mainly taken by Barnes; often appear to be posed group shots; and were clearly part of his creation of a discourse about the prevalence, value and popularity of this kind of work. However, the quantity of photographs and variety of activities suggests that this part of life was indeed significant. The images are also corroborated by ex-pupils, even those who are sceptical about other aspects of Barnes’ version of


\(^{40}\) Eleanor Pease, interviewed by Gemma Geldert 13 September 2010, Wennington Archive.

\(^{41}\) HMI Report from inspection 1-4 December 1959, Wennington Archive.
events, as a record of the kinds of activities which went on at the school. Photographs in the archive, which are not featured in published accounts, reflect a similar emphasis on outdoor manual work, including examples such as Figure 3.11 and 3.12, which appears to be less posed and shows an adult with two pupils getting on with a maintenance job. The importance of this aspect of life at the school is also reinforced by an amateur black-and-white film which opens with images of children processing fire-wood, cleaning out the swimming pool, digging, up ladders, chiselling a window frame, cleaning a sink, painting a drawer, sawing wood.

Figure 3.1: ‘hauling a tree for planking to the local sawmill at “Old Wennington” (before 1945).’

Figure 3.2: ‘The potato plot 1944’.  

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42 Pat Mitchell and Sam Doncaster, interviewed 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.  
43 Wennington; edited version, black and white footage, copy held by anonymous female pupil at Wennington.  
Figure 3.3: ‘peeling apples’.  

Figure 3.4: ‘New Building, Polishing the Hall’.  

Figure 3.5: ‘Girls at it too’.  

Barnes (1980), 94.  
Barnes (1980), 97.
Figure 3.6: untitled from Wennington Archive.

Figure 3.7: untitled from Wennington Archive.

Figure 3.8: untitled from Wennington Archive.
Figure 3.9: untitled from Wennington Archive.

Figure 3.10: untitled from Wennington Archive.

Figure 3.11: 'members of the fire squad deal with a water crisis'.

Many ex-pupils from different decades corroborate Barnes' claims and the impression created by photographic and film evidence about the range of activities and their importance in the daily life of the school. Gill Nicholson, pupil from 1945, suggests that 'obviously we did a lot of housework...' and repeats twice the idea that the school insisted on pupils 'pulling their weight'. Her use of 'obviously' suggests that she remembers this kind of work as a taken-for-granted part of the life of the school. Wendy Green, also pupil in the 1940s, before I could even ask a first question, offered as a first memory of the school, that 'we did chores...washing up, cutting up butter, gardening, stairs and passage...'. When I asked whether she enjoyed the work, she replied that 'it just was' – implying that it was not up for debate. Belinda Swift, pupil 1953-60, also reinforces the idea that the work was an accepted part of the routine at the school with her testimony using 'we' and 'you' and offering a matter-of-fact description which implies that it was an uncontroversial part of school life for all pupils.

We did regular maintenance or jobs every day. We had a rota. We were in a squad and you had to look up every half-term and see what your jobs were

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50 Gill Nicholson, interviewed by Craig Fees 22 September 2013, Wennington Archive.
51 Gill Nicholson, interviewed by Craig Fees 22 September 2013, Wennington Archive.
52 Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2018.
53 Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2018.
going to be. You did something for a week. Like peeling the potatoes before breakfast. Or sweeping the dormitory. Or gardening.54

Testimony and images, in many ways, support the dominant discourse created by Barnes and other members of the school community of ‘everybody doing everything’.55 However, primary sources also reveal that this ideal did not always play out in practice. The photographs, by definition, cannot show the people who were not involved. Sam Doncaster, pupil in the 1950s, recalls that ‘you were invited to be part of the team’56 – suggesting that there was an exclusive aspect to some types of work. One ex-pupil confirms that these kinds of activities did go on: ‘we used to grow things...I remember people hauling logs about...’ but reveals an ambivalent personal experience: ‘I honestly can’t remember a lot more about outdoor work’.57 Evidence also suggests that there was a gendered aspect to the division of labour. Girls often refer to domestic work while boys often refer to outdoor work. The photographs of the fence-building team and water squad, Figures 3.11 and 3.12, show boys only. The caption for two girls felling a tree, Figure 3.5, is captioned ‘girls at it too’ which implies that this was noteworthy rather than ordinary. Jonathan Adamson, pupil 1961-1966 suggests that he ‘can’t remember a lot of girls felling trees’ and that ‘girls might end up doing indoors work’.58

However, the evidence also suggests that this kind of gendered division of labour was, to some extent, challenged at the school, for example, the image of the boy helping to polish the dining room floor, Figure 3.4, and the girls helping to roll a heavy log, Figure 3.8, and fell trees, Figure 3.5. Barnes, in his Annual Report of 1966-7 criticises the gendering of these kinds of activities: ‘girls, through the supposition that they are more suited to domestic jobs, tend to be put down for indoor work when they ought to be outdoors and more energetic’.59 This comment suggests that Barnes recognised the problem but was not willing or able to change

54 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
56 Sam Doncaster, interviewed 16 May 2018.
57 Anonymous female pupil, interviewed 8 October 2015.
58 Jonathan Adamson, group discussion 13 May 2013, Wennington Archive.
practices in reality – raising interesting questions about the consistency of his rhetoric and the limits to his power in the school, particularly in the later period. Staff and pupil testimony also suggests that, rather than being a constant in the life of the school, there was a reduction of time spent on this kind of work over the decades. In spite of Barnes' rhetorical prioritising of community over 'educational pressures', he also acknowledged that after 1950 there was a decline in the amount of time spent on 'domestic work' due to other pressures on the children's time and the concerns [of other un-named people] about their 'tiredness'.

This analysis again reveals an apparent limit to Barnes' commitment to or control over this aspect of life at the school. This reduction is also recalled by ex-pupils, for example, Sam Doncaster, pupil in the 1950s, claims that these kinds of activities 'dwindled' in the 1960s and 1970s. Barnes, writing in an Annual Report in 1967, acknowledges that 'we are seriously short of staff' for outdoor work. And David Lewis, pupil at the school after Barnes had left in 1968, claims that the children's 'chores were much less...to give more time for study.' The photographs and film footage of this type of work reinforce this hypothesis since they are predominantly from the early decades of the schools' life.

The evidence casts light not only on rhetoric about the extent of pupil participation in maintenance work but also their attitudes towards this activity. Barnes claimed that pupils were not only involved with this kind of activity but also that they co-operated fully with it and were even eager to take the initiative. As early as 1941, he wrote that: 'not only do children now accept without complaint or criticism their share of the daily chores, but they find other things that need to be done and take charge without waiting for the staff to suggest it'. In 1980, he boasts that many pupils wanted to come back before the beginning of term to 'help in preparations' and that 'often too many wanted to do this and we had to hold them back'.

Barnes argued for the value of this kind of experience for the individual pupils as a way to develop skills and character, claiming that 'carrying the school's upkeep in a

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61 Sam Doncaster, group discussion 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
64 Barnes, K., 'Bulletin from December 1941' cited in Barnes (1980), 42.
65 Barnes (1980), 103.
literal sense on their own shoulders’ was of ‘immeasurable value’ as a practical ‘training’ in ‘all-round resourcefulness’ and as one of the ‘chief foundations of character’. He demonstrated success in instilling these values when he describes with great pride how Wennington boys and girls set about cleaning the kitchen in youth hostels ‘without having to be reminded by the warden’. He also positioned this kind of work as a ‘therapeutic experience’ for emotionally disturbed pupils for it ‘put them back into relationship when otherwise they might have sat about doing nothing’.

Barnes also connected pupil involvement in this work to empowerment in the community. In 1941, he claimed that this kind of work ‘gives them a sense of belonging’ and in 1980, he reflected that their involvement with practical tasks showed that ‘there was no doubt that they felt it to be their school’. Barnes contrasts this practical aspect to participation with the ‘talking shop of conventional school and university governing bodies’ and claims that ‘it is sharing at the personal and practical level as well as the administrative’. He also argued that contribution to the community was not at the expense of freedom but rather a route to it: ‘the boys and girls who discovered how to make washing up efficient were finding a freedom…’.

Pupil testimony, to some extent, reinforces these claims. Many pupils recall with pleasure and pride their daily responsibilities. Pat Mitchell argues that maintenance work ‘was fun’. Richard Schofield evokes the central and positive place of this kind of work in the overall school culture when he describes the ‘buzzing’ around the notice-boards to find out who had to do what and in which ‘squad’ and how people ‘found the jobs that suited you’. Testimony also suggests that pupils volunteered for extra jobs – implying a willingness to take on this kind of work. For example, Andrew Peers, pupil from 1966–73, recalls the voluntary clearing of the swimming
pool which ‘took three days’ and around ‘forty kids helped’ and, with visible pleasure in the memory, he describes his own voluntary early arrival at school each term to take on ‘lots of responsibility for site and rotas’. Photographs, to some extent, reinforce this impression of willing co-operation with images such as Figure 3.6 of a boy beaming as he holds an armful of logs, Figure 3.5 of girls laughing as they fell a tree and Figure 3.8 of a group of adults and children smiling as they work to move timber. Figure 3.11 of the fire squad and 3.3 of pupils peeling apples show groups of pupils apparently self-organising and motivated in their task without adult supervision – albeit that the photographs were taken by Barnes.

Many pupils support Barnes’ view that this kind of work developed useful, practical skills. Belinda Swift claims with enthusiasm that ‘I’m a really good sweeper’ and others claim, only half-joking, that Wenningtonians are ‘the best DIYers in the world’. Richard Pemble, pupil 1959-60, describes how this kind of maintenance work gave him ‘confidence in the ability to do things’, particularly as he had struggled in previous schools because of dyslexia. Ex-pupils also value the qualities of character which involvement in maintenance work developed. Pat Mitchell, pupil 1955-60, argues that it ‘developed a sense of responsibility’ and helped pupils ‘To be responsible for yourself, to be aware of others and work together.’ The Inspector Report of 1959 also connected these practical experiences to qualities of ‘independence’; ‘good relationships with one another and the staff’; and a ‘marked self-respect and also a respect for others’.

Pupils also reinforce the idea that this kind of activity was closely related to a feeling of empowerment in the community. Andrew Peers connects his practical involvement to a wider feeling that he was ‘empowered’ and that ‘kids were listened to by teachers’. At a group conversation at the Wennington Archive Week in 2013, Len Clarke, who attended the progressive Pestalozzi school, listened to the Wenningtonian memories of being involved in maintenance of the physical infrastructure of the school and commented that ‘doing creates belonging’ – echoing

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77 Andrew Peers, interviewed 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
78 Andrew Peers, interviewed 16 May 2018.
79 Sam Doncaster, group discussion 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
80 Richard Pemble, comment made at Common Roots Event 13 May 2015, Wennington Archive.
81 Pat Mitchell, written account of her time at Wennington, Wennington Archive.
82 HMI Report (1959), Wennington Archive, 14.
Barnes’ own language in 1941. Ex-Wennington pupils, present at the conversation, nodded vigorously their agreement. David Lewis also identifies an opposite correlation – based on his own experiences – that in the 1960s when there was a reduction in chores, there was also a ‘loss of community’.

However, other sources suggest that claims about willing co-operation, initiative and empowerment are, to some extent, hyperbole and myth-making. In practice, ‘duties’ and ‘outdoor work’ were enforced by adults – and in particular Barnes. Barnes acknowledged that there was a need for this kind of work to be compulsory – in some ways undermining the idea that pupils willingly undertook it – claiming that when a school became above a certain size it was necessary in order ‘to guard against the consequences of human fallibility’. Barnes also acknowledged some active resistance from pupils who ‘wonder why they are expected to do this work’. Barnes’ response to this resistance was to seek to convert pupils through a speech about its ‘origin and justification’ during a Sunday Evening Talk – reflecting an evangelical aspect to this aspect of school life. A BBC documentary, made in 1962, shows footage of pupils discussing in the senate meeting an ‘unfinished maintenance job’ with concerns expressed by the pupils that ‘we are getting into the habit of expecting the school to do everything which we could do ourselves’. This scene reveals that Barnes may have exaggerated his success in achieving a reality of pupils eagerly taking responsibility for looking after the physical fabric; although, the fact that criticism found its way into a Sunday Evening Talk and a discussion at the Senate Meeting reinforces the idea that it was very much part of the school philosophy and culture for both Barnes and pupils – even if not always achieved in reality.

The photographic evidence also complicates Barnes’ representation of willing and self-motivated pupil workers. The photographs of pupils involved in this kind of work often seem posed with pupils facing the camera rather than getting on with their job, Figures 3.5 and 3.6. Other photographs, such as Figures 3.8 and 3.9, reveal an

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84 Len Clarke, group discussion 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
85 Group discussion 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
89 The Schools, BBC documentary by Richard Cawston, 18 September 1962, BFI, London.
90 The Schools, BBC documentary by Richard Cawston, 18 September 1962, BFI, London.
adult busy and engaged with the pupils unsure of their role – looking as if the work might feel a bit, as Vientiane, pupil 1962-70, suggests, ‘pointless’. Figure 3.4 evokes hierarchy rather than collaboration – with a young boy on his knees polishing the floor under the controlling supervision of an adult team. In figures 3.1 and 3.7 pupils work in big groups on repetitive or hard physical work such as digging or dragging wood. It is difficult to assess whether the children feel empowered or subservient, motivated or resigned.

Pupil testimony often evokes resignation and acceptance rather than initiative and empowerment. Ernie Thomas expressed his attitude towards cleaning the toilets as: ‘I got on and did it’ and Belinda Swift suggests that ‘we accepted the work’. Other pupils suggest that the emphasis on responsibility could be experienced as overwhelming – for example, Belinda Swift recalls feeling ‘tearful’ at some aspects of their responsibility - so that Barnes’ metaphor of the pupils ‘carrying the school’s upkeep on their shoulders’ and images of the children dragging logs take on oppressive rather than empowering connotations.

The sources reveal tensions in relation to the emphasis on pupil involvement in maintenance work, as expressed by Jonathan Adamson, pupil 1961-66, who claims that attitudes ranged from ‘dreadful’ to ‘great’ or as Pat Mitchell, pupil 1955-60, encapsulates: ‘it might seem that all this was child labour and exploitation’ but ‘it was fun and developed a sense of responsibility’. This ambivalence persists in the present with enthusiastic pupils at the Wennington Archive Weeks celebrating opportunities to wash up together while less keen ex-pupils, such as Wendy Green, describes the ‘glorious day’ when she got a dish-washer and ‘I have not washed up since’.

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92 Ernie Thomas, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 17 May 2010, Wennington Archive.
93 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
95 Pat Michell, unpublished written account, Wennington Archive.
96 Jonathan Adamson, group discussion 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
97 Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2014.
‘Can you use a kid?’. The experiences and meanings of useful work at Kilquhanity

Kilquhanity, like Wennington, was based in an old building in a rural setting without much spare income for domestic and grounds staff. Gavin Aitkenhead claimed that the practice of ‘useful work’ emerged from ‘need’ rather than ‘theory’ and that there was ‘a huge amount of physical work’ in order for the site to ‘tick over’. The role of ‘work’ is mentioned repeatedly in John Aitkenhead’s writing and speaking about the school. In 1990, he summarised the experience of the school as: ‘we worked together and learned to live together’ and ‘academic skills found their real level’—reflecting his priorities in his ordering of ‘work’, ‘learning’ and ‘academic skills’.

Aitkenhead emphasised the value of this work for individuals in developing practical skills and traits of co-operation and responsibility and for the school as an ‘extended family’ or community. He, like Barnes, connected pupils’ involvement with maintenance of the physical fabric to his wider social and political values. In an article in New Society (1969) Aitkenhead is quoted: ‘sharing in tasks particularly domestic ones, underlines the essential dignity of labour’ and writing in 1990, he claims that ‘adults and kids shared all kinds of work on a basis of equality’. He positioned land-based work as becoming ‘peasants again, doing something real in time and tune with the great rhythm of the seasons’. This kind of language is similar to socialist and anarchist arguments for the value of manual and land-based work, such as Peter Kropotkin’s call for ‘raising manual labour to the place of honour it ought to occupy in society’. Aitkenhead also positioned maintenance and stewardship work as part of a sense of responsibility to the environment, reflected in

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98 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
101 Kilquhanity House Prospectus Notes (1993), Dumfries Local Records Office.
102 Punch, M. ‘How to be a “progressive” school now?’, New Society, 23 January 1969, 123-4,123.
his frequent references to the environmental text, Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973).

Aitkenhead, like Barnes, spent a considerable amount of his own time working on the farm or on the general maintenance of the estate. Gavin Aitkenhead, during our interview, gave an evocative impression of his father’s rhetorical rally when a physical infrastructure problem needed to be dealt with: ‘what does DIY stand for? – do it yourself – exactly – that’s what we’re going to do’. The gusto of his son’s impression suggests a much repeated catch-phrase. Testimony suggests that the ‘we’ was not just a rhetorical device but that John Aitkenhead, himself dug ditches, milked cows and fixed windows. An inspector, reporting in 1953, even expressed concern about his ‘dual role’ as ‘headmaster’ and ‘proprietor’. Aitkenhead also recognised a tension between the practical and educational aspects of his role, as revealed in his lament in 1962 that ‘rather sadly...once again it is chalk dust and not oats that gathers in my pockets’. However, in spite of this ‘chalk dust’, he remained a very hands-on headteacher, for example, Richard Jones describes the vivid memory of Aitkenhead digging a ditch while a pupil stood by watching, as an example of Aitkenhead’s commitment to ‘teaching by doing’ and his valuing of this kind of manual maintenance work in his own actions.

In terms of pupil experience, Aitkenhead established a rhythm and culture in which pupils spent a significant amount of time looking after the buildings and land. By 1957, an article in *The Scottish Sunday Express* describes how ‘as well as ordinary academic subjects, the boys and girls of Kilquhanity fell trees, run a poultry farm, grow veg, make butter, bake bread...’. In 1962, Aitkenhead describes farm-work as one of the ‘constant elements’ of the school. In 1963, this ‘element’ was broadened and formalised into a daily practice referred to as ‘useful work’ in which

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107 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.


110 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.


every morning from 8.30-9.15 am (Appendix 2) all the adults and children in the community were expected to look after the physical infrastructure which they shared—chopping kindling, feeding animals, lighting fires, sweeping rooms and stairs, tidying workshop spaces, preparing meals or morning ‘pieces’. An article in The Observer in 1963 commented that ‘everybody takes a turn at the domestic chores’. The published list of ‘Useful Work Sharing’ from a 1977 edition of The Broadsheet reinforces the idea that pupil and staff involvement in looking after the physical fabric of the community had become a firmly entrenched part of how the school was organised.

On top of the daily ‘useful work’ slot, pupils also had the option to take on additional ‘paid work’ such as setting up breakfast or bell ringing, as pictured in Figure 3.15. Pupils could also choose to do ‘maintenance work’ as part of morning or afternoon ‘options’ in which they had free choice between different activities—including general maintenance. Shotton describes this aspect of Kilquhanity and how ‘free choice’ might ‘mean English or Drama but it could also mean draining the meadow or repairing a fence’. An ex-pupil describes the ‘free choice’ option of ‘maintenance’ as ‘just basically going round the school fixing fences, building walls, doing basically things that need doing’. The possibility for pupils to choose between academic, creative and practical activities implies an unusually high valuing of practical work. Gavin Aitkenhead describes how any maintenance task which needed doing, regardless of timetable, would be prioritised and viewed as an opportunity for pupil involvement, he recalls how his father would ask any visiting tradesman, ‘can you use a kid’?

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113 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
118 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
Sources from other pupils and staff suggest that involvement in ‘useful work’ was not just rose-tinted Aitkenhead rhetoric or school folklore. Many pupils and staff, from across the decades of the school’s life, emphasise ‘useful work’ as a defining characteristic of life at the school – and one which was valued alongside and sometimes even more than academic and other kinds of extra-curricular activity. Roger Bardwell, teacher in the 1940s, recalls how the first question he was asked
on arrival was “Can you do anything practical: decorating, carpentry, gardening?”;\textsuperscript{119} Fermain Milne, pupil in the 1940s, describes work tasks such as 'making nettle soup', 'bringing the cows in to milk' and 'gathering elderberries' and 'sitting through the night with a farrowing sow' in amongst a list of other activities such as 'swimming at the bridge' and 'exhibiting art' and 'mud fights' as if they were all an equal part of the Kilquhanity experience;\textsuperscript{120} Chris Millwood, pupil in the 1950s, explicitly contrasts his vivid memories of 'picking and peeling spuds' and 'repairing bikes' with 'not much of the three Rs';\textsuperscript{121} Mark Muirhead, pupil in the 1960s, describes being 'in the byre with John A. milking Susy' while others chopped firewood or swept out buildings;\textsuperscript{122} Sam Booth, pupil in the 1970s, claims that 'useful work' was 'the most useful and important thing' about the school;\textsuperscript{123} Mike Todd, staff in the 1970s, describes how it was an 'important part of Kili that chores need to be done';\textsuperscript{124} and Camilla Cox, pupil in the 1990s, recalls the various 'different jobs' she experienced through 'useful work' and how the 'older kids' helped her father, as a member of staff, on maintenance projects.\textsuperscript{125}

The significance of this kind of work in the pupils’ lives at the school is also reflected in The Broadsheet with news-stories, front-cover illustrations, cartoons and poetry which focused on detailed aspects of the physical fabric and associated maintenance activities. The Broadsheet includes good-news stories such as detailed accounts of improvement work on buildings and the garden, as shown in Figures 3.15 and 3.16, but also includes challenges such as this graphic description: ‘a veritable shower of shit...caused by a blocked drain ending badly’.\textsuperscript{126} The granularity of these reports and the range of subjects, reveal how, as at Wennington, there was a culture of pupil interest and involvement in the detailed workings of the physical site from food production to sewage disposal. These experiences were also manifested in artistic output, for example, the front-cover illustration of bell-ringing, Figure 3.14; a cartoon image of pupils repairing a roof, Figure 3.17; an illustration of staff and pupils hay-making and ‘Alasdair’s Garden...in

\textsuperscript{120} Fermain Milne in Cameron (1990), 24.
\textsuperscript{121} Chris Millwood in Cameron (1990), 30.
\textsuperscript{122} Mark Muirhead in Cameron (1990), 33.
\textsuperscript{123} Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
\textsuperscript{124} Camilla Cox, interviewed 28 January 2017.
\textsuperscript{125} The Broadsheet, 19 October 1973.
the garden which I have',¹²⁷ and a poem dedicated to farm-work experiences by a young pupil, Figure 3.16. This creative writing and drawing relating to ‘useful work’ reinforces the idea that this aspect of school life loomed large for pupils and was a highly valued part of the school culture. These articles and drawings also reflect high levels of ownership of this kind of activity and its results, for example, Alasdair’s drawing of his garden, is described with repeated use of the ‘I’ form: ‘In the garden which I have, I grow potatoes, leeks, lettuce...’.¹²⁸

![GARDEN]

*During the latter part of the term Tony and Phil W have completely reorganised the school’s vegetable garden. The garden is now flourishing with rows of: swedes, cabbages, turnips, peas, kale and every other sort of rare vegetables. They have also enlarged the garden to include several more rows of potatoes. A new strong fence has been erected to keep rabbits and other veg eating animals out.*

Figure 3.15: ‘Hard News’, *The Broadsheet*, 16 June 1972.

![Poem]

*We went out to see the cows and pigs and I fed them. The pigs were noisy and big and fat. The cows were being fed and they went moooo. The farm was all smelly and me and Tony had a good time.*

Figure 3.16: *The Broadsheet*, 1 March 1974, 4.

The importance of this characteristic also struck visitors and commentators – reflected in its high profile in films and articles about the school. The BBC film about the school made in 1968 includes footage of ‘useful work’ and ‘farm-work’, as shown in Figure 3.18, by the photograph selected for the associated article in The Listener, with the pose of a pupil feeding the farm animals. This article also describes how ‘some [kids] might be on maintenance, working with men draining the meadow, or repairing the fencing’. A teacher-training film made by Jordan Hill College, also from 1968, comments that ‘there were jobs to be done’ by pupils. And Ed Booth’s 1986 short film sets the scene with opening footage of a girl walking around the school grounds on bell-ringing duty. Skidelsky (1969) claimed that ‘class-work plays a very small part in Kilquhanity’s “scheme of things”’ and that the main lessons are centred around the farm and the upkeep of the estate. Bartholomew in his article in Anarchy (1968) was impressed by the effectiveness of pupils: ‘the team was mucking out, feeding and milking in what seemed an efficient and workmanlike fashion’. Even the official inspectors of the school were struck by this aspect of the school; in 1957, the inspectors claimed that ‘the whole

129 Four Heads in a Row (1968), BBC documentary by Trevor Philpot.
131 ‘Four Heads in a Row’, 330.
atmosphere of the school is coloured by the fact that it is almost as much a farm as a school'. And in 1969, inspectors explicitly drew attention to the value of ‘daily chores’ as a function of ‘living together’.

The evidence suggests that this activity was highly valued in the school as valuable work for individuals and the community as a whole. Aitkenhead describes how the ‘kudos is the important thing’ in relation to farm and practical work. Mike Todd, teacher from 1966-76, also uses the word ‘kudos’ to describe how and why pupils were motivated about jobs such as ‘re-roofing the porch of the lodge’. A 15-year-old pupil is quoted in a newspaper article published in 1997 just before the school’s closure that: ‘you are admired for making good kindling for the fires as much as doing well in studies’. In contrast to Wennington, there is no evidence of ‘useful work’ being used as punishment and no evidence of any disrespect by Aitkenhead towards adults whose roles were mainly manual or domestic; in fact the lines between academic staff and domestic staff seem to have been blurred and non-hierarchical, for example, Morag Aitkenhead was responsible for organising the

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136 Inspection Report by HMI Mr Gillies and HMCI Miss Young 20 June 1957, National Record Offices in Edinburgh.
139 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
laundry at the school and the article in *The Scotsman* in 1997 observes that ‘the Spanish teacher is getting on with kitchen duties’.  

The testimony from across the decades suggests that this emphasis on the practice and value of ‘useful work’ continued right up until the closure of the school. In 1990 Croall wrote that ‘everyone tackles chores for the first hour of the day’. In 1993, a new school prospectus described how a ‘share in the domestic work is reckoned part of school life’. In 1997, Richard Jones describes in an article in *The Scotsman* how Kilquhanity is ‘different’ because ‘the first hour of the day is spent doing essential jobs – cleaning toilets, lighting fires, repairing bikes. We have no domestic staff. It creates a bond’. The same article describes how ‘pupils clean the toilets, fix bikes and then decide what lessons they want’ – suggesting that up to the very end of the school’s existence, practical work came before lessons in terms of priorities and was considered more important than classes. This continued emphasis on pupil’s ‘useful work’ suggests that there was less of a decline in this practice than at Wennington, although Gavin Aitkenhead admits that the school became less food self-sufficient over its lifetime with fewer animals and crops.

Testimony suggests that Sam Booth’s ‘everyone mucks in’ is an accurate evocation of the overall feeling and culture of the school for both adults and children. In 1990, Croall wrote that ‘everyone, staff included, tackles chores’. Bob Cuddihy recalls how ‘we did it, of course we did’ suggesting that, as at Wennington, it was a taken-for-granted part of life at the school. However, also like Wennington, testimony shows that some pupils – and indeed staff -- were more involved in this kind of maintenance work than others. According to the Jordan Hill College film, some pupils were reluctant to join in when they arrived and then ‘came to accept’ the jobs. Richard Jones, teacher from 1969-97, recalls that

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143 Kilquhanity House Prospectus Notes (1993), Dumfries Local Records Office.
146 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
147 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
149 Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 23 February 2018.
Aitkenhead had a strong faith that ‘eventually they did join in...’\textsuperscript{151} However, there is also evidence that some pupils, particularly those who started at the school as teenagers, never did join in. Liz Winning, pupil 1962-64, recalls that she hid in her room rather than get involved in physical labour.\textsuperscript{152}

There is also evidence that certain pupils may have felt excluded from certain types of work, for example, \textit{The Broadsheet} refers to ‘Toddy and his bunch of cronies’\textsuperscript{153} working on the removal of a stump. The use of the word ‘cronies’ and the nickname for the teacher, suggests an in-clique of pupils involved with this kind of work, based on their close relationship with this particular adult. As at Wennington, there also appears to have been a gendered aspect to the division of labour, for example, Sam Booth, pupil in the 1970s, acknowledges that some aspects of manual outdoor work were ‘laddy’.\textsuperscript{154} And the list of ‘useful work sharing’ shows a conventional division of labour with the girls allocated to domestic work and the boys allocated to ‘bike repairs’ and ‘workshop’, Figure 3.13. However, Figure 3.17 shows a girl working on the re-roofing project – suggesting that gender stereotyping in relation to ‘useful work’ was not rigid.

Pupils’ level of participation varied, and so did the values and meanings which they attributed to the work. Pupil testimony, to some extent, supports Aitkenhead’s claim that this kind of work was enjoyable and ‘fun’.\textsuperscript{155} For example; Calum’s poem about farm work in 1974, ends with an emphatic ‘we had a good time’, Figure 3.16;\textsuperscript{156} Sam Booth’s gleeful memories of turning a menial task such as breakfast preparations into a creative opportunity as he would ‘sculpt the butter’; Mike Todd’s account of how pupils ‘got stuck into it [re-roofing a building]’;\textsuperscript{157} and many pupils’ evocation of a cheerful camaraderie. The fact that maintenance work was ‘chosen’ by some pupils is also evidence of positive attitudes towards this kind of work, an ex-pupil, interviewed for BBC Radio Scotland in 1990 claimed that ‘free choice’ was the ‘best

\textsuperscript{151} Richard and Vivien Jones, interviewed 29 September 2016.
\textsuperscript{152} Liz Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{The Broadsheet}, 16 June 1972.
\textsuperscript{154} Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{The Broadsheet}, no 4, 1 March 1974.
\textsuperscript{157} Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
thing’ and when asked what he was ‘choosing’ that day, he explained ‘It’s maintenance’.158

Evidence also supports Aitkenhead’s claims that pupils often found ‘useful work’ a valuable as well as enjoyable experience. Many ex-pupils are proud of their ongoing ability to fix and look after their own spaces and belongings. Bob Cuddihy wrote in an obituary of Aitkenhead that ‘there could be few pupils who could not replace a pane of glass’.159 Many ex-pupils also testify to feelings of satisfaction and empowerment related to the experience of useful work. Gus Cameron, pupil in the 1970s, who is critical of many other aspects of the school, reflects that contributing to looking after the physical fabric ‘made me feel good about myself’ and ‘valuable to other people’.160 Sam Booth claims that it was not only about ‘useful work’ but about ‘useful people’ – and the value of everyone’s contribution – ‘so that if you don’t do it, it impacts’.161 Mike Todd compares the practice of ‘useful work’ with the culture which he admired when living in South America, where ‘children are vital and necessary…with five year olds bringing the cattle back’.162 Claire Cameron, writing in 1979 about her six years at the school, concluded that ‘I have learnt how to give a hand to the community I live in’163 and forty years later, having put together the Kilquhanity Jubilee, reflects that ‘useful work’ was ‘key’ as it gave children ‘a structure’ and ‘a place’ in the community based on tangible contribution and the experience that ‘people rely on you’.164

However, not everyone enjoyed or valued ‘useful work’. Deedee, pupil in the 1970s, recalled ‘washing pissy sheets’ and how ‘I hated doing that’.165 Mark Muirhead, pupil in the 1960s, also evokes a less rose-tinted side to ‘useful work’, such as being shouted at by a fellow pupil to “Come on! Get Working”166 and ‘David slaving

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160 Angus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.
161 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
162 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
164 Claire Cameron and Ed Booth, interviewed 10 January 2017.
away chopping kindling’. Tony describes the need for his ‘useful work boss’ role to deal with some of the ‘difficulties’ in the scheme of useful work: ‘some people don’t work or are always running away or maybe they don’t work properly, and I, as elected useful work boss, have to chase them to make them work’. The compulsory status of ‘useful work’ in the timetable and the existence of a ‘useful work boss’ indicates an element of resistance from some pupils. The list of ‘staff in charge’ in Figure 3.13 also reveals the hierarchical role of adults in enforcing the system. The article in Anarchy in 1968 also suggests that there was a reliance on adult supervision for this type of work: ‘a young member of the staff supervises the farm work and has three kids to help him’. Bob Cuddihy’s account of how ‘if you broke a window, you mended it’ also has an authoritarian aspect as ‘he [Aitkenhead] supervised you replacing it’. These methods of enforcing manual work support Bob Cuddihy’s, affectionate caricature of ‘useful work’ as like a ‘gulag’ – which albeit exaggerated and humourous in tone – draws attention to a tension between the stated values of ‘freedom’ and ‘against authority’ and getting ‘useful work’ done.

Paradoxically pupils often seem to have appreciated and valued these more authoritarian and disciplinarian aspects to ‘useful work’. Aitkenhead claimed that the external disciplines of this kind of work were ‘fundamental’ since the ‘tempo of farm work where, at your cost, you hurry a milking or egg-collection [meant that] the children at once are attracted and held and relaxed’. Pupil testimony also suggests that the external discipline of ‘useful work’ was appreciated. Sam Booth, pupil in the 1970s, suggests that in an otherwise ‘chaotic’ day, useful work provided invaluable structure in that ‘you knew how the day would start’ and Steve Bateman, pupil in the 1960s, argues for the value of ‘useful work’ and the weekly meeting as compulsory elements in a wider context of high levels of freedom in

170 Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.
174 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
175 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
choosing classes and ways to spend time.\textsuperscript{175} Accounts and images of ‘useful work’ at Kilquhanity appear less authoritarian than at Wennington with its language of ‘squads’ and ‘duties’ and images of well-organised teams. These differences may reflect the smaller size of the community at Kilquhanity, a less formal approach to documentation of life at the school and a more established culture of self-government.

Staff and pupils sometimes criticised the efficacy and value of ‘useful work’, for example, at a weekly meeting, ‘Mrs Moore complained about dust on the kitchen floor. The pans aren’t washed early enough’;\textsuperscript{176} Mark Muirhead, pupil in the 1960s, refers to ‘useful work’ as ‘useless work’ as if this was common parlance at the school;\textsuperscript{177} Adam Booth, pupil in the 1970s, criticises ‘useful work’ as ‘a bit daft’ since he and friend were able to chop the required kindling in a fraction of the allocated time. Ben Lyle, in his fictional account of the school (2015) offers a scathing parody of the ineffectiveness of both ‘useful work’ and the ‘weekly meeting’ in his account of a meeting where no one volunteered to help on a maintenance project but instead, in a never-ending ‘talking shop’ vote for the setting up of a ‘working group to explore how to increase pupil participation in infrastructure issues’.

This kind of criticism of ‘useful work’ draws attention to its relationship with the practice of self-government at the school. In antithesis to Lyle’s critique, evidence suggests that the combination of ‘useful work’ and the ‘weekly meeting’ was beneficial for both practices. Accounts of the weekly meeting suggest that the challenges of ‘useful work’ provided rich material for the practice of self-government in terms of giving staff and pupils a recognised forum to raise unresolved maintenance issues and debate responsibilities. Both staff and pupils could bring complaints to the meeting, for example, Mrs Moore brought up her complaint about inadequate washing and Bartholomew, in his article for Anarchy, noted that pupils struggling with damp kindling agreed that ‘they would bring up the whole subject of

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\textsuperscript{175} Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
\textsuperscript{177} Mark Muirhead in Cameron (1990), 33.
\textsuperscript{178} Adam Booth, interviewed 29 September 2016.
\end{flushright}
kindling at the weekly council meeting'. ¹⁸⁰ Both staff and pupils could also be brought up for neglecting their duties, for example, council meeting notes refer to a complaint about ‘Richard Jones not turning up for useful work’. ¹⁸¹ Discussion of damage and breakages also provided subject-matter for an informal justice system, for example, *The Scottish Sunday Express* in 1957 reported ‘an entry’ in the ‘school log’ whereby ‘pupils decided [another pupil] should buy a new pane of glass and putty it into place’. ¹⁸² Debates and even, ‘terrible rows’ ¹⁸³ about ‘useful work’ found an outlet at the weekly meeting.

Challenges to the ‘useful work’ system also manifested in different ways: through irreverent articles in *The Broadsheet* parodying ‘useless work’; ¹⁸⁴ subversion such as stealing extra food while on breakfast set-up; ¹⁸⁵ and direct action such as Adam Booth’s scheme of ‘making such vast quantities of kindling that there was no fire-wood left’. ¹⁸⁶ Adam Booth’s account of Aitkenhead’s response to his protest is also revealing. Adam Booth suggests that Aitkenhead found it ‘hilarious’ because it had shown up a ‘ridiculous’ rigidity in the system and that he set about giving the boys ‘other jobs to do’. ¹⁸⁷ The humour and flexibility of Aitkenhead’s response, as told by a critic of the school, reveals an unshakable confidence in the value of this kind of work alongside an acceptance – even a welcoming -- of resistance relating to it. The ways in which tensions about manual work were navigated within both the structure of the formal weekly meeting and more informal mechanisms suggests that rather than undermining what the school stood for, they demonstrated Aitkenhead’s stated measure of a ‘good school’ which was not ‘one where everything goes smoothly’ but where ‘the young and the not so young get together to sort things out’. ¹⁸⁸

The experiences and challenges of ‘useful work’ also supported the development of the kinds of close and informal relationships, characteristic of family and mixed-age community.  Aitkenhead describes how ‘a share in the domestic work is reckoned

¹⁸² ‘Crisis Looms for School in the Woods’, *Scottish Sunday Express*, 15 December 1957.
¹⁸⁵ Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
¹⁸⁶ Adam Booth, interviewed 29 September 2016.
¹⁸⁷ Adam Booth, interviewed 29 September 2016.
part of school life... in this way the school is like an extended family'. 189 Croall describes how this kind of practical working together reflected a 'lack of distance between adults and children'. 190 Bartholomew's article draws attention to the kind of informal discussion and decision-making between pupils as they solved practical problems: 'kids were shouting instructions and counter-instructions to each other as they tried to cope with a blocked-up chimney'. 191 This way of concluding the article reveals how 'useful work' supported the development of informal mechanisms of negotiation, characteristic of family and community – alongside the more formal systems of self-government, characteristic of institutions.

The inspection of Kilquhanity by the authorities in 1997 was the final death knoll for the school at Kilquhanity House, which had struggled with leadership issues in its final years. The reason most often given for its closure was that the school was forced to close in 1997 on health and safety grounds. 192 The inspectors attacked the value of 'useful work', claiming it was at the expense of academic work. Aitkenhead, after decades of diplomatic negotiation with the authorities, was unwilling to compromise, as he felt that to remove this aspect of life at the school was 'not compatible with the original vision which inspired the school'. 193 Deedee Cuddihy recounts the story told to her by John and Morag Aitkenhead, shortly after the final visit by the inspectors; how the inspectors had come into their office and how one had sat down on a chair to talk with them. The chair broke. This collapse of the physical fabric – for John and Morag – marked a symbolic and dramatic 'end of them'. 194 This representation of the 'end' of the school as a story about physical maintenance – or the lack of it – reflects both the challenges and the importance of 'useful work' and the physical fabric to the identity of the school.

