In a letter to the Yorkshire Post in 18 June 1906, local Headingley resident J.R. Mozley wrote of his alarm over the proposed sale of the Kirkstall Grange Estate. He feared that the estate would succumb to, “parallelograms of streets and houses,” but hoped some scheme would emerge to protect the rural beauty of the area. He described the walk through Beckett Park meadowland that: “Slopes gently downwards expanding to right and left in glades of grass and timber covered heights.” The heart of the estate was spared extensive housing, in its place came a building in glades of grass and timber covered heights. The Leeds Training College had been established six years earlier in 1907; the Leeds Training College had been something of Mozley’s rural and sylvan idyll. He described the walk thorough Beckett Park meadowland that: “Slopes gently downwards expanding to right and left in glades of grass and timber covered heights.”

The Leeds Training College had been established six years earlier in 1907; the Leeds Training College had been something of Mozley’s rural and sylvan idyll. He described the walk thorough Beckett Park meadowland that: “Slopes gently downwards expanding to right and left in glades of grass and timber covered heights.”

On 13 June 1913, a luncheon was held by the Lord Mayor of Leeds in the Town Hall, at around 2.30pm guests travelled by specially commissioned trams to the entrance of the Training College. Among those who gathered in the Great Hall of the College were the Lord and Lady Mayor of Leeds, Alderman, Councillors, representatives of both Leeds and West Riding Councils, the Bishop of Ripon, the Vicar of Leeds, Leeds University Chancellor and Pro Chancellor, College Principals, Directors and Secretaries of Education and many other representatives of schools, educational bodies and authorities from around the country.

There must have been a palpable feeling of civic pride exuding from the gathered dignitaries but perhaps one tempered by caution, mindful that only 75% of the capital costs had been met by the Board of Education in London and that the whole enterprise was. Of all the potential sites considered by Leeds Education Committee, Kirkstall Grange had been the most expensive; the price agreed by the Committee, led by Kinder and Graham, for 40 acres was £48,000. Battle continued his onslaught lambasting Leeds Corporation for presuming to provide a teacher training programme equal or even superior to that already received by the students. Towards the end of his speech a, “harmless-looking, grey-haired old lady”, as the Leeds Mercury described her, rose to her feet calling for votes for women. This was at the height of the suffragette struggle. At that very moment Lilian Lenton, suffragette cause célèbre, was being held in nearby Armley Gaol and had begun a hunger strike. The interpoling elderly lady had apparently evaded the barbaric practice of force feeding suffragettes in gaol. There were anecdotal, unconfirmed reports of further suffragette activity with one lady throwing herself in the College swimming pool.

After a series of votes of thanks and responses, Pease was presented with silver candlesticks and an inkind as a memento of the occasion. Lord Grimthorpe, who had not only sold the land on which the College was built but had gifted additional land to the scheme, in a final flourish presented to the College a painting called The Wooden Walls of England, by an unnamed Yorkshire artist. A great fuss was made of the painting’s value of £1,600 and of Grimthorpe’s overall generosity. Despite being a cloudy and breezy day, the weather held and on the newly-laid out lawn, overlooked by the dazzling red brick and pristine sandstone facings of the Education Block and Hostels, the band of the 7th Battalion Prince of Wales Own West Yorkshire Regiment (Leeds Rifles) played, “Lively operatic and other selections,” including work by Gounod and Offenbach; they played two sessions finishing well into the evening. Visitors took tea and refreshments in and around the brand new hostels while they inspected the College facilities.

The next day, a Saturday, the general public were admitted to the college and grounds between 3 and 6pm, more tea and refreshments were served and the band played for a second day. Finally, the Leeds ratepayers could see how their money had been spent.

FROM THE ARCHIVE: OPENING DAY

On the 13 June 1913 the new Leeds Training College was officially opened on the former Kirkstall Grange Estate at Beckett Park, which now forms our Headingley Campus. As we celebrate our campus centenary, Keith Rowntree reflects on events 100 years ago.