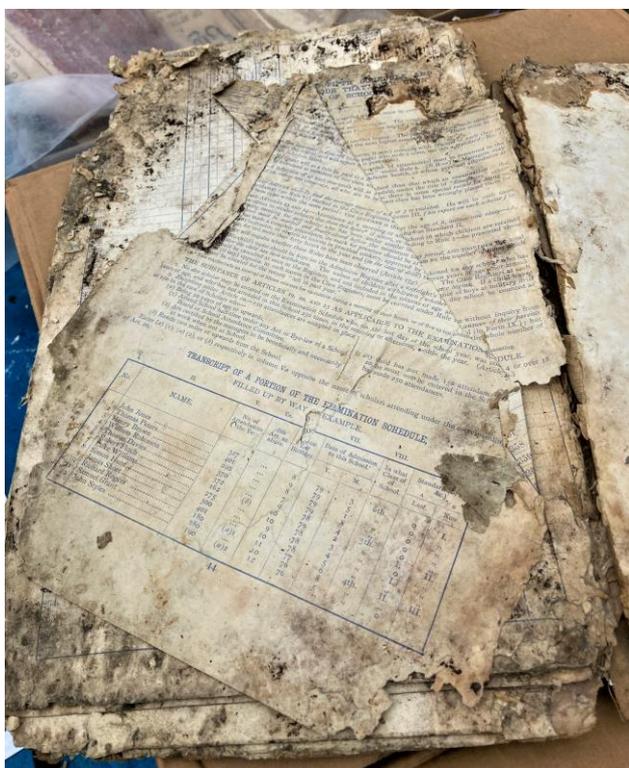


THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE ABSOLUTELY ABYSMAL

An Overview of the 1867 – 1899 Attendance Registers for Bluntisham Old Day School



The old day school, located on Bluntisham High Street, served the village from 1842 until 1967 when it was replaced by the new St Helen's primary school on Colne Road. Several years after it closed two large boxes were discovered in the building's loft space. They contained school attendance registers. Rescued from the damp and vermin risk of the school and put into safer storage, nothing was done with them, or their contents, until they resurfaced in April 2021.



The condition of some of the more deplorable and less than legible registers

Before David Gedye delivered them into the safe keeping of the County Archives in Huntingdon Library, I was given the opportunity to dust them down, and I do mean, dust them down, and have a good look through them to see what further information could be gleaned as to the early history of the village school.

I think it true to say that the registers had survived storage unevenly. Some were in excellent condition considering their age, some had been used to press leaves, some had provided lunch for a variety of creatures and some were heavily stained or falling apart, hence the title of this article. Although not a full record, some registers missing and others so damaged they had to be disposed of, they nevertheless cover most of the thirty two years of attendance from 1867 to 1899. Whatever state they were in, they have provided plenty of questions, some of which I've been able to answer whereas some still remain to be solved.

