

School in Old Marston

Below is a collection of documents and information about the schools in Marston.

Before the School

When Dr Thomas Secker visited Marston in 1738 on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford, he noted that there was no free school or voluntary charity school. In 1799 the Gentleman's Magazine recorded that some of the young farmers have studied psalmody. In 1816 there was evidence that there was a private school with twenty children in Marston.

1851

In 1851 the first official Marston school was officially opened as a National School to serve the children living in the village. It was funded by the state, the Anglican Church, wealthy locals and the money obtained from the children -1d week on a Monday per child. But there was never enough money. What is now the Church Hall was originally built to house the school.

For 20 years a variety of teachers struggled to teach up to 70 children in cold and cramped conditions. A few managed to have the help of a member of their family, while Mary Gordon, the daughter of the vicar helped when she could, but most had to cope on their own.

Inspection teams frequently complained about the poor maintenance of the building and the low standard of teaching. Naturally, the attainment of the children was low too. Most left before they were eleven to find paid work.

1852

Gardner's History, Gazetteer & Directory of Oxfordshire, 1852 reported the following: The Parish School is a neat and picturesque building, recently erected by subscription and opened by the lord bishop of Oxford. It is built of Headington stone, with Bath stone facings and quoins, and is situate near the church.

1854

In 1854 the bishop of Oxford, [Samuel Wilberforce](#), son of the anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce, visited Marston and made several observations about the school and local education.

Sunday services and 11am and 2.30pm. Sermons at each, excepting those days on which the communion is administered or the children catechised.

Preparatory to a Confirmation it is usual to catechise and explain the Catechism to the school children in Church and frequently to hear them catechised by the Master on Sunday afternoons in school.

One efficient National school numbering from 60 to 70 children, a few more attend the Sunday School. There is also a Dame's school, where a few young children receive instruction. The National school is supported partly by children's pence, partly by subscription, but principally by the Incumbent who alone is responsible to the Master and Mistress for their salary.

[Are you able to retain your young people in your Sunday School after they have ceased to attend daily school?] A very small proportion.

[Have you employed any other method of retaining them under instruction?] During the last winter a few young men attended an Evening school.

[Is there any other matter which you consider it expedient to bring under the Bishop's notice? No answer seems to have been made.] National Schools.... were supported by the National Society for the Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church.

The Rothwells

In 1871, after a particularly damning report, the school was closed for four years. It opened again in 1875 with Mr and Mrs Rothwell in charge. They were trained teachers, he from Lancashire and she from Yorkshire.

On the first day, 75 pupils were registered, assessed and organised into forms by age and ability. The school had begun a new chapter.

The Rothwells worked well together as a team, and later were able to employ a past pupil to help. They arrived with two children of their own and had six more in the next twelve years. Most of these became teachers themselves.

Mr Rothwell became the wise man of the village. He took the census in 1881, helped parents to understand the effects of new legislation on education as many parents couldn't read themselves, and generally played a central role in the life of the village. Now inspection teams praised the teaching, but usually condemned the state of the buildings.

Sadly Mr Rothwell died young in 1887 and is buried by a yew tree in the churchyard. His wife stayed on working with other heads into the twentieth century. By now the school was functioning well and more able pupils were encouraged to stay on until they were fourteen. A few even went on to teachers' training colleges.

1891

Kelly's Directory of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire, 1891:

National School (mixed), erected in 1851, for 79 children & enlarged in 1887 for 100; average attendance, 100; Mr. Henry Furby, master; Mrs. Jane Rothwell, mistress

Margaret Roberts

Margaret was one of the daughters of William Roberts, a local shoemaker and chairman of the Parish Council. She worked as an assistant at the school but sadly died at the age of 18. She is buried with her older sister Florence in the church yard.

1913

In 1913 a new head arrived with his wife – Mr and Mrs Chapman. There are still some people living locally who remember being taught by this couple.

They had only been here a short time when WW1 began. The young men left the village for military service, and those left behind had a difficult time of it. Food was short, the children malnourished and frequently ill.

