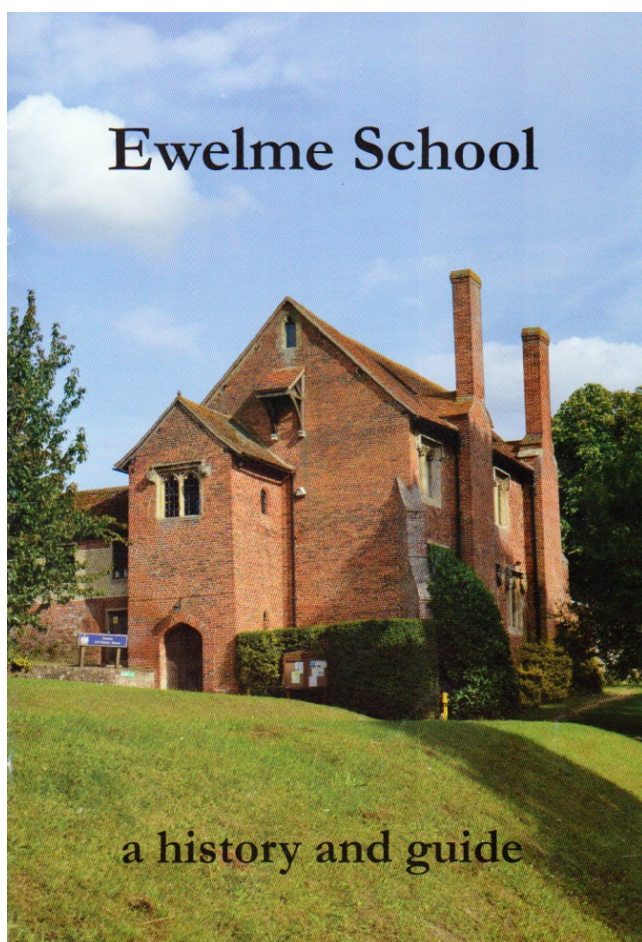


Ewelme School in the 20th Century

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A new booklet '*Ewelme School - History and Guide*' was presented to the Friends of Ewelme School. Local Historian Dr Kate Tiller very generously gave her time in writing and producing this booklet as her personal dedication to the memory of the late George Cannon, headmaster from 1971 to 1986. The Village Archive was able to provide information to Dr Tiller, much of it from George's own research; and the Headmaster's Log Book from 1920-1953, found in his papers, was hurriedly précised for her use.



The Logs give a glimpse into the daily activities of the School. The earliest was kept by long serving William Herman (headmaster from 1889 to 1924). His humdrum, brief entries began in 1908 recording the frequent visits of Dr Birch from Dorchester and the Nit Nurse, checking for 'dirty heads' and other 'verminous conditions'. Also recorded were severe outbreaks of colds and influenza and the contagious childhood diseases which closed the school for weeks; plus impetigo and ringworm that kept individual children away. There was a 7 week prolonged summer 'holiday' in September 1909, due to the late harvest keeping the children occupied. In March 1910 an unfamiliar visitor - "HM Inspector brought Mr Carr, Chief Inspector of Nigeria to the school. Children very interested, never having seen an African before."

(Unfortunately, there is a gap in the Log during the War period 1914-1918). Two boys were ignominiously sent home – Thomas Drewett on March 11th 1921 because "he had fallen into the brook", and a year later Herbert Webb for "insubordination."

There was an annual day's holiday at the end of September to attend the Wallingford Fair; and school always closed - even for minor Royal events - as on February 28th 1922 "For Princess Mary's wedding day", and for a reason unexplained on April 26th 1923 "...at the request of the King." On November 11th 1924 is the first mention of the children attending the Remembrance Service at the War Shrine.

Mr Herman retired on December 12th 1924 and his successor, 44 year old Robert Quixley took over on January 5th 1925 with 71 pupils attending. He had already served 23 years in the Army Education Corps, teaching 5 years in India, 1 year in Aden and at various Camps in England. After retiring from the Army, he was Head for a year at Aston Rowant School before applying for Ewelme. His bold, sloping hand recorded each working day of his 24 year tenure. Nicknamed 'Boss' Quixley he is remembered as a firm disciplinarian, and effectively coached children to pass the 11+ for Wallingford Grammar School.



