

GREAT HASELEY ENDOWED SCHOOL 1881 - 1942

Introduction

By the second half of the nineteenth century “education for all” for all had become an increasing matter of public and political interest. There was concern that, with the emergence of Germany, France and the U.S.A. as major industrial powers, Britain would become increasingly uncompetitive unless it developed an educated and trained workforce.

In 1870 the Forster Education Act was passed as a means of addressing these concerns. The Act established a national system of elementary education in England and Wales, delivered either through existing church schools such as Great Haseley Endowed School (which had been established in 1688 with an endowment from the estate of Luke Tayer) or newly established board schools. In 1872 a “revised code” laid down a national curriculum for reading, writing and arithmetic which elementary schools were required to follow and by 1880 schooling had been made compulsory for all children between the ages of five and ten years.

In 1891 school fees were abolished at Great Haseley School, the Elementary Education Act of that year made grants available so that schools could cease charging fees. In 1902 elementary schools came under the control of newly established Local Education Authorities, and Great Haseley School was brought under the aegis of Oxfordshire Education Committee.

The school leaving age was raised to fourteen in 1918 and presented many challenges to the school with severe financial constraints imposed both on the employment of additional teachers and the building of new classrooms. The first “senior class” was admitted in 1926 and by September 1931 there were four senior school classes. The school now admitted children between the ages of five and fourteen.

The 1944 Education Act separated “Primary Schools”, for those between the ages of five and eleven years, from “Secondary Schools” which educated children between eleven and eighteen years. Great Haseley

School was designated a primary school and became so in 1948. It was closed in 1994, one of many primary schools in Oxfordshire deemed to be too small to be kept open.

The Great Haseley Endowed School Log Book

The 1870 Forster Education Act required head teachers of elementary schools to keep a log book “outlining such events as the introduction of new books, apparatus or courses of instruction, absence or misconduct of staff and any special circumstances affecting the school.”

The following brief historical narrative of Great Haseley School 1881-1942, relies heavily on the school log book as source material. Unless otherwise referenced all quotes in inverted commas are taken from the log book. They provide a fascinating insight into the life and work of a small rural Oxfordshire school during a time of radical social, economic and cultural change, both locally and nationally.

Great Haseley Endowed School 1881 -1910

In 1871 Joseph Bower was appointed Head Teacher of Great Haseley Endowed School, a position he held until 1910. He was legally required to keep a school log from the date of his appointment, but did so only from June 1881 following a highly critical H.M.I. (Her Majesty’s Inspector of Schools) school inspection report which stated pointedly “A Log book must be provided.” Thereafter Bower kept the log book, although his entries at times present as somewhat spare, anodyne and repetitive.

St. Peter’s Church and the Life of the School

The relationship; between the school and the church was a close one, with the church an indivisible part of school life. The Rector (Canon Ellison 1881-1894, and Canon Edwards 1894-1910) visited the school at least two or three times a week, for special occasions, to take assembly, to provide religious instruction and to check the school attendance registers.

The church also provided help by providing books and other materials. In May 1884 Canon Ellison provided the school with a number of books, including “Robinson Crusoe” and “Pictures from English History”.

The Diocese of Oxford carried out an annual inspection of the school, mainly concerned with the efficiency of religious instruction. An extract from the Diocesan report of September 1885 reads “I found the tone and discipline very good. The children have a thoroughly good knowledge of their scripture work. They also say and write their home prayers well. The answering of the Church Catechism is good.”

However, Joseph Bower did try to distinguish between religious and secular aspects of education. In September 1882 he wrote “Religious instruction given at Church from 9 to 9.30 – secular work as usual at 9.45” In August 1903 he recorded “The Rector visited in the afternoon and assisted in the secular work.”

Teaching and Learning

Little is written explicitly in the log about the kinds of teaching and learning methods used. There is, however, a clear emphasis on recalling information through rote learning and repetition.

The curriculum covered reading, writing and arithmetic together with singing, reciting of poetry, drawing and religious education. The work and progress of children reading, writing and arithmetic was measured against six nationally determined standards. Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Schools (H.M.I.s) reports show that inspectors looked carefully at the extent to which children met these standards.

There is no evidence to show that children who found learning difficult were provided with additional or specialist help. These children were commonly described as “dull” or “very dull”.

Boys and girls were taught separately until May 9th 1892 when “The school recommenced this day as a mixed school, after being unavoidably closed for two weeks for alterations to buildings.”