189 Kilquhanity House Prospectus Notes (1993), Dumfries Local Records Office.
There's something fishy about this school, everyone's working. the wider context of ‘useful work’

A.S.Neill’s position on children and ‘useful work’, as expressed in the subtitle quotation, casts light on tensions and debates about this characteristic of the case-study schools. This section uncovers whether and why the emphasis on ‘useful work’ at the case-study schools increasingly distinguished them from other mainstream and progressive schools – exploring Barnes’ claim that that ‘shared activity for maintenance of the community distinguished us from any other school’. It also explores ways in which, instead, the case-study schools’ emphasis on ‘useful work’ characterised them as similar to various forms of radical – and paradoxically traditional - communities.

In state schools, Michael Sanderson has described an overall trend over the twentieth century that the ‘literary and academic...dominated over the manual and practical’. The Second World War and immediate post-war years offers some exception to this general trend with State Camp Schools for evacuated children, for example Westmark, where the children were ‘responsible for the tidiness of their dormitories and washing-places and help with the sweeping and cleaning after meals’. And pupils in mainstream state schools were involved in various ways to help with the war effort, known as ‘doing your bit’, for example, knitting clothes, salvaging scrap materials, growing vegetables on the land in rural areas. Figure 3.19 shows a wartime photograph of pupils at Impington Village College ready for gardening work with a caption using the same language of ‘useful work’ as at Kilquhanity.

Aitkenhead acknowledged that during the war ‘many a school was digging for victory, as the posters had it’. He distinguished the farm work at Kilquhanity, claiming that ‘we should have had a farm in any case...a vital part of the school –

196 Barnes, K. voice-over to black and white amateur footage, recorded in 1990s, Wennington Archive.
not so much farm animals attached to the school but animals as an integral part of the school.\textsuperscript{201} In this distinction, he implies that farms in other schools were a superficial or temporary addition rather than a fundamental part of the identity of the school – a criticism which was borne out by the fact that the practice of growing food in schools became increasingly marginal after the wartime effort ended. Figure 3.19 also suggests a more regimented approach than both Kilquhanity and Wennington, reflecting military associations and the realities of mass schooling with bigger classes and stricter discipline.

Figure 3.19: Impington Village College, wartime agency caption reads ‘boys and girls do useful gardening work on the allotments’.\textsuperscript{202}

This kind of ‘useful work’ for young people became increasingly unusual at school or home, as the century progressed, as part of the wider ‘decline of child labour’,\textsuperscript{203} which has been traced by many historians. In a collection of 34 photographs of children’s ‘school lives’ in a market town in Gloucestershire the 1950s,\textsuperscript{204} there are examples of children studying, playing sport and music, creating artwork, going on outings, eating, drinking, doing science experiments – but no evidence of any manual work to maintain or look after the school buildings or grounds. This photographic absence suggests that pupils did not do this kind of work at school or that the schools did not consider it photo-worthy if they did. Eleanor Pease, pupil at

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Wennington from the 1940s, suggests that there were ‘very few schools where the children did the washing up and managed it’.²⁰⁵ Andy Peers, pupil 1966-73, recalls that joining Wennington was a ‘culture shock’ because, at school and home, he had ‘never had to clean a loo or peel a potato’.²⁰⁶ In 1969, the inspectors of Kilquhanity, commented on how pupils were involved with the ‘daily chores...much more than among children living in the normal environment of home and day school’.²⁰⁷ Camilla Cox, Kilquhanity pupil in the 1980s, recalled that when she attended a mainstream secondary school after her experiences at Kilquhanity, she was ‘surprised’ how little her contemporaries ‘knew how to do’.²⁰⁸

Paradoxically, the practice of manual work in the early- and mid-twentieth century was more often a feature of private and public schools, partly because of the boarding tradition. For example, even in wealthy public schools, such as Eton and Harrow, there was a tradition of ‘fagging’ whereby older pupils forced younger pupils in their ‘houses’ to do the work of looking after spaces and belongings – sometimes by brutal means. At less wealthy private schools, there was often an expectation of pupils doing chores as a cost-saving exercise. Susan Charkin, who attended a private girls’ boarding school, Red Maids in Bristol, in the 1960s, recalls helping to clean classrooms as part of a taken-for-granted routine at the school rather than a celebrated part of the community ethos of the school.²⁰⁹ This practice diminished from the 1960s onwards as school facilities were modernised and in the context of changing expectations, including, as John Rae suggests, a ‘new emphasis on academic achievement’.²¹⁰ In The Public Schools: a Factual Survey (1966), the only mention of manual work is for a minority of pupils in a minority of schools as part of optional ‘social service duties’ for the elderly or ‘extracurricular clubs’ such as horticultural, forestry, agricultural, including Young Farmer’s Club.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ Eleanor Pease, interviewed 10 May 2018.
²⁰⁶ Andrew Peers, group discussion 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive.
²⁰⁹ Susan Charkin, interviewed 9 April 2019.
'Useful work' was also a common characteristic of the early progressive schools. Barnes explicitly acknowledged that he had adopted the practice of 'outdoor work'\textsuperscript{212} from John Badley, the headteacher of Bedales, who, in turn, had adopted it from Abbotsholme. In 1962, the headteacher of Abbotsholme wrote that ‘every boy has a job’\textsuperscript{213} to do straight after breakfast. Barnes claims that at Bedales ‘everyone had to join in the outdoor work twice a week, in farm or gardens, in constructional or repair work.’\textsuperscript{214} Figure 3.20 shows staff and pupil sawing a tree at Bedales in the 1950s. This image is strikingly similar to images of Wennington, such as Figure 3.21, with an emphasis on hearty, collaborative outdoor work. This kind of practice set Bedales, and therefore also the case-study schools, apart from traditional public schools, as revealed by the fact that in its early decades Bedales was caricatured as the school ‘where they did nothing but dig for potatoes’\textsuperscript{215} and the fact that ‘some parents and pupils found it decidedly odd that outdoor work took the place of games on certain days’.\textsuperscript{216}

Figure 3.20: felling a tree at Bedales School in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{217}

\textsuperscript{216} Wake and Denton (1993), 272.
\textsuperscript{217} Wake and Denton (1993), 137.
Manual work was also a feature of the second wave of progressive schools founded in the 1920s, such as Dartington (1926–) where the founding ideal was an integration of the school and its pupils in the real work of looking after the Estate – an ideal reflected in a photograph of pupils gardening included in the 1928 prospectus and Michael Young’s memories of ‘useful work’ such as ‘felling and thinning trees in the wood’. This kind of work was also a common characteristic of the third wave of progressive schools set up in 1930s. In particular, Monkton Wyld appears to have held similar values relating to work, as expressed by its headteacher: ‘...we never had the attitude that manual work was menial work’ and that the ‘school is not divided into “superior” and “inferior” beings’. It also appears to have had similar practices, for example, according to Urban, ‘pupils cultivate their own gardens’, ‘make their own beds and clean their own bedrooms’ and join in with a ‘voluntary estate-work group’. In America, the c.1937 flyer for Black Mountain College, claimed that students would acquire the ‘ability to take community responsibility’ through involvement in the ‘work programme’.

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221 Urban (1962), 108.
study schools with some parts of the wider New or Progressive Movement of the first half of the twentieth century.

This emphasis on ‘useful work’ was, however, not common to all progressive schools – and, even where it existed, often held different meanings from the case-study schools. In the 1930s, Kees Boeke, founder and headteacher of ‘The Workshop School’ in Holland, drew attention to a tension within the progressive movement in relation to manual work. He contrasted his valuing of the ‘necessity’ of ‘manual work’ with ‘other schools’ where manual work was used ‘to give opportunities to the children to express themselves and to create because this is considered necessary for their development’. 223 Mark Kidel’s account of Dartington Hall School also draws attention to this kind of ‘fundamental contradiction’ when he describes how the school favoured the ‘cult of the child’ over the discipline of land-based work on the Estate from the 1930s.224 The experiences of ‘useful work’ at the case-study schools suggest that they were more similar in ethos to The Children’s Workshop, in terms of emphasis on the value of ‘necessity’225 and ‘doing something real’,226 and, more distant from the individualistic and child-centred orientation of many of the early progressive schools, such as Dartington and Summerhill.

Over the second half of the twentieth century, the practice of manual work became less common, even in progressive schools. In *The Independent Progressive Schools* (1962), the chapter on Bedales notably makes no mention at all of ‘outdoor work’ reflecting its declining significance, as charted in Wake and Denton’s account227 and in ex-pupil John Russell’s account of the ‘fight’ by the teacher, John Rogers, to revive the practice in the 1970s, against the prevailing culture of the school, which according to Russell, considered the practice as ‘idealistic nonsense’ and John Rogers as ‘an object of ridicule’.228 In the 1960s, it seems that many progressive schools, including Wennington, reduced the time for this kind of practical activity in response to similar academic pressures to more mainstream

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225 Barnes, K. and F. (1936) *A Proposal for a New School*, Jennings and Sons, Surrey, held at Wennington Archive.
boarding schools. The focus of experimentation amongst progressive schools also shifted, as Shotton describes in relation to changes at Monkton Wyld after the death of its founders, towards a preoccupation with collective decision-making and what he has called ‘a more clearly defined libertarian philosophy’. By 1969, Skidelsky contrasted Kilquhanity’s continued emphasis on the ‘upkeep of the estate’, with ‘most of the other progressive schools’ which ‘have long since abandoned the school farm and virtually the whole of the physical side of education apart from some vestigial maintenance work and school chores’.229

Neill’s account of his own changing attitudes towards this subject is revealing of this wider difference of attitudes within the progressive movement. For example, in 1967, he wrote how earlier in his career he had sought to share his own pleasure in gardening with the children at the mainstream village school where he taught and ‘where we all dug and planted and I got the idea that children like gardening’. In retrospect, he concludes that he had deluded himself and that the children only enjoyed gardening work in comparison to sitting in a classroom looking at a blackboard and he concludes that ‘they will weed but only for wages’. He went on to criticise the whole idea of children working – claiming that ‘the desire to do manual labour is just not there’. He was critical of other ‘progressive schools’ in which manual work was a part, for example, he is reported as observing when he visited Monkton Wyld that, ‘there’s something fishy here, everyone’s working’.234

This philosophy meant that paid domestic staff at Summerhill took care of the physical buildings and grounds at the school along with Neill himself, in spite of his libertarian principles, ‘grumbling all-the-while at the lack of help he was getting’. There was also an acceptance of site untidiness as Neill put it with some pride: ‘Summerhill is often untidy...and no one cares except the tidy-minded visitor’. Pupils at Summerhill spent their time playing, hanging out or attending voluntary classes. The many images of children outdoors taken by John Walmsley reflect this

232 Neill (1967), 123.
difference of ethos, since there are no examples of the kinds of images of children working outdoors which are such a significant part of the Wennington archive and back-copies of The Broadsheet at Kilquhanity.\footnote{Walmsley, J. (1969) Neill and Summerhill: A Man and his Work: A Pictorial Study, London: Penguin.}

This difference in attitudes and practices relating to work and the physical environment may have contributed to Barnes’ distancing of his ideas from what he called, ‘Neill’s slack discipline’.\footnote{Barnes, K. (1957) Annual Report, Wennington Archive.} Aitkenhead did not draw attention to this difference between Kilquhanity and Summerhill – reflecting a wider emotional loyalty outlined in the Literature Review. However, Kilquhanity ex-pupils express a strong awareness of this difference between the two schools. A pupil account of a visit in 1975 to Summerhill suggests profound disapproval of the lack of care for the physical environment: ‘the litter was really terrible’ and ‘it had an air of nobody caring so different from Killy where everybody is proud of the school’.\footnote{Report on Summerhill, The Broadsheet, no 281, 18 July 1975.}

Mikey Cuddihy, pupil at Summerhill, describes how her brother and sister who attended Kilquhanity, argue that ‘Killy is more authentic, less spoilt than Summerhill’\footnote{Cuddihy, M. (2014) A Conversation About Happiness, London: Atlantic Books, 123.} and connects this to Summerhill having ‘no chores’ and ‘cleaning ladies’ who ‘made beds’.\footnote{Mikey Cuddihy, interviewed 29 June 2017.} Margaret Cox, parent of Kilquhanity pupils in the 1970s, rejected Summerhill as ‘horrendous’ based explicitly on the fact that Summerhill children ‘didn’t do any useful work’.\footnote{Margaret Cox, interviewed 14 May 2018.} Bob Cuddihy also reflects this derogatory perspective on the lack of purposeful work at Summerhill in his caricature of the Summerhill experience as, ‘just a bunch of wee boys sitting around picking their noses’.\footnote{Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.}

These judgements might well have been dismissed by Neill as the puritanical criticism of a ‘tidy-minded visitor’.\footnote{Neill, A.S. (1967) Talking of Summerhill, London: Gollancz, 17.} Other commentators have also supported Neill’s position; for example Skidelsky argues that Neill was ‘entirely free from the cultural evangelism which forced pupils to listen to half an hour of Bach before breakfast or to chop trees for the “good of the community”’\footnote{Skidelsky, R. (1969) English Progressive Schools, London: Penguin, 43.} with the quotation marks implying the top-down imposition of adult values. Skidelsky may have been alluding to the more traditional public schools which he visited, such as
Gordonstoun or Abbotsholme, but the critique could also apply in certain respects to Kilquhanity and Wennington. Albert Lamb claims that the absence of responsibility for work such as cooking, cleaning and laundry has been part of the reason why the Summerhill 'community of children is such a strong one' and should be celebrated as a 'full-fat experiment in freedom for children'. From this perspective, the practice of 'useful work' at the case-study schools was a form of 'cultural evangelism' which disqualifies them from being considered as 'full-fat experiments in freedom' and confirms their position as 'less radical' than Summerhill.

However, the lens of 'useful work' also draws attention to the relationship of the case-study schools with a distinct tradition of anarchist, utopian and therapeutic schools and mixed-age communities in the twentieth century, in which a different view of freedom and community prevailed. In this radical tradition, the child is not 'born free' but achieves freedom through participation in community – including 'useful work'. This kind of work, in radical schools and communities in the twentieth century, was not an educational exercise, nor did it emerge simply from economic necessity but was closely related to political values, such as Kropotkin's ideal of 'erasing the present distinction between the brain workers and the manual workers'.

Striking similarities of practice relating to 'useful work' emerge in accounts of radical schools and communities. For example, according to Aker and Smith, at anarchist schools, practising 'integral' education, in late-nineteenth-century France 'the household maintenance and domestic chores were in the pupils' hands'. Similarly, at the anarchist New York Modern School in the early part of the twentieth century, there was a slogan that 'all are workers' with children expected to combine school work with work in the community and teachers expected to act as caretakers.

Hardy's research on community experiments in the first half of the twentieth century has shown that co-operative working of the land was a key component of many of the

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247 Notes on conversation between Emily Charkin and Albert Lamb, 14 May 2017.
these communities. For example: the Millthorpe community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where the socialist Edward Carpenter lived and ‘worked the land, made sandals and read Thoreau’;\(^{251}\) Dartington, founded in 1926, as primarily an experiment in creating a ‘revived rural and agricultural community’;\(^{252}\) the Adelphi Centre in the 1930s intended as a training ground for communitarian socialists with a philosophy that ‘no such socialist centre can be really living until each member, or guest, takes as an obvious duty his full share, according to his capacity, of the actual work of the place’.\(^{253}\) My own research of the anarchist Whiteway Colony has found that colonists of all ages helped with tasks such as fetching water from the spring, maintaining paths, growing food into the 1940s and 1950s – long after these activities were disappearing from life in neighbouring villages.\(^{254}\) Joy Evans, child in Whiteway in the 1930s, recalls how: ‘when it was a matter of [repairing] the roof, I'd go up on the roof and be doing that with him’.\(^{255}\) This shared emphasis on involving young people in maintenance of the physical fabric, suggests that the case-study schools can, to some extent, be understood as part of this wider history of experimental and utopian communities – perhaps more so than the higher-profile Dartington Hall School which tended, as Kidel has suggested, to prioritise the ‘cult of the child’\(^{256}\) over the maintenance and farming aspects of the wider community.

The practice of ‘useful work’ has also been emphasised as an important feature, indeed method, of therapeutic communities. Weaver’s schema from 1962 sets ‘work on farm or estate’ and ‘shared responsibility’ as the first two of the characteristics of therapeutic ‘establishments’.\(^{257}\) He argues that ‘practical work’ and the ‘habit of manual work’ was a ‘chief ingredient’\(^{258}\) in therapeutic experiments. Kennard has also suggested that ‘real work’ is one of the four common attributes of ‘all therapeutic communities’.\(^{259}\) Accounts of specific examples of therapeutic communities support these overviews. Leila Berg opens her article on the tradition

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\(^{255}\) Joy Evans, interviewed 13 January 2012.


\(^{258}\) Weaver (1964),147.

of radical education (1972) with the example of Makarenko’s Gorki Colony for juvenile delinquents in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, where the boys and girls had responsibility for ‘running the colony’ – looking after pigs and bees, doing repairs, chopping firewood. Wills’ emphasis on the value of ‘useful work’ is revealed in his reflection that: ‘I should no more think of doing a small repair job by myself than Ben [teacher at The Barns] would think of teaching an empty class-room. I should feel that I was wasting my time.’ This way of thinking is very similar to Aitkenhead with his perennial question to any visiting tradesman – ‘can you use a kid’? This shared valuing of ‘useful work’, to some extent, suggests that the case-studies could, as Maurice Bridgeland describes David Will’s Hawkspur Experiment, be considered as ‘community of workers’.

**Conclusions**

This chapter has shown that the philosophy and practice of ‘useful work’ was an important and valuable part of many pupils’ daily experiences at the schools. At Wennington, there is widespread agreement that maintenance work for the community was, as Jonathan Adamson puts it, ‘an important part of the school’ as important as academic attainment and more important than formal self-government through The Senate -- certainly until Barnes left. At Kilquhanity too, ‘useful work’ is positioned as one of the most important practices of the school, providing a physical corollary to the weekly meeting and a non-negotiable for Aitkenhead at the end of the school’s life. Although historians and commentators have been right to draw attention to contradictions and tensions in relation to reliance on young people’s ‘useful work’ contributions as potentially contradictory, exploitative or authoritarian, these aspects have not undermined the more positive emerging main story of ‘useful work’ as an empowering experience of participation in community life.

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263 Jonathan Adamson, group discussion 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
The emphasis on ‘useful work’ at both schools, to some extent, strengthens arguments for positioning them as part of the New or Progressive Movement of schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – and a splinter group of the traditional public boarding schools. Comparisons have shown that Barnes’ claim that this practice ‘distinguished’ Wennington from ‘all other schools’ was an exaggeration particularly in the early period of the life of the school. However the continued commitment to this practice, when abandoned by other schools in the post-war period, suggests that his claim became increasingly valid, and has even more relevance for Kilquhanity, which perpetuated the practice into the 1990s.

The experiences of ‘useful work’ as an essential aspect of living in community suggests that Hori is right to describe it as a ‘Deweyan’ feature, since it can be understood as an example of the kind of ‘active occupations’ or ‘social occupations’ which Dewey advocated in 1916 as both ‘educative’ and ‘intrinsically valuable’. However, this research has complicated Hori’s account of this practice as simply a ‘Deweyan addition to Neill’s ideas about freedom’. Instead, Neill’s rhetorical abhorrence of ‘useful work’ has drawn attention to important differences between the case-study schools and Summerhill, relating to attitudes towards freedom and community - and has shown that, in this respect, they were closer to therapeutic communities, anarchist schools and experimental communities.

264 Barnes, K., voice-over to black and white amateur footage, recorded in 1990s, Wennington Archive.
Chapter 4

‘Antiquarian’ or ‘transformative’?: arts, crafts and invention at Kilquhanity and Wennington

Introduction

Staff and pupils at Kilquanity and Wennington not only worked with their hands to look after the existing physical infrastructure, as explored in Chapter 3, they also contributed to its creation – from wooden spoons, bedsteads, furniture, works of art, skate-boards, rockets, musical instruments and boats. John Aitkenhead and Kenneth Barnes both celebrated this aspect of manual work as a creative and developmental process for individual pupils but also as a way for pupils to make what they needed for themselves and their communities on limited budgets. Testimony from staff and pupils casts light on the headteachers’ rhetoric about the importance of this creative manual activity, and on whether the extent, purposes and value of these experiences changed over time and varied between the two schools.

This analysis focuses on the different roles of different adults in relation to this activity and, therefore, how the activity should score on Roger Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’. It also explores whether pupils found these experiences valuable or a form of reactionary nostalgia as Robert Skidelsky evokes with his description of craft activity in progressive schools as ‘antiquarian orgies’ against the ‘hated industrial society’. Woodwork, pottery, art and sewing were ‘subjects’ in the timetable with dedicated lessons, spaces and teachers, compared with the practice of ‘useful work’ as part of daily community life. This aspect of manual work therefore casts light more explicitly than ‘useful work’ on the aims and values of education at the schools and their relationship to progressive, liberal and radical philosophies of education.

2 Richard Pemble, group discussion 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
5 Skidelsky (1969), 35.
The practice and meanings of arts and crafts at the case-study schools are compared with mainstream and progressive schools to evaluate whether they enjoyed an ‘unusual level of creative work’ or whether Skidelsky is right that by the 1960s this kind of activity was ‘incorporated into all good schools’ and should no longer be treated as a ‘distinctive feature’. This chapter also explores significant and neglected tensions in the purposes and values behind what Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor call the ‘constant progressive image’ of the child as ‘maker of art’. I question whether, in relation to attitudes towards arts and crafts, the case-study schools were closer to radical schools and communities – which paradoxically perpetuated these traditional crafts and disciplines.

‘In love with a dove-tail’: experiences and meanings of making at Kilquhanity School

Aitkenhead emphasised the importance of creative manual activity in his writing and speaking over the decades. He acknowledged the biographical relevance of carpentry in a life history interview given at the end of his life, when he described the influence of his father’s work as a ship carpenter and how he loved carpentry at school. He celebrated the process, claiming that ‘creative work’ is both a ‘basic need’ and a way to ‘nourish the human spirit’ and that ‘people are always creating’. This emphasis formed part of his wider educational philosophy that children ‘learn through living’ so that the ideal learning spaces are ‘carpenter’s shop, painting studio, a pottery’. He claimed that, in this way, pupils learn ‘real disciplines and real skills’ and that ‘pupils here are competent at all sorts of astonishing things’. He also argued for the incidental academic learning associated with making things: for example, in 1969 he enthuses in an interview for the teacher

6 Kilquhanity House Prospectus Notes (1993), Dumfries Local Records Office.
training Jordan Hill film, that ‘when children make things, they must calculate, they must measure’.\textsuperscript{16} He suggested that classrooms are a ‘compromise’\textsuperscript{17} of this form of learning through living.

As well as celebrating the process and educational benefits of craft work, Aitkenhead also emphasised the results of this creativity as a practical contribution to community, based on the reality that ‘for lack of money and the usual hardware of schools, improvisation is the name of the game’.\textsuperscript{18} He also valued it as an almost spiritual contribution to the creation of the school community. In an uncharacteristically abstract paragraph, of his first published writing about the school (1962), he articulates his view of the central importance of the Arts, within which he included craft activity such as woodwork, textiles and pottery:

\begin{quote}
we practise education through art and would go so far as to claim that the rare and rewarding sense of community enjoyed by staff and pupils and former members of the school, reflects the extent to which the spirit of the Arts permeates the school life...glimpses of the kind of order, organic unity that could unite society again.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

This quotation suggests a simultaneously radical and conservative view of the potential role of creative manual work as part of building community and uniting society. It reflects his wider attachment to the practices and values of pre-industrial community life, as reflected in his pleasure at the ‘island society’ of Skyros, where he and his wife went for a two-week holiday in 1977, and where he admired the fact that all the ‘essential craftsmen are still to be found’.\textsuperscript{20} In 1990, looking back over fifty years of the school, he observed that the school had experienced ‘a specially high input of positive, happy, creative energy’ and connected this energy to the value of self-government, claiming that it is ‘the hallmark...of youngsters who are trusted’.\textsuperscript{21}

This philosophy meant that Aitkenhead often valued craft over other activities; for example, in 1962 he wrote that academic studying is not ‘nearly so important as the creative, artistic, imaginative work or play indulged in by the pupils’\(^{22}\) and he positions the ‘carpenter’s shop, the art room and pottery’ before ‘maths and language classes’.\(^{23}\) In 1968, he told the interviewer for the Jordan Hill film that he gave ‘creative work...pride of place’.\(^{24}\) This ethos translated into extensive time dedicated to creative and inventive manual activities and projects in and out of the timetable. Pupils could choose art or craft activities during ‘free choice’ sessions, when the relevant spaces and adult practitioners would be available (Appendix 2). Woodwork, pottery, textiles, art all had dedicated spaces and teachers. In such a small school, the existence of these spaces and staff is in itself testimony to how much this kind of creative activity was valued. With ‘free choice’ in the morning and afternoon, on a typical day pupils could spend more time making than studying in academic classes. Creative manual projects also spilled over into extra-curricular time – sometimes related to specific community events and celebrations, for example, the creation of an arch for the return of John and Morag Aitkenhead after a long trip to the USA\(^{25}\) and the frenzied use of the workshop for making presents in the run-up to Christmas.\(^{26}\)

This strong emphasis on craft was noticed by visitors, inspectors, journalists and film-makers. An article in the *Times Educational Supplement* (1966) included an image of the ‘carpentry shop’\(^ {27}\) on the first page and described the creative and practical emphasis of free choice sessions: ‘carpenters can get down to an uninterrupted spell of work; so can the potters, the boat-builders, the writers and poets.’\(^ {28}\) The writer’s representation reinforces Aitkenhead’s philosophy as he describes the activity as ‘work’ rather than ‘lessons’ or ‘classes’ and defines adults and children by their activity as ‘potters’ rather than their position in the school hierarchy as teachers or pupils. A 1970 newspaper article about Kilquhanity observed that the ‘teaching curriculum is heavily biased towards the arts’ and ‘an

\(^{23}\) Aitkenhead (1962), 85.
\(^{25}\) *The Broadsheet*, 7 July 1972, 222.
\(^{26}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
\(^{28}\) ‘An afternoon at Kilquhanity’.
emphasis is put upon working with the hands’. In 1990, in the *Times Educational Supplement*, Croall claims that the school day includes two hours of ‘ordinary teaching’ while the ‘rest of the time they are free to choose from a range of practical activities’. All four films about the school include extensive footage of pupils in the workshop and art-room.

This emphasis on craft activity is also reflected in accounts of the school by staff and pupils at the time. ‘Workshop news’ was a regular feature in *The Broadsheet*; for example, in 1974 there was an article about a new pole lathe for carpentry and a new kiln for pottery. In 1975, Adam Booth wrote a poem contrasting the workshop’s ‘hustle and bustle’ with the ‘quiet’ art and sewing room – evoking the strong identity of these two spaces. A comic poem, developed in 1946, for reciting to new staff suggests that the ‘matter of craft’ was a well-established enough characteristic to be worthy of parody, even in the school’s first decade:

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But if craft is your forte you shouldn't be haughty  
We know far too much about that; 
We're so over-staffed in the matter of craft 
That we may have to turn you down flat.
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The poem suggests that the school attracted an absurd number of adults interested in craft work – more than could actually be useful in such a small school – evoking Skidelsky’s image of an ‘antiquarian orgy’ of crafts.

Testimony from staff and pupils from different generations of the school suggests that craft activities and spaces were an important part of life at the school throughout the decades. The order of Fermain Milne’s, pupil in the 1940s, list of lessons is typical and reflects Aitkenhead’s priorities: ‘lessons in Art, Woodwork, Metalwork, Pottery’ come before the more academic subjects. Chris Millwood, pupil in the 1950s, called ‘pottery and art…equally memorable’.

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31 *The Broadsheet*, no 253, 1 March 1974, 4. 
pupil in the 1970s, claims that he spent 70 per cent of his time in the workshop.  

A girl interviewed in the 1986 film explains that ‘I spend a lot of time in the workshop’. And, as late as 1993, when Kilquhanity became a day school, the prospectus claims that ‘a much more important place than usual given to arts and crafts...in woodwork especially they enjoy a most unusual level of creative work and guidance’. Boat-building was also, according to many ex-pupils and Bartholomew’s article about the school, ‘a perennially popular topic’. Bob Cuddihy, pupil 1962-65, claimed that the school had a ‘fleet’ of boats made by staff and pupils. Gavin Aitkenhead enthuses about the ‘phenomenal’ construction of a dug-out boat and positions it as emblematic of a wider feeling that ‘there were so many things like that that seemed to happen’. The Broadsheet reports in 1973 that Dave Wilson converted his classroom into a ‘hive of activity’ for making a number of canoes for a spring expedition. The ‘conversion’ of a classroom implies the priority given to these kinds of manual activities over academic work.

Testimony suggests that pupils had high levels of choice about which craft activity to do during ‘free choice’ and in their spare time; for example, Joyce Garland, pupil in the 1960s, relished the freedom of choosing to spend time with ‘Mrs Ritchie’s sewing class and woodwork with Richard’. Testimony suggests that pupils often experienced craft and technology as a fun, experimental and opportunistic process. Nan Harrison, teacher in the 1940s, recalls the falling of a walnut tree and the resulting ‘wood-carving activities with the children’. Gus Cameron, pupil in the 1970s, recalls how many experimental projects ‘didn’t work’ but the ‘anticipation and process was great’. Figure 4.1 shows a group of staff and pupils gathered to watch a failing project burn, according to Niall Sutherland, pupil 1965-74, it was ‘all part of the process’.

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36 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
38 Kilquhanity House Prospectus Notes (1993), Dumfries Local Records Office.
40 Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.
41 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
45 Angus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.
46 Niall Sutherland, interviewed 31 October 2017.
Many ex-pupils claim that they could ‘make what they wanted’ and that adults helped them. Steve Bateman, pupil in the 1960s, recalls Richard Jones’ support for the pupil-led craze for making skateboards. He claims it was ‘not external curriculum’ but came from the ‘curiosity of kids and their volition to make it’: ‘we set up a whole steam box to steam ply’. Ed Booth, pupil in the 1970s, recalls that ‘you could wander into Toddy’s lab with a dream and you could progress it’. Mike Todd has kept photographs of Steve Winning’s project to make a gas turbine, Figures 4.2 and 4.3, with Steve’s hand on the turbine in a proprietorial manner. These projects could even subvert the prevailing values of the school. For example, Bob Cuddihy, pupil 1962-5, recalls that, in spite of John Aitkenhead and many of the other staff’s committed pacifism, the pupils made imitation guns for their games, sometimes with the support of staff such as Mike Kerr who ‘could make the most wonderful guns’.

Third-party accounts drew attention to the quantity and quality of the children’s creative output. An article on the school in Scotland in 1951 admired a five-year old making a model ship; the Times Educational Supplement in 1964 claimed that ‘over the whole place is a feeling of inspired improvisation’; the TES article in 1966 described the creative work as of a ‘standard nearer to art school than that normally expected of secondary education’; and an article written in 1970 claimed that ‘walking around the school grounds can be an experience in children’s creativity’.

A Sunday Post article in 2009, opens with how ‘In Andrew Pyle’s first year [1968]...he built a rocket’ – recognising this kind of inventive, manual process as a defining characteristic of the school.

Testimony also supports the idea that making things for the community was also a significant part of craft experiences at the school. Jem Cox, pupil in the 1970s, describes the felling of a large sycamore tree which he then used nearly two years later to make ‘drawer sides and bottoms for the oak table’. The Broadsheet (1977) lists ‘pottery and craft’ as ways of raising money for the school at the Open Day. Richard Jones recalls how pupils made their own spoons for the midsummer party.

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47 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
48 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
49 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
50 Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.
52 Times Educational Supplement, 10 April 1964, Scottish Records Office in Edinburgh.
55 ‘It’s the school where pupils make the rules’, The Sunday Post, 18 October 2009.
56 The Broadsheet, 7 December 1973.
Christmas presents and even tools for the workshop, as shown in Figure 4.5. Sam Booth, pupil in the 1970s, describes how craftwork at the school felt ‘purposeful’.\textsuperscript{58}

Figure 4.1: a failed rocket project. Niall Sutherland’s photographs from Mike Todd.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3: Steve Winning’s gas turbine made in the science laboratory with Mike Todd, taken by Mike Todd.

The wealth of evidence about the emphasis on craft across the decades supports Aitkenhead’s claim that arts and crafts were ‘constant elements’.\textsuperscript{59} However, Claire Cameron, pupil in the 1970s and editor of Kilquhanity Jubilee, also suggests that some periods of the school’s history were more ‘creative’ than other periods related

\textsuperscript{58} Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
to ‘varying levels of enthusiasm among the staff’. Andrew Pyle suggests that the 1970s was a ‘golden’ period. Gavin Aitkenhead also positions this decade as the school’s creative ‘hey-day’ and connects this creativity to a wider flourishing in the community: the workshop developed, the meeting developed, we were a group of staff that stayed fairly constant. In this period, Richard Jones was in charge of what he describes as a ‘well set-up buzzing workshop’, which was the ‘cool place to be’. Gavin Aitkenhead also describes the workshop in this period as ‘a hive of quality’ and Richard Jones as a ‘phenomenal teacher’.

Richard Jones’ experiences and values as woodwork teacher cast light on different aspects of liberal and progressive education – and the associated roles of the adult. To some extent, Richard Jones was firmly part of a progressive view of the teacher as facilitator of the child’s creativity. He describes himself as helping pupils to decide what to make and then helping them make it: ‘kids could make what they wanted to make. And if they were doing something the wrong way, if it wasn’t dangerous to themselves or the tool, I would let them try, I would let them do it and discover.’ The use of the word ‘discover’ connects his approach explicitly to the wider child-centred movement at the primary school level, in which ‘discovering learning’ was particularly emphasised. During their interview, Richard and Vivien Jones, his wife and an art-teacher at the school in the 1970s, reminisced about how they had worked together on processes to help younger pupils make choices about what they would make – the attention to this kind of intervention, reflecting a conscious commitment to their role as facilitators of creativity and freedom. Pupil testimony supports this view. Camilla Cox, Kilquhanity pupil in the 1980s, describes Richard Jones’ ‘spirit’ of ‘what to make next’ as a ‘lovely way of empowering you’. Adam Booth, pupil in the 1970s, is even critical of the degree of freedom, claiming that Richard Jones ‘didn’t teach’ and that he only welcomed those who already had their ‘own ideas and projects for him to help you with’. His brother, Sam Booth, also suggests that because of the freedom, you had to be ‘self-motivated’.

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60 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.  
61 Andrew Pyle, interviewed 25 January 2015.  
63 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.  
64 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.  
65 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.  
66 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.  
67 Richard and Vivien Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.  
69 Adam Booth, interviewed 29 September 2017.  
70 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
centred approaches, such as R.F. Dearden, who claimed that the teacher must be an ‘active interventionist and leader’ because ‘there are things that [the child] neither knows, nor even suspects that he doesn’t know’.\(^{71}\)

Alongside this progressive approach, Richard Jones recognised a strong leadership aspect to his role as adult and teacher in the workshop. He was clear about the need to introduce some ‘absolute rules’ about order and discipline in the workshop space. In fact, he claims that he was, ‘very tight on discipline’ and that the pupils ‘might remember me as a strict disciplinarian’.\(^{72}\) However, he also claims that ‘they learn how to do it and they learn how to be safe’ and that the ‘kids gravitated to order’.\(^{73}\) This account of order in the workshop reflects a wider valuing of discipline, structure and order alongside the valuing of freedom in the school. John Aitkenhead in the 1986 film sets out his belief that children ‘like the order even if they jump the rails’.\(^{74}\) Gavin Aitkenhead suggests that woodwork activity helped young people develop a positive attitude towards discipline since the order is ‘within the thing’ rather than imposed by the authority of one person on another.\(^{75}\) Richard Jones reinforces the idea that the order in the workshop did not rely on a conventional hierarchy of adults over children, when he acknowledges that the ‘abuse’ of tools was far worse by staff in the holidays than pupils in term-time.\(^{76}\) Minutes of the weekly meeting in *The Broadsheet* (1977) also show how there were sometimes tensions relating to the issue of ‘missing tools’, and that the whole school community would agree the repercussions, for example, ‘lock the site until people learn to leave tools where they belong’.\(^{77}\) These ideas about order are similar to the anarchist belief in, what Colin Ward called ‘spontaneous order’, which evolved from a ‘common need’ and by ‘improvisation, trial and error’.\(^{78}\) This connection implies that Richard Jones’ leadership and authority in the workshop was not so much top down or ‘disciplinarian’ as an embodiment of the community’s need for order and discipline in the workshop.

Richard Jones also accepted a leadership role in terms of inspiring pupils with his own ideas about what to make and how, related to his own interests and skills. In

\(^{72}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
\(^{73}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
\(^{75}\) Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
\(^{76}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
this capacity, he positions himself in the more traditional role of a teacher passing on his or her own enthusiasm, knowledge and skills. Claire Cameron, pupil in 1970s, recalls how ‘because he was a musician, he was also interested in making instruments’ and ‘lots of us made instruments’. Richard Jones positions this approach as part of a wider attitude to teaching at the school, advocated by John Aitkenhead, that ‘it’s you you’re sharing’. In fact, Richard Jones suggests that Aitkenhead’s preference for employing the ‘person’ rather than the ‘teacher’ sometimes went ‘too far’. However, the enthusiastic support of Gavin and John Aitkenhead for his approach in the workshop suggests that Richard Jones’ approach was compatible with the wider ethos of the school.

To an extent, Richard Jones successfully shared his interests so that some pupils felt strong ownership of the projects, even if initiated by the teacher; for example, Sam Booth, pupil in the 1970s, annotated an article on musical instruments in The Broadsheet – a physical representation of making the project his own, Figure 4.4. Grant, pupil, describes in The Broadsheet how he ‘made the seventeenth century pole lathe’ as if it was his own project, Figure, 4.5.

Figure 4.4: ‘Musical Instrument Making’ by Richard Jones, October 1975.

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79 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
80 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
81 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
82 The Broadsheet, no 285, 24 October 1975.
83 The Broadsheet, no 285, 24 October 1975.
As well as steering, to some extent, what was made, Richard Jones also sought to pass on the traditional skills and techniques of the craft of woodwork. For example, he wrote in ‘The workshop news’ in *The Broadsheet* that ‘it has been great to see so many fall in love with a dove-tail’ and in our interview, he clearly continues to take pride in the fact that in some phases of the school’s life, being able to make a dove-tail joint became a ‘rite of passage’. He acknowledges that he had his ‘eyes set on the arts and crafts movement’ and jokes that Vivien Jones disapproved of him encouraging competition between the pupils in the quality and finish of their constructions. This difference of emphasis between Richard and Vivien Jones reflects a wider tension between the liberal ideal of initiating the child into what Dearden calls a ‘cultural inheritance’ versus the progressive critique of tradition, competition and results.

