

## **POSSIBLE CLOSURE OF LONGCOT & FERNHAM SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

For more than 20 years, from 1945 to 1969, the continued existence of a primary school in Longcot was in doubt. In 1945 or 1946 the school building in Longcot was condemned as unsuitable for use as an educational establishment. What would happen to the children from Longcot and Fernham? Maybe they could go to a new, yet to be built, school in Shellingford. Transferring to the school in Uffington was discussed but deemed impractical due to lack of space and teachers. Fleeting a move to Shrivenham was also suggested. For two decades, the problem was discussed but nothing agreed. The residents of Longcot still wanted a school in their village. In 1961 local resident Mrs Gladys Crosbie, landlady of the Bricklayer's Arms and Clerk to the Parish Council, gathered support from the villagers. A petition with 130 signatures was presented to the local education authority.

In September 1962, a formidable lady named Mrs Betty O'Brien became headmistress at Longcot School. She took on a school with enormous problems: a dilapidated, condemned building, clerical work in chaos, and only 39 children on the register. The standard of the work of older children was deemed very low and very untidy. She worked determinedly with school managers, her staff and parents to improve the school and to increase attendance.

During the following years the school improved and new housing led to an increase in the number of children in the village. In 1967 it was learned that re-building of the school was possibly going to begin later that year. The plans were considered and approved and building commenced. On January 20th 1969, the new open plan school was opened with 70 pupils on the roll. The old school was then demolished. Mrs O'Brien remained as headmistress until 1983 when she retired. The school building is still in use today.

## From the Minutes Book of the managers of Longcot and Fernham School

Text in italics is taken from the Minutes Book. The original comprises handwriting, closely written and of variable legibility, so there may be errors in transcription.

April 12<sup>th</sup> 1945 At a meeting of the school managers, a memorandum from **Canon ?** states, *'if under the new Act it should become necessary to close Longcot School and if the managers did not feel able to build a new school the Longcot and Fernham children should be conveyed to a new, up to date school to be built in Shellingford. The alternative would be to send the children to Shrivenham. The Managers after discussion agreed that the school buildings at Longcot were beyond repair and likely to be condemned under the new Act. This being so they welcomed the plan to send the children to Shellingford. It was assumed that Longcot and Fernham would be represented on the Shellingford Board of Managers.'*

October 1946 At a meeting of the school managers *'the vicar also reports that the County Surveyor had condemned the school building for educational purposes and said that this meant either a new school (Church or Council) being built or the children conveyed elsewhere. The managers unanimously agreed that if a new school in Longcot could not be built then the children should go to the new church school in Shellingford under the scheme discussed on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1945.'*

It is interesting that the managers don't seem to be unduly concerned by this news. The school in Longcot remained in use.

June 14<sup>th</sup> 1951 *'The vicar reported as the school buildings are condemned and as it had been decided that the children would be transferred to Shellingford Church School as soon as the new school should be ready the Education Authorities had agreed that the managers could apply at once for "Controlled Status" The vicar therefore made a proposition to this effect which was carried unanimously.'*

September 14<sup>th</sup> 1956 *'The vicar outlined the proposals regarding Longcot School. It has been suggested that Uffington School should be extended to accommodate the children from Longcot, Fernham, Shellingford and Kingston Lisle. The vicar said that the children would benefit by the change they would*

*receive a better standard of education. There would be teachers of each age group. Transport would be provided. There would be a small amount of money to be found each year, roughly £10. The old school buildings would be sold or let and monies would go toward the enlarged school.*

*A new board of managers would be appointed, the vicar and one other member from each parish. The board would appoint their own teaching staff, if the present teaching staff were not appointed alternative employment would be found at present salaries. The managers unanimously agreed in favour of the proposed scheme and were prepared to discuss the matter with the Education Committee and the managers of Uffington School.'*

July 24<sup>th</sup> 1957 A meeting was held at Uffington where the managers from Uffington School were present together with a representative of the Berkshire Education Committee.

