

# Longcot and Fernham School, 1874 to 2024

In 2024, we observe the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Longcot and Fernham School. 1874 is significant, not just because it marks the founding of this school, but because it marks the transition from a time when the majority of children did not go to school to a time when most children did go to school.



- 2 Before 1874
- 4 The national background – what changed?
- 6 The role of churches – religious and ‘board’ schools
- 7 How did Longcot qualify for a school?
- 8 What else was happening in 1874?
- 9 Going to school in 1874
- 18 What was Longcot village like in the 1870s?
- 21 Threat of closure and new building
- 24 How did this display and pamphlet happen?
- 25 Further information about Longcot’s past

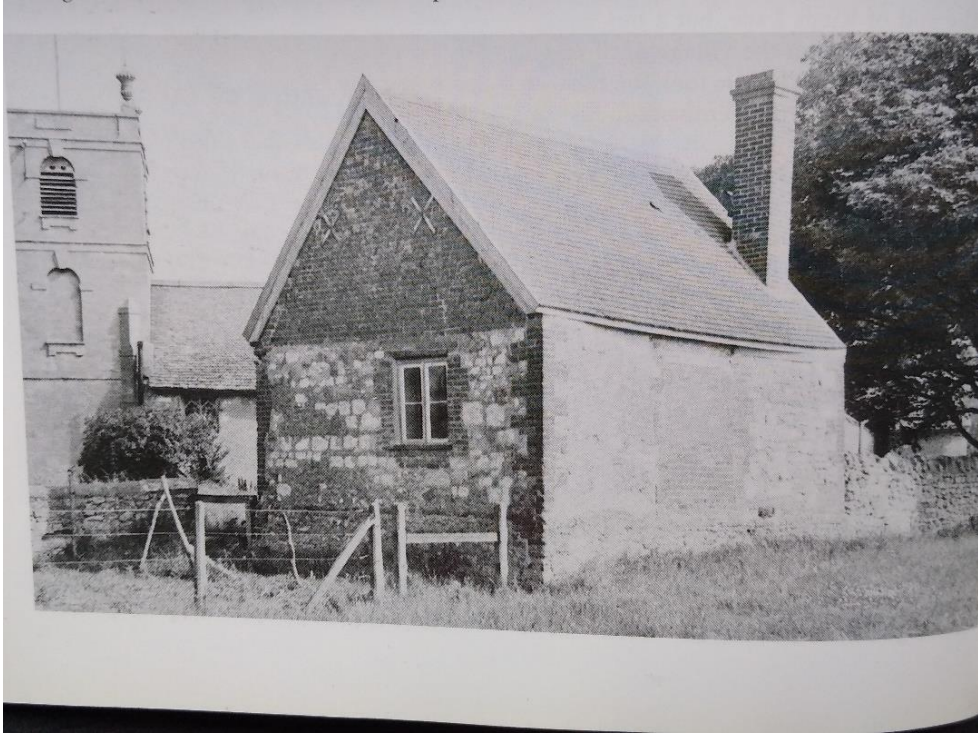
## Before 1874

The 1874 school did have precursors. Education was voluntary and fees were paid, and until the 1870s the majority of children received no formal education.

In 1717 a school for boys was built in the south west corner of Longcot churchyard. It consisted of only one room 22 feet by 17 feet. Pupils were probably mostly the sons of farmers. At one point they paid one penny a week to attend the school. Above the fireplace was an inscription that read *'This house was erected for the perpetual use of a Charity school in the year of our Lord 1717 by the charitable contributions of the gentlemen and clergy in this neighbourhood and of the inhabitants of this village and Fernham'*. The building has now been demolished, and only a small section of wall survives as part of the churchyard wall.

Longcot and Fernham were formerly part of the ecclesiastical parish of Shrivenham, but became a separate parish. As a parting gift to the village in 1847, the vicar Archdeacon Berens gave the cottage and garden by the church gate to be used as a school for girls. After 1874, the cottage was let and the rent added to school funds. At one time it was also used to accommodate the schoolmistress. The cottage has been a private dwelling for many years.