Richard Jones also experienced a tension between his commitment to ‘art for all’ and his commitment to excellence in craft. He believed in offering a creative opportunity for *all* the children and teenagers based on the inclusive view that ‘everyone wants to make something. That’s fundamental in people.’ His valuing of all the children’s creative work is manifest in the numerous albums that he has

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86 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.  
87 Richard and Vivien Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.  
89 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
made and kept of all the different creations made by pupils and in the pride with which he shared those albums during the interview. Pupil testimony and film footage, to some extent, supports this view of the workshop as an inclusive space. It appears that both boys and girls participated in wood working – not only but including during the Richard Jones era – supporting Bengt Wasen’s, pupil late 1960s, claim that ‘Kilquhanity was a pioneer in the rights of the girls to participate in, for example, woodwork’. Evidence also suggests that children from a surprisingly young age were included in ambitious creative work; for example, a girl interviewed in the BBC film (1968) is scornful of what children of the same age do in the workshops in other schools.

However, alongside this emphasis on craft for all, Richard Jones also admits that there was also a ‘privilege’ and ‘thrill’ in teaching the likes of Sam Booth and Jem Cox, pupils in the 1970s with a particular gift for design and craft, both of whom have gone on to make a living out of these skills. Richard Jones claims that his role with these pupils was partly ‘teaching some skills’ but more importantly, ‘a lot of discussion and time to talk about things’. This description suggests a vocational education based on a master-apprentice relationship in a real workshop rather than a teacher-pupil in a classroom. This kind of experience was only possible for a small number of pupils, which, to some extent, created the impression of a privileged inner circle around the figure of Richard Jones. Sam Booth, pupil and part of this circle in the 1970s, acknowledges that this circle could stand accused of being fairly ‘macho’ and that a good experience in the workshop depended on whether ‘you could get the best out of [Richard Jones]’ – reflecting a wider tension in relation to the reliance on individuals and the quality of their relationships in this small school.

These different types of adult roles and relationships with the young people emerge in images of the workshop. In Figure 4.6, the three pupils are working on their own, absorbed in their own projects, with no apparent adult involvement. In Figure 4.7, Richard Jones is working alongside three young people who are working together on a project – it is not clear whether they are working on the same project as their teacher or a different one. He is not instructing or observing the young people but

91 Four Heads in a Row (1968), BBC documentary by Trevor Phillipot.
92 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
93 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
94 Sam Booth, interviewed September 2018.
just a background presence. As described by Doreen Taylor about the ‘art class in
the attic’ – ‘it’s hard to tell who is teacher and who is pupil’. In Figure 4.8, it
appears that the three pupils are approaching Richard Jones with their own
question or idea rather than being instructed. In the 1986 film, young pupils, aged
eight or nine, work on their own for a bit and are then gathered together for Richard
Jones to explain a technique and use of material in a more conventional teacher
style. In all the images, the atmosphere of the workshop appears non-hierarchical
but orderly.

Figure 4.6: the old workshop (pre-1971).

Figure 4.7: the new workshop (post-1971).

Blackrose Press, 55.
98 Cameron (1990), 56.
In *Kilquhanity’s Jubilee* (1990), Richard Jones describes ‘the hum of creative activity’ and how the ‘coming and going...is a thrill to me’. In 2016, as I stood in the quiet and well-used workshop where Richard Jones now works, mainly on his own, to make historical instruments for commissions, I asked if he enjoys the peace and quiet after the decades of working at Kilquhanity. His answer was instant and instinctive: ‘you cannot beat the buzz of working in a workshop and alongside people and teaching’. It is perhaps revealing that the ‘teaching’ comes last in that sentence after working and being alongside people.

In spite of tensions between these various aspects to Richard Jones’ role and values, it appears that he struck the kind of balance, which Dearden advocated for as the ‘right balance between pressure and permissiveness, between freedom and authority, between self-expression and submission to disciplines.’ He also appears to have struck a balance between enjoyable process and end-results. For example, Claire Cameron describes, with approval, how Richard Jones was a ‘proper teacher’ and that he helped pupils achieve O'level early at age 14, as ‘something along the way’ rather than the ‘finish of wood-work.’

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101 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
103 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
104 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
Chris Millwood, pupil in the 1950s, appreciated ‘learning to observe a piece of wood, to know its grain and how it will react to different tools’.⁹⁵ Although not all pupils were involved with making complicated furniture and instruments or went on to become carpenters, many were touched by workshop life, as Claire Cameron observes, based on the testimony collected for Kilquhanity’s Jubilee, ‘many pupils have referred to the pleasure and skills they have gained from their time spent in Kilquhanity’s wood workshop’.⁹⁶ Margot Gibbs, pupil 1974-6, enthused that he was a ‘formative influence’ as he was ‘so talented and he shared it’.⁹⁷ Wanda Harrison, pupil 1973-75, claims that ‘the good part of Killy for me was Richard Jones and I am pleased that I managed to have two very fulfilling and happy years in the workshop’.⁹⁸

During the same period, Mike Todd was leading a ‘lab’ where, he claims, ‘anything could happen’⁹⁹ – from making bombs to rockets to reed boats to skinning a dead cat. Mike Todd, positions his role at the school as to be ‘on the kid’s side’ and ‘helping children to make things’.¹⁰⁰ He self-defines as ‘less like a teacher’¹⁰¹ than Richard Jones and did not teach again after he left the school. In some ways, he sees himself as more like a ‘youth worker’ than a ‘teacher’ – albeit, as an architecture graduate, having no qualifications in either teaching or youth work.

Claire Cameron suggests that Mike Todd ‘ran a cornucopia workshop – from leather work to stuffing dead animals. Things he was interested in’.¹⁰² Niall Sutherland, pupil 1965-74, describes how he ‘presided over a whole room of bombs and rockets’.¹⁰³ These descriptions imply that the laboratory was very much Mike Todd’s domain – reflected in its name, ‘Toddy’s lab’. The sources show that he did not only follow the interests of the pupils, whether in the laboratory or further afield, but also pursued his own – with more or less involvement from pupils. A pupil writes

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¹⁰⁰ Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
¹⁰¹ Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
¹⁰² Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
¹⁰³ Niall Sutherland, interviewed 31 October 2017.
in *The Broadsheet* in 1977 with a tone of affectionate forbearance how ‘sometimes we got very annoyed with this obsession’.\(^{114}\)

The Jordan Hill film also reveals an explicitly educational purpose to some of Mike Todd’s projects, as he introduces an activity through which, he claims, the children would ‘learn about different aspects of the physical world’.\(^{115}\) He also admits, to his own surprise, that he has found some teaching notes in his handwriting, which suggest that he did more conventional teaching than he remembers. His surprise reflects a theoretical hostility to the idea of formal teaching in experimental schools, whereas in reality a more blended approach prevailed. Pupils evoke this combination of approaches in their claims that he was both ‘devoted to the kids’\(^{116}\) but also had a body of knowledge and expertise which he shared with them: for example, Gus Cameron suggests that he ‘knew his science’;\(^{117}\) Ed Booth that he was a ‘fantastic craftsman’;\(^{118}\) and Steve Bateman that he had an ‘extraordinary practical sense’.\(^{119}\) In spite of, or perhaps partly because of, Mike Todd’s denial of a teacher-like role, some pupils regard him as an ‘influential’ and ‘inspirational’\(^{120}\) teacher.

Mike Todd suggests that there was a ‘blurred’ power dynamic between him and the pupils – reflected in the fact that he cannot remember which projects were initiated by him and which by the pupils. Pupil testimony reinforces this account; Angus Cameron recalls how we ‘hassled Toddy to do it’\(^ {121}\) – evoking the power of the pupils. Steve Winning recalls that Mike Todd was ‘very good at involving us in the process’\(^ {122}\) and ‘we were all in it learning how to do it together’,\(^ {123}\) implying a collaborative feel to projects even if they were initiated by the adult.

In a similar way to the ‘inner circle’ around Richard Jones in the workshop, there appears to have been a small group of pupils who were closely involved with Mike Todd’s schemes and projects. One ex-pupil claimed that ‘Toddy had favourites’\(^ {124}\)


\(^{116}\) Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.

\(^{117}\) Gus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.

\(^{118}\) Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.

\(^{119}\) Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.

\(^{120}\) Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.

\(^{121}\) Gus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.

\(^{122}\) Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.

\(^{123}\) Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.

\(^{124}\) Niall Sutherland, interviewed 30 October 2017.
and another that ‘you knew if you were one of Toddy’s dudes’. Richard Jones also refers to “Toddy’s boys” as if it was a recognised category. This group, to some extent, excluded other pupils and reinforced gender stereotypes, for example, Toddy’s boys involved with engineering and scientific experiments. However, the evidence also suggests that their activities were part of a wider culture of making and, as Mike Todd describes it, ‘daily experimentation’. Figure 4.1 of a group gathered to watch a failing rocket experiment, suggests that pupils engaged with this kind of ‘making’ project in different ways, even if not always closely involved in the hands-on making.

Outside of the regular lessons in the workshop or laboratory, occasional boat-making projects are revealing of purposes and power dynamics relating to activities at the school. The purpose of these projects appears to have been partly the fun and challenge of the process and partly a form of experiential and incidental education. Bartholomew observes the ‘educational value of learning geography, history, woodwork, sailing theory and plain hard graft all at first-hand’ and Bob Cuddihy describes how Aitkenhead turned the making of a ‘new mast for the school’s sailing dinghy’ into a ‘geometry lesson’ as an example of how Aitkenhead was a ‘wonderfully practical teacher’.

The initiative for these projects emerged from both staff and pupils. For example, in the case of the ‘dug-out’ canoe built in 1966, Gavin Aitkenhead recalls how ‘his older brother and his mates – chiselling out this thing, echoing around - they were all chatting away’ – evoking an image of enjoyable pupil engagement in the project. Bob Cuddihy claims that that ‘everything was made by the kids’. However, a photograph of the project, Figure 4.9, shows the teacher very much in charge with pupils standing around the edge not doing anything and not particularly engaged. Bob Cuddihy also acknowledges that it was Mike Kerr’s ‘idea’ and Gavin Aitkenhead describes how ‘he felled the huge tree’ and ‘he built a dug-out’ – implying that the project was owned by the teacher. Mike Kerr’s own account of a

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125 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
126 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
127 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
130 Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.
131 Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.
‘terrible night’ working to get the sail completed reveals his sense of responsibility for its completion, even though the next day reverts to an account of the whole community’s involvement with pupils ‘running around doing things’ in preparation for its official launch. The article in Anarchy (1968) also evokes this kind of mixed ownership with a description of an ‘outrigger canoe...built entirely by the kids’ but that it is ‘John’s pride and joy’ and that ‘the idea came, I believe, from a teacher’. In the 1970s, an article in The Broadsheet entitled ‘canoodling with Dave’ suggests that this boat-building project was again an adult-led initiative – albeit with an irreverent take on that adult leadership.

Accounts of the workshop, laboratory and boat building reveal a dominant discourse about the school as a place where, as Richard Jones encapsulates it: ‘everyone likes to make and do’. However, evidence has also shown that pupils experienced different levels of engagement with this kind of creative and experimental activity. To some extent, these differences related to the interests and choices of individual pupils; for example, some pupils chose non-manual activity such as drama or writing for The Broadsheet during free choice sessions and, outside of the timetabled sessions, not all pupils chose to spend extra time in the workshop or other making spaces. However, there is also an impression that some pupils could feel excluded from a making space or activity because of ability, gender

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134 Cameron (ed) (1990), 46.
138 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
or personality clashes with the teacher in charge, as described by Adam Booth in relation to his experiences with Richard Jones.

There was also active resistance from some pupils to the dominant craft culture. Richard Jones describes his challenging first weeks at the school when he was allocated pupils who were disaffected at the school, and their opening remark that 'I'm not doing fucking carpentry'. Although one of the girls, according to Richard, 'fell in love with making things', the others did not comply. This difficult start shows that not all pupils went willingly to woodwork, that not all pupils came round to it, and that the school resorted to compulsion, in terms of activities, with disengaged pupils. Some pupils experienced the focus on craft as the kind of nostalgic and conservative indulgence described by Skidelsky in his wider parody of the progressive movement's emphasis on craft as 'antiquarian orgies in basket-making, weaving and pottery', which is 'remote' from ordinary life. Angus Cameron offers a reality check on how 'the excitement of making another eggcup in the workshop began to wane' and challenges what he perceives as Aitkenhead's uncritical extolling of craft as 'the greatest thing you could ever do'. He suggests that it was 'single minded' and 'restrictive' and led to Aitkenhead 'dismissing' areas of that life that he 'didn't understand'. In Ben Lyle's fictional account of the school, the protagonist rages about his view of the dominant artistic culture at the school: 'I wouldn't go to Art and learn bugger all about next to nothing. I didn't need a silk screen to express my feelings, or a charcoal daub to explore my inner self.'

In spite of this kind of criticism, for many pupils, time spent making and creating was a highlight of the school – and something that many continue to value in their lives today – some as part of their work, others as something they turn to as a useful and enjoyable hobby. Clare Albon, pupil in the 1960s, recalls how she 'enjoyed all the arts and crafts classes'. Angus Cameron, in spite of his criticism of an over-emphasis on craft, describes how the workshop was a 'great' place for 'doing and creating things' and shows photographs of the furniture that he still makes for his home. Emily James, pupil at Kilquhanity in the 1970s, is a potter and claims that

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139 Richard and Vivien Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
140 Richard and Vivien Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
142 Angus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.
143 Angus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.
146 Angus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.
the ‘wood, sewing and ceramics was a formative influence for me’. Camilla Cox, pupil in the 1980s, recalls that ‘I loved the workshop and the art-room’ and claims that it is something she will ‘come back to’. Claire Cameron observed, in collecting the testimony for *Kilquhanity’s Jubilee*, a theme relating to the ‘sheer joy of positive creative energy used to nurture the development of individuals within a community’. This observation suggests that pupils particularly appreciated the value of craft within a community context.

‘*We all ended up making things*’: experiences and meanings of making at Wennington School

Barnes, like Aitkenhead, emphasised the importance of creative and artistic activity. He acknowledged the influence of his experiences at Bedales where he claimed, ‘hard bodily work and craftsmanship received no less honour than the work of the brain’. The emphasis on creative manual activity also formed part of his wider philosophy about the good life, based on his Quaker beliefs in ‘the unity of human experience, the unity of the active and the contemplative life’ – the use of the word ‘unity’ revealing a shared vocabulary with Aitkenhead.

Barnes celebrated the importance of ‘immediate creative enjoyment’ – including it as part of the first school advertisement in *New Era* in 1941. He valued the opportunity for self-expression but also the self-discipline, which young people could learn through the experience of ‘the possibilities and limits of your own capacity and the way you adjust them to the material’. He valued not only the process but also the end results, as artistic achievement and practical contribution to the community. In the Annual Report of 1953, he celebrated the building of rafts which are ‘able to carry all the juniors’. Barnes placed much more explicit emphasis than Aitkenhead on the utilitarian idea that the workshop was an essential centre for repair and construction on the site as well as a space for artistic development of the

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pupils, and therefore more closely related to the kind of maintenance activity described in Chapter 3. Barnes wrote in 1962, that ‘the one thing we had to spend money on to begin with was equipment for a workshop – for we had to make all the rest of our equipment’. In 1980, he claimed that ‘we justified having two workshop teachers in our small school by the fact that they gave half their time to repair and construction’. He holds up as ideal that the workshop teacher should also contribute to the practical aspects of looking after the school, for example, he cites a Bedales sixth-former who in the 1940s worked ‘tirelessly’ as the ‘handicraft teacher’ but also ‘could cope with any repair work’.

Barnes sought to manifest these values in his own practices. Pupils recall that, although he was a ‘man of ideas’ he was primarily a ‘doer’ and ‘wood-worked and painted’ – and that he believed that working with your hands was ‘very important’. He also sought to establish arts and crafts activity as an important part of the school culture. In 1962, he describes as ‘continuing characteristics’ the practical making of furniture in the workshop and more artistic work in the pottery department, which he claims goes from ‘strength to strength’. In Annual Reports, Barnes often emphasised arts and craft achievements; for example, Figure 4.10 shows a lathe made by one of the pupils, used on the front cover in 1967/68. In *Energy Unbound* (1980), Barnes chose to include around 20 photographs (out of the full 69) of young people involved with creative manual projects of various kinds, for example Figures 4.14 and 4.15 of the pottery. Even the front cover is from a pottery decoration by a pupil in 1944. These photographs reflect the value placed on this kind of arts and crafts work – and show, in practical terms, a surprising amount of dedicated space and equipment.

157 Barnes (1980), 65
159 Anonymous female ex-pupil, interviewed 8 October 2015.
Figure 4.10: lathe in workshop, made by pupil on right c.1967-68.\textsuperscript{161}

Figure 4.11: photo of Tony Harrison (nearest) and Jonathan Adamson (further) painting mural in summer 1966.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{162}Photograph by Bill Hall in Jonathan Adamson’s private files.
Figure 4.12: Robin completes her dinghy, early 1960s.\textsuperscript{163}

Figure 4.13: pupils welding the ‘battleship’ bedsteads for their own beds.\textsuperscript{164}

Figure 4.14: pupils throwing pots in the pottery.\textsuperscript{165}


\textsuperscript{164} Barnes (1980), 191.
This valuing of creative manual activities translated into how time was spent at the school. In the formal timetable, there was substantial time dedicated to creative work, reflecting a valuing of this kind of activity alongside academic work and ‘useful work’. An ex-pupil from the 1960s, who went on to become a teacher, commented that it was a ‘balanced curriculum’ in terms of academic, practical and creative activities. The HMI report of 1959 confirms these claims in its statement that ‘the distinctive feature of the curriculum...is the generous allocation of time to art, craft and music’. According to the film, Incurably Human the school also sought out pupils with an artistic bent who were not ‘just grammar school kids’ but those who favoured ‘craft, art, music’. In 1950, during a period of curriculum experimentation with the Dalton system, Barnes claimed that in the afternoons children could ‘choose between classrooms and workshops’. This reference to the Dalton system suggests that historians, del Mar del Pozo Andrés and van der Ploeg may have underestimated its persistence in Britain. Even after this experiment, Barnes claimed that there was ‘elasticity’ in the timetable, which meant that pupils could fit in, for example ‘extra workshop sessions’. He also claimed, as with ‘useful work’, that pupils put in much ‘voluntary work’ and ‘voluntary sessions’ outside of the formal timetable on creative work.

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167 Anonymous female ex-pupil, interviewed 8 October 2015.
168 HMI report (1959), Wennington Archive, 6.
169 *Incurably Human* (1983), A Meeting Point Film by John Morris and Peter Hamilton.
172 Barnes (1962), 158.
It is difficult to draw exact comparisons but it seems that, although there was a ‘generous allocation’ of time to these activities in comparison with more mainstream schools, there was less time dedicated to these kinds of manual crafts at Wennington than at Kilquhanity – certainly within the formal timetable. Wennington, apart from its brief flirtation with the Dalton system, retained a more conventional allocation of time to individual academic subjects – see Appendix 2 for a typical day. Over the life of the school, there is no evidence of a trend towards reducing time spent on these creative activities, unlike ‘useful work’, as described in Chapter 3, which was reduced due to academic pressures. W.A.C. Stewart (1968) claimed that ‘the arts and crafts have always been encouraged at Wennington’. However, as at Kilquhanity, memories of these creative activities seem to be closely connected to particular adults and spaces at particular times, such as Frank Burgess in the workshop and Louis Jones in the art room and pottery.

Pupil testimony shows that pupils, to some extent, experienced arts and crafts at the school as a form of self-expression and artistic development. Wendy Green, pupil in the 1940s, describes how the school entered various pupils’ pottery work, including a bowl, which she still owns, into an international exhibition of children’s art. Photographs of the pottery, Figures 4.14 and 4.15, evoke a primarily artistic space. However, there was also a more explicitly utilitarian focus to craft work at Wennington than at Kilquhanity. Barnes claimed in the 1957 Annual Report that ‘anything that could be done with hands and materials, we have done’ and in 1962 that ‘a good deal of class-room furniture continues to be built in the workshop, and recently new banks of lockers for the whole school’. Pupil testimony suggests that these claims were not just rhetorical ideals. Pupils have vivid memories of being involved with making useful furniture and equipment for the school. For example, Richard Schofield, pupil 1966-69, describes the making of beds, as shown in Figure 4.13, as a ‘tradition’ for new pupils – the use of the word ‘tradition’ suggesting a well-established practice. The photograph, Figure 4.13 shows a pupil absorbed in the task – with welding tools, equipment and no visible adult supervision – more like a real workshop situation than a classroom. Sam Doncaster and Pat Mitchell emphasise how in the workshop, pupils made useful

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175 Annual Report (1957), 4, Wennington Archive.
177 Richard Schofield, interviewed 11 July 2017,
equipment and furniture both for themselves and the community. For example, they recall making a tea urn trolley for moving hot water in the school – as well as making their own coffee tables to take home.\textsuperscript{178} Pupil testimony often suggests a pride in this kind of contribution to the community. Richard Schofield describes how making your own bed is ‘fantastic’.\textsuperscript{179} The experience of making furniture for the community was closely connected to the feeling that ‘doing is belonging’ expressed in relation to maintenance work in Chapter 3.

Pupils also had maintenance responsibilities towards the craft spaces where these activities took place. Wendy Green describes, with pride, how she took an active role in looking after the pottery and the firing process: ‘I tread the clay and stack the kiln’.\textsuperscript{180} Richard Pemble, pupil in the 1950s, also describes with enthusiasm, how ‘at the age of fourteen, I landed what I considered to be the plum job of cleaning the workshop’.\textsuperscript{181} This responsibility also brought with it the privilege of a key to the workshop so that he had constant access. These examples reveal a close relationship between this kind of creative work and the kind of maintenance work described in Chapter 3.

In spite of this emphasis on making useful equipment for the community, pupil testimony also suggests that, as at Kilquhanity, there was a high level of pupil initiative and freedom relating to creative activities. Richard Pemble recalls about the workshop that: ‘I could go there whenever I fancied, I could make what I liked’\textsuperscript{182} and ‘I could spend as much time as I wanted’.\textsuperscript{183} Andrew Peers, pupil 1966-73, also recalls that he could go to the workshop ‘anytime’.\textsuperscript{184} Even during formal lessons, Richard Pemble recalls being asked: ‘what do you want to make?’\textsuperscript{185} He describes building a canoe with the help of John Swift, the engineer responsible for looking after the site and new construction projects. He completed the canoe successfully and set off away from the school along the Leeds-Liverpool canal. The story suggests that, as at Kilquhanity, there was scope for pupils to initiate their own projects and receive help to achieve these projects from adult staff.

\textsuperscript{178} Pat Mitchell and Sam Doncaster, interviewed 16 May 2018.
\textsuperscript{179} Richard Schofield, interviewed 14 July 2017.
\textsuperscript{180} Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2018.
\textsuperscript{181} Richard Pemble, interviewed by Frances Meredith 19 May 2010, Wennington Archive.
\textsuperscript{182} Richard Pemble, interviewed by Frances Meredith 19 May 2010, Wennington Archive.
\textsuperscript{183} Richard Pemble, group discussion 16 May 2018, at Wennington Archive Week.
\textsuperscript{184} Andrew Peers, interviewed 14 June 2015.
\textsuperscript{185} Richard Pemble, interviewed 14 June 2015.
In the amateur footage of the school, there is a scene taken in the workshop, where some boys are tinkering with an old lorry engine – the scene certainly suggests pupil-initiated activity. Figure 4.12 is entitled ‘Robin completing her dinghy’ and implies that she is sailing the boat she made. Jonathan Adamson describes an artistic project, Figure 4.11, to paint the fifth-form classroom with murals in 1966. He recalls that Barnes endorsed this activity despite the sexual imagery of some of the work. The intense absorption of the young artists evokes a sense that it is very much their own project, although also a work of art for the school community. Figure 4.10, at first glance, appears to be a teacher showing pupils how a tool works. However, the ‘teacher’ is in fact a pupil, Graham, who had made the circular saw bench by himself from raw materials and is showing fellow-pupils how it works.

In spite of high levels of pupil-initiation and freedom in relation to the workshop and other artistic and craft spaces, there is evidence that the role of adults in relation to craft was important, exemplifying Barnes’ wider philosophy that ‘adults have a real part to play’ and that ‘the adult does not cease to be an adult’. Louis Jones, in the film Incurably Human claims that the ‘child develops from its inner resources’ – revealing a progressive view of the adult art teacher as facilitator of the child’s creativity. Barnes evokes a non-hierarchical relationship between Louis Jones and his pupils when he describes how pupils ‘work by his side’ and positions it as a ‘superb example[s] of convivial education’ -- with the word ‘convivial’ perhaps an implicit or explicit reference to the radical de-schooler Illich’s Tools for Conviviality (1972). Louis Jones’ position in the background of Figure 4.15 as the pupils remove items from the kiln suggests an atmosphere of relative equality with the pupils appearing in charge of the process. An HMI report of 1959 observed that ‘the work in craft is in the hands of capable men who have very good relationships with their pupils’.

Pupil testimony, to some extent, also supports the idea that there were ‘good relationships’ between adults and children in relation to craft activity. Pupils often

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186 Wennington School Film, based on amateur footage, voice-over by Barnes when in his 90s, Reel 2, Wennington Archive.
189 Barnes, K. ‘Conditions for Effective Teaching’, notes on a staff meeting 12 June 1956, held in private files of Pat Mitchell.
190 Incurably Human (1983), A Meeting Point Film by John Morris and Peter Hamilton.
192 Barnes (1980), 111.
193 HMI report, 1-4 December 1959, Wennington Archive.
refer to arts and crafts teachers as three-dimensional characters rather than ‘teachers’, for example, David Jenkins suggests that Frank Burgess, the wood-work teacher was ‘wonderful’ and a ‘really nice bloke’ and Richard Schofield describes him as a ‘conscientious objector with a heart of gold’ – defining him by his politics and character rather than his craft or teaching. Gill Nicholson describes meeting up with Louis Jones after she left the school – implying that their relationship was not just about teacher-pupil in the classroom. Pat Mitchell suggests that ‘we didn’t see them as teachers but competent adults’.196

However, there was also a more traditional teaching dimension to the adult ‘part’. Tim Thody, pupil 1949-53, recalls conventional teaching in the woodwork classes in which ‘the carpentry master showed us how to use hand-tools, we started by making three legged stools’ – the term ‘master’ and the nature of the project are reminiscent of workshops in more traditional public schools. Sam Doncaster recalls how pupils learnt ‘sophisticated’ woodwork skills with Frank Burgess, who was a ‘second fix joiner’ and Richard Pemble remembers how his teacher, Martin Eden, asked him: ‘do you want to do technical drawing?...it was a useful skill for the rest of my life’. These examples reveal a value placed on the passing on of adult knowledge and skill and suggest, as at Kilquhanity, a balancing of traditional and progressive roles for the adult in relation to arts and crafts work.

Evidence suggests that, as at Kilquhanity, not everyone had the same access to craft activities – depending on gender and the quality of their relationship with the relevant teacher. Barnes claimed in 1953 that ‘in carpentry, girls continue to show that they can be as good as the boys’ and, looking back in 1980, he claimed that the woodwork teacher took girls ‘seriously’ and that ‘one of Wennington’s best woodworkers was a girl’. David Jenkins, pupil from 1969, claims that there was a reversal of traditional roles so that ‘the lads would do cookery and the girls would do woodwork and metal work.’ Figure 4.12 shows a girl making a boat, which she

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194 David Jenkins, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 14 September 2010, Wennington Archive.
196 Pat Mitchell, interviewed 16 May 2018.
198 Sam Doncaster, interviewed 16 May 2018.
199 Richard Pemble, interviewed by Frances Meredith 19 May 2010, Wennington Archive.
202 David Jenkins, interviewed 14 September 2010 by Gemma Geldart, Wennington Archive.
calls ‘her’ dinghy and Belinda Swift, pupil in the 1950s, suggests that girls were very involved with woodwork. However, a traditional association of boys with woodwork also persisted. Girls did not take O-level woodwork and metalwork. Belinda attributes this exclusion of girls to the wider context: ‘It was just that era of time but the school hadn’t moved on in that respect which was a bit of a shame and a bit surprising. This evidence suggests that the school both challenged and reinforced gender stereotypes in relation to craft activity.

In spite of many pupils recalling positive experiences of craft spaces, activities and relationships at Wennington, there were also, as at Kilquhanity, other perspectives. David Jenkins describes, for example, ‘people that had problems with Frank...it was such a small set up you would always have clashes with people.’ Tim Thody, pupil 1949-53, complains that as a ‘junior’ (under 11) ‘my artistic talents had found little encouragement’. Richard Pemble, pupil 1956-60, recalls that Barnes tried to discourage him from pursuing manual activities by claiming that ‘you’ll be working in boring factories’. This memory appears to be a complete contradiction of Barnes’ account in Energy Unbound (1980) of Richard Pemble as an example of a dyslexic pupil who became ‘established in the instrument-making industry’, because he was ‘appreciated and encouraged’ at school. Perhaps, it is a tribute to the wider school culture that, in spite of Barnes’ inconsistencies, Richard Pemble experienced the workshop at the school as a ‘transformative place’.

The culture in the workshop was, in some ways, distinct from the wider culture of the school, and represented, for many, what was most positive about the school. Ernie Thomas commented that the art and woodwork teachers, Frank Burgess and Louis Jones, embodied ‘the whole philosophy, you know, for 24 hours a day...they treated the school as a community’. Wendy Green is generally negative about the school, reflected in her abrupt departure before her final exams saying ‘sod this’. However, she is very positive about her experiences of pottery with the art-teacher Louis Jones. She claims that she is grateful for the ‘chance to do it’ and

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204 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
205 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
206 David Jenkins, interviewed 14 September 2010 by Gemma Geldart, Wennington Archive.
208 Richard Pemble, pupil 1956-60, interviewed 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
209 Richard Pemble, group discussion 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
211 Ernie Thomas, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 17 May 2010, Wennington Archive.
212 Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2018.
that ‘the pottery was a bit of all right’. Gill Nicholson views the workshop and Frank Burgess as crucial to her development. She describes him as ‘the person that really rescued me’ because he ‘plonked me in the workshop with...a huge piece of wood to have a go at, which I did, and I thought to myself, “well if I can be here doing this, I think I might be alright”’. Gill and Wendy became professional potters. These examples show how the opportunities for making at the school were significant as vocational and therapeutic experiences. Jonathan Adamson, pupil 1961-6, artist and activist, who is critical of Barnes and the school as a whole, suggests that its redeeming quality was that ‘we all ended up making things’.

‘The tables or the children’: the wider context and meanings of craft activity

A.S.Neill sent a letter to Dartington criticising the school for prioritising the aesthetics of a ‘table’ over the freedom of the ‘children’. This letter draws attention to a tension within the progressive movement relating to their shared emphasis on arts and crafts. This section explores how far the approach to crafts at the case-study schools was similar to or distinct from the wider progressive movement and related developments in mainstream education – and how this position changed over time. It also explores whether and how the approaches to craft work at the case-study schools shed light on the schools’ relationship to radical ideas and examples from anarchist, utopian and therapeutic schools and communities.

In the first half of the twentieth century, it was still a common feature of children’s lives, particularly working-class children, to make things as part of helping their families and communities, and for their own entertainment. The photograph in Figure 4.16, taken in the 1950s, shows children playing with a home-made go-kart. Feeney describes how ‘children regularly made these for themselves, using old wooden crates, bits of wood and the wheels from discarded prams’. Over the century, this kind of scene became increasingly unusual so that a comparable

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213 Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2018.
214 Gill Nicholson, interviewed by Craig Fees 22 September 2013, Wennington Archive.
image, such as Figure 4.17, taken in the 1970s or 1980s, was more likely to occur as part of an experimental school or community.

Figure 4.16: children playing with their homemade go-kart.  

![Image of children playing with a homemade go-kart](image)

Figure 4.17: photograph of Kilquhanity.  

![Image of Kilquhanity](image)

The strong emphasis on craft and making at the case-study schools superficially strengthens the argument for positioning them as firmly part of the progressive movement of the early twentieth century. John Dewey described a ‘workshop where the child could work out his constructive instincts’ as a fundamental aspect of an ‘ideal school’. Historical overviews of progressive education often draw attention to this focus on arts and crafts in the early progressive schools. William

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Boyd and Wyatt Rawson’s (1965) only chapter on the practices of New Education is about the ‘Arts in Education’, opening with the view that ‘art should be the basis of education’; Skidelsky’s (1969) opening definition of progressive education includes ‘learning-by-doing’ and ‘Arts and Crafts’; Willem van Der Eyken (1975) dedicates a whole chapter to Art and Craft in the early progressive movement. Accounts by headteachers of individual progressive schools also support the idea that an emphasis on arts and craft activities was a common characteristic. Many of the headteachers writing in The Modern School Handbook (1934) refer to arts and crafts activity; the headteacher of St Christopher’s claims that ‘it is difficult to overstress the educational value of working with the hands’; Dartington’s heads boast that ‘the artroom and workshop...are never closed and children may go to them whenever they are free’; and Neill, at Summerhill, argues that ‘school subjects are of much less importance than creation in the form of handwork of all kinds’. Aitkenhead, in describing his first impression of Summerhill, claims that ‘the first thing I saw was a boy making a dinghy’ and that this was part of a wider culture of children ‘making things they wanted to make and doing things they wanted to do’. The fact that he cites this after 75 years, reveals the influence of creative manual activity at Summerhill on his work at Kilquhanity.

Historians have also reinforced the claims made by the schools about the importance of craft for progressive schools. For example, Roy Wake and Penny Denton write about Bedales that the workshop has had importance throughout the life of the school with ‘high standards of skill in working with wood and metal’. Mark Kidel suggests that the ‘crafts had, from the 1920s, played an important role at Dartington’ and that the school considered art and pottery ‘as valuable to the development of the child as more conventional educational subjects’. Burke and Grosvenor also draw attention to similar themes in their account of ‘the progressive

231 Kidel (1990), 39.
image’. The images and themes are strikingly similar to the case-study schools: for example, ‘the child as builder and maker of art’, ‘the absence or tangential position of the teacher’ and ‘the single child in concentration or getting on with their own thing while in a wider group’. These descriptions could apply to the images of children in the workshops and art studios at Wennington and Kilquhanity, as shown in Figures 4.6 - 4.15.

Amongst the early progressive schools, craft was valued as not only a creative process but as a useful way to make what was needed and a critique of industrial society. The art educator, Robin Tanner, wrote in 1936 that arts and crafts ought ‘not be regarded as a frill’ but ‘should be an attitude of mind to all work’. At the Forest School in Hampshire in the 1930s, the first prospectus claimed that ‘a child doing music would be expected to make his own instrument’ and an ex-pupil recalls that ‘the child uses the cup he has made, wears the scarf he has woven, sits on the stool he has carpentered’. At Prestolee (1919-52) known as a ‘do it yourself school’ the headteacher, O’Neill, claimed: ‘my aim is to create in school, with our own hands, all the school furniture’. And at The Workshop School, Boeke argued that construction of the school furniture was important ‘not...because it is nice or even advisable for psychological reasons, but simply because we need the things!’ and eulogised that ‘one of the most beautiful sights’ is ‘when a group of children is busy with full concentration making all kinds of things the community needs’. He also claimed that an emphasis on craft was not ‘merely a point of method’ but a fundamental conception’ that would ‘change the face of the world’. Some progressive schools, such as Dartington and Bedales, had close connections with the Arts and Crafts movement of the early twentieth century. In relation to these wider social ideals, Kilquhanity and Wennington share much in common with these early progressive schools, although they were less involved with the wider

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233 Burke and Grosvenor (2007), 155-68.
artistic and cultural networks, which some higher-profile progressive schools enjoyed.

This emphasis on craft amongst progressive schools persisted into the post-war period, as shown by the chapters in *The Independent Progressive Schools* (1962) in which creative spaces and activities are a focus of all the chapters. Photographs of the Summerhill workshop, taken by John Walmsley in the 1960s, for example, Figures 4.18 and 4.19 share a similar look and feel to those taken at Kilquhanity and Wennington, with pupils intent on their own work, using real tools and with the adult in the background rather than instructing. Commentary to the photographs also conjures up a similar atmosphere: ‘certain restrictions but they could come and go as they please’.\(^{241}\)

![Figure 4.18 and 4.19: Summerhill workshop with Neill in the background of Figure 4.18, in Walmsley’s photographic study of the school (1969).](image)

A focus on children’s creativity also become more common in mainstream state schools in the 1960s and 1970s as part of a wider adoption of certain child-centred approaches such as, according to the historian, Richmond, ‘free expression’, ‘activity’ and ‘experience’.\(^{243}\) Well-equipped workshops and art-rooms – with an ethos of encouraging ‘art for all’ and the idea of ‘children as artists’ – were increasingly a characteristic of mainstream schools. A pamphlet published by the


\(^{242}\) Walmsley (1969).

Schools Council in 1974 claimed that art was ‘no longer out on the periphery of education but has moved near the centre’.

These changes did not just influence primary schools. A guide to art teaching in state middle schools, published in 1970, claimed that ‘art has gained increasing importance in schools’ for its value as ‘creative exploration’, developing ‘self-respect’ and to ‘enliven the life of the school’. Secondary Modern schools were also subject to what Taylor calls the ‘progressive influence’ of the Hadow Report (1926 and 1931) which encouraged creative and practical activity. According to the film *The Schools* (1962), Secondary Modern schools had a particular ‘bias on craft’. John Partridge, who is generally critical of the Secondary Modern school where he taught in the 1960s, admires the ‘woodwork and metal workshops’ as ‘kitted out with good modern equipment’ and the ‘elaborate arts and crafts room’ which offer ‘all the boys...some way of expressing themselves’.

This analysis suggests that, in their emphasis on creative manual work, the case-study schools were part of an overall direction of travel in both progressive and mainstream schools. Aitkenhead himself wrote in a leaflet accompanying an art exhibition in the local town in 1955 that ‘the great value of creative expression for children of all ages has come to be admitted by most educators.’

Skidelsky, writing in 1969, suggested that the progressive emphasis on creative activity has been ‘incorporated’ into ‘all good schools’ and should no longer be treated as a ‘distinctive feature’ of progressive education.

However, this chapter has also shown that the quantity and quality of craft work at the case-study schools was ‘distinctive’. There is evidence that the importance of craft at other progressive schools has often been exaggerated. At the New Education Conference in 1934, van der Leeuw, argued for the idea of ‘The Workshop School’ where the workshop is ‘the heart of the school’ and contrasted this idea with ‘most schools’ – including progressive schools - where ‘the workshop and studio are side-shows’. Kidel claims that craft at Dartington was not ‘quite as

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247 *The Schools*, BBC film, 18 September 1962, BFI.
central as is often supposed’. There is also evidence that the amount of time spent on craft at Secondary Moderns was far less than at the case-study schools. William Taylor (1963) describes how a typical Secondary Modern dedicates ‘substantial’ amounts of time to practical activities such as woodwork or metal work – but his idea of ‘substantial’ is a morning or afternoon a week, far less than at the case-study schools. A pupil in the 1986 Kilquhanity film compares the workshop with the one at her previous school, which she describes as ‘rubbish’.

