

## **Oliver Hooper**

### **Headteacher Sibford Gower Endowed Primary School from 1912-1932**

**Oxfordshire was the Local Education Authority and the School number was 183. The School Registration Number was E31/18/4**

During his tenure as Headteacher Mr Oliver Hooper reported on the Inspections made at the school by His Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMI) on behalf of the Board of Education and on the separate inspections made by the Diocesan Inspector of Schools.

HMI carried out seven separate inspections in 1912, 1919, 1920, 1923, 1926, 1929 and 1932.

The Diocese carried out annual inspections starting in 1914 until 1924. One further inspection was made in 1928.

### **HMI Inspections**

In **November 1912** the HMI reported that: '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.'

The next inspection was carried out in **April 1919** when Mr Hooper had been in post for six and a half years. 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, was seen to be a valuable asset and the children had already developed a love of reading, broadening their ideas and general knowledge.

The report states that, 'The fact that the Head Teacher has the charge of the Standards III to VII, which comprise exactly one half of the total numbers on the books, is an adverse feature since he had no time for the effective supervision of the remaining classes.

Now that there is a prospect of the staff becoming more settled, it should be possible to reorganise the classes in such a way as to reduce the size of the Upper Division.

The appointment of a good Monitor to assist in the Infants room would greatly facilitate this. Some specialisation should also be possible.'

Overall, the Head Teacher was seen to 'have done good work'.

By **October 1920**, at the next Inspection, the HMI reported that, 'the Headmaster's evident interest in his school 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.'

'The teacher in Standard I and the Infants had provided many more resources and apparatus to provide interesting and progressive lessons in reading and number. It was hoped that the jerky sing-song style of reading would be avoided in future and that writing would be placed on a sounder basis.'

However, in the Second Class and Lower part of the Top Class' talkative habits among the children should be checked.'

In **February 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, and discussed with the Headmaster and Staff were, a 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'.

The Infant teaching was being 'capably handled by an enthusiastic teacher and very creditable results are attained'.

Outside work was to be put in hand at once to 'level the playground which was in urgent need of levelling, and at to attend to the fence between the playground and the school garden.'

The following inspection was carried out in **November 1926**, when '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'.

However, in the highest group the lower section children were seen to be suffering from a number of factors, 'a defective teacher' who had left, school closures, and much sickness but slow signs of improvement were apparent. At tests set during the Inspection, apart from 'a lapse in Arithmetic' and a 'certain lack of definition in the quality of some of their knowledge' the children were, on the whole, 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 – a matter in which the children were seen to be somewhat defective'. 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.

Three years later in **June 1929** at the next Inspection, 'Sound training in written English given to the Top Class, and the bright, interesting teaching of the Lower group were seen to be good features in the work of the school'.

On testing the Senior Division, despite the amount of their knowledge they had 'less ability to use their knowledge in reasoning processes.' The nature of their teaching and the over-grouping for oral subjects were seen to be the two main reasons for this. Both these causes 'did not encourage sufficient self-effort on the part of the children and tend to produce restlessness and a want of concentration when they are thrown on their own resources. The remedies for these defects were discussed with the Head Master and will, it is trusted be adopted.'

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 two assistants.'

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.'

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.

## Diocesan Inspections

Although Sibford Gower Endowed School was not a Church Aided School the Education Act required all Religious Education to be inspected by an Inspector appointed by the Local Diocese.

Following his appointment as Head Master in 1912, Oliver Hooper did not have a Diocesan Inspection until **July 6<sup>th</sup> 1914**. It was carried out by the Rev C H Verey, Diocesan Inspector of Schools.

He reported that, '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.'

Prizes were awarded :-

Bishop's Prize – Agnes Golder

Certificates – Mary Blencowe, Harry Kaye and Esther Spicer

Commended:-

Standard I – Thomas Lines, Frances Cooper, Dora Rymell and Albert Bodfish

Standard II – Charles Cooper, Fred Lines, Edith Barnes, William Dunkley and Edith Barton

Standard III – Henry Tanner, Lionel Lines, Phyllis Cooper, William Spicer, Catherine Inns and Harry Blencowe.

On **May 19<sup>th</sup> 1915** the School was examined by Rev R de M Nixon. Following a long closure due to illness among the children, he commented that, 'I could not expect to see it at its best but the School continues to do valuable work. All I did see shewed me how careful, skilfully and effectively the children had been taught. The written work alone gave ample evidence of this.'

in one sense as the results obtained were not quite up to the special Award of Excellence, he felt the 'in the circumstances' and in light of the teaching he felt the School fully deserved credit and was happy to give the Award.

