



DRAYTON MANOR HIGH SCHOOL

HANWELL COMMUNITY CENTRE

13 MAY 2020



In a normal academic year at Drayton Manor High School, students regularly make the short walk to Hanwell Community Centre where some PE lessons take place and they learn how to play sports such as badminton, handball, basketball and indoor football.

As we approach the school's 90th birthday in November, it is worth bearing in mind that the community centre was also once a school, although one of a very different kind, which closed just two years after Drayton Manor opened.

The London District Poor School opened on 20 October 1857 and was a boarding school for up to 1,200 poor and disadvantaged children providing schooling and training. In addition to classrooms, dining hall, kitchen, library, gymnasium, dormitories and bathrooms, the school had its own chaplain, infirmary, swimming pool, laundry, wash house, dairy and farm house.

One of the school's most famous pupils was Charlie Chaplin, who spent time there from June 1896 to January 1898. But Charlie never had happy memories as he didn't like the harsh discipline and corporal punishment. He recalls there were regular Friday morning punishment sessions in the gymnasium. For minor offences, a boy was laid face down across a long desk, feet strapped and was given from three to six hefty strokes with a four-foot cane. Recipients would cry or even faint afterwards and had to be carried away to recover. Chaplin himself once received three strokes with the cane, apparently for an offence he did not commit. However, he did not forget what the school tried to do for all the poor and orphaned children. He returned on one occasion and treated all the schoolchildren to a picnic and a showing of one of his films in a Shepherds Bush cinema.

In June 1933 all the scholars were transferred to other schools and the building was left empty. The Hanwell Community Association moved into the building in 1938 and has leased the building ever since as a Municipal Community Centre in 1942 to serve the people of the London Borough of Ealing and the surrounding area.

In more recent times the building has been steeped in rock music history. It was here that Deep Purple Mk2 began their rehearsals and wrote much of their hard rock masterpiece Deep Purple in Rock. Bassist Roger Clover said, *"it was always available, it was cheap, and it was close to where we were all living at the time"*. Ian Paice recalls, *"it was the only place we could find where we could make a lot of noise"*.

The Rock band, The Who, also rehearsed here prior to their 1969 US Tour, as Pete Townsend's parents lived around the corner.

As well as having links with music history, The Hanwell Community Centre also has links with major motion pictures. It was here that the famous gym sequence was filmed in the 2000 hit film Billy Elliot starring Jamie Bell.

We look forward to when our students can return to this historic site for their PE lessons with hopefully a little more understanding of its colourful history. They may even see the ghost that is said to haunt it!