Despite the hardship, the school did what it could for the war effort. The Revd Mortimer was the vicar at the time and he loved singing. He trained the choir which gave concerts to raise money for tobacco for the wounded, or sang to the men recovering in the Town Hall – then used as a military hospital.

In season the children picked blackberries for jam and the older children were released from school to get the harvest in as there were no men left to do it. Despite all the privations, the inspectors left every year announcing that the school was Excellent.

Kelly's Directory of Oxford, 1914

National School (mixed), erected in 1851, enlarged in 1887 & 1894; it will now hold 125 children; average attendance, 78; Herbert Chapman, master.

Boy Scouts (9th Oxford Troop), Miss E. Peto, scoutmaster, Hall, New Marston
Carriers—Willis, to Oxford daily, except Thurs.; Sumner & Poulton, Wed. & Sat.

The Reading Room

The war years brought change. The Women's Institute vacated the Reading Room which then became the overflow building for the school.

With the passage of time the Reading Room fell into disrepair and it was felt that the structure was not sound enough to justify any large amount being spent on repairs. Yet village activities continued to take place there but only because at that time there was no

other hall available. At last the time came when the children moved to the new Primary School and the Reading Room was no longer considered safe for large gatherings.

It was at this point that a member of the Church offered to buy the Reading Room – but on conditions. The purchase money should be used to convert the old Village School into a much needed Church Hall.

1932 till Present

The Chapmans finally left in 1932, and were soon replaced by Mr and Mrs Jennings. They too had a war to cope with and this one brought evacuees from London. Those that came in 1939, soon returned home as the ‘phoney war’ dragged on, but once the blitz started, children from two schools came to the village with their teachers and many stayed for the duration. The school was full to bursting and the Reading Room – now demolished – was used as class-room space and for school dinners.

The passing of the 1944 Education Act, meant that the children eventually moved on at eleven, some to grammar schools, but most to Gosford Hill at Kidlington where they went by bus. Once the war finished, all but three of the men returned, the last evacuees went back to London and for a short time the teachers could take a deep breath. But the bulge was on the way!

By 1951 the school was using rooms in the tie factory at the back of the school, the Reading Room and even the pavilion at the back of the White Hart. Cyril Jennings cycled round the village checking up on his expanding empire. At last money was found to build a new school on the edge of the quickly expanding estate of new houses to the south of the village and St. Nicholas School opened its doors for the first time in September 1954. Marston Village School had come of age. It had a new name and was no longer a church school.

Cyril Jennings remained head until 1967 when he retired. He started the tradition of May Day celebrations, where the children processed to the church for a service, then round to Alan Court to crown their Queen of the May and dance round the maypole on the lawn. Under his leadership this new primary school flourished and it continued to do so after his retirement.

In 1972 the schools in the City of Oxford changed to a three tier system and St Nicholas became a first school, having children only from 5 to 9 years old. The Harlow School, which shared the same site, changed from being a secondary modern to a middle school and the children from St Nicks went on there for another four years before moving on to their upper school. In the late 80s the children began to be tested in the basics at 7 – end of key stage one, and 11 – end of key stage two. This meant that the children changed schools half way through key stage two, and this was not good for them. Finally, at the beginning of the 21st century, the system became two tiers again, and St Nicks now has children from nursery to eleven.

Change is often difficult to manage, but the school has continued to prosper throughout all the upheavals and is now a junior school giving 316 children a sound basis in all the academic skills they need to face secondary education – but they get so much more.

Children and Giving

by Mrs Bette Jones

Young, active people at St Nicholas C.P. School in Old Marston have been raising money and bringing happiness to the community for a variety of causes and events in many different ways.

As the school term closed for the Christmas holidays last Friday, Mr. Peter Jones, the Headmaster, said: "Although we have appealed all term for funds for the School Swimming Pool, the children have looked beyond themselves to the needs of others both here and overseas. On their own initiative, with the help of the teachers, they have undertaken some inspiring and imaginative projects. My staff and I are very proud of their achievements."