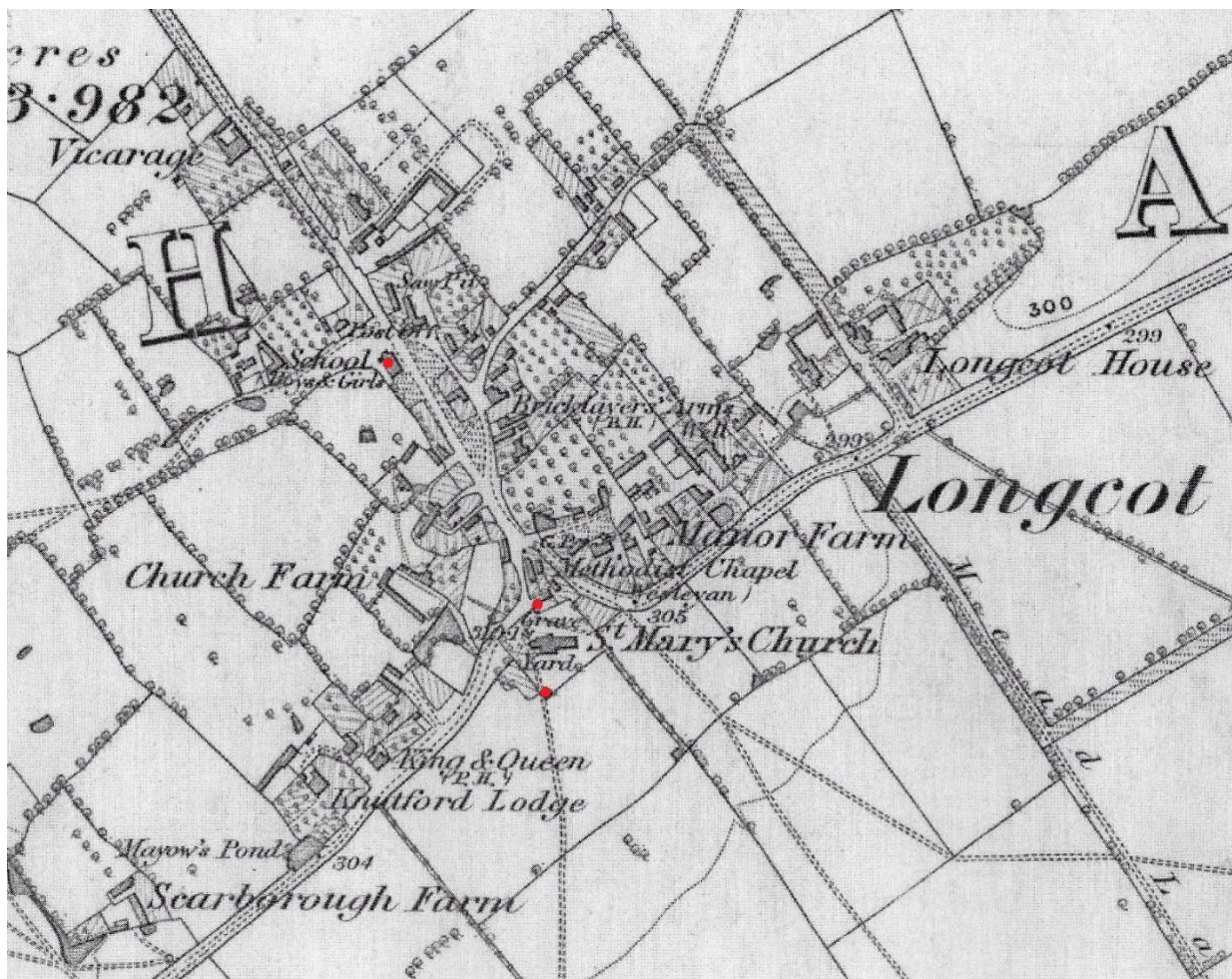
At Fernham there was a 'dame' school, a school run by a teacher with no recognised qualifications. It appears that the pupils from this school came to the new Longcot and Fernham school in 1874.



The former 1717 boys school in 1943



The former 1847 girls school in about 2000



The sites of

- the 1874 school by The Green
- the 1847 girls school by the church gate, and
- the 1717 boys school at the south corner of the churchyard.

## The national background – what changed?

In the 1860s some annual funding from central government existed for schools and there was growing pressure for the state to provide schools where none existed. However religious organisations had a vested interest in the education of children and dominated parliamentary discussions. How could this be resolved to enable schools for all children to be funded? Should the state pay for schools to be run by religious denominations or should schools have no association with any denomination?