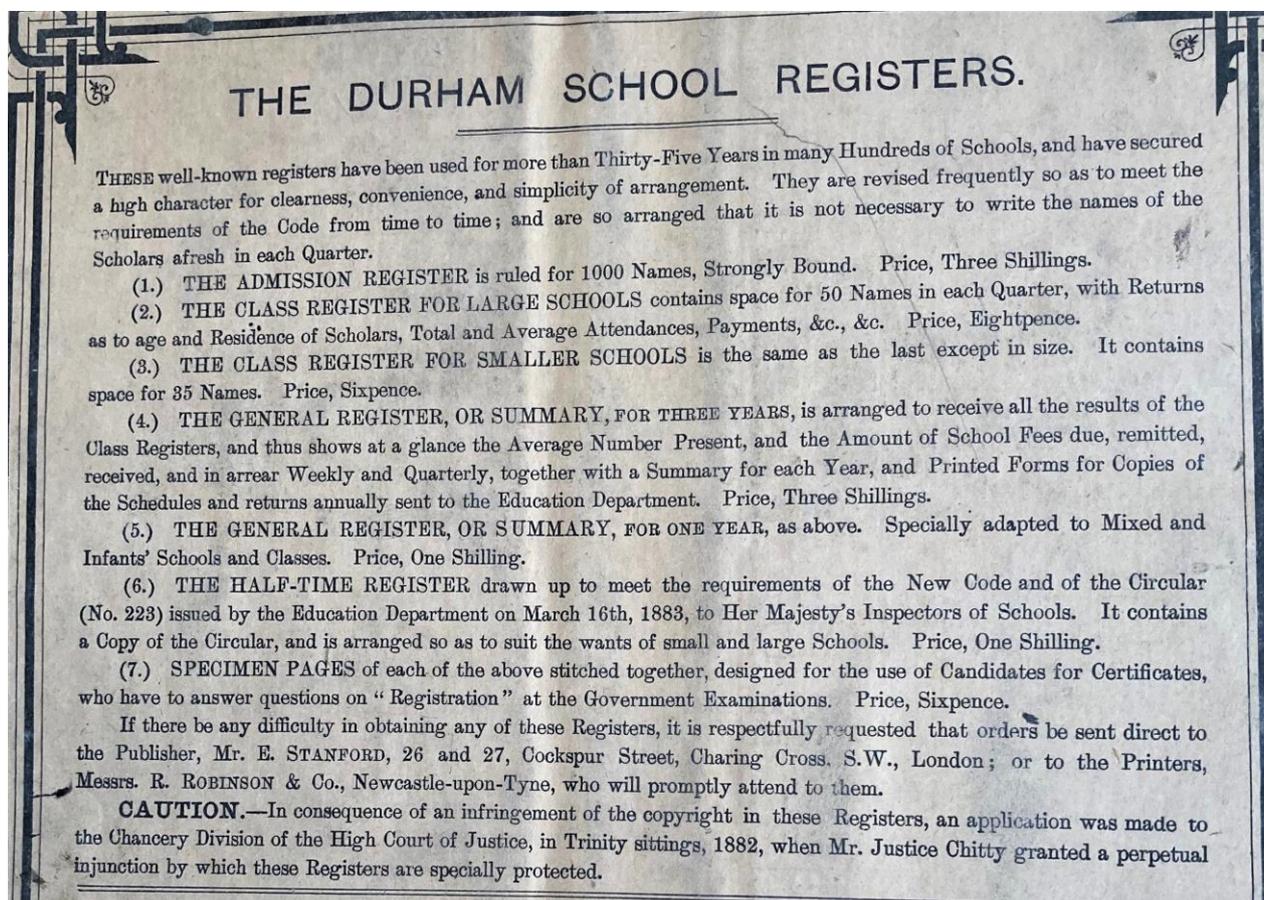
Why all the fuss then?

We know how important attendance was especially as a fee grant was awarded to a school based upon numbers present and, I suspect, that there must have been attempts at skulduggery among the less than honourable members of the teaching profession hence the need for many of these regulations.

- The rule about making entries in ink for example was to avoid any crafty alteration of numbers at the end of the week.
- Similarly:- 'Registers must be original, and not copied from slates, papers etc, on pretence of keeping them clean, or any other plea.'
- The rules stated that the registers must be 'carefully preserved for at least 10 years (*these have lasted a little longer than that*) and any Teacher taking away or destroying such Registers shall be dealt with under Regulation 25.' Sounds serious!

Pupils were supposed to be given a book, at no cost to the family, which followed them through the school showing attendances and standards reached. The idea was that they could show it to prospective employers once they had left school or could take it with them if they moved schools. The rule stated that if a teacher asked for any payment for making an entry or if they refused to make an entry then the Department would 'deal with them under Regulation 69.'

The way registers were marked was obviously so important that candidates for the Teaching Certificate exam could be expected to answer questions on Registration. In a canny bit of advertising on the back cover of the registers a sample collection of the different kinds of register [there were five different types depending upon the type of school] was offered for sixpence (*see point 7 in the photograph below*).



THE DURHAM SCHOOL REGISTERS.

THESE well-known registers have been used for more than Thirty-Five Years in many Hundreds of Schools, and have secured a high character for clearness, convenience, and simplicity of arrangement. They are revised frequently so as to meet the requirements of the Code from time to time; and are so arranged that it is not necessary to write the names of the Scholars afresh in each Quarter.

