

## CHAPTER 5

### Mr L. Steel, 1964-68

In December 1963, eight candidates were interviewed for the post of head teacher to succeed Miss Euston. Six had previous experience in primary schools, and two had a background in secondary education. Mr Steel, who was appointed, belonged to the latter group. He had been assistant master of Gatton County Secondary School and a housemaster at the Royal Alexandra and Albert School in Gatton Park, Reigate, a boarding school for children whose parents were in the forces. He took up his new post in the summer term of 1964.

#### Improving the school house

The parish was faced with the costly task of adapting the school house to accommodate Mr and Mrs Steel and their two daughters, who paid £85 a year for rent, water and rates (equivalent to roughly £1,250 today). An anonymous parishioner lent £1,000 free of interest, and an appeal was launched to repay the loan by the end of 1966. Apart from private donations and a grant of £25 from the National Society, funds were raised during 1965 by a series of events, which included a jumble sale, whist drive, tennis tournament, barbecue and dance music evening, plant sale and an Any Questions programme. Also, for a time, the collection at Matins for the first Sunday in each month was devoted to the appeal.

A special note was placed in the parish magazine to explain that, as a church school, maintenance of the head teacher's house received no funding from the county. The opportunity was also taken to remind readers of the value of not only having a school in the village but a head teacher who, by being resident, was well placed to get to know the children and their parents. As a further inducement to encourage local people to give money, the divisional education officer, Mr F Stafford Welch, assured the parishioners that 'no contributors to the Appeal Fund need fear that their money would be wasted since all the evidence pointed to the school continuing for a long time'. (In fact, the school was closed 17 years later.) In spite of all these efforts, the fund-raising fell short of the target. By June 1965, £508 had been collected, rising to £753 by November, but by the following March, no further contributions having been received, the fund was closed. However, the loan was repaid in full, thanks to donations from the Parochial Church Council and the school managers.

## Rising rolls

During the first two years of Mr Steel's headship, the school roll surged by 40 per cent from 45 in June 1964 to 63 in March 1966. Although the notional accommodation figure under existing regulations was 70, the managers regarded this as unrealistic, and the school development plan put the maximum figure at 50. The managers therefore decided to stop admitting children from outside the parish for the time being, unless brothers or sisters were already attending the school. The number of junior girls always exceeded the number of boys, once by margin of 17, presumably because many boys were transferred to private education.

By the summer of 1965, there were more infants than juniors, creating pressure in the small infants' room. To cope with this, an extra class was created for the top infants and lower juniors, who were taught by Mrs Bailey and a new part-timer, Mrs W. Griffiths.

All but a handful of children stayed to school lunches, perhaps a tribute to the quality of food, which was cooked in the kitchen at Brockham School, a couple of miles away.

## Staff changes

In his first report to the managing body in June 1964, Mr Steel was at pains to thank the teachers for the help he had received, describing Mrs Maynard, in charge of the infants, as 'a dedicated teacher' and Mrs Bailey, a part-timer with the juniors, as having 'a unique way with children' who responded 'wonderfully well'. Later, there was some turnover of staff. In the autumn term of 1965, Mrs Griffiths was succeeded by Mrs D. Lambert, who taught in the school for six years. In February 1966, Mrs Maynard (pictured on p.101) left and Mrs N. Burston took over the infant class; in the autumn term 1967, Mrs Bailey left and Mrs H. Broughton, a teacher on exchange from Canada, joined the staff on a part-time basis.

## High standards of achievement

There are no records of HMI inspections during Mr Steel's period, but, two reports from the Southwark diocesan inspector have survived – both very favourable, as always:

### *January 1965*

There has been a smooth transition, it would seem, to Mr Steele's regime. The high standards of this splendid little school and its close and happy links with the Parish have been maintained.

### *February 1966*

The juniors' instruction has been thoroughly and imaginatively planned by the Headmaster, whose teaching notes were nicely articulated. ... Questions were well answered on the Christian year in relation to the Gospels and the Sacraments. ... This is a splendid little school and a fortunate parish to enjoy its ministrations.



**Infants playing in the playground by a frosty school field (left) and all the infants (below) in 1966 (Photos by the late Mrs Jeanette Boyce)**



It was customary for managers to visit the school by turns and to furnish the managing body with a report. Usually these were warm and congratulatory. For example, Colonel T. R. B. Sanders, head of the Buckland Estate and representing the Parish Council, ended his report to the managers in March 1967 as follows:

If I have one main impression about this visit, it was the total relaxed and happy behaviour of the children, and perhaps the best compliment I can pay Mr Steel, who has brought this about, is to say that I went rather from a sense of duty but came away having thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

### **Trying to innovate**

Mr Steel ensured that the school kept up-to-date with the latest educational equipment. In 1967 he bought a climbing frame, a sewing machine, a film projector, and a television set as well as extending the school library. Martin Boyce, a former pupil, today recalls watching the first landing on the moon on the school's new TV. Steve Cox, another former pupil, remembers Mr Steel introducing more sport, obtaining a vaulting horse and spring board, and hanging four climbing ropes from the main room



**The climbing frame introduced by Mr Steel (Photo by the late Mrs Jeanette Boyce)**

the school, and at his first meeting with the managers in June 1964 he proposed that a parent-teachers association might be set up – only to withdraw the idea at the November meeting, arguing that he now considered a PTA was not necessary. Three years later, however, he tried again, floating the idea to parents at an open evening in the autumn term of 1967; but his suggestion received only a lukewarm response. He suggested to the managers that this was because the school was small and contact with staff was easy and informal. Nothing further was done in this direction during the remaining years of the school: indeed, the school prospectus for 1979 made clear that there was no established PTA.

## Memories of Mr Steel

Life in the school under Mr Steel is recalled by some former pupils. Janice Pearce (née Boyce) and her brother Martin recall him as ‘a tall man, strong on discipline’, who ‘always threatened people with the cane, but we can’t remember him using it’. Steve Cox too remembers the headmaster as ‘a big guy’ and ‘a lot stricter’ than Miss Euston. Steve also recalls Mr Steel making a big thing about learning multiplication tables, all other maths teaching being postponed until the children mastered these:

You would have to stand up on a chair and recite your tables, and the rest of the class would fire questions at you to try and catch you out, such as ‘What are seven 7s? What are eight 3s? What are five 6s?’ And if you got too many wrong, you would have to go back and do it all over again. So it was something you wanted to get right. You had to pass this test before you could go back on to other arithmetic learning.

As a result, that year of children became experts at mental arithmetic, and nowadays Steve can work complicated sums out faster in his head than a by using a calculator!

Robert Gregory remembers an unusual punishment, when Mr Steel swung a boy around in the playground:

I don't remember precisely what misdemeanour led up to this novel punishment

– probably something like encroaching into the wrong part of the playground. I recall that the playground was divided into four, with infant boys, infant girls, junior boys and junior girls all separated, the whole thing being patrolled by either a teacher or Mrs Coward, the school helper. Anyway, whatever this boy had done was deemed worthy by Mr Steele of holding him by the hands and swinging him round and round, which made a lasting impression on me and I'm sure was far more effective than had he been told to stand in the corner.

Robert also recalls an incident when a boy, Mark Haines, in Mrs Burston's infant class, swung on his chair and fell off, banging his head on the radiator. He was taken to hospital by Mr Steel, whose dog accompanied him in the car and licked the boy's head en route. Robert has found that just the threat of telling his own children this story is enough to stop them leaning too far back in their chairs!