Regular inspections of the school were carried out both by H.M.I.’s and Inspectors from the Diocese. H.M.I. reports, were often very brief and transcribed in full into the school log book. The H.M.I. report of June 1881 reads “The school is still being very efficiently taught and disciplined. A Log book must be provided. It would also be well if children admitted to the school since January 1878 were supplied with Childs School Books.”

School Attendance

Unexplained absences from school were treated seriously and dealt with quickly, both by teachers and the school attendance office, who would visit the family of the absent child. The school attendance register was marked meticulously. If a mistake was made in the register it had to be corrected and the correction noted in the school log book. Full attendance at school was praised as a virtue, on the 24th December 1909 "Fifteen students were presented with medals for a full year's attendance."

Sickness and Ill Health

Sickness and Ill Health dominated the life of the school in a way unimaginable today. Children were malnourished and vaccination programmes against common childhood diseases were some way in the future. When outbreaks occurred the response of the school was to close immediately so as to prevent infection spreading. It was common for the local medical officer of health to order a school to close, usually on a direct instruction by telegram. The following examples indicate how severe these outbreaks could be:

In June 1889 the school was closed initially for a period of three weeks and then for a further two weeks following an outbreak of measles, "there were about 180 cases."

On April 14th 1890 many boys were away with whooping cough and most were still absent on May 5th.

On February 1st. 1898 over half the children were absent with mumps and the school was closed for three weeks.

The school was closed between December 17th. 1904 and 6th. February 1905 following an outbreak of measles. It was closed again on 21st. June 1905, the result of an outbreak of whooping cough. When the school reopened on 3rd. July only 15 out of 85 children were well enough to attend and the school was closed for a further eight days.

The school log does not record how many children died or had continuing ill health as a result of these outbreaks.

Harvest

The school summer holiday was known as “harvest holiday” and it was expected that every school child would take some part in the gathering of the harvest. Harvest holiday would begin at the beginning of August and last for five weeks. However, if harvest was late the harvest holiday was extended. In 1884, 1885 and 1909 harvest holiday was extended by a week. On October 1st. 1888 Joseph Bower wrote in the school log: “School commenced today with bad attendance, the harvest not yet over, owing to continued wet weather. The holidays were extended this year owing to the length of the harvest.”

Joseph Bower

Joseph Bower retired on 31st January 1910. Throughout his tenure as head teacher inspector’s reports show him to be hard working, conscientious and well liked and with the best interests of the children at heart. However, in the last four years of service “both discipline and attainments have steadily declined.” (Report from E.F. Davidson, HMI dated 11th February 1910.)

The reason for this decline can be found in the log book entries for April 1906:

“April 12th. Thursday. No school this day. Mrs Bower the assistant dying suddenly.

April 13th. Good Friday.

April 14th – 21st Easter week holidays.

April 23rd Work as usual

However, it wasn’t work as usual. Joseph and Harriet Bower had been happily married for thirty years and both had taught at Great Haseley School for twenty eight years. Joseph Bower, devastated by the death of Harriet, struggled on for another four years and finally retired on 31st January 1910. On retirement he moved to Thame where he died in 1931. Joseph and Harriet Bower are buried in the churchyard of St.

Peter's, Great Haseley. There is a moving inscription on Harriet's gravestone which reads: "Harriet Bower died April. 12. 1906 aged 60. Twenty eight years schoolmistress of Haseley. Blessing God for her life and love. The villagers placed this stone to her memory."

Great Haseley Endowed School 1910 – 1942

Between 1910 and 1942 the school was run by just two head teachers. Henry G. Boorman was appointed head teacher on 1st February 1910 and remained until his retirement on 31st May 1928. He was succeeded by Thomas M.C. Smith who remained until his retirement on 31st May 1942.

Both head teachers were in charge at a time of great change in Oxfordshire. Improved roads and road transport, the mechanisation of agriculture, the growth of manufacturing in Oxford and electrification of the Haseleys were to create many more opportunities for Haseley children. Two World Wars and the economic recession of the 1930's were also to have a significant impact on life and work in the Haseleys.

In 1911 there had been ninety children on the school roll and four teachers. In 1926 a senior class for children up to the age of fourteen, was added to the school. These children came from both from the Haseleys and surrounding villages. Three additional senior classes were added by 1931.

Teaching and Learning

The final H.M.I report on the stewardship of the school under Joseph Bower presents a sharp critique of the way in which the school had been managed and the children taught. It praised Bower for his conscientious efforts but concluded that it "would require much strenuous endeavour on the part of the new Master if the school is to maintain a normal measure of efficiency." Many of the suggestions resonate today and include; schemes of work for all subjects, detailed reports on the work and progress of each child, teaching which should aim at a more intelligent grasp of the subject matter through variety and imagination and linking with the everyday experiences of children.