The Bishop's prize was given to Mary Blencowe

Certificates were awarded to Albert Bodfish, Madge Wheeler, Horace Rymell and Edith Barton

Commended were,

Standard I: Frederick Inns, Frances Cooper, George Keyte, William Green and Arthur Hyde

Standard II: Jesse Tanner, Bertha Keyte, Brenda Hawtin, Frederick Lines, Charles Cooper and Walter Tanner

Standard III: Edward Hooper, Kathleen Inns, Harriet Leaver, William Morby

The following year Rev C H Verey, Diocesan Inspector of Schools visited the School on **29 May 1916** reported that, 'The School is doing thoroughly good work.' He was very pleased with the way, 'the children answered throughout, the second group being a really excellent one. The written work had been carefully and efficiently taught.'

This year the Bishop's Prize was awarded to: Rose Keene

Certificates were awarded to Frederick Inns, and Jesse Tanner

Commended were,

Standard I: Eustace Inns, Leslie Wilson, Frances Cooper, Eric Newman, William Green and Isabel Blencowe

Standard II: Dorothy Breakspear, Edward Hooper, Kathleen Inns, Frances Leaver, Elsie Scruby, Henry Tanner, Horace Rymell, William Morby

Standard III: John Inns, Bertie Page, Irene Kench

The Diocesan Inspector in 1917 was Rev Marsh Kirby. He inspected the School on **July 4<sup>th</sup> 1917**.

Despite the national problems associated with the brutal First World War, school life in Sibford continued in much the same way. He reported that work was 'thoroughly and conscientiously done and the tone and discipline of the school was admirable.'

'The Upper Group answered excellently and some of their written work was also excellent, while some was very good and some indifferent.' The children attending the village school were largely from an agricultural background and by 1917, agricultural workers, previously exempt from conscription were called up into the armed forces following serious losses during the Battle of the Somme. Financial constraints, hardship and shortages of some food items must have made family life difficult for some village families.

The inspector continued to be impressed by the 'admirable Tone and Discipline in the School' with work, 'being thoroughly and consciously done'. The work in the Upper Group was observed to be mixed while the Middle Group, 'answered brightly and often exceedingly well but their written work was disappointing. It seemed as though statements as to our Faith were put down without a true or real grasp of the meaning.'

'One or two Infants answered brilliantly but there was a tail, some appeared to take only a small interest in their work. Maybe the many excellent Infant schools in the Deanery made me expect too much.'

In the Upper Group, The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Anne Webb

Certificates were awarded to: William Breakspear and Frederick Inns

Commended were: Eustace Inns, Isabel Blencowe, Oliver Lines, Eric Newman, and Edith Barton

The Middle Group

Certificates were awarded to: Henry Tanner, Leslie Breakspear

Commended were: Edward Hooper, John Inns, Horace Rymell, Fred Berry and Elizabeth Lamb

Infants

Certificate: Gladys Hooper (exceptionally good)

Commended were: Florence Moulson, Jessie Cadd, Henry Poulton, Ronald Breakspear,

Rose Lamb, Amy Spicer and Phyllis Kaye

Rev R de M Nixon returned to inspect the School on **June 11<sup>th</sup> 1918.**

On this occasion he awarded the School a Special Mark – Very Good. He observed that 'this is an excellent school, full of life and work, - with thorough teaching throughout and being given in a way that is interesting, and likely to be of real use to the children when they go out to face the difficulties and experiences of their lives.'

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Edith Barton

Certificates to: Eustace inns, Isabel Blencowe, Gladys Hooper, Leslie Breakspear

Commended

Standard I: Henry Tanner, Elizabeth Coleman, Harry Blencowe, D Breakspear  
and Frederick Berry

Standard II: Edward Hooper, John Inns, William Sabin, Clifford Bodfish, Lewis Poulton,  
Henry Poulton, Kathleen Inns and R Breakspear.

The following Inspection was carried out by another Diocesan Inspector, Rev W Fothergill Robinson on **13th August 1919**.

He noted that the School was in, 'most competent hands, and I am convinced that the work done should redound to the advantage of the children and the credit of the Church and religious life of the Village. This is, of course, the main point to be aimed at.'

However, following changes to staff in the Infants and Lower Standards, he reported that, 'the school has suffered but the present teachers appear to be getting hold of their children in a satisfactory manner.'

'Throughout the School prayers should be taken more slowly; this will ensure care of words and even more meaning.'