Closer analysis also reveals significant differences of intentions and values behind an ostensibly shared enthusiasm for the idea of child as maker and artist. Even in the early twentieth century, many progressive schools focused more on the idea of children’s creativity and self-expression rather than on useful contribution for the community or the passing on of craft traditions and disciplines – the ‘child’ rather than the ‘table’. In 1934, the headteacher of King Alfred School wrote that ‘the art work and craft work in wood, metal, leather and textiles are regarded primarily as means for expression for the child’s creative urge’. At Dartington, in spite of the wider context of rural regeneration, the emphasis was on the artistic side of craft activity rather than more practical or political aspects: ‘the promotion of the arts was an end in itself’. Barnes explicitly contrasted the focus on utility in the workshop at Wennington with his experiences at Bedales in the 1930s where the ‘well-equipped workshop’ was ‘used for only formal exercises’ and it was with ‘some difficulty’ that he was allowed to use it to for making equipment which was needed for a Science Club.

Neill claimed, with characteristic extremity, that at Summerhill, staff refused to even make suggestions, let alone insist on the children making useful equipment: ‘no suggestion is given about creative work’ and that ‘if a boy asks “what shall I make?” the answer is “you have to decide that”’. In 1967, he recounts with pride an incident when ‘my boys' did not follow the ideas of adults, for example, in the building of a boat ‘because they were accustomed to deciding for themselves what

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they wanted to build\textsuperscript{259} – in direct contrast with the boat-building tradition at the case-study schools.

Within this extreme libertarian context, the role of the adult in relation to craft activity was also different from the case-study schools. Neill was adamant that ‘the children are not inspired by my work’\textsuperscript{260} and even refused to admire the end results of what the pupils made; a teacher from the 1960s recalled with mixed feelings how he would tell pupils to ‘show Neill what we’ve done…and he wouldn’t look at it’.\textsuperscript{261} Kidel has identified an ‘uncomfortable tension’\textsuperscript{262} at Dartington between the child-centred, creative ethos of the school and the more conservative culture of craft traditions and disciplines in the wider estate. Testimony has shown that this kind of ‘tension’\textsuperscript{263} also existed at the case-study schools but that it was navigated differently – blending both traditional and progressive attitudes towards craft and the role of the adult more than at the more libertarian and child-centred schools, such as Dartington and Summerhill.

Over the course of the twentieth century, this focus on child-centred craft-for-creativity rather than craft-for-community or craft-as-tradition increased, as part of what the writer-designer, Peter Korn, describes as an ‘historical movement to turn to craft for meaning’\textsuperscript{264} and a shift away from the Arts and Crafts movement of the early twentieth century, with its commitment to craft traditions and socialist ideals. The case-study schools were, to some extent, influenced by this wider context. Jonathan Adamson, pupil in the 1960s, draws parallels between Wennington and the high-profile American Black Mountain College with its prospectus statement that it ‘did not wish to turn out artists but to bring out the artist in everyone’.\textsuperscript{265} Richard Jones and Louis Jones certainly appear to have been influenced by contemporary ideas about craft as self-expression. However, these teachers, and the case-study schools more widely, balanced a view of arts and crafts as self-expression with the idea of arts and crafts as community contribution, with an emphasis on the aesthetic, utility and tradition involved with the making of a ‘table’ as well as the freedom of the ‘child’.

\textsuperscript{260} Neill, A.S. (1928) ‘Summerhill School’, \textit{New Era}, vol 9, no 34, April, 70.
\textsuperscript{262} Kidel (1990), 148.
\textsuperscript{264} Harris, M.E. (2005) ‘Experience and Experiment in American Education’ in \textit{Starting at Zero – Black Mountain College 1933-57}, catalogue produced for exhibition at Kettle’s Yard and Arnolfini,
In Secondary Modern schools, in spite of rhetoric about a ‘bias for craft’, this activity still formed part of the wider denigration of all forms of manual work as suitable for ‘academic failures’. The Hadow Report (1926) advocated a practical curriculum as a ‘means of intellectual training’ for less academic pupils. In the TV documentary *A Place in the Class* (1997), the introductory footage for Secondary Modern schools is a scene of pupils in a workshop, even while the commentary claims that the ‘secondary modern was seen as a failure’ – revealing an on-going prejudice against this kind of activity. The liberal philosopher of education, R.S.Peters, (1966) advocated that ‘duller’ children should be encouraged to ‘build boats, make guitars and do cookery and metal-work’ emphatically not as a ‘worthwhile activity’ in itself but as a way to access ‘worthwhile activities’ such as ‘history, literature...elementary science’. By contrast, at the case-study schools, craft activity was valued for all pupils – academic and non-academic – for its own qualities, with any academic benefits considered as incidental rather than the primary.

These differences of purpose and values in relation to craft activity strengthen arguments developed in Chapter 3 for distinguishing the case-study schools from the wider progressive movement. Instead, their approach supports arguments for positioning the schools as closer to approaches in the radical tradition, as exemplified in anarchist, utopian and therapeutic schools and communities. Craft was an important ingredient in anarchist schools and communities. Michael Smith describes how at Robin’s Cempius School in the late nineteenth century and in Faure’s La Ruche school in the early twentieth century, children spent their time in a ‘variety of workshops’ and that ‘all children had to do everything’, for example, ‘girls as well as boys did carpentry and metalwork’. This emphasis on manual craft, according to Smith, was partly about acquiring a range of vocational skills but also the ‘balanced development of the full human being’. Judith Suissa has also explored how this emphasis on craft represented a ‘political critique of the capitalist system which divorces manual work from mental work’, reflecting Kropotkin’s

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268 ‘A place in the Class’ documentary for BBC, 2 July 1997.
271 Smith (1983), 33.
ideas about the need to break down the difference between ‘brain work and manual work’.  

The valuing of craft as part of a wider political ideology, played out in anarchist communities as well as schools. For example, the anarchist colony Whiteway (1898- ) had strong connections to the wider craft revival movement in Gloucestershire and colonists growing up there in the 1940s and 1950s recall that ‘we had to make everything’ -- as part of a culture of self-reliance and resistance to industrial society. The practice of craft at the case-study schools as ‘purposeful’ and useful work for the community as well as creative self-development for the individual connects them to this anarchist tradition.

Craft activity was also an important characteristic of many therapeutic communities. Tony Weaver’s schema on ‘therapeutic environments’ refers to ‘arts and creativity’ as a characteristic but does not mention ‘craft’. However, many primary and secondary accounts of therapeutic communities suggest that ‘craft’ was equally, if not more, important than purely artistic activities. Maurice Bridgeland emphasises the importance of craft work in the therapeutic tradition by citing how Homer Lane was a ‘skilled carpenter’ himself and believed in the educational benefits of craftsmanship in terms of fostering ‘independence and self-reliance’. Similarly, David Wills argues in The Barns Experiment for ‘making things’ as a ‘medicine’ and that ‘we are not out to make carpenters; we are only out to make self-confident and self-reliant men’. This emphasis on craft, as an aspect of practical self-reliance in community, is similar to the case-study schools.

Radicals from across different disciplines in the 1960s and 1970s tended to champion a surprisingly traditional paradigm of adult practitioners passing on craft skills to children in a community setting. Paul Goodman argued for the ‘educative’ nature of small communities – partly because of the opportunity to ‘learn crafts’. Bernard Rudofsky, in the Bulletin of Environmental Education in 1978, argued against modern toys as the cause of the ‘paralysis of the creative faculties’ and in favour of the practices in simpler communities of making their ‘own toys…with the

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274 Sue Bartlett, interviewed 3 June 2013.
278 Wills (1945), 89.
pulsing life of all that is self-created, imperfect and sufficient’. Christopher Alexander advocated for the idea of young children learning from adults plying their traditional crafts as part of a wider de-schooling movement or ‘shop-front school’, as illustrated in Figure 4.20. The image of the adult expert at work, with the children drawn to watch, is similar to accounts of how pupils at the case-study schools would gravitate towards competent adults in their workspaces. John Holt admired the example of a teacher in a radical school in Denmark ‘making himself a bass viol at the school. It took a long time…some of the older kids worked with him’. This description could readily apply to Richard Jones at Kilquhanity working with pupils. Holt claimed that children benefitted from this kind of experience of seeing ‘things done well’, an argument which is supported by Kilquhanity pupils’ positive responses to Richard Jones’ work.

Figure 4.20: from Christopher Alexander’s *Pattern Language*. 

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The approach to craft at the case-study schools was closer to these radical ideas and practices than to child-centred progressive or libertarian ideas – valuing the traditions and skills of the maker of the ‘table’ in his or her community as well as the free creativity or development of the ‘children’.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that arts and crafts activities were a vibrant and constant feature of life at both case-study schools. Pupils agree on its extent; mainly agree on its quality; but vary in their attitudes towards its value with some supporting Skidelsky’s cynical view of craft as an irrelevant ‘antiquarian orgy’ and others positioning it as the most enjoyable and most formative aspect of life at the schools – or even ‘transformative’. To some extent, the craft activities described in this chapter score low on Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ since they were, often, initiated, steered or influenced by adults. However, pupils also had opportunities to pursue their own making and invention projects, either on their own in the workshops or in collaboration with the teachers. Comparison with other schools in this period shows that, to some extent, the quantity and quality of creativity at the case-study schools became, as Skidelsky has suggested, ‘no longer distinctive’. However, this comparison also uncovers significant differences of purposes and values behind the shared icon of the ‘child as maker of art’ – with a distinctive emphasis at the case-study schools on contribution to the community and the discipline of the craft as well as creative self-expression. To some extent, this perpetuating of utilitarian and traditional aspects of craftwork supports the idea of a less radical positioning of the schools compared to the libertarian Summerhill and Dartington. However, similarities to other radical settings in which craft-for-community was valued, suggest that the opportunities to work alongside skilled adults to make what was needed by the community, situates the schools as both more traditional and more radical than other mainstream and progressive schools in the second half of the twentieth century.

The experiences of craft have cast light on wider questions relating to the educational aims and values of the schools: in some ways craft education was a

286 Richard Pemble, group discussion 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
broadening of the **liberal** tradition of passing on a ‘worthwhile activity’ or a ‘cultural inheritance’; in other ways craft education was a broadening of the **vocational** tradition, whereby manual skills were treated not as instrumental for getting a job but as a way to lead a good life; and in other ways craft education formed part of a radical tradition of making your own equipment and toys. In these three traditions, the role of the adult is central and distinct – partly as facilitator and co-creator but also as teacher and master crafts person. This chapter has shown that the schools were able to encompass these different aims and types of relationship between adult and children – thereby navigating the tensions between these traditions, as Dearden advocates to ‘find the right balance...between self-expression and submission to disciplines’\(^{290}\) or as Kidel argues ‘to work with the contradictions rather than against them’.\(^{291}\)


Chapter 5

‘Together they build a structure to suit their needs’: construction work at Kilquhanity and Wennington

Introduction

Manual work for pupils at Wennington and Kilquhanity included construction of full-scale buildings from huts to cabins to sewage systems. Construction work did not form part of the formal timetable, like ‘useful work’ and craft work, but these one-off projects punctuated the history of the school and the results became iconic symbols of hands-on pupil participation at the schools, Appendix 1 and 2. The headteachers of both schools celebrated the idea of pupils collaborating with staff to build needed infrastructure – and were also supportive of pupils’ own independent hut- and den-building. They made bold claims for the extent and importance of this building activity, with John Aitkenhead suggesting that pupils ‘think they have built the school as indeed they have – or helped to build it’ and Kenneth Barnes that the school was ‘built by our own hands’. Contemporary commentators and historians have also emphasised this aspect of life at the schools: Michael Bartholomew in an article in Anarchy (1968) celebrated that ‘an enormous amount of gear at Kilquhanity is built by the staff and kids’; W.A.C. Stewart (1968) noted that at Wennington it was ‘characteristic’ for ‘boys, girls and staff’ to ‘take part’ in ‘advanced and ambitious projects’; and John Shotton (1993) described building work at Kilquhanity as ‘an important area of the school activity’.

Sources cast light on: whether pupil experiences support or challenge these claims about the extent of pupil involvement in construction; differences of purpose and

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process between their involvement in school community buildings versus their own hut-building; the role of adults in both types of activity – and therefore how they should be positioned on Roger Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’;\(^7\) and how the meanings of building work varied over time and between the two schools. I explore the value of these construction projects to pupils and to the school community as a whole – and whether they embodied the kind of ‘incidental’\(^8\) or ‘ideal’\(^9\) education, advocated by Paul Goodman, Royston Lambert and other radicals in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the changing post-war context, I analyse whether the involvement of staff and pupils in creating their own buildings was a characteristic of the progressive movement or whether it was closer to the radical traditions of community self-build and, in terms of hut-building, a rural corollary of the adventure playground movement.

‘The house that children built’:\(^{10}\) building work at Kilquhanity

In 1990, John Aitkenhead, looking back over 50 years of the school’s history, emphasised the persistent importance of the building work that was ‘always going on’ and ‘has been constantly present’.\(^{11}\) Aitkenhead argued that pupils at Kilquhanity had a significant role in this activity and that they ‘frequently found themselves faced with the planning and building of the school’.\(^{12}\) This building activity was envisaged as a purposeful collaboration between adults and children in the conversion of existing buildings in the 1940s and 1950s and new-build projects between 1966 and 1979: a log cabin with Mike Kerr (1966), a cabin with Mike Todd (1970), The Site with Richard Jones (1971) and The Dome with John Waterhouse (1978/79). Aitkenhead positioned these various construction projects as central to


the story of the school, calling the buildings significant ‘milestones’ in the history of the school. He also celebrated the more continuous practice of pupils building their own huts and dens as an example of spontaneous and pupil-initiated activity. His approval of this activity, perhaps even more than their involvement in community buildings, is reflected in his use of Holly Hut as a visible symbol for the school by situating a school photograph in front of it in 1988, as shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Kilquhanity House, pupils and staff, 1988.14

Third-party accounts from the 1960s onwards reinforce Aitkenhead’s rhetoric about the extent of pupil involvement in community building activity. Bartholomew’s article in Anarchy in 1968 emphasises this characteristic, describing how the junior common room was ‘built by the kids and a teacher’.15 He implies that this constructive collaboration is characteristic of the school – claiming that ‘an

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enormous amount of gear at Kilquhanity is built by the staff and kids’. It could be argued that Bartholomew exaggerates this characteristic because it exemplifies anarchist values of self-reliance and community. However, this characteristic was also picked up by more mainstream publications such as The Times Educational Supplement, which wrote in 1964 that ‘in effect, the children are themselves still helping to build the school’. Pupil and staff testimony confirm the idea that pupil participation was not just an ideal. There is an overall feeling in the testimony that, as Bob Cuddihy, pupil 1962-65, recalls ‘we were always building something’ and that as Mike Todd suggests, the building site was ‘not an out-of-bounds’ space but an opportunity for involvement in real projects. Pupil testimony supports the idea that construction activity was valued at the school as a worthwhile alternative to studying. For example, Steve Winning, pupil in the 1960s, recalls that lessons were not compulsory but ‘you had to do something else that was worthy or worthwhile like building something’. Gavin Aitkenhead also suggests that building work could replace more conventional school work as he remembers that ‘instead of doing academics, we would lay these floors’. Bartholomew observed in his 1968 article for Anarchy that building projects ‘cut right across conventional timetables’. Pupils also have positive memories of collaborating with their peers, when working on these kinds of projects, based on a sense of external purpose and discipline. For example, Gavin Aitkenhead evokes the positive atmosphere as pupils ‘talked and chiselled’ and Angus Cameron writes how ‘sometimes we got so caught up in a group activity, such as re-slaughtering a barn, that we simply forgot what our relationships with our peers were supposed to be – nasty’. This comment implies that this kind of activity could create a different atmosphere from other types of activity at the school – just as Chapter 4 shows that pupils often remember certain work spaces as having a distinct atmosphere. It is also a useful reminder of the less

16 Bartholomew (1968), 310-11.
17 Times Educational Supplement, 10 April 1964, Scottish Records Office.
18 Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018.
19 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
20 Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
22 Bartholomew, M. ‘A visit to Kilquhanity House School’, Anarchy, 92 vol 8, no 10, October 1968, 310-18, 318.
23 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
than ideal reality of some aspects of peer relationships, even in a school which placed importance on good relationships.

However, the idea that this kind of project was a ‘frequent’ or ‘constant’ experience was certainly not the case for all pupils and all periods in the life of the school. This kind of school construction work does not feature in any of the film footage -- reflecting its occasional status in the school schedule compared to the more continuous routine of craft and useful work. Construction work appears to have been more common in the 1970s, perhaps related to the wider ‘creative hey day’ also referred to in Chapter 4 in relation to craft activity. In earlier decades, construction projects were concerned with adaptation and conversion of existing buildings rather than new buildings and in the 1980s and 1990s, there is no evidence of this kind of school construction project – perhaps reflecting increasing regulation and a decreasing momentum in the school as a whole.

Figure 5.2: Toddy’s Cabin January 1971. Figure 5.3: Toddy’s Cabin May 1971.

Sources suggest that these building projects were envisaged as opportunities for participation with an ethos of ‘all hands’, ‘willing hands’ and ‘all come along, lend

26 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
27 Toddy’s Cabin by Don’ in The Broadsheet, no 187, 15 January 1971, front cover.
28 ‘Mike Todds CABIN (ALMOST FINISHED)’, The Broadsheet, no 197, 18 May 1971, front cover.
a hand” as described in *The Broadsheet* and illustrated in Figure 5.4. The *Times Educational Supplement* article in 1966 suggested that these projects were structured intentionally so that ‘the whole school might be included on every project’. The evidence suggests that, to some extent, this intention played out in reality. Claire Cameron reflects in *Kilquhanity’s Jubilee* that ‘one of the things the school does well is to enable everyone to become involved in a project.’ Richard Jones’ reported on pupil participation in The Site in 1971, claiming that they dug the foundation trenches with ‘help from gangs of kids and staff’ – the word ‘gangs’ suggest that many people were involved. Articles in *The Broadsheet* about building projects acknowledge long lists of pupil helpers.

From a young age, pupils were surprisingly close to many different aspects of construction projects. Steve Winning, pupil in the 1960s, remembers how, as young as 10 years old, ‘I helped lay the floor in the library...working with a professional joiner and...reroofed the byre with a slate roof’. Mike Todd recounts the process of making a cabin for his accommodation with the help of pupils and John Aitkenhead: ‘when a panel was ready, the kids and John would help install it’. The two front-cover illustrations in *The Broadsheet* of his cabin, Figures 5.2 and 5.3 reveal how closely involved some of the individual pupils were in the process – and suggest an interest amongst the wider school community in the progress of these buildings projects. For example, the second drawing of Mike Todd’s cabin is notated ‘ALMOST finished’ and the drawings show an awareness of detailed changes to the structure, so that the cover artist noted, for example, the addition of steps and a window to the cabin.

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34 *The Broadsheet*, 16 June 1972.
36 Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
37 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
38 ‘Mike Todds CABIN (ALMOST FINISHED)’, *The Broadsheet*, no 197, 18 May 1971, front cover.
However, evidence also suggests that ‘everyone’ and ‘all hands’ was an exaggeration, representing an ideal rather than reality. The same names seem to crop up regularly in The Broadsheet reports of building projects. Even the image in Figure 5.4, which ‘all hands’ describes, only includes five people. Claire Cameron acknowledges that, it was ‘a complete mish-mash of who was around’ rather than ‘carefully constructed with equal representation of adult and children’. There is no evidence for whether female staff or pupils were involved with these full-scale construction projects, in fact, a call to move sections from the workshop after the weekly meeting was for ‘able-bodied strong men’.

Even if ‘all hands’ was hyperbole, there is also evidence that the feeling of participation was often achieved, even without actual physical involvement. For example, Gavin Aitkenhead described how ‘as a youngster, you’d stand and watch and go and get things’ or ‘play on the building site’. Ed Booth suggests that even a relatively superficial amount of hands-on involvement could feel emotionally significant, for example, in relation to the construction of The Dome in the late 1970s.  

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39 The Broadsheet, no 227, 6 January 1973, front cover.  
40 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.  
41 The Broadsheet, no 216, 12 May 1972.  
42 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
1970s, he claims that 'I feel like I built that myself but I probably nailed three nails'.

Even for those people who went nowhere near the building site, these projects formed part of the background beat of the school – providing news, interest and a sense of belonging. *The Broadsheet* articles and ex-pupils in interviews often use the phrase, 'we built', without necessarily meaning it in a literal sense. Claire Cameron has found in testimonials contributed to *Kilquhanity’s Jubilee* that 'pupils often feel they’ve helped build the school'. This analysis suggests that this feeling was based on the strong cultural idea of 'we built' in the school community as well as – and sometimes instead of – the actual physical experience of building.

The purpose, leadership and motivation for these projects were mixed. John Aitkenhead claimed that the building activity was a way to achieve real and necessary work for the community. For example, he wrote a letter to the Local Authority in 1965, in his official response to their criticism of the inadequacy of the school’s buildings, that the ‘new junior common room is being constructed by pupils and it should be completed this term’. Gavin Aitkenhead is emphatic that ‘a lot of the building was done because we needed it’ and that ‘it wasn't building for the sake of building it’. He positions self-build as a fundamental aspect of life at the school, comparing it to the weekly meeting as 'another way of making what you need'.

Bob Cuddihy reinforces the Aitkenhead position with his assessment that 'building for survival mattered' and the *TES* article in 1966 positioned the building of a cabin as because the ‘children needed a common room’ and as a pragmatic response to the 'lack of ready cash'. John and Gavin Aitkenhead both argued for the ‘immeasurable value’ to pupils of this kind of purposeful construction enterprise, as a form of 'real' or 'incidental' education.

However, sources also suggest that there were a range of different purposes and motivations behind these projects and the involvement of young people. The article

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43 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
44 For example, 'The Dome', *The Broadsheet*, no 344, and nearly all the interviews with ex-pupils.
47 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
48 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
in the *Times Educational Supplement* suggests that pupils were involved with building to ‘work off energy’, implying that in some ways, it acted as a substitute for team sport, as suggested by Skidelsky in relation to all manual work at progressive schools.\(^{54}\) Gavin Aitkenhead suggests that the log cabin project emerged as a kind of pet project for Mike Kerr who wanted to try out his Canadian woodworking experiences.\(^{55}\) Mike Todd initiated and planned a cabin as staff accommodation but also because, as Gavin Aitkenhead suggests, and his own enthusiastic account of the process reinforces, he would ‘get a thrill from doing things’.\(^{56}\) Similarly, Richard Jones initiated and designed The Site partly because, as John Aitkenhead suggested, there was a need for ‘more elbow room’ but also because of his own ‘excitement for this plan’.\(^{57}\) And Sam Booth recalls that the dome construction emerged from a maths lesson with the teacher John Waterhouse\(^ {59}\) – revealing that community self-build was sometimes a form of intentional rather than ‘incidental’ education.

This testimony also suggests that, in spite of an ideal of adult and child in ‘willing’\(^{60}\) collaboration in shaping the environment, adults rather than children tended to initiate, plan and deliver the major school building projects. Richard Jones recalls a reluctant realisation that he was ‘going to have to do everything’\(^{61}\) – revealing that the conception and leadership of the project derived from his own individual energy and enthusiasm rather than the pupils or the whole school community or, indeed, the headteacher. The completion of these construction projects also relied, to some extent, on adult leadership. He draws attention to an important alternative perspective to dominant accounts of pupils willingly co-constructing school buildings, in his vivid recollection of the ‘dark days’ and ‘heart ache’ of trying to finish the building on his own when others had ‘run out of steam’.\(^{62}\)

In spite of these challenges, Richard Jones remains committed to the possibility of pupil participation, for example, he reflects on how sometimes a project ‘captured’


\(^{55}\) Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.

\(^{56}\) Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.


\(^{59}\) Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.

\(^{60}\) *The Broadsheet*, no 217, 26 May 1972.

\(^{61}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.

\(^{62}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
the kids and ‘they’ll be flying with you’, for example, ‘the foundation wall for that building – 100 feet long, 20 feet wide, 8 feet high’ or getting concrete into the trenches. However, he acknowledges that at other times, he would find himself ‘on his own’, for example, ‘putting up a plaster ceiling’. This account draws attention to the realities of potentially inconsistent contributions by pupils and the leadership role of adults in seeing complex projects through to completion. He concludes that the ‘ups and downs’ of involving pupils do not ‘invalidate’ the attempt to involve young people but challenge the adult to think ‘how can I structure this to have the greatest chance of drawing in the children’. His conclusion that the children need ‘drawing in’ suggests that pupil participation was not as embedded and straightforward as John Aitkenhead’s rhetoric implies.

This analysis suggests that these construction projects would sit on Hart’s rung number six, ‘adult initiated, shared decisions with children’ rather than higher up as child-initiated projects. However, there is also a feeling that, as in the craft and invention projects in Chapter 4, it is impossible and maybe ‘irrelevant’, as Gavin Aitkenhead suggests, to seek to disentangle whether ideas came from adults or children. Pupils were often drawn towards the adult initiative and experienced strong feelings of participation regardless of who began or ended the project. Richard Jones suggests that this kind of building activity and the resulting adult-child relationships were examples of John Aitkenhead’s paradigm of ‘motivated adults with kids alongside them’ rather than conventional or even progressive teacher-pupil relations.

The end results of this construction work met with varying responses. Bartholomew claims that the buildings were of a ‘surprisingly high standard’. However, ongoing arguments with the inspectors about the physical fabric reflect their persistent view that the ‘physical conditions are very primitive and will not do’. In 1958, the inspector made critical remarks about the fact that the ‘only improvements’ are

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63 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
64 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
65 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
67 Gavin Aitkenhead interviewed 24 January 2015.
68 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
69 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
71 Inspector Report, 6 June 1958, by HMI Mr Miller and HMI Dr Cadzow and HMI Mr Macdonald, Scottish Records Office in Edinburgh.
‘some redecoration done by pupils’, implying that in his view, the pupils’ work was insufficient and inadequate. Richard Jones also draws attention to a tension between process and end result. He evokes almost a grieving for ‘all the effort and focus’, which he associates with the construction phase. He describes the transition from building site to finished building in emotional language as ‘the most awful empty feeling’ of the new ‘purpose-built workshop’ which felt like ‘sterile space’ with a ‘deadening effect’ until the ‘marks of people’s use’ started to enliven it. This attachment to the building process rather than end result is reflected in the fact that the temporary naming of ‘The Site’ persists to this day.

Accounts of the dome-building project cast further light on tensions in relation to the dominant discourse of self-motivated pupil participation in necessary building work. Ben Lyle claims, in his fictional account of the school, that ‘for people like Fran [a teacher] it represented all that was good and sacred about the school, a community coming together to create a meeting space’. However, James, the pupil protagonist, punctures this rose-tinted ideal with his description of the dome as a ‘badly lit shack with no heating’. Adam Booth suggests a realistic ambivalence about the project; he was ‘interested’ but that it felt like ‘someone else’s project’. Sam Booth is positive about the process of being involved with the dome but admits that he left before he could use it as a meeting space. This testimony draws attention to the realities of a transient community of young people involved with creating buildings with adults and suggests that pupils’ primary motivations were about the fun of the process and learning new practical skills rather than any more long-term stake in the built fabric of the community. These examples suggest that there was an element of the ‘building for the sake of building’, which Gavin Aitkenhead was keen to deny.

In parallel to this tradition of pupil participation in community buildings, there was a distinct, although related, tradition of pupils building their own huts, dens, igloos, bridges and even a fort – without adult involvement. The structures varied in scale.

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72 Inspector Report, 6 June 1958, by HMI Mr Miller and HMI Dr Cadzow and HMI Mr Macdonald, Scottish Records Office in Edinburgh.
73 Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
76 Lyle (2015), 66.
77 Adam Booth, interviewed 29 September 2017.
78 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
and ambition; from very short-lived grass or ice igloos, Figure 5.10, to an ingenious
three-storey tree house built by Alistair Drummond, pupil at Kilquhanity in the 1970s
(who tragically died in a road accident in 1973), Figure 5.11, and the substantial Fort
structure built in the 1960s which lasted ‘almost 10 years’. The school held up these structures as an essential part of the spirit of the school.

The Fort, in particular, became a celebrated part of the built fabric of the school so that when it reached the end of its life, it was pulled down in a ceremonial fashion by the whole community, and marked in a poem by pupil, Sean Cuddihy: ‘we got hold of the rope and pulled and pulled and down it came’. This poetic representation of a community ritual reflects the school’s valuing of this structure; it also shows how some of these pupil-built structures were incorporated into the main fabric and identity of the school. In Bartholomew’s account of his visit to the school in 1968, he describes how there is no road sign for the school but that ‘its existence is proclaimed by a twenty foot high fort’, which suggests that this pupil-built structure was an important external symbol for the school.

Third-party accounts also noted and, to some extent, contributed to the establishing of this tradition at the school. As early as 1951, a newspaper article remarked that ‘in the trees around the mansion-house, the youngsters build little huts’ and a newspaper article in 1957 commented on the ‘Davy Crocket fort out of fir wood – built by the small boys “among the trees”’. And an inspector’s report related hut-building to ‘the freedom which the pupils enjoy in the fairly large wooded grounds’. The radical educator and fellow Scotsman, R.F. Mackenzie, in 1965, praised the fort-building at Kilquhanity as an example of ‘education at its best’ because it was ‘a real problem not a set exercise like going to the library to do a project on forts...it arose out of their own interests and wishes’. This analysis suggests that the fort-building was a kind of textbook example of Goodman’s ‘incidental education’.

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80 Sean Cuddihy (1969), 40.
82 ‘Queerest School in Scotland’, Scotland, no 49, March 1951, 66.
83 ‘Crisis looms for “school in the woods”’, Scottish Sunday Express, 15 December 1957.
84 Inspection Report by R. Macdonald in 1953, Scottish Record Offices in Edinburgh.
The *Scottish Field* article in 1971 included a photograph of a three-storey hut and admired it for its impressive extras such as ‘battery lighting and draw-bridge’. The article claimed that the photographed hut was ‘one of several similar huts among the trees’. The treehouses and huts are positioned in these accounts as part of the distinctive character of the school – alongside the weekly meeting, ‘useful work’ and a wider focus on creative activity. This hut-building activity is also regarded as a significant characteristic by Shotton, who describes how ‘children build their own huts in trees, on the ground, even beneath the ground’ and identifies this tendency as part of a wider sense that children were active participants in building the fabric of the school.

Pupil accounts suggest that hut-building was a significant part of the reality of life at the school, not just a photographic opportunity for journalists or an exemplar for progressive educators. Hut-building was pursued outside of ‘formal classes’ – as it was a boarding school without many scheduled classes, there was ample time.

Clare Albon, pupil in the 1960s, writes that hut-building was a ‘big activity’. Gavin Aitkenhead recalls with great enthusiasm that ‘there were a lot of kid’s projects’. The numerous excited articles and front cover pictures in *The Broadsheet*, for example, Figures 5.5, 5.6 and 5.8, give a sense of the pride and ownership that pupils at Kilquhanity took in their structures and their high profile in the school culture. The 1986 film includes footage of two boys emerging from a hut built by pupils in the middle of a pond. The hut is not mentioned in the narration suggesting that it was seen as the backdrop of life in the school or business-as-usual.

The popularity of hut-building is emphasised in accounts throughout the decades. However, it appears that in certain periods it was more popular or high-profile than others and that some pupils were more involved than others. For example, Clare Albon suggests that it was important ‘especially in William Burrow’s time [1960s] when The Fort was built and the Wee Kids Hut and various others’. It also seems that not all pupils were involved with hut-building. The huts were often named after

88 ‘Kilquhanity School’, 40.
91 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
individual pupils or small groups, as shown in *The Broadsheet* articles which were very clear about the specific authorship of each hut: ‘Zoe, Lisa, Elizabeth, me and Tony all helped to build our hut’. In spite of examples of girls involved in hut construction, there is an impression that more boys than girls were involved, certainly at the time of the 1980 hut ownership audit, as shown in Figure 5.13, in which all the 15 pupils named as owners are boys.

Figure 5.5: *The Broadsheet* front cover, 1973.

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93 *The Broadsheet*, no 221, June 1972.
Figure 5.6: ‘Luke’s Hut’, 1974.96

Figure 5.7: ‘Donald's Hut’, 1977.97

96 The Broadsheet, no 259, 31 May 1974.
97 The Broadsheet, no 311, 18 February 1977.
The purposes of these pupil-built structures were variable. Mike Todd claims that hut-building ‘was all about making and use’. The ‘uses’ related to a desire for

98 *The Broadsheet*, 28 October 1977, front cover.
100 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
privacy, or as Steve Bateman describes it, ‘fulfiling an early nest-building desire’.\textsuperscript{101} Clare Albon recalls that ‘the Fort was the place to go for a sneaky cigarette, the Wee Kids Hut was where we shared parcels from home’.\textsuperscript{102} Sean Cuddihy suggests that ‘kids did sleep and play in’ the fort.\textsuperscript{103} However, plans for use did not always come to fruition, as Heather wrote in *The Broadsheet* in 1972, ‘We haven’t had a full night out yet because firstly Lizzie made us scared and secondly Matt G and Adam came and made ghostly noises and made Lisa scared. So we all decided to go back to bed.’\textsuperscript{104}

The focus of pupil testimony about the huts is more on the process of ‘making’ rather than the end use of the structures. For example, Cyrus, pupil in the 1980s, recalls ‘all the huts I’ve started and not finished’.\textsuperscript{105} The description in *The Broadsheet* of the rolling process behind Alistair Drummond’s hut— with a changing cast of builders, fire disaster, site moving and new floors — is written in a matter-of-fact tone as if was par for the course.\textsuperscript{106} Pupils worked on their own, in pairs and small groups; and these combinations were a significant part of the story, as chronicled in Alistair Drummond’s account, which is told in the first person ‘I’ but tells how he got a ‘partner’, Chris Kirkman, the artist of the drawing which is superimposed on the writing, Figure 5.11, perhaps reflecting the organic, collaborative and somewhat haphazard nature of the actual construction project.\textsuperscript{107}

This iterative process was distinct from the more finite process of the community build projects and experienced as serious and important play rather than work by pupils.

These construction projects appear to have been initiated and led by the pupils, with very little involvement by the adults. In an article for *Anarchy*, Mackenzie draws attention to the child–led initiation and delivery of The Fort:

\textsuperscript{101} Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
\textsuperscript{104} *The Broadsheet*, no 221, June 1972.
\textsuperscript{106} *The Broadsheet*, no 200, 16 July 1971.
\textsuperscript{107} *The Broadsheet*, no 200, 16 July 1971.
‘one day senior boys approached the headmaster and said “we want to build a fort” “all right. What do you want to make it with?” “one of the Three Sisters”. All the work was done by the pupils.’

Pupil and staff testimony suggests that this anecdote was not just mythology – although it attained mythical status. Ed Booth, pupil in the 1960s, is emphatic that ‘no-one ever told us to build a hut’. The articles in The Broadsheet often titled ‘my’ or ‘our’ or named in honour of the child who made it, see Figures 5.6, 5.7, 5.9 and 5.11, also reinforce this sense that pupils had strong personal ownership of these projects. Mike Todd observes that the ‘children did it themselves’ and Gavin Aitkenhead claims that there was ‘not much asking for help’. The huts provided an opportunity for working out from first principles with, according to Steve Bateman, ‘no formal instruction’. However, there is also evidence of older pupils passing on the skills of hut-building to younger pupils, for example, Val Graham recalls having ‘help from older kids’ to build a hut which she then slept in. In some ways, these structures allowed for the development of a parallel children’s community distinct from the mixed-age community of the main school spaces. For example, Matthew, writing in The Broadsheet in 1971, described how ‘we’ve got about 3 huts and 4 fires’ and titles it ‘The Village’. Steve Bateman describes the distinct ‘groupy’ dynamics and a ‘hierarchy of age’, which operated in this ‘village’.

111 Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
112 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015.
113 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
114 Val Graham, interviewed 29 September 2016.
116 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
Figure 5.10: photograph of grass igloo made by pupils, from Niall Sutherland’s private photos, taken c.1968.

Figure 5.11: three-storey tree house built by Alistair Drummond.\textsuperscript{117}

In spite of considerable autonomy and freedom in relation to hut-building, the young people's hut world was not a complete free-for-all. It was still influenced and, to some extent, in relationship with the wider mixed-age community of the school. Adults at the school supported in practical ways by providing slab wood as a cheap material and lending tools from the workshop. They also supported by not interfering – allowing the pupils to use sharp tools, climb heights, and light fires without supervision. It is not clear whether this non-interference was a progressive

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principle, a form of Rousseau's idea of 'negative education', or whether it was a reality of busy staff with no time or inclination to supervise. Reflecting from the contemporary context of non-stop supervision of young people, Richard Jones admits 'I don't understand why there weren't more accidents...proves that kids are more capable than we think'\(^\text{120}\) and Val Aitkenhead suggests that it was 'an endorsement of freedom...that children look after each other and themselves'.\(^\text{121}\) Gavin Aitkenhead compares this phenomenon to *The Peckham Experiment* (1943),\(^\text{122}\) which his father recommended him to read, where the children were trusted with high levels of physical freedom to climb, swing, swim and yet 'there were no accidents'.\(^\text{123}\) This robust attitude does not appear to have been affected by Alistair Drummond's tragic accident, hit by a car while he was fixing his bike at the side of a lane near the school.

John Aitkenhead retained a level of control in relation to hut-building. For example, the position of the huts was agreed by him in a kind of informal planning permission process. Alistair Drummond recounts how Aitkenhead gave him permission for a new hut but 'was not very pleased about me giving away my old hut'.\(^\text{124}\) This example shows that Aitkenhead made his opinion clear but did not necessarily overrule. It also shows that the pupil was willing to go ahead without his approval, another example of the fluid and negotiable character of relations between adults and children, which has also emerged in earlier chapters. However, at other times, Aitkenhead was more absolute. Steve Bateman recalls Aitkenhead using his authority to ban the trend for excavating underground pits and tunnels instead of huts above the ground, as ‘too dangerous’\(^\text{125}\) and according to *The Broadsheet*, he also interfered in hut life in 1980, by calling a ‘special meeting' to discuss the trend for the buying and selling of huts which he argued was 'not right' since the school supplied the materials for free. There was some discussion between Aitkenhead and the boys about ‘ownership’ and some compromises over ownership and involvement with multiple huts. However, he appears to have been non-negotiable on ‘no sales whatsoever’, Figure 5.13. These examples show that Aitkenhead was

\(^{120}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.

\(^{121}\) Val Graham, interviewed 29 September 2016.


\(^{123}\) Gavin Aitkenhead interview.


\(^{125}\) Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
willing to discuss and compromise but set definite boundaries in enforcing certain values.

