

Charlton Mackrell CofE Primary School History

Education in The Charltons first began with Sunday Schools, but Church Daily Schools were started in both Charlton Mackrell and Charlton Adam in 1830. The school in Adam closed and an Infants School only was opened from 1865 until 1917.

In 1846, Charlton Mackrell School had 82 pupils of all ages, but only one room and a small house for the teacher. We don't know whether it was on this site or in the grounds of the Rectory, which is now called "The Court". The Rector was the Reverend William Thomas Parr Brymer, who began a complete restoration of the church in 1847. We believe he also planned the unique school building, designed by the architect C E Giles, which we still enjoy today. Certainly in 1846 he left money in his will to pay for the schoolteacher and other running costs of the school, as recorded on the brass plaque near the altar in Charlton Mackrell Church. After he died in August 1852, his brother James Snaith Brymer paid for this school building as a memorial to him and the recent restoration of the main schoolroom ceiling has revealed the commemorative inscription around the walls.

The first schoolteacher we know about was Miss Elizabeth Rooke, from London. She left early in 1853, perhaps due to the new school building. After her were schoolmasters, W. Jackson, W. Wrigley, and then William Tyler. William Tyler was the schoolmaster and the church organist for nearly 10 years from 1856. There were also paid pupil teachers and monitors, as well as a schoolmistress for the Infants class. The school's income was supplemented by subscriptions from the local gentry and 1d per week paid by each family.

Benjamin Thomas became the schoolmaster in May 1866 and his wife was the sewing mistress. Some pupils came from as far as Keinton, Babcary, Lydford and Ilchester, but he found that many things prevented the village children getting a proper education. A night school for men and older boys became very popular.

From 1870 onwards, local School Boards had to provide new elementary schools so that all children between the ages of 5 and 10 could attend school. For some time then, our school had only an Infants teacher and a Monitor and it was even closed for several months because no trained teacher could be found. Several stayed only a year, or less, and the number of pupils fell to 20, until Francis Harris became Master in November 1877. The new Rector, another of the Brymer family, supported him well and, even before education became compulsory in 1880, attendance rose to 80. However Francis Harris died suddenly and after several more difficult months was replaced by Samuel Stocks in September 1881. He had an interest in science and brought a more modern approach to the subjects taught in the school. The stone cross was blown off the south of the school roof on 1st November 1882. (Some of you will probably remember when the cross at the front of the school was blown down - 101 years, 1 month, 1 week and 1 day later....)

In 1883 Alfred Carey and his wife Amelia succeeded Samuel Stocks. During their 4 years at the school, it was described as excellent and the number of pupils rose to over 90. Frederick and Fanny Davies were the next Headmaster and sewing mistress and stayed nearly 4 years. In 1887, Susannah Gardner moved from Charlton Adam Infants School to be the Infants mistress. Next came William and Penelope Locke, but they stayed only a few months in the schoolhouse - perhaps country life did not suit many people!

Then, in April 1891, Edmund Butler arrived. He was only 24 years old and had just been to an Anglican teacher training college. His wife Charlotte was also a certificated teacher and later taught the Infants class as well as needlework. In September 1891, elementary education in our District of Somerset was made free. The Attendance Officer had to make sure that children attended school regularly and that none were illegally employed. This meant that by 1900 the school was very overcrowded - the Infants sat in a gallery, on tiered benches, which was removed in 1909 to free floor space for active exercises. There were then 84 older pupils in the main room, so in 1911 a new classroom and a new cloakroom were built at the back of the school. Edmund Butler retired after 36 years' service as Headmaster in 1927 and was presented with a handsome walking stick. He had guided the school from the Victorian era into the 20th century.

Mr Walter Long took charge of the school in July 1927 and moved into the schoolhouse with his wife and four children. He was an experienced teacher with a love of history and English traditions, but also very keen to bring the teaching up to date. The other teachers, Miss Copping and Miss Criddle, were sent to visit other schools for new ideas and the classrooms were made brighter and more interesting. In 1939, Mr Long was officially congratulated for the many original schemes he had introduced, but then the Second World War broke out and everything changed.... The school-leaving age was raised to 15; many evacuees arrived from London; and Mr Long was the first village ARP Warden too, organising gas masks and air raid drills. When the new Secondary School opened at Huish Episcopi in 1940, Charlton Mackrell became just a Primary School, so Miss Criddle had to move to another school and Mr Long retired.

Miss Ida Grant was the headmistress through most of the war, until Joan M Hughes took over in September 1944. Miss Eva Copping retired in 1947, having been a pupil at this school and then worked here for 53 years as a monitress and Infants teacher. Miss Criddle returned to the school to replace her. In 1949, Charlton Mackrell was renamed a Church of England Voluntarily Controlled School - as it is today. From 1952 to 1962, the headmistress was Miss Hampton, who became Mrs Cooper. During this time there were many improvements to the school buildings and more interesting activities and excursions were introduced. When Mrs Cooper left, so too did Miss May Criddle who first taught at the school at the end of the First World War. In January 1963, Miss Riley and Miss Smith came to be the new Head and Infants teacher. Despite a cold and frosty start, they stayed for 25 successful years and we are pleased that they remain in the village and continue to support our activities today.

We are sure the Victorians would be impressed by the dedication of our teachers in the 21st century and amazed by some of the things we learn, but they would definitely still recognise the wonderful village school they created.

The catchment area of our school changed in 2010 when the children of Kingsdon joined us, following the sad closure of their own village school. Since then, strong links have been forged, with both communities supporting the school and its children. Former Kingsdon parents joined the Governing Body, which certainly helped to build bridges and make new friendships. Kingsdon pupils are entitled to a free transport service to and from school every day.