

The rise and fall of primary school numbers

The September picture in the Reepham Life 2018 Calendar shows the Reepham Primary School Class 2 of 1937.



Hackford and Whitwell School was built on the current site of the primary school in School Road, Reepham, in the 1890s, replacing the previous school building in Church Street, which is now the Town Hall.

The present Town Hall had been the original Hackford and Whitwell Parochial School dating from the 1860s and paid for by subscription. With a rising population the Church Street premises had become too cramped for the increasing numbers of children.

Reepham parish also had a school – St Mary’s on Norwich Road, where Richard Cornall was the headmaster from 1896 (taking over from Susan Goddard) until 1912.

Entries from St Mary’s log book show the importance of attendance in relation to funds granted to the school by the School Board. Regular visits were made to check on the attendance registers, which had to be marked by a certain time each day, morning and afternoon.

Regular inspections were also made, often unannounced, by school inspectors to check on pupil attainment and quality of teaching. Funds granted relied on the results of these inspections.

Later entries show that by 1914 there were approximately 50 pupils on the register. Numbers continued to dwindle and Reepham St Mary’s school closed around 1920, amalgamating with Hackford and Whitwell, although the building continued to be used for woodwork and cookery classes by other schools in the area.

The log book also records school closures on account of measles, whooping cough, cases of ringworm, non-attendance due to bad weather and bad boots!

Reepham St Mary’s log book is available on the UK-based online genealogy service Findmypast and, like the curate’s egg, is good in parts.

*For a more detailed look at Hackford and Whitwell School in the 1920s and 1930s refer to Wesley Piercy’s booklet *My Town: Essays on the History of Reepham*.*

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