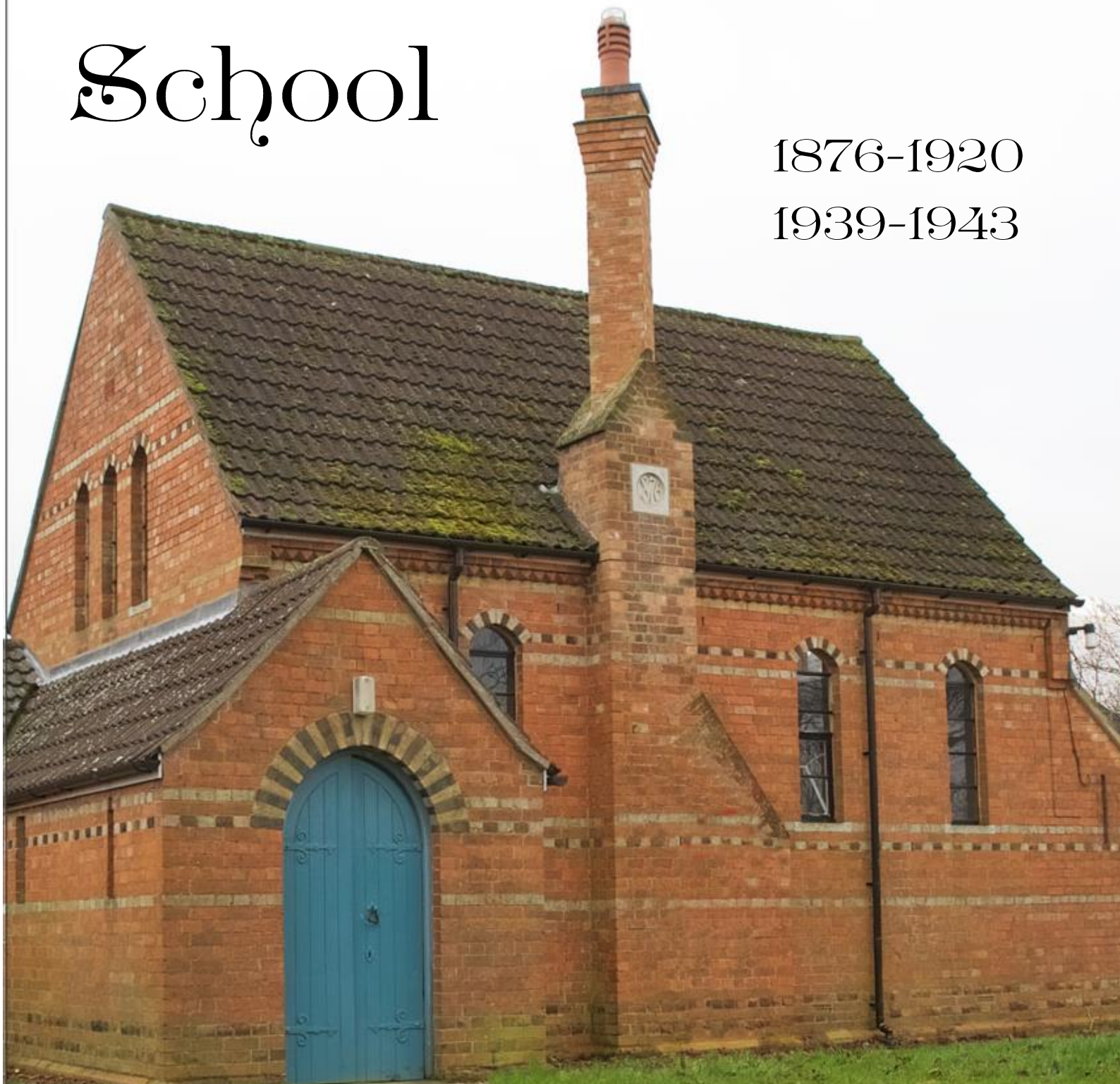


Covington School

1876-1920
1939-1943



'The children in this little school are in excellent order and have been most carefully taught.' HMI report 2 April 1883

Covington History Group

Text by Mary-Ann Parsons

Publication of this booklet has only been possible
with the award of a generous grant from

The Goodliff Fund



Huntingdonshire Local History Society

Founded 1957

Registered Charity 29074

Contents

Introduction	3
Timeline.....	4
Getting Started.....	5
The Mistress	9
The Monitress	12
The School Year.....	13
The School Room	16
Maps	18
Scholars	19
Educational Theory and Regulation	28
Curriculum.....	35
Community Involvement	39
Visitors	40
Closure	43
World War II.....	45
Conclusion.....	49
Sources	50
Acknowledgements.....	50

Introduction

After nearly ten years of indecision and delays, Covington Board School commenced on 6 November 1876. The school was opened as a response to the 1870 Forster Education Act with the express purpose of educating the rural poor. In 1902, due to Government frustration with the generally inadequate standard of rural schools, Covington Board School joined all other elementary schools in being taken over by the newly formed LEAs, in this instance Huntingdonshire Education Committee. The school was then renamed Covington Council School and was governed by 'managers' instead of a 'board'. Ultimate decisions were taken by the Committee. After a 'near miss' in February 1905, the school closed on 6 August 1920. The closure was on condition that the school would reopen whenever the number of pupils in the village made it viable, and this was the case during WW2, numbers of village children being augmented by an influx of evacuees. The school closed for good on 30 April 1943. In the 1920s and 1930s and again post-war, the building took on a new life as a venue for village meetings, clubs, entertainments and celebrations. The village took responsibility for the building's upkeep in the 1990s when it was substantially renovated and became the village hall. The village hall and the church are now the only village amenities.

Original documents (held at Huntingdon Archives), reminiscences and photographs have been used to compile this booklet. Of the documents, it is the School Log Book, completed each week by the Mistress of the time, which has provided the greatest insight into what it was like to be a scholar in the early days of compulsory education and direct quotations from this are shown in italics. 2016 is the 140th anniversary of the opening of Covington Board School. It is hoped this booklet provides a fitting record of the life of this once thriving little educational establishment.



*Village Hall interior after renovation.
This was the schoolroom.*

Timeline

1854	Small Sunday School
1859	Covington School with Miss Mary Wadsworth as the teacher
1861	Census records Sarah Lines (previously a lacemaker) as a school mistress
June 1865	Rev. Robert Lancaster Watson appointed Rector
January 1868	Duke of Manchester willing to make a grant of land for a school
1869	Day school, supported by voluntary subscriptions
June 1870	Duke of Manchester granted a site at a cost of £20
May 1875	A School Board formed in Covington
6 Nov 1876	Covington Board School opened with 33 scholars
Dec 1894	Inaugural meeting of the Parish Meeting – held in the schoolroom
1900	Standards system abandoned by Board of Education
1902	LEAs set up to take over school boards. School renamed Covington Council School
1905	Special Meeting of the Managers held to discuss possible closure of the school
August 1920	Covington Council School closed – children walk to Tilbrook, Hargrave and Catworth
March 1936	Conveyance provided to transport children to Tilbrook School
Nov 1939	Authority given for repairs and redecoration of the school in preparation to receive evacuees and local children
March 1942	Decision taken to keep Covington School open despite great reduction in number of evacuees
April 1943	School closed for good

Getting Started

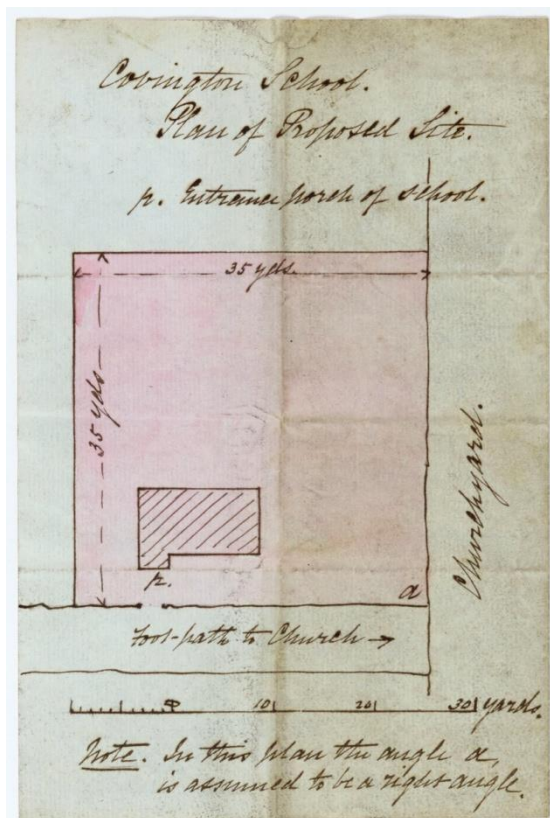
COVINGTON SCHOOL OPENING. – On Wednesday morning the new Board School at Covington was opened by a short religious service, conducted by the rector, the Rev. R. L. Watson. A concert and reading took place in the evening. The school was designed by Mr. W. Lewis Baker, architect, of London, and built by Messrs. Smith and Adams, of Raunds. Though small and unpretending, it is almost a model of brick work, and is, in its style, in well-considered harmony with the quaint old parish church, which dates from the Norman, if not an earlier period. This latter venerable building sadly requires repair, and an effort for its judicious restoration is, we understand, now to be made by the Rector and his family, and the leading residents of the parish. The proceeds of the concert given on Wednesday are to be devoted to this good purpose. The concert, which was under the able direction of R. L. Watson, Esq., was a great success, and many pieces and songs were vigorously encored, especially the instrumental trios, which were given with professional precision. A cradle song, written and published by Mr. R. L. Watson, was much admired. N.H. 29:7:76

This newspaper cutting gives absolutely no indication of the effort that was required of the Rev. Watson to bring about this momentous event. The preceding ten years were filled with hopes raised, hopes dashed, and general frustration caused by delays and new obstacles and it was only through the enthusiasm and persistence of the Rector that the school was finally opened. He seems to have had a hand in the opening ceremony too!

There is evidence that there was some sort of education available prior to Watson's arrival. The History Gazetteer – Directory of Huntingdonshire - recorded a small Sunday School in Covington in 1854. Kelly's Directory for Huntingdonshire in 1859 mentioned Covington School with Miss Mary Wadsworth as the teacher and, in 1861, a schoolmistress, Sarah Lines, was recorded in the census. In the 1841 census, Sarah Lines appeared as a lacemaker so it is possible that the school referred to was a Lace School (as in nearby Dean) where children were taught a few letters and perhaps some arithmetic while learning how to make lace. She was again a lacemaker in 1881 and died a pauper soon afterwards in her eighties.

By January 1868, Watson believed progress was being made and wrote to the Duke of Manchester's agent, Valentine Hill Esq., to say how pleased he was that the Duke 'has it in his power to make a grant of land, that he is so kind as to be

willing to do it in our case. I am sure the labouring poor will be very thankful to his Grace for this donation and will show their appreciation of his liberality by availing themselves of the school that will in due course be built upon the site.' Watson asked for the deeds to be returned quickly as he intended applying to the Privy Council for a building grant. The architect, a Mr. Baker, discussed the matter with Mr. Hawkins of the Privy Council and discovered that a minimum of a quarter acre site, bounded by a hedge or fence, was required. On the reverse of his letter reporting back to Watson, Baker drew the following sketch map which had been approved by Mr. Hawkins:



*Sketch plan of school, drawn by
Mr. Baker, architect, 1868*

Despite the Rector's best efforts, matters stalled with the draft Trust Deed held up either in the Privy Council or with the Duke. This Deed allowed landowners to give land for a school for children only 'of labouring, manufacturing and other poorer classes...' The principal officiating minister would be in charge with other residents contributing at least £20 each year and only communicant members of the Church of England allowed to be on the committee.

