

## Mr Oliver Hooper

### Head Master Sibford Gower Endowed School, 1912-1932

During his tenure as Head Master at the village School Oliver Hooper kept a Log Book and this has been separately transcribed.

This record covers the everyday life of the school, its staff and pupils over a twenty-year period. Much of the detail is repetitious noting dates when the school was closed and re-opened after periods of closure for holiday, weather and illness etc.

Village life some hundred years ago was very different from village life today and this is reflected in the style and content of the record. Although there has been a school for the children of the Sibfords since the mid 17 century,



*Original school building*

the old school building, rebuilt in 1866 at a cost of £500, provided for all the pupils from 5-14 years of age. This original school building has subsequently been extended to provide a Hall, kitchen, offices and an additional classroom and now only houses the older children aged 8 -11 years – the Lower and Upper Juniors, now known as Key Stage 2. A further building, separated by the road, known as Acre Ditch, was built in the 1960's to provide separate accommodation for the children aged 5 – 7 years of age, now known as the Reception and Infant Classes or Key Stage 1. Children now transfer to a Secondary School aged eleven.

While Hooper was Head Master, village children spent the whole of their school life at the village school unless, very rarely, they gained a scholarship to Banbury County or another senior school. School provided both primary and secondary education from the age of five to fourteen which was the school leaving age at that time. Some pupils left for employment before the age of fourteen to work on local farms. Providing the Head Master knew their employers he kept the children on the Registers until they reached their official leaving age. All registers were regularly examined by School Managers so there must have been some necessary explanation for absence from time to time.

Absences of staff and pupils due to many different causes feature heavily in the Log Book record.

### Staff

The Head Master was responsible for teaching the older children known as the Upper Division. He was supported in some practical subjects by external, County Instructors – Horticulture, Physical Exercise, Needlework, Woodwork and Handicrafts. The senior boys spent a great deal of time learning gardening skills and tended the school gardens which were frequently examined and inspected by the relevant advisor. This strongly reflected the agricultural environment in which most male adults were employed. The girls were expected to become proficient in sewing and received instruction in Needlework from a County Instructor. Woodwork was introduced into the curriculum during Mr Hooper's period as Head Master and some senior boys attended a Centre in Bloxham once a week for specialist instruction.



*Teacher and pupils in school garden*

Teaching Assistants were appointed to help with teaching across the school but only seemed to remain for a very short time. The Infant Division had their own teacher who may have been an Uncertificated Teacher with little or no formal training. Often, they had been the more able scholars during their own time at school and continued to teach the younger children.

Staffing changes were frequent and disruptive and must have had a severe impact on the children's learning. Staff absence through illness also played an important part but Mrs Hooper, the Head Master's wife was frequently asked to cover classes for short periods or employed as a Supply Teacher for longer periods.

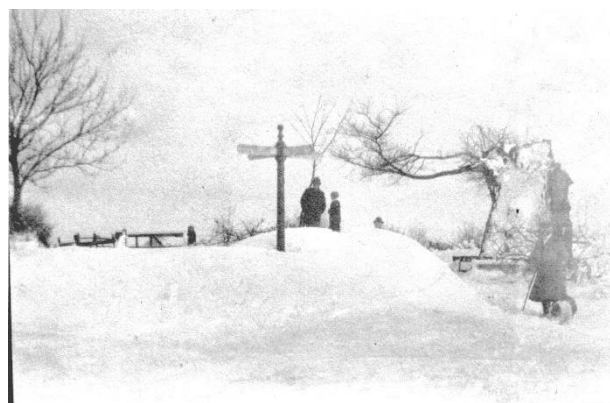
Although not a Church of England School, Religious Education formed an important part of the curriculum. In addition to the frequent inspection of the school by government HMI Inspectors, the Diocese appointed its own Inspectors who visited annually to test the children's religious knowledge, ability to recite Scripture, write the Catechism and other religious text, say their prayers quietly, meaningfully and with expression and to sing hymns well!

During his tenure Mr Hooper gradually improved standards of learning despite the frequent changes of staff and Inspectors noted a slow improvement as his methods bore fruit and he often mentored other Head Teachers from surrounding local schools inviting them to Sibford to 'study methods of teaching.'

### **Absence**

Hooper recorded that severe weather – snow, rain or excessive heat affected the number of scholars in school. The school day consisted of two separated parts and registers were taken twice a day. Pupils were expected to return home at lunchtime as no school meals were available so attendance could be different during the two halves of the same day.

Excessive rain prevented some pupils from attending as their clothing would become sodden as they walked to school and many did not have a change of clothes. The fire safety grids surrounding the solid fuel fires were often draped with outdoor clothes providing a steamy atmosphere in the classrooms. Footwear was also an issue. Many



*Snow at The Elm, 1916*

children did not have shoes or boots in good enough condition to keep out the wet. Snow prevented journeys for pupils and staff alike and the temperature in the classrooms fell to bitterly low levels. There was no electricity in the village at this time so the light level in classrooms sometimes prevented lessons being delivered at all. Severe weather conditions meant that school occasionally had to be closed for short periods

Illness was an important factor affecting attendance. Outbreaks of Influenza, Chicken Pox, Measles, Mumps, Whooping Cough and Scarlet Fever occurred frequently –

there were no childhood immunisations in the early 1900's so infection and contagious diseases decimated numbers to such an extent that the Medical Officer found it wise and necessary sometimes to close school for long periods.