The weekly meeting was also part of governing hut activity, as revealed in council meeting notes such as ‘Christine and her friends would like permission for her hut. She is granted’\textsuperscript{126} and, on the other hand, Ian Hastie ‘wants a new hut. Permission not granted.’\textsuperscript{127} It also set limits when problems arose relating to hut construction, such as use of materials which were not intended for that purpose or pupils ‘nabbing the best bits’\textsuperscript{128} rather than sharing them fairly. These issues were discussed at the weekly meeting and documented in 	extit{The Broadsheet}. For example, in 1973, the council meeting minutes stated a ‘very strong warning that slab wood is the ONLY wood available for hut-building. All other wood no matter where it is found must be asked about.’\textsuperscript{129} And a few weeks later, in the next edition of 	extit{The Broadsheet}, it is reported that Richard and Nicky ‘found good timber used as flooring in D’s hut as well as cutlery, nails and polythene. All this will have to be paid for by the kids involved.’\textsuperscript{130} These minutes reveal how tensions between pupil-initiated and adult-initiated projects occurred and how pupils did not always abide by the rulings of the meeting but that the meeting provided a mechanism for navigating these tensions, as was found in relation to ‘useful work’ in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{126} 	extit{The Broadsheet}, no 284, 17 October 1975.
\textsuperscript{127} 	extit{The Broadsheet}, no 206, 12 November 1971.
\textsuperscript{128} Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
\textsuperscript{129} 	extit{The Broadsheet}, no 230, 23 February 1973.
\textsuperscript{130} 	extit{The Broadsheet}, no 231, 2 March 1973.
Staff and pupils claim that this kind of activity developed resourcefulness and self-reliance, partly in subverting the spaces and resources of the school for their own purposes; for example, Mike Todd describes the ‘ingenuity fostered’ by young people working out ways to get access to the locked workshop in order to borrow tools for their projects out-of-hours.\(^{131}\) Alistair recounts how he and his friend built themselves a workshop and then colour coded their tools as a way to deal with the challenges of sharing tools\(^{132}\) – an example which shows how pupils learnt to resolve problems for themselves without adult intervention.

A change in the culture of hut-building occurred towards the end of the school’s life with the increasing sense that it had become a part of the curriculum and a tradition to respect, rather than emerging from the interests and drives of the young people. The *ideal huts* front cover of *The Broadsheet* in 1985, Figure 5.14, the introduction of hut-building as an adult-led option in summer activity weeks\(^{133}\) and Ed Booth’s

\(^{131}\) Mike Todd, interviewed 31 May 2016.
\(^{132}\) *The Broadsheet*, no 200, 16 July 1971.
\(^{133}\) Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
criticism of Holly Hut as a ‘pastiche’ and ‘one for the tourists’ implies a new self-consciousness and suggests that it was no longer true that ‘no one told us to build a hut’. Gavin Aitkenhead admits that projects were ‘latterly...more adult-promoted probably’. These perspectives suggest that hut-building moved from rung seven ‘child initiated and directed’ to rung three ‘tokenism’ on Hart’s ‘model of participation’.

This decline in the tradition of self-initiated hut-building correlated with a decline in community self-build projects at the school – and perhaps a wider decline in the vitality of the school as a whole. Pupils argue that there was a very close relationship between physical construction and the wider ethos of the school. For example, Steve Winning argues that self-build and self-government were inextricably linked, ‘they were part of the whole’, and Claire Cameron’s immediate response when I explained my interest in the physical construction of the school was that ‘I don’t see [self-build] as just a physical construction, I see it as a social and cultural construction’. This kind of testimony suggests that physical building work should not be treated separately from the wider task of community building at the school.

‘Knock it down every ten years and start again’: building work at Wennington School

Before he opened the school, Kenneth Barnes set out his commitment to involving pupils in its physical creation as part of a philosophy of community empowerment:

We do not intend to start a school with elaborate buildings and equipment all ready-made... giving the children themselves as large as possible a part in the planning and carrying out of each development. This would give the children the feeling that the school was their own creation, dependent upon

134 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
135 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
138 Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
139 Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
them for its very life, not a mystic alma-mater, existing over and above them, imposing tradition and authority.  

Barnes claimed that this intention was achieved. In 1962, he identified a ‘tradition of constructional work’ as his first example of ‘continuing characteristics’ at the school. In his last Annual Report before he retired, he claimed that Wennington is ‘a place that had been subtly and progressively shaped by the life of the community’ – a similar conclusion to John Aitkenhead’s claim that pupils ‘think they have built the school’.

In *Energy Unbound* (1980) and various Annual Reports, Barnes includes numerous photographs and drawings of building projects; for example, Figures 5.15-5.21, reflect his persistent emphasis on pupil participation and his valuing of these kinds of projects as an essential part of the story of the ‘creation of the school’. In 1957, Barnes celebrated the process of ‘moving hundreds of tons of earth and building materials’ and building new ‘workshops and garages with our own hands’. In 1958, he claims that the ‘new sewage filter bed is a triumph...squads of boys and girls worked at it all through the autumn term’. And in 1959, he celebrates the ‘attack with all the man-power (man, woman, boy and girl) we could muster’ to clear the area for the hard-court when the cost of contractors turned out to be ‘too high’. The ‘we’ and the ‘our’ reinforce the idea that this kind of project was envisaged as a collaborative act of community – partly emerging from necessity but also from Barnes’ wider ideal of the child ‘contributing to the community and growing with it and through it.’

Third-party accounts also emphasise this aspect of life at Wennington and support Barnes’ claim that it was an important tradition at the school. The HMI report of Wennington in 1959 remarks on pupils’ involvement in ‘ambitious constructional

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undertakings in the school grounds’, with a full list of construction work at the school with stars on five out of eight of these projects to denote where ‘staff and pupils have assisted’. The report, like Barnes, positions this kind of work as part of providing a ‘community experience’. Stewart (1968) argued that construction work, like ‘useful work’, emerged from the ‘sheer necessity of economics and physical survival’ in the Second World War. However, he also acknowledged that it became an ongoing ‘characteristic’ for ‘boys, girls and staff’ to ‘take part’ in ‘advanced and ambitious projects’. The fact that both accounts use the term ‘ambitious’ reveals the noteworthy scale of the projects with which pupils were involved.

Barnes described in *Energy Unbound* (1980) how pupils participated in these kinds of projects as part of ‘outdoor work’ or ‘community work’ on certain afternoons. In 1956 he claimed that the pupils joined in ‘readily’ and often in ‘free time’ and in 1962 that ‘these projects were carried out with great energy and zest’. Barnes was full of praise, at least in theory, for the idea of cancelling lessons altogether to pursue a practical community project such as ‘building a library or a chapel’ and claimed that practical ‘projects did burst out of the timetable’. Although there are not frequent examples of this, Richard Schofield, pupil 1966-69, describes how he was allowed to spend his first year wiring a new theatre instead of going to classes.

Photographic evidence to some extent supports Barnes’ claims that pupils formed the work force for major infrastructure projects. The images of pupils involved in building the sewage system, Figures 5.15, 5.16 and 5.17, unsettle the usual associations of school projects by suggesting a ‘real’ building site in terms of the scale and complexity of the project, the materials and the tools. However, some of the photographs also appear posed with well-distributed groupings of young people.

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150 HMI Report, Wennington School, 1-4 December 1959, Wennington Archive.
151 HMI Report, Wennington School, 1-4 December 1959, Wennington Archive.
153 Stewart (1968), 212.
158 Barnes (1980), 86.
159 Richard Schofield, interviewed June 2014, Wennington Archive Week.
– in this way more like a school educational activity than a ‘real’ building site. The taking and subsequent use of these photographs as publicity about the school underlines the importance placed on the idea of young people building the fabric of the school and, in particular, the repeated use of the sewage system project as a symbol of this ethos. However, there are also other images of pupil involvement in more low-key projects, which seem less posed and suggest that this kind of activity was not just about high-profile set piece projects but part of the ordinary life of the school, like maintenance work. For example, Reel 2 of the amateur footage of Wennington\textsuperscript{160} opens with a scene of boys constructing a pig-pen and Figure 5.18 shows boys and girls moving stones for a garden construction project.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\caption{‘at work on interior’\textsuperscript{161}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{160} Wennington School Film, based on amateur footage, Wennington Archive.
Figure 5.16: from Wennington Archive.

Figure 5.17: from Wennington Archive.

Figure 5.18: from Wennington Archive.
Barnes called ‘construction’ a ‘continuing characteristic’. However, the list of construction projects in Appendix 2 shows that these projects were at their height in the 1950s. As at Kilquhanity, this intense phase of construction was part of a wider flourishing or, as Sam Doncaster called it, ‘prime’ of the school in this period. These ‘ambitious’ construction projects relied heavily on the leadership and engineering expertise of an adult, John Swift, the estate manager (1957-72).

Jonathan Adamson suggested that ‘when John came, we started building things’ implying that this school ‘tradition’ was closely associated with this particular adult in this particular period. The crucial role of John Swift shows how, as at Kilquhanity, adults had a key leadership role in major infrastructure projects, with pupils helping rather than initiating and leading projects. However, according to the HMI inspector’s report in 1959, ‘the part played by staff in all these activities is not always clear: in some they initiate and lead, in others they help and support’. This shifting and unclear power dynamic is similar to Kilquhanity.

John Swift’s role casts light on the alternative to conventional teacher-pupil relationships which were made possible by this kind of building project. John Swift was not a teacher in the usual sense of the word and did not teach formal lessons. Belinda Swift, his daughter and an ex-pupil, claimed that ‘he liked imparting knowledge in an informal way’ but was not ‘disciplinarian’ enough to be a teacher. This comparison suggests that other teachers at Wennington may have been surprisingly traditional in their approach. However, other ex-pupils describe him as if he was a teacher: Andrew Peers call him ‘very influential’, Richard Schofield claims that he was ‘almost more respected than the teachers’, Richard Pemble suggests that he ‘always had time to explain something’, a female ex-pupil claims that ‘he probably would have made a better teacher than most of the formal teachers there’, and Pat Mitchell, who went on to be a headteacher of a

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163 Sam Doncaster, interviewed by Elaine Boyling 21 May 2018, Wennington Archive, PETT.
164 Jonathan Adamson, interviewed May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
165 HMI Report 1959, Wennington Archive.
166 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
167 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
168 Andrew Peers, interviewed 14 June 2015, Wennington Archive Week.
170 Richard Pemble, interviewed 14 June 2015, Wennington Archive Week.
171 Anonymous female ex-pupil of Wennington, interviewed 8 October 2015.
school in London, claims that 'John Swift was one of the great educationists of the school'.

John Swift achieved these accolades by not being a teacher but working with the pupils on maintenance and building work. The HMI report in 1959 acknowledges his unusual role as 'a well-qualified estate manager...[who] performs his tasks with the pupils in such a way that he is undoubtedly a valuable member of the staff'.

Pupils seem to have appreciated the different kind of relationship that was made possible by his non-teacher status. Belinda Swift recalls that certain pupils 'would find their niche and their comfort zone and find that they felt happy and useful attaching themselves to John'. Sam Doncaster appears to have been an example of one of the pupils who found a 'niche' with him. In contrast to a difficult relationship with Kenneth Barnes, he remembers that, with John Swift, he would spend 'hours and hours in his office' discussing how to make things, as manifested in the sketches in Figures 5.19 and 5.20. This kind of testimony is reminiscent of how some Kilquhanity pupils felt working alongside Mike Todd, a competent and sympathetic adult rather than a teacher. John Swift appears to have exemplified Barnes' philosophy that adults should 'enjoy living with boys and girls at all stages, we must find things to do together – activities that break away from the ordinary classroom situation'. In this case, building was the activity to 'do together'.

Ex-pupils' testimony reinforces the idea that pupils were closely involved with various building projects. Belinda Swift, pupil 1953-60, recalls how pupils were part of creating buildings 'from scratch', implying that they were a part of the whole process. Sam Doncaster and Richard Pemble vividly recall their involvement with projects such as building a store for lawn-mower, sports equipment and tractor. They remember debates about how to build the structures and the trials and tribulations of executing them. As they discuss together how it worked and draw a diagram to explain it to me, Figures 5.19 and 5.20, their enthusiasm for and sense of ownership of the project is palpable. Their sketches evoke the pupils'

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172 Pat Mitchell, group discussion, 14 June 2015, Wennington Archive Week.
174 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
175 Sam Doncaster, interviewed 14 June 2015, Wennington Archive Week.
176 Barnes, Annual Report in 1957 magazine, 8, Wennington Archive.
177 Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015.
178 Sam Doncaster and Richard Pemble, discussion 14 June 2015, Wennington Archive Week.
contemporaneous sketches and plans of buildings in the Kilquhanity *Broadsheet*, Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.9, and similarly imply an intimate knowledge of these school construction projects, but with a more technical perspective which may reflect their own adult interests and/or the engineering expertise of John Swift.

Figure 5.19: drawing by Sam Doncaster and Richard Pemble.\textsuperscript{179}

Figure 5.20: drawing by Sam Doncaster and Richard Pemble.\textsuperscript{180}

However, there were also contradictions and tensions related to this characteristic of involving pupils in shaping the physical environment. Barnes describes how one

\textsuperscript{179} Sketches created by Sam Doncaster and Richard Pemble, discussion 14 June 2015, Wennington Archive Week.

\textsuperscript{180} Sketches created by Sam Doncaster and Richard Pemble, discussion 14 June 2015, Wennington Archive Week.
Easter holiday, all the children went home for the holidays ‘leaving us free to give all our energy to constructional and land work’;\(^\text{181}\) when the school moved premises in 1945, Barnes describes how ‘builders came to start building downstairs lavatories and flats over the garages’;\(^\text{182}\) and with later construction projects such as the science lab (1965) and theatre (1967), professional contractors were brought in to do the work, with pupils only involved in the final phases. These examples reveal a more conventional separation of ‘school’ and ‘building’ work where pupils have to be out of the way in order for building work to be achieved. As at Kilquhanity, there appears to have been an ‘in-group’ in terms of construction projects. Richard Schofield recalls how John Swift would ‘pick the team’;\(^\text{183}\) Belinda Swift suggests that ‘some of the boys got very involved’;\(^\text{184}\) implying that there was a tendency for boys to be more involved with this kind of work than girls. However, photographs, such as Figures 5.17 and 5.18, and the enthusiastic testimony of female ex-pupils about this aspect, suggest that girls were included in some of these projects. This mixed testimony confirms analysis in previous chapters that gender stereotypes were both reinforced and challenged at the school.

In spite of varying levels of individual involvement, this construction work formed an important part of the community spirit at the school. Pupils refer to the making of the sewage system as representative of the school’s distinctive approach to involving pupils in major construction projects, so that they felt, even if they were not personally involved, as Richard Schofield suggests that ‘we built the sewer’.\(^\text{185}\) This feeling of ‘we built’ is similar to accounts of building projects at Kilquhanity. Figure 5.21 shows a sketch by Barnes of an engineering challenge, where a few individuals were involved, but the wider community gathers to watch what is going on. Sam Doncaster suggests that the picture evokes the atmosphere of the school and the sense that it was ‘an exciting thing to see’ the work of creating the school.\(^\text{186}\) In spite of adult leadership and varying levels of involvement, many ex-pupils’ continued enthusiasm about the school and its projects suggests that this

\(^{\text{182}}\) Barnes (1980), 69.
\(^{\text{183}}\) Richard Schofield, interviewed 14 June 2015.
\(^{\text{184}}\) Belinda Swift interviewed 22 January 2015.
\(^{\text{185}}\) Richard Schofield interviewed 14 June 2014, Wennington Archive Week.
\(^{\text{186}}\) Sam Doncaster, interviewed 15 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
experience of participation in construction projects did help pupils feel, as Barnes had hoped, that the ‘school was their own creation’.  

In the surrounding woodland, Wennington pupils, like Kilquhanity pupils, used the site for their own construction projects such as dens, camps, tree houses, aerial walkways and ‘enormous subterranean warrens’. Andrew Peers recalls that ‘we made lots of tree houses’ using off-cuts from the main construction projects. Jonathan Adamson describes in some detail a two-storey den which he and a friend built around 1962. The den was lined with fertiliser sacks and lit by a candle or oil lamp which eventually ended badly with the structure ‘burnt down to the ground in five minutes’. This story suggests, as at Kilquhanity, that pupils recall the iterative life of the structure as much as its final use.

Figure 5.21: drawing by Barnes from Energy Unbound.

References:

189 Sam Doncaster, group discussion, 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
For the younger pupils, den-building in the surrounding woodland was primarily a playful activity – forming part of their games which might not always reflect the Quaker, pacifist ethos of the main school, as revealed in Figure 5.22. For older pupils, the woodland and dens were a source of solitude or illicit gatherings with friends or lovers. Jonathan Adamson, pupil 1961-66, describes the woodland and the shelter he built as an ‘important private place to go’. Another ex-pupil remembers the woods as ‘somewhere to go for a fag, a bit of a kiss and a cuddle...private...where you couldn’t be found’ and positions the woods as an important retreat from the communal life of the school where ‘it wasn’t easy to be private’ and you were ‘doing things with lots of other people’. Richard Pemble, pupil 1956-61, also recalls that we went there for a ‘fag break’. These spaces in the wood loom large in the memories of ex-pupils as a significant under-the-radar outlet and context for their social and sexual energy.

The use of the woodland and informal structures in this way was accepted by the school, although not particularly promoted. Barnes recognised that ‘communities can oppress the individual – the woods were good for losing oneself’. Irene Hill, teacher in the 1950s, remembered that ‘it was Kenneth who used to say he was glad that the school had all the space in the wood and in the trees so that the

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193 Anonymous female ex-pupil (who was sent by a local authority and attended in the 1960s and would prefer to remain anonymous), interviewed 8 October 2015.
194 Richard Pemble, interviewed 16 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
195 Incurably Human (1983), A Meeting Point Film by John Morris and Peter Hamilton.
children could go if they wanted to be by themselves’. Barnes cites in *Energy Unbound* (1980) the example of how a school ‘refuser’ hid in a ‘very dense part of the wood’ in a ‘neatly constructed little hut’. This idea of the woodland as ‘escape’ is more emphasised at Wennington than Kilquhanity by both staff and pupils, perhaps because the more extensive woodland at Wennington was conducive but perhaps also because the school community was bigger, more institutional and with a weaker tradition of self-government and therefore a structure that pupils were more likely to want or need to escape from.

Barnes recognised the value of pupils’ dens as part of this escape-valve from the main community. He also includes in the Annual Report of 1966-7 an image of a pupil-initiated treehouse, Figure 5.23, suggesting that he valued of this kind of pupil activity. However, this aspect of life at the school received far less attention than at Kilquhanity. The emblematic construction project for Wennington was the adult-led community project of the sewage system, in contrast to the pupil-initiated structures which were emblematic at Kilquhanity. This difference of representation may, to some extent, reflect an underlying difference of pupil experience between Kilquhanity and Wennington. However, the difference also seems to reflect a difference of presented identity between the two schools with Wennington emphasising a community at work over children at play.

Figure 5.23: from Annual Report of 1966-7.

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196 Irene Hill, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 12 September 2010.
Barnes argued in 1962 that this ‘tradition of constructional work’ in the school ‘develops unusual resourcefulness and initiative’. Pupils often express pride in the practical skills that they acquired through these construction projects. In group conversation, ex-pupils discuss the value of being involved in construction work as ‘doing things, making things, being practical…learning to problem-solve and work together’. The Evening Standard, when writing about the school’s most famous alumna, who was agent for the Beatles made a point of the fact that ‘she helped to build a sewer while she was there…yet another string to her remarkable bow’. Others present this kind of building work as a lifeline out of traditional classroom experiences. Sam Doncaster, looking at photographs of the sewage system project, recalls that ‘we loved that job…so creative and clever’. And Richard Schofield positions the chance to work on the new theatre building instead of classes at his previous school as ‘the difference between heaven and hell’.

The emphasis in these accounts of the value of involvement in building work is firmly on the process rather than the end result. Barnes expresses in the Annual Report of 1966-67 a profound ambivalence about the completion of new buildings – reminiscent of Richard Jones’ account of the new workshop. He describes how on the one hand, ‘it is good to see buildings growing up around us and in them the realisation of what we once thought were hopeless dreams’ but on the other hand ‘moments…usually late at night when I have walked around our new buildings and seen them empty – when I have recognised with unusual force that people matter more than buildings.’ In Energy Unbound (1980), he cites with nostalgia the example of how, in the early years, ‘what we lacked in conventional laboratory accommodation, we made up for by using the marvellous countryside’. Similarly, ex-pupils do not seem to regret the absence of facilities in the early days of the school and many speak with pleasure about, for example, the annual transformation of the music and assembly hall into a theatre performance space before a dedicated theatre was built.

199 Group discussion, 14 May 2013, Wennington Archive Week.
201 Sam Doncaster, interviewed 16 May 2018.
205 Group discussion, 10 June 2014, Wennington Archive Week.
The background beat of the construction process at the school, described by Barnes as ‘continuous creation’,\textsuperscript{206} emerges from the evidence as life-blood to the school community. In 1956, Barnes argued for the value of what he calls the ‘pioneer stage in which understanding and unity are developed out of the struggle to build up’\textsuperscript{207}. It is revealing that he uses the word ‘build’ to evoke this wider process of creating the community. He also endorsed John Badley’s, headteacher of Bedales, claim that ‘so interesting and significant had the first few struggling years of its existence been that he sometimes wished he could knock it down and start again’.\textsuperscript{208} Wennington’s closure in 1975 partly speaks to this sense that the making process – ‘pioneer work’\textsuperscript{209} – was an essential part of the vitality of the community. The school had its science labs, its theatre and its classrooms – the building work was done and the community lost its purpose.

‘Children simply do not build schools’\textsuperscript{210}: the wider context of children’s participation in building work

A.S. Neill was critical of the idea of children being involved in school building projects, as suggested in the sub-title above. His criticism casts further light on philosophical tensions within the progressive movement, which have been explored in previous chapters. The involvement of pupils in construction at the case-study schools is also compared with community self-build projects, therapeutic communities and the adventure playground movement of the post-war era – to explore how self-build and hut-building related to the distinct radical movement in childhood and education.

Neill reflects in 1992, on his own changing opinions on children building and, in this way, casts light on wider tensions within the progressive movement.

I once read about a school in America that was built by the pupils themselves. I used to think this was the ideal way. It isn’t. If children build their own school, you can be sure that some gentleman with a breezy,

\textsuperscript{207} Notes on staff meeting 12 June 1956, Pat Mitchell’s personal archive.
benevolent authority was standing by lustily shouting encouragement. When such authority is not present, children simply do not build schools.211

This quotation suggests that he would have been critical of Richard Jones, Mike Todd or John Swift as examples of this kind of ‘breezy authority’ in spite of his general approval of the case-study schools. He cites the example of his own attempt to enrol children to ‘help build a sanatorium’ and claimed that they were ‘not motivated’ but that ‘by themselves’ they built a ‘bike shed’.212 This example shows how he was only in favour of children building when the idea and motivation came from the children; by this criterion, he favoured child-initiated structures such as treehouses but not community build projects such as Wennington’s sewage system. Neill approved of treehouses as ‘play’ initiated by the child rather than ‘work’ imposed by the adult. His approval of this activity is reflected in Walmsley’s collection of photographs taken at Summerhill in 1969, Figures 5.23 and 5.24.213 The precarious-looking nature of the treehouse and the child peering out from his leafy shelter suggest images which could have been taken at Kilquhanity or Wennington. However, Neill’s explicit description of these activities as ‘boys’ play’214 suggests that this activity was more gendered at Summerhill than at the case-study schools. There is also no reference to any evolving ‘tradition’ or collection of structures – perhaps reflecting the less industrious and communal ethos of the school.

212 Neill (1992), 41.
Over the twentieth century, hut- and den-building became a less common part of ordinary childhood due to reduced access to land, increased use of indoor spaces.


and changing attitudes towards unsupervised play – part of Mathew Thomson’s account of the ‘lost freedom’ of children over the twentieth century. However, progressive schools often had the grounds and the philosophy to perpetuate this kind of ‘freedom’. Hamish Black, speaking about his time at the progressive boarding school Kingsmuir in the 1950s, recalled how ‘you could go anywhere’ and ‘make camps and build whole buildings’ and ‘no one told us how to do it’.218

The involvement of pupils in full-scale construction work was rare even in progressive schools. An article in New Era claimed that ‘we have found children love to build’,219 suggesting that the philosophy of children building appealed to the progressive movement. However, in practice, a survey of New Era articles in the 1930s and 1940s reveals only one example of pupils actually involved with a full-scale construction project; in 1936, at New Herrlingen Home School in Kent, the children worked with the teachers to build a theatre which ‘involved real hard manual work…above all a genuinely communal and socially creative work’.220 The photograph of the activity appears similar to projects at the case-study schools, Figure 5.25. However, the article also calls the project an ‘unusual piece of community work’.221 There are other examples such as, in 1934, W.B. Curry wrote that at Dartington Hall School ‘the children themselves have this term constructed a new swimming pool’.222 In A History of Abbotsholme School, there are photographs of ‘pupils building the Boat House’ and the ‘Hen House’ in the late nineteenth century.223 John Russell, ex-pupil of Bedales 1978-85, describes the building of the tennis courts by pupils in the early history of the school as an ‘unbelievable undertaking’.224 These examples were noteworthy rather than part of a widespread practice such as small-scale arts and crafts activities, as discussed in Chapter 4.

218 Hamish Black, interviewed 24 August 2018.
221 Capon (1936), 25.
Amongst state schools, Catherine Burke and Mark Dudek have uncovered a similar tradition of construction at O’Neill’s school in Prestolee (1919-52). According to their research, the children built ‘cages for school pets, a milk bar, an outdoor stage, flower trellises and vegetable patches, several towers and a working windmill containing several rooms that stood thirty feet high, garden pools including one for swimming, a roundabout combining frame, several bridges spanning gardens and ponds and a goat house’. An ex-pupil claims, based on these experiences, that ‘I can build anything, a greenhouse, I can build a house, me!’ This testimony is similar to pupils at the case-study schools – revealing that this kind of practice was not limited to private progressive schools. However, Burke and Dudek describe the school as an ‘extraordinary environment’.

The tradition of pupil involvement in construction at the case-study schools became more unusual in the post-war era as school construction became increasingly industrialised and professionalised. The post-war period was a time of substantial

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227 Burke and Dudek (2010), 212.
228 Burke and Dudek (2010), 217.
investment in new state secondary school buildings and playgrounds, which Andrew Saint claims was a ‘triumph of fresh thought about childhood, teaching and learning’ and which Burke describes as ‘architects and educators…united in the same purpose of re-inventing the school’. However, pupil and staff participation was not a central part of this ‘fresh thought’ or ‘re-invention’. The articles about school-building in the *Architectural Journal* in the post-war period reflect a preoccupation with efficiencies and innovations based on an industrialised process of school-building production – ‘appropriate to the mechanized age in which we live’. David Kynaston, social historian of the twentieth century, describes how the architects of a new building for Hunstanton School in 1954 reflected this ‘new brutalism’ in only allowing the school ‘to be photographed on condition that there were neither children nor furniture and fittings to spoil the effect’. The architect was often a distant figure, for whom teachers and pupils were an abstracted design challenge, as illustrated in Figure 5.26; this abstraction was in stark contrast to the personal process which characterised design and construction at the case-study schools.

![Figure 5.26: architect’s plan for new school in 1950.](image)

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Construction projects for pupils in any schools in the second half of the twentieth century became increasingly rare – related to wider changes in relation to children’s involvement with manual work, as discussed in Chapter 3. At Bedales School, where the tradition of community building projects had been strong in its early decades, the emphasis on construction became a ‘less significant part of life’ from the mid 1960s to 1970s; a brief revival was witnessed in 1980 when pupils and staff re-constructed a timber-framed barn. 234 At Abbotsholme, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was the construction of many new buildings, but in spite of the headteacher’s claim in 1962 that ‘there is much constructional work associated with estate work, laboratories and stage’, 235 the history of the school by Sederman makes no reference to pupil involvement in these new structures, in contrast to the pioneering years of the school. 236

In this period, construction projects were more likely to be adopted as creative or educational projects rather than as a ‘real’ way to build a school. For example, at the experimental Black Mountain College in America (1933-57), geodesic domes were designed by architect and inventor Buckminster Fuller in 1948 so they would ‘deliberately fall down’. 237 The focus was firmly on the creative and experimental process rather than on making a useful building, as shown in Figure 5.27, in which the photograph evokes an artistic process rather than a building site. This dome project can be contrasted with the geodesic dome created at Kilquhanity in the 1970s, which although referencing Buckminster Fuller 238 and partly conducted as an experimental process, was also understood as a useful community building for weekly meetings and a theatre in the round. Gavin Aitkenhead contrasts this project with building projects at other progressive schools, which he claims had an ‘educational purpose’. 239 This difference of emphasis is also reflected in John Aitkenhead’s account of a visit to a Danish Free School, Efterskole, in 1978. He acknowledged that the school was ‘so like Kilquhanity’ 240 but distances himself with

238 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
239 Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 Jan 2015.
240 The Broadsheet, no 333, 3 November 1978.
inverted commas from the idea that ‘the adaptation of farm buildings for a school is considered of “pedagogical value”’. 241

Figure 5.27: the Supine Dome, the Buckminster Fuller class summer 1948. 242

This analysis suggests that, in the 1960s and 1970s, it is more appropriate to compare the involvement of pupils in real construction projects at the case-study schools with a tradition of community self-build projects. The value of community self-build for children and young people was emphasised by anarchists and radical de-schoolers in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Goodman, the ‘opportunity to create your own buildings’ and ‘buildings built by students and teachers’ 243 is characteristic of the kind of small intentional community which can act as an alternative-to-school. John Holt emphasised the value of flexible spaces which can be changed by adults and children. He argued that the ‘ideal classroom would never be finished’ 244 and celebrated the example of a free school called Ny Lillerskole in Denmark where the re-organisation of the space by the whole school community was a regular and important part of the life of the school. 245

For some therapeutic communities, self-build was the defining activity. In the 1940s, David Wills’ account of Q camp suggests that the building process was not only a means to an end but an end in itself:

241 The Broadsheet, no 333, 3 November 1978.
245 Holt (2004), 126.
It would have saved us some real hardship and have sometimes been cheaper to buy doors, windows and other joinery ready-made or ready-milled. We did not do so even though this meant our working in the midst of winter covered only by a roof in a shelter with neither walls nor solid floor which it was impossible to warm because we wanted to build the camp as nearly unaided as we could.246

This quotation suggests a more extreme emphasis on the process compared to the case-study schools where I have found that there was a concern with process but also with the end result. For example, Richard Jones, teacher at Kilquhanity, wrote in 1972 to thank the supplier of a circular saw and lathe, admitting that ‘I have always had mixed feelings about men being replaced by machines but in this case I really wonder how on earth we managed without it’.247 This letter reveals a pragmatic desire to get the job done alongside an attachment to the ideal of working by hand, which contrasts with the Q-camp’s uncompromising focus on the manual process as therapy.

The emphasis on self-build was also a feature of experimental communities such as the Whiteway Colony (1898- ), where colonists set about building their own homes and community spaces. The colonists tell the stories of their childhood against the backdrop of the evolving physical spaces of their homes, work and community, even as late as the 1970s, as Katrina Thacker puts it, the colony was ‘being built around me’.248 The children also helped with community building projects such as the colony hall, swimming pool and roads.

In the 1970s, self-build housing initiatives were championed by radical architects such as Christopher Alexander, Walter Segal and Bernard Rudofsky. The case-study schools did not involve architects in their building projects. However, this absence was consistent with the ideas of Alexander, Segal and Rudofsky who preferred the idea of ‘architecture without architects’249 and a ‘master-builder’250 role where the responsibility for the design and delivery of the project remained within

the community. Richard Jones, at Kilquhanity, explicitly uses the term ‘master-
builder’.\textsuperscript{251} John Swift, at Wennington, also acted in this capacity with responsibility
for the design, construction and ongoing maintenance of the various structures he
was involved with, while also being a member of the community which the building
was to serve.

Children and young people were not the focus of these self-build community
projects but they were allowed and encouraged to participate. Walter Segal
describes how, in a self-build housing project in Lewisham, London in the 1970s,
‘children were of course expected and allowed to play on the site. And the older
ones also helped if they wished to help.’\textsuperscript{252} These descriptions and the photographs
of community self-build projects from the 1970s and 1980s, for example, Figure
5.28 with children helping out and messing around on and around adult building
sites are similar to the descriptions of building projects at the case-study schools.

Figure 5.28: ‘self-builders of different generations, helping each other at
Lewisham’.\textsuperscript{253}

Although not envisaged as primarily an educational process, architects positioned
the process as empowering for the individuals and communities involved. For
example, Christopher Alexander’s account of \textit{The Production of Houses} (1985)
explores how those involved in an ambitious housing scheme in Mexico, learnt new
skills and were ‘transformed’ through the physical, social and political act of building
their own homes: ‘they have made their own stuff, they have made themselves solid
in the world, have shaped the world as they have shaped themselves, and live now,
in the world they have created for themselves, changed, transformed, opened,

\textsuperscript{252} Segal, W. ‘Walter Segal: the go-between’ in Ward, C. (1996)\textit{Talking to Architects}, London:
Freedom Press, 31-9, 34.
powerful, free’. 254 This sentiment is similar to those of the headteachers of the case-study schools, although expressed in more political and purple prose.

Radicals and anarchists also celebrated the post-war adventure playgrounds, where children and young people set about building their own structures in relative freedom. Joe Benjamin, a play worker for a number of different playgrounds in the post-war period, described their aim: ‘it was to be a place in which [the child] would have the tools and materials to hand; where he could build, destroy and build again’. 255 Accounts of the adventure playgrounds suggest that a large part of activity at these playgrounds was construction: “so if they give you a space of your own and say you can do what you like with it, the obvious thing is to build” (quote from a kid). 256 Figures 5.29 and 5.30 show front cover artwork from Grounds for Play (1974) and Adventure Playgrounds (1972). The drawings evoke a busy group of children making and looking after their own spaces, where play and work are blurred, a kind of children’s community or village rather than a playground or school, reflecting Bengtsson’s proposal that ‘an adventure playground is in many ways a primitive society’. 257

Figure 5.29: Front cover of Joe Benjamin’s second book on adventure playgrounds, 1974.\textsuperscript{258}

Figure 5.30: Front cover of Bengtsson’s book on international movement of adventure playgrounds.\textsuperscript{259}


\textsuperscript{259} Bengtsson, A. (1972) \textit{Adventure Playgrounds}, London: Crosby Lockwood Staples.
Hut- and den-building was not the focus of the case-study schools, as it was at the adventure playgrounds. However, the kind of space and opportunities offered by the combination of the workshop and nearby woodland and the resulting construction activity and sense of children's community is similar. The style of building was also very similar – made with cheap materials to hand or supplied by the school/play worker; it developed organically with bits added over time and making use of the features of the environment. In Danish playgrounds which lasted for years and decades, a vernacular tradition evolved, in which 'kids built up set ways of doing things' reflecting accounts of the passing on of hut-building skills from one generation of pupils to another at Kilquhanity. Accounts and images of the structures, Figures 5.29-5.32, suggest the similarities of process and end result between the adventure playgrounds and hut-building areas at the case-study schools, despite the very different contexts. There was a similar range of sophistication in the structures built by the young people so that 'some builders never get past this first stage and their dens are never completed, others go on building week after week, maybe all summer...the original small den may develop into something more like a church or at least a tower.' This range and the ongoing nature of the process which was 'never fixed or static' is similar to the case-study schools, particularly Kilquhanity, although the orderly lay-out of the structures in Endrump, Denmark, Figure 5.32, was never achieved or probably desired.

262 Bengtsson (1972), 125.
Figure 5.31: a junk playground, 1961.\textsuperscript{263}

Figure 5.32: Endrup Adventure Playground in Copenhagen as the ‘starting point’.\textsuperscript{264}


Adult play workers on adventure playgrounds can also be compared with some of the adult teachers at the case-study schools. Joe Benjamin and Jack Lambert both identified themselves as facilitators of the children’s projects and spaces – rather than teacher or instructor or project leader. Jack Lambert positioned the adult as ‘liberator’ and claimed that the ‘sovereignty of the children must be defended’. This role became defined as ‘play worker’ with a distinct professional identity and qualifications. This facilitating role was similar to the way in which teachers at the case-study schools supported young people’s projects – with tools, encouragement, interventions to keep things fair. However, the adults at the case-study schools were less involved with the hut-building activities than the play-workers in adventure playgrounds. At the case-study schools, this kind of activity was marginal and under-the-radar – adults were aware of it but it was not their focus. This difference of focus meant that the children’s freedoms at the case-study schools were not championed and protected as explicitly. For example, adults at the case-study schools did not tend to use the political language of children’s ‘sovereignty’. However, this lack of attention also meant that the young people at the case-study schools were left alone to shape their own world in the wood – without even the benevolent gaze of a play-leader.

These comparisons suggest that Kilquhanity, and, to a lesser extent Wennington, can be understood as closely connected to the ideas and values of adventure playgrounds, even though the adventure playgrounds were used by a much more mixed urban demographic. In this respect the hut-building activities at the case-study schools can be understood as what Colin Ward called the adventure playgrounds: an ‘exemplar of childhood freedom’, ‘a rare opportunity for children to manipulate their environment’ and a ‘parable of anarchy’. Joe Benjamin concluded that the children’s experiences of building in an adventure playground supported their sense of belonging to a wider community. He claimed that ‘when young people are left to their own devices, they are participating in the cultural traditions of their own communities’. John Bertelsen wrote about Endrump in

1946 that it had ‘gradually become the children’s community within adult society’. These conclusions about the relationship of hut-building and community-building also emerge from analysis of experiences of young people at the case-study schools. Neill may have been right that children ‘do not build schools’ – but it seems that, perhaps, they do build communities.

**Conclusions**

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of pupils’ self-build activities at the case-study schools, both as part of mixed-age community projects with adults but also without adults in the surrounding woodland. Although this kind of building activity was not perhaps always ‘all hands’ and ‘willing hands’, as suggested in the dominant discourse, it was nevertheless an important part of the identity and lived experiences of many pupils at both schools. This aspect of manual work distinguished the schools from other progressive and mainstream schools, particularly from the 1950s onwards as school-building became increasingly professionalised.

This chapter has shown that pupil-initiated hut-building sits higher on Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ in some respects than community self-build projects. However, it also shows that the experiences of community self-build, albeit relying on what Neill might criticise as ‘breezy’ adult authority, nevertheless contributed to pupils’ feelings of belonging and empowerment in the mixed-age community of the schools. As in Chapters 3 and 4, the practices described in this chapter suggest that, in spite of commonalities with the wider progressive movement, the emphasis on young people’s participation in construction was more closely aligned with radical and anarchist discourses, such as Goodman’s ‘incidental’ education and initiatives such as self-build communities and adventure playgrounds.

