

History of Chinnor School Brenda Wilson

In the middle of the 19th century a party called Voluntaryist, which included the Congregationalists, raised money and opened schools-they had opened 364 by 1851. In Chinnor, by 1841 a British School had been opened by James Rutherford the Congregational minister. This consisted of a large room plus a small room at the back where the schoolmaster or mistress lived. This building is still standing in Chinnor and is now used by the Chinnor Silver Band for storing instruments and practice sessions. In 1885 a new building was erected by the Congregationalists next to their chape and 115 children were attending this school in 1890. In 1893 £62 was raised for adding a classroom for infants, but the school was closed at the end of the year. No reason was given but it could possibly have been because of competition from the Church of England School at that time, which received grants from Oxford colleges and was Government aided, whilst the Congregational school received no such aid. The children were transferred to the Church of England School.

Work on a Church of England school in Chinnor was eventually begun in 1857. In 1848 Magdalen College had voted £100 for building and another £115 in 1859. The school was designed by G.E. Street and built at a cost of £800, some of this money being provided by John Fletcher, the landlord of the Crown Inn. The foundation stone was laid by Sir Wykeham Musgrave in 1859 and the school was opened by the Bishop of Oxford in 1860. From the old records, the housing in the village at this time is given as

181 cottages; 35 houses; 5 public houses; 10 beer shops; 2 chapels and 2 other schools. There were 115 pupils at the school in 1887. In 1888 the infants school was lengthened 10 or 15 feet the name of a carpenter 'Burt Ives' can be seen carved on a rafter, with this date. In 1892 the school was enlarged to hold 260, local builders from Thame adding a large room and 'babies room'.

The 1870 Education Act gave the school board powers to appoint an officer or officers to enforce the attendance of children between the ages of 5 and 12, unless satisfactory arrangements for their education had already been made. The new C of E school was a voluntary one, denominational, built by endowments and subscriptions and was maintained partly from this source and partly by Government grant but not by rates. It was not, therefore, a Board School. It was run by a Board of Governors, the Incumbent of the time and others (the present Head thought probably the Chairman of the Parish Council and possibly 'educated' folk.) Records were started at Chinnor school in 1871, after the 1870 Education Act and from these it can be seen that village children attended; but there is no record of the local doctor's or rector's children attending. From the admissions registered in 1886, such occupations of fathers as bricklayer, dealer, farm labourer (majority occupation), draper, chairmaker (several), inn-keeper, miller, blacksmith, woodman, lace dealer, are given. Names still familiar in the village can be seen in these records.

The records also show that in 1870 the British School was closed and the pupils transferred to the new Church of England school. The building was still used, however, as the wife of an old resident in the village remembers the girls going along to the old British School for their cookery lessons. In 1887 the school had 115 pupils and in 1892 there were 243 children at the school. From information gained from an old Chinnor resident who left the school in 1904 at the age of 13, some children came to school in the afternoons only sometimes going out to work in the mornings to supplement the family income. He also said that some children came to school as early as 3 years of age into what he called the 'babies' class. He also recalled that in 1903 the school was closed for 2 weeks because one of the pupils had smallpox.

School hours were from 9 am to 12 noon in the morning. No school lunches were provided of course, the children going home for a meal or, those who had walked in from the surrounding hamlets, bringing sandwiches. Afternoon school was from 1:30 until 3:45 pm. The curriculum seems to have consisted of the 3 Rs with sport such as cricket for the boys and cooking for the girls. Some musical work must have been done too as my informant stated that the school won 2nd prize at Aylesbury Music Festival in 1905. The headmaster around this time was a Mr Jones, who was very keen on sport, his wife taught as well, but there are no records as to what other staff there were.

The children were divided by standards from I to VII, the leaving year being the VII standard. (This system was a result of the 'Payment by Results' scheme of Robert Lowe's Revised Code of 1862).

The children left school at the end of the week in which their 13th birthday fell – not at the end of the school year. No record exists of any test, although there must have been, except by the Rector in R.I.

It was a general practice in rural areas for children to be excused from attendance at school for a period up to 6 weeks in order to help with agricultural work and the elderly gentleman called his summer break the 'Harvest Holiday' not the summer holiday.

In 1930 the large room at the school was partitioned to make two smaller rooms. Also in 1930 a wooden building was erected in the girls' playground. In the following year children aged 11 upwards from Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount were sent by bus to Chinnor; perhaps this was the reason, partly, for the additional building. Children were staying at school until 14, not 13 years of age by this time (Hadow Report 1926) The Hadow Report also brought about the transfer from elementary schooling to primary and secondary, the change over at age 11. Standards I to VII were abolished. Children aged 11 plus stayed at Chinnor school, in the senior department. It was not until 1959 that they were transferred to Thame at 11. Later, when Sydenham (1948) and Kingston Blount (1956) schools closed Chinnor had to accommodate the small number involved.

In 1932 a building for cookery and woodwork classes was built in Chinnor school – a gift from a villager, Mr W.E. Benham.

During the second world war, approximately 40 evacuees from a Roman Catholic school in Islington, North London, came to Chinnor, and they had 2 classes in the village hall. (Some of these families remained in Chinnor after the war and settled here). Chinnor school became controlled in 1948, the Managers then were composed of 2 Parish Councillors, 2 County Councillors, 2 Church Councillors. This was a result of the Education Act of 1944 which stated that the 'Whole cost of maintenance falls on the L.E.A. The L.E.A. must inform the Managers or Governors of a controlled voluntary school before appointing any particular candidate as head of it, and must consult them as to the appointment of reserved teachers for religious instruction.'

After Chinnor school became controlled, there is no record of any change in the curriculum apart from R.I. which officially took 2 periods a week. The 1944 Act states that in a controlled school denominational religious instruction might be given 'during not more than 2 periods in each week.' Under this Act religious instruction in schools was compulsory.