Two factors contributed to the change in the provision of education for all children:

- There was growing pressure from, among others, the National Education League for the state to provide *'free, compulsory and non-religious education for all children'*.
- Industrialists considered mass education *'to be vital to the nation's ability to maintain its lead in manufacture and industry'*. This opinion carried a lot of weight in parliamentary discussion.

A bill which addressed many of these aims was introduced into parliament by W.E. Forster and quickly passed as the 1870 Education Act. The Act brought a commitment to provide education on a national scale in England and Wales, and all children between the age of 5 and 14 years were expected to attend school.

**All children should be able to go to school!**



W E Forster

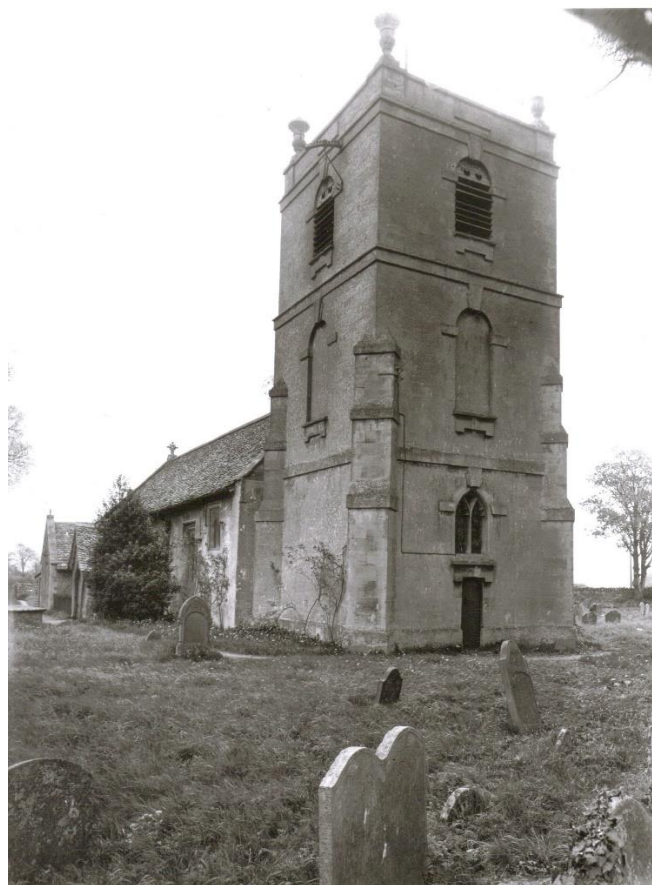
However attendance did not actually become compulsory until a few years later. Many children worked from a young age and parents were reluctant to forgo their labour or income. Continued concern over the use of child labour led to the 1880 Education Act which made it compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 10 to attend school. However, absenteeism continued to be a large problem in attempting to implement this law.

## The role of churches – religious and ‘board’ schools

Two voluntary organisations, the British and Foreign Schools Society (founded in 1808) and The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (founded in 1811) funded schools ‘*to build a steady, honest and God-fearing society*’.

Following the 1870 Education Act, a very large number of schools was required.

- The Act established a system of ‘school boards’ to build and manage schools in areas where they were needed. The boards were locally elected and drew funding from the local rates. Religious teaching in board schools was to be non-denominational.
- Supporters of religious education continued to fund existing and new schools to stave off ‘*godless*’ board schools in the villages. Additional funding came from the local authority, depending on the outcome of examination by inspectors.



Longcot church in 1949

## How did Longcot qualify for a school?

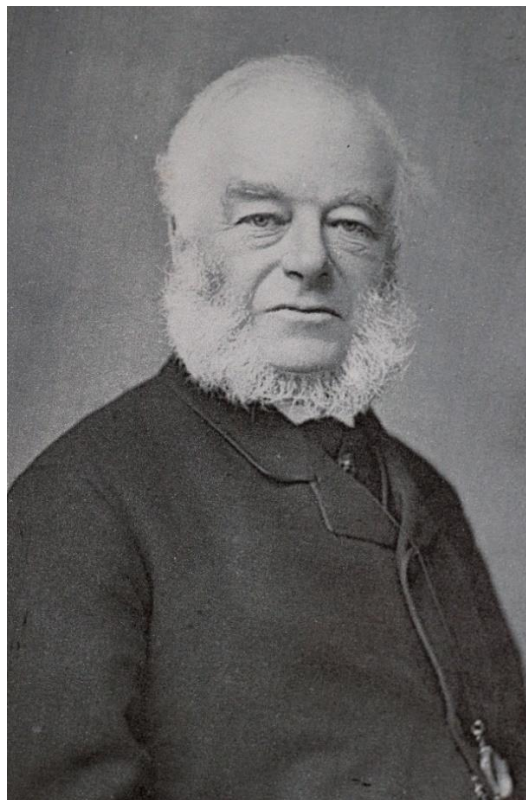
A survey conducted by the local authority showed that there were 89 children in Longcot who were of an age to attend school. A similar survey in Fernham showed 20 children. It was decided to merge the two districts and to build a school in Longcot.

