

## Oliver Hooper's tenure and legacy – a summary

Until the 1944 Education Act introduced free education to all children of primary and secondary age, payment could be demanded for all schooling. In Sibford, the Town Estate Charity provided that payment for the Gower and Burdrop children while the Ferris children were charged. Pupils remained at the village school for the whole of their school career – no secondary schools at this time.

The Church of England has, historically, had a strong religious influence in English schools and in some schools the Diocese provided the funding for their voluntarily aided schools. This still remains the case today. Our village School was not a church school although the school managers were expected to include a Diocesan representative.

The quality of education delivered in the nation's school was monitored by a group called HMI – His Majesty's Inspectors. Following his appointment on 4 November 1912, an HMI inspector arrived 8 days later to inspect the school. The Inspector's report provided a base line assessment on which the new headmaster could build. Here is what it said:

*The new Headteacher has made a good beginning here, but the work of the Upper part of the school has deteriorated through the recent changes in the staff, and there is much leeway to make up. The more mechanical parts of the work are fairly good, but the majority of the children in the two upper classes show very little power of concentration or of sustained attention, and their intelligence is below the normal level.*

*Satisfactory work continues to be done in the lowest group of the Mixed Division but the teacher has failed to eradicate the bad habit of irregular and simultaneous answering which has been referred to in several previous reports. The Infants are kindly and very fairly well taught, but their conversational powers need developing and greater clearness of enunciation should be cultivated.*

*The premises generally are in good condition, but the ceiling of the cloakroom on the north side of the building is badly in need of repair, and some ventilation should be provided. The heating of both the rooms in the Middle Division appears to be inadequate. Records of temperature should be carefully kept, and, if necessary, more effective heating apparatus should be supplied.*

*The Infants seats require backs, and more material for Handiwork is desirable, broadening their ideas and of their general knowledge.*

So there was work to be done to improve the children's educational journey.

The first Diocesan Inspection was not done until July 1914. It was carried out by Rev C H Verey who reported:

*The children answered well throughout and those in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Standards were particularly ready and quick. The Catechism was accurately written out by all the children and many of the papers on the Old and New Testament in the Upper Division were carefully and well done.*

*The Infants had evidently been carefully taught, they said their texts and answered very nicely.*

A satisfactory report on the religious education for the village children.

Six further HMI Inspections were carried out during Oliver Hooper's 20-year tenure as Headmaster. After 6 years in post, and following a difficult period, including many staff changes, the Inspector commented that:

*In spite of unsoundness in the preparation which has been given in the lower part of the school, the attainments in the Upper Groups have invariably reached a satisfactory level, and the Senior children are receiving a valuable training in habits of self-reliance and individual effort.*

A School Library, recently purchased by Mr Hooper, was seen to be a valuable asset and the children had already developed a love of reading, broadening their ideas and general knowledge. Overall, the Head Teacher was seen to "have done good work".

At the next Inspection a year later the HMI reported that

*...the Headmaster's evident interest in his school's welfare was evident in the friendly and live spirit that prevails and that genuine and careful work is being done. The attainments of the children in the top section may be regarded as distinctly promising largely due to the encouragement of a taste for reading.*

Many more resources and apparatus had provided interesting and progressive lessons in reading and number and the Inspector hoped that the jerky sing-song style of reading would be avoided in future and that writing would be placed on a sounder basis. He also noted that talkative habits among the younger children should be checked.

**Three years later in 1923** the HMI Inspector reported that,

*The state of this school is satisfactory. Sound work is done, great care being shown, and a good level of attainment being reached particularly in the fundamental subjects.*

The matters needing attention were the need for a new outlook in the teaching of geography and a firmer hand was needed in dealing with “the desultory chatter at the change of lessons”. Creditable results were being attained in the infant class by a capable and enthusiastic teacher.

By **November 1926**, “Steady effort” was seen to be the main characteristic of the school. Enterprising and methodical teaching resulted in the lower groups achieving “a very creditable standard of attainment indeed”.

Given the levels of sickness and further staff changes the children were seen to be “above the average in intelligence and attainment”.

Two areas requiring attention were seen to be “the cultivation of time sense in History” and secondly “the replacement of the existing lessons in general knowledge with a course of experimental investigations into the simple phenomena of their environment”.

It is interesting to note that as early as 1926 children at our village school were being given the opportunity for hands-on practical investigations of a scientific nature to help them understand environmental factors in the world around them. A step forward from the earlier forms of non-experimental rote learning.

A Diocesan report was filed each year during the headmaster’s tenure and the Bishop’s prizes and other prizes were awarded to the children judged to have performed best in their religious studies. In 1919 the Inspector noted that the school was in

*the most competent hands, and I am convinced that the work done should be to the advantage of the children and the credit of the Church and the religious life of the Village. Throughout the School prayers should be taken more slowly; this will ensure care of words and even more meaning.*

Subsequent inspections made further complementary comments about the religious instruction in school including:

*There is an excellent Tone and Discipline in school with a very marked religious atmosphere. This is one of the schools which it is a pleasure to inspect. Tone and Discipline are everything that can be desired and as one would expect. Religious Instruction is evidently very carefully done. The children are responsive and have been well grounded in the Articles of our Faith.*

In **March 1932**, at the end of Oliver Hooper’s tenure as Headmaster, the HMI Inspector reported that

*The Head Master of this school is shortly retiring after nearly twenty years faithful service in it. During that time, he has uniformly given of his best to*

*successive generations of children, and in this he has been loyally supported by his wife who often provided supply teaching cover with his two assistant teachers. He had monitored teachers from other local schools into his methods of teaching.*

*The children were seen to receive a sound education in the primary subjects; and conscientious attempts have also been made to widen their interests in many other ways.*

The first football match between Sibford and Hook Norton had taken place and the heating system had been improved but there was still no mains water or sewage system in place. He had supported the children and their families through the difficulties of both the First World War and the Spanish Flu epidemic. He had welcomed Belgian refugees as scholars and seen many of his senior pupils into work placements on local farms.

Mr Hooper had made a valuable contribution to the education of the children in his care and passed the school on to the next Head Master in a sound state.

*Maureen Hicks*