

## Education Since 1900

The 1902 Balfour Education Act attempted to transfer power from the church and school boards to local education authorities (LEAs), and to require them to establish secondary education. At the time there were 5,700 board schools, responsible for 2.6 million pupils, and 14,000 voluntary schools, with 3 million pupils. School boards were abolished. The LEA for Hook Norton was Oxfordshire County Council, which was a notably conservative (nay, feudal) body, with Viscount Valentia as its chairman at that time, followed later by the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Macclesfield of Shirburn Castle, who was chairman uninterruptedly from 1937-1970. Education became properly funded, and could now be coordinated nationally and standardised in ways not possible for the local boards and churches. The LEA raised school-leaving age to 14, but exemption was permitted for agricultural districts, including Hook Norton.

The LEAs built new schools, most often in expanding communities, and many secondary schools. The Banbury County School in Ruskin Road opened in 1930 for 360 pupils. Villages with long established National/Church schools gained only modest improvements. Their children tended to stay at the village primary school until school-leaving age, rather than progressing to a distant secondary school. Thus, Hook Norton's 1855 building was referred to as "The Mixed School".

In the early years of the new century, on Monday mornings, Hook Norton children had to take their penny to school, to be collected personally by the Rector, otherwise they could not attend school that week. Children from non-C of E families could opt out of religious instruction. But everyone had to sit, crammed together on hard benches in the dismal, cold schoolroom, to listen periodically to the head, Mr Clarkson, singing his favourite ballad: "I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls". (The teacher's inherent need to show off increases with seniority: the author recalls, during the Second World War, being summoned to the school hall to hear the Head playing, fortissimo, the Warsaw Concerto when the Russians won a battle.)



*High Rock, Sibford Road*

*Courtesy: Village Museum and Archive*

In 1918, at the end of the Great War, elementary education became completely free of charge, and opportunities for secondary and higher levels of education developed slowly. The school leaving age of 14 was enforced everywhere. The standard and status of teachers gradually improved. The enlarging middle class tended to shun elementary schools and use small private schools; there was one at “High Rock” on the Sibford Road and another at “Symnel” in the High Street.



*Symnel, High Street*

*Courtesy: Village Museum and Archive*

Most children attended the village school. At 8.30 the school bell could be heard throughout the village. There were neither accompanying parents nor cars; children with friends and siblings walked to school: girls with hoops or playing hopscotch, boys playing marbles, sometimes whipping tops. School started promptly at nine; lateness was not tolerated. After the morning session, the school was locked up, and the children went home for dinner. An hour later they had to be back. For most, this was the only school they would ever attend.

Before the 1939-1945 war, the proportion of English children gaining an education enabling them to attend university or any form of higher education was tiny compared with other industrialised countries. Such opportunities in country villages were smaller than in towns and cities, and were limited to the wealthy and upper middle-class.

### ***The Second World War***

On September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939 Germany invaded Poland. It was the first day of Mr Miller's headship at Hook Norton. Almost immediately he was ordered to prepare for the arrival of the boys from Dulwich College, South London, and to supervise their billeting. Shortly afterwards, the evacuees arrived - 130 girls from Barking, East London. They arrived on a Saturday and by Wednesday school lessons were in progress. Evacuated children continued to arrive, school numbers reached 460, more than three times the pre-war number; class sizes were great; and girls greatly outnumbered boys. Classrooms and facilities were organised in the Memorial Hall and adjacent huts, the pub clubrooms, the Wesleyan church, and in the Baptist Church Hall (which Oxfordshire LEA continued to use for several years after the war). The children came with six of their London teachers, women with new ideas and practices, which appealed to many village children. In the next year further groups of children from different parts of London arrived. By 1943 most of the early evacuees had returned home, but throughout the war there were sudden arrivals of others, and in 1944 at the time of the flying-bomb "Doodlebug" assault many young children arrived with their mothers from Kent. Refuge for them was created in the school-rooms; classes were suspended.



*Photographs from Hooky School Days*

During the war, the infants' section in the annex had 102 children aged from three to six, and two teachers. When the air raid siren sounded the children were out of the building, in outdoor clothing, within two minutes. From the main building, older children ran home, gas-masks dangling. After raid alerts at night, school started an hour later, but many children would be absent.

### ***The New Post-war System***

The “Butler” Education Act of 1944 organised schools as *primary or secondary* – no more “elementary”. Fees were abolished. It sought post-war opportunities for all children, using a tri-partite system of secondary schools: *Secondary Modern, Technical, and Grammar Schools*. Allocation to these schools was based on an examination: the “eleven-plus”.

### ***Grammar School***

The eleven-plus achieved much of the desired social mobility. For the first time, clever children from poor and less privileged homes could have, at grammar school, a free secondary education of quality rivalling that of expensive prestigious public schools. It enabled them to win scholarships to universities, and to gain senior positions in the professions, government, armed services and institutions. Britain's class-ridden hierarchy was changing: meritocracy was emerging. The two other arms of the tri-partite system were not successful; few good technical schools developed, and many secondary modern schools were seen as inferior or associated with failure. There was concern about the fairness of the eleven-plus exam, particularly since the pass rate to grammar school ranged from 10-45% across different LEAs, depending on the availability of teachers and school buildings.

The local Grammar School for Hook Norton was the former Banbury County School, now renamed *Banbury Grammar School*, and with over 600 pupils. Three to six Hook Norton children gained admission there each year, many during the headship of the outstanding educationalist Harry Judge. The standard of secondary education was high, but it was difficult for village children to participate in extracurricular activities in times of limited public transport and rare car ownership.