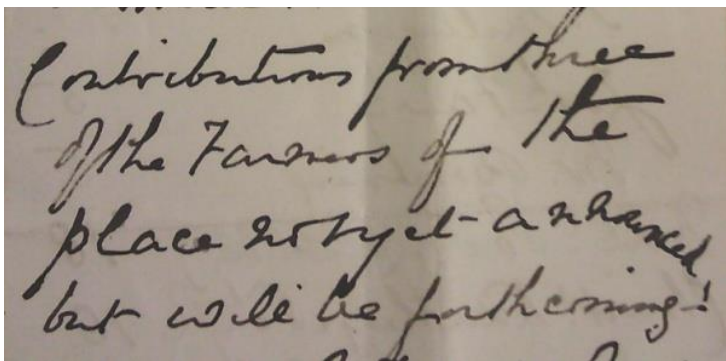
In 1869 there was only a 'Day School supported by voluntary subscriptions' – what we would call a 'Dame School'. The 1871 census (prior to the opening of the school but after Watson's arrival) records 22 scholars with an additional four at the Rectory. It is interesting to consider where these children were taught before the school was built.

In 1870 the Forster Education Act was passed, paving the way for mass education as it was thought that Britain was falling behind the rest of the world. The Act stipulated that:

- (a) The country would be divided into about 2500 school districts;
- (b) School Boards were to be elected by ratepayers in each district;
- (c) The School Boards were to examine the provision of elementary education in their district, provided then by Voluntary Societies, and, if there were not enough school places, they could build and maintain schools out of the rates;
- (d) The school Boards could ... charge fees or let children in free.

Between 1870 and 1880 3-4000 schools were set up or taken over by school boards and Covington Board School would be one of these.

In November 1870, Watson wrote that the principal ratepayers had agreed to build a schoolroom and accommodation for a teacher. He continued, 'there is no time to lose to apply for a parliamentary grant'. He was in fact too late to be awarded a grant. Elementary schools were now to be funded by local rates levied by the newly formed school boards. A plan for the school had already been sketched out but Watson requested that the school building be moved to the other side of the plot. The cost of a schoolroom and teacher's house was budgeted at £300 (£150 each) and Watson set about gathering subscriptions from the local landowners, leading the way himself with a donation of £20. He managed to raise £204 of actual and 'probable' donations (including the potential grant and a promise of funds from Mr. Fitzwilliam) but this was not



'Contributions from three of the farmers of the place not yet announced but will be forthcoming!' Letter from Watson to Manchester.

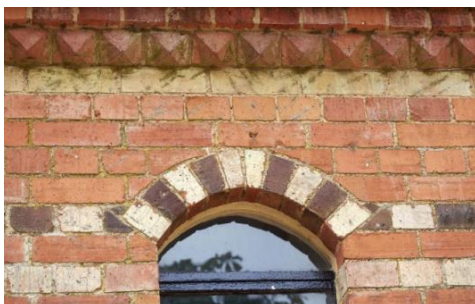
enough and he wrote again to the Duke of Manchester, on behalf of the principal ratepayers, asking for a 'money contribution'. He put forward two arguments: Firstly, the 'heavy expense entailed on a few to provide these buildings' and, secondly, the lasting expense tenants were having to bear following the recent road-building in the parish they had been forced to undertake at Manchester's insistence. The new roads apparently improved the value of the Duke's lands while raising the rates payable so much that it was the equivalent, for one tenant, of an extra £50 on his annual rent. In January 1871, Watson was still waiting for a reply from the Education Department.

There follows a gap in the correspondence, until May 1875, when Watson wrote again to the Duke of Manchester:

'Having failed through want of common consent to provide school accommodation for this parish, we have formed a school board for that purpose. We have had our first meeting and appointed the necessary officers. I have been requested, as chairman, to write to your Grace to ask if you would kindly give to the Board that site for a school that you agreed to give to the Parish some time ago when we were moving in this matter?'

It seems that Watson was losing patience with the Duke as he went on to point out that the Duke had already given land to Grafham for the same purpose and he also urged the Duke to waste no further time so that 'we can set to work immediately in doing what ought to have been done long ago'. A plan of the site was apparently enclosed with this letter but has not survived. A reply from Manchester, written at the end of May 1875, stated that the Duke felt it was unnecessary for a single landowner (ie himself) to bear all the expense of providing a site for the school as there was now a Covington School Board with the power to raise rates and, accordingly, the Board would now have to purchase the land (that previously was to be a gift) for £20. This run of letters concludes in June 1875 when Watson, on behalf of the School Board, accepted the land for £20. It should be pointed out that the seemingly callous reply from the Duke of Manchester may have been as a result of him suffering his own considerable financial difficulties at this time.

It is not known what rates Covington School Board levied for the building of the school. Neither is it known whether the donations collected in 1870 were in fact put towards the works in 1875-6. In effect, the school cost £350 to build. The bricks used could have come from the Manchester Estate kilns, or even the kiln along the Gorse Road. When the bricks arrived, they were sorted by colour and bricks with darker sides reserved for the decoration courses. It was intended to provide a school house for the Mistress and the row of cottages in Church Lane have long been considered as contemporary with the school. However, these cottages were built on land not owned by the Duke of Manchester and, moreover, the 1871 census shows they were already built and inhabited. Two of the schoolteachers, Miss Baseley and Miss Jacobs, lived in No. 5 (the cottages were numbered 1, 3, 5 and 7, starting from the end nearest the church). Subsequent teachers lodged with Miss Coleman in Milton Street, now known as Keyston Road. However, Dukes Cottages, at the other end of Church Lane, were built on Manchester land and have very similar brickwork decoration to that of the school. Census evidence indicates that they probably are contemporary with the school but no Mistress lived there, which was a pity as the Church Lane cottages had only three small rooms but Dukes Cottages had four!



*Brick decoration
on the school
building.*



The Mistress

<i>Took up duties</i>	<i>Name and qualifications (if known)</i>
6 November 1876	Miss Ellen B. Baseley, Provisionally Certificated, aged 23 in 1881. From Northampton and lived in No. 5 Church Lane with a 12 year old village schoolgirl as her servant.
2 January 1882	Margaret Comeskey, Certificate of the Second Class
2 March 1885	Ada E. Beeston
24 October 1888	Mrs. A. Neale Certificated Teacher
11 February 1889	Lily Eliza Jacobs – lodged with Miss J. Coleman. Born in 1869 in Northamptonshire.
June 1893	F. L. Flack Trained Certificated Teacher (temporary)
11 September 1893	Emily Matilda Flack Trained Certificated Teacher (sister of above). Earned an extra wage as the church organist.
12 August 1898	Elizabeth L. Taylor, a single Headteacher from Portsmouth, aged 46 in 1901 and shown in that census and in 1911 as lodging with Jane Coleman.
21 July 1915	Miss E. G. Cox Uncertified Student Teacher (temporary)
13 September 1915	Harriet Gabriel. Her two children also joined the school. She often was late or had to leave early to catch a train to Peterborough.
25 June 1917	<p>Mrs. A. E. Shacklock - Fully certificated, could play and sing, Elementary Certificate in Drawing and Hygiene, Certificate for Drill and Tonic sol fa. Salary £67-10s-0d. Mrs. Shacklock saw the advertisement for the post in The School Mistress and wrote from Nottingham to apply. Her references focused more on her regular attendance at Church, rather than her ability in the schoolroom, but she was judged to be suitable. When her appointment was confirmed, she asked that Miss Coleman be informed of her imminent arrival.</p> <p>Mrs. Shacklock married widower Jesse Nicholson in December 1917 and, from then on, is recorded as Mrs. A. E. Nicholson. (Jesse, aged four, was a scholar at the school in 1881 and lived in New Cottages.) She asked for a revision of salary but there was no pay-scale for a Grade A school. Her salary was however raised to £90, based on her qualifications. When the school closed in 1920, she was transferred to another local school.</p>

Teaching was evidently a family affair! In 1893, one Flack sister took charge of the school temporarily only for the other to be appointed Mistress two months later. During Mrs. Neale's tenure, Mr. Neale was often at the school giving singing lessons. And, of course, the whole Watson family assisted with reading, singing, scripture etc. etc. It would appear that any 'worthy' adult – preferably female – could take charge of the school if required: In November 1893, Miss E. Flintham took the school so that the Mistress could attend her sister's wedding. On 12 August 1898, Miss Ethel Bloodworth, also a village resident, took charge of the school for a day and a half as the Mistress was ill. However, in 1889, the HMI commented *'My Lords have been unable to pay any grant for the period during which the school was under the charge of an unqualified teacher.'* To judge from her letters of application, Mrs. Shacklock was very keen to obtain the appointment of Mistress at Covington Council School. She found Covington so much to her taste that she married one of the residents, Jesse Nicholson, a farm labourer and village constable who was recently widowed. When the school closed, she was promised a post in another local school (probably Keyston) but it seems that she and Jesse may have emigrated to America soon afterwards and raised a family there. (This somewhat reflected the national picture as, in 1921, government agricultural subsidies were withdrawn and there was a rapid reduction in rural wages, which, together with the lifting of tariffs on imported Canadian grain, led to increased rural poverty and emigration from countryside to towns or even other countries.)



The Old Post Office, Keyston Road, Covington, home of Miss Jane Coleman and several Mistresses of Covington School.

For much of the existence of the school, the Mistress lodged with Miss Coleman in her cottage just behind Rookery Farm. Miss Coleman even visited the school in November 1893 to see the children go through musical drill. Miss Coleman was also the postmistress and a stalwart of the village. On her death in 1934, the then Rector wrote that she 'feared no man but saved her fear for God'!

Teaching a whole school with children aged 3-14 years and of varying abilities was undeniably difficult and led to one teacher, Elizabeth Taylor, having a breakdown. The Rev. Pauley recorded in the Managers' Minute Book his

intention to do his utmost to get 'her the most favourable retiring pension possible'. Mrs. Gabriel, despite her own children being enrolled at the school, resigned twice, firstly in 1916 and then in April 1917. In 1916, there were complaints about lack of discipline and her unpunctuality. There was earlier unpunctuality too – On 30 September 1896 the school opened three quarters of an hour late owing to the key being lost down the inside of the Mistress's cloak! However, the time wasted was added on to the other end of the day and school closed at 4:40. In 1918, there were complaints about lack of discipline, unpunctuality of the Mistress, children straying from the school premises during school hours and the neglect of the Mistress to help the Monitress prepare for examinations. Additionally, there is evidence of a conflict between village opinion as to what children should be studying and the curriculum prescribed by the Council – one teacher was accused of 'neglect of important subjects for drawing, painting and the like'.

There is no documentary evidence that the Mistress took Sunday School, but one, Miss Flack, certainly played the organ in church. These photographs of the Sunday School are thought to date from the early 1900s. Perhaps one of the ladies seated is the Mistress at the school and the young lady, the Monitress.