### **Memories of Mrs A. L. Coward**

Mrs A. L. Coward was the school helper and secretary. Appointed by Miss Euston in 1956, she supervised children at break, lunch and home time, and made a great impression on all the pupils. Indeed, Janice Pearce says that she and her former school friends can remember more about Mrs Coward than the teachers: 'Teachers were insignificant compared with her.' She remembers how Mrs Coward was insistent on the children observing table manners and how, if you could not tie your shoelace or tie, you had to sit on a bench until you could do so. More affectionately, she recalls how Mrs Coward organised playground games, while on wet days during break she would get the children singing such songs as 'Here we come gathering nuts in May' and 'In and out the dusky bluebells'. Janice also remembers Mrs Coward's procedure at the end of play:

We all had to sit under our pegs and in turn were ordered to go to the toilet whether we needed to or not. During this procedure, you had to sit so quietly you could hear a pin drop.

Robert Gregory remembers Mrs Coward's procedure for going home:

One of my very earliest memories of Buckland School is of lining up with Mrs Coward at 'going home time'. The day would finish with a prayer or a song and then we had to form two lines – girls on one side and boys on the other. The two children at the front held Mrs Coward's hands and we were led out to the front gate to meet our mothers. I also recall Mrs Coward giving us safety tips – like don't leave pan handles sticking out, another thing that has stuck with me and I still now repeat at home.

Martin Boyce insists that Mrs Coward, for all her bossiness, was 'really a gem because she was teaching you how to grow up. Really she was a lovely person.' Memories of Mrs Coward during Miss Yeomanson's headship are given in the next chapter.



**The school entrance, 1966 (Photo by the late Mrs Jeanette Boyce)**

### **A shock resignation**

In January 1968, shortly after Canon R. C. Stephens succeeded Montague Barlow as rector and chairman of the managers, Mr Steel announced – to everyone's evident surprise – that he was resigning at the end of the spring term to become head of Lakeside Junior School in Frimley. Although he had not been long in his post at Buckland, he seems to have made a favourable impression on the pupils, managers and diocesan inspector. He was a conscientious head, enjoying good relationships with his staff and endeavouring to keep up with the times by introducing new educational equipment and extending children's educational opportunities – even if some of his suggestions, such as a PTA, were not taken up.

## CHAPTER 6

# Miss Marjorie Alberta Yeomanson

## 1968-79

When Mr Steel announced his resignation, the managers immediately made arrangements for the appointment of a new head teacher, who would occupy the school house at a rent of £60 per year plus rates. This is equivalent to roughly £678 in today's money – much less than Mr Steel was evidently charged. Four candidates were interviewed in February 1968, but no one was appointed. This may have been because the post was residential since when the managers decided to re-advertise they agreed not to make it compulsory for the head to live on site. On the second round, six candidates (including four men) were interviewed: Miss Marjorie Yeomanson was appointed and, although it was no longer a requirement, declared a wish to live in the school house. Her sister, Pat, and mother lived with her.

However, since Miss Yeomanson was unable to start until September, Miss Anne McConnell, from the county's unattached staff, was placed in the school as acting head for the summer term. In her singing lessons, Miss McConnell focussed on religious music, teaching the children to sing the Magnificat – though, on her own admission, not very successfully!

### **The teachers and their memories**

By common consent amongst those who were connected with the school, Miss Yeomanson (affectionately referred to by some as Yo-Yo) lacked the exceptional leadership and personal qualities of Miss Euston. But her teachers enjoyed their experiences at the school, finding the atmosphere friendly and the pupils a joy to teach, and, as we shall see, the diocesan inspectors were very impressed.

When the new headmistress arrived, the infants were being taught by Mrs N. Burston, now in her third year at the school. When Mrs Burston left in the summer of 1970, she was succeeded by Mrs Joan Gregory, who today recalls how fortunate she felt to have taught at St Mary's:

I taught the younger children at the village school from 1970 to 1973. It was my first teaching post and I felt very privileged. Although Miss Euston had retired in 1964, the school was still basking in the wonderful reputation she had built up during her long tenure as headmistress. My class of 17 included children from Buckland, Betchworth, Brockham and Reigate.

The older children were taught in the Victorian schoolroom. My room was in the modern extension, on the north side of the building, and I am sure it was the classroom with the best view in Surrey. My happiest memories from that time are of the glorious summer days, when all my lessons were out of doors. Although the youngest among my pupils were only four years old, they soon became efficient at helping to move the furniture and equipment outside on sunny days. They seemed to share my enthusiasm for working in the open air!

I think few teachers can look back on their first appointment with such pleasure. I hope those who started school in Buckland in the early seventies will also remember it as a happy time.



**Back row from left: Miss West ( infants teacher), Miss Yeomanson (Head) and Mrs Coward (school helper) (Photo by the late Mrs Jeanette Boyce)**

Pupils from left – Front row: Suzie Hall, Tanya Philpin, Craig Balchin, Glen Finch, ?, Stuart Finch, Jenny Toksvig. Behind: Darren Finch, Neil Balchin and Sandra Clifford (part hidden), Adam Chinery, Chris Long (partly hidden), Stephen Lythgoe (in front of Miss West), Shaun Fuller (head turned), Sally Emeny (part hidden), Simon Long (centre top), Matthew Sharwood (below Simon), Belinda Finch (in front of Miss Yeomanson), Vanessa Greenfield, Wayne Finch, Reggie Lythgoe, Jams Emeny. (Names as remembered by Simon Long)

When Mrs Gregory left at the end of the summer term 1973, she was succeeded by Miss Valerie West. This was Miss West's first post, and today she recalls feeling daunted by the presence of six persons interviewing her – the headmistress, rector (as chairman) and four other managers – which seemed to her a bit over the top, given that her class was even smaller than Mrs Gregory's – often just 10 or a dozen pupils.



Miss West was expected to devise her own curriculum, with no guidance from the school or local authority. Sometimes she was asked to teach the whole school to give the headmistress a break, not easy when the age range was 3–11. In spite of these difficulties, she remembers the warm, family atmosphere – ‘cosy and nice’. On one occasion, her class was thrilled when Hugh Montefiore, the bishop of Southwark, visited the school in full regalia and allowed the children to finger all his ecclesiastical rings. Two embarrassing occasions, however, are still vivid in her memory. One was the time she was teaching cookery in the kitchen and the food in the oven caught fire, which fortunately was easily extinguished with an asbestos blanket. The other incident took more personal courage. For a while, the head’s sister, Pat, ‘a rather eccentric lady’, helped in the kitchen, and used to clean the cutlery with Vim without rinsing it off. Miss West felt nervous about saying anything since Pat was very much older than she, but eventually she decided to speak out: Pat was furious, and left the school!



**Miss Yeomanson with some children (Photo by the late Mrs Jeanette Boyce)**

Pupils from left – Top row: Simon Long, Louisa Chinery, Stephen Lythgoe. Middle row: Reggie Lythgoe, Wayne Finch, Sandra Clifford, Vanessa Greenfield. Front row: Chris Long, Sally Emeny, Neil Balchin, Belinda Finch, James Emeny. (Names as remembered by Simon Long)

In the autumn term of 1976, Miss West and Miss Yeomanson were interviewed for Danish Television. On 17 September, a film of the children taking PE in the playground was screened in Denmark as part of a documentary on church schools. St Mary’s School had been chosen because the director’s daughter, Jenny Toksvig, was a pupil.

In 1977, Miss West married to become Mrs Jones. She resigned the following summer to take up a post at Brooklands Special School and was succeeded by Mrs Edwards, a probationary teacher, who stayed for a year.

