

## Hesley Hall, 25 July 1950



Looking for all the world like a costume for a participant in a fancy dress ball, such as one held at Hesley Hall by Benjamin and Caroline Whitaker in 1910 for 300 or so guests, this is in fact the uniform worn by the Whitaker's coachman. Made from silk, the jacket was blue, the breeches red and the stockings white. The ensemble was completed with a bicorn hat, waistcoat, gloves and buckled shoes. It all emphasised the status and wealth of the Whitaker family.

The uniform was worn by 65 year old Harry Bingham, son of the Whitaker's coachman, on 25 July 1950, as a member of the reception committee to greet the arrival of Queen Elizabeth at Hesley Hall. After opening the Portland Training College for the Disabled at Mansfield the previous day, the Queen came to open Hesley Hall as a boarding school for 5-11 year olds to be run by the Central Council for the Care of Cripples. The Council was founded in 1919 to organise a national scheme to deal with the 'cripple problem' throughout the UK. One of its aims was to provide facilities for the early discovery and prompt treatment of children with physical disabilities and enable them to have the education of a 'normal person'. Before the opening of places such as Hesley Hall School for Crippled Children, children with severe physical disabilities were taught in orthopaedic hospital schools.

Since her days as the Duchess of York, the Queen had taken an interest in people with physical disabilities, opening the 'Cripples Training College' on 27 June 1935. The College was later renamed The Queen Elizabeth Training College for the Disabled.

Returning to 25 July 1950... on a dais outside the Hall the Queen was greeted by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Sheffield and formally welcomed by Major General Sir John Whitaker, High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire, who had made the Hall available for the school in 1947. (It took three years and cost £22,000 to convert the Hall to its new use. The first five children joined the school on 1 March 1950.) More than 20 children, most of them in wheelchairs and all waving union jacks, were assembled on one of the lawns, on a very hot day. One of the girls, five year old Beryl Cook from Micklefield near Leeds, presented the Queen with a bouquet. Beryl's parents were among the crowd estimated at over 4,000 people who had gathered in the grounds to greet the Queen.

*The photograph is one of the cuttings saved by Miss Florence Whinfrey in her album of cuttings which Betty Hill loaned to the Society and which was digitised by Steve Payne.*