At the time, Longcot and Fernham were fortunate to have John Hughes as vicar. Well-loved and benevolent to the villagers, he planned, negotiated funding and communicated with the authorities.

### **Longcot and Fernham C of E School was opened in 1874.**

John Hughes became Correspondent and later Chairman of the managers committee of Longcot and Fernham School. A school for infants was also provided in Fernham.

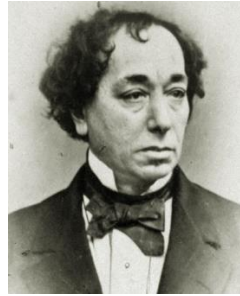
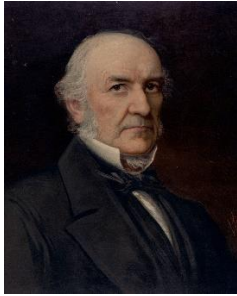
In general, Church authorities wanted to maintain their influence on children's education. The new school was largely funded by the Church, but also received money from the local authority. The latter depended on school results after examination by inspectors.



Rev. John Hughes

## What else was happening in 1874?

Britain had a change of Prime Minister in 1874 too, in this case from Gladstone to Disraeli.



William Gladstone Benjamin Disraeli

Winston S. Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace in November 1874

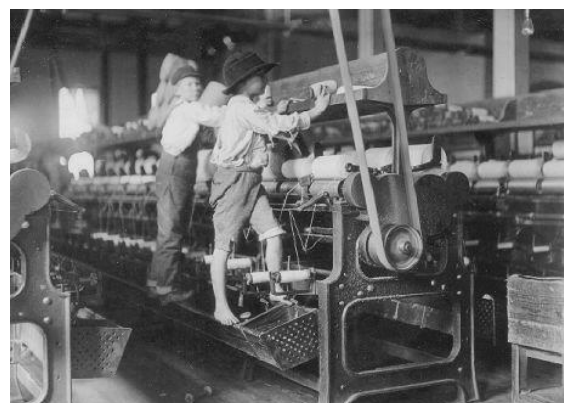


One of a series of 'factory acts' was passed, in this case limiting the hours of work for women and children in textile factories to 10 hours per day, and raising the minimum age for children to 10 years old.

The first exhibition organised by the painters who were to become known as the impressionists was held in Paris in April 1874.



Claude Monet (1840–1926)  
*Impression, Soleil Levant*, 1872





## Going to school in 1874

### *Where was the school building? What was it like?*

The 1874 school building was in Kings Lane opposite The Green, between the site of the current school building and the road. It was gloomy inside, too hot in summer and too cold in winter. Inside it was divided into two classrooms, a room for the head teacher, cloakroom space and outside toilets. It had high windows to reduce distractions. We have no photographs of the inside of Longcot school, but we have some of similar schools in Oxfordshire villages.



The 1874 school, probably in the 1920s

Unlike present schools, the 1874 school was unlikely to have been very welcoming to young children. It would have been a space with very little colour, poorly lit and under equipped. There would have been few pictures on the walls, perhaps a picture of Queen Victoria, scenes from the Bible, a world map or a list of kings and queens. The large Tortoise stoves were not adequate to heat the large space, and classrooms were often very cold in winter (one winter it was so cold that ink froze in the ink wells). In summer, because the windows were high up with small openings, the rooms became too hot.

### *Inside the school*

Children didn't wear uniform but would have been expected to be clean and tidily dressed. Children sat in cramped conditions and were not allowed to move about. Boys and girls were often separated, and sat on hard wooden benches with iron frames and shared a long writing surface.

The teacher would have been smartly dressed and probably would have had a high desk and chair at the front of the room. Blackboard and chinks were used for teaching lessons. Paper was expensive, so young pupils had a slate pencil and slate which could be wiped clean and re-used. They brought their own cleaning cloth (or used a sleeve or handkerchief). Older children used a dip-pen and ink. Equipment was in short supply: there were few books (no library), perhaps an abacus and a globe.



