

FROM THE GARTON ARCHIVE AT LINCOLN CHRIST'S HOSPITAL SCHOOL

Headmistress Cleave and her 1950s Rules

My long experience in education has taught me that teachers fight a perennial battle with their pupils and students to ensure that school rules are known, understood and followed. The difference between what I observe in today's schools, and what applied in the 1950s during my own secondary education is largely cosmetic. In my day, teachers made the rules, and took whatever steps were necessary to enforce them, with the sanctions available and permitted at the time. The same applies today. Nothing has changed, although many would argue that the task is more difficult for a number of social and cultural reasons!

Every once in a while a real gem comes to my attention through my work in the archives at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School, and the following list of rules from Lincoln Christ's Hospital Girls High School (LHS) during the mid-twentieth century is a prime example. The letter, sent to parents by Headmistress Miss Cleave during the 1950s, was kindly sent to me by a former Head Girl of LHS, Ruth Miller, née Montgomery. The rules were implemented by Miss Cleave and her staff during the 1940s and '50s, but later rescinded with some obvious reluctance, or possibly even disdain! The message to the parents is quite clear; the Headmistress expects!

Lincoln Christ's Hospital School

There was for many years a rule, printed on the declaration form which parents sign as they entered the school, to the effect that no child under sixteen might visit places of public amusement except in the charge of some responsible person. This rule was made, mainly with the cinema in view, for the following reasons:

1. No child who is doing her work properly can have the time both to get sufficient fresh air and sleep, and go to the cinema.
2. A child's taste must be trained; habitual picture-going blunts the powers of discrimination and is definitely harmful to aesthetic and mental development.
3. Although many films give a balanced view of life, many others stress unduly the part played by the emotions of sex. This type is not calculated to encourage a healthy outlook in the adolescent.

These reasons seem to us to hold good. Aware, however, that a rule unsupported by many parents and so disregarded by their children is useless, we cancelled it, asking parents to assume all responsibility in the matter. We do nevertheless urge upon them the extreme undesirability of girls being allowed to go to the cinema at the end of a day in school.

We would also warn parents that it is unwise to allow grammar school girls, particularly in the senior forms, to commit themselves to regular meetings in the evenings, except at the weekends.

Signed I V Cleave, Headmistress

Readers will have their reactions to these rules of course, but there are a few issues of interest to me that might also be worthy of debate between parents and their children, and by teachers with their students in secondary schools:

1. I wonder how students manage to have enough sleep in today's culture? I'm sure many still go to the cinema, and also have all the gadgets and other distractions to keep them awake! It seems clear to me from my own observations that students at LCHS still work very hard to achieve their qualifications, and I'm sure that the same applies to other schools and academies.
2. Surely there is a place for leisure time in our society? All work and no play.....?
3. Is there something intrinsically inferior to the cinema compared to the other arts? It seems to me that Miss Cleave had a misplaced and élitist attitude to the cinema. Surely the cinema as an art form has the power to train the mind, to nurture the powers of discrimination and to develop aesthetic and cognitive development?
4. It is the view of educationists that addressing the 'emotions of sex' is a major adolescent task, and needs to be confronted and celebrated with help and support from parents and teachers. I wonder what Miss Cleave would have made of today's 'sexting', provocative 'selfies' and explicit Facebook images? Her approach seems to be to sweep sexual issues under the carpet, which is much more likely to lead to an 'unhealthy attitude'. In the 1950s, when my own interest was being aroused, sex tended to be repressed, and was only 'discovered' during the 'swinging '60s!
5. The debate about whose responsibility it is to support and educate children in understanding and coming to terms with their sexual development and identity is not new! It looms large as a recurrent issue.
6. From a linguistic standpoint I find the sentence beginning, "We do nevertheless urge..." somewhat cumbersome. Is it grammatically correct? I suggest that it is certainly not a construction likely to be found in current usage. Perhaps it is another example of how language use changes over time.

I do recall a similarly censorial attitude by one Headmaster at Lincoln School, who banned a play from being performed because of a passing reference to sex. However, I also remember the legendary Mr 'Shep' Shepherd encouraging his upper school French scholars to attend the showings of 'artistic' French films at the Grand

cinema in Lincoln! I'm not sure that they improved my French, but they certainly developed my 'aesthetic' judgement!

Food for thought in today's 'permissive' society!

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