



East Meon CE Primary School records: report by Hampshire Record Office

This report relates to certain records which were placed on temporary deposit in Hampshire Record Office (temporary deposit no. 641) by Mr F.G. Standfield in order to give the staff of the Record Office an opportunity to inspect them and make recommendations on the advisability of placing them on long-term deposit in the office.

The earliest records are the account book and the minute books of the committee of subscribers, effectively governors, beginning in 1846 and 1848 respectively. Although many villages schools, like East Meon's, were founded around 1840 it is very common to find that the records only begin in the 1860s, when Government requirements for record-keeping were tightened, so these early records are of particular interest. The account book lists the weekly pence paid by the pupils, who seem to have averaged between 50 and 60 in number.

The minutes contain information on the buildings (such as a proposal to add a porch at the west end in May 1859), the equipment (such as decisions to buy a map of Europe in Jul 1857 and copy-books in Apr 1863) and the staff (in Oct 1848 we read that the salary for the master and mistress was £50 plus four tons of coal and the use of the house and gardens, whilst a monitor was to be paid 6d per week)

The log books commence in 1863, and continue to 1990. They give a detailed portrait of day-to-day classroom life as recorded by the successive head teachers. There are references to the school building itself, such as a complaint by the Inspector in Feb 1911 that the gallery in the infants' classroom was inconvenient, as some children found it difficult to climb up and down, and many of those in the gallery were out of close contact with the teacher. In 1964 there are day-to-day reports on the arrival of furniture and equipment in the new school building which replaced the c1840 premises. The health of the children is often mentioned, ranging from an occasion in Jan 1903 when bad colds caused disruption because the teachers could not be heard above the coughing, to more serious incidents such as outbreaks of diphtheria and whooping-cough.

The log books of many schools record exceptions to the normal routine in great detail, but remain silent about what the normal routine actually was. It is therefore of great interest to find in the East Meon log books comprehensive schemes of work. In 1910, for instance, Class 1 was assigned *Little Nell* and *King Alfred* as reading books, their arithmetic lessons were to range from vulgar and decimal fractions to land surveying, and sight-singing and perspective drawing were also included. Class 3 was given elementary science lessons based around the themes of 'The hedge I know' and 'Growing things' and history lessons ranging from 'A Warrior Queen' to 'The Children's Friend' (perhaps Boudicca and Lord Shaftesbury respectively), whilst Class 4's geography lessons were to use Cassell & Co's *Little Folks of Other Lands*.

Despite the emphasis on agricultural and horticultural examples in the syllabus, the inclusion of 'A simple letter - to be taken both orally and by writing' in the composition lessons may indicate a perception of the growing numbers of pupils who would make a career in an office rather than on the land. The infants were using Collins' *Readers*, and writing was introduced gradually with the right line and link in

the first term, the hook in the second term, and the curve in the third; they were also taught paper-flower making and clay modelling, and given object lessons on subjects such as peas & beans and a wheelbarrow.

The log books are also informative about the teachers themselves: in 1901 we read of the death of the headmaster, Mr W S Tregear, while teaching his class in the large room. Subsequent entries in the log book are made by his son and daughters, all experienced teachers, who took temporary charge of the school for the remainder of the term, and recorded that the success of the pupil teachers in their exam was 'the last thing my Father had spoken of to his family, expressing his pleasure at the results'. There are many examples of the troubles facing teachers: in Dec 1875 a pupil was sent home because his pinafore was dirty and torn, and 'the Mother sent him back with a saucy note', the beginning of a series of confrontations between this family and the teacher; in May 1938 mice were seen running around the floor at dinner time, as a result of which a nest of about a dozen mice was discovered in a disused desk.

National events are also reflected in the log books, which record special activities for coronation and jubilee celebrations. The Second World War gives rise to many entries, such as the admission of 21 evacuees in Nov 1939, the decision later that month to reschedule the afternoon session to enable children to get home before the blackout took effect, and events in aid of the Petersfield and District Warship Week in Feb-Mar 1942.

In summary, the records present a comprehensive picture of school life in East Meon. We should like to recommend that the school authorities consider depositing all these records in Hampshire Record Office. This would mean that they could be stored in the best possible conditions and made available to researchers under proper supervision, subject to any appropriate restrictions (usually we do not make log books, registers and minutes under 30 years old available for consultation except to persons authorised by the headteacher or governors).

The Record Office provides secure accommodation in strongrooms with fire and flood detection and intruder alarm systems. Thanks to the thickness of the walls, together with an air handling system, the temperature and relative humidity are kept within the limits recommended by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, so that the storage areas are neither dry enough to accelerate the deterioration of the paper into brittleness, nor damp enough to promote mould growth. Another important aspect of the climate control is that conditions are kept as constant as possible, avoiding the sudden swings in temperature associated with many centrally-heated buildings, which can cause deterioration in the documents as the papers, cloth and leather of which they are made expand and contract at different rates.

Records are made available to searchers in our supervised search room. Access to this is available without charge or appointment: it is visited by over 20,000 people each year. The largest number of visitors is made of family historians, who come from all over the country and from overseas: they find it a great convenience to have a wide range of sources for all the parishes in the county available under one roof. The second largest group of users is comprised of local historians, and even for those based in the Meon valley it is likely to be more convenient to be able to consult the school records alongside the many other sources relating to East Meon parish that are

already deposited here. Deposit of the records would also relieve the headteacher and staff of the work of supervising anyone wishing to use the documents or dealing with postal enquiries (which the Record Office is happy to handle).

School records which are placed on deposit in the Record Office continue to belong to their existing owners: there is no change in ownership, but only in custody. This means that it is always possible for schools to take back some or all of their records temporarily for exhibitions or classroom use, or indeed to resume custody of them permanently if for any reason that is desired (the Record Office reserves the right to make copies if this occurs). In addition, copies of selected material could be made for classroom use. We should be happy to make select a few typical or notable pages from the log books, minutes books and registers, and provide copies free of charge. If a larger quantity of copies was needed, we would suggest use of our microfiche service to save wear and tear on the binding of the documents.

We shall be happy to answer any questions the school authorities may have about deposit. Please contact David Rymill on 01962 846146 or 01962 846154; I shall be out of the office in mid-late July but my colleague Adrienne Allen (846135 or 846154) will be pleased to provide advice if I am away.

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