Waterperry School, 1907

*What was it like to be going to school for the first time?*

Longcot and Fernham School opened with 119 scholars on the register and during the year another 30 children were admitted, although some dropped out (many agricultural workers moved between farms, changing employers at 'hiring fairs'). In the first year, children ranged in age from about 2 to 16 years old, with the majority being between 5 and 13 years old. In a village school, before the time of nursery schools, children would have known each other as neighbours. A few had attended the boys and girls schools in Longcot, others the 'dame' school in Fernham, but probably most had not been to school previously, and did not know what to expect. Children from Fernham had to walk between the villages.

The first headmaster was a Mr Mitchell who was expected to teach all of the pupils. Older children helped by acting as monitors, and later unqualified assistant teachers were employed. Employing and keeping staff was a continuing problem. With only the Headmaster and possibly one other teacher, control and discipline of such a large group of children of different ages, many of whom had never been to school before, must have been very difficult.



Stratton Audley School 1905

### *What was the school day like?*

School began at 9 am and children filed into school, boys and girls entering in separate lines. There were stringent rules, talking in class was forbidden and teachers were strict. After taking the register the day might begin with scripture, often taught by the local vicar.

Some children may have gone home for lunch, others brought something to eat, an apple or baked potato.

During breaks or after school there would have been an opportunity for games such as skipping, tag, whip and top, marbles, football, jacks, hoop and stick, ball games or 'grandmother's footsteps'. In early years there wasn't a surfaced playground, only a grass field. One school inspector asked for more boot scrapers to reduce the amount of mud brought into the building.



1880

## *Teachers*

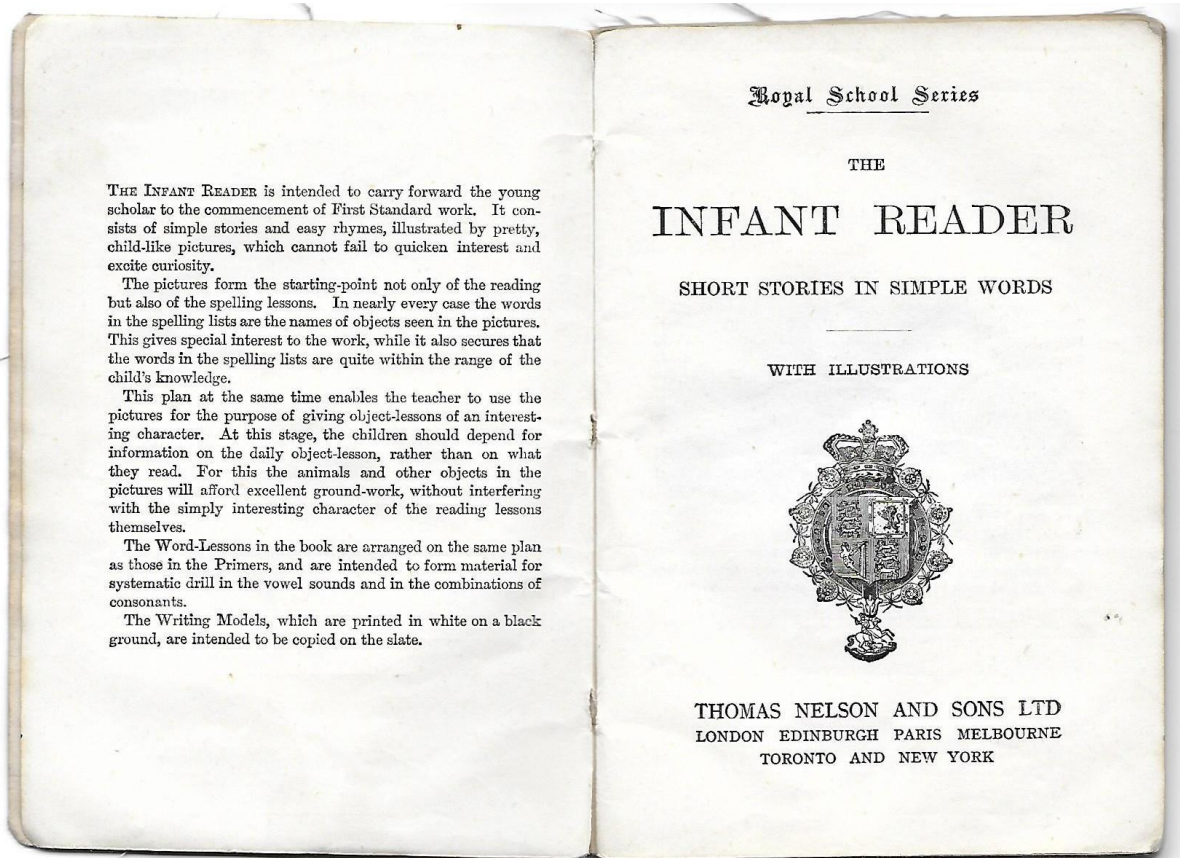
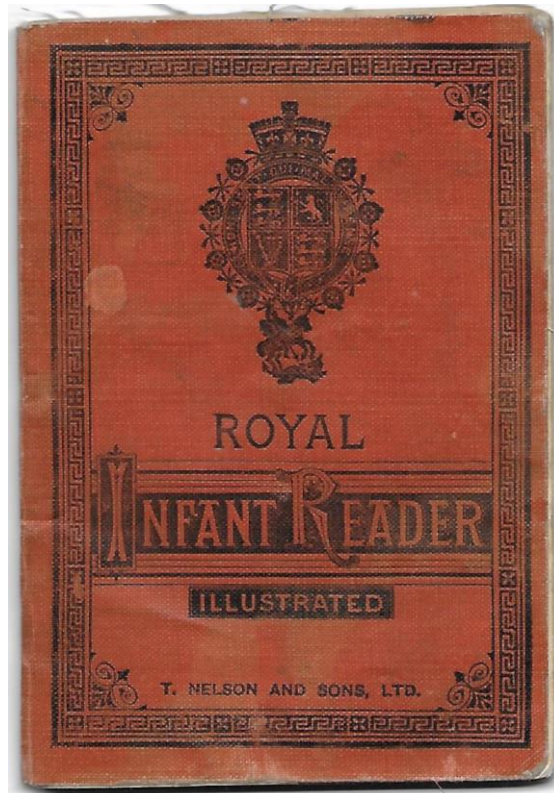
Head teachers were interviewed and appointed by the committee of School Managers and Subscribers. After the passing of the 1870 Education Act, many more teachers were needed for new schools.