For a time, there were also some part-time teachers. Mrs D. Lambert taught the juniors three days a week with some specialist work in art and needlework until the summer of 1971; she effectively had a job-share, at first with Mrs Broughton, then Mrs Rogers and

then Mrs Wallis. Robert Gregory recollects lessons with Mrs Lambert, who tried to teach a very precise italic script during handwriting lessons and also country dancing to the accompaniment of a wind-up gramophone: 'Quite what use the country dancing has been in later life I'm not sure, but I'm grateful to have left Buckland School with legible handwriting'.

When Mrs Lambert had to go into hospital in the summer of 1969, Mrs Jeanette Boyce took her place for a time and then stayed for six years, undertaking some specialist work in PE and games and also taking the infants for music.

### **Pupils' memories of Miss Yeomanson**

Martin Boyce, a former pupil, recalls Miss Yeomanson as a fairly big woman whose face, when she got cross, would turn a brilliant red. He remembers her enthusiasm for swimming and taking the children on school trips. She escorted the children by coach to the Reigate baths on a regular basis and also taught French (unusual for this age group at the time). Martin particularly recalls the summer of 1970 when the headmistress took a group to Blankenberge in Belgium, which included a day trip to Bruges. Later, Wissant in France was visited.

At that time, the pupils played football on the village green, on which goal posts had been erected in 1959; but, as Mark Gregory, a former pupil, tells us, Miss Yeomanson took exception to the children's own objectives:

We would run around dreaming of being the next George Best or Jimmy Greaves, but sadly our skill level did not match our ambition or enthusiasm with the result that a shot aimed goalwards was often drawn towards the rather bigger target of the village pond. Miss Yeomanson, distinctly unimpressed, decreed that any boy who kicked the ball into the pond would be sent back into the school to do ten sums.



**Football posts on the Green in front of the school**

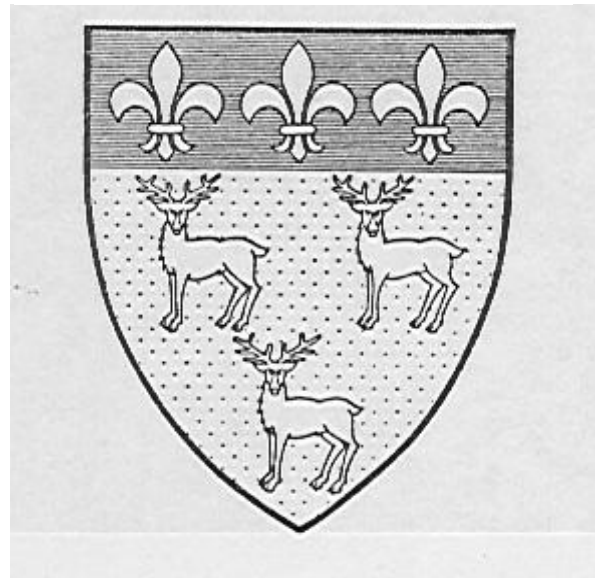
Mark's brother, Robert, recalls Miss Yeomanson refereeing football herself and adopting her own rule and penalty:

Later in my time at Buckland School I remember games lessons taken by Miss Yeomanson. Football on the Green was played to basically the normal rules – except that if you fell over or were goalkeeper and dived, you were sent off as it was deemed unnecessary to get muddy!

## School uniform



**Martin and Janice Boyce in their new uniforms with the school blazer badge, introduced in 1969 (Photos by the late Mrs Jeanette Boyce)**



At the request of parents, a 'suggested' school uniform was introduced in the summer of 1969, the design of the school's book plate and shield being used for the blazer badge (see picture). The fleur-de-lis (in white against a blue background) was apt since, in Christian heraldry, it is a symbol of the Trinity and also of St Mary. The stags (in red against a yellow background), however, seem to be based on a false premise if they represent the deer of Buckland. According to Duncan Ferns in his book *Buckland 1000-2000*, the village name probably derives from the medieval Bochelant, which means land held by 'book' or charter, as distinct from land held by service.

The pupils could buy blazer badges from the school at half cost, and obtain a partial refund if they returned them in good condition. In the autumn and spring terms, the girls wore grey skirts or pinafore dresses, white blouses and royal blue cardigans; in the summer, they wore blue and white checked dresses. The boys wore grey shorts and grey or white shirts with grey or royal blue pullovers and blue ties. The uniform was optional, but many children wore at least some of the items.

## School lunches and Mrs Coward

As in Mr Steel's time, lunches were cooked at Brockham School, sometimes arriving late in winter because the bridge over the River Mole was impassable. In 1968, lunches cost just 1s 6d (5½ p). When Colonel Sanders visited the school as a manager eight years later, the price had almost trebled. On this occasion lunch consisted of roast lamb, roast potatoes and cabbage with 'a sort of flan' afterwards: 'It looked appetising', he commented, 'and at 16p very good value. I would have been quite happy with it.' Pauline Covey (then Mrs Long), who helped serve the lunches, today recalls how the children had a roast once a week, and always fish on Fridays.

In November 1977, however, the headmistress reported concerns: 'Some days the meat is uneatable by adults, let alone small children losing their first teeth.' Noting that it was the suppliers, not the cook, who were to blame, the managers called in the area school meals adviser, but by the time she came all seemed well. Bob Sharwood, commenting on the lunch during his managerial visit in February 1978, observed that the bacon and cheese rolls, mashed potatoes, tomatoes, semolina and rosehip syrup was 'promptly devoured by most of the children with relish'. In the summer, Mr Willows, another manager, seemed gratified to see 'the spicy nature' of the meals had been replaced by 'a more straightforward menu'.

Mrs Covey well remembers the school helper, Mrs A. L. Coward, who was mentioned in the last chapter, as 'a very strict and a firm disciplinarian'. Some children, she says, were frightened of her, but she helped to keep good order. She also ran a successful Red Cross group to teach First Aid. Sandra Tudor (née Clifford), a pupil in the 1970s, also recalls these First Aid courses, which were organised after school. She also remembers the way Mrs Coward 'was a constant presence helping out with anything and everything'. Anna Bedford (née Gregory), a pupil in the late 1960s and early 70s, recalls her lunchtime experiences with Mrs Coward supervising:

I remember dinner time at Buckland School. Asking 'What's for pudding, Mrs Coward?', the reply was always 'Wait and see with custard'.

I remember singing grace before dinner, 'Thank you for the world so sweet', and one day having to sing it again on my own as I was standing on one leg the first time; Mrs Coward really could see everything.

I remember the 'pigswill' dish for leftovers: that was always empty because you did not leave the table to go out to play until your plate was empty.

I remember the roast dinner followed by butterscotch tart (with custard of course). Delicious.

## A happy and busy school

As ever, the school took its religious foundation seriously, and, according to the managers' minutes, the diocesan inspectors were impressed with the religious instruction. Daily assemblies always included prayers and stories from the Bible. Every Wednesday morning, the staff led the children across the road to St Mary's Church,

where Miss Yeomanson played the organ. The local authority, however, was not impressed, pointing out that holding collective worship off the school premises was not in accordance with the Education Acts of 1944 and 1946, which stipulated that religious instruction could be outside the school premises on only special occasions. The managers ignored this advice, and the practice continued.

As with Mr Steel, there are no records of HM inspectors visiting the school in this period, but a number of reports by diocesan inspectors have survived. The following extracts illustrate the inspectors' enthusiasm with the happy school ethos, the idyllic environment and the high standards of religious life:

*May 1970*

We were welcomed by the Headmistress, Miss Yeomanson, into the quiet and lovely atmosphere of this little country school as it assembled for morning worship. The prayers were said with utter sincerity, unhurried, every word felt and meant by the children. ... This is a lively, active, Christian school, happy and successful in its work and a joy to visit.