### ***Secondary Modern School***

Before the war Oxfordshire had provided little secondary education, so there were many claims for new secondary schools. In 1950 Hook Norton achieved one: a single story *Secondary Modern School* on the south side of The Bourne, now the area of Old School End. It was a large site of nearly four acres, bounded to the east by Watery Lane.

At first it was the smallest Secondary Modern school in Oxfordshire, accommodating between 120 and 130 pupils. Some went through the school in classes of only 12 to 15 pupils. As it developed, taking children from surrounding villages as distant as Shutford and Great Tew, numbers doubled. It was a HORSAs school (Hutted Operation for Raising the School-leaving Age). The buildings used a



*Hook Norton Secondary Modern School,  
looking westward along The Bourne.*

Photograph by Packer.

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wartime construction technique of pre-cast concrete frame with a pitched roof. The four huts, around a quadrangle included a hall, six classrooms (later eight), and a canteen; heating came from three coke boilers. As the village had neither sewage system nor mains water, a water tower and septic tank were necessary; the septic tank was pumped out once a week. The staff comprised the new head, Mr Goddard, four female and two male teachers.

Buildings of the early 1950s rarely achieved popularity or longevity. The school closed twenty-one years later. It had been a school typical of its time; physical punishment had been the norm: boys caned for going into the girls' playground or for lying. Its newness, cleanliness, the school-kitchens and dinners, and the school garden and pond, now the site of D'Oily Close and adjacent bungalows, were appreciated; and the spaciousness envied. But the Secondary Modern vision of broad education free of competitive examination was not sustainable.



*Hook Norton Secondary Modern School*

*Courtesy: Village Museum and Archive*

### ***Comprehensive School***

In 1971 Oxfordshire adopted a system of Comprehensive Schools, which accepted children of all faiths without prior test or assessment of ability. The demise of grammar schools was mourned by the minority who had benefited from their happy combination of privilege and opportunity; but for most children there would be better education. For most grammar schools, the immediate challenge was that of changing from a boys' or girls' school to a mixed school. For Hook Norton's older children it was the end of an age when they could walk to school.

*Chipping Norton Grammar School* did not have the academic pretensions of Banbury Grammar School, and this enabled it to merge successfully with its Secondary Modern school to become comprehensive. Ambitious and thoughtful planning led to the development of a large attractive campus on the Burford Road, now able to accommodate 1,100 pupils aged between eleven and eighteen.

The school leaving age was raised to 15 in 1947. Though secondary schooling improved greatly after the war, in the 1960s most children still left school at

the age of 15 to work. Only 12% of 17 year-olds were at school. In 1972 the school leaving age was raised to 16.

### ***New Village Primary School***

In 1957 the village school opened an extension on the site of the village playground. That study centre had two rooms for infant classes. School uniform was introduced on an optional basis. In 1971 the school moved from the High Street to the former secondary modern school on The Bourne, with the expectation of moving to a new purpose-built school within a few years. Because the move was to be temporary, very little money was made available for conversion to a primary school; a grant of £50 is remembered. However, government economies, disputes about the most appropriate site - The Bourne or the Sibford Road- and planning and funding delays led to a very long stay.



*The new Hook Norton Primary School, opened 1993*

[Photograph from school website](#)

In 1980 about half the pupils were children of parents who themselves had been brought up in Hook Norton. Numbers increased as schools in neighbouring villages closed. After thirteen years and many battles to secure a new school for the village, the Head Teacher, Andrew Bowen, saw the final move to the purpose-built premises on the Sibford Road in 1993. Throughout its first 140 years there had been 16 head teachers, all of them men. Change lay ahead.



*Hook Norton Primary School*

Photograph from school website

Nowadays, children must start school in the academic year in which they reach the age of five; many start earlier. *Hook Norton Church of England Primary School* accepts children aged three to eleven. It has about 220 pupils, including two classes of infants. The staff comprises the Head Teacher, eight teachers and many support staff. It is a voluntary controlled C of E school, which means that the Education Authority provides staff and funding, and though Christianity is the ethos, religious education includes that of other faiths. The Church nominates two of the governors. Unlike Victorian times, the Rector is not *ex-officio* Chairman of Governors; he does conduct one school assembly each week. The school catchment area is Hook Norton, Wigginton, Swerford and Milcombe. It is one of ten feeder schools for *Chipping Norton School*, to which most of the older children proceed and, since 2013, they have to stay at school or be in some form of formal training until they are 17.

### ***Fee-paying Schools***

Throughout England, opting out of local LEA education is becoming less common, particularly for young children. Eighty years ago children of the vicar or the doctor would have a governess or go to private school, often as a boarder; few would attend the village school. At secondary school level substantial numbers still opt out, attending private schools and public (boarding) schools; but the main change has been the trend to attend such boarding schools as day or weekly pupils. Some local

families use Sibford, Bloxham, and Tudor Hall (which lies between Bloxham and Banbury). The fees for non-boarders range from £4,000-7,500 per term. When children reside at boarding school, it is more likely to be one nearer home than was the case in the last century. Six hundred years ago two boys from Hook Norton were at Winchester College. Doing so now costs £11,000 per boy per term.

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### ***Further Reading***

Articles on Education, *Cake & Cockhorse*, vol. 7 (1976), pages 1-31.

M. Pickering, "Schooling Village Children in Edwardian England", *Cake & Cockhorse*, vol. 8 (1982), pages 232-240.

*Hook School Days, 1855-1993*, a booklet produced to celebrate the opening of the new primary school; a copy is in the Village Archive. It includes recollections of twentieth-century education.

### ***Other References***

"Schools", *The Victoria County History, Oxfordshire*, vol. 1, (1939), pages 457-490.

The Hook Norton Head-teachers' log-books, admission register and attendance records are in the Oxfordshire History Centre at Cowley, as collection S137/1; copies of much of that material are in the Village Archive.