
**References**


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**Review**

K. Willoughby (ed)


This engaging and unusual book was designed to be used by primary school children following the history curriculum promulgated in 1999 in Ireland. It takes them – and any reader – into the daily lives of teacher and pupils in the schools of the Kildare Place Society in Dublin in the 1820s. The Society was established by philanthropists in 1811, and supported by grants from the (British) government from 1815 until 1831, when the National School System was set up in Ireland. It aimed to provide basic training in literacy and numeracy at elementary level throughout Ireland. The Society was non-denominational, and the ‘religious question’ was confronted by having the Bible read in its schools without any interpretative comment.

The KPS schools used the monitorial system, older pupils instructing their juniors in small groups. As usual with this kind of system, clear-cut rules of procedure were followed. They included routines for dealing with the slates which we kept in the pupils’ desks. ‘Slates up!’ and the pupils would hold them up; ‘Slates down!’ and they would be put on desks. ‘Clean slates!’ ‘Pens up! Write!’ and the lesson began. (Readers of *Paradigm* will remember Nigel Hall’s discussion in his article on slates in Lancasterian schools: *Paradigm* 2.7 (2003) 46–54). The last of the four units into which the book is divided follows a day in the life of a pupil; the other three deal with the schoolhouse, the content of learning and discipline. Each unit presents contemporary material, in large format (the book is A4) and often in colour. A starring role is played by three posters printed by W. Darton in 1820. ‘Grammar’ offers us nine couplets, from ‘Three little words we often see / Are articles, a, an, and the’ to ‘The interjection shows surprise / As. Oh! How pretty! Ah! How wise!’ The border of the poster is made up of 26 pictures, from Apple to Zebra. X, always a problem, is here a picture of Xenophon (did you know he had a beard?). The other posters deal with ‘Rustic Scenes’ and ‘The Costumes of Nations’. In a supporting role are other teaching aids: handwriting charts, merit certificates, lists of misdeeds, and so on.

This book is an admirable and well-conceived teaching tool. The space taken up by questions to be answered by (modern) pupils make it both more and less than a straightforward compilation of historical evidence. But anyone interested in the crucial detail of curriculum and teaching in the past would enjoy reading ‘Slates Up!’ To quote again from one of the posters it shows us: *Oh! How pretty! Ah! How wise!*

*Chris Stray*