

National 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. Further information will be found under Church School, Hankerton.

From Wiltshire Community History