*There appear to be two classes: Infants and 'Upper Division'. The children are standing on a school bench. The photographs seem to have been taken in the school grounds.
(Reproduced by kind permission of Huntingdon Archives KHAC3/3393)*

The Monitress

There was always only one teacher – the Mistress or Headteacher, but from 7 May 1877 she was assisted by a Monitor. One of the more able school leavers (a girl) was appointed to this job, for which she received a small salary and teaching in preparation for the secondary education examination (for example the pupil teacher examination for Huntingdon Grammar School). In February 1916, Mary Mason took up her appointment as Monitor at the age of 14 years with a salary of £6 p.a. Lottie Mayes went on to become a teacher, her occupation recorded as such in the marriage register.. Sometimes it was not helpful that the Monitor might have younger siblings in the school: *24 March 1882 Rev. Watson and Mr. Barber came as members of the Board to reprove the Monitor for interfering with the Mistress when correcting her brother for disobedience. HM discontinued her duties as Monitor’.*

Date	Log Book entry
7 May 1877	Margaret Ellen Green entered upon her duties as Monitress.
11 May 1877	Examined the class which had been under Monitress’s care during the week. She has taken great pains with them.
1 June 1877	Kept the Monitor in to give a reading lesson after 12.
2 July 1877	Gave the Monitor a holiday.
8 August 1877	Scolded Monitor for being so late.
5 Oct. 1877	Mistress obliged to be away in the afternoon on account of illness. School conducted by Monitor.
24 Oct. 1877	Monitor asked permission to leave school at 3 o’clock.
29 Nov. 1877	Mistress away...., school conducted by Monitor.
11 June 1878	Scolded Monitor for being late.
24-28 March 1879	Mistress away ill. School conducted by Monitor with occasional assistance of Miss Watson and the Rev. Watson.
4 July 1879	Margaret Green gave up her duties as Monitor.
7 July 1879	Mary Emma Hewitt was appointed as Monitor.
7 May 1880	Mary Emma Hewitt gave up her duties as Monitor.
10 May 1880	Hannah Mayes appointed as Monitor.
24 March 1882	Hannah Mayes discontinued as Monitor [see above]
9 January 1914	Monitress Lottie Mayes has left having obtained a better appointment at Ellington School Huntingdon.
4 Feb 1916	Mary Mason now employed [as Monitress]
16 March 1916	Half day holiday to allow Monitress and Headteacher to attend confirmation service.

The School Year

The school year began on 1 February, with a short break at Easter, anything from a day to one week's holiday at Whitsun, six to eight weeks in August/September/October and one week or so at Christmas. The School Board determined the precise date school would open or close, with often only a few days' notice. Frequently, the reopening of the school in the autumn had to be delayed because the children were still helping with the harvest or gleaning and so not able to attend. School days were long by modern standards, starting at 9am but not finishing until well past 4pm. In November each year, the timings for afternoon school were brought forward by thirty minutes *'for the winter months'*, and in February the process was reversed *'for the summer months'*. Below is the 'calendar' for 1886:

1886	Event
4 Jan	Commenced school after the Christmas holidays.
29 Jan	The last day in school year
1 Feb	Her Majesty's Inspector examined the school.
10 Mar	Being Ash Wednesday, the children went to church at 11 o'clock. There was a half holiday in the afternoon.
14 June	The children had a holiday.
15 June	Half holiday
16 June	Half holiday
28 July	... a holiday on Monday and a half holiday on Tuesday and Wednesday, it being Feast week.
20 Aug	Closed school for the Harvest Vacation.
4 Oct	School opened.... Attendance very poor owing to the gleaning.
8 Oct	School closed on account of the non-attendance of the children.
3 Dec	School closed through sickness.
3 Jan	School opened.

An interesting note in the Huntingdonshire Primary Sub-Committee Minutes of 14 May 1946 sheds light on when the school year changed to its modern setting. In most primary schools in Huntingdonshire, the school year ended at Easter as, prior to April 1945, the school grant was related to attendance and the financial year. The secondary school year, however, ended at the midsummer holidays. From September 1946, The Ministry of Education Regulations defined the school year as ending on the last day of the midsummer holidays. There was still some discrepancy though, as school managers could vary the precise dates of the holidays provided they notified parents in May!

The Chairman of the Board (who was either the Rector or Major C. Barnett for the duration of the school) had the power to declare a half or even a whole holiday. These were sometimes planned, but often occurred because the children had absented themselves or would have absented themselves in any case. The 'causes' of these holidays give an insight, not only into the impact on this small Huntingdonshire community of national events, e.g. coronations, but also into the life of the village as a whole.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reason for holiday, given in the School Log Book</i>
12 Oct 1877	Kimbolton Fair
24 May 1883	Reopening of the church (after extensive repairs)
28 July 1886 (and annually)	Feast week (variously half holiday, a whole day and/or a mixture of the two)
6 Aug 1890	School trip to Hunstanton
4 Nov 1890	Half-holiday to have the school repaired
14 May 1891	Half holiday to take children to the woods
10 March 1892	Half holiday in the afternoon for the Mistress and children to attend the funeral of Rev. R. L. Watson
29 Sept 1892	Statute Fair
20 March 1893	Half holiday for foxhounds meet at Three Shire Stone
5 June 1895	Half holiday for Tilbrook Club Feast
21 Sept 1896	Half holiday for harvest thanksgiving sales
22 June 1897	Great Jubilee
30 Jul 1900	Mistress away by consent of the Managers
23 May 1902	Whit Monday half holiday by permission of Rev. Heaton, and the next two days children dismissed early because more than half of them were absent at Feasts held in the neighbourhood
25-30 June 1902	Coronation
23 Jan 1903	Following his inspection, the HMI suggested the children be given a half holiday.
12 Oct 1906	Half holiday for dinner and tea given by the Rector to everyone in the parish
2 Aug 1909	Half holiday to allow boys to attend cricket match in Hargrave
20 May 1910	Funeral of King Edward VII
16 June 1911	(several days) owing to the Coronation

Date	Reason for holiday, given in the School Log Book
19 July 1912	Half holiday given on Monday afternoon... on account of a 'Tea' given in the hayfield to the children and mothers by kindness of Major Barnett
25 June-21 July 1915	Following breakdown of the Mistress
16 March 1916	Half day to allow Monitress and Headteacher to attend confirmation service
24 May 1916	Empire Day half day holiday spent with the children giving demonstration entitled 'Allies in Arms'

Aug: 10th Closed school for the Harvest Vacation.
 September 20th Reopened school after the harvest holidays. very poor attendance, gleaming not yet finished. 20 children left the school.
 October 2nd The attendance during the past week has been very poor.
 Oct. 5th Admitted two children under four.
 Oct. 12th Admitted a fresh child.

Gave a lesson to the Sixth Standard on Decimals fractions. + taught Standard II a new rule in Arithmetic

I resign my appointment as Mistress of the Congregational Board school. During the years I have been here. I have been treated with great consideration by the Managers. & feel very sorry to leave my pupils.

July 22nd Gave the children a half days holiday, it being Feast Week.
 23rd Half days holiday.
 24th Holiday in the afternoon for the School Treat.

Mrs A. Neale is leaving this school as the Managers require a young Mistress.

12th Gave a Scripture Lesson. Closed school this afternoon. Only four children present, it being Gilbrook Club feast.

May 30 Began secular instruction at nine o'clock. Took the children to Church at eleven; it being Ascension Day.

Extracts from the School Log Book

The School Room

It is hard to imagine there was space for forty scholars in the one schoolroom and perhaps it is fortunate for them that this number was never achieved. The Mistress's desk itself, situated as it was at the far end of the room from the current entrance, must have taken up a not-inconsiderable proportion of the space available. In true Victorian fashion, the room was well lit, but with windows too high for the view outside to have been a distraction for the inmates. It is unclear as to whether there was an open fire or a stove originally. In February 1901, the Inspector commented: *The chimney smokes badly and needs attention. The two top windows should be made to open. School walls need cleaning.* Early in 1918, the Managers wrote to Huntingdonshire Education Committee to say that *the fire grate gave out inadequate heat and that the room was often intensely cold.* Protracted correspondence between the Rector and the County Surveyors' Office about a replacement stove resulted in one arriving in April, despite the difficulties in obtaining such an item in wartime.

Inspectors' reports, along with entries in the Log Book, give a glimpse as to what conditions could be like in the school. In March 1890, the Inspector recorded that the desks were unsuitable and the walls needed *re-colouring*. However, one year later the desks were still too high for the infants and a *proper urinal* was required for the boys. By 1892, new desks had arrived but, in 1904, it was again necessary that *the clumsy desks should be replaced.* Additionally, a cupboard for books and a fireguard were needed.

1896 is the first of many references to the playground and or paths to the school needing re-gravelling. In 1904, it was suggested that part of the grass playground should be gravelled and, in 1915, the Inspector thought that the *front outside part* of the school could have gravel paths and flowerbeds. (Even before the school closed in 1920, the 'herbage' or grass part of the school grounds was being rented out and the children's playground was restricted to the front part of the school only.) The same inspector also noticed *spouting and tiles in need of repair.* Nothing was evidently done about the spouting and tiles as in December the Mistress noted *work very difficult this week because of the dampness of the school. Rain leaked through walls and roof onto the floor. Spouting and tiles off in several places.* A year later, a January gale blew various tiles off the roof.

In August 1916, there was the most serious condemnation of the plumbing: The Sanitary Surveyor and Inspector of Nuisances from Thrapston wrote to the Managers describing various defects and concluding that the sanitary arrangements at the school were the worst he had seen! It was proposed that the girls' lavatory be filled in and one built outside the school. Another recommendation was that the old sink be taken away and portable basins on iron stands be provided instead. A large casement window should be put in instead of the slits. The floor was to be concreted, and the 'walls to a height of three feet'. A screen was required to be put up around the boys' 'offices'. All this work was completed in the school holidays and the schoolroom was also colour-washed and painted.

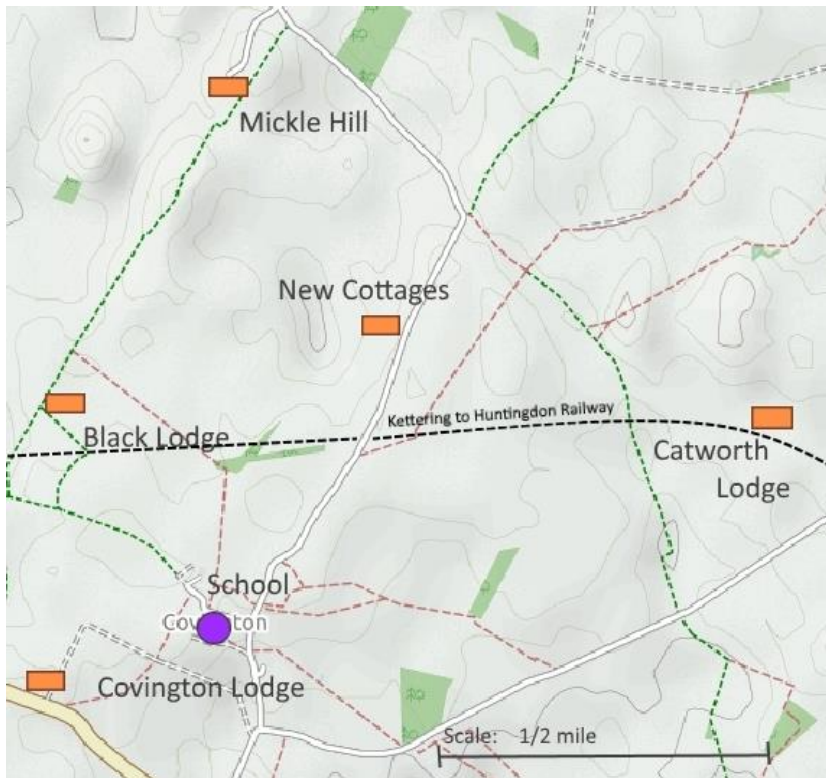
Covington School.
The 'sink' in the above school should be altered so that the waste water pipe empties in the open air alongside of a 'Gully' trap. This pipe now is connected direct to the drain, which is a serious nuisance to health.