Many schools used older pupils as monitors for trial periods before they committed to becoming Pupil Teachers. Some became 'Article 68 Teachers', which meant that they were over the age of eighteen, considered moral and had been vaccinated. After satisfactorily completing a five year apprenticeship, a Pupil Teacher became recognised as an Uncertificated Teacher. An 'Article 50 Teacher' had completed his or her apprenticeship but had not passed the examination to be a Certificated Teacher. At Longcot and Fernham School, teachers often left after short periods.

## *Lessons*

The elementary school curriculum was dominated by reading, writing and arithmetic, particularly after the Revised Code of 1862 insisted that all government grants, except for school buildings, should be dependent upon attendance and the results of an annual examination by Her Majesty's Inspector based on the 'three Rs'. As well as Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic, scripture and drill were prominent. Girls were taught needlework.

All children in a class would have done the same thing at the same time. Learning was by repetition and copying from the blackboard. Set texts were learned by heart, spelling and copperplate handwriting were practised. From the school log book, it seems that children in Longcot school often struggled with arithmetic. Later, other subjects such as history, geography, music, woodwork, and nature study were introduced.



THE INFANT READER is intended to carry forward the young scholar to the commencement of First Standard work. It consists of simple stories and easy rhymes, illustrated by pretty, child-like pictures, which cannot fail to quicken interest and excite curiosity.

The pictures form the starting-point not only of the reading but also of the spelling lessons. In nearly every case the words in the spelling lists are the names of objects seen in the pictures. This gives special interest to the work, while it also secures that the words in the spelling lists are quite within the range of the child's knowledge.

This plan at the same time enables the teacher to use the pictures for the purpose of giving object-lessons of an interesting character. At this stage, the children should depend for information on the daily object-lesson, rather than on what they read. For this the animals and other objects in the pictures will afford excellent ground-work, without interfering with the simply interesting character of the reading lessons themselves.

The Word-Lessons in the book are arranged on the same plan as those in the Primers, and are intended to form material for systematic drill in the vowel sounds and in the combinations of consonants.

The Writing Models, which are printed in white on a black ground, are intended to be copied on the slate.