*March 1972*

It was a great pleasure to visit this charming little country school again, unique in its setting, with a stretch of downs to be seen from its windows on the north side and the village green and its pond in front, and, next door, a farm. ... These children are in the care of an earnest and dedicated headmistress. There is a lovely atmosphere of happiness ... This is an excellent little Church school.

At their termly meetings the managers always arranged for one of their number to visit the school and report back at the next meeting. The minutes contain delightful reports of lessons that seem to have intrigued the managers, who were invariably impressed by what they saw and the children's achievements, articulation and behaviour. Mrs Mary Bishop, on her first managerial visit, found the pupils 'completely engrossed' in their work, and was impressed by the number and range of books available – 2-3,000 she reported. 'All the children were very polite', she wrote, 'which must reflect on the headmistress's approach and Christian teaching.'

Mark Gregory remembers daily life in the junior class:

The school day always started with assembly, including prayers, hymns and Bible stories. Then the junior school would be divided into two groups, with the younger children at the front of the classroom and the older ones at the back – all the desks in rows facing the teachers at the front, of course. I remember a lot of English, arithmetic and RE lessons, but very little science, if any. In the year or so before I left the school we started learning French, which was the one time the TV regularly came out so that we could watch the BBC schools broadcast. A typical afternoon would often include singing, either traditional songs or hymn practice, before the school day ended at 3.15.

For a small school, the number and range of special activities was striking. In just the three months between December 1971 and the following March, for instance, the children entertained senior citizens, enjoyed a conjuring show, performed an epiphany play in the church, saw 'Humpty Dumpty' at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, visited the

Guildford Museum to examine Bronze Age relics, and travelled to Lullingstone in Kent to visit a Roman Villa.

Every November, the parents would organise a bonfire and fireworks display in the school field (attracting 110 people one year); other annual events were sports day on the Green, a concert in the summer and a play at Christmas. In December 1978, all pupils took part in afternoon and evening performances of the nativity play *The Carol Singers* and went on to give performances for the benefit of geriatric patients, nurses and doctors at Dorking Hospital. The headmistress told the managers: 'It was beautifully done by the children, who had to adapt to strange surroundings, and was greatly appreciated.'

### **Maintenance problems –again!**

The school was kept clean and bright, and in May 1974 the diocesan inspector marvelled at the way Miss Yeomanson had decorated the classrooms during the summer holidays:

The inside of the school is colourful and beautifully decorated, clean and well kept. The Headmistress herself, with the help of the lady caretaker, paints and decorates it in her summer holiday. Such devotion is rare and deserves the highest praise.

As ever, however, there seemed never a period when the state of the school building was not causing concern. In March 1969, when a new floor was laid in the junior classroom, some supporting beams were found to have dry rot and had to be replaced. Splinters in the wooden floor of the larger classroom prevented children taking PE barefoot, but this was rectified in 1974 when the floor was covered in linoleum, with help from parents past and present, producing a warmer and more comfortable room.

The flat roofs over the cloakrooms and infants' entrance were constantly leaking because there was no fall for water to get away; these were repaired from time to time, but the problem kept recurring and was not helped when a building contractor went bankrupt in 1977. A new builder was enlisted, but the price rocketed from £2,510 to £4,316 (roughly £18,000 in today's money) and the managers complained of shoddy work, withholding the final payment until repairs were completed satisfactorily and rubbish was cleared away. On one occasion, part of the roof was stripped on a very wet day, and the invading rain water caused parts of the ceiling to come down in the cloakrooms. Even after re-repairing the roofs, leaks continued to occur, and the problem, first reported to the managers in 1970, continued until at least 1978.

The school was regularly used as a polling station, and in 1974 a number of voters tripped over on the uneven step in the front entrance. The managers agreed that the step should be painted white, but were subsequently surprised to find it red. The headmistress offered a reasonable explanation: no white paint could be found in the school! Another paint problem occurred in 1977 when the school was decorated externally. The yellowy-green colour turned out to be not at all pleasing, but Miss

Yeomanson told the managers that she had not been consulted by the decorators. The managers informed the county architect that they were 'gravely dissatisfied' with the contractors, and considered having a new top coat in a more acceptable colour – but money problems prevented this.

### **Car parking problems**

In his last report to the managers in January 1968, Mr Steel had raised the problem of cars encroaching on the Green when children were delivered and collected, and the Parish Council had promised to ask the Education Authority to provide some hard-standing. Thence began a saga which ran on for 2½ years. In March 1969, the Parish Council changed its mind and no longer regarded car parking as a problem, much to the chagrin of Colonel Sanders who accused the councillors of 'shirking their responsibility'. The county engineer was consulted, but pleaded helpless since the road by the school was unadopted, and the council could not take it over since it was not used by the general public. Sanders was again incensed, maintaining that the authority was 'by-passing the issue'.

Not to be defeated, the managers arranged a meeting with representatives from the Parish Council, the Rural District Council, the divisional executive of the Education Authority and county hall officers. The best idea, they were told, was to block off the road to the east side of the Green and make up the road in front of the school to a width of 16 feet, with a turning circle at its eastern end. It was intimated that the county would adopt the road once work had been completed, but the initial cost would have to be borne by the Parish Council and Education Authority.

In March 1970, the county engineer submitted a scheme to the Parish Council to make up the roadway by the school, putting a curb round the north side of the Green, and placing posts to shut off the road on the eastern side; the costs would be shared between the Education Authority (£150), the Parish Council (£50) and the managers (£50). Funds were not immediately forthcoming, but, after several months' delay, the scheme was implemented. This accounts for the posts still in place on the eastern side of the village green.

### **Parental representation on the managing body**

Today, it is taken for granted that parents are well represented on school governing bodies, but in Miss Yeomanson's time the idea was a novelty and often regarded as inappropriate. In 1975, however, the managers agreed to invite a parent to their next meeting, leaving it to the chairman and headmistress to decide just who. It seems, however, that this practice was not regularly observed, and in the autumn term of 1977 the managers decided not to take advantage of a new regulation that would have allowed parents (and also, if wanted, the press and general public) to be invited to managers' meetings. The turning point occurred in the autumn of 1978, when a parent demanded that one of their number should attend the discussions about the possibility of the school having to close. This time, the headmistress asked the parents themselves to nominate a representative. In the event, the parents drew up a rota to ensure that several of them were represented over a period of time.

## Re-organisation and the loss of the older children

During the summer term of 1968, when Miss McConnell was acting head teacher, the county announced its decision to change the primary school structures from Infants (5-7 years) and Juniors (7-11 years) to First (5-8 years) and Middle (8-12 years). On 5 September 1972, St Mary's became a First school, losing pupils from the age of 8 years instead of 11 years, with the older children transferring mainly to the Priory Middle School in Reigate. In 1974, the diocesan inspector added his regrets to the loss of older pupils who had maintained such close links with the village church:

The school is small but very much alive educationally. There is a feeling of regret that the older junior children are no longer taught in this school, especially as they grew up into the church, joined its organisations and the Choir, and often became regular members of the congregation eventually. It is much more difficult to maintain this link when children leave so young and are scattered into state schools in other places.