Extracts from a letter dated 28 June 1916 T. Lloyd, Sanitary Surveyor and Inspector of Nuisances at Thrapston Rural District Council, to Revd. A. J. Powley, Manager of Covington School, reproduced with kind permission of Huntingdon Archives (KPC14/3367/2)

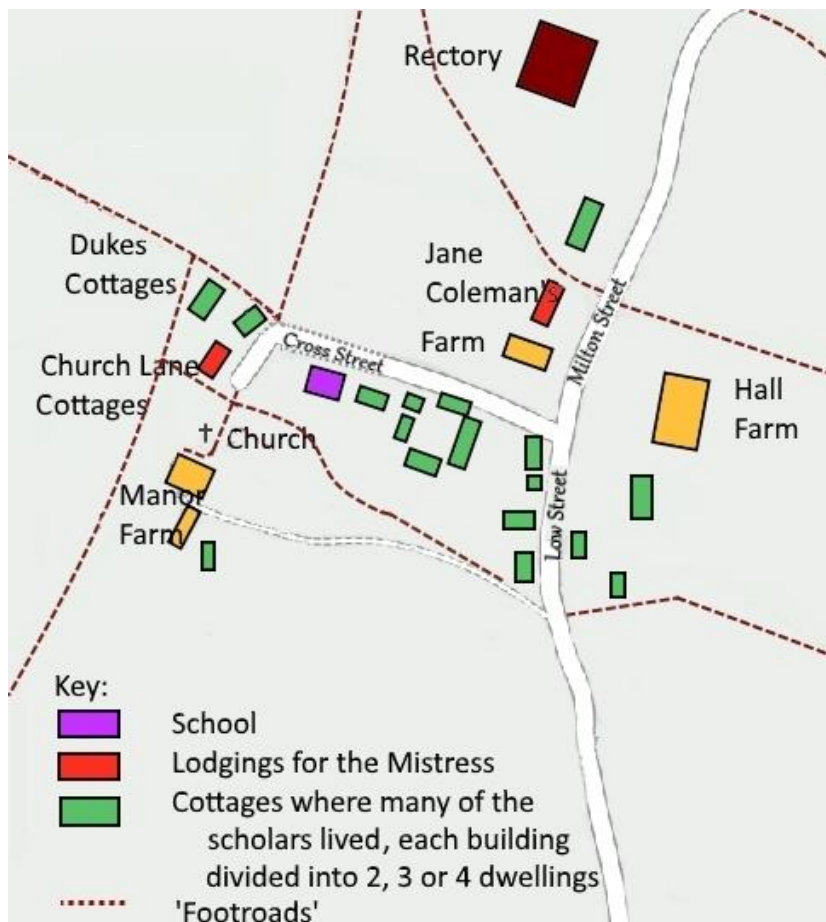
The nail closet in the girls department, in its present position is also a serious nuisance.

The extent to which the 'sanitary arrangements' contributed to the spread of infections is not known, but the scarlet fever and ring worm outbreaks in 1912 resulted in the school being *thoroughly cleaned* on a fortnightly basis thereafter. Cleaning the school was of course only half the story: A few months after the school opened, the Board sent orders *to send some of the children home for uncleanness*. It is probably just as well that there were no sanitary inspections in 1895 when the Mistress noted *signs of a mouse's mischief this morning and shortly after the mouse itself which however escaped!*

Maps



Map of Covington Parish showing the outlying lodges. Children as young as three years old walked across the fields to attend the school in the centre of the village.



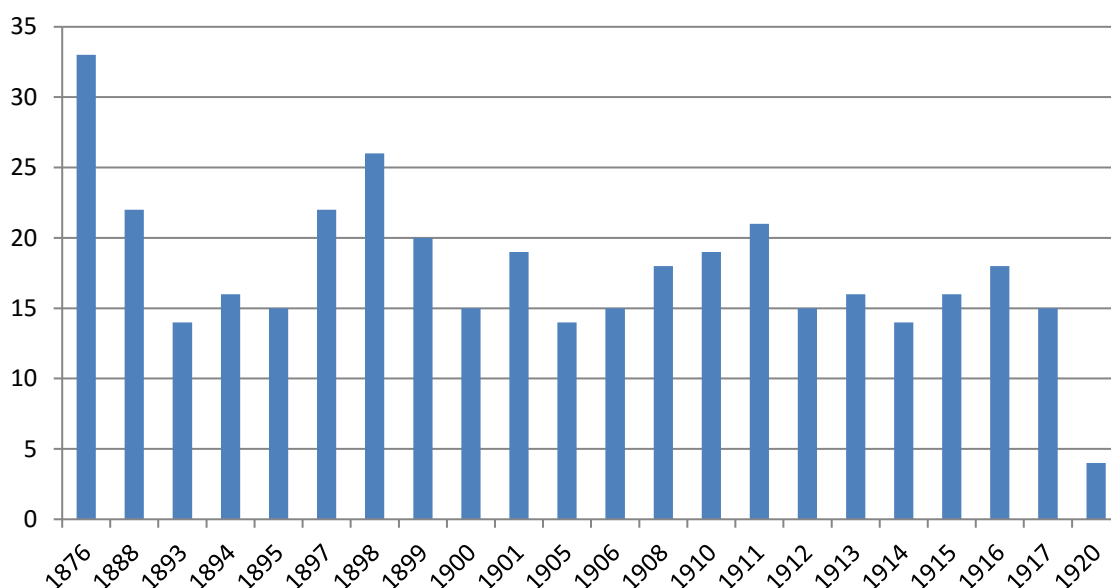
Map showing the principal buildings relating to Covington School 1870-1920.

*Map data from
OpenStreetMap.org
Annotation by M. Parsons*

Scholars

The number of children on roll was always an issue: The school had been built for forty but the roll never achieved this number. Thirty three children arrived when it opened, but, with the exception of a peak of 26 in 1898, the number of children was generally less than twenty and had reduced to only four by the time the school closed in 1920 (see page 10 regarding migration away from rural areas).

Maximum recorded number of pupils on roll



Children could enter the school as young as three years old - *1898 admitted FR, just three years old today* - and had to pass at least Standard IV and later V before they were allowed to leave. The high proportion of infants, as recorded in 1899 - *Greater number of the children are of very tender years*, was one of the barriers to the school's progress. In July 1908 another infant was added to the register and the teacher commented *the tender years of the majority of the children render the work somewhat slow and tedious*. As time went on, the school leaving age was gradually raised (see Regulations panel) but children, especially in rural areas, were allowed to leave earlier to go to work provided they had achieved at least Standard V (in 1905) and gained an exemption certificate/labour certificate/certificate of proficiency. Some children stayed on to gain higher standards but this was a luxury as most were required to go to work as soon as possible to supplement the family income. Children moved up the school through Standards (1872 onwards), each Standard having a series of criteria (see panel below) which had to be met during the annual examination - promotion from one to another was by merit, not age.

The six Standards of Education in the Revised Code of Regulations 1872

STANDARD I

- Reading: One of the narratives next in order after monosyllables in an elementary reading book used by the school.
- Writing: Copy in manuscript character a line of print, and write from dictation a few common words.
- Arithmetic: Simple addition and subtraction of numbers of not more than four figures, and the multiplication table to multiplication by six.

STANDARD II

- Reading: A short paragraph from an elementary reading book.
- Writing: A sentence from the same book, slowly read once, and then dictated in single words.
- Arithmetic: The multiplication table, and a simple rule as far as short division (inclusive)

STANDARD III

- Reading: A short paragraph from a more advanced reading book.
- Writing: A sentence slowly dictated once by a few words at a time, from the same book.
- Arithmetic: Long division and compound rules (money).

STANDARD IV

- Reading: A few lines of poetry or prose, at the choice of the inspector.
- Writing: A sentence slowly dictated once, by a few words at a time, from a reading book, such as is used in the first class of the school.
- Arithmetic: Compound rules (common weights and measures).

STANDARD V

- Reading: A short ordinary paragraph in a newspaper, or other modern narrative.
- Writing: Another short ordinary paragraph in a newspaper, or other modern narrative, slowly dictated once by a few words at a time.
- Arithmetic: Practice and bills of parcels.

STANDARD VI

- Reading: To read with fluency and expression.
- Writing: A short theme or letter, or an easy paraphrase.
- Arithmetic: Proportion and fractions (vulgar and decimal).

A Standard VII was added in 1882, to provide for children staying in school after reaching the age of 13.

The School Log Book records the risk posed to children by serious illness. Whooping cough, measles, influenza and scarlet fever were all life threatening and very infectious diseases which recurred throughout the first period that the school was open. There is no record in the Log Book of any pupils dying as a result of contracting one of these but several were absent for many weeks. Houses with scarlet fever were put under quarantine by the Sanitary Inspector and children warned to keep away from infected families. The Sanitary Inspector (from Thrapston Rural Sanitary District, which was formed in 1875 out of the 1837 Poor Law Unions, and was replaced by Thrapston Rural District Council in 1894) visited the school in July 1894 and left a tin of Sanitas and a tablet of carbolic soap to be given away *in case of need*.

Date	Illness
15 July 1885	Whooping cough – school closed for one week
28 Nov 1886	11 children absent with measles
6 June 1892	Measles – school closed for one week
24 January 1894	Flu – school closed
4 June 1894	Whooping cough
6 July 1894	Scarletina (Scarlet fever) – 2 families. Still children with whooping cough
10-16 July 1894	Scarlet fever – school closed. No-one from affected family to return before 12 August.
4 June 1895	St. Vitas Dance (Sydenham's Chorea)
1 Oct 1895	Skin disease/eczema
2 March 1896	Severe colds – school closed because so many away
3 Dec 1897	Scarletina
25 Feb 1898	'some form of ezcema' – two children not to return to school without doctor's permission
17 Nov 1911	Scarlet fever
23 Jan 1912	Scarlet fever – school closed until 12 February
12 Feb 1912	Scarlet fever – 10 pupils still absent
18 March 1912	Ringworm
12 March 1915	Measles
15 Oct 1915	Whooping cough – references to whooping cough until 10 Dec 1915
8 Feb 1916	Vermin in head
5 July 1916	Verminous heads – 2 children excluded for one week by School Medical Officer
23 Nov 1916	Verminous heads
2 May 1917	Croup

Entries in the Log Book are sparse from 1917 onwards and there is no mention of the Spanish 'Flu epidemic which raged across the country in 1918. However, from other sources, it is known that at least two children and their father died in Covington in a single week.