- (1.) THE ADMISSION REGISTER is ruled for 1000 Names, Strongly Bound. Price, Three Shillings.
- (2.) THE CLASS REGISTER FOR LARGE SCHOOLS contains space for 50 Names in each Quarter, with Returns as to age and Residence of Scholars, Total and Average Attendances, Payments, &c., &c. Price, Eightpence.
- (3.) THE CLASS REGISTER FOR SMALLER SCHOOLS is the same as the last except in size. It contains space for 35 Names. Price, Sixpence.
- (4.) THE GENERAL REGISTER, OR SUMMARY, FOR THREE YEARS, is arranged to receive all the results of the Class Registers, and thus shows at a glance the Average Number Present, and the Amount of School Fees due, remitted, received, and in arrear Weekly and Quarterly, together with a Summary for each Year, and Printed Forms for Copies of the Schedules and returns annually sent to the Education Department. Price, Three Shillings.
- (5.) THE GENERAL REGISTER, OR SUMMARY, FOR ONE YEAR, as above. Specially adapted to Mixed and Infants' Schools and Classes. Price, One Shilling.
- (6.) THE HALF-TIME REGISTER drawn up to meet the requirements of the New Code and of the Circular (No. 223) issued by the Education Department on March 16th, 1883, to Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. It contains a Copy of the Circular, and is arranged so as to suit the wants of small and large Schools. Price, One Shilling.
- (7.) SPECIMEN PAGES of each of the above stitched together, designed for the use of Candidates for Certificates, who have to answer questions on "Registration" at the Government Examinations. Price, Sixpence.

If there be any difficulty in obtaining any of these Registers, it is respectfully requested that orders be sent direct to the Publisher, Mr. E. STANFORD, 26 and 27, Cockspur Street, Charing Cross, S.W., London; or to the Printers, Messrs. R. ROBINSON & Co., Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who will promptly attend to them.

CAUTION.—In consequence of an infringement of the copyright in these Registers, an application was made to the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice, in Trinity sittings, 1882, when Mr. Justice Chitty granted a perpetual injunction by which these Registers are specially protected.

Classes. These must have been snug!

On the cover of each register there was the expected information – class, year etc etc. My first lesson, when all the essential information was actually written in the registers, was to understand how the classes were organised. I had assumed, for example, that Class 1 would be the Infants class and that Class 4 would be the 'top' class, i.e those ready for leaving. Not so. In fact, the reverse was true. In 1873, Boys 4 consisted of children between the ages of 3+ to 7 + whereas Boys 1 contained pupils of 10 + to almost 15. If you think that those are wide age ranges read on!

In the earlier registers, those going from 1867 to 1872, the classes appear to have been mixed but in 1873 it would seem that there was an attempt to segregate the genders.

In one of the very earliest registers from 1867 there were 27 children in the class, of mixed genders and with age ranges between 7 years and 5 months and 18!!! By the second quarter this had been reduced to 20 children aged between 7 and almost 16. Well, it was a start!

Things did improve but, in some cases, the age ranges did remain fairly wide. In many cases the older children were held back in a class because they hadn't achieved the necessary standard for moving up.

I also found a couple of registers for Night School. In one of these, from 1892, the age ranges of the boys went from 13 to 19 but there appeared to have been more absences than attendances. There were four Tabbutt boys [where have we heard that name before?] who were definitely noticeable by their absence.

Included with the registers were a couple of books for noting attendances and payments. These had to be completed by the head teacher at the end of every week and then, eventually, the quarterly figures calculated.

In the figures for 1878 I noticed that attendances had been entered for several children under the age of 3. I have no way of knowing how many of these youngsters there were and it was obvious that they weren't attending on a regular basis but, nevertheless it came as a big surprise.

School closures

As well as the occasions already mentioned in my account of the Old Day School 1899 -1905 the registers also give other examples of why the school had to shut up shop. Sometimes it was for very pleasant occasions.

- In 1878 there was a half day given for The School Treat in July and another half day for The Missionary Treat in August.
- In 1881 a confirmation in Somersham warranted an afternoon off for the whole school. Most intriguingly, however, was the afternoon off given for a Water Party. The choir was also mentioned as was a Mrs Cozens.