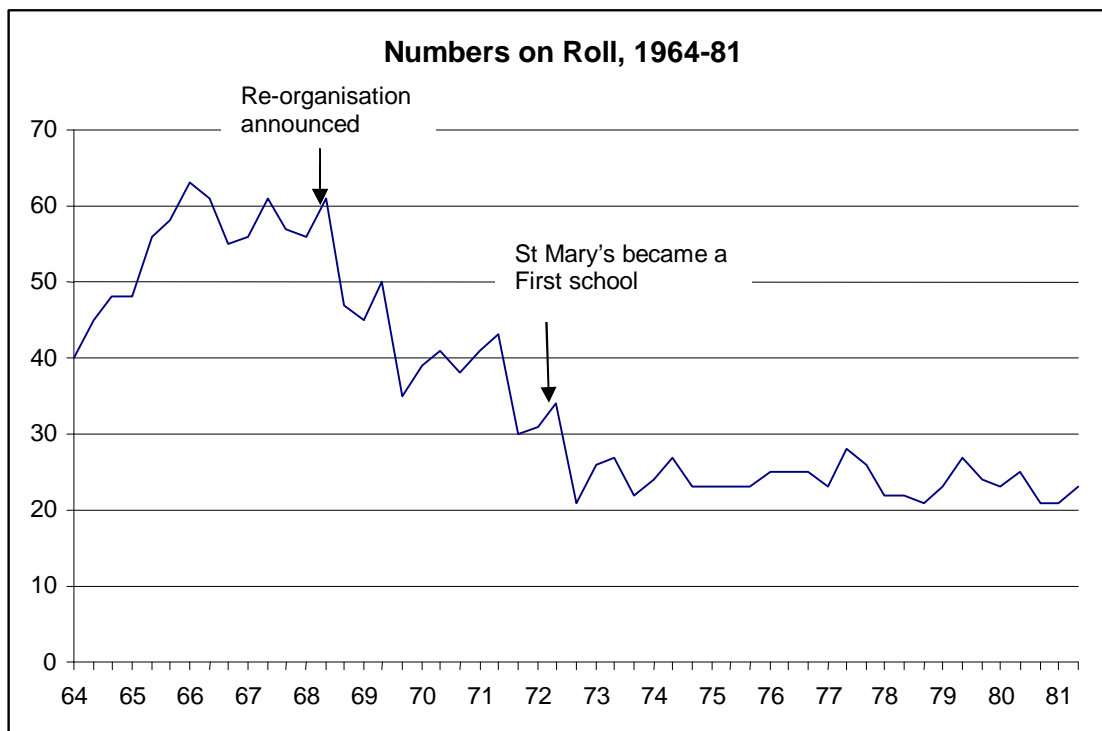
The rector and headmistress tried to keep links with the children who now transferred at eight years of age. In particular, Miss Yeomanson organised reunions to encourage former pupils to keep up their friendships and their loyalty to St Mary's church. All the same, the loss of the older children was disastrous for the viability of the school and eventually contributed to its closure. The matter was worsened by the School Premises Regulations 1972, which recommended an area of 3.7 square meters per pupil, reducing the official accommodation figure of St Mary's First School from 30 to 25 places – a contrast to the figure of 88 in 1905!

In the mid-1960s the school roll was between 56 and 63, but from the late 1960s numbers fell dramatically. As the chart shows, between the summer of 1968, when re-organisation was announced, and the summer of 1972, just before re-organisation, numbers plummeted to 34 despite some fluctuations. Parents were opting for the new combined First and Middle schools that catered for children from infants up to 12 years to save the trauma of transfer at eight. After St Mary's actually became a First school in September 1972, the school roll dropped further to 21 pupils, and remained in the 20s until the school closed.

Adrian Sanders, now head of the Buckland Estate and a pupil in the early 1940s, considers that another factor contributing to falling rolls was the changing demography of the village: the potential number of pupils had declined as many of the old families in the village, with loyalties to the school, no longer existed, while the number of agricultural workers had declined and the richer people who were moving into the village were sending their children to private schools.

The headmistress and managers considered how best to increase the numbers of pupils and considered establishing a nursery class or a playgroup, but they were put off by the financial implications of the high staff-pupil ratio and accommodation requirements laid down by the Department of Education and Science. The school had only two classrooms, and these were needed to split the 5-8 year-olds into two groups. In later years, as we shall see, 'rising fives' were admitted.





### Threats of closure

The first official warning of possible closure had been way back in September 1947, when Surrey County Council considered that the school was not viable. In the parish magazine the next month, the rector, the Rev A. H. W. Sanders, objected to the council's threat on two grounds. One was that 'we want a school in Buckland itself, for the school is a centre of cultural and community life for the village'. His other argument was that 'we want not only a school in Buckland, but a church school, where the children are brought up in such an atmosphere as exists in our school, to become worshipping members of the church'. To this he added that, while religion is taught in all schools, 'it is important that Christian teaching should be given by teachers who both believe in, and practise, their faith', which one could not guarantee in non-church schools.

Alarmed at the local authority's suggestion, the Parochial Church Council had passed a resolution of protest, putting forward both social and religious arguments:

We believe that the close connection between the Church and the School is of real benefit, not only to both parties but also to the community as a whole. We affirm that the sound teaching the children receive in the Church's faith is of real and lasting benefit to them and is a very important factor in enabling them to grow up as worshipping members of the Church and good citizens of our realm.

The county held a well-attended public meeting in October, at which strong opposition to closure was expressed.

The threat passed away, but was revived in the autumn of 1976 when the area education

officer wrote to say that the Education Committee was considering closing 18 village primary schools with less than 50 pupils, both St Mary's and Betchworth among them. The argument was essentially financial: closing the schools would save the county £150,000 plus another £87,000 saved for repairs, while selling land that the county owned would reap a further £200,000. Moreover, with the number of pupils declining and a falling birthrate in the area, the prospect of viable school rolls seemed unlikely.

Although some councillors spoke against the proposals, the general view was that closures were necessary since small schools were so expensive to run. The chief education officer, John Henry, denied the suggestion that closure would damage local communities: in a speech to the local branch of the National Union of Teachers in October, he argued that experience elsewhere suggested that closing small schools in rural areas was often the consequence of the death of a community and not the cause of it. This argument would surely have been difficult to sustain in the case of Buckland. To counter the CEO's suggestion that the pupils could be switched to Betchworth School, Canon John Montague, chairman of the managers, made a counter-proposal: that Betchworth should merge with St Mary's School, thus preserving a church school in the area and justifying a recent expenditure of several thousand pounds on the school roof.

The managers agreed that, if the school was forced to close, it should do so only at the time when Miss Yeomanson retired. In the parish magazine for October, Canon John Montague noted the irony of the threat of closure after the school's reorganisation as a First school:

When the introduction of Middle schools deprived us of the 8-11 age group, we were told what a splendid thing a really small First School would be – the children would have space to move around. But now it is a different story – all First schools with less than 50 children on the roll have the guillotine suspended over them. We are promised a number of consultations, etc. – but consultations bind no one. However, the time they take, which is usually considerable, will be time gained.

Constitutionally, of course, the County cannot close an Aided School. Only the managers have the power to do this. [The school was given 'Aided' status in the late 1940s under the 1944 Education Act, Unlike 'Controlled' schools, it had to meet some of the maintenance costs in exchange for a degree of control over religious education.] But what the County can do is to withhold its financial approval and thus cut off supplies to staff salaries and to the upkeep of the buildings. Another little irony, especially for parents, is that the threat of closure comes at precisely the moment when many of our children have had their bus passes withdrawn [because they live more than two miles from the school]. The A25 does not lend itself to cycling, even for older children. What price free education?