The importance of the process of self-build to the vitality of these communities also emerges loud and clear. In fact, the schools flourished when there was building

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work and did not when there was not – suggesting that they were fundamentally ‘building communities’. Their closure, therefore, could be understood in the spirit of the Vai Tribe’s ‘ideal’ approach to education, as described by Lambert: they had built ‘a structure to suit their needs’ and it was time to ‘burn the structure to the ground’ and start again.

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275 Lambert (1972).
Chapter 6

‘Something like it today’:¹ a conversation between past and present

Introduction

Many ex-pupils of the case-study schools express the wish that there was ‘something like [their schools] today’.² The current use of the two school sites tells a story about the present. Wennington is now a Special School for boys with autism. Kilquhanity was bought in 2002 by Kinokuni Children’s Village, under the leadership of Shinichiro Hori, and is used as a space for summer camps for pupils from a group of progressive Japanese schools of which Shinichiro Hori is headteacher. Claire Cameron recently claimed, as part of her professorial lecture, that there is a ‘red thread’³ which connects her experiences as a pupil at Kilquhanity to practices in contemporary social pedagogy. This chapter follows this ‘thread’ in relation to participation in manual work in contemporary discourse, settings and projects – identifying whether, where and how it still occurs and whether this aspect of the thread is still strong, frayed or broken.

This chapter explores changes and continuities in relation to the ideas and practices of manual work at the case-study schools, as they occur in a range of contemporary settings and projects: from mainstream schools to alternative schools to therapeutic, home education and land-based communities – including the current use of the case-study school sites and the author’s own work at Wilderness Wood. I also draw on the ways in which ex-pupils perceive these traditions carrying on – through their own life stories but also their children’s and grandchildren’s stories.

I examine whether the contemporary context is more or less sympathetic to the kinds of manual and outdoor practices, which were prevalent at the case-study schools and whether Kelvin Campbell is right that for advocates of self-build and de-

¹ Sam Doncaster, interviewed 21 May 2008 by Elaine Boyling, Wennington Archive.
² Sam Doncaster, interviewed 21 May 2008 by Elaine Boyling, Wennington Archive.
schooling from the 1960s and 1970s, ‘their time is now’.\(^4\) Concerns about ‘nature deficit disorder’\(^5\) and the rise in the popularity of ‘Forest School’ and ‘nature connection’ activities for children, in some ways suggest that for the tradition of outdoor, manual activities, as Marina Robb, Director of Circle of Life and author of *Learning with Nature* (2015) claims ‘it’s the time to be in’.\(^6\) However, this chapter questions whether apparently similar manual practices have very different meanings and associations.

Comparisons of past and present cast light backwards on the meanings of the practices at the case-study schools and forwards as a way to challenge assumptions and offer new perspectives to contemporary practitioners – including reflections on lessons for my own practical work and actions at Wilderness Wood.

"*Missing out*: young people’s experiences of ‘useful work’ in the present"

Over the lifetime of the case-study schools, the involvement of young people in ‘useful work’ became an increasingly unusual characteristic, as explored in Chapter 3. Today, this practice is almost non-existent at mainstream schools and other settings for young people in the UK. When visiting a holiday club at an Adventure Playground in South London in 2019, I arrived at the end of the day, as adults were tidying and cleaning up while the children sat and chatted as they waited for their parents to pick them up – it was remarkable how unremarkable this situation appeared to staff, parents and children.\(^8\) This situation reflects both a reduction in the need for manual ‘useful work’ due to economic and technological developments and profoundly different attitudes towards young people’s role in society – with the transformation from ‘earner to learner’\(^9\) nearly fully complete.

Of course, in some parts of the world and amongst certain ethnic or socio-economic groups in the UK, there is still an expectation or need for children to work in paid or

\(^6\) Marina Robb, interviewed 19 March 2018.
\(^8\) Notes by Emily Charkin taken during a visit to Oasis Adventure Playground in London, 18 April 2019.
unpaid work. This work tends to be thought of as a negative experience. For example, in the UK, in 2011, the children’s charity Barnardos published a report claiming that children working as unpaid ‘carers’ had increased to 178,000 and describes ‘isolated’ children taking on ‘adult responsibilities’ resulting in ‘miss[ing] out on opportunities that other children have to play and learn’. This perspective on the negative meanings of work for young people reflects a dominant view equating education with opportunities and work with exploitation – a very different perspective from that offered by experiences at the case-study schools.

Physical and maintenance work is particularly marginalised in contemporary young people’s experiences. Matthew Crawford criticises a contemporary situation in which manual work has ‘suffered such a devaluation as a component of education’. Jenny Gibbons, born 1987, recalls how her state secondary school in the 1990s, was ‘very encouraging of performing arts...but scornful of manual work’. In rural areas in the UK children growing up on farms may still be expected to help out as part of a seasonal work routine. For example, James Rebanks, in his account of life as a contemporary shepherd in the Lake District, The Shepherd’s Life (2015), describes how his children are expected to help with various manual jobs including helping to deliver lambs. However, the book presents a way of life which is increasingly unusual and self-conscious, reflected in his justifying of this work as a way for his children to ‘learn about duties and responsibilities’ rather than as a taken-for-granted essential of the economic life of the farm.

At Wilderness Wood over the past six years, my husband and I have sought to offer opportunities for young people to be involved with the work of stewarding the wood and constructing new timber structures. We have found that involving young people with everyday ‘useful work’ feels particularly counter-culture; for many young people even washing up their own plate is a new experience. When primary schools or families visit the wood to participate in Forest School activities, there is often no time or expectation of helping to set up or clear up; for example, kindling is collected and pre-dried for their fire-lighting activities, poles are placed ready for their den-building

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and banana peels are whisked away to the compost area which is out-of-bounds. Secondary school pupils on work experience weeks are not allowed to use sharp hand-tools because of health and safety restrictions which significantly reduces the possibility of their genuine involvement in ‘useful work’ around the wood. When a group of 15 year old BTEC construction pupils from the local secondary school were part of a building project at the wood in 2018, they enjoyed the project but complained about the physical work of collecting the materials from the wood; they were used to activities being set up and ready for them.16

I find that I have to protect ‘useful work’ against the pressures of parents, the wider culture and my own hesitations, which deem education and play more important and appropriate for children and teenagers.17 I feel subject to contemporary sensibilities about appropriate and inappropriate work for children and even teenagers. For example, I find it hard to ask children to clean the toilets or the chicken coop or spend hours in front of the sink. I also struggle to justify some of the physical risks involved in real ‘useful work’. For example, chopping and stacking fire-wood are an important part of the daily work at the wood. Teenagers are often capable of doing this kind of work safely. But I have moments when I feel that the risk of injury, and everything that might mean for the individual and the community around the wood, outweighs the value of their participation. My concern is part of a wider increasing intolerance of risk in our society which I discuss below in more detail in relation to unsupervised den-building.

In this changing context, experiences of ‘useful work’ are more likely to occur not in school but in more exceptional and temporary situations, for example, residential school trips to places such as Farms for City Kids18 or Jamie’s Farms19 or camping trips with youth groups such as Scouts and Guides, Woodcraft Folk and Forest School Camps. Marina Robb explains how she insists that young people on camps help with what she calls ‘village maintenance’.20 She describes her insistence on their help as refusing to take a ‘motherly’ role,21 revealing an attitude that this kind of

20 Marina Robb, interviewed 19 March 2018.
21 Marina Robb, interviewed 19 March 2018.
work applies to camp life rather than as a normal part of daily family or community life. On Scout and Guide camps, there are ‘patrols’ with camp responsibilities related to, as a scout leader describes, ‘living reduced to its bare facts’ so that it is ‘very tangible what needs doing’. At Woodcraft Folk camps, ‘working together’ is a crucial component with ‘clans’ of mixed-age young people responsible for the cooking, cleaning, fire-wood and water for the camp. Forest School Camps also emphasise looking after the site and maintaining ‘an orderly environment’. These camps offer a taste of ‘useful work’ as part of community life, albeit temporary, outside of the young people’s ordinary daily experiences and with a tendency for adults to take responsibility for the harder jobs such as cleaning the toilets or washing up in the dark.

Amongst contemporary progressive schools, there are examples which continue to champion the idea of pupil involvement in ‘useful work’ but where the reality is tokenistic. ‘Useful work’ is part of the timetable for the groups of Japanese children who come to Kilquhanity Village for summer stays. However, given the brevity of the stay and the young age of the pupils, this practice is included as an acknowledgement of the school’s historical tradition rather than a contemporary reality of how the school grounds and buildings are really looked after. Similarly, Bedales School still promotes ‘outdoor work’; for example, there are photographs on the home-page of the website of pupils gardening and the photograph on the back cover of the prospectus is of children bringing in hay. The Good School Guide (2018) supports this promotional material by describing how ‘outdoor work is a key part of the curriculum’. However, an ex-pupil, who attended the school in the 1970s, suggests that this emphasis is just ‘PR’ and describes how on a recent visit to Bedales, he watched a tennis coaching lesson going on, while staff dug out snow around the pupil who was being coached. He claims that John Badley, founder headteacher, would have been ‘horrified’ and found it ‘anathema’ that staff were

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22 Crowborough Scout Group, discussion with Ruby Woods (aged 12), Martha Sugden (aged 11) and Jackie Sugden (aged 46) 22 September 2018.
25 Notes from conference ‘Education for Social Change: the many histories of Woodcraft Folk’ at Institute of Education 15 September 2018; Crowborough Scout Group, discussion with Ruby Woods (aged 12), Martha Sugden (aged 11) and Jackie Sugden (aged 46) 22 September 2018.
27 https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/schools/bedales-school-petersfield/7C21D63#tab_review, last accessed 20 October 2018.
doing this work for pupils on the tennis courts which had been built and maintained by pupils’ manual work decades ago.

Even in progressive schools where there is still an expectation that pupils look after land and buildings, such as Michael Hall Steiner School and Trefoil Montessori School, the emphasis tends to be on the development of the individual pupil, rather than necessary work for the community. A parent and teacher, involved over the last decade, describes the routines to do with setting up and tidying up as a way to ‘instil regard’ and positioned them as a ‘fundamental’ and ‘compulsory’ part of the rhythm of the days.29 When they are aged 15 or 16 years old, pupils also spend three weeks dedicated to improving the fabric of the school – including maintenance of structures, fencing and paths. This kind of practice is in some ways similar to the case-study schools but is framed in more formal educational terms, so that the grounds are considered as an ‘outdoor classroom’30 and the work as a developmental process for the young people – rather than a practical necessity. There is also a more overt focus on the environmental aspects of ‘useful work’ than at the case-study schools; for example, the official history of the Michael Hall School claims that ‘the grounds...call daily for us to care for the land in every gesture of our education’.31

Similarly, at Trefoil School in West Sussex, the founder-headteachers, Grace and Grant Vickerman, insist on the children helping out with ‘lunch duties’ and ‘farm duties’ and run a ‘field-to-fork’ scheme in which groups of children look after and grow vegetables in a plot of land and prepare a meal for an end-of-term celebration.32 These practices are, in many respects, similar to the case-study schools; the Vickermans’ claim that the farm exists with or without the school rather than as an educational device is similar to Aitkenhead’s claim that the ‘farm must be real’.33 However, the Vickermans also acknowledge various tensions, which did not arise at the case-study schools: that the ‘duties’ are often not actually ‘useful’ in that it often requires more work by adult staff because of the need to supervise the

29 Anonymised interview with two ex-staff and parents of pupils at Michael Hall Steiner School 5 November 2018.
31 Mansfield (2014), 82.
children; problems associated with the children over-exciting the animals; and the need to introduce competition to ‘field-to-fork’ because the children find weeding ‘so boring’—reminiscent of A.S. Neill’s views on children and gardening, as explored in Chapter 3. Grace Vickerman persists with these practices because she believes that the children ‘learn so much’ and as a contribution to ‘developing a sustainable future for all’. The headteachers at the case-study schools shared this belief that ‘useful work’ has an educational value, but they also insisted on its real practical value in the present life of the community—a utilitarian emphasis which is hard to find amongst progressive contemporary schools.

In spite of this overall direction of travel, there are contemporary examples of experimental schools, communities and families with an ethos of ‘useful work’ which is similar to the case-study schools. Paideia, a contemporary anarchist school in Spain, emphasises the value of ‘responsabilidad’ alongside more libertarian values and insists on ‘collective work’ as part of the timetable—contrasting this practice with children’s home lives, claiming that during the summer holidays, the children have ‘lost autonomy’ because parents do everything for them and ‘they have forgotten what needs doing’.

At Kissori School in Germany, pupils help with the daily job of cleaning the classrooms and can spend Wednesday afternoons helping the caretaker with the more time-consuming tasks of looking after the school and its grounds. The high status of the caretaker at the school, as reflected in his leadership role in their trip to visit Wilderness Wood, also reveals a counter-cultural valuing of the work of looking after the physical fabric.

An ethos of pupil responsibility for everyday tasks and a valuing of manual work was noticeable in the approach of Kissori adults and young people when they came to camp at Wilderness Wood in summer 2016, 2017 and 2018. They shared many aspects of ‘useful work’, including cooking and chopping fire-wood, as shown in Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Figure 6.1 shows the students working very comfortably alongside a teacher and adult volunteer to prepare the evening meal together. As in some photographs of the case-study schools, it is difficult to distinguish pupil and

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34 Grace and Grant Vickerman, headteacher and caretaker of Ashurst Farm and Trefoil School, interviewed 29 August 2018.
staff as all are engaged in the same purpose and activity alongside each other. In spite of my theoretical enthusiasm for this kind of pupil involvement, I found myself surprised, even challenged, when the teacher sent a pupil to sort out the finances and rubbish disposal with me – my knee-jerk response that this is not work for teenagers, reflecting the wider context in which this kind of responsibility is not often given to young people.\(^{38}\)

The practice of ‘useful work’, as an integral part of a daily or weekly rhythm for young people, still exists in therapeutic communities such as The Mount, Camphill for young people with learning disabilities and Wilderness Camp for young people with behavioural problems. My first impression on arriving at The Mount on a weekday mid-morning was of students and co-workers out and about looking after the grounds together before gathering for a coffee break back in the main building together. The founder, Gill Baron, confirmed that they do the cleaning and gardening work themselves.\(^{39}\) At Wilderness Camp, the information leaflet claims that ‘camping routines such as raking trails, cleaning lanterns, cutting firewood and campfire cooking provide a structure to each day’.\(^{40}\) In a written account of the aims and values of the camps, the staff explicitly connects these ideas to L.B. Sharp’s Wilderness Camps in America in the 1950s and the ‘therapeutic community model’ in the UK citing David Wills’ Hawkspur Camp.\(^{41}\)

Outside of formal educational settings, the practice of ‘useful work’ for young people can continue – in some ways more freely. Amongst the growing numbers of home-educated young people in the UK,\(^{42}\) a proportion may spend considerable time helping parents or other adults with ‘useful work’, depending on the family and community contexts within which they are growing up. It can be part of the ‘curriculum’ of the day, while at school pupils’ time is taken up with ‘lessons’ or ‘break’ time. For example, home educated Bonnie, aged 14, Pippa, aged 11 and Ruby aged 9,\(^{43}\) describe how their parents give them freedom about many activities but insist that they help out with looking after the house so that their ‘home’ days

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\(^{39}\) Charkin, E., notes on tour of The Mount Camphill with Gill Baron 10 May 2018.

\(^{40}\) Promotional leaflet about Comeragh Wilderness Camp, sent to author in September 2014.

\(^{41}\) ‘Description of Comeragh Wilderness Camp Ltd’, document describing aims and methods, emailed to Emily Charkin 1 October 2014.

\(^{42}\) c.40,000 according to Education Otherwise, [https://www.educationotherwise.org/index.php/what-is-he](https://www.educationotherwise.org/index.php/what-is-he), last accessed 7 February 2020; c.50,000 according to BBC news article, 26 April 2018: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-42624220](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-42624220), last accessed 7 February 2020.

\(^{43}\) Bonnie, Pippa and Ruby, interviewed 27 February 2020.
often include a mixture of studying and practical tasks, such as Maths and cleaning out the guinea pigs or English and hoovering the stairs. Evan, aged 12, home-educated all his life, described how he and his siblings help with looking after the tiny home which he built with his father. In our conversation, he seemed to take ‘useful work’ for granted, revealing in itself, but on being asked about it reflected that he had ‘grown up doing that’.44

When home-educating families gather together, the young people are also more likely to help with the mechanics of looking after the spaces which they use, because the gatherings often occur outside of an institutional infrastructure with cleaners and maintenance staff. Even in slightly more formalised group settings for home-educated children such as A Place to Grow, a three-day per week children’s community, maintenance of the space is an important aspect of the structure of the day for the young people. In fact, the only fixed points of the day at A Place to Grow, which was otherwise child-led and play-orientated with no formal lessons, were the morning meeting and clearing up spaces after lunch and at the end of the day45 – reminiscent of accounts of Kilquhanity, in which the weekly meeting and ‘useful work’ are cited as the only regular and compulsory structure to their days.

The involvement of young people in outdoor maintenance and stewardship work also persists outside of formal institutions in land-based community projects such as Taliesin Wood,46 Embercombe Farm47 and Cherry Wood Project.48 The development of young people is, as John Aitkenhead wrote about the farm at Kilquhanity, ‘incidental’49 and the focus instead is stewardship of the land and the development of community. When my family and I attended working weekends at Embercombe and Cherry Wood Project, we were struck by the unusual opportunity for children to be around the work of looking after the land and the associated mixed-age meeting and meals.50 However, it is revealing that since our visits in 2009 and 2010 to Embercome, the invitation to families has been re-branded from ‘working weekends’ to ‘wilding weekends’ while Cherry Wood Project is being

44 Evan, interviewed 29 October 2018.
developed into a glamping site, perhaps reflecting a wider direction of travel towards ‘wilding’ projects,\textsuperscript{51} nature-connection and retreat experiences for individuals over ‘useful work’ for the community and stewardship of the land.

At Wilderness Wood, which acts as both a land-based community project and a centre for home-educating families, my family and I experiment with including ‘useful work’ as part of what we schedule, do and document – rather than doing the work ourselves or sub-contracting this aspect of the experience. Figures 6.1 to 6.4 give a flavour of adults and young people engaged in different ‘useful work’ at Wilderness Wood, in some ways similar to the case-study schools. The images also capture differences in terms of the involvement of families and a wider public. Figure 6.3 shows a family working together; the parents thanked us enthusiastically for what they perceived as a valuable and positive opportunity to work together as a family.\textsuperscript{52} Figure 6.4 shows two girls who were public visitors to the wood. They saw the adult getting on with the job and spontaneously offered to help, in spite of not being signed-up members of the community which would benefit from the work. These examples suggest the potential wider relevance and appeal of the practices and ideals of ‘useful work’ to less cloistered communities than boarding schools and to family groupings as well as teacher and pupils.

At our annual week-long summer working party, I schedule ‘useful work’ before ‘project work’ but it is hard to establish and insist on the routine, and it often falls to the adult organisers instead – perhaps we need a ‘useful work boss’ like Kilquhanity.\textsuperscript{53} The examples of how difficulties and challenges relating to ‘useful work’ were navigated at the schools has encouraged me to try to raise these issues at our morning meetings so that the tensions are resolved or accepted but, at least, do not become completely invisible.\textsuperscript{54} The experiences at the case-study schools strengthen my resolve in very practical ways; for example, the account of the boy at Wennington, whose job was to clean the toilets every day, challenged me to ask a 15-year old boy on a week-long residential working party whether he would clean

\textsuperscript{52} Wilderness Wood Visitor Book, October 2016.
the shared toilets each morning – he appeared to do the job willingly; I described it as a ‘breakthrough’ in my journal – reflecting that this is not usual practice.  

Figure 6.1: Kissori pupils and teacher prepare lunch for the Wilderness Wood team and fellow students with volunteer chef, June 2017.

Figure 6.2: Kissori pupil chops firewood as an optional extra activity, July 2016, photography by Beth Mercer.

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In spite of a context in which manual work has less economic significance, ‘useful work’ has continuing value for young people in terms of developing competence, confidence and a sense of belonging: Evan declared that he ‘like[s] helping’; a volunteer at Wilderness Wood wrote about her experiences that ‘hard graft=a happy heart’; a parent of children at Wilderness Wood Friday Club called it ‘child labour at its best’; a 12-year old boy who had never washed up before, admitted that it

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56 Evan, interviewed on 29 October 2018.
58 Katy Fone, email 18 November 2019, relating to Friday Club activities on 15 November 2019.
was ‘quite fun’,\textsuperscript{59} and an 11 year old boy expressed disappointment on realising that he was at a celebration party rather than a working party as he claimed he liked ‘being useful’.\textsuperscript{60} Kissori pupils opt for log-splitting over studying and take clear pride in their growing strength and the growing pile of logs to be used by the community around the woodland, as suggested by the commitment apparent in Figure 6.2. On the other hand, an absence of ‘useful work’ for contemporary young people is perceived as a negative development. For example, Steve Bateman, pupil at Kilquhanity in the 1960s, compares his own practical competence, learnt at Kilquhanity, with his son’s ‘helplessness’ because he ‘doesn’t know how to fix’ practical things in his flat.\textsuperscript{61}

As well as benefits to individual young people, ‘useful work’ in the present, as at the case-study schools, appears to strengthen relationships between adults and children as it creates the opportunity to be alongside each other in a constructive and companionable way. Rebanks describes the benefit to family life, when he claims that ‘working makes the food and family times later in the day more meaningful’.\textsuperscript{62} At Wilderness Wood I have found that it is a good way for adults, who are not parents or teachers, to develop positive relationships with young people. In my own personal experience, I have found that ‘stacking [logs] and chatting’\textsuperscript{63} creates a companionable and non-hierarchical atmosphere conducive to free-flowing conversation. Dan Morrish, my husband, has also observed the satisfaction of working with young children and their parents on clearing and reseeding a public area – a relatively simple task which allows him to work companionably alongside the mixed-age volunteers.\textsuperscript{64} This kind of simple and ‘useful work’ gives the young person a more equal status to the adult, as a fellow member of the wood, rather than primarily a pupil or a child – as evoked in Figures 6.3 and 6.4.

The experience of manual maintenance also contributes to a more positive relationship with the community and physical environment. Jake Reed, who is responsible for working on maintenance with volunteers of all ages at Wilderness

\textsuperscript{60} Charkin, E., unpublished journal, 3 May 2018.
\textsuperscript{61} Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
\textsuperscript{63} Charkin, E., unpublished journal, 7 February 2015.
\textsuperscript{64} Charkin, E., unpublished journal, 5 April 2019.
Wood, observes that ‘I feel cleaning and maintaining spaces can be extremely beneficial for encouraging a good relationship with the place itself’; this attitude supports Crawford’s argument that the practices of maintenance and repair are also an ‘ethic’ which makes our world ‘intelligible, so we can be responsible for it’. We certainly notice that young people who are part of our mixed-age working parties, even if they sometimes resist or challenge involvement in menial tasks, seem to experience a greater sense of respect for the environment and belonging in the community than those who are only involved with educational or play activities at the wood, as reflected in less vandalism and more regular voluntary attendance at meetings and celebrations.

At a workshop to discuss ‘useful work’ at Wilderness Wood, the mixed-age, but mainly adult, participants expressed the dilemma that, in spite of the benefits of involvement in manual work, it is ‘problematic’ to compel children because they are potentially ‘missing out’ on more enjoyable ‘opportunities’. Visitors to Wilderness Wood, who see children helping out, often joke about the revival of ‘child labour’ – hard to know if they think that is a good thing or not – reflecting a wider ambivalence in society about young people and work, which also emerged in pupil reflections on ‘useful work’ at the case-study schools. While recognising the validity of these tensions and the difficulties of comparisons across time and space, it seems that in the contemporary Western context, it is often the opportunities for ‘useful work’ that are in danger of being ‘missed out on’.

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65 Jake Reed, born 1990, written reflections at discussion about ‘useful work’ at Wilderness Wood 7 October 2017.
‘Purposeful and useful’: young people’s experiences of craft work in the present

A recent news article drew attention to the effects of reduced manual competence amongst young people with headlines about the professor of surgical education at Imperial College, London’s complaint that ‘students might have high academic grades but cannot cut or sew’. In Jared Diamond’s populist anthropological *The World Until Yesterday* (2012) he claims that American children are ‘less creative’ than children from Mozambique, partly because they are ‘deprived’ of the ‘educational value’ of ‘designing and making their own toys’. He illustrates his point with the simplistic but resonant contrasting images of a group of children in a village in Mozambique who have made their own toy cars with a Western girl on her own surrounded by shop-bought toys, Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5: from *The World Until Yesterday*.  

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69 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.  
72 Diamond (2012), 180, plate 18.  
73 Diamond (2012), 180, plates 17 and 18.  
74 Diamond (2012), 180, plates 17 and 18.
Chapter 4 explored how in the twentieth century, even in progressive schools, workshops were usually a ‘side-show’.  

Today most workshops could not even be called a ‘side-show’ – let alone the buzzing workshops at the centre of school life, depicted at the case-study schools in Chapter 4. John Macbeth, Design and Technology teacher at a state secondary school in East Sussex, argues that workshops in all schools have been ‘down-graded’, with schools getting rid of woodworking tools such as lathes and chisels as part of a wider marginalising of manual subjects.  

The evolving name of the school subject, which takes place in contemporary schools, tells its own story: ‘craft, design and technology’ has now been replaced by ‘Design and Technology’. John Macbeth suggests that ‘nothing gets called craft’ as a ‘conscious decision to be taken more seriously’ since ‘craft’ is associated with primary school ‘cutting and sticking’.  

John Russell, ex-pupil of Bedales and timber-framer, also observes that the manual aspect of school Design and Technology is now minimal with craft becoming a ‘paper exercise’ due to the cost and perceived risks of making things.  

Richard Sennett argues that this devaluing of craft is not new and that ‘western civilization has had a deep-rooted trouble in recognizing and encouraging the impulse of craftsmanship’. This ‘trouble’ has played out in the History of Education over the past century, culminating in the 1990 National Curriculum in which the ‘literary and academic again...dominated over the manual and practical’.  

Outside of schools, it can be argued that there is something of a craft revival, reflected in a proliferation of TV programmes and books about craft – both ‘how to’ and more philosophical defences such as Sennett's *The Craftsman* (2008) and Peter Korn's *Why We Make Things and Why it Matters* (2013). On the ground, this revival is manifest not only in rural enterprises and communities but also in the urban, artisan warehouses of Hoxton, Hackney and Shoreditch in London. Oliver Lowenstein, editor of *Fourth Door Review* and leading member of *Making Lewes*, identifies the ‘roots’ of what he calls the ‘current maker culture’ as ‘The Seventies
and Eighties alternative culture...self-build, community architecture, co-ops...which itself stood on the shoulders of the handicraft orientated arts and crafts movement'.

The case-study schools, as described in Chapters 4 and 5, shared ideas and practices with these ‘roots’.

However, this contemporary craft revival is very different from these ‘roots’. In some ways, this craft revival reflects a more individualistic and consumerist culture – with bite-sized one-off workshops, expensive craft markets and pre-packaged throw-away craft kits. There is also a strong element of nostalgia in the movement. For example, Grayson Perry’s high-profile exhibition in 2011 in The British Museum, entitled, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, was positioned as a celebration of and ‘memorial to makers and builders’. At Wilderness Wood, we experience this revival in terms of the popularity of craft activities such as one-day workshops and demonstrations at Easter and Christmas. However, this apparent revival can feel like nostalgic ‘wallpaper’ or a ‘theme park’ for visitors who spend their real lives in front of computers – similar to the ‘memorial’ intention of Grayson Perry’s exhibition. John Russell questions whether the contemporary craft revival translates into the experience of young people and argues that it represents a kind of ‘privatisation’ of craft education. Even when young people are part of this craft revival, its meanings have mainly continued in the direction described in Chapter 4, towards craft as a form of individual creativity or self-development, as Peter Korn calls it, a ‘vehicle for discovery and self-transformation’ rather than a practical contribution towards meeting the needs of the community. I have experienced that children and their parents can be quite insistent on taking home whatever they make rather than contributing it to a collective endeavour.

Even in progressive schools with a tradition of craft work, such as King Alfred School, the emphasis has shifted to ‘creativity’ and ‘design’ rather than ‘craft’. For example, the prospectus claims that ‘we place a strong emphasis on creative and

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84 Lowenstein (2017), 125.
active learning’. Bedales continues to place a rhetorical emphasis on the process of ‘making’; Peter Clegg, ex-pupil and architect, describes it as ‘a vital part of their educational offer’. In describing the ‘Bedales difference’ on the ‘about us’ section of their website, aim two of five is: ‘to enable students’ talents to develop through doing and making’. ‘Head, heart, hand’ has been the slogan since its founding in 1893 – and still is. At the opening of a new Arts and Design building in June 2016, the chair of governors called it part of a ‘wonderful continuum of arts and crafts which is deeply engrained in the middle of Bedales’. However, it is revealing that the name of the new building does not mention ‘craft’, and the idea of ‘making’ as ‘educational offer’ suggests a narrow focus on the development of the individual child rather than any notion of a purposeful contribution to the community of the school.

At Michael Hall Steiner School, there is a continuing focus on manual skills and craft work, as reflected in the images on the home-page of their website and references to a ‘craft programme’. This publicity material is reinforced by testimony from an ex-pupil describing how university friends ‘cannot believe I have learnt joinery, basket-making, silver-smithing’. A parent reflects on how the crafts at Michael Hall are valued like ‘maths’, and that there is an emphasis on the creative work of the hand, against the ‘tendency for everything to be intellectual’. As at Bedales, and in contrast to the case-study schools, the justification for this valuing of craft activity is framed in abstracted language about the development of the individual child: for example, the website claims that ‘working with the hands...helps to bring about a strengthening of the will and of the capacity for logical thinking...and social awareness’. The approach to craft education is also based on a strict Steiner aesthetic, compared to the impression of a more varied and less purist approach of the case-study schools, where aesthetics were influenced by the staff and pupils themselves.

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93 www.michaelhall.co.uk, last accessed 3 April 2019.
95 Interview with two parents, anonymous, who have been involved with Michael Hall School since the late 1980s to 2017 on 5 November 2018.
96 http://www.michaelhall.co.uk/art, last accessed 3 April 2019.
Even the Woodcraft Folk, founded in 1925 to change the world through co-educational camping, hiking, ritual and handicraft, explains almost defensively in their most recent publicity leaflet that ‘we don’t craft much out of wood’ indicating a significant shift of emphasis since the organisation was founded and named. In the recently published history of the organisation, Harper notes that ‘the handcraftsmanship evident in early Woodcraft Folk artefacts is gone, replaced by more general creative work’. He claims that this shift stems from ‘fundamental pragmatism which has moved with the times’. This shift with the times is reflected in the language of the recent leaflet which claims that instead of woodcraft, ‘we create...and develop confidence through self-expression’.

In spite of this overall tendency towards a more individualistic craft-for-creativity, a ‘thread’ of discourse, projects and spaces persists where craft has a wider social value. Richard Sennett’s account of The Craftsman challenges contemporary trends; for example, he claims that ‘creativity appears as little as possible’ in his book and instead he seeks to revive the idea from the early Greeks of craft as a practice of ‘good work’ for the ‘collective good’. Sarah Corbett, founder of the recently established, Craftivist Collective, also seeks to restore a political edge to craft in her recent book, positioning craft as ‘the art of gentle protest’.

In practice, in the contemporary context, the ‘thread’ of a vibrant workshop culture and craft with a community purpose is more likely to be found outside of schools in therapeutic and land-based communities, street workshops and temporary creative gatherings such as festivals and markets. In therapeutic communities, craft spaces and activities are often central. At Running Deer School for children who struggle in mainstream education, arts and crafts are part of the ‘core curriculum’ and images of children working with their hands dominate the website. At The Mount Camphill Community, workshops rather than classrooms are the key spaces and craft activities rather than lessons form the structure of the students’ days. A leaflet about the community claims that ‘engaging in practical activities such as traditional

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97 ‘Woodcraft Folk, the First 90 years’ (2015), leaflet, Woodcraft Folk Archive, UCL Institute of Education.
100 ‘Woodcraft Folk, the First 90 years’ (2015), leaflet, Woodcraft Folk Archive, Institute of Education.
crafts is a key feature of education at The Mount' because of its ‘therapeutic potential and for developing valuable transferable skills’. However, its founder Gill Baron mitigates the instrumental language of the leaflet by claiming that craft activities are closely integrated with the present life and values of the community – students make things for use by the community or for selling at craft markets as a way to raise funds for the community. The time, space and appreciation of craft work is reminiscent of the case-study schools, even if, as described above in relation to Steiner Schools, there is a more top-down approach to what and how things are made as part of a specific Steiner aesthetic.

A community workshop for young people, ‘El Warcha’, set up in Tunis by architect Benjamin Perrot, demonstrates the potential wider relevance of craft spaces and activities for young people in a contemporary urban context. The aims and values of El Warcha are similar to the case-study schools in terms of valuing the work of the hand and collaborative creative relationships between adults and children, for example, Benjamin describes how ‘we’re working together to produce something’. However, there are also significant differences of purpose and ethos. Benjamin rejects the traditions and techniques of ‘fiddly carpentry’ and suggests that it has been positive for the project that no professional carpenters have been involved ‘so that no one has the answer’. He describes its purpose instead as giving the young people opportunities for ‘fun’ and to do something ‘constructive’. He argues for the benefit of cheap materials which are ‘good for experimentation’, evoking the spirit of the adventure playground movement and the hut-building culture at the case-study schools rather than the more disciplined space and master-apprentice relationships of the workshop at the schools.

El Warcha also has a stronger relationship than the case-study schools with the wider community around it. A short film about its work shows the way in which its craft activity spills out on to the streets of the city. This visibility has led to commissions for street furniture and an art-room in a state school so that the older teenagers can start to be paid for the work that they do and see their work in the

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105 Leaflet about ‘The Mount Camphill Community’.
106 Charkin, E., notes on tour of The Mount Camphill with Gill Baron 10 May 2018.
107 Benjamin Perrot, interviewed 18 May 2018.
public domain. This connection to a wider social and economic context brings tensions but also offers a real-life dimension which was perhaps missing from the workshops in the case-study schools which served, at most, the immediate closed community of the school rather than the wider geographical community.

At Wilderness Wood, I have found that craft-for-community becomes possible as people become more involved in the wood through regular groups or working parties. Their sense of belonging means that they are motivated to contribute the results of their craft work to that community, for example, willingly helping to make decorations or furniture for community spaces, as suggested by Figures 6.7 and 6.8 where young members of the wood make thank-you presents for a community celebration and wooden stools for the new Meeting House space.\textsuperscript{111} As at the case-study schools, the craft activity becomes an expression of a feeling of belonging as well as contributing to that feeling. I have also observed that, as at the case-study schools, it is possible for craft work to be experienced as both ‘for-community’ and ‘for-creativity’ at the same time with a focus on purpose and utility enhancing the creative process for the individual. For example, Dan and I recently set a project for the regular Friday Club group to make decorative tiles for the new Bathhouse structure at the wood. The brief felt quite prescriptive as each pair of children had a very specific scene to depict on their clay tile. We wondered if the tight brief might undermine the children’s creativity and motivation about the project. But the enthusiasm of the young people was high – particularly from those who do not usually self-define as artistic or creative – and the sense of a wider purpose seemed to increase rather than diminish their engagement.\textsuperscript{112}

Craft work at the wood also fosters various different kinds of relationships between adults and children, as uncovered at the case-study schools. To some extent, Wilderness Wood hosts the traditional passing on of craft knowledge from an adult expert to a child novice, with craft demonstrations and craft workshops led by adult experts.\textsuperscript{113} Adult members of the wood often volunteer to share their skills and adopt a kind of ‘elder’ or ‘grandparent’ relationship towards the children and teenagers, as shown in Figure 6.6. However, young people can usually choose which adult they want to work with and on which activity, so that although, in some

\textsuperscript{112} Charkin, E., unpublished journal, 5 June 2019.
\textsuperscript{113} www.wildernesswood.org/whatson, last accessed 9 October 2019.
ways, a traditional teaching dynamic, it is one which the young people choose to engage with, as at the case-study schools, where pupils 'gravitated' towards certain adults, spaces and activities. Craft activity also allows for positive collaborations between older and younger members of the wood. For example, the adult craft group, which meets regularly on Friday mornings in the cafe, has worked with Friday Club children to make blankets and cushions for the shared space of the cafe. This activity allows for the ‘incidental’ sharing of skills but also new ideas and energy for the adult group, as suggested in Nina Morrish and Rose Graham’s written account of how the group started as ‘knit and knatter’, but has become more inclusive and diverse: ‘now all different women come and do different things’.114

Craft activity also allows for a reversal of the traditional adult-child hierarchy. At Wilderness Wood, I have observed that often the child is more expert than the adult; for example, during a secondary school Enrichment Week, an experienced 14 year old boy demonstrated blacksmithing to fellow-pupils, teachers and cafe users115 and during our working parties, young people, who have mastered a particular skill or tool, pass on their skill to new adult volunteers.116 Young people also teach other young people or adults in more formal learning situations, for example, at Friday Club over summer 2018, we organised a series of workshops at which young people taught their craft skills to others in the mixed-age group.117 Jake Keen, in his *Teacher’s Guide to Ancient Technology* (1996) also draws attention to this aspect of craft activity, for example in Figure 6.5, the boy is positioned as an ‘expert’ demonstrating at a fayre118 and the teacher who led the project reflects on the value of unsettling the usual hierarchy of adult teacher and child learner: ‘It is refreshing for pupil, parents and teachers to be able to share learning experiences on a level footing and with equal interest’ 119

In some situations, craft activity allows the whole notion of ‘expert’ to be challenged; for example, Kent Thodsen who leads green-woodworking groups at Wilderness Wood, explicitly positions his role as to work alongside the young people to ‘support and guide each individual to work on their own creation – offering help when

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needed’. At other times, adults and children are simply working together on how to make a needed item, for example in Figure 6.8, no one was an expert on making wooden stools and the group worked it out together over a number of sessions. The way in which craft activity generates these different ways for adults and young people to work together is similar to the case-study schools and has ongoing value.

Figure 6.6: adult volunteer showing the Friday Club children at Wilderness Wood how to weave, 2016.

Figure 6.7: children making baskets with a local artisan as thank-you presents for the annual May Day party at Wilderness Wood, April 2017.

Figure 6.8: adults and children working out how to make stools for The Meeting House at Wilderness Wood, 2017.

Figure 6.9: pupil-expert, 1996.\textsuperscript{121}

In our high-tech era, craft is often positioned, as by the contemporary architect Peter Clegg, as ‘self-indulgent and romantic’ with an assumption ‘the old hand/eye connectivity isn’t absolutely necessary....except you might say for therapeutic reasons’. Sam Booth, ex-pupil of Kilquhanity and owner of a contemporary design-and-build studio, argues that schools should no longer justify craft on the basis of its practical or vocational value, but ‘as a reason for getting up in the morning’ and for ‘the joy of I did that’. John Russell echoes this position, claiming the value of craft work as part of a ‘search for meaning’. The examples in this research support these existential arguments for the value of craft – but they also show that there is an ongoing value to craft work, as Sam Booth also acknowledges, as part of being ‘purposeful and useful’ to the community within which the craft is created.

