

BIRCHINGTON C. OF E. SCHOOL - THE NATIONAL SCHOOL

From Alfred Walker's notes

"Some interesting items from the old log books"

The Birchington C. of E. School in Park Lane, originally known as the National School, was founded in 1845 and opened in 1848. It was known as the National School because when it was built a grant towards the building was made by the National Society for the Promotion of Religious Education in accordance with the Principles of the Church of England.

Since 1863 a log book has been kept at the school, which is a record of the daily life of the school. In the log books the head teachers entered an account of any important school happening, event, visit etc. The entries are most interesting and throw a great deal of light on village life at the time.

The first log book extant opens,

1863 March 9th. Elizabeth Murphy admitted.

Pupil teacher ill.

The average attendance at this time was about 61.

March 10. Holiday – it was the marriage of the Prince of Wales.

This was later King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.

March 25. Boys absent to work – planting potatoes.

There are many entries of absences - children going out to work in the fields.

Also entries noting poor attendance owing to the very wet weather.

June 24. Attendance increasing on account of School feast.

The feast was the following day on the 25th.

There are a number of entries about punishments.

July 6. Two boys whipped for throwing ink about.

In **September 1863** a new head teacher was appointed.

Here is his first entry.

"William Lockyer Banks Certificated Teacher, 2nd Class, 3rd Divs, late Master of Boughton Monchelsea National School took up duties, as Head.

40 children present.

The children appear to be intelligent and docile, to a certain extent, but wayward and passionate. They require gentle but very firm treatment if I mistake not."

It seems as if truancing was frequent.

September 1863 Charles Hatcher played truant several times."

September 17 Hatcher made his appearance this morning – promised to give him a penny at the end of next week if he would be present every day."

Children are still the same, note this entry.

September 21 1863. "Children are inveterate chatterers and busybodies."

October 8. "Wm George Snell has gone to join the Revenue cutter at Ramsgate." This was the boat that tried to prevent smuggling.

October 20 1863.

"The Free School at Acol was closed yesterday."

Does this refer to the school attached to the Crispe Charity? I can find little or no information about this school. It was not the one that was run in St Mildred's new little Church, as this was not built until 1876 and ran until 1886.

The next entry is interesting as it refers to the Coast Guard Station a Plum Pudding Island now no longer in existence.

November 9 1863.

“Elizabeth Edward, Freeman Everall, Henry & William England, and Adeline, Ellen & William Corney who all live at St. Nicholas Station of the Coast Guard left for the winter, the way being dangerous – indeed William Corney who came to bring me notice was blown over the cliff today on his way here. Fortunately he was but little hurt.”

There were other schools in the area as this entry shows.

Nov 10 1863

“Sarah Huckstep has gone to the “Parlour School”

The “Parlour School” was run by a Miss Sidders.

The furnishings of the school were far from adequate as this and other entries show.

1863 Nov 18

“The Vicar (Rev Whish) came in this afternoon and promised me a new set of desks. The old desks to be converted into cupboards.”

It seems as if some children were expected to help with the work at the school.

Nov 26

“Arthur Adams, whose turn it was to help light the fire this morning, suspended from school as his parents objected to his doing that duty. Mrs Adams came to apologise in the afternoon and the boy was allowed to attend again.”

1863 Dec 8

“Received a note from Mrs. Ginman, grandmother and guardian of Charles Coffin, stating that she refused to pay for a slate he had carelessly broken. Suspended him from attendance at school till payment shall be made.

Dec 9 (the next day)

“Charles Coffin brought payment for the slate.”

1864 Jan 5

This entry shows the difficulties of working without proper desks.

“The children cannot write in copy books as the new desks have not yet arrived and the old ones were converted into cupboards during the holidays.”

Jan 7 “The new desks arrived today.”

Jan 8 (Trouble with new desks.)

“**Ambrose Adams** commenced to trace on the new desks with his slate pencil notwithstanding a caution given. Flogged him and cautioned the rest of the school again.”

[Ambrose Adams was the second son of Ann and Josiah Adams of Crispe Farm. We have his mother’s sampler worked while she was at school in Birchington.]

It appears that Park Lane School was very cold at times and children were absent because of the freezing conditions.

Jan 25

“Charles Mills withdrawn from school by his parents rather than he should take his turn in sweeping the school and lighting the school fire.”

Early in Feb it was bitterly cold as these entries show.

Feb 10

“Bitterly cold. The children’s minds seem frozen as well as their bodies, poor things.”

Because of continued absence several names were crossed off – there was no compulsory attendance.

In the spring a number of children were absent from school to work on the land.

March 21

“Several of the elder boys are engaged at Quex picking stones.”

March 24

“The school room is to be whitewashed, coloured etc to make it more fit for the celebration of Divine Service therein **during the restoration of the church.**”

(The parish church was closed until the following February for ‘restoration’.)

There is an entry about this.

May 2 (May Day)

“A few children absent “garlanding.”

By the beginning of May the school room had been converted into a temporary church.

May 9

“School room converted into a temporary church.”

May 28

“Average attendance 59.”