Herbert Boorman was determined to implement change. By September 2012 H.M.I. Leaf reported “The introduction of gardening and hand work is an excellent feature, but they might be more associated with other subjects such as arithmetic. The formation of a school library and a supply of continuous story books and selections of poetry are very desirable.”

Thereafter the school log records a number of innovations. In April 1913 the school was presented with a sewing machine “valued at £2- 16s” and by July of that year nature rambles were part of the curriculum.

In June 1914 the older boys made a visit to Haseley iron works. Much is made of the visit the school log. “The foreman conducted the party through the works and took the greatest pains in explaining the mechanical advantages of the various machines at work- the saving of time and of labour, the accuracy of the results. The boys also saw in operation the blast furnace, molten iron, and the casting of iron into moulds.”

In July 1925 the children went on a day trip to London by charabanc. “The undertaking was an unqualified success.”

A great emphasis was put on practical work, including woodwork, needlework and gardening. In January 1925 the school log recorded “the piano platform made by the woodwork class as an exercise – finished and sent to the village institute.” The platform is now in the village hall and still used to this day. In June 1927 “the boys went to the cricket ground to erect a large screen they had made.”

In November 1925 Mr. Boorman presented an Honours Board to the school, “with names entered up to date”. The board, now on display in the village hall, was made by E.J. Arnold of Leeds and cost £6 – 16s

H.M.I. reports on the progress of the school were mixed. In 1925 H.M.I. Hunt commented “that while the good points of the school remain as before, it is essential that lessons should follow the heuristic method [allowing children to find things out for themselves], rather than the deadening effect of lecturing.”

In June 1928 Herbert Boorman was succeeded as headmaster by Thomas Smith. By November 1928 H.M.I Hunt was able to write that the

new head “full of zeal and energy, he has already infused new life into the school and developed its activities, and he is exerting a sound and widening influence on the children.”

Sports and games became an integral part of the curriculum, with football, rugby and cricket for boys and netball and tennis for girls. In April 1930 the log recorded “The schools final [football] at Thame 6-2, Cup won for second year in succession. Cup medals presented by Sir Gifford Fox M.P.”

On 22nd December 1930 the first school concert was held. “Great success – crowded house.”

Great Haseley was connected to the National Grid in 1932 by the Wessex Electricity Company and by October 1933 children were listening to a “School broadcast Programme” on science, agriculture and biology “with the children paying for their own pamphlets. Reception was very clear.”

On 3rd June 1939 H.M.I. Hunt presented an entirely favourable report on the school:

“The school consists of an Infant and Junior group in two classes and 90 senior children.

In senior classes there is a strong emphasis on practical instruction. There is purposeful activity in domestic science, needlework, gardening, arts and domestic crafts. The academic side of the curriculum is by no means neglected, and honest and painstaking effort is evident throughout the classes.

The infants and juniors are a delightful body of class, who thoroughly enjoy a well balanced programme.

School life as a whole leaves the impression of being founded on sound ideals, generously applied in the interest of the children.”

Discipline and Punishment

The school was legally required to keep a separate punishment book containing full details of all offences and punishments. Some incidents

are also recorded in the log book, although there seems to be no underlying rationale for this. Examples include:

On November 11th Miss Smith, a teacher at the school, complained that three boys “had called objectionable names after her in the street. Two boys were punished for misconduct during lesson time.”

In December 1928 it was recorded that “a boy was given two strokes (one on each hand) for lifting up the clothes of a girl in the dinner hour.”

Many senior children from outlying villages travelled to and from school by bus, and a number of incidents of misbehaviour are recorded in the log book. In December 1935 the driver of the Stadhampton bus complained of the continued misbehaviour of certain children. Five children were identified as the culprits. The headmaster addresses all the senior scholars on the subject of their conduct and pointed out the dangers incurred by the driver having to look round. He then publicly punished those he found guilty. In 1936 a boy assaulted another on the school bus. “Case proved – six strokes on the seat given. As this is the third complaint of this boy having assaulted others I have forbidden him to ride on the bus until further notice.” In November 1938 the driver of the Tiddington bus reported misbehaviour amongst the boys. Two boys were punished and others warned that a repetition would result in their being forbidden to use the bus for a week.

A somewhat atypical entry is made in the log book in February 1939. A parent complained that a teacher had slapped his daughter and left weals on her thigh. “The teacher was very distressed to learn this. I advise her to slap children’s hands only if no other punishment meets the case.”