*'The managers of Uffington School had been asked to take the Longcot children temporarily or until such time that a new school should be built in Shellingford. Mr Doran said that it was a matter of days until the end of term and it was impossible to accept the children under existing circumstances, the influx of 40 children making classes much larger would lower their standard of education. Before Mr Doran said the Managers could accept the extra children two extra teachers (one master) would be required, two extra staff in the kitchen and a portable building as an extra classroom built onto the school. Mr Ford said that the closing of Longcot School was due to lack of staff. Mr Reeves the headmaster had accepted a post at Faringdon School, Miss Morris had accepted to go to Shrivenham School. This left Longcot School without any teaching staff for the September term. These replacements would be difficult to fill if the Managers were able to find new staff they could then open Longcot School. Mr Mortimer said that the Managers were not willing to release Mr Reeves or Miss Morris until the end of the September term as they had not received any written resignation from either teacher. Mr Doran said that he thought that the two teachers should stay until the end of the year and he would be willing to take the children in January 58.*

*Transport would be arranged for the children, it was usual for the children whose homes were within 3 miles of school to travel free if (under 8) the other children would be asked to pay 10/- per term. Mr Mortimer said as the children were being transferred by the E.C. he considered transport should be free. Mr Ford*

*said that he would place all this before the committee and he thought children already attending school would receive free transport.'*

September 1<sup>st</sup> 1957 A meeting was held at Uffington School; Mr Whitfield, the Director of Education from Reading, was present.

*'Mr Whitfield asked Mr Doran for his plans for the acceptance of the Longcot and Fernham children. Mr Doran said that he was afraid that his Managers would not accept these children into Uffington School. Mr Whitfield said that he was more than disappointed that this decision had been taken. Mr ?Mortimer also said it was a great disappointment for Longcot managers also.*

*Mr Whitfield asked if there were any alternative suggestions to be put forward. Mr ? Mansbridge said that he had plans to put forward for the new school at Shellingford or the extension of the present building, they could accommodate 75 children if the extensions were built. The plans were passed round the meeting and were approved, Mr Whitfield agreed the plans to be forwarded for further approval.'*

March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1959 A meeting was held at the Old Vicarage, Longcot. *'no date had been given for the closing of Longcot School and nothing further toward the building of Shellingford School. Shellingford School would remain aided status via C. of E. School. 1960!'*

November 24<sup>th</sup> 1960 At a meeting of the managers of Shellingford and Longcot Schools at Shellingford School, the Rector and twelve managers were present. *'The Education and Church Authorities Oxford wanted all managers to be up to date with its plans, no decision would be made at this meeting.'*

*'The rector said that the reason for building the school in Shellingford was this; 13 acres of land had been given and the money required, this was £4,500, Shellingford had through the generosity of Mr Williams. When Uffington refused to accept the children of Longcot and Fernham, Shellingford stepped in new plans were drawn up (sic) and were taken up by Reading into a new proposal to go forward with these plans. It is proposed to build a 3 class school, 1 teacher for infants, 2 teachers from infants to 11 years old.*

*Transport would be provided for the children from Longcot. For Fernham children up to eight years old would be free. Over that age the cost would be 10/6 per term, where there were more than one child a reduction would be made. 10/- per child would have to be found by the church for Longcot children who*

*attended the school. If the Managers agreed to these proposals Mr Harmon would contact Reading regarding this. Mr Wilkins and Mr Horlick, Managers of Longcot School did not agree with the closing of Longcot School and could not accept the proposal put forth. A meeting was therefore arranged for the managers of Longcot School the following Friday at 7.30'.*

December 9th 1960 All managers were present at a meeting in Longcot School, the Rector was in the chair. *'Mr Wilkins said that he could see no reason for closing Longcot School and he was very much against the idea of Longcot children travelling to Shellingford School each day. Mr Horlick said that he would prefer to see Longcot School kept open – but if the children benefitted greatly it was the best policy for the schools children to be transferred to Shellingford.*