Mrs. Annette Chadwick, who teaches a class of lower juniors aged from 7-9 years recently took a party of 16 children to sing Carols and Songs to patients in the Radcliffe Infirmary. They entertained patients in Rowley, Alexandra and Leopold (Children's) Wards with Songs accompanying themselves on Glockenspiels and Xylophones Children in Mrs. Bonnie Johnston's class of Upper Juniors were very concerned about the fate of the East Pakistan people after seeing a Panorama programme on Television about the disastrous cyclone and the tragedy it had brought. They decided to raise funds for the East Pakistan Disaster Fund.

As enthusiasm spread like wild-fire throughout the school, Mrs. Johnston gathered together a party of young carollers from the Juniors who went to sing in Marston and raised E5 4s. 1d. The children in Mrs Johnston's class also baked a Gingerbread House which was raffled to the parents and raised £2 15s. 0d. for the Disaster Fund.

The Magpie television programme's appeal for funds for a teaching machine for handicapped children will benefit by £25. This is the sum raised by children in Mrs. Marjorie Hensel's class.

Their inventiveness in fundraising ranged from 'Guessing the Scarecrows Name' and 'How many Peas in the Jar', to selling sweets and cakes they had made themselves. Earlier in the term two of the children raised 15/- for the Royal Naval Lifeboat Fund by making flags and selling them. They even built their own model of a lifeboat to illustrate their appeal.

During the whole of this year the Children throughout the school have managed to raise. £100 to buy an Oxygen Machine for Spina Bifida Children and next term ten children will be going to the Radcliffe Infirmary to see the machine in operation.

To end these activities all the decorations made by the Infants have been taken to the Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital, and those from the Junior department have gone to the Alexandra Ward of the Radcliffe Infirmary.

2007: Marston Times Report

School is no longer just about teaching children the three R's. It must include all aspects of their physical well being, their attitude to those around them and the wider world in general. They must be offered the opportunity to express themselves in music, art and drama; to learn new skills and develop their talents.

We have all heard of Jamie Oliver's efforts to encourage everyone to have a healthy eating life style. In the past most children have brought packed lunches from home with very few taking up the option of a cooked meal mid-day. But things are changing. All the staff now eat a school meal sitting at the tables and talking to the children. The school cook provides lunches for at least 30% (and rising) of the children. There is a choice, all healthy of course, and the children like them. For those who still have packed lunches there are 'Healthy Lunch Box' stickers listing recommended contents and the school nurse has talked to all the children about possible healthy options too. A cooking club has been formed where the children learn how to cook basic, healthy food.

The children in this generation of are often described as couch potatoes, and obesity is an ever growing worry. Outside coaching is provided in school time for squash, cricket, rugby, football and multi skills. Hockey, cricket and football are also included in the extended day activities. All sport on offer is for girls as well as boys of course! The children are encouraged to walk to school as part of the school's travel plan. There is to be a 'Get Fit Kids' day and a 'Healthy School' week. The school is working towards having 'Healthy School Status', a scheme run by the county. Part of this is achieved by fulfilling the aims of the Football Association Charter for Schools.

For eighty years the old school was heated by boilers in the classroom which often produced more smoke than heat. If you were near them, you were too hot, but on the other side of the room, you shivered. Some heads became adept at taking them to pieces and 'mending' them. Some had the knack -others didn't. When piped water arrived in the village in the late twenties, it was possible to have radiators and life looked up. A modern school has gas, electric central heating, which forms a large part of the budget. 'Energy Week' was from 12th - 16th March when a green energy bus visited the school enabling the children to learn about solar and wind power and to discuss the affects of global warming on their future lives. It was a great success with lots of hand-on experience for the children. It has helped every child in every class to become more conscious of the importance of saving energy so that lights are turned off when not necessary, doors shut to conserve heat and they are talking about these matters at home.