### **Health**

In addition to the ailments already mentioned school provided, in most instances, the medical welfare of the children. Consulting a doctor or dentist incurred a fee so many children just had to endure illness and poor dental health. There was no National Health Service so the County Education Authority provided medical and dental services to schools and Mr Hooper records visits to school of the Medical Officer, District Nurse and County Dentists. He does not record whether, following inspection, the Dentists returned to treat children in school.

## Holidays, Celebrations and Events

The school year was divided into three terms, just like now, although the dates for the ending of the summer term and the commencement of the next academic year were very flexible. Harvest time was paramount and all children and their families were expected to help with the gathering and storage of crops. School sometimes did not recommence until early October if the harvest season was a late one. During the First World War school children also helped with the Home Front War Effort, and were given holiday from school to pick blackberries and to send them to Bloxham Station for transport to London where they were used in jam making for the serving military troops. In 1918 a total of one ton, six hundred weight and ninety-four pounds of blackberries were sent to Bloxham.



1930's Gordon Keyte & Harry Rymell harvesting

It is interesting to note that on the outbreak of hostilities with Germany in 1914 no mention of this calamitous national event was recorded by the Head Master. On that very day the Head Master recorded that the School Gardens took second place in the District Garden competition! There is a single reference to admitting two Belgian refugees as scholars to school during the war years but no further details are given in the Log Book. Details of the Belgian refugee families are recorded in the village archive. The end of four war-torn years is recognised on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918 when Hooper records, *"Signing of the Armistice received. A very wet day."* The following day, November 12<sup>th</sup> the Log Book states, *"The scholars marched through the village singing Patriotic Songs."*

The next entry, on 22 November, some 10 days later, tells us that *"Influenza broke out in the school and only 36 present this morning. Dr Coles, Medical Officer closed the school until December 9<sup>th</sup>."* Although an effort was made to re-open school on Dec 9<sup>th</sup> most of the children and families were still suffering from Influenza so school remained closed until 5 January 1919 and then only 50 pupils were present.

Very few village families were able to take holiday time away from the village so **Sibford Club Day**, which fell on the first Monday in June, was celebrated by villagers and provided a day of fun and celebration for all. School was closed for two days as it was in use by 'the Club'. The Club was a Friendly Society whose members were farmers and agricultural workers who paid a small subscription to provide some financial benefit to families when the breadwinner was unable to work. They held their Annual Meeting on 'Club Day' when the all-male Club Members attended a service in Church followed by a meeting in the School Room. The Annual Report was delivered and the disbursements during the previous year were acknowledged. They all enjoyed a hearty meal and joined the



Club Day, 1910

Village Brass Band and Church Choir at the village pond. From there they paraded through the village, following the Band and finally stopped on Poulton's Field opposite the Church where the Village Hall is today. Families, dressed in their Sunday best joined the male Members at the Village Fete which followed, complete with Swing Boats and other Fair attractions. A cold supper followed back at the School Room when the beer was finished, children were returned home to bed and a Dance followed in the Old Village Hall (which was behind the Wykham Arms) until the early hours of the following morning. A day of celebration for the whole community, old and young alike.





**May Day Celebrations** were another highlight in the school year. A May Queen was chosen together with a number of attendants, a floral bower and garlands were carefully constructed and decorated with greenery and fresh flowers and dances and songs were learned by all the pupils. The children paraded around the Gower, Burdrop and the Ferris singing and dancing their way through the villages to welcome spring.



The Log Book records the many times when the school gardens and their valued crops were damaged or destroyed by animals, sheep, pigs, cattle or horses that had broken through fences and created havoc in the carefully tended plots.

There was an annual **School Treat** held towards the end of the summer term. The children were occasionally invited by a wealthy villager to take tea and play games in their garden. Alternatively, it was held at school when a special tea was provided before they broke for the hard work required of children and adults during the gathering of the harvest.

The **Michaelmas Fair in Banbury** was also a special time when school finished early to allow children to go the Fair which was held in October every year. On one occasion a village notary, Mr J M Ormrod, gave six pence to each pupil to spend at the fair

At the end of each school year, and before the Harvest Holiday, there was the annual distribution of prizes to those pupils who had achieved success during the academic year. Some prizes were awarded by the Town Estate Charity and those for attainment in Religious Studies by the Diocesan Board. The prizes were usually presented by the Chair of the School Managers and other invited guests who often addressed the pupils.

Tributes and thanks were paid to Mr and Mrs Oliver Hooper when the Head Master retired after twenty years of service to Sibford Gower Endowed School in 1932. Teaching and learning had improved and was more diverse than when he took over. The first Football Match between Sibford and Hook Norton School had taken place, the heating systems had been improved but there was still no mains water or sewerage systems in the village. All water was collected from the Tite – a constant water source which surfaced in the school garden, and outdoor bucket lavatories required regular emptying. Hard to imagine for those of us living in the village almost 100 years later.