The Inspector’s Report on the school is interesting. The report is written in the log book.

1864 May 28

Summary of the Inspector’s Report on the school.

The school is very quietly carried on.

Answers on Religious Knowledge satisfactory.

General attainments fairly good except arithmetic in which many failed.

Needlework very fair but very slow.

Average attendance 59. Note this is for all ages.

Number of children presented for examination 30.

On ex.	R. 28		
	W.25	at 2s 8d.	= 65
	A. 12		

On attendance only.

Infts under 6 at 6s 6d	9		
Av Attendance	£8	17s	0d
Examination	£6	10s	0d
Infts under 6	£2	3s	11d
Total	£17	10s	11d

On this report was based the amount of grant the school would get.

The following entry shows that the Head Teacher was experiencing some difficulty with certain people in the place.

July 11

Finding that false reports are in circulation carefully and sedulously disseminated by malicious persons for their own base purposes respecting the time of commencing school mornings and afternoon. I have determined that I will henceforth carefully note the exact time when I begin prayers in the morning and the Doxology in the afternoon.

I hereby testify that the time in every case will be exact by the **Wesleyan Chapel Clock** and entered here at the moment and signed by me.

Witness my hand
W. Lockyer Banks.

Monday afternoon – opened school at 2 p.m. *W.L.B.*
12 Tuesday commenced at 9 a.m. *W.L.B.*

Sept. 12

Mr Hodges Steam waggonette being on the Square I allowed the children to look at it for a quarter of an hour and therefore P.M. opened school at 2.15.
W.L.B.

Oct 19 This entry refers to the **restoration of the parish church in 1863.**

“As it seems unlikely that the church will be completed before Christmas it was thought better to return at once to the proper room.”

1864. There were staffing difficulties in those days as well as now.

Nov There are several entries about the want of assistance.

The Curate, Rev Whish, “denies help” under the plea of “want of funds.”

1865 Feb 24 Feast of St. Matthias

The **church was re-opened today** after restoration and the school had a holiday.

March 9 “The Vicar and Curate came into school this morning with the agreeable announcement that I should be allowed a pupil teacher to help me in school and that my stipend should be raised from this time.”

1866 Jan Mr W. L. Banks left.

The Curate Rev H. Whish took charge.

Jan 15. Mr. Thos Williams entered upon his duties as Master.

The log book entries end Feb 6th 1866.

The next log book opens **Jan 31 1870.**

Thomas Goodbourn in charge after being absent since mid summer 1869.

Average attendance was then 49.

1870 March 2 Ash Wednesday.

Children attended church this morning. I was not at all pleased with the order. Compelled to punish four boys for light conduct during the service.

7th March Henry Brooks entered upon his duties as Master.

3 boys punished for going to church to see a wedding against the Curate’s desire and the Master’s orders.

In July there was a falling off in attendance owing to the harvest.

Nov 22 This entry is interesting.

Gave C. Pemble one stroke with the cane for continued disobedience.

He then ran out of the school and in a few minutes returned with his father who assaulted me with a horse whip in hand calling me a B----- fool, and using other foul language in the presence of the school children, after which he left the room saying he would take d--- good care not to send his children here again.

Note. Mr. Pemble was a butcher and a member of the church choir. He was suspended from the church choir.

Nov 28 Another school being opened near the Mill, several children in that locality have left.

In **1871** Birchington became a separate parish with its own Vicar. Rev Alcock was the first Vicar. Rev Alcock frequently visited the school to hear reading.

Sep 22 The school treat brought the children from field work but not to school and some who were not well with measles attended the feast.

1872 Mr. Herbert Catford was Master.

1873 Sept Several children absent gleaning and some gathering hops.

1874 Average attendance 80.

1875 Average attendance 120.

July 23. 2 classes taken to Margate to see the Prince and Princess of Wales. The day was very wet.

Later these became King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.

In June is mentioned the **recent enlargement of the school** – affords a better opportunity for the separate instruction of the classes.

1876 Jan. Average attendance 120.

April Friday 21st. Holiday on Tuesday it being the occasion on which the foundation stone of the **School Church** was laid at Acol.

Nov 3rd. Many children absent in consequence of there being a wax works exhibition in the Square.

1877 Sept. Attendance low as “whole families” are gone hopping.

1879 Nov. Few boys away from school to go “Guy Fawkesing.”

1880 Jan 5. School reopened.

Took the pence.

Note. Children had to pay to go to school.

Average attendance 144.

1881 May 6th.

Only fair attendance, there was a procession through the streets of Oddfellows headed by a band on the occasion of a Lodge being formed in the Village.

1884. Average attendance 170.

1887 Sept. Treat in Quex Park in celebration of the coming of age of Mr. Percy Cotton.

Nov. Serious outbreak of measles. School closed for a month.

1889. Mr Alfred W. G. Scorer Head of the school.

The log book of the Acol and Birchington Infant school commences in **1873**.

The Mistress was Harriet Sidders. The Infants school was first held in the Old Institute Building behind the International Stores in the Square.

In **1879** Miss Banks was Mistress.