Throughout the Log Book, concern is expressed for the number of children who are absent, and the reasons for these absences are recorded. This gives a wonderful insight into the lives of the young scholars. Their ailments are listed in the tables below, along with annual events on the rural calendar, the work they had to do to help with the family finances, and the impact of weather on the need to walk distances to school across the fields.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reasons for absence - medical</i>
	See table on recorded illnesses
30 Nov 1893	MN's health is of serious anxiety (to parents) so the Doctor says she must be kept from school and all excitement and mental exertion. Medical certificate to say that she was 'unable to bear the strain of constant tuition. An elder brother sank gradually into imbecility.' It was recommended that she attend school occasionally for a 'change of scene'.
28 June 1895	Gathered foot [gathering = accumulation of pus]
4 July 1895	Broken leg
18 Dec 1895	Weak eyes
9 July 1909	One infant unable to attend through delicacy – doctor's certificate
3 May 1912	EB spent 7 weeks in Huntingdon hospital having met with a serious accident to his right hand.
2 Feb 1917	Bad legs

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reasons for absence – country life</i>
12 Dec 1877	Foxhunting
1 May 1895	A-Maying
6 Nov 1895	Foxhunting
16 Sept 1896	Kimbolton Statute Fair
9 July 1897	Catworth Feast
2 May 1898	A-mayoling
1 May 1902	The elder children missing going round the village singing
11 Feb 1910	..bulk of the children gone after the hounds
1 May 1917	Most children at Thrapston May Fair

Date	Reasons for absence - work
9 May 1881	Picking cowslips [medicinal, also for celebrations]
13 March 1889	Chip gathering ['chips' were dried cowpats]
25 March 1889	Flower gathering
6 May 1889	Flower gathering
12 May 1891	Children gone to gather wild flowers
25 April 1894	Picking cowslips
18 March 1895	Working in the fields for a few days
10 May 1895	2 ½ days farm work
17 May 1895	4 days ploughing
5 Dec 1895	Gathering sticks blown down by the high wind
27 April 1896	Picking cowslips
21 July 1896	Scaring crows from ripe barley
21 Sept 1896	'necessary farm work for mornings for the next 2-3 weeks'
22 March 1897	Attendance poor because weather at last favourable for getting in potatoes etc.
26 March 1897	Gathering colts foot [medicinal]
7 May 1897	Farm work
1 July 1898	'Reasonably absent to carry meals to fathers cutting and carting clover etc.'
15 July 1899	EC absent all week because of mother being urgently wanted again in the hayfield.
26 Sept 1902	Harvest not being yet finished
13 August 1915	Harvest work

The weather

The weather had quite an impact on the scholars at Covington School. Apart from obvious structural implications (such as leaks and missing tiles referred to elsewhere), attendance, particularly of those children living in outlying lodges (Catworth Lodge, Black Lodge, New Cottages, and Mickle Hill), was at the mercy of snow, heavy rainfall and strong winds. Sometimes, as on 25 March 1898, the school was closed *because of exceptionally bad weather*. In February 1895, the Mistress noted *weather exceptionally cold. Ink frozen the last three nights*. The winter of 1916 was apparently horrendous. When the weather was extremely hot, school started earlier as it was cooler then.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reasons for absence - weather</i>
13 Jan 1895	2 children absent in afternoon because of sudden snow storm.
5 Jan 1896	Sudden violent storm at the dinner hour kept three young scholars at home in the afternoon.
4 Dec 1896	LT not attending during cold weather as he is very young and lives a long way off [Catworth Lodge].
12 Jan 1897	Roads are very dirty so family from Catworth Lodge do not attend school.
7 April 1897	Very snowy only 11/21 present.
14 Dec 1897	7 children live at a great distance and generally come over fields – and so are affected by very wet weather.
15 March 1898	Cold wind
25 March 1898	Exceptionally bad weather – school closed.
2 May 1898	Only 5 children present. Very wet between 8 and 9 o'clock preventing distance children coming.
16 Feb 1900	Heavy snow. Three children living at a distant lodge not able to attend.
9 Nov 1906	Heavy rain on Thursday and Friday so 6 children living at a distance unable to attend.
17 May 1907	Heavy rain
12 July 1907	Very wet day children living at lodges could not attend.
19 Jan 1912	Heavy snow storm so the five children living in lodges could not possibly attend.
15 Feb 1916	Heavy fall of snow, roads are blocked and several unable to attend – only 4 present.
24 Feb 1916	Heavy fall of snow only five present.
28 Feb 1916	Weather too severe only 5 present.
28 March 1916	Heavy fall of snow – only 5 present. Poor attendance all week.
15 Jan 1917	Only 4 children present because of snowstorm.
16 Jan 1917	Snowstorm

As in all schools, some 'reasons for absence' were rather unusual, others were creative, and still others provide evidence as to the reality of life for some children, for example those who were carers.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reasons for absence - other</i>
8 April 1892	Only 2 children present others having gone to the next village to see the circus go through.
19 Dec 1893	Long errands
3 Oct 1894	'Taken the flag in front of a traction engine during dinner time in a case of real necessity' – BN was excused but BM who accompanied him without permission was caned one stroke.
1 Oct 1895	Help mother
7 April 1896	BS 15 minutes late – said that it was because their dinner was late. ...children come from further away than before so it will be necessary to give an especially loud and long ring of the bell.
26 April 1897	'Catworth [Lodge] children appear to have gone home for their dinner which did not arrive according to their expectation.'
4 Feb 1897	Genuine reason - unreliable clock
9 May 1898	Special family reasons
23 June 1898	MB late – reason had to come further round on account of unfriendly animals.
13 June 1898	4 children by special request allowed to leave school for a few minutes to see a little of an infant neighbour's funeral
24 Jan 1902	Unavoidably detained at home through her mother's blindness

As mentioned above, discipline was a matter of grave concern to the Mistress, managers and parents alike. A variety of misdemeanours are recorded including, soon after the school opened, *Mr. Fairy came in to tell the boys they would have to pay for the bell next time it was broken by them*, but it is not clear what happened when the bell rope was again broken in October 1893. In 1904, the Inspector reported *habitual answering out of turn of the children*. One boy was punished on several occasions for *disobedience* whilst another was punished for *whistling in school*. Three *little boys* were punished for playing truant one afternoon, and more children for truancing when the circus came through a neighbouring village. The First Class was on one occasion

punished for *carelessness in dictation* and several times a child was disciplined for *idleness*. The cane was used for severe crimes but there are no records of punishments after 1898. It is clear that 1897 was a difficult year!

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reason for caning</i>
4 Nov 1885	Four boys late for school and 2 absent because they went fox hunting. All got the cane.
17 Nov 1893	Caned BN for untruthfulness.
2 Feb 1894	CM caned for disobedience.
5 Nov 1894	Caned a child for bad language – a child who has offended several times since commencing school a few weeks ago. [26 Oct 1894 two infant girls reprimanded then punished for using bad language.]
8 Oct 1896	Caned three boys for coming to school half an hour late with no reason one stroke each but the first WB resisting occasioned himself more.
16 Feb 1897	Caned WB for disobedience.
5 March 1897	Caned JT [aged 8] for throwing down an infant roughly and intentionally.
24 March 1897	Caned JT for rough behaviour in the playground.
29 March 1897	Caned JT for defiant behaviour.
2 April 1897	Caned JT for idleness.
5 April 1897	Caned WB and sister and JT for repeated unpunctuality.
15 April 1897	Caned JT for neglecting to finish his task this dinner time.
12 May 1897	Caned JT for obstinately persisting in drawing lines the wrong way ie vertical lines upwards.

There are also a few references to girls being caned:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reason for caning</i>
19 Oct 1893	Caned EW for marking her initials in ink on the newest desks and persisting in falsehood about it.
1 March 1897	Caned MB for disobedience.
5 April 1897	Caned MB for repeated unpunctuality.
21 June 1897	Caned MB for disobedience (2 strokes on the hand).

Other forms of punishment are mentioned, such as a half-hour detention or loss of playtime and a note home to mother for being late. Some of the references above may seem harsh to modern eyes, however it is clear from the following extract that the Mistress had mischievous clientele!

10 July 1896: Two boys were sent just outside to get in the pony which had got out through a little one's forgetfulness to close the gate. Acting apparently in all good faith, they remained out until school time was over almost all morning – sentenced them to make up lesson time from future playtimes and after school.

Children were also positively 'encouraged': in October 1895 the Mistress began to give 'good', 'fair' etc. marks for each lesson *as a useful stimulus*. In 1897, she gave *tiny floral cards to twelve children who had made ten attendances* and, in 1898, *gave out four certificates for good attendance*. There is also evidence of kindness on behalf of the Mistress. 23 November 1893 was so cold that the Mistress *arranged the desks so children could sit nearer the fire*. 7 April 1896 *Children come from further away than before... so it will be necessary to give an especially loud and long ring of the bell at the end of dinnertime*. On 30 June 1898, four children were *allowed to leave the school for a few minutes to see a little of an infant neighbour's funeral*. School was opened earlier in the mornings on very hot days in July 1896, and, in July 1911, the Mistress observed that the children had *done their best in spite of the great heat*.



Village event, about 1910. This photograph was taken outside The Red Cow Public House, proprietor Alfred Mayes. It is thought the gentleman on the left is Major Carew Barnett, for a short while Chief Manager of the school before going to France in 1914.

Educational Theory and Regulation

Both the increased regulation of education and changes in educational theory and practice are clearly seen through the notes logged by the Mistress (italicised) and other sources relating to Covington School.

Regulation	<i>Evidence of application in Covington School</i>
<p>1870 Forster Education Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established system of school boards to build and manage schools where no provision existed Religious instruction in such schools was to be non-denominational (as opposed to schools established by religious orders, e.g. Voluntary Schools) 	<p>Covington School Board set up in 1876, but no parliamentary funding available for school building as out of time limit (31.12.1870). Permission for the School Board to be created had to be gained from the Board of Education.</p> <p><i>4 Jan 1870 Orders from Board to discontinue the creed. However, 14 February 1870 Began secular instruction at 9 o'clock. Took children to church at 11 [Ash Wednesday].</i> This religious instruction regulation is interesting as 'Scripture' lessons are frequently recorded as being given by the Rector. Board schools were designed to lessen the influence of the Church but, in Covington, Church and School were inextricably entwined – <i>17 Oct 1877 Rev R. L. Watson came in and brought a cupboard for the Sunday School books.</i></p>
<p>1871 Code of Regulations (Forster Code)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created an infant stage below Standard I for the 5-7 age range Introduced military drill to help with discipline with a large group of children 	<p><i>3 Nov 1899 17 on register, bulk are infants</i></p> <p><i>18 March 1891 Began to teach Musical Drill.</i></p> <p><i>29 June 1892 ...new song with fan drill [Just imagine, 12 year old farm boys doing fan drill!]</i></p>

Regulation (continued)	Evidence of application in Covington School
1871 Code of Regulations (Forster Code) continued.	<p><i>25 October 1893 Took ten minutes for mental arithmetic out of musical drill – children must rest their bodies during the 45 minutes allowed for drill and their mental faculties have had little increase.</i></p> <p><i>13 January 1897 Tried drilling in 2 lines from teacher's desk to schoolroom door.</i></p>
<p>1880 Education Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School compulsory between ages of 5 and 10 • Children younger than 13 had to have a certificate stating they had achieved the locally required educational standard – in Huntingdonshire this was Standard V – in order to leave and go to work 	<p>The Log book gives instances of many children younger than five years attending Covington School. Rev. Watson (and subsequent Chairmen of the Board) regularly checked the registers until, in 1903, a Frank Fortescue, School Attendance Officer, began visiting the school initially monthly but then on a fortnightly basis. The frequent absence of scholars, on all kinds of excuses, was a constant trial for the Mistress!</p> <p><i>November 1884 Three boys, Samuel Mayes, Walter Nicholson and Frank Nicholson, went to Bythorn to be examined for Certificate of Proficiency.</i></p> <p><i>21 Feb 1898 Readmitted Gertrude Thompson who obtained labour certificate last June.</i></p> <p><i>5 Feb 1904 Gertrude Hewitt left having passed Standard V.</i></p> <p><i>23 June 1905 Only 14 on register because three children left exempted through passing Standard V.</i></p>
<p>1880 onwards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing examination: freehand, geometry 	<p><i>20 January 1892 Boys examined in drawing by Colonel Hill</i></p> <p><i>30 January 1893 Major General Ruddell examined the boys in drawing.</i></p>

<i>Regulation (continued)</i>	<i>Evidence of application in Covington School</i>
1882 Mundella Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Object lessons • Excellent teachers could progress to become sub-inspectors or even inspectors 	<i>12 May 1885 gave a lesson on a 'sponge' to the infants.</i> <i>15 January 1890 gave the Infants an object lesson on a lead pencil.</i> <i>19 October 1911 Sub-Inspector Fishwick visited and gave good advice and recommended useful hints.</i>
1893 Circular <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaving age raised to 11 • A full four years' attendance in the Infants is now the rule rather than the exception 	<i>22 Feb 1898 Admitted Bertram Thompson aged 3.</i> <i>10 March 1898 Admitted Frank Rawlins just 3 years old today.</i>
1894 New Education Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision for lessons on temperance in elementary schools • Teachers to examine lower Standards, HMI the upper • Some adjustment of the content requirements for specific Standards 	<i>9 April 1894 New Code afternoon school starts with 10 minutes recreation. 2nd and 3rd lessons therefore start 10 minutes later. Ten minutes for tables and exercises before prayers and dismissal no longer.</i> <i>8 February 1907 Sub-Inspector Fishwick visited and recommended some books on Temperance and Hygiene for Upper Division children.</i>
1902 Balfour Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEAs set up and took over the running of all board schools • No pupil or teacher could be forced to attend religious ritual • Basis for secondary education 	School name changed from Covington Board School to Covington Council School. Instead of being run by a board, the school was operated by managers under Huntingdonshire Education Committee. Some managers were appointed by the Committee and some by the newly formed Parish Meeting.