In Standards I, II and III there was a tendency to, 'give thoughtless answers; this should be checked. The value of an answer to a question lies more in the thought behind it than in its hidebound accuracy, though the latter can be secured with no loss to the former.'

He noticed, 'certain slips in the actual airs of the hymns sung, and also the presence of continual slurring from high to low notes, this is very common in most country places but where the work is otherwise so good, I doubt not that this can, and will be cured.'

'Mr Hooper has every reason to be deserve praise for the work done.'

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Henry Tanner

Certificates were awarded to: Jesse Tanner, William Dunkley, Edith Barton, Edward Hooper

Commended: Ernest Eden

Standard II

Certificates were awarded to: William Holton, John Inns, Winston Tanner and Frank Neal.

The Rev W Fothergill Robinson returned to the School on **July 9<sup>th</sup> 1920** to carry out the annual Diocesan Inspection.

While he noted, 'very considerable improvement during the year' he had many points of criticism and comments which he said, 'were solely due to the general excellence of the religious work' and he was, 'only trying to raise the standard to an even higher seal.'

He noted certain notable features in the Upper Group, 'the written work is not up to standard and the girls appear to show very little real enthusiasm.' He was pleased to say that, 'having said the worst,' he was impressed with, 'a most amazing fine tone among the boys: they answered with keenness, and showed real thought; they appeared to have some characteristic due entirely to the character of the school, which is a really important asset in the life of the village.'

He felt that 'the tone of the whole school would be helped if there were picture in the Infants School', and he recommended 'Nelsons.' He found that he was unable to examine, 'Upon the Acts' because 'so little ground had been covered' and he criticised that is was, 'not in the meaning of the syllabus for only three groups of the work of the Acts to be presented.'

He did, however, report that, 'the greatest improvement was in the Middle Group and I was much pleased by the keenness and intelligence of the children in this group.'

He felt unable to award the school the top mark available this year but hoped, 'to do so, at my next inspection whenever that may be.'

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Henry Tanner

Certificates in Group 1 were awarded to: William Dunkley, Jesse Tanner, Edward Hooper and Edith Barton

Commended: Ernest Eden

Certificates in Group 2 were awarded to: John Inns, Gladys Hooper, William Holton

Infants: Winston Tanner and Frank Neal

On **16<sup>th</sup> June 1921** the Diocesan Inspector, Rev O J Hogarth noted that, 'the prayers were repeated slowly and reverently, and the singing was satisfactory, attention being paid to expression. The Repetition, Prayer Book, Creed and Catechism were all good.'

Examining the Upper group he felt they had been thoroughly prepared – 'more evident in the written than in the oral work where the answering was confined to a small group. In the written answers 'the facts and the explanations were both good' and the children in Standard IV were 'but a little inferior to those in the VIIth Standard.'

In the Lower Group 'a well applied lesson was given on the Commandments. Repetition and Catechism were satisfactory and the written work was neat and correct.'

In the Infants he observed that their general knowledge was good. 'Texts and Baptisms were especially good.' However, 'The Old Testament subjects might be taught in greater and more graphic detail.'

Once again 'the urgent need of pictures' was noted and he recommended, 'a good picture of Our Blessed Lord in the Upper School would be a great acquisition.'

Overall, after a thorough inspection of all religious teaching the 'Summary Mark is Very Good'.

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Fred Berry

Certificates were awarded to Edward Hooper and Harry Blencowe

Commended - George Cadd, Clifford Bodfish, William Holton, John Inns, Gladys Hooper, Ivy Harris, Dora Blencowe, Annie Spicer

The Rev Marsh Kirby returned to Inspect the school for the Diocese on **24<sup>th</sup> June 1922**

Once again, he recorded an 'excellent Tone and Discipline' in school with a 'very marked religious atmosphere'. Oral and written work in the Upper Group was, 'for the most part Excellent. Some of the written papers were extraordinarily well done whereas others varied from VG to G'. Thoroughness and care in teaching were thought to be the reason for the good results.

Work in the Lower Group 'was not so good.' On the whole the oral work was very good but, he suggested that, 'the children should be taught to think before answering.' He found it impossible to

give the usual simple questions and could 'only give the Lord's Prayer to write down'. This did not allow him to, 'give any judgement as to their powers'.

The Infants were, 'good but not nearly excellent'.

Judging the school throughout he awarded it V.G (Very Good).