The following January, the deputy county education officer, Mr E. B. Tweddle, wrote to say that 18 small schools, including Buckland, would not be singled out for closure just because they had less than 50 pupils on roll, but would be considered as part of a general review of primary schools throughout the county; even so, he went on, the review would need to take account of the falling school population, predicted to

decrease by a third over the next fifteen years. The county was facing financial pressures, as it explained in a news release, which said that schools with under 50 pupils were throwing a severe strain on the education budget following a drastic reduction in the government rate support grant. At the same time, the chairman of the Education Committee, Mrs Margaret Marshall, after visiting a number of small schools, tried to reassure the public:

I have been most impressed with all I have seen. We all realise the value of these schools and know their worth. The public can be assured that the closest examination of all the facts will take place before any decision is taken.

Sir Kenneth O'Connor, the diocesan representative on the managing body, noted after a visit to St Mary's School that, with small numbers, 'children can get, and do get, the individual attention which is so vital for young children and which they could not get in the larger (often too large) schools which are fashionable nowadays'.

In the summer of 1978, the county published its review of the primary school development plan for the Mole Valley, which suggested that Buckland children could be accommodated at Betchworth School (now The Acorns). In response, the managers resolved to inform the Education Committee that, whilst they were aware of the economic problems in retaining a small school, they were 'very far from convinced' that the alternative accommodation being offered to Buckland children at Betchworth School was satisfactory, adding that 'the environment of Buckland School is second to none in the neighbourhood'. What was the view of the diocese? At this point, the schools' officer for Southwark Diocesan Board seemed optimistic for when he attended a meeting of the school managers the same summer he emphasised that the diocese would take account not only economic viability but a range of other factors. These would include the value local residents placed on the school, whether the school was *educationally* (as distinct from economically) viable and whether it was large enough to provide sufficient social interaction for the children.

When the managers next met, in October 1978, they received a request from a parent for representation on the managing body in view of the possible closure of the school. As we saw earlier, parents took turns to attend meetings, an arrangement that no doubt gave wider representation if at the cost of continuity. At the same meeting, the Rev H. Marshall, who had been invited to attend as representative of the Diocesan Schools Committee, reported that, should St Mary's be sold, any proceeds would go to providing or improving Church of England schools in other areas – but this was small consolation to the people of Buckland.

Towards the end of April 1979, hopes were raised when a group of county councillors expressed a change of heart: 'Small is beautiful', they declared, adding that the retention of small schools was 'socially and culturally' desirable even if it might mean higher rates. However, these sentiments were directed primarily at schools in Abinger and Abinger Hammer: the future of Buckland, now with just 19 pupils was still in jeopardy. None the less, Canon John Montague seized on the councillors' statement when he spoke to the *Dorking Advertiser*: 'We have been saying this all along. We just hope they will come round to thinking that our school is too valuable a part of the

community to close down.’ Mrs Mary Bishop, another manager, told the *Caterham Times and Weekly Press*: ‘I don’t think it is right to take a defeatist attitude in the parish’, adding that the position was now ‘a little more hopeful’ since the official attitude is changing’. The *Advertiser* threw in its support in a strongly-worded leader: encouraging the school managers in their campaign, it acknowledged that a reprieve could mean a rate rise, but ‘that would be a small price to pay for the education of children in such happy and pleasant surroundings’. At the same time it reported that some Buckland parents were sending their children to nearby Brockham First and Middle School from the start to save the need to change schools at the age of eight, thus compounding the falling rolls problem at Buckland.

During the next month, four members of the somewhat ironically called Education Development Sub-Committee met the managers of Buckland and Betchworth schools, and the chairman of the sub-committee visited the schools. The meeting, however, did not work in St Mary’s favour, for in June 1979 the Education Committee accepted a recommendation from the Education Development Sub-Committee that the school should close. There was still a little hope left, however. By law, a public meeting would need to be held, and, in any case, the final decision would be made by the Secretary of State. On behalf of his fellow managers, Mr P. Willows (also the parish’s solicitor) was asked to prepare objections to the threatened ‘Section 13’ notice (Section 13 of the Education Act 1944).

## Retirement

Miss Yeomanson did not remain to witness the closure of her school since she retired at the end of August 1979 before the axe fell. Writing in the parish magazine, Canon Montague, the rector, sympathised with her leaving ‘while this cloud hangs over the school’, but went on to point out that ‘nothing can destroy the work she has done over the last eleven years, because its results are carried on in the lives of those she has taught and the effects of the services she has rendered to our community and church’. Montague’s references to the headmistress’s work outside the school would have included her singing as a contralto in the church choir, her membership of the Parochial Church Council and taking care of the church linen.

Miss Yeomanson’s retirement party was held in the Reading Room on 18 July, and was attended by about 70 people. The managers presented her with a beautiful bookcase, and past and present pupils, parents, teachers and friends in the congregation and village gave her a cheque for £185. For a few months, she and her sister continued to live in the school house, before moving to Winchester in April 1980. According to the parish magazine, Miss Yeomanson spent some of her retirement playing the organ in Winchester Cathedral.

## CHAPTER 7

### Mrs Janet Brearley, 1979-1981

With the threat of closure hanging over the school and the number of pupils down to the 20s, the county officials thought it would be inappropriate to appoint a new head teacher to succeed Miss Yeomanson. Instead, the area education officer decided that, subject to the agreement of the chairman of the managers, he would appoint an acting head, and Mrs Janet Brearley, deputy head of Newdigate Endowed CE (Aided) First School, was chosen. At the same time, Miss Sarah Waterston was appointed to succeed Mrs Edwards. Initially, these appointments were for just a year, but both contracts were subsequently renewed until the summer of 1981 when the school closed.



**Susan Archer supervising lunch. The school shield can be seen over the door on the left (Mary Wade Bishop collection)**

At the end of Mrs Brearley's first term, Mrs Coward, after 23 years as the school helper, resigned. Mrs Susan Archer succeeded her and remained until the school closed. Today, Mrs Archer recalls 'doing everything' – all the secretarial work (on a very old fashioned typewriter), supervising school lunches, collecting dinner money, even measuring the sunflowers that the children had planted from seed to monitor their growth.

Mrs Brearley took over a school of 24 children, divided into two classes of 10 and 14. Over the next two years, numbers fluctuated between 21 and 25. In spite of the difficult circumstances, school life continued as before, and Mrs Brearley entered into the task with enthusiasm. Susan Archer today recalls the acting head running the school as a 'happy family': she was 'professional to the end and totally committed to the children and the school'.



**Mrs Brearley teaching pupils to play the recorders (Mary Wade Bishop collection)**

Following the tradition, Mrs Brearley accompanied the older children to Buckland Church once a week, and the school prospectus for this period began by making clear that St Mary's was a church school and that religious education played a prominent part:

Religious Education is with us throughout the day; it cannot be isolated and we lose no opportunity to discuss and strengthen the children's understanding and faith.

Complementing this, we teach children about God's love and care for our school, homes, families and the community and for others less fortunate than ourselves.

On Monday afternoons, accompanied by a parent, Mrs Brearley took the children to Newdigate School for coaching in gymnastics while she taught a class of Newdigate pupils to play the recorder, thus demonstrating how children in a small school could have their educational opportunities widened. The children regularly attended the Dorking baths for swimming lessons, and the school continued its many special activities.

## Attempts to keep the school open

As we saw in the last chapter, threats that the school would be closed because of falling numbers and a declining birthrate had been the subject of heated debate during Miss Yeomanson's headship. Under Mrs Brearley, the threats became official policy; but this did not stop the protest movement: on the contrary, it inflamed local anger as never before.



