

Reprint from The Teacher of the Deaf - April 1964.

OBITUARY

MR. L.J. BENHAM.

We deeply regret to announce the sudden and unexpected death of Mr. L.J. Benham, at the Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children, on February 25th.

Mr. Benham was spared a long illness; in fact, he took morning assembly only a few moments before his death; but the loss sustained by his friends and by the College is immeasurable. His service to the deaf began earlier than it did for most of us, as a "probationary teacher" at Rayners, before proceeding to Culham College, Oxford, and then to Manchester University for the Diploma Course. His career as a qualified teacher began at Brighton, but he was already on the staff of the Jewish School when his predecessor, Mr. Hart, died (also in harness) and Mr. Benham agreed to carry on, in a temporary capacity since he was not a member of the Jewish faith. However, the Managing Committee soon came to appreciate to the full the sterling qualities of this unassuming man who, regardless of creed or dogma, has served Jewish deaf children - and their parents - with unstinted devotion for so many years since that first "temporary" appointment.

We are left now with only the memory of a man who never spared himself; a man who never dressed his shop window, but whose goods were always of the highest quality, the quality which needs no advertising; a man whose transparent honesty inspired immediate confidence, in whose friendship trust and integrity were always explicit. At meetings of the College Executive he spoke perhaps infrequently, but always to the point, and as a result, his words were always received with respectful attention.

His own attitude is perhaps best illustrated by his response when asked by his Managing Committee what gift he would most appreciate to mark the milestone of his 25th anniversary at the school. He replied, "Something which no-one can give me; time, to travel, in Europe, to visit other schools for the deaf outside the British Isles." Here, of course, he underestimated the donors, because they were able to give him just that; time off to fulfil his dream; and no-one ever proved himself more worthy of such fulfilment.

To Mrs. Benham, who now faces alone the retirement which they had planned so soon to enjoy together, and to Mr. Denton who dons the heavy mantle of his responsibility in winding up the school he served so long, we offer sympathy and encouragement for a future which can never be the same without his gentle and unassuming presence.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR JEWISH DEAF CHILDREN

Ninety-Third Annual Report, 1963-64

The Executive and House Committees beg to submit the Annual Report of the School for the year ended 31st March, 1964.

It is with a deep sense of bereavement that we have to report the sudden death of Mr. L. J. Benham in February. No words could convey all he meant to the school, to the Committees and to the generations of pupils and their parents who owed so much to him during the many years he guided the school as Headmaster. He joined the staff in 1934 and took over as Head Master after the death of Mr. Hart in 1943. Under his inspired leadership, the reputation of the school soared and stood very high in the estimation of the Ministry of Education and the local education authorities. He was a magnificent teacher and organiser and an invaluable friend. We shall miss him sorely.

Mr. L. J. Benham

The sudden death of Mr. L. J. Benham at the early age of 55 was a double tragedy in every sense of the word. On the one hand all the cherished dreams for an early retirement held by Mr. and Mrs. Benham were shattered, and on the other hand the school and indeed, the entire world of the deaf lost a valued counsellor and good friend.

In all the thirty-two years of his work for the deaf, no one ever saw Mr. Benham lose his temper, act hastily or lack patience, even when confronted with the extremely difficult and trying problems that all who work with the deaf constantly have to face.

Trained at Manchester, two years with the doubly handicapped deaf at Penn and thirty years as teacher and Headmaster at the R.S.J.D.C. Mr. Benham did not confine his interests and energies to the schoolroom. An able and devoted teacher and administrator, he also travelled widely in search of new ideas for the education of the deaf, bringing to this country many innovations seen abroad, in this way following worthily in the footsteps of his

illustrious predecessor at the school, William Van Praagh, who introduced the oral system to Britain.



Mr. Benham was widely known and respected for his work on the executive committee of the N.C.T.D., serving as Chairman for one year, and Hon. Secretary for many more.

With his sudden death the world of the deaf has lost one of the really devoted and dedicated teachers it so sorely needs, and his memory will long continue to act as a guide and inspiration to the teaching of the deaf profession.