*After further discussion it was found in the minutes of 1951 the managers had agreed that the children from Longcot should be transferred to Shellingford when the school was ready. It was agreed that a representative from Reading should visit Longcot School, and should speak to the parents and explain the benefits etc. that their children would receive by this transfer.'*

July 1961 An open meeting was held in Longcot School attended by parents and all interested in the closing of the school. Rev. J. Harman was in the chair, also present were Col. Horn, Mr Bennet and Mr Sherwood. Apologies were received from Mr Williams who had gone to London to receive the O.B.E. *Under the new developed plan Longcot School would close and the children transferred to Shellingford School. Mr Mann had presented 13 acres of land to Shellingford to be used for a new Rectory, School and playing fields and to extend the graveyard. Mr Owen had invested money to provide the school and the amount requested from Shellingford was now available.*

*Mr Bennet then explained some of the advantages of the new school, first it would be a 3 teacher school also transport would be provided free to all the children from Longcot. Mr Bennet also said with larger classes there was more competition which was a good thing and with 3 teachers and a larger school there was always more games. Children under 8 years old would also be conveyed free from Fernham but over 8 years a small charge would be made. Mrs Rollo Walker asked how many children could be accommodated at Shellingford – and was told 70.*

*Mr Harman then read a letter dated 1958 in which it was stated the school was in a most unsatisfactory state, the great difficulty was in finding teachers also to*

*find accommodation was impossible. Mr Sherwood said there was no extra land that could be developed round the school also it would be impossible to make Longcot School up to modern standards.*

*Another question asked why not build a new school in Longcot? Mr Bennet said the ground and money had been given to Shellingford.*

*Another question, why not build a new school on the present site? Mr Bennet said that it would be an impossibility and where would the children go whilst it was being built? Also it would always be a Church Aided School.*

*Mr Crosbie said he was speaking on behalf of the village who were all against the closing of Longcot School and consider if a new school could not be built in Longcot village, the present school should remain open. Mr Sherwood said he quite understood the feelings of the village but he thought that careful consideration should be given to the advantages of the larger school, also the great benefit of having 3 teachers. Mrs Richard asked why Shellingford children couldn't attend Longcot School as there were fewer pupils at Shellingford than Longcot. Mr Harman said that greatest benefit was in the larger schools, more teachers and there would only be approx. 20 pupils in the classes and those children coming up to 11 plus needed much more attention and he thought the older children needed more games.*

*Mr Horlick asked if Longcot School couldn't remain open for the 5 – 7 year olds. Mr Bennet said that would be quite impossible.*

*Mr Crosbie said that Longcot people had no wish to stop Shellingford from having their new school, they simply wanted to keep their own.*

*Mr Vaughan asked if the land and money hadn't been given to Shellingford what would have happened? Would Longcot School still have had to close, and would a larger school have been built at Longcot?*

*Mr Harman said that it would not be right to take any decision at this meeting. Notice would be posted in the village regarding the school closing and when those were up everyone had a right to forward their objections and reasons regarding this matter to the authorities in Reading.*

December 11<sup>th</sup> 1961 A meeting of the managers of Longcot and Shellingford schools was held in Longcot School. *'The meeting was called by Mr Whitfield, Director of Education to discuss the objections and reasons as to the closing of Longcot School. Mr Sherwood asked if the proposal for Shellingford School had*

*been made as far back as Sept 1944. Mr Whitfield said in all fairness the protests from the parents must be carefully investigated. A petition with 130 signatures had been received from Longcot and there had also been one about 15 years ago.*

*After discussion it was agreed that if the Minister agreed that the school should close, Shellingford School would be built and the Longcot & Fernham children would attend whenever the parents cared to send them.'*

*April 27<sup>th</sup> 1962 'a meeting to interview Mrs O'Brien for the post of headteacher. Agreed to invite Mrs O'Brien to accept the post.'*

