

FOXDALE Kindergarten and Preparatory School, Kirk Ella

The following advertisement appeared in the Hull Daily Mail on Thursday, 29th August 1935:

KIRKELLA: FOXDALE KINDERGARTEN AND PREPARATORY SCHOOL Village road - The above school will be OPENED WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18 th . For Prospectus and particulars, apply after September 1 st to the Principal. P31

The Principal to whom applications were to be made was Mary Dorothea Sugden, a single lady, aged 40 years. The above advertisement gives the impression that this is the inaugural year of the school, although there is some ambiguity in the word 'opened'. However, this is the earliest reference to the school found so far.

Village Road, Kirk Ella was the former name of what is known today as School Lane, named for St. Andrew's Primary School, which has stood on the corner of Mill Lane and West Ella Road since 1859.

So, whereabouts on Village Road was Foxdale School located? The picture below provides the answer:



Kirk Ella: Junction of Church Lane, Village Road (School Lane) and Packman Lane with St. Andrew's Church in the background – late 1930s

The gate on the right of the picture is the entrance to what is now No. 1 School Lane¹. The notice next to the gate reads, 'Foxdale Kindergarten and Preparatory School'.

¹ In the 1930s, the present-day School Lane was known as Village Road. Then, none of the houses on Village Road had numbers, only names, which included 'Chestnut Lodge', 'Davarne', 'Ebbishamgate', 'Morven', 'Newington', 'Sandys', 'The Hollies', 'Thomis', 'Throx', 'Trevato', 'Valhalla' and 'Willesden'.

On the photograph below (probably taken slightly earlier than the previous picture), the school is the middle of the three bungalows and, although probably quite spacious for the time, would not have been able to accommodate a large number of young children.



Village Road, Kirk Ella - mid-1930s

The 1930s was a period when many new houses were built in new suburbs surrounding large cities like Hull and, as a result, Kirk Ella and Willerby were expanding rapidly. The many young families moving to the area to occupy these new-builds created a demand for early education for their children. Thus, during this period Mary Sugden was not the only one to spot an opportunity, and a number of other similar privately run schools were springing up in the area. These included St. Monica's and Wray Park, both of which were located on Kingston Road in Willerby. In 1939, there was also a kindergarten school at 'The Links' on Riplingham Road in Kirk Ella, run by Mrs. A.S. Waterson. These were all commercial undertakings and would have been fee-paying establishments, fees generally being payable by parents on a term-by-term basis.

Mary Dorothea Sugden had been born in the village of Barmby, about four miles west of Howden, into a farming family. Her father was John William Sugden and her mother Mary Alice (nee Fox). Two elder brothers, William and George and two younger sisters, Kathleen and Marjorie, formed the household in High Street, Barmby, in 1901. Little else is known of her background or education until she appeared as the Principal of Foxdale School in 1935. Her father had died in 1928, aged 75, leaving £1400 in his Will to his wife. As a reference, 85% of houses built during the 1930s cost less than £750, which suggests that William Sugden was reasonably well-off. Maybe some of this wealth descended to his eldest daughter, Mary, providing the capital that enabled her to establish Foxdale School in Kirk Ella.

The name of the school is intriguing. Why 'Foxdale'? Mary's mother's maiden name was Fox, which may give us part of the answer. Looking more closely at other family names, the maiden name of one of Mary's grandmothers was Gilderdale, so we could speculate that a combination of these two names provides the derivation of the name of the school. However, this is guesswork.

How many parents applied for a Prospectus in early September 1935 is unknown, but presumably there were enough favourable responses for the school to quickly establish itself.



'Foxdale', West Ella Road, Kirk Ella (2019)

Drive, Valley Drive, Westlands Road, West Ella Road, etc. This was a further indication that the school had built up a widespread reputation.

Pupils during the 1940s included Anthony Armstrong, Audrey Auty, Sandra Bailey, Anthony Barker, Avril Blight, David Carter, Michael Curtis, Susan Ferens, John Good, Hilary Headspeth, Elizabeth Irving, Susan Kirkland, John Larard, Elizabeth Manley, the McColl sisters, Sylvia Moon, Jacqueline Moxley, Richard Pearson, Carol Trever, Susan Uebel, Pam Wade and Mickey Watson.²

Richard Pearson takes up the story:

Apart from the village school, there was another, privately run, educational establishment in Kirkella which was known as "Foxdale". This was a Kindergarten school run by Miss Sugden at her home on the corner of Westella Road with Westland Road; the private property still carries that name.

The school catered for boys up to the age of eight years and girls to eleven. Being a private house, it was divided into two parts, one for education and the other as a home for Miss Sugden and her mother, who is remembered as being a kindly lady with white hair and dressed in black; she played no part in the teaching of the children. The strict rule for the young pupils was not to venture into the 'home' part of the house unless permitted by Miss Sugden, so there were certain doors through which we could not pass.

² Most of these names were provided by Carole Keech and Richard Pearson.