**Mrs Brearley teaching outside. In the background is the climbing frame erected by Mr Steel (Mary Wade Bishop collection)**

On 10 October 1979, a public meeting for parents, managers and other interested parties was called to protest against the proposed closure. Amid speculation that it might be the nearby Betchworth School, rather than St Mary's, that would have to close, Mr A. Hill, on behalf of the Education Authority, advised the 80 or so villagers who had crowded into the school that, should this come about, it would not follow that Buckland School would benefit and so become viable: indeed, the indications were that most parents would transfer their children to Brockham First and Middle School. Mr Hill went on to say that the authority saw a need for 45 school places in Buckland and Betchworth together, and that it appeared on face value that Betchworth School, with accommodation for 60, was therefore the more suitable school to keep open. The Buckland parents were angry, maintaining that the county architect, without offering a full explanation, had not accepted a proposal put forward by their action group that the school house be adapted to provide additional accommodation once Miss Yeomanson and her sister moved.

Still hoping that the county might back down, parents and governors arranged a meeting with members of the county Education Development Sub-committee to ask that the school be given a reprieve of at least five years. But their pleas were ignored when in January 1980 the sub-committee recommended that St Mary's School should be issued with a closing order. The chairman, Councillor Mrs Evelyn Collins, told the *Surrey Mirror* that the decision was virtually unanimous, with only one member

dissenting. She justified the decision on the grounds that the council must use its teaching resources as well as it possibly could, and that meant using the 'plenty of spare places' at Betchworth School. Needless to say, this did not satisfy the parents, who wanted their children to go to be educated in the traditions of the Church of England and who were concerned that the children would have a longer walk to school if they had to enrol at Betchworth. Canon John Montague told the *Dorking Advertiser* that if the County Council approved this recommendation the managers would continue the fight and appeal to the Secretary of State as the only legal recourse left to them.

On 27 June 1980, hopes were dashed when the Surrey County Council formally anticipated that the school would close on 31 August 1981, and submitted their proposal to the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Ironically, the managers' status had been improved the previous month when, under a recent Education Act, they became known as governors and were given greater independence from the local authority.

The newly-named governing body assumed that Southwark diocese would give them strong backing, as the Diocesan Board's representative had appeared to do so in 1978, but in this they were mistaken. According to the minutes, when the diocesan education officer, Miss Yardley, came to visit the school, she was evidently impressed by what she saw but felt unable to oppose the closure because of other demands on diocesan resources.

Later in 1980, the parents' action group came up with another proposal, inspired by Mr Gerry Neale, MP for North Cornwall. With the local MP, Keith Wickenden, Mr Neale met parents at the school to explain a partnership scheme that parents were proposing in his constituency to challenge the Cornwall Council's decision to close a village school. Buckland parents and governors were attracted to the idea, and formed an action committee to negotiate with Surrey County Council for a similar arrangement to save St Mary's School. At the meeting in September with education officers and members of the county Education Committee, including the chairman, Mrs M J Marshall, they offered to form a financial arrangement with the Education Authority, keeping the school open by contributing to the running costs. The county representatives did not turn down the idea – indeed, they wanted to see the proposals set out in more detail; but they pointed out certain legal difficulties, and warned they would need to be convinced that the governors and parents would be able to raise the necessary £14,000 a year. During the course of their discussions, the governors proposed that the scope of their partnership might be extended by parents carrying out some of the maintenance work and the posts of school dinner helper and cleaner being held on a voluntary basis.

In its later deliberations, however, Surrey would not agree to any form of financial partnership, maintaining that school responsibilities should not be undertaken voluntarily since this could lead to legal and accountability problems. The council also feared that it could end up being responsible for a school with lower standards than other schools in the county.

In June 1980, notices announcing the school's closure were posted on the school gate and other village sites. Mrs Brearley, who had always argued strongly in favour of



keeping the school open, told the *Dorking Advertiser* about the effects that this news was already having on the village community:

The parents use the school as a meeting place and they are very supportive of it and want their children to come here. But because of the threatened closure parents are sending their children elsewhere rather than here, mainly to private schools.

The matter was finally brought to a conclusion when, on 21 February 1981, the school received news that the Secretary of State, Mark Carlisle, had overruled the many objections to closure. Canon John Montague responded to this the next day in a statement to the *Dorking Advertiser*:

We have been through every single process to try to save the school, but we'll now have to accept that it is going for good. Everybody likes to see children going to the village school, and having no children of school age around the place will have a deadening effect.

Soon afterwards, the area education officer wrote to parents asking them to suggest an alternative school for their children, and added salt to the wound by pointing out that pupils were eligible for free travel only if they were attending the nearest school and that school was at least two miles from their home (or three miles if they were transferring to a Middle school).

### **The last term**

Much to the credit of the acting headmistress and the rector, the last term was treated more as a celebration for the life of the school than as a time for despondency. Mrs Brearley, as she put it in a letter to parents, was anxious that the school would close 'not with a whimper, but with a bang', and a great variety of events was arranged. There was a service for mothers and children in the schoolroom and an open day for parents, governors and friends in the village. At a sponsored event, the children sang as many hymns as possible in 15 minutes, raising £65.27 to support Helen House, a hospice for terminally ill children. The rector held a Eucharistic thanksgiving service in the school, with collections for Lifeboat and Christian Aid, the governors financed an outing to the Bluebell Railway and Wings Haven Bird Sanctuary and Hospital, and Mrs Brearley arranged for the children to take part in a sports afternoon at Newdigate School.

In June Mrs Brearley wrote to the parents announcing a series of pre-closure activities, and took the opportunity to summarise her feelings about the school's record of service to the community:

It has served the families of Buckland (and many others) for no less than 119 years [in fact, the school had served the community for 160 years, if one includes the original National School in Rectory Lane] and has itself been served with great devotion by many generations of teaching and ancillary staff. It has been a source of pride and joy to the whole parish. As with a much loved friend, there is deep sorrow (and some anger) at its passing.

Mrs Jean Mockford, the caretaker, who had two children at the school, told the *Dorking Advertiser*: 'I think it's very sad that the school's closing as it's such a lovely little place and I am sure it will make a lot of difference to the life of the village.' A seven-year-old pupil, Bryan Vahey, told the reporter that he had enjoyed his two years at the school, adding for good measure: 'I do not want it to close – in fact I think they should cancel the closing.' His mother reinforced these sentiments, foretelling what may since have become true:

I think it's disgusting that they should close the school because it's going to spoil the village completely. The children will lose contact with the church and the older people will lose touch with the children.

The governors held their last meeting on 6 July 1981, and all members were present – Canon John Montague (rector and chairman), Mr Carl Seager (vice-chairman), Mrs M. Bishop, Mrs A. J. Hitchcock, Mr R. Sharwood and Mr P. Willows; a parent representative, Mrs C. Robinson, also attended, as did the acting headmistress. The chairman thanked Mrs Brearley, who had by now been appointed head teacher of Newdigate CE School, 'for the tremendous efforts she had made to keep the school spirit alive during the last two years when the threat of closure had been imminent'.



**Ancillary staff Mrs M. Bussey (left) and Mrs Susan Archer (right) with children at lunch time  
(Mary Wade Bishop collection)**

### **The last week and a Thanksgiving Weekend**

On Friday 17 July, a special service was held in the school. The Rector presented each pupil with a Bible and a leather bookmark commemorating the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. Over the next two days, following an idea conceived by the rector, a Thanksgiving Weekend for the life and work of the school was held.