A school allotment was started by the head of the time (Hubert William John Pugh) at the end of 1911, in which the older boys could learn to grow fruit and vegetables to feed themselves and their families. This flourished up to WW2. Last year a flower and vegetable garden was started as part of the route to achieving Healthy School status. The Vegetable Plot produced a wide variety of fruit and vegetables - organic of course! - in its first year and these were sold to parents and staff. Our Nature Garden flowered abundantly! Everyone associated with the project was pleased to win the Silver Award in the 'Oxford in Bloom' Best Schools

Environmental Project category. Work has started on the plot again as spring advances and it is hoped to have a polytunnel in place soon.

Now a plan is afoot to change the field behind the old middle school into a meadow including a pond – water to come from draining the football pitches, some dry stone walling, a wet woodland area on the marshy part of the field and a copse area. This would provide a versatile teaching environment in which to learn a wide range of topics. If possible, a wind turbine could be put there too.

The Revd Mortimer would be delighted to know that the school has two choirs – KS1 and KS2 – and an orchestra. They practice hard and give concerts. To one of these, held in the school hall, they invited their neighbours from nearby roads. Some visitors, who have lived locally for years, found themselves in the school for the first time and thoroughly enjoyed the concert. Parents and friends attended another given in Mortimer Hall. One young violinist has won the music scholarship to Oxford High for next September. As part of the L.E.A Music Service it is possible for pupils to learn to play the guitar, violin, flute or clarinet.

In the 70's a unit was established at the school for autistic children 5-11 who could benefit from specialist teaching, but who also needed to be able to integrate into the main school, with help, when appropriate. It was called the Chinnor Unit as the original base was founded at St Andrew's School, Chinnor. In later years bases were created at Lord William's School, Thame, and our local Cherwell School so that autistic children have appropriate primary and secondary education. These units are now called Autism Resource Bases. These arrangements have enabled children, who previously were often considered educatable to get GCSE's, A levels and go on to university and play their proper role in the community. The system in Oxfordshire has been a model for the rest of the country.

When the Rothwells came down from the north to Old Marston in 1875, they found the local dialect difficult at times. This is shown in the way they wrote the new names down phonetically as they heard them – Ripington became Reppington for instance. I expect the villagers struggled to follow the Yorkshire and Lancashire accents too! They would be amazed to know that some 40 different nationalities are represented at the school now, and 12 languages other than English spoken at home by the pupils. All those to whom English is not their first language are given special tuition three times a week and most become proficient very quickly. All children with special needs receive extra, individual help in class to give them the best chance possible to keep up with the others.

Over the last few years the timing of school has changed to take account of the life-styles of the families. Some parents have to leave home early so some 5-10 children are able to come to school at 8 a.m. for Breakfast Club. Then there is the After School Club from 3.15 – 5.30 p.m. everyday. Some 15-20 children stay most days. During this time the adults with them help them with art, or cooking, improving their computer skills, or they can do jigsaws or play with other toys. There is a charge for these services, but working parents know that their children are well looked after and stimulated.

Other after school clubs take place during the week. In this case the activities include creative writing, football, cooking, multi sports and choir practice.

When I was at school the classes were known as 1A, or 3B denoting the year and the classification by ability. Later they were known by their year and their teacher, but the natural turnover of staff meant there was not continuity. Now, right from when they first enter school, their classes are known by plant or tree names. The first class is 'Beanstalk'. This takes in children in Foundation 1 and 2. 1 is reception and 2 is nursery in old speak. The older children move on to Sunflower for the rest of their reception year. The rooms are connected by a joint outside play area and each room is decorated according to its name. This provides a very bright and colourful environment for these young children. Once in main school, they can go into Oak or Fir. Fir has some year 2s, the rest being in Palm. Years 3 and 4 are spread between Pine, Ash and Lime; year 5s are in Elm and year 6s in Yew. English is taught in a special room called the Banyan room after an Indian tree.

The school has always fostered good relations between teachers and parents, believing them to be crucial to the education and development of the children. An organisation called FOSNS (Friends of St Nicholas School) was set up many years ago. In the summer term they organise a school fete which is always great fun. Throughout the year they hold other money raising events or provide a forum for discussion and decision about important current matters concerning the school.