It probably paid to be a member of the choir because, in 1883, they got a whole day off for an excursion. This was possibly a reward for performing in the choir concert a few days previously. There was also a Mothers' Tea half day in the January of that year.

- In 1887, not only were there two half days for The Bible Class Tea and The Sunday School Feast but a whole day to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria.
- Another whole day in November 1896 was given for 'Change of Master' – presumably a new

Headteacher.

- Two months later the children got an extra half day thanks to their new Headmaster. 'Half-holiday 'Master ill.' Every cloud as they say!
- In 1897 Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee occasioned another whole day.

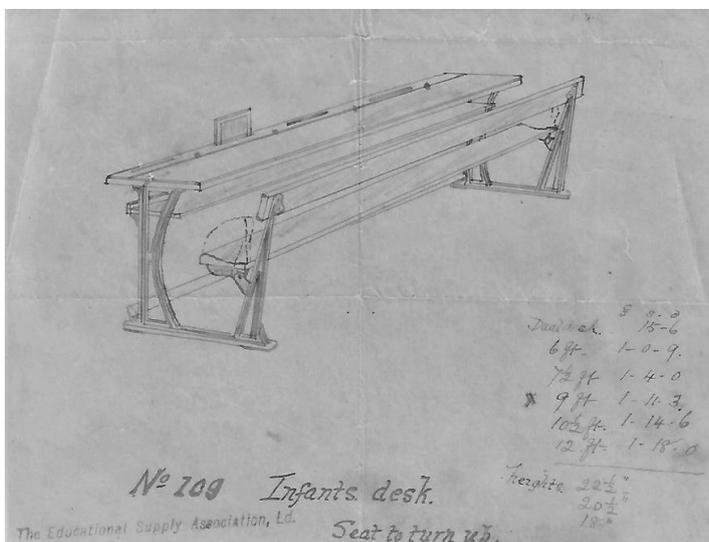
Not all school closures were due to pleasant events. There is mention of school closures for influenza outbreaks, measles [in February 1890 the school shut for two weeks] and scarlet fever.

CLASSN ^o	6 TH WEEK					7 TH WEEK					8 TH WEEK					9 TH WEEK					CLASSN ^o		
	END ^o	M	T	W	T	F	END ^o	M	T	W	T	F	END ^o	M	T	W	T	F	END ^o	M		T	W
1	Feb 6	S	S	S	S	S											///	///	///	///	///	1	
2		///	///	///	///	///											///	///	///	///	///	2	
3		///	///	///	///	S											///	a	///	///	///	3	
4		S	S	S	S	S											S	S	S	S	S	4	
5		S	S	S	S	S											S	S	S	S	S	5	
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7		///	///	///	///	///											S	S	S	S	S	7	
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11		S	S	S	S	S											S	S	S	S	S	11	
12		S	S	S	S	S											S	S	S	S	S	12	
13																						13	
14																						14	

School Closed Measles

On a sad note, whilst mentioning illnesses, a couple of children had their names removed from the register due to the fact that they had died. One young lass who had had a tremendous amount of absence passed away in 1891 when she was 10 and an even younger child who had also had a lot of absence died in 1897, aged 5. The only comments written on the registers against the children's names were 'deceased' and the even more terse 'dead.'