‘Building real things’: young people as builders in the present

Contemporary school construction in the West rarely involves young people, in fact the building site is usually out-of-bounds, as suggested by the omni-present sign, Figure 6.10. There has been substantial investment in new school buildings over the past two decades, in the state sector, under the ‘Building Schools for the Future’ initiative (2004-10) and, since then, privately funded flagship buildings for new or reinventing Academy schools. There has also been much written and spoken, in both the worlds of architecture and education, about the idea of young people’s participation in the creation of these new buildings. For example, in an article entitled, ‘Schools for the twenty-first century: school design and educational transformation’ (2011), architectural researchers claim that ‘user participation...has been given much consideration and is increasingly common in practice’. However, the realities of the modern construction process, as well as changing attitudes towards young people and work, have made hands-on involvement in the building process almost unimaginable. John Horton and Peter Kraftl have shown

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123 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
125 Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
how ‘transformational’ discourse has translated, at most, into consultation methods which are ‘essentially peripheral’\textsuperscript{128} to the design process.

The recent ‘Designing with Children’\textsuperscript{129} research programme is, in some ways, further evidence of Horton and Kraftl’s critique, with an emphasis on ‘design dialogue’ and ‘children’s rights’\textsuperscript{130} rather than practical participation. The researchers are sympathetic to the importance of ‘non-verbal, embodied moments of collaboration and creation’\textsuperscript{131} but their language is abstracted and reflects a scarcity of real examples of young people getting involved in the physical work of building their own schools in their mapping of projects across the UK.\textsuperscript{132} A recent newsletter about major construction work at Uckfield College is also symptomatic: it shows a photograph of a school group posing with a spade, described as the ‘ceremony before the contractors started the digging’.\textsuperscript{133} This image and commentary, as shown in Figure 6.11, reflects an ideal of pupil participation. However, the pupils’ smart school uniform and gleaming singular spade are testimony to the purely ceremonial nature of this ideal.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{site-safety-sign.png}
\caption{SITE SAFETY

\textbf{Dangerous site}

- Hard hats, boots and hi visibility vests must be worn
- All visitors to this site must report to site office
- No unauthorised access
- Children must not play on this site}
\end{figure}

Figure 6.10: standard building site sign forbids access to children.

\textsuperscript{129} http://designingwithchildren.net/about, last accessed 23 October 2018.
\textsuperscript{131} http://designingwithchildren.net/about, last accessed 23 October 2018.
\textsuperscript{132} Uckfield College newsletter ‘Essential College Information’ 1 March 2019.
Opportunities for young people in mainstream schools to get involved in physical construction are mainly found as part of one-off projects, often related to researching and experiencing Ancient Technology. For example, Jake Keen, teacher, created a number of ambitious full-scale buildings with middle school pupils in Dorset in the 1980s, which have developed into an Ancient Technology Centre used today for educational visits by local schools and other groups. At Moulsecoomb Primary School in Brighton, craft practitioners and pupils have built various structures in the school play area: an Iron Age Round House and Saxon House in 2007, a Neolithic House in 2011, an Anderson shelter in 2012 and a Medieval House in 2014. Figures 6.12 and 6.13 show children and adults working alongside each other on these projects. In some ways, these images evoke projects at the case-study schools – practical work, simple structures, adults and children working together. Keen’s enthusiastic leadership and valuing of ‘first-hand experience’, ‘practical scientific enquiry’ and ‘self-reliance' through ‘enabling them to explore technology they can build, repair, fully understand and use’ is similar to the language and ethos of adults at the case-study schools, as described in Chapters 4 and 5.

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134 Uckfield College newsletter ‘Essential College Information’ 1 March 2019.
137 Keen (1996), 3.
However, these examples of contemporary construction projects also have a very different kind of intention and feel from the case-study projects. For example, Keen elaborates an educational case for involving young people in these kinds of projects, claiming that it provides a ‘relevant context for a wider variety of curriculum areas’ and as a ‘cross-curricular’ project to ‘stimulate interest in a variety of disciplines’. His pamphlet ends with a list of ways in which this work contributes to the different curriculum subjects. This emphasis may reflect the educational interest of his target reader, rather than the author’s own motivations and values, but gives an insight into the kind of developmental justification needed for doing these kinds of projects in the contemporary educational climate. Similarly, the Moulsecoomb Primary School website positions the structures as the ‘perfect venue for outdoor learning’. By contrast, at the case-study schools, the research suggests that projects emerged primarily from the enthusiasm of individuals and the needs of the community, rather than as part of learning or curriculum objectives.

Figure 6.12: Moulsecoomb Primary School building.

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139 Keen (1966), 5.
142 Photograph of Moulsecoomb project, emailed by Lucy Rayner January 2017.
Even at progressive schools which pride themselves on being hands-on and experiential, this kind of construction activity has become increasingly rare or rarified. At Bedales, in the opening speech about the Arts and Design building completed in 2016, there were claims about pupil involvement, but the style of building is high-budget, professional and unlikely to be conducive to pupil participation;\textsuperscript{144} John Russell led a construction project of a memorial pavilion at the school (c.2010) with some involvement of pupils but found that participation felt ‘tokenistic’ and more about the photo opportunities than meaningful experiences for the pupils or the project.\textsuperscript{145} Kraftl describes the designing and building of a Steiner School in Wales in the 1990s by contemporary advocate of self-build, Christopher Day, as an ‘ideal building for childhood’.\textsuperscript{146} And yet, Kraftl admits that Day’s description of the process in \textit{Building with Heart}\textsuperscript{147} is ‘idealised’ and that ‘almost all the construction work was undertaken by adults for children’.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{144} Short video of opening ceremony of art and design building on 25 June 2016: https://www.bedales.org.uk/home/about-bedales/bedales-estate/art-design-building
\textsuperscript{145} John Russell, interviewed 29 January 2020.
The annual ‘Village Project’ at the progressive King Alfred’s School (1898-) involves young people in building their own huts, cooking their own food on fire, choosing from a range of traditional crafts and creating their own rules. In many ways this ‘village project’ appears similar to the approaches and ideas practised at the case-study schools. However, there are important differences. These activities are self-consciously positioned outside of the usual school day in a ‘screened off settlement’ where the adults ‘ring-fence a place and time...freed from the normal demands of school’. The huts are built ‘through a process that is facilitated by staff’ as part of ‘fostering creativity’. The aims are described as ‘learning’ how to build a community – ‘they learn about everything needed to build a community’. This description is symptomatic of a wider cultural change where the emphasis has shifted to learning how to build a community rather than actually building one.

In spite of this direction of travel, ex-pupils of the case-study schools, draw attention to the continuing influence of this self-build practice in their own lives and its influence on their children’s and even grandchildren’s lives; for example, Stuart, pupil at Wennington 1952-8, proudly tells the group that his son makes camper vans, influenced by the ‘tradition’; and Tim Thody, ex-pupil of Wennington, describes how his granddaughter is involved with the ‘tiny homes’ movement and has built her own mobile van to make food for the local community.

In wider society, a continuing ‘thread’ of mixed-age community self-build ideas and projects offers young people the opportunity to participate in constructing buildings – for real. In 1993, the architect, Peter Hübner won a competition for the building of.

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150 de Brett (2014), 70.
151 de Brett (2014), 69.
152 Pupil testimony, [https://www.kingalfred.org.uk/2016/06/06/reflections-on-the-village-project-2016/](https://www.kingalfred.org.uk/2016/06/06/reflections-on-the-village-project-2016/), last accessed at 10 February 2020.
153 de Brett (2014), 73.
154 Notes on visit by Emily Charkin 12 September 2018.
155 Stuart, during group discussion, Wennington Archive Week 14 May 2013.
156 Tim Thody, email to Emily Charkin 8 February 2016; [https://nidulari.com/about/](https://nidulari.com/about/), last accessed 8 February 2020.
Gelsenkirchen school in Germany through a story about pupil self-build, as Blundell Jones calls it, 'shift[ing] the emphasis radically towards process'. During a school re-building project in Haiti after the earthquakes in 2009, an adult volunteer describes the hands-on and voluntary participation of the prospective pupils: ‘they leapt at the chance to get involved’. In practice in the UK, this kind of community self-build seems to occur more often in the pioneering stages of creating small, alternative schools or home-education groups with low-budgets and high levels of engagement by volunteers. A parent whose children attended a small and ‘perilous’ Steiner School in South London in the late 1980s, recalled helping to build new classrooms which were needed. He contrasted the ‘exciting’ feeling of ‘we created it’ and ‘community spirit’ with the more detached and passive experience of being a parent with children at the more established Michael Hall Steiner School. At A Place to Grow, participating families built the cargo net play area and the yurt meeting space.

In certain therapeutic settings, working with challenging young people, self-build is positioned as a central part of the experience. Comeragh writes in its publicity leaflet that ‘instead of a classroom, the group designs, builds and maintains their own campsite’. At Hillholt, Steve Donagain, the Chief Executive describes how ‘all the buildings at Hillholt were built by young people’. In particular, he cites the recent example of a group of 15 and 16 year olds from a school’s pupil referral unit, which came to work on a new workshop classroom for a day per week in 2015/16. The image of the project, Figure 6.14, is much more like a professional building team than images of pupils building at the case-study schools, where there were no hard hats or high visibility vests. This difference partly reflects a different photo culture but also stricter health and safety rules and a more structured and vocational approach in the contemporary project.

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158 Helen Butterworth, written account of rebuilding a school after the Haiti earthquake, emailed to Emily Charkin 12 January 2010.
159 Two anonymous parents of children at Steiner School in South London and Michael Hall from late 1980s-2010, interviewed 5 November 2018.
161 ‘Comeragh Wilderness Camp’, leaflet, undated but sent by the organisers to Emily Charkin in 2015.
162 Steve Donagain, talk at Community Woodlands Study Workshop, Wilderness Wood 9 October 2018.
Figure 6.14: a school referral group who built this new classroom workshop at Hillholt, 2015-16.

Figure 6.15: neither teacher nor parent – adult and child working together at Wilderness Wood, summer 2017.
At Wilderness Wood, and in previous projects, my husband, an architect and builder, and I have created opportunities for young people to get involved with many aspects of the construction of timber buildings, through mixed-age working parties for members of the wood and ‘enrichment’ projects for secondary schools. We have found that the children, from a surprisingly young age, are able to make meaningful contributions to the work. However, we have also found that there are many challenges with involving young people, some of which were experienced at the case-study schools. Dan, who leads the building projects, identifies closely with Richard Jones’ dark moments in trying to complete projects on his own while volunteers of all ages have disappeared off to play football. On a bad day, it feels uneconomic, dangerous and tokenistic – why would we do it? On a good day, it feels like the participating young people make the project worth doing and that this kind of creative collaboration is lifeblood for the community around the wood, as I have suggested about the case-study schools.

The experience of community self-build at Wilderness Wood, as at the case-study schools, creates different kinds of relationships between adults and children. Young people move from the passive role of being taught or looked after to being fellow volunteers alongside other adult volunteers. They learn from the more experienced adults around them, as shown in Figure 6.15, but rather than just formal instruction, they learn by doing, watching, listening and asking questions. Young people are also exposed to the ways in which adults work together on a collaborative project of this kind – talking, arguing, solving problems. This experience of a mixed-age team gives young people the possibility of learning from adults who might not be comfortable in the role of formal ‘teacher’ but certainly have skills, knowledge and attitudes to share with the children – something like the kind of relationship between John Swift and pupils at Wennington. Adults comment with surprise on how much they enjoy working with the children in this way; a carpenter with no formal teaching experience reflected that he ‘learnt a lot’ and ‘overcame some fears’ by leading a group of young people. Even for experienced teachers, construction projects can offer a different way to be alongside pupils. John Macbeth reflected that being outside of the classroom and working on real projects improved relationships

164 James Gallagher, group discussion 1 August 2014.
between him and the pupils based on different values and more tangible activities than the classroom: he claims that they saw that ‘I was a person’ and they gain more ‘respect for you because you can pick up something heavy’.165

The involvement of young people in building projects at Wilderness Wood also draws attention to some of the tensions and contradictions between child-centred and participatory practices, which emerged at the case-study schools. It appears that high levels of participation and feelings of ownership still occur within the context of strong adult leadership of projects. The purpose and work plan of the buildings at Wilderness Wood, as at the case-study schools, is set by adults – even if sometimes the projects are for the children, for example, play equipment. In spite of this adult leadership, we have found that the young people enjoy the involvement and collaboration and can be very motivated in helping on structures which they will not personally use, for example, older children helping with play equipment for younger children or parts of buildings which they may not use. One girl, aged nine, whispered to her father speaking on the phone to her mother: ‘Tell Mum we raised four frames’ about a kindergarten building that she would never attend.166 Even if it is not a structure that they will use, they seem to like that it is ‘real’ rather than just an educational exercise, as emphasised by a regular teenage volunteer.167

The enthusiasm of the young people at celebrations to open various new structures reflects their feeling of ownership and participation – even if they were just around the work rather than actively involved – reminiscent of Ed Booth’s, ex-pupil at Kilquhanity, image of the ‘one nail’ creating strong feelings of involvement. A parent of one of the Friday Club children reflects that ‘it’s great to feel part of something that’s being built’.168 Steve Donagain, at Hillholt, also testifies to the enthusiasm of participants and their families on completing a building, even within the context of the project being a staff-led ‘outdoor classroom’.169 He describes how the photograph shown in Figure 6.14 received a ‘huge amount of likes and shares due mainly to their family members having something positive to shout about in their child’s education’.170 At Moulsecoomb, Lucy Rayner claims that the building

165 Macbeth, J. interviewed at Uckfield College 18 October 2018.
168 Evaluation notes from meeting with Friday Club, summer 2015.
169 Steve Donagain, email to Emily Charkin 16 October 2018.
170 Steve Donagain, email to Emily Charkin 16 October 2018.
process had a ‘transformative effect’ in terms of ‘empowering’ the children and giving them pride in their school.\textsuperscript{171} As in the case of ‘useful work’, it seems that involvement leads to responsibility, reflecting Joe Benjamin’s findings at the adventure playgrounds in the post-war period.\textsuperscript{172} These contemporary examples, albeit often small and informal, suggest that the ‘thread’ of young people’s involvement in self-build projects persists and has value – in spite of many pressures to the contrary.

‘Deep into the woods’\textsuperscript{173}: young people building huts in the present

Child-initiated and unsupervised den- or hut-building in the woods is perhaps the most endangered of all the manual activities which were an important aspect of lives at the case-study schools. The historian, Riney-Kehrberg, has described how ‘by the [twentieth] century’s end, the vast majority [of children] no longer lived in close contact with the natural world...children became observers and visitors to natural environments’.\textsuperscript{174} The much-cited ‘Natural Childhood’ report from the National Trust (2012) explicitly supports Louv’s account that many children in the West are suffering from ‘nature deficit disorder’\textsuperscript{175} and repeats the findings of studies during the past decades: ‘that most youngsters play outdoors for less than an hour a day and that...climbing trees and building dens have been replaced by hours spent in front of screens in digital bedrooms’.\textsuperscript{176} This development has led to a plethora of adult-led interventions including Forest School and Nature Pedagogy. An article in The Guardian in 2014, suggested that the popularity of the Forest School movement is in part ‘a reaction against the contemporary testing culture’.\textsuperscript{177} However, its discourse of certification, professionalization and developmental goals is, in some ways, part of the same overall direction of travel, with a smattering of nostalgia for a rural childhood idyll of

\begin{thebibliography}{177}
\bibitem{173} Thaddeus, ‘Wo Wi Wo We’, \textit{Wild Times}, no 7, Winter 2017-Spring 2018, 29
\bibitem{176} Moss, S. (2012) \textit{Natural Childhood}, Report from the National Trust.
\end{thebibliography}
the past. These adult-led and supervised initiatives have a very different feel from the child-initiated hut-building at the case-study schools – they represent a ‘schoolification’ of outdoor activities with ‘nature’ as an ‘outdoor classroom’ in which young people can enhance their personal and academic development, as shown in this promotional email from Circle of Life: ‘Forest School sessions in the outdoors help children develop in so many ways! It improves health and fitness, language and concentration, social interactions and communication’. Within this ‘schooly’ discourse, researchers of childhood and Forest School position den-building as a ‘powerful pedagogical tool’ providing ‘developmental and educational advantages’ and in which the child requires ‘sensitive’ and ‘professional encouragement’ and ‘pedagogical approaches’.

Children not only spend less time in nature, but also have less time in which to play unsupervised. Unsupervised play has become unacceptable not only within schools and other child-centred institutions but also within wider society. The premise of the 2014 film What We Did On Our Holidays is the socially unacceptable and noteworthy situation of three children on their own on a beach. Tim Gill calls this phenomenon ‘the logic of containment’ and suggests that ‘benign neglect has all but disappeared from acceptable parenting practice’. He claims that over-protection of children ‘can lead to longer-term problems with mental health and well-being’ and he campaigns for more positive forms of risk assessment for outdoor activities. Marina Robb, while acknowledging the value of what is known amongst outdoor education practitioners as ‘wild play’, positions ‘safety’ as the absolute priority: the ‘key thing is keeping it safe...can’t allow people to hurt themselves...containment creates safety creates freedom’. Robb’s words support

179 Promotional email sent by Circle of Life 16 October 2018.
186 Gill (2010).
187 Marina Robb, interviewed 19 March 2018.
Furedi’s claim that ‘safety has become the fundamental value’ of contemporary Western parenting culture.

This emphasis on safety and the associated shift from child-initiated to adult-initiated activity is reflected in the provision of playgrounds, with a move towards safer and more elaborate versions of adventure playgrounds where the young people are invited to ‘use’ in fairly prescribed ways what has already been built and fixed. As Moore (2014) has suggested, contemporary playgrounds are ‘well-designed, mostly synthetic and extremely safe but are the antithesis of the adventure playground model’. Lowther Castle, a visitor attraction in the Lake District boasts a newly built ‘adventure playground’ which it claims is the ‘stuff of children’s dreams’ ‘built’ as a ‘wondersome architectural echo of Lowther Castle itself’. The elaborate structures designed by architects and built by contractors have nothing to do with the self-build urban adventure playgrounds or the kinds of structures which were built by pupils at the case-study schools in which the children – not professional architects – created any architectural ‘echo’ themselves.

However, the ethos and values of the post-war adventure playgrounds hang on by a ‘thread’. The Oasis Playground in South London encourages children to build temporary structures, even if the main structures are fixed and built by professional contractors. Joslin Rashleigh, play-worker, acknowledges that he helped the children by gathering materials and initiating den-building. However, he claims that when he went for his lunch-break, the children took over the project as their own – in fact started arguing between themselves about whose it was – reminiscent of the heated negotiations about ownership which occurred at Kilquhanity. A new playground called ‘The Land’ in Plas Maddock in Wales, set up by Claire Griffiths in 2012, overtly positions itself as, ‘close to the original adventure playgrounds that started in Denmark during the second world war’ and counter to some aspects of contemporary child culture. Claire claims that she ‘wanted to compensate for the lack of wild play and “adult-free” experiences’. She also has a counter-culture attitude towards safety – ‘better a broken bone than a broken spirit’.

190 Promotional leaflet about Lowther Castle, 2018.
191 Joslin Rashleigh, interviewed 18 April 2019.
Claire acknowledges that these kinds of projects have to sit outside of normal rules and are, in some ways, not part of the ‘real’ world: ‘The Land is fantastic but in an ideal world, there wouldn’t be a fence round it’. Her ambivalence about this separation reflects an ongoing dilemma for progressives, as described by Benjamin in the 1970s, that the creation of a ‘children’s ghetto’, albeit a wonderful adventure playground, to some extent ‘exacerbates the divorce of child from adult’. By contrast, the experiences of child-initiated self-build at the case-study schools were separate and yet overlapping with their ‘real’ lives – not divided by a ‘fence’.

At small progressive schools and home-educating groups, there is often an attempt to protect opportunities for young people to play and build their own spaces. At Trefoil the children often play amongst a collection of trees away from the main buildings and unsupervised by the staff, where they create their own mini-worlds from natural materials lying around. At A Place to Grow and The Garden, children spend much of their time playing outdoors in nearby wooded areas, a little distance away from adults, who are available if something serious goes wrong but do not otherwise interfere. At a weekly Forest School group for home-educated children at Wilderness Wood, the leader allows the children to go off and make their own dens. She sees her role in this as ‘keeping the parents busy’ and occasionally checking on the children but without them seeing her. She contrasts this opportunity with the school groups she works with where the children have to be ‘constantly supervised’.

In some progressive contexts, the adult reverence for den-building activity replaces the children’s own motivation. For example, Ed Booth suggests that the new tree houses which the Japanese children help to make during their week-long visits to Kilquhanity, represents a ‘pastiche’ of the pupil-initiated structures of their time at the school. When I visited the school in September 2016, my own children (at the time aged 11 and 8) enjoyed playing with the Japanese children in these treehouses.

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196 Notes in author’s journal ‘Project Life’ May 2013.
197 Mel Evans, interviewed 28 October 2018.
198 Mel Evans, interviewed 28 October 2018.
199 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
but there was no sense of ownership amongst those children – it was more like a piece of play equipment put there by a third party.\textsuperscript{200}

Adult support for self-initiated building projects can also lead to a new level of adult observation and interference, albeit with a supportive intention. Rowan Salim’s account (2018) of a ‘magical’\textsuperscript{201} self-initiated children’s building project at Free We Grow, where she works as an adult facilitator, reveals a new self-consciousness about the role of the adult. She describes how the children set to cleaning bricks. She criticises herself, as adult facilitator, for attempting to channel the children’s brick-cleaning energy into the creation of a raised bed for the garden of the school community. She celebrates the revival of the project when she learnt to ‘lay off’ and the children decided instead to build a house for themselves. And the happy ending of her account is ‘that [the children] even found a job for me’ in their project.\textsuperscript{202} Superficially, this description suggests a similar ethos to the case-study schools. However, the adult’s reverence for this activity as ‘magical’, her guilt at attempting to involve the children in wider school projects and her delight that they invited her into their project reveals a very different adult attitude from the case-study schools where adults left pupils to their own devices when they were hut-building and sought to involve them with their own projects and school community projects without feelings of guilt. This difference perhaps reflects a more confident and less relativistic framework of social and political values amongst the adults at the case-study schools.

Young people’s motivation to build their own spaces continues to bubble up outside of designated settings, through under-the-radar collaborations of groups of friends, such as Tallulah Booth’s creation of ‘Jamrock’ on a derelict space at the end of her street in Cambridge in 2012. Tallulah’s parents attended Kilquhanity and Tallulah has grown up with the Cambridge Woodcraft Folk as an important part of her life. During our interview, she claimed that she wishes she could have gone to a school like Kilquhanity.\textsuperscript{203} Her description of the Jamrock Site with ‘dense woodland’ and the process by which ‘the structure was rebuilt and rebuilt throughout the next

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{200} Notes on visit by author and family to Kilquhanity School, 29 September 2016.
\textsuperscript{202} Rowan Salim (2018).
\textsuperscript{203} Tallulah Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
\end{flushleft}
following years and never properly completed is evocative of the stories of the evolving hut structures at Kilquhanity. In this very different context, she brought some aspects of the ethos of Kilquhanity to an urban and public setting.

At Wilderness Wood, we found ourselves navigating these various tensions in relation to wild play and child-initiated hut-building. It feels impossible not to be part of the problem. On the one hand, families and schools welcome the relatively wild environment of the woodland. On the other hand, there is an anxiety about not being able to see what the children are doing and the inevitable hazards of a natural environment. On the one hand, we celebrate children’s play – our slogan is ‘where adults and children work and play’. But on the other hand, we also commodify and ‘schoolify’ play, with a designated play area and adult-led activities such as making fairy houses, den-building and playing in the Mud Kitchen. We involve young people in the building of play structures, as described in the filmed project for the ‘Designing with Children’ research programme but the play area still feels like an act of adult provision -- designed, checked and looked after by adults with associated workshops. We are part of a wider contemporary tendency to signpost and appropriate children’s play.

I was inspired by stories of what pupils built for themselves at the case-study schools and in the post-war adventure playgrounds. But when I tried to facilitate this kind of activity by setting up a summer course with a young adult supporting teenagers in creating their own built structure in the wood, I concluded in my journal that I felt ‘despair’ about the project as ‘somehow it now feels like no one wants it – just my pet project’. Perhaps I intervened where it is best not to. On the other hand, when local children spontaneously initiate or adapt their own dens at Wilderness Wood, for example, Figure 6.16, it can be problematic in terms of damage to the wood and potential hazards to the children, who have often turned up without their parents. The result is that I find myself challenged in my theoretical

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support of this kind of activity, as reflected in my journal entry ‘how did I become the person telling off children for building dens?’ I have found myself wishing for a weekly meeting, as at Kilquhanity, to talk through and resolve these conflicts of interest with the young people themselves.

In spite of these tensions, the tradition of young people creating their own spaces persists, with children from the community around the wood building their own dens and structures in unsupervised parts of the wood, as shown in Figure 6.16. A walk around Wilderness Wood at any time of the year evokes Robert Macfarlane’s description of children visiting a woodland near to his home in South Cambridge as a ‘happy labour-force of construction workers’ and the ‘whole wood as an ongoing site of assembly and demolition’. The ongoing value of this kind of activity is difficult to evaluate – even to ask the question is to interfere with the fragile process of change and identity formation which occurs in the building and inhabiting of these huts, dens, or, as Macfarlane calls them ‘chrysalises’.

The relationship between the ‘play’ of den-building and the ‘work’ of community self-build is more easily observable since it manifests outside of the ‘chrysalis’. A 13 year old reflects on the ‘new practical skills’ he acquired by helping build steps for The Meeting House and then the opportunity to use those same skills in his spare time by creating a ‘masterpiece in the form of a two-storey luxury den’. The next day, he is more skilled in his contribution to the community building. A 14 year old divides his time during a school enrichment week between helping out with community projects and initiating the building of goal-posts for the groups’ football games. Children involved with the Edmondsham kindergarten building project, which my husband and I led in 2012-13, also played games which were very close in content to the adult work going on, for example, digging, wheel-barrowing, building camps, building bike ramps.

211 Macfarlane (2013).
Supporting this activity at Wilderness Wood is fraught with contradictions and challenges. However, I can find ways to negotiate with children and teenagers from the village so that their use of the wood does not cause damage; I can support young people’s requests to build their own tree-houses – even if their parents would prefer they were involved with more visibly productive activities; I can create the time and space in our working parties for young people to be able to get away and do their own thing; and I can challenge myself and others to resist the cultural assumption that young people need constant supervision and instruction in activities such as den-building, drawing inspiration from Richard Jones who reflects that ‘the kids are more capable than we think’.²¹⁵ As I reflected in an article for ‘Wild Times’ in 2018, perhaps the best thing we can do is ‘not to stop them’.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Richard Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016.
Conclusions

This chapter has shown that the ‘thread’ of young people’s involvement in manual work is frayed and under threat. Twenty-five years ago, Stuart Aitken claimed that ‘rarely do children have the opportunity to interact with adults or engage in productive activities, nor do they have control of the environments that mould their experiences’. The examples in this chapter have shown that this direction of travel has continued. Manual work in community is often neglected or under-valued in an education system which tends to focus on academic attainment above all other purpose and safety above all other values. Even where the practices persist, they often have very different meanings. The manual participatory practices, which characterised the daily rhythm of the case-study schools, have tended to become exceptional, abstracted and ‘schoolified’, with the focus on the individual rather than the community.

However, the ‘thread’ of manual work as a valued part of a community context persists through settings and projects which are often more inclusive than the case-study schools and with a more explicit environmental focus. I have reflected on how, even in my own small-scale work at Wilderness Wood, there are ways to resist the overall direction of travel and strengthen the ‘thread’ of inter-generational and participatory practices which were a feature of the case-study schools. These examples offer some support to Campbell’s claim that for advocates of self-build and de-schooling from the 1960s and 1970s, ‘their time is now’ – an echo to Colin Ward’s claim in 1973 that ‘nothing could be more mistaken than the tendency to dismiss the ideas the de-schoolers represent as a passing fad’. However, the evidence also suggests that these ideas and practices continue, as when these authors first published, to fly ‘against the wind’.

The happy ending of the 2003 film School of Rock is that the rock rebel, who has brought about a mini-revolution by converting a traditional classroom into a band rehearsal space, retreats from the classroom and sets up an after-school club. This ending is in some ways rather quiet and mundane. It reflects a profound reality about the contemporary educational context, in which these kinds of counter-cultural

practices and values cannot often be held in a 'school' or 'classroom' but continue to burst out in spaces around and outside of the main school structure. This chapter has shown that the same is true for manual work practices and projects – and that under-the-radar and outside-of-school is a more conducive context for these practices in current times.
Chapter 7

‘Lessons from the margins’: conclusions

This chapter draws together how the different ideas about and experiences of manual work, uncovered in this research, cast light on historical questions about the case-study schools and their position in relationship to the traditions of progressive and radical education. It also explores ways in which this research contributes to ongoing debates relating to education and childhood.

‘The strongest tradition in the school’: experiences of manual work at the case-study schools

Sources have shown that young people’s participation in manual work formed a central part of the identity and lived reality of both schools as both a necessary practical contribution and as an important aspect of the community ethos of the schools. Sources also uncover contradictions and tensions in relation to the headteachers’ apparent championing of manual work and varying experiences of and attitudes towards manual work amongst pupils: not everyone was involved with or valued manual work. This research has supported Robert Skidelsky’s account of the importance of manual work at Kilquhanny in the ‘scheme of things’ but there is no evidence to support his more cynical theory that it was primarily a substitute for competitive sport, since many pupils also recall hours spent playing football – albeit not exactly ‘organised’ or ‘competitive’ with other schools. It has also reinforced W.A.C. Stewart’s account of manual work as a ‘characteristic’ at Wennington.

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4 Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
6 Stewart (1968), 212.
The focus of this research has revealed the multi-faceted nature of manual work – with ‘useful work’, craft and building activities all playing very different parts in the life of the school and involving different skills, spaces and relationships. ‘Useful work’ was most closely connected to ideas of responsibility, community and learning-by-doing. It operated on a daily basis and across the whole school site and relied most clearly on the authority of adults. Craft operated more like a traditional school subject or discipline in dedicated spaces and with relationships between adults and children often more like conventional teacher-pupil relationships, albeit with high levels of pupil freedom. Building activity was more occasional and project-based with adults in positions of leadership in relation to school structures, while the young people were given high levels of autonomy in relation to hut-building. In spite of these differences, all three types of activity were experienced as enjoyable – with aspects of play and creativity. They also all contributed to feelings of participation and belonging in the school communities.

The lens of manual work has uncovered many similarities of discourse and experience between the two schools. However, it has also revealed significant differences; for example, at Kilquhanity, there was a much greater recognition and engagement with the pupils’ hut-building; at Wennington, there was more involvement with ambitious engineering projects. These differences, to some extent, reflect the particular interests of staff and pupils, but also reflect wider cultural differences between the two schools – with Kilquhanity smaller, more informal and more bottom-up and Wennington more hierarchical, structured and influenced by Quaker values. These differences reveal the possibility of different leadership styles and organisational approaches even in schools with many shared aims and values.

This work has also found that there were changes in the extent and meanings of manual work over the lives of the schools, partly related to the changing cast of characters at the schools, but also developments in wider society as manual work became a more marginal activity and no longer an ordinary part of childhood. In particular, at Wennington, there was a decrease in maintenance or ‘useful’ work over time, in response to wider societal pressures and a move towards using outside contractors for building work from the 1960s. However, sources also suggest a surprising level of continuity in terms of the emphasis on manual work at both schools, which became an increasingly distinctive and radical characteristic of
the two schools, in comparison with other schools, over the course of the twentieth century.

Participation in manual work has emerged as an important corollary, and for some pupils, alternative to more formal systems of self-government, such as the weekly meetings at Kilquhanity or the senate meetings at Wennington. Aitkenhead claimed in 1962 that the weekly meeting was the ‘strongest tradition in the school’. This research has suggested that manual work rivalled its position.

‘On-the-radar’: positioning the case-study schools

The lens of manual work has, to some extent, supported the positioning of the case-study schools by most historians and commentators as part of the last wave of progressive schools set up in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In fact, it suggests that historians and philosophers of education should pay more attention to manual work as a significant and neglected characteristic of this movement. It also suggests that Hori Shinichiro is right to characterise manual work as a ‘Deweyan’ characteristic, thereby drawing attention to John Dewey’s ideas from *Democracy and Education* about the importance of ‘active occupations’ and the ‘social environment’, rather than the more individualistic, ‘child-centred’ label with which Dewey is often associated. The continued emphasis on manual work for the community over the course of the twentieth century, while other progressive and more mainstream schools placed greater focus on creative and academic activities for the individual pupil’s development, suggests that the schools deserve to be firmly ‘on-the-radar’ in accounts of progressive ideas and practices.

However, comparisons of attitudes and practices in relation to manual work have also shown that there were significant differences between the case-study schools and other progressive schools, particularly the iconic Summerhill, where ‘work’ for children was abhorred. These differences add a new perspective to John Shotton’s

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8 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
11 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
work to ‘differentiate’ Kilquhanity from other parts of the progressive movement – suggesting that the differences lie not in the extent of the school’s libertarian values but in its community values and a related view of freedom, as achieved in and through community. This difference of attitudes and practices, in relation to freedom and community, has exposed a significant fault-line within the progressive movement. This fault-line has often been ignored or underestimated in accounts of progressive education by both advocates and critics, who assume that the child-centred and libertarian paradigm at Summerhill is the gold-standard.

The recognition of this fault-line implies that the case-study schools are not simply ‘less radical’ versions of the better-known Summerhill as suggested by many commentators and historians, including Albert Lamb, W.A.C. Stewart and Skidelsky. The lens of manual work suggests that the case-study schools are not the same kind of ‘full-fat experiments in freedom’ as Summerhill, and are perhaps less radical on a libertarian continuum. It seems that ‘puritanical’ is a valid description and that David Lewis is right to describe Wennington school as a ‘Quaker community’ rather than libertarian educational experiment. Nevertheless, as experiments in freedom through community, they also deserve to be considered as ‘full-fat’ and perhaps more radical than Summerhill and other progressive schools, in that they challenged the tendency at these schools, part of wider developments in mainstream society, to exclude children from the experience of participating in mixed-age community.

Comparisons with radical ideas and experiments has shown that the case-study schools should also be considered as part of an overlapping but distinct radical movement of the twentieth century, which played out in anarchist schools, therapeutic communities, self-build communities and adventure playgrounds. The experiences at the case-study schools cast light on this wider radical movement and its relationship to the progressive movement, suggesting that Michael Smith is right to describe radical education as ‘distinct’ from the wider progressive movement because of the emphasis on ‘practical education’ but also teasing out the wider significance of this emphasis in terms of a significantly different conception of

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freedom as achieved through community – rather than the more individualistic account of freedom and learning associated with progressive schools.

Comparisons have revealed striking similarities in relation to the value and meanings of manual work as a central aspect of therapeutic communities; this finding reinforces Tony Weaver and Maurice Bridgeland’s positioning of the schools as closely related to the therapeutic community movement in spite of some differences of priority and purpose. It has also shown that the schools had, in respect of manual work, more in common with radical, and even traditional or religious, communities than schools. These shared practices and ideals support Skidelsky’s view that the progressives saw themselves as ‘models of a revived rural and agricultural community’. They also support arguments put forward by ex-pupils and staff that school is a ‘misnomer’ and that these schools were paradoxically ‘not really a school at all’ but more like a ‘large family’ or ‘small community’ or ‘primitive tribe’ or ‘village’. This research cannot resolve whether the case-study schools were ‘utopia manqué’ as Dartington was described by Denis Hardy. However, the experiences of manual work at both schools certainly strengthen arguments that they deserve to be considered as social or community experiments and were closer to utopian or social anarchist communities than the more child-centred and libertarian Dartington.

In this thesis, therefore, manual work at the case-study schools emerges not as described by Hori Shinichiro as a ‘Deweyan addition to Neill’s ideas about freedom’ but rather as a social anarchist or Quaker alternative to Neill’s child-centred approach. Through this lens, the schools appear not, as Royston Lambert suggested, as examples of the ‘full, unadulterated progressive ethic’ but as part of the more radical tradition implied by the title of his article, Alternatives to School, and closer to his ‘educational ideal’ of the Vai Tribe than Summerhill. It seems that

22 Val Graham, interviewed 29 September 2016.
Fielding and Moss could add ‘manual work’ to their ‘signs or indicators’ in a school which practises radical education\textsuperscript{26} and to Fielding’s analysis of the ‘commonalities and solidarities’\textsuperscript{27} between radical education and social pedagogy. Chapter 6 has shown that the practice of manual work in the present survives more often in informal educational settings and community land-based projects and communities rather than formal schools – and therefore reflects the finding that the historical case-study schools, in respect of manual work, often had more in common with experimental communities than schools.

The examples in this research therefore deserve their place in the recent chapter by Suissa and myself for \textit{The Handbook of Radical Politics},\textsuperscript{28} as part of a radical tradition focused on mixed-age community and societal change as well as a progressive tradition focused on children as individuals and pedagogical change.

\textit{Side-stepping the ‘loggerhead’: ongoing debates about education}

The experiences of manual work at the case-study schools and contemporary settings challenge criticism by liberal philosophers of education and more populist criticism of progressive and radical education as a ‘dumbing down’\textsuperscript{30} and an abandonment of the ideals of an academic or liberal education. It is true that critics of the case-study schools claim that the emphasis on manual work was at the expense of a good academic education, as encapsulated by Ben Lyle’s criticism that Kilquhanity pupils ‘can build a tree-house but they can’t spell’.\textsuperscript{31} And even some enthusiasts complain about a limited academic education: ex-pupils of Kilquhanity make comments such as, ‘I don’t feel I learnt a lot academically in my teens’\textsuperscript{32} or the ‘academic side seemed very lacking’.\textsuperscript{33} Ex-pupils also criticise a lack of vocational preparation for the world beyond the school: for example, Wendy Green, ex-pupil of

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Wennington, argues that it offered a ‘lousy education’ and that there was ‘nobody thinking about what I would do next’.34

However, other pupils offer a different perspective. Ed Booth describes how ‘the assumed critique about places like Killy is that no one learns anything and you’re screwed for the rest of your life’.35 However, he strongly rejects this critique claiming that it was possible, through experiences such as building work, to enjoy the process, which he connects to Aitkenhead’s philosophy of ‘jam today’ but that it could also help you in the future, ‘jam tomorrow’.36 David Webb, pupil at Wennington, claims that he benefited from an all-round education: ‘best thing that ever happened to me...encouraged practical skills as well as academic...brought out lots of sides of me’.37 Ex-pupils even defend some aspects of their academic education: for example, Jonathan Adamson, pupil at Wennington, claims that he developed a ‘love of poetry’ from the English teacher, Brian Hill. Gus Cameron, ex-pupil at Kilquhanity, in spite of his criticism of the lack of ‘traditional’ science teaching, acknowledges that he was exposed to a ‘scientific approach’ and that Mike Todd ‘knew his physics’38 – his subsequent career as a university scientist also complicates the idea that a lack of formal science education at school has been detrimental to his academic development.

