

Minety Schools



St Leonard's National School

Warburton's 'Account of Wiltshire Schools' stated that a building grant of £116 was given in 1847 to build a school and schoolmaster's house on glebe land. As at 1858 the school had 30 to 40 scholars, mixed, taught by a trained, but certified mistress, in a very fair room, with flagged floor, and wall desks. The teacher urgently needs assistance, but the discipline and instruction are fair notwithstanding'. The school log-books survive from 1869 and give us an idea of what life was like for the teachers and pupils in the Victorian period. When the surviving log-books began there were 52 children attending the school. By 1892, the number of children had risen to around 61 but in the 1870s it was down to between 35 and 45. The figure improved again to around 55 in 1894.

The subjects the children were taught were very similar to those today; arithmetic, needlework (the girls were taken by Miss Ben), knitting, reading, geography, singing, grammar, history and drill (PE). Other subjects included religious knowledge (regularly examined by Reverend Edwards). The infants had object lessons for items such as tree, dog, waves and postman. Some lessons were conducted outside such as that for trees and leaves in 1900. Poetry recitations were covered using poems such as those by Wordsworth. In 1891, a drawing examination was held for the first time with 12 children present due to the 'Government grant for drawing'. In 1895, clay for modelling was received and the children had their first lesson with it.

In 1869, the new mistress found the size of the school too small and so began successfully using the attached school cottage as a classroom. She was paid £5.16.8d (£5.83p) for two and a half months salary. A paid monitor left for a situation in London in October 1886 and the school managers did not feel it necessary to replace her. During this time, the Vicar's daughter was helping with the teaching. In October 1888, the school mistress left and the pupil teacher transferred to the Silver Street School. The new mistress found it very hard to keep strictly to the timetable with only the help of a monitress. In March 1900, one of the teachers was dismissed by the Manager for 'drunkenness'.

The Her Majesty's Inspector's Report from 1870 tells of the hard work put in by the mistress but there were still problems with religious knowledge and accuracy in their work and reading. There was a tendency for the children to copy. At the same time, the Inspector inquired why the School residence was not used as it had been built with aid from the Parliamentary Grant of 1847. In 1870, the mistress was boarding with a local farmer and we know from the log books that it was because she was using the residence as another schoolroom. This situation must have been finally sorted out with the

opening of the Silver Street School in 1875. In May 1871, several children were transferred to the lower level standard because their attendance was so poor and they could not keep up. The children were in 'good order' in 1874 and were being 'carefully taught'. In 1880, the Report was not so good with a lower percentage of exam passes than the year before and the 'infants are very backward in their work'. New desks were needed. The 1891 Report was concerned that separate entrances were not provided for boys and girls and that the Managers would 'do well to make a division between the playgrounds of the two sexes'. By 1882 reading, spelling and composition were now fairly good. After a downturn, due to staff replacements in 1883, the children continued to improve, but in 1886, it was stated that although improvements had been made, the children were still backward for their age. By 1888, the older children were performing fairly and satisfactorily but the infants still required attention. In 1892, there were again changes of staff leading to a downturn in attainment and this continued into the early 1900s. When a new Schoolmaster took over in 1898, he noted that only object lessons for infants were given, and no songs taught.

Another reason for a lack of attainment must have been the attendance record of the children, which was at times very poor. There were many reasons for this; the weather and rain in particular always produced low attendance. It was very difficult getting the children dry when they had become wet on the way to school and this was often one of the causes of illness. The only way the children would have been able to get dry was by standing near the small stoves in the schoolroom (which were still in use in the 1930s). In the winters of 1873 to 1875, the snow was very heavy which prevented children from attending. This also happened in the winters of 1881, 1887, 1888 and 1898 to 1900. In August 1887, the schoolroom became so warm that the children had to play outside for part of the afternoon. The weather also caused lesson disruption in May 1893 when a very heavy thunder storm in the afternoon meant drawing and needlework had to be suspended due to lack of light. Oral lessons were given instead. There was a very wet day indeed in February 1897 and only 10 children were present. Even those children had to be sent home because the desks were so soaked with rain that the children could not possibly sit at them. Did this mean the schoolroom roof leaked? In January 1899, flooding kept some children away from school.