<i>Regulation (continued)</i>	<i>Evidence of application in Covington School</i>
<p>1907 Education Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start of School Health Service • LEAs had to provide a formal inspection of children in public elementary schools 	<p>15 November 1912 is the first reference to a School Medical Examiner, who visited and examined one boy. The Logbook records several further visits, including: <i>9 May 1916 Lady Doctor School Medical Officer visited – as no classroom here and rain falling heavily children dismissed to allow her to examine thoroughly four girls over the age of 12.</i></p>
<p>1918 Education Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public elementary schools to include practical instruction • Responsible for the health and physical wellbeing of pupils • Education was compulsory between the ages of 5 and 14 • No under 12s to be employed • No fees to be charged, except for dinners 	<p>Mrs. Nicholson was reminded of her responsibility for the wellbeing of pupils as a result of complaints that children were running wild outside the school precincts in March 1918.</p> <p>In June 1935, a Huntingdonshire bylaw allowing children living more than one mile from school not to attend until they were aged seven was revoked and in 1936 the Education Committee clarified that all children over the age of five living within one mile of a school had to attend. Conveyances began to be provided by the Council as required e.g. to take children from Keyston to Bythorn and, as a result of pressure from Covington parents, to take Covington children to Tilbrook from March 1936.</p> <p>In June 1940, Huntingdonshire Education Committee decided that children over twelve years could leave school to do farmwork if no-one else was available, but the Committee was soon forced to rescind this order by the Board of Education.</p>

<i>Regulation (continued)</i>	<i>Evidence of application in Covington School</i>
1921 Education Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised school leaving age to 14 	The higher leaving age given in the 1918 Act was not implemented until 1921 because of post war cuts in spending. Covington children were, by this time, attending school in Tilbrook.
1936 Education Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised school leaving age to 15, but allowed Local Authorities to issue Employment Certificates for 14 year olds to work where it was more beneficial for them to do so rather than stay at school, e.g. if the family would suffer extreme hardship without their income 	This was put into effect in Huntingdonshire in June 1939: 'Every child....must stay until the end of the term in which they are 15'. 'Exemptions' to be given to those who would benefit by employment (Huntingdonshire Education Committee Minutes 28/6/39). – but then deferred because of the outbreak of war and pressure put on school places by the influx of evacuees.



View of the church from Cross Street, just outside the school railings. The young gentleman is Lennie Nicholson who was admitted to the school as an Infant on 11 May 1900. Soon after, he was absent for six months through illness and was readmitted in April 1902. The whole plot up to the church was included in the original plan. It is unclear when the wall was built. The cottages in Church Lane (where the Mistress lived for a time) are just visible to the right of the photograph. (KPH19/6)

When Covington Board School opened, elementary education was funded by 'school pence' and a parliamentary grant earned by achievement. By the time it closed in 1920, funding was dependent upon average attendance and was provided by Huntingdonshire Education Committee. School records illustrate the journey towards the education system we have today:

Funding Regulation	Evidence of application in Covington School
1871 Forster Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New grants of 3/- for a pass in two subjects in Stds. IV, V, VI. 	<i>16 February 1880 Received the papers from the Government 2 failures in arithmetic.</i>
1875 Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Class subjects to be taught as well as the obligatory 3Rs – grammar, geography, history, and needlework, for which an additional grant was paid 	<i>19 March 1880 Received the following Report from H. M. Inspector 'The order is excellent and the Standard work very good throughout the school. Grammar is good. Needlework very good. Geography moderate, being learnt too much by rote.'</i>
1880 Education Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board Schools charge 2d per week per pupil 	<i>29 January 1890 The Guardians (Poor Law) refused to pay the school pence of the M family for a fortnight due to their bad attendance.</i>
1882 Mundella Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small part of the grant was given for discipline and order. The Class Subject was for all above Standard I. Merit grant for more intelligent teaching. 	<i>April 1886 Inspector's Report: A merit has not been strictly earned and is only recommended in consideration of the fact that the school was closed for some weeks on account of an epidemic and the work interrupted.</i> <i>3 March 1893 ...more intelligence must be shown another year for the continuance of the higher grant under article 101(a) (HMI report).</i>
1883 Circular to Inspectors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ..provision of 'appropriate and varied occupations' for infants as a requirement for the awarding of the merit grant 	<i>25 February 1895 Miss E. Flintham brought scraps for the little ones' Fraying.</i>

Funding Regulation (continued)	Evidence of application in Covington School
1890 Code 1891 Elementary Education Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abolished grant for the 3 Rs. Aimed to develop interest, intelligence and acquirement of real substantial knowledge Fixed grant based on average attendance of children aged 3-15 years 	19 November 1897 Average 17.6/22 21 January 1898 Average just 13 again. 5 October 1891 The Mistress received a note from the Clerk to the Board to the effect that <i>the children were no longer to pay school fees.</i>
1902 Balfour Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliament to pay LEAs 4/- per pupil per year 	Responsibility for funding all aspects of running the school lay with Huntingdonshire Education Committee. When new facilities were required, the Chief Manager wrote to the Clerk to the Committee. In March 1912, S. G. Cook of the Committee is recorded as visiting the school.
1907 Free Place Regulations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examinations for Pupil Teachers to go on to further study Provided more scholarships and bursaries to enable promising children from public elementary schools go on to further education at fee charging 'continuation' schools 	A complaint was made by a manager (who happened to be the father of the Monitress) that she was not being sufficiently prepared for the Pupil Teacher examination at Huntingdon. An application was made in 1918 for this Monitress to take scholarship examinations in Needlework, Geography and History.

These are excerpts from the letter written by the Acting Clerk to the Education Committee to Rev. Powley (Correspondent) in March 1918 in response to the above mentioned complaint.

(KPC14/3367/2)

As regards the Monitress, the Head Teacher is responsible only for giving instruction in Penmanship, Needlework, Music, and a certain amount of Drawing; other subjects including Algebra and Geometry are taught at the Central Classes. In small Country Schools such as Covington we find that it is hardly possible to insist that a Monitress shall receive the full three half-days per week, and the matter must be left largely to the Head Teacher's discretion.

At the same time, it is open to the Monitress, or her parents, to make a complaint to the Committee if it is felt that the instruction is insufficient or unsatisfactory and they would give the same careful consideration, and would take the circumstances into account in determining whether the special grant payable to the Head Teacher for instructing the Monitress should be paid or withheld.

Curriculum

Despite the children having apparently attended 'Dame' schools in the village, the initial observation of the Mistress in November 1876 was that she *found them very wild and backward. A few of the elder ones had a fair knowledge of reading. Not one had the least notion of Arithmetic.* However, the first Inspector's report received in March 1878 recorded: *The order is excellent; the*

In 1883, set reading books for each Standard were listed as follows:

Standard I & II	Royal Readers, School Board Readers
Standard III	Royal Readers, School Board Readers, Phillips Historical Readers
Standard IV	Royal Readers, Collins School Series, Phillips Historical Readers
Standard V	Royal Readers, Standard Authors Readers, Phillips Historical Readers

results of the examination are most creditable. HMI reports were not always so glowing: Well behaved. Fairly effective teaching. Higher Principal Grant and Grant under Article 105 of the Code will not be recommended next year unless great improvement. (15 March 1902).

The Elementary School curriculum was based on reading, writing and arithmetic, with the

addition, in 1875, of Class subjects: grammar, geography, history and needlework – *1 April 1896 Standard V garments now cut out; 2 May 1898 Began garment and 15 July 1898 First garment finished.* Drawing was included for the boys from 1880. From 1882 teachers were allowed to choose a subject in which they had expertise for whole class examination. Up until February 1900, the chosen subject was English (Literature), but the then Mistress, Elizabeth Taylor, decided that she preferred to teach geography. The Log Book also records much focus on scripture, recitation and singing, including an insight into the children's music education: *16 February 1894 Started manual signs for singing by note; 8 May 1899 Received a 'modulator' for teaching Tonic sol fa.* Singing and recitation were an important part of the curriculum from the opening of the school. Poems chosen for recitation each year fully reflected the Victorian obsession with melodrama! 'The Wreck of the Hesperus', 'Little Jim', 'Llewellyn and his Dog', 'Mary Queen of Scots' and Scott's 'Lady of the Lake' featured in several year-plans. In 1883, Standard I were to learn 'The Gleaner' (the cornfield as a metaphor for death), and, in 1884, Standard I were allocated 'A Child's First Grief' by Felicia Hemans.

February 1896 Object Lessons for Infants and Lower Standards

I Plant Life

1. The mustard plant (grown in school)
2. The carrot
3. Climbing stems (note directions in which various plants twine)
4. Leaves (shape, veining, arrangement)

II Animal Life

1. The horse
2. The rabbit
3. The garden snail
4. The earthworm
5. The frog

III The Sky

1. Sunrise, noon and sunset
2. Shadow
3. The moon (its changes)
4. The constellations following: Great Bear and Pole Star, Orion, Cassiopeia, The Pleiades
5. Jupiter and Venus
6. Varying length of day and night
7. Clouds (three chief kinds 'heaps', 'beds', 'feathers')

IV The Surface of the Earth

1. Soils: clay (clay-pits in neighbourhood), sand, chalk, granite (used here in mending roads)
2. Hard and soft water
3. Vegetable mould and earth-worms
4. Garden produce compared with wild ditto as plum with sloes etc
5. Salt

V Country Sights

1. The daisy, violet and bluebell
2. A field 'laid' for hay
3. A pond

VI Science of Common Things

Water

1. How carried: jugs, bottles etc.
2. Things that float and things that sink

Solids

1. Hard and soft articles in the room (clothing, desks)
2. Things porous (bread, sponge) and things that dissolve (sugar and salt)
3. Air. Taught by illustrations – bubbles, a burning candle, fans, blowing feathers, pouring water into an empty jug.
4. Things that stretch and things that bend

Poetical Extracts

'Lady Clare' – Standards IV and V

'Lines written in March' – Standard V

'Little Jim' – Standards II and III

'Pussy's Mistake' – Standard I and Infants

'How to Learn a Lesson' – Standard I and Infants

Varied Occupations

Singing, recitations and drill

Infants also fraying and stick laying

Class Subject

English B

The concept of a different curriculum for Infants was already established by the time Covington School opened and was reinforced by the Mundella Code of 1882. This Code, unusually, was based upon the contributions of practising teachers rather than those of educational and political theorists. Object (*collective*) lessons began to appear by November 1884 – *gave a lesson on a horse on Tuesday afternoon and upon a tree on Thursday to the infants*. In 1885, the following *Infant collective lessons* were planned: *form, colour, gold, silver, brass, copper, iron, glass, carpenter, post office, cow, bear, dog, sheep, pigeon, hen, whale, raven, monkey, bee and beehive, soap, barley, wheat, cotton, salt, wool, fir tree, walnut tree and a shop*. The influence of Froebel percolated through even to Covington and here Infants benefitted from the ‘Occupations’ of fraying and stick-laying although, in 1900, the Inspector considered *Varied Occupations for Infants* to be *meagre*. Froebel coined the term ‘Kindergarten’ and this too appears in the Covington School Log Book: *13 October 1897 Received...large board ruled in squares for Kindergarten...*

Mistress Emily Flack used the Log Book to record some of her teaching methods and her efforts to keep up-to-date. She followed *word-building* lessons from the publication ‘School Mistress’ and a *daily home lesson in spelling* was introduced in October 1893. In November that year, she *began teaching a Christmas carol during RI*. She *gave a number lesson illustrated with haricot beans and used bags of small slate pencils in 10s and 100s to teach Standard I subtraction*. Infants and Standard I *counted out old stamps into tens and hundreds*. The standard of arithmetic was, as ever, a concern: *Took I, II, III together in very simple mental calculation to excite the elder children to rapidity the youngest being very quick*. Mistress Flack encouraged children with ‘good’, ‘fair’ marks for each lesson and gave *tiny floral cards to twelve children who had made ten attendances*. She recorded her appreciation of the children’s efforts: *Children show unexpected satisfaction and intelligence in constructing sentences*. The Inspector noted the difference Mistress Flack was making, commenting in February 1896 that the *school was conducted with considerable zeal*.