Mr Herman with his class at Ewelme School

The common health afflictions continued to disturb the School's smooth running. On March 1st 1929 he recorded - "*Influenza and colds so prevalent only 6 [of the 86 pupils] attended. All teaching staff except the headmaster also away ill. Oxford ordered headmaster to carry on!*" Minnie Harris (nee Winfield) had joined the school as an assistant teacher in April 1922, (she became the first Almswoman appointed in her own right in 1976), but she and 'The Boss' Quixley enjoyed a volatile relationship with several spats recorded. On October 14th 1932 he wrote - "*Had to speak to Mrs Harris as Winnie Justins fell off a desk in the playground and she made no attempt to attend to her. I had to attend to the child and Mrs Harris said she wasn't hurt and in any case, it was her own fault.*"

Mr Quixley proved a capable guide through the Second World War. The opening of RAF Benson brought more children from Service families billeted in the village. In January 1939 there were 51 local pupils, comfortably taught with the infants in the lower room and two classes in the upper room, divided by a central curtain. On April 5th the '*first influx*' of RAF pupils is recorded. By April 17th the roll had increased to 72 and a request was made for another teacher. In September, during the Phoney War period, the school had a huge influx of 51 children from London, the majority being from St Saviours C of E School, Paddington, and the remainder from West Ham. There were already 60 local pupils enrolled, so lack of space prevented the newcomers following Oxford's set curriculum. With one accompanying teacher. Mr Beal, they were kept outdoors on nature studies, country rambles, gardening, physical training and organised games – the fresh air and sunshine deemed '*more beneficial*'. Gradually the London children dispersed and attendance on April 1st 1940 was 50 local and 15 London pupils. Fortunately, on May 22nd the Billeting Authority ordered the remainder to leave for Garsington. Individual evacuees began to arrive that September, and throughout 1941 their numbers averaged 16 pupils. In 1942 the differentiation ceases and the entire roll is recorded as a manageable 65. The boys dug their own vegetable patch to support the War effort and were doubtless encouraged by a helpful visit on January 14th 1943 from Mr Moyes "...*who gave a lantern lecture on 'Garden Pests and Pruning*'."

An unexpected modern link materialised connected to the Log entry of May 3rd 1943. This recorded an intake of 5 new pupils including Reg Francis, a 5 yr old evacuee billeted at Goulds Grove, but who returned to London after only one term. Reg telephoned saying his memories of Ewelme were vague, apart from the long walk to school and watching a diverted Squadron of battle-damaged American B-17 Bombers limping into RAF Benson – a moving experience also recorded by Mr Quixley's son

Bob. Archive documents concerning the school were emailed and Reg appreciatively replied – *“Suddenly I have an identity as a very young person that eluded me for so many years!”*



Mr Bob Quixley outside the School House

In January 1947 pupil numbers swelled to 89 as more RAF children arrived due to the building of married quarters. This trend continued, and Mr Quixley’s last entry was made on July 27th 1949 *“Attendance 81 out of 98, School broke up at midday.”* He ruled a thick red line under this entry and retired to Cornwall.

His successor was Mr David Jones. Almost all his entries deal with his perpetual struggle with lack of space and teachers to cope with pupil numbers – one day reaching 132! On September 12th 1949 he recorded the first use of the Annexe [Curates Stable] with 31 Infants crammed into its small downstairs room! On September 5th, 1951, the Middle Juniors started their classes in the Reading Room, but on September 15th had to vacate it, as it was Women’s Institute Day – *“...forcing lessons to be held in the open”* – thankfully in fine weather!

In 1952 Mr Jones records a deterioration in his relationship with the Rector regarding the school’s weekly church service which was frequently cancelled at the last minute, or the Rector would fail to turn up. On January 22nd Mr Jones complained that this was *“...a bad experience for the children.”* The Rector responded *“...by becoming abusive, swore at me and threatened violence. This in the church!”* Mr Jones immediately phoned Mr Tom Orpwood, a School Manager, to visit him to report the matter, but meanwhile the Rector arrived – *“...and came down to my class and just outside the door repeated each item complained about!”* The Rector left Ewelme shortly afterwards, enabling the resumption of harmonious relations between Church and School.

The Log ends when Mr Jones resigned in July 1953 with plans in discussion to reduce pupil numbers by building a school at RAF Benson. Mr Roger Coles arrived in the Autumn Term to lead the School into the new Elizabethan Age.

The Managers Minute Books covering 1903 to 1960 and the Minute Books for the Parent Teachers Assoc. from its formation in February 1951 to October 1958 has been deposited in Oxford County records for safe keeping and access for researchers.

Ewelme Village Archive