Running, entwined throughout the curriculum and extra-curriculum activities, are the constant themes of courtesy, kindness, tolerance, respect for others, and doing your best. The children of Marston are in safe hands.

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Pennies Needed to Balance The Books

By John Chipperfield

Like many other schools, the village school at Old Marston, Oxford, relied heavily on what was known as the 'School Pence' to balance its books.

Pennies needed to balance the books

Every pupil had to bring a penny on Monday mornings for the privilege of being taught. The school's only other income came from the Church, the Government's capitation grant, and some voluntary contributions.

Accounts books from the mid-19th century, revealed in Marston Village School 1851-1954, a book compiled by former governor Jan Sanders, show how some of the money was spent. A glazier was paid a shilling, coal cost £1, ink a shilling, window blinds 9s 6d, a scrubbing brush 1s 3d and emptying the privies cost £1 5s.

A male teacher was paid £50 a year, whereas a woman teacher received £35.

Absenteeism was often a problem. In a farming village like Marston, there was great pressure on children to help in the fields.

The book records: "In spring, the potatoes and cereals had to be planted, then hay made. When the crops ripened, they had to be harvested, and finally the potatoes had to be dug." Many children also suffered ill-health, as a result of living in homes of poor hygiene.

"Almost every year, epidemics broke out of measles, chickenpox, whooping cough or scarlet fever, all potential killers.

"The school had to be shut sometimes to try to prevent the outbreak spreading, or just because numbers were so low it wasn't worth opening."

In the mid-1860s, the school – now known as St Nicholas – appears to have gone through a particularly challenging period, with poor attendance, unruly behaviour and criticism of standards by inspectors.

The head, Mr Moulding, lasted just 18 months before heading for pastures new. More on the school soon.

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/9526808.pennies-needed-balance-books/>

RESIDENTS OBJECT

Ten residents of Old Marston are signing a holding objection asking the County Education Committee to delay its decision on increasing the number of places at Peers School, Littlemore.

At present the school takes 120 children between the ages of 14 and 16 from Marston, but when the building is extended in 1971/2 this number will be raised to 300. The feeling of those who signed the petition is that the extensions should be made to the Harlow School. This would mean that time and expense were saved in transport and that the children would be able to join in extra-curricular activities more easily.

On the other hand, the Harlow School is not sufficiently equipped with staff or facilities to teach up to O-level standard, and for this reason most parents would prefer their children to go to Littlemore.

In addition, the long-term situation is confused by the raising of the school-leaving age to 16, due to take effect in 1972 and by the fact that there is a continuing uncertainty about the incorporation of Marston into the City.

In this event the whole education system in Marston would need to be modified to fit in with that of Oxford.

Swan School

Oxford's newest Secondary School is being built in the parish of Old Marston. There have been a huge division of opinion across Marston of those who desperately need the provision and those who feel the location is in the wrong place and have concerns in relation to overloading an already local traffic infrastructure. [You can find out more about the school by going to their website.](#)

When the River Learning Trust announced their plans to build a new secondary school along the Marston Road and to expand Meadowbrook College on the Harlow site, it was also made clear that St Nicholas School would lose most of their playing field to accommodate this. This decision caused great concern and caused a division between parents in New Marston and the residents in Old Marston and others who are affected by this decision. The River Learning Trust bought this piece of Green Belt land for £1 from the County Council.

Considering they owned the land next to Cherwell School, which was larger and more suitable and had recently been vacated by the Harlequins Rugby Club, and had an underpass under the road, people could not understand why they insisted on persisting on building on this site to the detriment of St Nicholas School. The Parish Council joined with others to persuade the trust to build on the land next to Cherwell School instead, but to no avail.

Concerns were raised regarding the expansion of Meadowbrook College so close to a residential area as well. There are concerns at the huge increase of traffic in an already heavily congested area as well as the increase in air pollution, considering the catchment area is the whole of Oxford. Also there are huge concerns regarding building a busy entrance across the UK's busiest cycle to school cycle track without building some kind of underpass to allow young cyclists to travel safely to and from school (despite an estimate budget of over £40m of Government money).