There were many illnesses the children could catch in the 19th and early 20th century and several of them were extremely serious. Children suffered from whooping cough in August 1869, 1879, 1890 and 1899. Chicken pox occurred in 1874, 1877, 1881 and 1889. A measles outbreaks happened in 1878 (the school was closed for eight weeks), 1881, 1892 and 1900. Scarletina came in 1881, scarlet fever in 1893 (the school was closed for two months) and mumps in 1896. Three children were away from school through illness in May to June 1875 and three children died at this time, maybe due to the illness. In September 1880, the mistress was so ill she had to close the school for a week until she was able to return to work. In January 1894, a child was taken to Gloucester Hospital with a bad foot. That same year children were sent home with ringworm and St Vitus' Dance. This epidemic occurred during the Middle Ages in which the infected suffered from compulsive movements which caused them great pain before they died. The disease was not around in the nineteenth century. The schoolmistress may have used the term because she did not understand what was wrong with the child; it may have been caused by epilepsy but we cannot know. In 1901, a parent wrote to the mistress informing her that the doctor had seen her daughter over the holiday and that she had to keep her at home as her studies were too much for her. She hoped that the mistress would excuse her daughter from some of her work. In October 1886, another parent gave the same reason as to why their daughter was not at school and was very indignant at having received a notice from the School Attendance Officer.

The children themselves did seem reluctant to go to school at times! In February 1870, school was dismissed at 11am as most of the children had gone to a meeting of the hounds. On May 3rd 1886, only ten children came to school because of the Oaksey Races; the school closed in the afternoon. The schoolmistress seemed very frustrated in September 1886 when an attendance officer called in but could not suggest any means of raising attendance. She wrote "the time spent in filling up the papers for the attendance committee is entirely wasted". In March 1887, the attendance officer

returned and 'harangued the children on irregular attendance. The absentees were more numerous on the following morning'. The following month a parent visited the school and asked if her boy could be locked up at lunchtime to prevent him playing truant in the afternoon. It was noted in the Diocesan Inspection Report of 1887 that 'the children had a long way to come in a very scattered parish and are very irregular in their attendance which consequently affects their work'. The situation was still no better in April 1896 and the HM Inspector told the mistress to report several cases of irregularity to the School Attendance Officer. She did this but then noted, "the attendance still continues to be very bad especially in the first class. Several children have been away for weeks; no reason is sent to account for their absence, neither does the attendance officer come to look them up". In June 1897, many of the children went to Oaksey to attend a 'Jubilee treat' rather than go to school. In May 1899, 49 children were on the registers but the average attendance was only 36. In 1901, the schoolmaster noted, "There are several families in this school who never make a full week's attendance and it seems to me utterly impossible to teach them their work or to see any progress in them whatsoever"

The reasons for not attending school were not always so clear cut as the following entry shows: in December 1887, a boy had not been to school for a fortnight because he had no boots to wear and so could not walk to school. Children also had to help their parents in the field with tasks such as planting, picking acorns and sloe berries, fieldwork, hay making, potato planting, apple and blackberry picking and gleaning.

Holidays in the 1860s were not as long as they are now with one week at Whitsun, two weeks at Christmas and three weeks in July. By the late 1870s, the summer holiday had been extended to four weeks and Christmas three weeks. Only Good Friday and Easter Monday were taken off at Easter time. In the 1890s, the summer holiday was extended to four-five weeks and Easter also extended into the week after Easter Monday.