*November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1962 At an extraordinary meeting of Longcot School managers with representatives of the L.E.A., present were **Rev. L. Harman**, Mr B. Horlick, Mrs Rollo-Walker, Mr Whitfield, R.F.Gilling with Mrs. Showers and Colonel Horne (L.E.A.), Mr Bennet, and Mrs O'Brien (Headmistress)*

*'The L.E.A. wished to know the feeling of the managers with regard to the future of Longcot School. It was pointed out that Longcot was likely to increase its population and the plan to close Longcot School was undesirable. The school building was not technically sound and improvements would have to be made. No money was available till 1964 for major projects but certain improvements could be made including better sanitation.*

*After the representatives of the L.E.A. had left the managers remained in session. The following resolution was proposed by Mrs Rollo-Walker and seconded by Mr Horlick. It was carried unanimously.*

*'That, in view of the changing circumstances in Longcot, the Director of Education be asked to review the Development Plan and to make provision if possible for the continuance of the school in Longcot.'*

*During the following four years school numbers increased:*

*In November 1963, there were 34 children on the roll, 12 infants and 22 in the older class.*

*In March 1964, alterations, repairs and decoration were being done. 'Owing to the fact there was a number of new houses and bungalows being erected in Longcot it was thought that more children would be attending Longcot School, there was 30 on the roll now and 52 was the maximum that could be taken but two more toilets would be required.'*

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1965, there were 42 children on the roll.

July 16<sup>th</sup> 1965 *'a report of the L.E.A. ? Building Programme 1965/66 was presented to the meeting, the programme does not include the improvement to Longcot and Fernham School.'*

August 18<sup>th</sup> 1966 A letter sent to Mrs O'Brien re the estimates of 1967/68 was discussed and she was asked to reply to it stressing the need for a larger school. A new part time teacher of the middle class was starting and then there would be a new infant teacher.

November 26<sup>th</sup> 1965 *'The headmistress reported that there were 42 children on the roll. The school had been repainted and a new floor laid but the kitchen still flooded. Mrs O'Brien said she estimated that an extra 17 children would enter school between Jan 1966 & July 1967 which would bring the total up to 50 of which 36 would be under the age of 8 years and extra help would be required also the school would be crowded. The Correspondent was asked to write to the L.E.A. explaining the situation making a request for a Terrapin Hut.'*

August 18<sup>th</sup> 1966 *Mrs O'Brien reported that there would be 50 on the roll in September.*

December 9<sup>th</sup> 1966 *'Mrs O'Brien reported that there were 44 on the register. The correspondent was asked to write to the local County Councillor and ask him to put before the County Council that the increasing population of Longcot was causing concern of the managers by the possibility of the overcrowding of the school in the near future and inadequate accommodation in the toilets and classrooms and the dampness of the walls, also there was likely to be 52 in school at Easter.'*

March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1967 *'Mrs O'Brien reported 50 on the roll & attendance of 93%, the number next term would probably be 56.'*

*'In correspondence it was stated that the re-building of Longcot School was in the programme for the year ending March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1968 and it might be started in the next six months.'*



September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1967 A managers' meeting 'to consider the plans for re-building the school. The Plans were approved.'

The minutes from the Managers' Meetings end here.

From the School Log Book, written by Mrs O'Brien

Jan 7<sup>th</sup> 1969 'returned to school in the old building. 70 on roll.'

Jan 14<sup>th</sup> 1969 'Mrs Price and I visited Crowthorne Infant School to see open plan school in action. All furniture and books packed ready for move.'

Jan 20<sup>th</sup> 1969 'Arrived at school 8.30am. All prepared to move, squad of older children and I aided by Beard's building contractors moved infant furniture and belongings before 9.15 so that Infant class could settle in under fairly normal conditions.

Working all day we had transferred all portable goods into the new building. There are still carpenters and other workmen in the school. There is no hope of a playground for at least a month. It rained heavily all day.'