

THORPE MANDEVILLE SCHOOL

Maurice Cole

'I shut the door of this little school with much sadness...'

The print depicting kings and queens of England had been hanging in Thorpe Mandeville village hall for many years. However, its state of decay eventually necessitated its demise. This led to a discovery, reminding us that the building had been the village school for over a century. The backing paper to the print was the original school timetable for 1921. It had been formally signed as approved by the Northamptonshire Local Education Authority and counter-signed, on behalf of the Board of Education, as fulfilling the requirements of the Elementary Education Act, 1870.

The school was Church of England endowed and religion clearly formed a material part of the curriculum. In 1921, morning attendance registers were marked at 9am, and closed at 9.45am. During this period prayers were said, followed by religious instruction. Grace was said on dismissal for the lunch break and again when school reconvened at 1.30pm. School finished at 4pm with closing prayers. Religious instruction for the juniors totalled two and a half hours each week, compared with just over three hours for arithmetic, five and a half hours for English writing, reading and recitation, and one hour each for history and geography. Needlework was allotted two hours and music slightly less; the school had a harmonium at that time. Physical recreation and games occupied one and a half hours.

Thorpe's population has rarely exceeded 200 and therefore the number of children has always been small. There was resultant difficulty for village schooling to meet the educational needs of all age groups.

It is not clear how education was first established in the parish. Perhaps informal schooling initially came from the rector. From 1536 parishes were required to provide basic reading lessons and religious instruction to all children. This was often provided by the clergy, and in the church.

During the 1600s and 1700s the nation's schooling was primarily fee-paying in private schools and the lower working classes were thereby excluded, not forgetting the cost from the loss of a child's labour. But schooling was increasingly provided to the poor by philanthropists and the expanding charity schools in the larger conurbations. Many children still received a very limited education, often only from family, friends and their own endeavours. Even in 1810 the position had not materially improved; the