

Church of England School, Hankerton

Accounts differ in regards to when exactly a National School was built in Hankerton. Arnold Platts in "Wiltshire Schools" states the school was built in 1860, with the help of a government grant. He writes this was initially for 60 children. But the Victoria County History for Wiltshire believes the school was built between the years of 1850 and 1852 and by 1858 it was well run and 40 to 50 children attended; as the latter statement comes from Warburton's Census of Schools it would seem that the school was built in the 1850s.

We do not hold Victorian log books for the school but the following will give an idea of what life was like at the school at this time:

The following general information would be relevant to the school for the latter part of the 19th century. Fees were paid for each child until 1891, normally at the rate of one penny (0.4p) a week and the 'school pence' were collected by the schoolteacher. There would have been a schoolmaster, or schoolmistress, with an assistant teacher and perhaps a pupil teacher. The pupil teacher was taught by the head before lessons started, took exams, sometimes went to the Diocesan Training College eventually becoming a teacher themselves. They mainly taught the younger children.

School holidays were at similar times to those of today but often there was only 2 days at Easter but a week at Whitsun. The summer holidays were of four, five or six weeks and were called the Harvest Holidays as the children either helped with the harvest or carried food and drink to their parents, who were working in the fields. There were more half-day and whole day holidays for special events. Half a day would be given after the annual H.M.I. or Diocesan inspections and there were holidays for school treats, choir outings, chapel teas, Christmas parties and at times when the school was needed for other purposes.

There were also many unauthorised absences. These would be for seasonal work, such as haymaking (June) and early or late harvest (July or September), being kept at home to help their parents, and working when they should have been at school. Bad weather such as heavy rain, cold weather, or snow kept children away from school, often because their parents couldn't afford to buy them suitable clothes and boots. Apart from the usual colds and coughs there were more serious illnesses than today and these included, mumps, measles, whooping cough, scarletina and diphtheria.

The elementary subjects were the '3 Rs' - reading writing and arithmetic. Scripture was often taught by the vicar and children would have attended church for services on some days. Older children were taught history and geography and there may have been some study of natural history. Singing was taught to all ages and all the girls and some of the boys would have done needlework. Drawing had been introduced by the 1890s.

Responsibility for the school passed to Wiltshire County Council in 1906 although a local board of managers remained.

In the early years of the 20th century the attendance was relatively low and seemed to fluctuate between 20 and 30 children. Illness, weather and work often kept children away from school. In July 1907 attendance was extremely low because of hay making. In December of that year several children were absent from school because heavy rainfall had partially flooded roads in the parish. Prior to the First World War, children were often absent in April because of the races at Oaksey. On 10 July 1911 the school was closed for two weeks by order of the school medical inspector, as nearly all the children had contracted measles. In September 1911 the headmistress wrote: "The heat this summer has been so intolerable that on some days it has not been safe for the children to work for more than half an hour at a time in the school gardens."

The vicar visited at least once every week in order to give scripture lessons.

The reports from the visiting inspectors seemed generally positive.

On 6 June 1905 His Majesty's Inspector wrote: "The children attending this small school are receiving careful

instruction and are interested in their work. They are making good progress." The Diocesan Inspector wrote on 22 May 1907: "A new teacher has taken charge of this school and has restored it to its former excellent condition. A very large amount of work was presented and was well known, the children answering with readiness and intelligence."

The school shut down in 1922, but re-opened in 1930. The original problems of low attendance remained however and in 1966 it was closed once again. In the summer of 1922 when the school was closing down, correspondent G.L. Hankey, the school correspondent, wrote: "This school is now closed owing to the refusal of the Wiltshire County Council Education Committee to support it any longer. The enclosure is enforced in opposition to the will of the managers, the parents and ratepayers of this village, and to the detriment of the health and well being of the younger children. The hope is expressed that the committee will, before long, see that a mistake has been made and that the school will be reopened."

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