A Headteacher arriving in 1915 found there was *no apparatus for modern teaching, particularly for the Infants* and that the standard of arithmetic, composition and writing was very poor – *everything too mechanical*. The following table lists some of the school equipment for learning requested or received up until closure in 1920.

December 1888 School Songs:

Little White Lily
The Violet
Angry Words
The Summer’s Departed
Gloomy Looks The Sky
The North Wind Doth Blow
Lazy Sheep
God Save the Queen

<i>Date</i>	<i>Equipment required or received</i>
March 1885	Library books given out to children for the first time
March 1889	Reading books need rebinding
March 1890	New natural history books required
March 1891	Reading books and reading sheets for infants required
August 1891	Received drawing materials and reading books and sheets for infants
October 1893	New arithmetic and grammar books
April 1894	New map of Europe supplied and hung up
April 1894	Using 'word-building' lessons from the 'School Mistress'
February 1895	Scraps brought in by Miss E. Flintham for 'fraying'
July 1895	New bibles, a few reading books and <i>other school apparatus</i> supplied
October 1897	<i>New easel with map slide, large board ruled in squares for Kindergarten and slates also ruled</i>
October 1897	<i>Received nice cabinet of specimens of mustard, starch etc. from Messrs J and J Coleman, supplied gratis and carriage paid</i>
November 1897	<i>Received specimens of cocoa and pictures from Messrs Fry and Sons</i>
February 1898	Suitable illustrations for object lessons required without delay
April 1898	Received Blackie's Object Lesson sheets
April 1899	Received books, slates, pencils, pens, foolscap and blotting paper, needlework material
May 1899	Received a 'modulator' for teaching Tonic sol fa, also arithmetic books
December 1899	Received foolscap, box of slate pencils, box of chalk, box of pens, 6 drawing books, jar of ink, 6 penholders
February 1900	Thermometer and geographical reading books required
March 1900	New map of England and Wales is required
July 1904	New map of Europe, additional pictures, cupboard for books required
February 1907	Books on Temperance and Hygiene recommended
Sept. 1915	<i>No apparatus for modern teaching present</i>
November 1915	Received requisition from Education Supply Association
February 1916	Goods received from Kimbolton Station

Community Involvement

Occasionally the school reflected events on a national scale, for example, in December 1916, Mrs. Barnett (Major Barnett having been killed one year before) *brought wool for the children to knit articles for soldiers*. In May that year, to celebrate Empire Day, the children had a half day holiday which they spent giving a *demonstration entitled 'Allies in Arms'*. *The entertainment was opened by Mrs. Wade [from Dean] (Col. Wade was on active service) and Rev. Pauley. Some wounded soldiers were present. Children were given tea on the Rectory lawn. There was a Red Cross tea for adults and the proceeds of £2 were given to Kimbolton Red Cross hospital.* For one week in March 1895 (also in 1894), lessons were rearranged so the children could be dismissed at 1pm and the schoolroom used for nursing lectures for four afternoons.

Concerts given by the children

22 December 1893
After school, children drilled, recited and sang carols. The Rev. and Mrs. Heaton and their children, Mrs. and Misses Flintham, Miss Barber and the children's relatives present.

Christmas holidays often started with an afternoon of carols and recitations.

29 December 1915
Concert given by school children – raised 35/- towards a piano for the school.

Photographs

April 1898 – *Children photographed just before afternoon school.*

It may come as a surprise to know that one Mistress had two non-English speaking children in the school. In 1915, two Belgian girls, daughters of a farm-worker, joined the school. The older child left, then returned in October 1916 -...*English so small has to be in the Lower Division.* Both girls left for Letchworth in December 1916. Scholars in 1883 also experienced continental visitors: A Mr. Baur (apparently lodging with the Rev. Watson) visited the school on many occasions in October and November, and was joined in his visits by a Mr. Hurlimann in

December. Mr. Hurlimann continued to visit and deliver scripture lessons well into the New Year, when he was succeeded by a Rev. G. Binetich.

Visitors

Visitors to the school, of which there were many, can be divided by purpose into 'casual', 'assisting' and 'official'. Casual visitors included relatives of the Mistress: In 1878, Miss K Baseley came and taught the children a new song, and, ten days later, Mrs. Baseley visited. In 1895, the Mistress's sister visited. In 1893, Miss E. Flintham and Miss H. Flintham (daughters of Mr. Flintham of Hall Farm) visited. Miss Coleman dropped in to see musical drill.

Chairmen of the School Board/Chief Managers

1876 – Rev. R. L. Watson

1891 – Rev. George F. Watson/ Mr. John Barber

1893 – Rev. A. F. Heaton (Rector)

1910 – Major Carew Barnett

1914 – Rev. A. T. Pauley (Rector)

1920– Mr. W. Brown became 'Correspondent' as Chairman of the Parish Meeting

... and their presents!

4 October 1878 Rev. Watson visited and, it being his birthday, the Mistress and scholars presented him with a bible.

23 December 1901 Rev. Heaton visited and distributed presents to teacher and children.

24 December 1902 Rev. Heaton gave books to Mistress and children.

21 December 1906 Rev. Heaton distributed to the scholars and teacher a nice book each and other toys.

23 December 1909 Rev. Heaton visited and presented to teacher and children exceedingly nice books which were thankfully appreciated by all.

23 December 1910 Major Barnett visited and gave three prizes among eleven children for the best written paper on English History.

22 December 1911 Major Barnett kindly gave two nice books as prizes.

24 December 1912 Major Barnett, Mrs. and Miss Barnett came and gave two nice books as prizes.

24 December 1913 Major Barnett and Miss Dorothy Barnett visited and gave two books as prizes for the best readers.

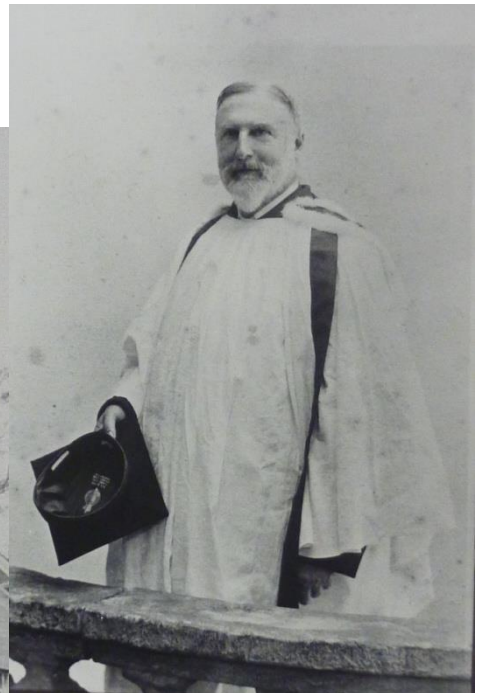
Over the years, the Mistress received assistance from all sorts of people connected with the school. Throughout the remainder of his life, the Rev. Watson took classes several times a week – these could be singing, scripture, arithmetic or reading. He also 'tested the registers' every few weeks and usually found them to be accurate. The Rev. Watson's visits were almost daily in the weeks leading up to the annual examination of the school by the inspector as he tested arithmetic and other subjects. His son took over these duties from 1891: Rev. George Watson brought the pictures and gave the First Class a grammar lesson. In 1882, the Rev. Watson and/or members of his family visited the school on sixty-one occasions. Miss Watson was a very frequent visitor for many, many years: In August 1908, Miss Watson visited each day this week and took a class

and, from about 1910, she visited the school every year in the last few days before the harvest holidays to give each scholar a packet of sweets. There are records of her visiting right up to 1916. The Rev. Watson was chairman of the Board and his successors in that role of course also provided valuable support. The Rev. Heaton visited the school for the first time in 1893. In 1896, he *brought walnuts to be divided after school hours*. The Rev. Heaton sometimes brought additional visitors with him, such as Lady Muir (1899), Archdeacon Vesey and the Rev. Sharland (1909). He regularly checked the registers and took classes, up to several times a week, until he became ill in February 1910. In December 1898, a F. Brayley Esq. visited the school. He *spoke very nicely to the children and presented money and other gifts for Christmas*. It is not known who this gentleman was or what his connection was with the school. The children may not have been quite so excited when Mrs. Whitehead (involved with property ownership in the village) *called in with pictures for the school walls* in October 1915!

The frequency of official visitors increased over the lifetime of Covington School as education and the care of children became more centrally regulated. The first record of a visit by an inspector is in February 1878. Thereafter, there was an annual visit, usually in January or February, and it was on the results of this Examination that the amount of grant to be paid was decided. From 1897, another inspection took place at other times in the year – this was under Article 84(b) and involved visits by sub-inspectors (who were high level teachers) to give advice or test individuals to see if they had reached the required Standard to be given a Labour Certificate and be exempted from schooling. Sub-inspector Fishwick recommended some *books on Temperance and Hygiene for Upper Division children* in 1907 and, in October 1911, he *gave good advice and recommended useful hints*. In later years, Huntingdonshire Education Committee sent an inspector: *Huntingdonshire County Council Inspector examined times tables and children's work* (1916). In October 1903, Frank Fortescue, School Attendance Officer, called to enquire about absentees. The attendance officer visited almost monthly from then on. As mentioned above, the first recorded visit by the Sanitary Inspector occurred in 1894. In November 1912, the School Medical Examiner *visited and examined one boy* and in May 1915 *Lady Doctor visited and examined four scholars in the schoolroom*. Several other visits of SMOs are mentioned. The report issued following one of these visits in 1916 stated: *AS – vermin in head, WJ – v bad boots and stockings, TS – enlarged tonsils and adenoids*. [The 1930s Minutes of Huntingdonshire Education Committee contain discussions about the high

incidence of 'verminous heads' and the provision of boots and clothing to children in need.]

Representatives of Huntingdonshire Education Committee sometimes travelled out to their most westerly school: *7 October 1915 Huntingdon County Inspector did stock take of books and noticed spouting and tiles in need of repair.* S. G. Cook Esq., Clerk to the Committee in Huntingdon, presented himself at the school in 1912 and again in 1915. In the last few years of the school's existence, there was a flurry of visits from the Education Committee architect, sanitary inspectors, builders and plumbers in order to rectify the decaying and outdated fabric and fittings of the school.