Sickness and Ill Health

Diseases of childhood such as mumps, whooping cough and chicken pox, together with influenza, continued to dominate school life, with outbreaks frequent and long lasting. The school was badly affected by the influenza pandemic of 1918/19 when nearly 60% of children were absent. Between September and October 1928 the school closed for a month on account of a measles epidemic and in January 1939 an

outbreak of chicken pox and mumps together with heavy snow meant that only 55 out of 133 children attended school.

Teaching and support staff were not immune from illness and their absence, as required, was recorded in the school log book, usually in the most general of terms: "Mr Williams absent to have treatment at the Radcliffe." "Miss Mason was absent with a chill."

Incremental improvements to children's health and welfare were gradually introduced, all of which contributed to the general wellbeing of Haseley schoolchildren. On June 1st 1915 a dental surgeon visited the school, the first record of such a visit noted in the school log book. He returned regularly until July 12th "When all the children had been seen." The teeth of the children were inspected and fillings were given. Dr. Hitchings, the school doctor, was present for extractions. A school health visitor, Nurse Bray from Postcombe, visited the school regularly and each child had a school medical card.

In October 1923 small pox was reported in Thame and thirteen Great Haseley children were vaccinated. In November 1941 Dr. Eiser "gives 18 diphtheria injections several children due for this were absent."

In January 1924 the log recorded that children had travelled to Great Milton for eye tests and in January 1925 six children received free spectacles from the Education Office. By September 1928 a roller towel was in place in the boy's lobby and a pail of drinking water, replaced daily, in both the boy's and girl's lobbies. Further, the head teacher had purchased a dozen tins of Gibbs Dentifrice toothpaste which he sold to the children at 1d. a tin.

The school log of 19th October 1931 reads "School dinners commenced today. The dinner was beautifully cooked and served. Children pay 10d. a week. The girls were allowed to wash up" By January 1932 hot cocoa was provided for dinner children at 1/2d. a mug. However, in February 1935 Mr Smith expressed concern that "at least twenty children who brought cold dinners from home would benefit from school dinners."

In March 1935 "children begin the M.O.N. [Ministry of Nutrition] milk scheme. 59 bottles (1/3 pint) delivered from Oxford Co-op Dairy. Tel:

Oxford 2483. Unfortunately the drinking straws were not delivered. Prefect sent to Thame to purchase same.”

There were some setbacks. Serious concern was expressed in April 1936 when the school house cess pool became clogged with “grease” and was in a constant state of overflow. The smell was noxious and the sewage seeped out of the drain to within eighteen feet of the wall. Dr. Hitchings was called to examine the throats of several children who were suffering from sore throats. The advice of the senior medical officer was sought on how to deal with the situation. There is no record which explains how the matter was resolved.

It is evident that both Mr. Boorman and Mr. Smith, together with their staff, worked diligently to promote and protect the health and welfare of the children in their care. Yet, not until after 1945, with post war improvements in living standards, the development of antibiotics and vaccines and the establishment of nationwide public health programmes by the N.H.S was effective protection provided against the ravages of childhood ill health and disease.

Great Haseley School during the Great War (1914-18)

Great Haseley school broke up for the summer holiday on 24th July 1914 and returned for the start of the autumn term on September 6th 1914. There were no entries made in the school log between these two dates so the outbreak of war on 4th August 1914 is not mentioned. However, the impact of the war on school life quickly became apparent. From the start of the war children were encouraged to raise funds for wartime causes and did so with enthusiasm. In March 1915 they collected parcels for troops and in October of the same year donated eggs to Oxford Military Hospital. In January 1917 they collected £1-9s. for the relief of destitute children and in January 1918 they raised £4-14-10 for children of blinded soldiers.

The war intruded in other ways. On 15th November 1916 “ a military balloon descended in a field near the school and the children were allowed out to see it.” On May 22nd 1916 the school opened an hour earlier “since summer time was now in use.”

As the war progressed the German naval blockade of the United Kingdom tightened and there were chronic shortages of food and other essentials. The school responded by growing its own food. On 28th February the log recorded, "Mrs Cooper's garden rented for one year to increase the schools food supply. 1,200 seeds of potatoes were sown." In May 1918 potatoes were again sown and 770 lbs. were picked.

In the autumn of 1917 and 1918 children picked blackberries. Between September 17th and October 18th 1918 children spent most school day afternoons blackberry picking. The log entry of 30th October reads "children out all day 10:00 am till 2:45 pm blackberry gathering, being last time this season." That season the school sent 2039 lbs. of blackberries, valued at £25 -9-9, to the centre at Thame. The children also collected waste paper which raised £1-11-8.