Some unexpected discoveries

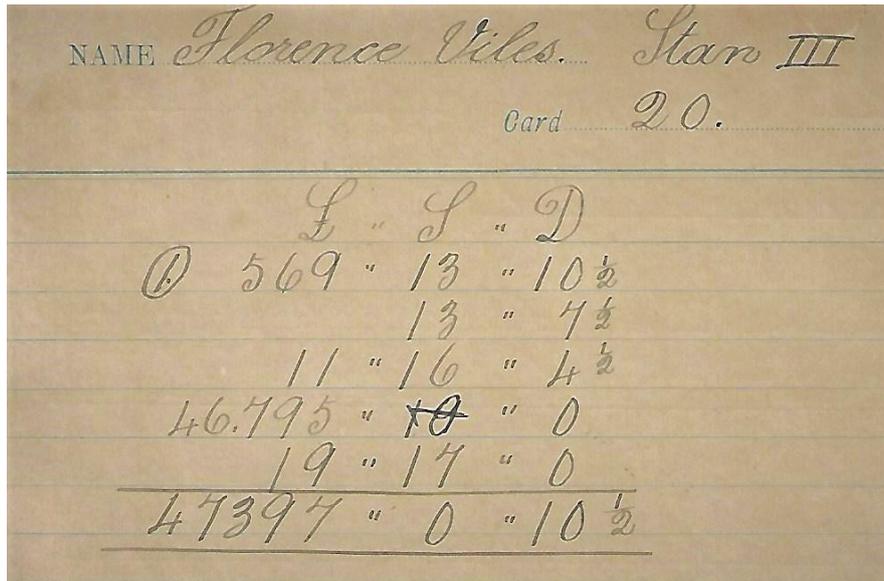


While doing the initial clean-up of the registers I occasionally came across the odd surprise find. I found a collection of dried leaves, carefully pressed in a bundle of the registers which had been tied up with purple wool and a diagram which I think was probably the design done for new infant desks that were purchased in 1904 following an HMI report in which it was recommended that the gallery should be removed and new desks purchased. I don't know if the writing is too faint to be made out but it would appear that a 6 feet

long desk would cost £1-0s-9d but a 12 feet long one would cost £1-18s-0d. That's the equivalent of £113 and £209 today.

As we're talking about money, here's a brain teaser for you.

I found this card which I think must show the working and answer to one of the arithmetic questions that were set in an exam. Florrie Viles was in Girls 1 in 1891 and I don't know if this was a Standard III question or if she was already a standard III pupil and hoping to gain Standard IV. Anyway, I thought that if you were subjected to the joys of pounds, shillings and pence sums, as I was in my junior years, you might enjoy a trip down memory lane and work it out to see if Florrie got it right. Have fun! *(the number with a line across it is a 10)*



Finally, there was a card containing several morning prayers. Although not a Church of England school, when he built and presented the school to the village, the Reverend Tillard ordained that the school should be run on Church of England school principles. Unsurprisingly therefore, the card also provided teachers with guidance on what aspects of the bible pupils should be taught by what age and by what means.

Diocese of Ely.

Scheme of Religious Instruction for Church Schools.

FIXED SUBJECTS, THE SAME EVERY YEAR.

	Old Testament.	New Testament.	Prayer Book.
INFANTS AND STANDARD I.	Lessons from Pictures.	Lessons from Pictures.	Creed, Lord's Prayer and Gloria Patri. Standard I. to know Catechism to end of Creed. Collective repetition will be accepted as sufficient.
JUNIOR DIVISION. <small>(corresponding generally to Standards II. & III.)</small>	Outline of Genesis. (1)	Outline of OUR LORD'S Life. (2)	Catechism to the end of the Commandments, with simple explanations of the words. The Church Seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Whitsuntide, Trinity.

NOTE A. - In Schools where Standard I. forms a separate group, the Scripture Lessons for that group should be those printed in darker type (B.) and (C.) below, and the Prayer Book Lessons, Catechism to end of Creed.

Morning Prayers.

I thank Thee, O my Heavenly Father
for keeping me safe through the night. And I
pray Thee, make me to live as thine own child
this day; and keep me under Thy care, For Jesus'
Sake. Amen.

O Lord Jesus, teach me to grow like unto
Thee, who was once a Child at Nazareth.
Make me humble and obedient, truthful and
pure, and loving to Thee and to all around me,
Make me really sorry that I have so often
sinned against Thee. Help me to remember that Thy
loving eye is always upon me. And keep me this
day from all bad thoughts, words, and deeds.
O good Jesus, bless my dear father and mother,
brothers and sisters, and all kind friends.
Give us food and clothing. Let Thy Holy Angels
be near us through the day. Make us to please
Thee in all we do; And bring us safe at last to our
home in Heaven, for Thy dear love's sake. Amen

Thou God seest me, Shew me my sins O Lord, and
I really sorry for them, for Christ's Sake. Amen
O my Heavenly Father, I thank Thee, that Thou hast taken
care of me this day. Keep me, and my father and mother, brothers
and sisters, from all sin and harm. And let Thy Holy
Angels, watch over us this night. Have mercy upon us now
and at the hour of our death, for Jesus' Sake. Amen.