Royal School Series

THE

# INFANT READER

SHORT STORIES IN SIMPLE WORDS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



THOMAS NELSON AND SONS LTD  
LONDON EDINBURGH PARIS MELBOURNE  
TORONTO AND NEW YORK



MY DOG.

<p>1. I have a dog, Its name is Dot ; And by my side It loves to trot.</p>	<p>3. It runs in glee Up hill and down Each day when we Go to the town.</p>
<p>2. A nice white coat My dog has got, And on its nose A small black spot</p>	<p>4. I love my dog, And in our cot Each one is fond Of poor old Dot.</p>

THE HOOP.

boy | hoop | stick | hand

1. Dick has been a good boy. All his work is done.

2. Now he is at play with his hoop.



3. As he runs he strikes it with the stick in his hand.

4. Look how fast he makes it go along the road!

5. After a long run he will go home to his tea.

a as in cat.

 cat	hat that lad glad	tax flax rag crag	ham sham hank thank
 fan	pan span rang sang	cab crab back black	hand stand mast cast
 cap	nap snap damp camp	ask task pass grass	latch catch dance lance

a as in pail.

 pail	nail snail hair chair	rain grain faint paint	maid paid claim faith
 gate	late slate sake shake	sale tale made spade	care share save slave
 cage	page rage lame blame	tape shape lace place	haste taste pay play

A B C D E  
 F G H I K  
 L M N O P  
 Q R S T U  
 V W X Y Z

Cat and Mouse  
 This is my cat.  
 Do you see its  
 long tail? It  
 has soft paws,  
 but it has very  
 sharp claws.

ADDITION.

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	3	5	7	9	2	4	6
2	4	6	8	10	3	5	7
1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
8	1	3	5	7	2	4	6
9	3	5	7	9	4	6	8
2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
8	1	3	5	7	2	4	6
10	4	6	8	10	5	7	9
4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5
1	3	5	2	4	6	1	3
5	7	9	6	8	10	6	8
5	5	5	6	6	6	6	7
5	2	4	1	3	2	4	1
10	7	9	7	9	8	10	8
7	7	8	8	9	1	2	3
3	2	1	2	1	10	10	10
10	9	9	10	10	11	12	13

SUBTRACTION.

1	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
1	1	2	1	3	2	1	3	2
0	1	0	2	0	1	3	1	2
4	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6
4	1	3	5	2	4	1	3	5
0	4	2	0	3	1	5	3	1
6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
2	4	6	1	3	5	7	2	4
4	2	0	6	4	2	0	5	3
7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
6	1	3	5	7	2	4	6	8
1	7	5	3	1	6	4	2	0
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
1	3	5	7	9	2	4	6	8
3	6	4	2	0	7	5	3	1
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
1	3	5	7	9	2	4	6	8
9	7	5	3	1	8	6	4	2



### *Punishment*

There were many school rules and disobedient scholars were punished. Lateness and truancy, stealing, telling lies, not concentrating, talking or spoiling work were all punished. In the classroom there might be a 'naughty corner' where children would have to stand or sit on a stool wearing a 'dunce's cap'. This was the punishment for being lazy, making many mistakes or giving wrong answers in class. Teachers used a birch-wood cane to beat children. Boys were caned on the backside and girls on the legs or hands. A record was entered into the school punishment book.

### *Absence from school*

Numbers attending school were variable. Weather conditions and illness were the main problems. Sitting in close proximity at school meant that diseases were easily spread. The school log books show records of absence due to measles, chicken pox, scarlet fever and influenza. In 1880 the school was closed for 11 weeks because of a typhus fever epidemic in the village. However in 1888 a serious epidemic of whooping cough resulted in several deaths. The school remained open as the schoolmaster felt that the children would be better off there rather than cooped up at home with sick brothers and sisters.

Both Longcot and Fernham were primarily agricultural villages; in poor homes children were often kept at home to help with chores and farm work. At the times for potato planting and lifting, haymaking, harvesting and gleaning school attendance was low. Girls were often absent on the day before market day as they were required to help with dairy work.

## What was Longcot village like in the 1870s?

In the 1870s, Longcot was an agricultural village with many small farms and a population of about 500. There were no regular transport links. Many people lived in rented cottages and often changed their employment seasonally. The Wilts and Berks canal and the brickworks on the western side of the village also provided employment. Records show a surprising number of supporting trades: blacksmith, draper, boot & shoe maker, tea dealer, timber dealer, butcher, dairy, sub-postmaster, cooper, tailor, as well as four public houses.