The children did get some time off during term time too. Children were always allowed a half day holiday after a Diocesan or HMI inspection and religious festivals such as Ascension Day were always free. A day off was also given for the school feast and treat. In 1870, the school was furnished with new desks and a work table. The school was closed for two afternoons in January 1872 so that the windows could be repaired. Every year in May, the children were always given a half day off when the chimney was swept. On a Friday in January 1874, there was no school as the school room was needed for penny reading. In June 1875, the children had a half day holiday so that they could be present at the ceremony of the opening of the new Sawyers Hill School. In February 1877, the children went to Silver Street School where they had cakes and wine kindly provided for them by the Reverend and Mrs Edwards. The children were also given a day's holiday in 1884 when the Church re-opened. The children missed school one afternoon in May 1886 to attend the funeral of the Reverend Edwards who was Vicar and the sole manager of the school. In January 1887, the schoolroom was used for the collection of tithes. Other uses for the school which gave children time off included use as a polling station or when the room was required in the evening. Days off could also occur when the mistress, teacher and some pupils attended a Choir Festival in towns such as Cirencester or Gloucester. During the May holidays in 1894, the walls of the school were scrubbed and the ceiling whitewashed. In May 1899, there was a holiday for the Foresters' Fete.

Punishment was carried out for impudence, disobedience, truancy, stone throwing, loitering and bad language. In January 1873, a boy was caned for telling 'untruths'. In September 1886, a boy was caned for disobedience and a show of temper. A note giving the reason for punishment was sent to his parents but they objected to corporal punishment and to his long detainment after school had ended. In August 1895, two boys were punished for throwing a hedgehog at the girls, two of which were baldly blistered. In February 1899, a boy was punished with one 'stripe' on each hand for disrespectful conduct and in April 1899, another boy had the same treatment for 'interfering with the girls during the midday interval'.

The children were also rewarded for good work as well as punished for bad behaviour. In January 1879, the Reverend Edwards visited to hand out prizes for scripture, secular knowledge and needlework. These prizes would be given out every year. In December 1870, the Reverend Edwards gave five of the girls who had been sweepers during the year two pinafores and a warm petticoat each.

In the early part of the 20th century overall control of the school passed to Wiltshire County Council, although still with local school managers

In 1955, there were 42 pupils and the school was voluntary controlled. In 1954, the older pupils were transferred to the Malmesbury Secondary School until a new Secondary School was provided for the surrounding area. The school was finally closed in 1968 and was a private residence by 1983. A new school, which incorporated both old ones, opened at the Sawyers Mill site in 1969 called the Minety Church of England Primary School.



Silver Street School

In 1872, extra space was urgently needed at the existing St. Leonard's School and a new school was planned near the railway station for approximately 58 children. Minety Silver Street National School and teacher's house was built at the junction of Silver Street and Flistridge Road in 1875. Around 50 children attended, mostly infants. A Sunday school was also held there. Unfortunately, the school log book does not survive but we do have an idea of what life was like for Victorian children from the surviving log book of St. Leonard's School in Minety. One reference states that in February 1877 the children of St. Leonard's School went to the Silver Street School where they had cakes and wine kindly provided for them by the Reverend and Mrs Edwards

An extra classroom was added to the school in 1898. In the early 20th century, it became a public elementary school. There were between 73 and 78 pupils aged over five in the 1920s. Numbers declined in the 1930s to between 66 and 81. During World War 2, the school took boys from an evacuated school; they were transferred in 1942. In 1943, there were 57 pupils. The Band Hall was used as temporary classrooms in 1954 and in 1955 the senior pupils were transferred to the Malmesbury Bremilham County Secondary School.

The Minety Silver Street School closed in 1968. A new school, which incorporated both this one and St. Leonard's opened at the Sawyers Mill site in 1969 called the Minety Church of England Primary School.

The new school, which replaced both Silver Street School and St Leonard's, opened at the Sawyers Mill site in 1969. In the year 2000 there were 155 children and in 2007, 102 children attending the school aged from 4-11. In 2008, a new school hall was built.



Ninety Church of England School

Wiltshire Community History