On 11th January 1918 children found and sorted 6cwt of horse chestnuts which "were collected". Who collected them and for what purpose is not revealed in the school log. This is no surprise as their use was a military secret. By early 1917 there was a critical shortage of cordite for use in guns and shells. Before the war cordite had been imported from the U.S.A. but the wartime German "u" boat blockade of the U.K. had severely restricted supplies. By the summer of 1917 a British scientist, Chaim Weitzmann, later the first President of Israel, had developed a process by which acetone, used in the making of cordite, could be extracted from horse chestnuts. The school received 7s 6d. a cwt. for them.

During the war children helped to gather in the harvest, their labour was even more important as many agricultural workers were away on active service. The school log notes that the school was closed for one week on 23rd June 1917 to enable the boys to work in the hayfields. In September 1918 boys were again absent from school for harvesting but the school remained open.

The log makes no mention of Armistice on 11th November 1918 but on November 11th 1920 the school log reads, "The Two Minutes Silence, for the fallen in the Great War kept 10:58 – 11:00 am." Thereafter the school commemorated Armistice Day on 11th November at 11:00 am, either in the school or at St. Peter's.

Great Haseley School and Preparations for War 1938-42

Preparations for the Second World War began early at Great Haseley School. On 29th September 1938 "Gas masks were fitted to forty Haseley scholars by Mr. Smith" and on 14th February 1939 the "first lecture for A.R.P. [Air Raid Precautions] given by Rev. R.A. Ker".

Just two weeks after the outbreak of war Great Haseley School received its first evacuees,"25 evacuees were admitted to the school and 18 transferees and new entrants." On 4th October 1939 "Great Milton senior girl evacuees, seven in number, commenced a Domestic Science course today under Miss Furnell." On the same day "Great Milton senior boy evacuees arrived at 8:50 am for woodwork." No woodwork master arrived and the boys were sent back at 11:00 am." No further mention is made of evacuees until 13th June 1940 when "the school was closed at 12:30 am for the evacuation." This evacuation took place four days later when "evacuees arrived from Tottenham and were taught in the church hall." The next day "evacuees [were] absorbed in their various classes." The last mention of evacuees was on 4th November 1941 when classes were reorganised to accommodate senior evacuees from Stadhampton.

It was not only children who were evacuated to rural Oxfordshire. In June 1940 "the headmaster accompanied standard VII Garden boys to Hearn's Hill to wire plot against sheep evacuated from S.E. England."

Food and fuel shortages became increasingly problematic for the school. In January 1940 the head received a letter from the butcher explaining that "he would be unable to supply any meat for school dinners today owing to government restrictions." The head then approached Mrs Gowing, who ran the grocer's shop at what is now The Old Post Office in Rectory Road to see if she would be able to supply any meat. In February 1942 the school could not open because of a lack of coal, and in November 1942 the school milk scheme ceased owing to an extreme shortage of milk.

In March 1940 fourteen boys were selected to take part in the "Dig for Victory" campaign, and potato planting and cropping became an established feature of school life. In October 1942 the school log read, "Attendance very poor since potato picking started" and "conker collection ceased as conkers tend to go mouldy."

On 21st May 1940 the school's savings scheme was resuscitated as a response to the urgent demand from the government for people to save. On the same day "the Headmaster has asked the Rector's permission for the Infants and juniors to use the Church Hall in the event of aerial bombardment." In July 1940 "the Junior timetable was interrupted owing to the papering and wiring of classroom windows against blast." Later that month the senior school timetable was similarly interrupted.

Teaching and other staff were also affected by the exigency of war. In June 1940 the headmaster reported that Mr. G. Baines was absent, visiting his brother who had been dangerously wounded in Flanders and was now in hospital in Preston.

Some staff were called up for active service. On 27th November 1940 the previously mentioned Mr. Baines "was given a day off before being called up for war service the next day." In July 1942 Mr. Symes the woodwork teacher was conscripted. The log shows that female teachers were appointed as replacements. One such teacher, a Miss Morton, came from London to provide teaching cover. When she returned to London the headmaster wrote, " I would like to record my appreciation of her work here."

The final, poignant, entry in the school log was made on December 17th 1942. It reads : "School closed for Xmas holidays. Mrs. L.M. Smith, Miss E.K. Hurst and I (Mr. A. C. Smith) end our Teaching Careers."

John Andrews
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