The Rev. A. F. Heaton succeeded Watson as Rector and as Chief Manager, positions he held until his death in 1911. He and his wife, pictured here in the front garden of the rectory, were frequent visitors to the school. Heaton visited at least once a week, examining the children, testing the registers and taking lessons e.g. arithmetic. (KPH19/10, KPH19/9)

Closure

A letter from S. G. Cook, Clerk to Huntingdonshire Education Committee, reveals that plans to close the school were put in motion in April 1920, although closure was initially suggested a year previously. The Managers were urgently required to consider a proposal to close the school from August so that the Headteacher could be given the required notice and then reappointed to the vacancy at Keyston (caused by the retirement of the Headteacher there) prior to the start of the autumn term. There were only four children on roll and one of them technically lived in Hargrave and another was below the compulsory school admission age. Despite pleas from Rev. Pauley, the Council refused to provide any transport for the children who would now have to attend Tilbrook School. The Rev. Pauley handed over the role of Correspondent to William Brown, who was also Chairman of the Parish Meeting. When the school closed, the village was given permission to rent the premises for a variety of uses. The grass from the playground had been sold since at least 1916 for an annual charge of 7/6 for herbage and this continued. Parish Meetings were held in the schoolroom. There were other annual lettings, for example for concerts, for Women's Institute gatherings and for Club dinners. (Labourers paid a small amount of their weekly wages into the 'Club' which then provided support if they had to be off work or lost their job. The surplus at the end of each year was spent on a Club dinner for all contributors.) Lettings over the period also included for dances, clothing sales, whist drives and, in 1921, for a political meeting. The Committee still paid for repairs to the schoolroom, for example a leak in the roof in 1922, and for a nominal caretaker. In 1920, William Brown handed over to the County Council the original conveyance of land from the Duke of Manchester to Covington School Board in 1875. (Note: Despite several enquiries over the years, this conveyance has not been found.)

Concert	2-0
Playground to Council	10-0
Clothing sale	5-0
Club Dinner	2-6
Women's Institute	2-6
	<hr/>
	1-2-0
Ans: Miss Taylor (caretaker)	5-0
	<hr/>
	17-0

Paid Jan 14/21

Nº 3349

HUNTS. COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY ACCOUNTANTS' OFFICE,
HUNTINGDON.

15 JAN 1925 192

Received of 12/- 11/- Pounds

the sum of Twelve shillings for Hire of room Covington School.

£0-12-0

County Accountant.

Rents collected in 1924
(KPC14/3367/2)

As mentioned above, children from Covington had to make their own way to Tilbrook School, the Education Committee maintaining that they were no worse off than other children in the county. This decision was reversed, however, in March 1936 when Mr. A.G. Facer of Keyston obtained the contract to convey children from Covington to Tilbrook in his impressive American Chrysler taxi – complete with ‘wooden spoke wheels, running boards and a top speed of not much but it sure beat Shanks’s pony of not many years previous’ (Bill Barley reminiscence). Keyston School was about to close and children from there were to be ‘conveyed’ to Bythorn. Covington parents heard about the proposal and submitted a petition that ‘proper provision should be made for their children to attend school’. This nearly backfired as the Committee considered that such ‘conveyance’ might start at Covington with children from the village joining those from Keyston in attending Bythorn School. In the event, this did not happen and Mr. Facer obtained contracts for both journeys. During the latter war years, Robinsons supplied an Austin 8 or 12 which carried about six children.



Village children learnt to swim in Covington Swimming Pool, otherwise known as Severals Pond.

World War II

(Reminiscence quotations in italics.)

The Education Committee met on 26 October 1938 having been given one week's preparation for the possible billeting in Huntingdonshire, at only a few hours' notice, of 15,000 London children. Luckily, the crisis passed but the Committee thought it prudent a few months later to draw up plans for an influx of evacuees. By 18 September 1939, the children had arrived. The WI was put in charge of finding them homes. A bus-load arrived in Covington to be distributed throughout the village.

I clearly remember a bus parked opposite the Red Cow and all these children alighting to outnumber us by quite a lot. On reflection, this was a sorry sight - children taken from their homes and families, each carrying a few possessions as best they could. Each with a gas mask in a cardboard box carried around their necks with a length of string and an ID tag pinned to their clothes. They were ushered into the school and the house next door to me [No. 10 Cross Street]. This house had only just been built, like mine, but was not yet occupied. After assembly, each household was compulsorily allocated children according to their sleeping arrangements. A minimum of one was expected, in our case, with rooms at Ferndale, we were given five.

Bill Barley reminiscence

In November 1939, authority was given for repairs to the school building and 're-decoration to be carried out at this little school on its reopening for the admission of children. The cost has

We had two girls, but after being there a while, one mother fetched her girl back. Then there was a boy and his mother. I still hear from Joan and Ray.

Dawn Manciocchi reminiscence

been limited to £20' (Education Committee Minutes). Six dual tables and fourteen chairs were also supplied and the path was re-gravelled. By November 1940, there were 4,595 evacuee children in Huntingdonshire but, by April 1942, this had reduced to 2,136 (out of a total elementary school population of 9,141). Despite the reduction in evacuees in the village, in March 1942 it was decided to keep Covington School open. In November 1942, a cleaner for the schoolroom is employed on a salary of £14-12-0d and

her husband taken on separately to clean the 'offices' (toilets) on a salary of £5-4-0d. It is a note alongside the listing of the termination of the cleaner's contract in June 1943 that gives the only evidence for the school's final closure, on 30 April 1943. More evacuees arrived in Covington in 1944 as a result of

the V2 attacks on London (the elementary population of Huntingdonshire increased by a quarter during this time), but children were transported to Tilbrook School. Tony Wood, a Covington evacuee arriving in 1944, remembered being disappointed at only getting to one Christmas party hosted for local children by the Americans at Kimbolton Airfield, the highlights being fruit juices in American Army issue cans and 'so many sweets'.



Mothers from London standing against Clay Pits gate in 1944. Tony Wood is the boy on the right.

When the evacuees came, it was planned that schools be closed for a fortnight to allow them to settle in. However, it was soon realised that the children needed to be in school to keep them out of mischief so this idea was scrapped by 11 September. The Christmas holidays were shortened to five days, 22-27 December, for the same reason and also to prevent the evacuees going back home. Another plan which soon had to be modified was the double shift arrangement where local children would attend in the mornings and evacuees in the afternoons. This proved far too complicated for families to manage so children attended alternate days instead. Initial advice regarding air raids was that children in rural areas should stay inside the school building as there was only a remote chance of it being hit, but with the proviso that, if parents objected, they could dig trenches in the grounds. This was swiftly changed to the sending home of any children living locally.

There is very little documentary information about what it was like to be at school in Covington during the war years and no log books, minutes or registers have been found. One local pupil remembered that the clock was over the fireplace and there being fifteen or sixteen children at the school. Another recollected that there was mostly one teacher, *although for a period we had another. She was the daughter-in-law of Mr. Bailey who stayed for a time with her son and father-in-law at No. 10.....the lady I refer to be Mrs.*

One day while we were working [outside in the vegetable garden], it would be the early days of the war, Ben Brown gave us a low flying display in a yellow Tiger Moth. Ben would have been in his early days of RAF training and I suppose drifted off course a bit to visit his old home. If it was a bit unofficial, I hope he did not get into trouble. It gave us a few minutes of excitement.

Bill Barley reminiscence

Morsby. I cannot recall if she was a fully qualified teacher or not but she did help at the school. Sometimes a screen would be put across the middle of the room to make two classes (to be frank a bit of a joke). This former pupil particularly objected to the high Victorian windows, designed to let light in but not to allow children to be distracted by looking out. He described the girls' and boys' toilets as being little changed too: The girls' room had its original doors from 1876. There was a wooden box arrangement, with a lid concealing the seat, and one small bucket. The boys' room had an external urinal on the east end corner. There was a six foot wall forming a square to the school, no roof and south facing open for all to see.



The girls' lavatory prior to removal in 1993. This was situated at the western end of the main building. The boy's 'offices' were situated at the eastern end. Unusually, there was a single entrance to the school for both boys and girls.

The rear of the school was turned into a vegetable garden as part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. There was a path right down the middle and plots and paths off both sides all the way down. *I remember this had been a playground for a long time and, as we made the vegetable plots, we had to clear barrow and bucket loads of stones.* Despite losing the rear playground, the children could still run round the school as a narrow strip was left. The front was covered in gravel. On the west end of the roof, there was a wooden structure which housed the bell. It was a favourite past-time throughout the lifetime of the bell in this position to fire stones at the bell with catapults and make it ring.

It was during the war that Huntingdonshire began to take on 'communal feeding' –in other words school dinners. Although needy and undernourished children in other areas had been receiving meals for some time, Huntingdonshire Education Committee was very resistant, stating (in June 1941) that most people had a hot meal in the evening anyway and that provision should be made for feeding the whole population, not just the children. One year later, school meals were being planned, with fourteen central kitchens, eleven vans and three motor cycles to carry out delivery. Areas targeted were Fletton and Needingworth, with no mention of the west of the county. Interestingly, the Committee was informed that 'a small scheme for the supply of hot school dinners at a very cheap rate has been in operation for some time at Great Staughton Council School and the Headteacher has been meeting the 10/- cost of preparation' (Education Committee Minutes 24 June 1941). The Education Committee resolved to reimburse the Headteacher with immediate effect. Free milk was available to 163 'undernourished' children in June 1938, with the parents of other children paying for it. Only 50% of the elementary school population had milk. In fifty schools, the milk was fresh, the rest having to make do with dried or condensed because of problems with supply and disposal.

The end of the elementary school system came with the 1944 Education Act. Schools became 'Primary' Schools and the school leaving age was finally raised to 15 (not put into effect until after the end of WW2) and then to 16. Covington children attending Tilbrook were placed in the St. Neots area for secondary education. Even the school year finally left behind its Victorian structure when, in May 1946, Ministry of Education decreed that it should end at the midsummer holidays. The schools originally set up to serve the needs of the rural poor now followed an annual cycle little related to the customs, culture and environment in which they are situated.

Conclusion

And what of Covington School today? It has a new lease of life as the centre of village activities – not just for children but for the whole community. It was the village community that came together to renovate, extend and adapt the building to be a meeting place, a place for celebrations, fund-raising and entertainment, and somewhere for people to learn new skills or share old ones – just as in the Rev. Watson's time 140 years ago.

Film Evening – Fireworks - Quiz Night – Gardeners' Question Time – Social Club

First Aid – Food Hygiene – Amenities Committee – History Group – Card Making – Pilates



Parish Meeting – Polling station – Book Group – Harvest Festival – Macmillan Walk & Tea

Archaeology – Dinners – Christmas Party – Talks – Reunion – Hand Bells - Quilts

Sources

Original documents, all available at Huntingdonshire Archives:

Covington School Log Book 1876-1917 (KPC14/191A/1)
Managers Minute Book (KPC14/3367/1)
School Correspondence 1916-1926 (KPC14/3367/2)
Covington School Rent Receipts (KPC14/3367/3)
Covington Parish Council Minute Book 1894-1932 (KPC14/2676/1)
Hunts. Education Minute Book No. 7 26.6.35 – 8.4.42 (CC2/M4/1/10)
Hunts. Education Minute Book No. 8 24.6.42 - 9.10.45 (CC2/M4/1/11)
Correspondence in The Manchester Collection (DDM51C/7/1)
Vestry Minutes 1911-1965 (KHP18/8/5/1)
Kelly's Directory for Huntingdonshire 1854, 1869, 1877
Census 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911

Secondary sources:

Education in England: a brief history, Derek Gillard,
(<http://www.educationengland.org.uk>)

Reminiscences and other contributions:

Bill Barley
Dawn Manciocchi
Tony and Cliff Wood
Kate Day-Dawson
Richard Brown
John Turrell
Linda Lockhart

Acknowledgements

Members of Covington History Group, who helped with transcription
Peter Sewell, Linda Lockhart and Simon Parsons, reviewers
Huntingdonshire Archives, who kindly gave permission for the inclusion of
photographs of original documents
John Turrell, Cliff Wood, Richard Brown, Doris Barley, who provided
photographs

All enquiries about this publication should be directed to history@covington.org.uk

© Covington History Group 2016

www.covington.org.uk

Printed by Lockwood Lithographics, Kimbolton