The village was without a manor house or resident squire. The large vicarage with grounds extending to the Dash was the home of Reverend John Hughes and his wife, Elizabeth. John became first vicar of Longcot in 1852 after it was separated from Shrivenham parish. Kind and generous, they helped villagers, particularly the poor, in many ways. After the death of his wife, John's niece May Hughes came to live in Longcot as housekeeper to John and to help with parish work. A feisty and determined character, already well known for her work with the poor in the East End of London, she was a strong believer in the importance of education and became manager and teacher at the school.



Mary (May) Hughes





Longcot from the church tower, date uncertain but before 1928



The Bricklayers Arms, date uncertain

## Threat of closure and new building



The 1874 school, probably in the 1960s

1939 the school became a Primary School for children aged 5 – 11 years; older children went to Faringdon Senior School. By 1945 there were many difficulties and the school was struggling. The school building was condemned by the County Surveyor (drains featured strongly in reports through the years, and former pupils have strong memories of the state of the loos). The staff laboured on and the school came close to closing several times. By 1960 with only 30 scholars, closure looked inevitable. Lengthy discussions took place about sending children to Uffington or Shellingford. However, parents didn't want their children to travel away from the village to school, and two very determined people, Betty O'Brien and Gladys Crosbie, worked hard to save the school.

Betty O'Brien became head teacher in 1962. A formidable character already well known to the county education authority, she was determined to improve and save the school. Gladys Crosbie was landlady of the Bricklayers Arms and Clerk to the Parish Council. A petition for a new building collected 130 signatures and well-attended public meetings attracted press coverage. The reputation of the school improved and pupil numbers significantly increased. Through the persistence and determination of these two people, the education authority was persuaded that, with increasing population in the village, a new school was needed.



Rev. Michael Starr (vicar), Betty O'Brien (retired head teacher), Gladys Crosbie (Clerk to the Parish Council), Jackie Maynard (current head teacher) and Shirley Dalton-Morris (Chair of Governors) in 2003.

A new school was built behind the old building to a modern and open plan design. The new building was opened in 1969 with 75 children on the roll.

An entry recorded by Betty O'Brien in the school log book reads

*January 20 1969 'Arrived at school at 8.30a.m. 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 the 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'.*

With improvements and extensions to buildings, Longcot and Fernham School continues to thrive today.



Longcot and Fernham School in 2024

## How did this display and pamphlet happen?

This display and pamphlet were prompted by two things, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Longcot and Fernham Primary School, and concern to preserve records of the early years of the school, which were known to exist but whose whereabouts were uncertain. These included records of correspondence, school registers, log books and minutes of meetings. Abstracts from these records are now readily accessible on the web-site of the Shrivenham Heritage Society. The paper records are now housed in the archive of the Society, together with other records of Longcot, and are available to the public on request.

## Sources of information

### *Books*

Longcot, a Village in the Vale, publ. 1999. Compiled from many local sources by Guy Richards and Shirley Dalton-Morris with assistance from Johanna Sienkiewicz, photographs by John Stretton and line drawings by Maryse Lawrie.

Oxfordshire at School in old Photographs, Malcolm Graham, publ. 1996 (also web-site).

### *Local knowledge*

Robert Baker, Steve Luker and Rosemary Stallard. A document about the history of Longcot written in the 1960s by Vicky Hunt.

### *Photographs*

Robert Baker, Mandy Barrow, Shirley Dalton-Morris, Janet Evins, Historic England Archive (formerly National Monuments Record), Neil Maw, John Stretton.

### *Websites*

Gillard, D (2018) *Education in the UK: a history*

<http://www.education-uk.org/history>

UK Parliament

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/school/overview>



## **Further information about Longcot's past**

If you are interested in aspects of Longcot's past, would like to find out more, or have information to offer, contact Janet Evins, [janet.evins@googlemail.com](mailto:janet.evins@googlemail.com)

The Shrivenham Heritage Society, managed by Neil Maw, is based at the Shrivenham Memorial Hall. It is usually opened on Tuesdays 10–12pm to view material or to make enquiries. Enquiries may also be made by e-mail to [info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk](mailto:info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk)

SHS website <https://www.shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk/>

Other sources include Berkshire Record Office, Oxfordshire Family History Centre and Swindon Library local history section.

Janet Evins, September 2024.