Pupils entered the school at the back of the house, the front door being one of those forbidden. On the ground floor was the hall, off which was a cloakroom for the pupils and the kitchen (forbidden). A front room overlooked the garden and was Miss Sugden's private sitting room (forbidden, again). To the rear was a classroom with a French window which was the entrance for the pupils. This opened on to the back garden parallel to Westland Road and essentially a grassed play area. On the grass was a big tree stump laid on its side called "the log" which was a focal point for playground games. Organised games such as rounders were also played on the grass. Upstairs there was another classroom facing south, similar to that on the ground floor and also a second, smaller classroom.

Miss Sugden was a good teacher but quite strict. To assist her were a couple of other female teachers and a lady who lived next door called Mrs Backley who helped out and supervised at playtimes. Mrs. Backley once gave me a telling off for constantly referring to her as Mrs. Broccoli! The school had a good reputation for teaching the basics of the three R's as well as other subjects. The older girls were given lessons in French and piano lessons but, for reasons unknown, not the boys. For good work one could earn a "red star", whilst for misbehaviour a "black star" would be awarded. There was no corporal punishment so, for too many black stars, it was a case of referring to the parents.

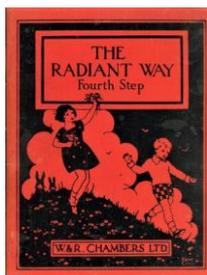
Memories of Foxdale have faded with the years but one or two aspects of life at the school still remain clear. Every week there was a music lesson including singing and a percussion band involving the pupils. This was supervised by a lady called Miss Suddaby who was a large lady with prominent front teeth. She came on her sit-up-and-beg bicycle with her sheet music in the basket on the front. Miss Suddaby played the piano whilst the rest of us would join in with bells, drums and triangles. To what extent it developed our musical appreciation is debatable but there was always a scrum to get the drum!

Every summer there would be a school play before an audience of parents and friends which involved a storyline with music. The one performance that is remembered involved a now politically incorrect tale of gypsies abducting the children of a king and queen. It took place one fine summer afternoon in 1946 on the grass playground with every pupil having a part to play in the production. The excitement was intensified with dressing-up and learning lines. Frequent ad-libs by the cast caused many laughs in the audience. Another summer performance at Foxdale involved King Arthur and his Court. I had a non-speaking part but it involved dressing up (fun) and carrying a wooden sword which was duly confiscated owing to a chivalric disfunction!

Miss Sugden died suddenly in 1950 or thereabouts. Her death was a shock to people in and around Kirkella as she had been a much-respected member of the community and, as a teacher, is remembered with affection by those whom she taught. No doubt there are many former pupils of Foxdale School who have memories of their time at Foxdale even though it closed long ago.³

³ This account by Richard Pearson was first issued in a booklet entitled *Kirk Ella Schooldays: Remembering the School and 'Foxdale'* published by the Local History Group of Anlaby, Willerby and Kirk Ella U3A in 2014. This 2020 version contains some updates.

Carol Keech (née Trever) continues with her memories:



I attended Foxdale school on Westella Road from 1942 until 1945 (aged five to eight). I remember a great deal and learned a lot - being in very small classes! I learned to read using the Radiant Way Series. Miss Sugden was the head mistress. She lived at the school with her mother, who lived upstairs. Mrs. Backley, who lived next door to the school, was another teacher and Miss Airey, also. The younger class was downstairs and the older children upstairs. We learnt French and History in addition to the 'three Rs'. In winter, the third-of-a-pint bottles of milk were warmed on the radiator! We had concerts on the grass in the summer and, one year, I played 'Romance' by Beethoven! We took our air raid masks to school. The uniform was brown and yellow and I remember berets, and blazers and a striped tie. For games lessons, we were in two teams - Foxes and Dales! I remember there was a boy who had a lengthy list of "black stars" for bad behaviour!

I had piano lessons with Miss Suddaby after school, and I think my lifelong musical appreciation began then! I taught singing and percussion to Infants and Juniors for thirty-four years – first in Hull and later in East Surrey – until my early retirement in 1994!

In 1946, the wording of Foxdale's newspaper advertisement exuded greater confidence than a decade earlier, indicating a well-established school with almost full uptake of the places available. On Monday, 1st July, the Hull Daily Mail printed the following notice:

FOXDALE School Modern kindergarten with nursery class and preparatory forms; a limited number of vacancies for next term; escort to and from the buses, also from The Square, Willerby.

However, it is likely that the school closed a few years later following the sudden death of Mary Sugden on 23rd January 1951.⁴ She left behind a legacy which, to this day, is much valued by those who attended her school.

Francis Davies
6th April 2020

Thank you to the following people for their contributions and for providing information and help towards the production of this account:

Richard Pearson, Carol Keech, Christine Gibbs, Nicholas Uebel and Christine Trever

⁴ When Mary Sugden's brother, George, died in 1959 his estate was worth £24,000 (which translates to over £½m in 2020)