

## LONGCOT OPEN-PLAN SCHOOL A RURAL SHOWPIECE

A SINGLE line in the weighty volume of the 1944 Education Act passed sentence on the primary school at Longcot, near Faringdon—"Discontinue."

"Premises are not capable of adaptation and it will be more economical to close and convey to Shellingford," the Act explained.

At that time, there were 40 children from Longcot and

said. And that is what she got.

Longcot is not the first open-plan primary school to be built. But what is unusual about the Longcot school is that it is smaller than most open-plan premises and has fewer pupils.

### NO SPECIAL HURDLES

There have been no special hurdles for the children to surmount moving into a school where freedom of space and movement boosts freedom of expression. Mrs. O'Brien has never been one for keeping the same bunch of children in the same classroom.

Her assistant in the junior section is 24-year-old Mr. Rodney Pollock. While he concentrates on maths and science, Mrs. O'Brien handles English and the arts. They combine their talents for subjects like geography and history.

Some equipment has still to be installed including a kiln for firing pottery. One small piece of land has already been set aside for a small pool for swimming instruction and £200 towards the cost has been put in the bank.

There is a library and a quiet room where some of the older children can get on with their work undisturbed. New canteens and a spacious hall, which will be fitted with gym equipment, ensure that the 40 children who stay to dinner can eat in comfort.



Headmistress Mrs. B. O'Brien makes a point.

Fernham on the roll. Some provisions of the 20-year-old Act have still not been put into operation.

But a visitor to Longcot today will find that the old school first opened in 1874 is at last being torn down. Yet only the bounce of a tennis ball away, rising from a sea of mud is a new open-plan school that could become a showpiece of modern rural education.



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**PROTEST MEETINGS**

Behind these bald facts lies the story of how the entire population of the village of Longcot threw a spanner in the works.

For until March, 1963, the intention was to discontinue, at an undetermined date, the use of the school buildings in Longcot and then the children of Longcot, Fernham and Shellingford would attend the Shellingford School which was to be rebuilt by the Church of England on a new site as a voluntary aided school. In 1962 the then Minister of Education gave the go-ahead for the Shellingford rebuilding project.

But between then and March, 1963, the 300 or so villagers of Longcot rose almost to the man to object to sending their children more than five miles to school on a route where there was no bus service.

Protest meetings were held and more than 95 per cent of the village's population sent a petition to Berkshire Education Committee.

"Why should we relinquish our school of 40 pupils in favour of the school at Shellingford which has only 17?" they asked.

Parents warned that they would rather go to prison or pay fines than send their children to Shellingford.

Education Committee representatives met managers of Longcot and Shellingford schools and on November 2, 1962, the Longcot managers asked if their school could continue. In March, 1963, this was agreed by the Education Committee and five years later the first work began on the new premises.

Patching-up operations were needed until the money was available. But even in the bitter January of 1964, the headmistress, Yorkshire-born Mrs. B. M. O'Brien recorded in her daily log that the lavatory buckets had not been emptied since before Christmas.

Although sanitary facilities were improved by the March of that year the work was restricted to the minimum required to make the existing buildings acceptable until the time when new premises were provided.



Mr. R. Pollock, the assistant teacher for the juniors, gives individual instruction.



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### BRIGHT AND MODERN

But only now, a quarter of a century after the Act was drawn up, is the high-roofed red brick school being demolished.

The new building is at the same time a monument to the efforts of hundreds of parents who rose in protest, and a corner-stone in the new world of rural education.

The new school is everything that is bright and modern, shallow sloping roofs, large windows and oil-fired central heating.

The pale yellow bricks and bright white wood are attractive even in this rural setting. At the moment the grounds are a quagmire and workmen are in fact still on the premises. The three staff and 72 pupils swapped quarters a week or two ago.

But only one thing appears to be missing—classrooms. But the days are numbered when children "sat sitting" while they were taught in rooms accommodating anything up to 50 pupils.

### THE VITAL YEARS

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Two verandas will be constructed and in the summer will be easily accessible through large French windows.

In the infant section, Mrs. Sheila Price has 27 children under her wing. It is this first couple of years, says the headmistress, which are so vitally important. Despite all the modern methods, reading is still given great emphasis.

For if a child cannot read when he moves into the junior section, says Mrs. O'Brien, his progress will be handicapped.

Mrs. O'Brien has been headmistress since September, 1962. She had previously taught in large primary schools and a secondary modern school. She believes that village schools have a great future and that in so many ways they are better than larger establishments because they allow more individual attention.

"No more than 100 children in a school and no more than 25 children to a member of staff as a rule" she says.

When asked what sort of school she would like built she recalled a visit to an open-plan school in Oxfordshire.

"That's what I want," she

Last month, in a bid to end the struggle, the RDC and the owner concerned and the council.

At the meeting, it was agreed on Monday, the engineering surveyor agreed to design a more effective weir which would be installed and maintained by the Uffington Parish Council.

The section of the stream at the western end of the field would also be examined. Mr. R. G. Spence, the owner, claimed that the grading and improved flow would allow free flow of water.

The parish council, however, has criticised the peace formed and asked for an estimate of the cost of the weir, and that the Upper Common should be cleared within six months.

But Coun. H. Arbutnot, Uffington representative on the parish council had agreed to a dam and not a weir to be constructed.

### INCLOSURE A

And he referred to the Inclosure Act of 1801 which he said, gave people specific rights from the stream and the course of the stream.

In view of this, the parish council has deferred the proposals to give the clerk a copy of the Inclosure Act and the county architect.

Planning committee members have been discussing a village plan for Stanbury and the county council and hoped a small piece including Bear House would be released for development, rounding off and infilling the village.

But now the council have rejected the plan and the RDC and Stanbury Council.

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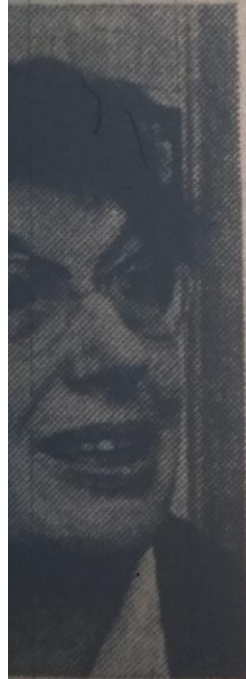
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