Claire Cameron, in an article in The Broadsheet when she left in the late 1970s, reflects on the compatibility of both academic and practical activity; ‘it is not impossible to be learning academically among a group of other kids who may be learning anything from milking cows to sewing seams’.39 Barnes argued that a focus on manual work actually improved academic and other kinds of achievement. He claimed that the reduction of manual work in the 1960s did not ‘release boys and girls for other achievements’ but rather that the period before the reduction was one of the ‘outstanding peak periods of achievement in academic work, music, drama and constructional work’.40 Similarly, in the contemporary context, Evan, home-educated 12 year old, challenges the idea that a focus on practical work holds back

34 Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2018.
36 Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
37 David Webb, group discussion Wennington Archive Week May 2018.
38 Gus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.
his academic education. Instead, he suggests that he ‘enjoys academic work more’ and ‘it’s made me want to learn a lot more’ because he does less of it.\textsuperscript{41}

The perspectives and experiences uncovered in this research cannot offer answers to debates about whether an emphasis on manual work is at the expense of academic subjects. Ex-pupils themselves acknowledge the irresolvable nature of the question: Claire Cameron and Ed Booth debate whether pupils were ‘held back’ by a lack of focus on academic subjects.\textsuperscript{42} Similarly, Liz and Steve Winning debate whether Steve would have benefited from more ‘academic pressure’ or whether, as Steve suggests, ‘I’d have rebelled’ and as Liz admits, ‘it wouldn’t have worked at the time and neither with me’.\textsuperscript{43} There are, of course, many other factors in determining people’s subsequent life stories, in particular, the socio-economic and/or educational/professional background of pupils’ families. However, this research suggests that these settings offer a different kind of learning based on the daily experiences of living in community. Claire Cameron, ex-pupil at Kilquhanity, reflects: ‘I’ve learnt how to run a meeting, how to live with people, how to negotiate, how to make things.’\textsuperscript{44} Ex-pupils at Wennington claim that as well as practical skills and ‘resourcefulness’,\textsuperscript{45} they learnt to ‘problem solve and to work together’.\textsuperscript{46} This testimony suggests that these schools did not offer a narrow vocational or liberal education but rather, the kind of broad education which Richard Pring advocates, as ‘education for living’ or for ‘becoming fully a person’.\textsuperscript{47}

Therefore, instead of entering the ring for this ‘loggerhead’, ‘scrap’ or ‘battle’,\textsuperscript{48} this research challenges the idea that these traditions are as antithetical as these metaphors imply and, instead, supports Pring’s position that the dichotomy between liberal education and vocational training is ‘deeply rooted but unnecessary’.\textsuperscript{49} This research offers alternative examples, to the pre-vocational courses of which Pring approves,\textsuperscript{50} which support his work to ‘broaden’ and ‘reconcile’ accounts of liberal

\textsuperscript{41} Evan, interviewed 29 October 2018.
\textsuperscript{42} Claire Cameron and Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
\textsuperscript{43} Liz and Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015.
\textsuperscript{44} Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
\textsuperscript{45} Group discussion, Wennington Archive Week 14 June 2015.
\textsuperscript{46} Group discussion, Wennington Archive Week 14 May 2013.
\textsuperscript{50} Pring (1995), 93.
and vocational education. The examples in this work suggest a view of vocational education, in which practical activities are not just a plan b for non-academic pupils or an instrumental training for future employment. Manual work is not in antithesis to liberal ideas of education, since particularly in the case of craft-work, it was treated as ‘worthwhile activity’ or a ‘tradition’ to be passed on from adults to children, as part of the wider liberal concern with, what Pring describes as: ‘what it is to live fully human lives’. The experiences in this research suggest that Pring is right that the engrained dichotomy between vocational and liberal ‘need not be so’ and therefore that Carr shuts down this avenue of enquiry prematurely when he claims that the attempt for ‘resolution’ of this dichotomy is ‘just empty verbiage’.

The role of the adult, as it emerges from this research, also offers a reconciliation of different educational traditions. Adults at the case-study schools did not ‘abrogate their adult status’. Aitkenhead and Barnes were clear that ‘the adult does not cease to be an adult’. These spaces were not, as is often suggested by critics, a ‘Lord of the Flies’ situation. However, adults were not just teachers or instructors, they also acted as master crafts-person, project leader, youth-worker, facilitator, co-creator. This blending of different roles in the same space, and even sometimes in the same person, contributes to Richard Davies’ argument about the possibility and desirability of youth-workers and teachers sharing spaces in order to be able to offer a more ‘complete and holistic educational experience’ with a broad aim, similar to Pring’s account: ‘to improve the ability of young people to live the good life’. Davies also argues that it would be positive if these different professionals could ‘co-create’ these shared spaces – this work has suggested that it could be positive if the young people could also be part of that process of co-creation.

As well as challenging the premise of a ‘loggerhead’ between these different educational ideas, this work has suggested the potential value of stepping outside of this ‘loggerhead’ altogether by foregrounding the neglected traditions of radical education. The ideas and the lived experiences in this research support Suissa’s

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55 Notes on staff meeting 12 June 1956, Pat Mitchell’s private file.
58 Davies (2014), 224.
suggestion that Pring could look to the anarchist tradition for an ‘expanded notion’ of liberal and vocational ideas of education. This radical tradition, as shown in the examples in this research, to some extent sidesteps the perennial arguments about the aims of education and is concerned with: social change rather than educational aims and pedagogy; a version of Johnson’s ‘really useful knowledge’ rather than an abstracted curriculum; communities rather than schools; and hand as well as head and voice.

In so far as these settings act as educative communities, this work contributes a defence against Robin Barrow’s scathing critique of radical education, in which he argues it ‘would not work because...[it is] based on the idea of an educative community which we don’t have’. The lens of manual work has uncovered many ways in which the settings in this research do act as ‘educative community’ – with the process of learning a form of ‘incidental education’ of the type advocated by Paul Goodman. Barnes explicitly quotes from Ivan Illich that education was ‘not the result of instruction...rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting’. The value attributed by ex-pupils to this kind of ‘incidental’ education in community suggests that Paul Holowchak is right that ‘Paul Goodman has much to say on pedagogical practice that is rich, poignant and relevant today’. This research also contributes to contemporary anarchist theories of learning as described by Joe Curnow as ‘ultimately about becoming a member of the community’ -- and suggests that active physical participation in the creation of ‘the community’ is a fundamental aspect of this ‘becoming’.

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65 Curnow (2016), 34.
‘Grown-ups and children...all waves on the same sea’: contribution to debates about childhood

John Aitkenhead recalled this ‘image’ of ‘waves on the same sea’ from his meeting c.1960 in Moscow with the Russian poet, Samuel Marshak, who wrote for both adults and children. This research throws light on the continuing relevance of the ‘same sea’ idea for debates about childhood and society, through the particular experiences of adults and children engaged together in manual work at the case-study and contemporary settings. Young people’s positive experiences of manual work in the historical and contemporary settings raise important questions about dominant accounts representing 'school' as emancipation from 'work'. Testimony suggests that young people can benefit from experiences of manual work in terms of skills, confidence and a powerful sense of belonging. These positive experiences suggest that Michael Bourdillon is right that work is a ‘neglected aspect of child well-being’ and, therefore, that it should be valued alongside studying and playing as an important activity for young people. These experiences also support the ideas of radicals such as George Orwell, who suggested that the ‘work’ of hop-picking caused less ‘harm’ than school and Goodman who emphasises the importance of the ‘opportunities to be useful’ and how helping out on an ‘economically marginal farm’ can be a ‘thinkable alternative’ to school.

This research has also complicated the idea of a sharp dichotomy between work and play – including Neill’s schematic view that children should only play. Pupils were working when they were ‘playing’ at building huts and playing when they were ‘working’ on school buildings or chopping logs or setting up breakfast. In the contemporary context, at Taliesin a member comments, ‘it’s like playing in the woods but it’s graft as well.’ These examples of the blurring of work and play support Holt’s argument for the benefits of both activities; ‘if children are not allowed to mix work and play, they soon forget how to do both’ and offer tangible examples

67 Aitkenhead (1962), 78.
68 Aitkenhead (1962), 78.
72 Goodman (1962), 32.
to David Kennedy’s philosophical ideas about the need for a ‘space dedicated to the reunification of work and play’.75

Experiences of craft work and spaces in this research have suggested that, in spite of its decreasing economic relevance, craft work is still a fundamental part of what Crawford describes as ‘full human flourishing’76 and, as Sennett suggests, a crucial ‘anchor in material reality’77 and a challenge to an engrained and unhelpful ‘fault-line’78 between head and hand, a parallel to the argument above about stepping outside of the ‘loggerhead’ between progressive and liberal educational traditions and testimony to the continuing resonance of Kropotkin’s critique of the division of ‘brain work and manual work’.79

Although some commentators and ex-pupils criticise the emphasis on craft at the case-study schools as ‘antiquarian’80 and at the expense of more relevant subjects, there is also evidence that a continued insistence on its value offers a useful corrective to a wider tendency to denigrate the work of the hand, based on what Crawford describes as ‘an assumption that manual work is anachronistic, [which] is its own kind of idealism’.81 This research contributes examples of counter-cultural practices within Western modernity which raises questions about the simplistic comparisons made by Rudofsky82 and Diamond,83 while supporting the thrust of their arguments about the potential value of the ‘inventive’ and ‘creative’ process of making your own.84 This work has also helped to highlight a distinction between craft-for-creativity and craft-for-community, suggesting that the latter is a neglected but valuable aspect of the experience of craft for young people.

Young people’s hands-on experience of constructing buildings in collaboration with adult members of the community offers an important counter-narrative to the dominant approach to school construction where pupils, at most, are involved in a consultation process about the design. This work has challenged current

84 Diamond (2012), 205.
assumptions that building sites should be out-of-bounds for young people. The examples in this research offer practical examples of the kind of ‘modest, everyday forms of work and participation in educational spaces’ which Horton and Kraftl show that contemporary policy discourse tends to ‘overlook and undervalue’. They also challenge the tendency of contemporary projects on children’s participation to focus on involvement in design aspects rather than actual construction and support Roger Hart and other anarchist sympathisers’ ideas about the value of building ‘with children rather than for children’.

The examples in this research also suggest that the process of creating the physical fabric can be part of the lifeblood and energy of the community, and as such should be recognised as an opportunity rather than obstacle in the creation of a positive learning environment. This finding supports the theories of radical educators such as Holt, who argued that the ‘ideal classroom would never be finished’ and Lambert who argued that the ‘ideal, flexible setting’ was the Vai Tribe, in which for each group of young people they ‘built’ and ‘burnt’ a structure to the ground. It also supports the theories of radical architects such as Rudofsky, Segal and Alexander in the 1970s and more recently Hübner about the value of involvement in the building process, but with a more explicit emphasis on how young people can benefit from this process.

The uncovering of experiences of child-initiated and unsupervised hut- or den-building in past and present settings offers a crucial alternative to the adult-led, albeit child-centred, approaches of Forest School and Nature Pedagogy. My research does not undermine the substantial claims of researchers about the psychological importance of this kind of activity, however it has also suggested that these activities should also be closely related to social participation and that Joe Benjamin is right that children’s ghettos are not a substitute for educating ‘society to accept children on a participatory basis’. The young people’s capacities in this work represent a challenge to the ‘culture of paranoia’ which currently prevails.

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They offer examples to support the work of Tim Gill and Frank Furedi in arguing for more positive attitudes towards risk-taking in outdoor settings and suggest that this kind of activity should be given more weight and value in debates about child well-being – even when in tension with understandable concerns about child safety and protection.

Young people’s experiences of these various, different forms of manual work have offered lived examples of different forms of what Kennedy calls, ‘adult-child forms of life’ from those generally found in schools and families: working alongside each other on fairly mundane but necessary work; the relationship of master craftsman to pupil in the workshop; collaborators on a building site; and the trust of the adults for the young people in letting them get on with building their own huts. These various ‘forms’ provide examples of the kind of ‘dialogical relationship’ which Kennedy advocates for as a ‘third way’ alternative to the ‘monologue’ paradigm which prevails in most schooling.

The ways in which manual work brings together adults and children also offers tangible examples of what Hart advocates for as: ‘joint community projects in which children and their elders offer to one another the special energies and perceptions of their generations’. These examples have shown that power in these activities is often shifting and fluid, and therefore that the ‘ladder’ metaphor is too categorical a representation for adult-child relationships in a living community. This finding supports Hart’s own warning that the ‘ladder’ metaphor should not be ‘considered as a measuring stick’. The shifting power dynamic seems to be better described by Jack Lambert in relation to adventure playgrounds in which ‘the line between one’s own ideas and the children’s can become very thin’. The blur of power relations in the context of manual work also develops Birch and Parnell’s critique of a ‘zero-sum power game’ between ‘children’s agency’ and ‘adults’ agency in design projects -- and suggests the possibility of a viable alternative, which could be called ‘community agency’.

96 Hart (1992), 11.
The strong relationship of manual work and self-government, which has emerged in this research, supports Hart’s claim that ‘looking after your spaces and opportunities to participate in community decision-making are linked’ and that it is ‘good to participate with adults in the creation of settings as it develops a sense of meaningful involvement and responsibility in society’. These findings suggest that more attention should be paid to these apparently mundane manual practices in research and practice relating to self-government and democratic practices in schools and other settings. Many ex-pupils of the case-study schools describe these experiences of participation as empowering. For example, Steve Bateman claims that this kind of physical involvement gave him the feeling that nothing was ‘insurmountable’ and that it was ‘part and parcel of empowerment’. In contemporary projects, this kind of benefit is also noticed: Mel Evans reflects on how she sees both children and adults become empowered through ‘looking after yourself, creating what you need, physical and emotional’. This testimony highlights the importance of manual work as a form of what Fielding calls ‘beyond voice’ forms of participation and what Barry Percy-Smith calls giving young people more than just a ‘say’ in shaping their environments and communities.

This research has also revealed significant benefits to society in terms of the contributions of people empowered in shaping their own lives and contributing to the lives of the communities around them. Ex-pupils often position their experiences of manual work as important in terms of being ‘valuable to other people’ and connect this experience to becoming, as an adult, the kind of person who will ‘take the initiative and intervene’. Sasha, daughter of a Wennington pupil, observes that ‘Wenningtonians don’t just moan and sit on the side but get involved and do something’. The habits of community building and social responsibility are carried into new worlds either through involvement with formal politics, such as Ernie Thomas who claims ‘my politics are...socialist, it was at Wennington that I developed that’ but more often through a wider approach to community building.

101 Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017.
102 Mel Evans, interviewed 28 October 2018.
105 Angus Cameron, interviewed 16 May 2017.
106 Sasha (Grace’s daughter), interviewed 15 May 2018, Wennington Archive Week.
107 Ernie Thomas, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 17 May 2010, Wennington Archive.
and change making, as Camilla Cox reflects on how her experiences at Kilquanity have led her to seek to 'recreate community' in her places of work and home.\textsuperscript{108} This kind of testimony offers tangible examples of Hart's proposal that 'the everyday learning of the skills of social participation is the foundation of civil society'\textsuperscript{109} and Sobel's notion that the chance to shape your environment as a child leads to an adult 'shaping the big world'.\textsuperscript{110} These examples therefore offer evidence to support Gert Biesta's view that the 'most significant' citizenship learning follows from 'experiences'\textsuperscript{111} and, to some extent, his analysis that citizenship education tends to operate 'more at the social than the political end of the spectrum'\textsuperscript{112} although they also draw attention to ways in which the social and political are inextricably entwined.

These conclusions speak to questions about the wider significance of these experimental settings and offer a partial defence to criticism that they are, as Kozol claimed, a 'dangerous exodus to the woods'.\textsuperscript{113} Ex-pupils describe the case-study schools as 'Narnia'\textsuperscript{114} and a 'warm bubble'\textsuperscript{115} and related contemporary projects are also often positioned as a kind of 'parallel universe' or a 'rural idyll'.\textsuperscript{116} These phrases can reinforce criticism that these small-scale experiments are cut-off, insular and irrelevant to wider economic and social realities. However, Paul Goodman argued that even if these kinds of community experiments are small and transitory, they 'irradiate society with people who have been profoundly touched by the excitement of community life'.\textsuperscript{117} The life stories of ex-pupils support this idea. Steve Winning describes himself as the 'type of person to challenge the way things are done'\textsuperscript{118} and Belinda Swift describes her feeling that 'you believe in yourself' and can follow 'the urge to do something', in her case, about clean water provision in the third world. An anonymous ex-pupil and Pat Mitchell explicitly applied experimental ideas from Wennington in their own practices as teachers in mainstream state

\textsuperscript{108} Camilla Cox, interviewed 28 January 2017.
\textsuperscript{112} Biesta (2008), 47.
\textsuperscript{113} Kozol, J. (1972) \textit{Free Schools}, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 10.
\textsuperscript{114} Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018.
\textsuperscript{115} Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015; Margot Gibbs, interviewed 15 May 2018.
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\textsuperscript{118} Steve Winning, interviewed 15 December 2015
schools. Claire Cameron in her work as a researcher on social pedagogy carries the ideas of Kilquhanity into wider debates about children in care.

The wider significance of these settings and experiences is also as educational and social experiments. A ‘warm bubble’ in more political language can be understood as: Fielding’s ‘real utopias’,¹¹⁹ Davis’s ‘grounded utopias’,¹²⁰ Kraftl’s ‘visions and versions of life itself’,¹²¹ and Cooper’s ‘everyday utopias’.¹²² Perhaps, as Ed Booth concludes, society might benefit from ‘more warm bubbles’¹²³ as an essential part of challenging contemporary assumptions and offering alternatives for wider social change.

After two years of writing my journal entitled ‘The Lives of Children at Wilderness Wood’, I reflected that ‘this notebook cannot be just about “the lives of children” – it’s about all of us trying to make a go of a small woodland community’.¹²⁴ This research has elaborated this perspective by uncovering ways in which a focus on the ‘school’ as ‘mixed-age community’ and the work of the ‘hand’ as well as the ‘head’ represents a promising alternative to more prevalent preoccupations with curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and aims. This thesis does not offer a blueprint for Gillis’s ‘new mainlands suited to the needs of adults and children’¹²⁵ – but it does suggest that these ‘new mainlands’ are more likely to be created by adults and children travelling together on the ‘same sea’ and, when they arrive on land, setting to the work of ‘building a community together’.¹²⁶

¹²³ Ed Booth, interviewed 13 June 2015.
¹²⁶ Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015.
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Gavin Aitkenhead, interviewed 24 January 2015 at his home in Kilquhanity. Gavin was born at the school in 1952 and stayed as a pupil until 1968. He worked as a teacher at the school in the 1970s and 1980s and became headteacher of it as a day school the 1990s. He worked looking after the site and Japanese school groups and built an eco-home on the site of the school where he lived until his recent death in January 2020.

Steve Bateman, interviewed 8 February 2017 in a cafe in Exeter. Steve attended Kilquhanity in 1970s and has had a career in publishing. The cafe was too noisy to record the interview but I took detailed notes, including some verbatim parts.
Adam Booth, interviewed 29 September 2017 in his blacksmithing workshop in Kirkpatrick Durham. Adam attended Kilquhanity from 1974 as a day boy.


Sam Booth, interviewed 12 September 2018 in his wood workshop near Kilquhanity. Sam attended Kilquhanity in the 1970s. He is a designer-builder and lives next door to the site of the school.

Angus Cameron (known as Gus), interviewed 16 May 2017 at Bristol University. Gus attended Kilquhanity from 1974. He is currently a Reader in Biomedical Science Education at Bristol University.

Claire Cameron, interviewed 13 June 2015 and 10 January 2017 at her home in Cambridge. Claire was a pupil at Kilquhanity in the 1970s and is a Professor of Social Pedagogy at the UCL Institute of Education. She is married to ex-pupil of Kilquhanity, Ed Booth.

Camilla Cox, interviewed 28 January 2017 at Wilderness Wood. Camilla attended Kilquhanity in the 1990s. Her father, Gem Cox, attended the school as a pupil and worked there as an adult. Her mother, Jools Cox, worked at the school too.

Margaret Cox, interviewed 14 May 2018 at her home in Stroud. Margaret was born in 1930. She chose to send her children, Gem and Margot, to Kilquhanity in the 1970s and taught there for a year.

Bob Cuddihy, interviewed 14 February 2018 on the telephone. Bob attended Kilquhanity 1962-5. He is a journalist and wrote an obituary of John Aitkenhead. He is brother of Deedee and Mikey Cuddihy (see below).

Deedee Cuddihy, interviewed 19 May 2017 in Glasgow. Deedee was born in New York and attended Kilquhanity in the 1960s. After school, she attended art college and became a journalist. She has written articles about Kilquhanity. Deedee is Bob and Mikey Cuddihy’s sister.


Val Graham, interviewed 29 September 2016 in her home near Kilquhanity. Val is John and Morag Aitkenhead’s daughter. She was born in the school in 1943 and attended as a pupil until 1957. She also worked at the school as house-mother and cook.

Richard and Vivien Jones, interviewed 30 September 2016 at their home in Powfoot, near Kilquhanity. Richard Jones was a woodwork teacher at the school from 1969. He became deputy head in the 1990s. Vivien became a member of staff in 1974. They married in 1989. After Kilquhanity closed, they set up the New Galloway Small School, which ran for a few years.

Andrew Pyle, interviewed 25 January 2015 at Kilquhanity School. He was pupil in the 1960s. He is currently based at the school – looking after the site, facilitating Japanese school groups and researching for a book about John Aitkenhead’s ideas.

Niall Sutherland, interviewed 31 October 2017 in Russell Square taxi rank. He attended Kilquhanity 1965-74 and is currently a black cab driver.

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Films about Wennington in date order

*Wennington School Film*, based on amateur footage with voice-over by Kenneth Barnes when in his 90s, Wennington Archive.
*Wennington: edited version*, black and white footage taken by Roger Gerdhardt, mid to late 1960s on 8mm film, Wennington Archive.

Audio recordings and transcripts held at Wennington Archive, Planned Environmental Therapy Trust, in alphabetical order by surname of interviewee

Michael Berkett, interviewed by Craig Fees 20 May 2010. He attended Wennington 1948-56.
Sam Doncaster, interviewed by Elaine Boyling 21 May 2008. He attended Wennington 1951-59. As an adult, he became an outdoor educator and keen self-builder in his spare time.
Irene Hill, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 12 September 2010. She taught music at Wennington in the 1950s and married Brian Hill, English teacher in 1955, who became headteacher after Kenneth Barnes.
David Jenkins, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 14 September 2010. He attended Wennington as a day pupil from 1969.
Tom Jones, interviewed by Carlos Pestana 6 March 2011. He attended Wennington 1952-5.
Gill Nicholson, interviewed by Craig Fees 22 September 2013. She attended Wennington from 1945.
Eleanor Pease, interviewed by Gemma Geldart 13 September 2010. She attended the school in the 1940s, became headgirl and subsequently married Kenneth Barnes in 1969.
Richard Pemble, interviewed by Frances Meredith 19 May 2010. He attended Wennington 1956-60.

Interviews conducted with Wennington pupil and staff by Emily Charkin in alphabetical order by the surname of the interviewee

Jonathan Adamson, interviewed 25 February 2016 at his home in Doncaster. He attended Wennington as a pupil 1961-6. He works as an artist and environmental campaigner.


Wendy Green, interviewed 14 May 2018 in her house in Stroud. She attended Wennington in mid-1940s.


Eleanor Pease, interviewed 10 May 2018 by phone.

Richard Pemble, interviewed and in group discussions at Wennington Archive Week 14 June 2015. He attended Wennington 1956-61. Was a key-holder for the workshop and went on to become an engineer.


Richard Schofield, interviewed at Wennington Archive Week June 2014 and 11 July 2017 in London. He attended Wennington 1966-9. He works as a designer, carpenter and activist and is involved with the anarchist research group. He has organised a number of conferences on radical education as part of the Wennington Archive Week.

Belinda Swift, interviewed 22 January 2015 in her home in Yorkshire. She attended Wennington 1953-60. She is daughter of John Swift who was an engineer who led major construction projects at the school. As an adult she has worked as a music teacher and been involved with campaigning and mountaineering.

Ernie Thomas, part of group discussion at Wennington Archive Week 16 May 2018. He attended Wennington 1957-61.

David Webb, part of group conversation at Wennington Archive Week 16 May 2018. He attended Wennington 1956-62.

Anonymous female pupil, interviewed 8 October 2015. She attended the school 1960-6. Referred and paid for by Local Authority. As an adult, she became a state school teacher.

Wennington Archive Weeks at Planned Environmental Therapy Trust with facilitated discussion groups by Emily Charkin: 14 May 2013, 10 June 2014, 14 June 2015, 16 May 2018.
Primary Sources for Historical Comparisons

Articles


Interviews conducted by Emily Charkin

Hamish Black, interviewed 22 August 2018 at Wilderness Wood. He was pupil at Kingsmuir School, 1953-61.
Susan Charkin, interviewed 9 April 2019 in London. She was pupil at Red Maids’ School 1959-66.
Mikey Cuddihy, interviewed 29 June 2017 in Lewes. She was pupil at Summerhill School in 1960s. Mikey is Bob and Deedee’s sister.
Albert Lamb, interviewed 14 May 2017. He was pupil at Summerhill 1961-64 and 1965-66 as ‘half a staff and half a pupil’.
John Russell, interviewed 29 January 2020 at Wilderness Wood. He was pupil at Bedales 1978-85.

Film

A Place in the Class, documentary for BBC, 2 July 1997.

Primary Sources for Contemporary Settings and Debates

Articles and unpublished documents in alphabetical order by surname of author

Charkin, E., Ethnographic notes on visits to Kilquhanity Children’s Village, The Mount Camphill and Oasis Adventure Playground.
Brochures, leaflets, email newsletters and informal publications and films

Email newsletter for Circle of Life, Taliesin Community Woodland; Uckfield College. Brochure for Comeragh, The Mount and Michael Hall Steiner School.
Hillholt email exchange and conversation with the current CEO and OFSTED report.
‘Field-to-fork’, short film about food growing project at Trefoil School, [http://www.trefoilmontessori.co.uk/field-to-fork/4594665739](http://www.trefoilmontessori.co.uk/field-to-fork/4594665739), last accessed 7 February 2020.

Various articles in *Wild Times*, ‘zine publication by and for Wilderness Wood Members.

Films in date order

*The School of Rock* (2003).
*What we did on our holidays* (2014).
*Captain Fantastic* (2016).

Interviews conducted by Emily Charkin, in alphabetical order by surname of interviewee

Anonymised interview with two ex-staff and parents of pupils at Michael Hall Steiner School. 5 November 2018.
Evan, interviewed 29 October 2018 in The Truck he built with his father. Evan was born on 22 February 2006 and has never been to school.
Bonnie, Pippa and Ruby, interviewed 27 February 2020. Bonnie was born on 16 July 2005. Pippa was born on 18 June 2008. Ruby was born on 24 March 2010. They have never been to school.
Mel Evans, interviewed 28 October 2018 at Wilderness Wood. Mel is a Forest School leader and home-educating parent. She works with school groups and home-educating families.
John Macbeth, interviewed 18 October 2018 at Uckfield College. John is a design, technology and engineering teacher at Uckfield College for pupils aged 11-18 and has led a number of groups of pupils for hands-on projects at Wilderness Wood (2018 BTEC construction pupils helped build Under Oak shelter; 2018 enrichment week for 12 pupils between ages 12 and 14; 2019 engineering students conduct feasibility study for a zip-wire).
Benjamin Perrot, interviewed 18 May 2018 in London. Benjamin is founder and director of El Warcha, a street workshop for young people in Tunis.
Lucy Rayner, interviewed 26 January 2017 at Moulescoomb Primary School. Lucy was project manager for the self-build constructions in the school playground.
Joslin Rashleigh, interviewed 18 April 2019 as part of a visit to Oasis Adventure Playground where he was a play worker at the time.
Jürgen Reuss (caretaker) and Lara (pupil) at Kissori School, interviewed 5 July 2016 at Wilderness Wood.

Marina Robb, interviewed 19 March 2018 in her home in Ringmer, East Sussex.
Marina is Director of Circle of Life Rediscovery and co-author of Learning with Nature (2015).

John Russell, interviewed 29 January 2020 at Wilderness Wood. He attended Bedales in the 1980s and works as a timber framer.

Grace and Grant Vickerman, interviewed 29 August 2018 at Wilderness Wood.
Grace and Grant are owners and directors of Ashurst Farm and Trefoil School, influenced by Montessori principles.

Members of Crowborough Scout Group, Ruby (aged 12), Martha (aged 11) and Jackie (aged 46), interviewed 22 September 2018 at Wilderness Wood.

Discussion group about ‘useful work’, 7 October 2017 at Wilderness Wood.
Discussion group about ‘self-build’, 6 October 2018 at Wilderness Wood.
Discussion debrief after working with wood week with Dan Morrish and James Gallagher 1 August 2014.
Appendix 1: Kilquhanity typical day and key dates

**Typical day**

This timetable was subject to change by general agreement e.g. for special occasions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.45 am</td>
<td>waking bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 am</td>
<td>breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.25 am</td>
<td>bed-making bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.30 am</td>
<td>‘useful work’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30-10.30 am</td>
<td>academic lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30-11 am</td>
<td>coffee break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-1 pm</td>
<td>free choice – woodwork/pottery/maintenance/drama/lab/art (two one-hour sessions 11-12 and 12-1)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 pm</td>
<td>lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 pm</td>
<td>academic lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 pm</td>
<td>free choice – sport/workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 pm</td>
<td>tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 pm</td>
<td>supper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*in 1976 this session was swapped with the afternoon academic session*

Weekly meeting: Thursday 2-3.30pm (with occasional over-running issues dealt with on Friday mornings) and Saturday evenings in the 1940s followed by a dance or ‘hop’

Saturday: outings

‘**Useful work**’

- preparing classrooms, workshop, art room etc.
- breakfast upstairs wash-up
- feeding animals
- lighting fires
- cleaning dorms
- chopping kindling
- cleaning bathrooms and toilets
- cooking e.g. helping to start soup
- fixing bicycles
- cleaning windows
- repairing windows
- being a useful work ‘boss’

**Paid work**

- breakfast set-up including making porridge, tea and toast
- bell-ringing
- potato peeling
- downstairs wash up of pots and pans
Time line of building projects and other key dates at Kilquhanity

1940  school founded by John and Morag Aitkenhead
1940s and 50s  gradual conversion of farm out-buildings into classrooms and accommodation
1957  the Fort built (3 storeys), led by pupil William Burrows
1961  stable converted to theatre
1962  article by John appears in Independent, Progressive Schools
1966  log cabin built, led by teacher Mike Kerr
1966  dug-out canoe, led by teacher Mike Kerr
1970  cabin for Staff accommodation, led by teacher Mike Todd
1971  The Site (new workshop and art studio), led by teacher Richard Jones
1972  Morag and John to America
1973  Alistair Drummond died in a road accident
1974  restoration of chimneys and walls of outbuildings
1975  building of a reed boat, led by Mike Todd
1978/9  The Dome built, led by John Waterhouse
1993  Gavin takes over as head and it becomes a day school
1997  school closed
2002  school purchased and refurbished by Kinokuni Children’s Village

Ongoing pupil construction projects

- tree-houses and huts which were slept in during the summer
- bridge across the pond
- ropes swings
- goal posts
- canvas canoe
- underground tunnels
- igloos – ice and grass
- skate-boards
Appendix 2: Wennington typical day and key dates

**Typical day**

7 am  
first wake-up bell  
vegetable preparation squad up and working

7.10 am  
second bell – get up  
morning Duties  
morning dip in pool  
breakfast

9 am  
morning assembly in music room – announcements, cultural life

9.30 am  
morning lessons

11 am  
morning break – cocoa hard-bake* and cod liver oil

12.30 pm  
lunch

1.30-2 pm  
siesta (abandoned after 1966)

2 pm  
outdoor work 2 days a week and games/sports 1 day a week

4 pm  
lessons

6.15 pm  
te a

After tea  
assignments

*hard-bake was bread baked in the oven until it resembled rusks.

Bedtimes were staggered according to age.

Thursday afternoon and Sunday – free time

Saturday afternoon/evening – cultural activities, dance etc

Sunday – letter-writing and evening assembly

Wednesday evening once a fortnight – The Senate meeting

**Jobs which pupils did as part of ‘Morning Duties’ or ‘Outdoor Work’**

- washing up
- laying and clearing tables
- making beds
- peeling potatoes and other veg.
- veg garden and fruit-picking
- bee-keeping
- laundry sorting
- library
- cleaning main hall
- cleaning other parts of the site including toilets
- counsellor-on-duty – check the little ones in bed
- getting people up in the morning
- lighting fires
- collecting newspaper from nearby town
- weather station – input meteorological information
- felling and cross-cutting timber
- getting stumps out
- digging holes
- pump team and fire squad
**Specialised jobs at Wennington**

- looking after workshop – including its fire (a pupil would have key to workshop)
- looking after swimming pool
- changing light bulbs
- looking after theatre and projector with stage hands erecting stage and lighting
- football pitch – white lines
- looking after science lab
- cleaning toilets
- mowing the playing field
- Sunday tea** made by sixth formers for the whole school to allow time off for the kitchen staff.

** boiled eggs and tea made with the same water in which the eggs had been cooked**

**List of key dates and construction projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>founded in Wennington, Lancashire, Lune Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>moved to Wetherby, Yorkshire – Ingmanthorpe Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>library with shelving and cupboards in former dining room*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>extension of workshop to provide separate wood and metal work rooms*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>concrete Nissen type hut – for circular saw shed and timber store*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>every year stage rebuilt in the ‘music room’ and painted back drop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>building of a raft as part of Spring Term project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>building of a sports pavilion out of timber from the estate*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>John Swift, civil engineer, joined the staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>installation of showers and water closets in the girls’ changing room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inspection pit for cars*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>new sewage system*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>timber building of one large and two small classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>new staff houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hut for lawn mower*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tennis Courts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>science lab (Sam Doncaster invited back to help finish the fittings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>theatre (Richard Schofield did the wiring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Kenneth Barnes retired and Brian Merrikin Hill (English teacher) took</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>over as head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>workshop extensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Alfred Sessa as head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*pupils were involved

**Ongoing pupil construction projects**

- camps and dens in larch woods (in craters where roots had come up) (68/69)
- aerial rope-way between two trees
- pulley for zip-wire

*280*
Appendix 3: Thumb-nail sketches of the contemporary settings referred to in Chapter 6 (arranged alphabetically)

**Ancient Technology Centre in Dorset (c.1985- )**  
Jake Keen led the construction of this centre. He was a school teacher at the Middle School in Cranbourne and worked with pupils to create ambitious buildings using ancient techniques and locally sourced materials. The site is now owned by the council and used for educational trips and events.

**Bedales School (1893- )**  
Independent school with a focus on creativity and artistic activities.

**Circle of Life Rediscovery (2007- )**  

**Comeragh Wilderness Camp (2011- )**  
Therapeutic camp for excluded and/or vulnerable teenage boys based in Southern Ireland with a Christian ethos.

**El Warcha -The Workshop (2017- )**  
A community workshop for young people in central Tunis, set up by architect, Benjamin Perrot, who is now working to set up a similar enterprise in London.

**Embercombe (1999- )**  
A land-based charity in Devon which runs development programmes for individuals and families.

**Forest School Camps (1947- )**  
An organisation based on the ethos of the 1930s Forest School which organises camps for young people.

**Free We Grow (2018- )**  
A 3-day a week alternative education space for home-educated children in London.

**Hillholt Wood Social Enterprise (2002- )**  
Educational and community woodland – often working with disadvantaged and excluded young people from the local area in Lincolnshire.

**Kilquhanity Children’s Village (2002- )**  
Shinichiro Hori’s chain of progressive Japanese schools visit Kilquhanity House as groups of 30 or so primary school aged children and their teachers for stays of 1-2 weeks.

**King Alfred School (1898- )**  
An independent progressive school in North London.

**Kissori School, (c.2010- )**  
A democratic school in Germany inspired by Montessori and democratic education ideas, secondary school.
The Land (2012- )
A playground inspired by the adventure playground movement set up by Claire Griffiths.

Michael Hall, Steiner School (1925- )
Well-established Steiner school including sixth form.

The Mount, Camphill (1970- )
A college and residential community for 15-25 year olds with special needs in East Sussex. Part of wider Camphill Movement founded in 1940 for severely disabled children and connected to Rudolf Steiner.

Moulsecoomb Primary School
Mainstream state primary school in outskirts of Brighton with Ancient Technology playground built by staff, pupils and local craft practitioners.

Oasis Adventure Playground (1973- )
An adventure playground in South London.

Paideia School (2000- )
Anarchist school in Spain.

A Place to Grow (2012-2019)
A 3-day a week children’s community for home-educated children near Stroud.

Scouts and Guides (1908- )
An international voluntary organisation dedicated to the development of young people with a focus on practical and outdoors activities and relying on adult volunteers.

Taliesin Community Woodland (1997- )
Community owned and run woodland in Galloway. A site for working parties, camps, practical courses and celebrations. Ex-Kilquhanity pupil and staff are involved with this project.

Trefoil School, (2009- )
Primary school inspired by Montessori ideas, based on a farm in West Sussex.

Uckfield College (1953- )
Mainstream secondary school in East Sussex with c.1,500 pupils.

Wilderness Wood in East Sussex, led by the author and her family since 2014
A 60-acre woodland with a collection of enterprises and a community of around 150 member families who help look after and improve the woodland in exchange for opportunities to work and play in a mixed-age community around the woods.

Woodcraft Folk (1925- )
Founded as a socially progressive alternative to scouts and still active in many areas of the UK.
Appendix 4

COPYRIGHT ASSIGNMENT & CONSENT FORM FOR ORAL HISTORY RECORDINGS

The purpose of this assignment and consent is to enable Emily Charkin, a PhD student at the Institute of Education, to make use of interviews conducted for her PhD and related academic articles or presentations.

In respect of the content of a sound recording made by Emily Charkin, PhD Researcher, consisting of the recollections of a contributor and constituting a literary work as defined by the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988:

As present owner of the copyright in the contributor content (i.e. the words spoken by the interviewee), I hereby assign such copyright to Emily Charkin. I hereby waive any moral rights which I presently own in relation to this work on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner and that the author of the contribution will be correctly identified in all uses of it. I understand that no payment is due to me for this assignment and consent. In assigning my copyright, I understand that I am giving Emily Charkin the right to use and make available the content of the recorded interview in the following ways:

- use in PhD
- public performance, lecture or talk
- use in print publications

Do you want your name to be disclosed? YES/NO

Signed: ………………………………………Date: ………………………

(Print name):

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Address:

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Postcode …………………………… Telephone: ………………………

Email: …………………………………….