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Edward Hooper

Certificates were awarded to John Inns and Gladys Hooper

Highly Commended - Clifford Bodfish, Dora Blencowe, John West, Mary Hone, Isabel Dyer  
Amy Spicer, Donald Harvey, Maggie Dyer and Leslie Bryan

In the Lower Group, - The Best were Frank Haynes and Ellen Dunkley

Highly Commended: Fred Tanner, Hilda Clifton, Frederick Moulson, Frank Neal

Infants: Violet Harris (Best)

Highly Commended – Mary Bridgman and Violet Payne

Commended – John Eden, Ellen Webb, Dorothy Green and Leslie Hooper

A year on, and the Rev Marsh Kirby returned to carry out the annual Diocesan Inspection on **June 14<sup>th</sup> 1923.**

He commented, '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 the Upper Group, 'the oral work was excellent' but the written work, although, 'very good showed much sameness resulting in one or two slight mistakes. Children should work out Foundations in their own words talking and thinking over what, we who teach, tell them. Otherwise, the written work was accurate and excellent.

The Middle Group showed a vast improvement – 'More originality and more correctness than when I last examined them, but in one question which might have many answers, every child said the same thing which was only half the answer that anyone might expect. Goodness surely lies under obedience perhaps more so than the necessary abstaining from evil.'

He recorded these things to show what he meant hoping that next year, 'this excellent School may quite come up to the excellent standard which it should and can.'

He noted that the Infants are, 'also greatly improved and in most cases were excellent. Overall, the School comes under the Mark V.G. but nearer Excellent than before.'

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Gladys Hooper

Certificate – John Inns

Highly Commended: - M Haynes, Mary Page, Donald Harvey, Jessie Cadd, George Blencowe,  
Frank Haynes, Emily Lines

Middle Group: - Frank Neal, Helen Haynes, Jack San-bin, I Rymell, Edwin West, Tom Neal,  
Alma Woogrove, Henry Long, M Sabin

Infants: - Barbara Gadd, Violet Harris, Leslie Hooper, Violet Payne, Margarita Gadd, Ellen Webb  
Dorothy Green, Freda Neal, Mary Pettipher and John Long

In 1924 a new inspector arrived at the school. Rev W E Womersley examined the school on  
**28<sup>th</sup> May 1924.**

He found the school to have 'an excellent tone.' On the occasion of his visit the children, 'sang their hymns well and said their prayers reverently. The baby class were bright and responsive and showed they had been sympathetically taught.'

The Middle Group were, 'somewhat uneven but many showed that the teaching had been carefully given.'

The Upper Group were, 'so responsive and gave evidence of careful and conscientious training. Many of them gave very thoughtful answers.'

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Clifford Bodfish.

Certificates: - G Blencowe, Mary Page

Commended: - C Eden, J Haynes, Rosa Sabin, Rose Inns, Helen Haynes and Irene Gadd.

The final report of a Diocesan Inspection which took place on **June 19<sup>th</sup> 1928** was recorded carefully by Oliver Hooper who had been Head Teacher throughout this period. He finally retired in 1932. The school was once again inspected by Rev Marsh Kirby representing the Diocese.

He found the school, 'vastly improved since my last visit (1923) especially in the Infant Department. Great care, patience and good handling have made this Department first class.'

He recorded that, 'We owe a great debt to the Head Master who has carried out his duties under very trying difficulties in a most marvellous way and has secured the affection of his children.'

The Lower Division is, 'a great improvement to that I examined three or four years ago. The oral work was really very good and the written work good, but capable of being made much better.'

'The Upper Division still keeps up to a very high standard, The papers sent in were all very good, two or three, excellent.'

He recorded that, 'very valuable Scripture teaching is given throughout the school. The Catechism is well kept up and made a back ground of teaching'.

The Bishop's Prize was awarded to Leslie Hooper (the Head Master's son).

Special Prize was awarded to Archibald Kaye

Certificates: - Alma Woolgrove and Dorothy Green

Special Notice: - John Long, Standard V and Irene Harris, Standard IV

Commended: - Violet Payne, Sidney Lines, Albert Cadd and Irene Spicer

Lower Division:

Best: - Eric Payne and Joan Green

Highly Commended: - Fred Bishop, Dick Wise, Arthur Bishop, Phyllis Bishop, Frances Gadd and Betty Bishop

Infants:

Best: - Barbara Lamb and Mary Poulton

Commended: - Florence Bishop, Mary Lamb, Joyce Webb, Norman Dyer, Richard Boyd and Richard Haynes

I have recorded the names of all the pupils who were given awards following Inspection by the Diocesan Inspectors as they provide a record of families whose children attended the village school during the Headship of Oliver Hooper from 1912 to 1932. It is interesting that many are family names that have been well represented in the village through many, many years – some still known today in 2021.

*Maureen Hicks*