On the Saturday, the villagers were treated to a Victorian Afternoon on the Green. With the sun shining despite a black cloud hovering in the distance, Colonel T. R. B. Sanders opened the proceedings with a brief history of the school. There then followed a performance by the percussion band, a costume parade, dancing display (with the school piano on the Green), singing games, running events, a puppet show presented by Miss Waterston and her friends, and a chance to ride on a steam train provided by the Kingswood Light Railway. The *Dorking Advertiser* (24 July 1981), describing it all as 'a bitter-sweet occasion', reported that 'the youngsters looked delightful in Victorian clothes made for them by their mothers. ... Dances included the family waltz, the Sicilian Circle and Virginia Reel. And in the last dance – Big Set – the audience joined in. Some were a bit slow to do so, but when they did it was with gusto.' Tea was served in the school, where two ladies in the village had mounted a photographic exhibition about the life of the school. Also on display was the old punishment book (now in the Surrey History Centre in Woking), which was evidently very popular and caused a few red faces among former pupils!

On the Sunday, the Rev Canon R. Garrard, chancellor of Southwark Cathedral, preached at a service of thanksgiving in the church. The next day, in her last letter to the parents, Mrs Brearley wrote that, while the school building would no longer be used to educate children, 'no one can quell our spirit, and, wherever we go, we can proudly say, "I was at St Mary's School in Buckland"'. On the Tuesday, the children were taken to the Redhill Centre to see a performance of *Rumpelstiltskin* by the Globe Players.

On the last day of term, Thursday 23 July 1981, the 23 children went out on to the Green to have their photo taken with the teaching staff – Mrs J. Brearley and Miss S. E. I. Waterston – and ancillary staff – Mrs L. S. Archer, Mrs M. M. Bussey, Mrs L. C. Shepherd, and Mrs J. A. Mockford. Eight of these children were to transfer to Betchworth First School, four to Leigh First School, four to Reigate Parish First School, five to Reigate Priory Middle School, one to Brockham First and Middle School, and one to Stanway School in Dorking. Sarah Waterston went on to teach at St Peter and St Paul CE First School in Chaldon; Susan Archer, the school helper, accompanied Mrs Brearley to Newdigate School, but the other ancillary staff were made redundant.

In the days that followed, the school furniture was conveyed to Capel CE First School, while stock was distributed between Betchworth First School, Newdigate CE First School and Reigate Parish First School; the piano was given to Meath Green First School in Horley, and percussion instruments to Newdigate First School.

In a recent interview, Mrs Brearley, now retired, recalled attending a service for teachers in Southwark Cathedral. Christian education meant a great deal to her, and she remembered her days at the school with much affection:

The two years that Sarah and I spent at Buckland were very special years. We complemented each other in our approach to teaching and we shared the same Christian beliefs. Sarah had strong connections with Southwark diocese, and we built up a very good relationship with the diocesan advisor for RE.



**Staff and children in their costumes on the Victorian Day, 19 July 1981. Top: Children dancing on the Green in front of the school (Mary Wade Bishop collection). Left: Janet Brearley (also on right in top picture); below: Sarah Waterston on left and Susan Archer on right (Photos by Susan Archer).**





**Staff and pupils on the last day**

**Back row from left: Miss Sarah Waterston (teacher), Mrs Janet Brearley (acting head), Canon John Montague (Chairman of the Governors), and Mrs Susan Archer (school helper) (Mary Wade Bishop collection)**

Perhaps it is fitting to end by quoting the words of Canon Montague in the parish magazine when he explained his reasoning for suggesting the Thanksgiving Weekend:

In a letter to the parents of all children who have attended our school over the last twenty-five years and whose addresses we have, I have compared the closing of our school with the death of a well-loved friend. There is grief at the hole which has been left in our lives and often anger at what seems to be the cruelty of the world in which we live. But what, as Christians, we try to do is to concentrate on 'the good times', to make thanksgiving for all that friend has been to and done for us and many others. The loyalty of many generations of children and parents, the devotion of many generations of staff and managers, the affection of many generations of the village; the carrying-on into the world of something of the best of what the School has tried to create; these cannot be as though they never were, and it is these we want to celebrate over the week-end of July 18-19th.

## Epilogue

The story did not end when the school was closed. Various legal problems arose, and these were pursued by Mr Peter Willows, a former governor and parish solicitor. First of all, there was a dispute about the ownership of the playing field at the back of the school. The county claimed that in January 1950 this had been sold to them by the rector and churchwardens. However, the Parochial Church Council disputed this. Anticipating that problems of ownership would arise if the school had to close, Miss Euston, the former headmistress, had written to Mary Wade Bishop, a school governor, in April 1980 setting out her understanding about who owned the school field:

When it comes to deciding who owns what after the closure, I hope that the present School Managers will not be hasty in listening to the County, who will not be slow to take all they can. I have particularly the School Field in mind. That has become very valuable since the Managers purchased it for £320 from the County, who only held it in trust for a short period until the School Managers were in a position to take it over.

The following July, Miss Euston wrote again, re-affirming what she had said:

A few years after I came here, he [Col. Sanders, a Foundation Manager at the time], wrote me asking for particulars of the acquisition of the School Field, and I wrote him a detailed account of this, which I was in a position to do as at the relevant time I was on the Development Committee of the County's Southern Divisional Executive.

Should you not obtain the information you are seeking and may in future need to use, I will write you my account of the various transactions. But I can assure you that unless any action has taken place since my retirement in 1964 with regard to it, the Field is definitely the property of the Buckland School Foundation Managers. It is now a very valuable asset. Its boundary is from the Coronation Cherry Trees, planted by Mrs Daniell [a former manager] and which mark the former boundary of the School Playground (the old one), down to the boundary fence of what was Miss Bowring's property. As far as the old playground is concerned it would be reckoned as a part of the original building site.

It eventually became clear, however, that Surrey County Council did own the land at the rear of the school, and by the spring of 1983 they agreed to sell part of it.

Secondly, there were questions about the legal title to the school, and a search had to be made for the Trust Deed (see Chapter 1). The school building lay empty for three years before it was sold on the open market in September 1984 for £84,898.85. There then followed protracted correspondence that went on for six years about what should be

done with the proceeds. A file in the parish archives shows that this involved many parties, including the school's trustees (the rector and churchwardens), their solicitors (Morrison's in Reigate), Buckland Parish Council, the Buckland Estate, the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education, the Charity Commission, the Department of Education and Science, and the Secretary of State for Education. In order to continue the objectives of the original benefactors, the Parochial Church Council wanted to use the money for educational purposes, particularly in the locality, and to form a Trust to administer the assets. The Diocesan Board of Education claimed that the money should be handed over to them to help other Church of England schools; but when the trustees and Parish Council, among others, pointed out that Buckland villagers had contributed the land and many thousands of pounds towards improving the school, the Diocesan Board agreed that the trustees retain ten per cent. Accordingly, in July 1987, 90 per cent of the proceeds – which, with interest, had by now amounted to over £105,000 – was paid to the Diocesan Board against a deed of indemnity which protected the school trustees from any future claims.



**The school as a private house (Photo, 1998, by Duncan Ferns)**

But Buckland continued to make representations and with some effect since in December 1989 the Secretary of State for Education, John MacGregor, ordered that 3/14ths of the proceeds be retained for a fund 'for the provision ... of religious education in accordance with the tenets of the Church of England by means of a Sunday School or otherwise'. The trustees of the Sunday School Fund (the rector and churchwardens, as appointed by the Order), received the sum of £13,245. Attempts were made to persuade the DES and the Charity Commission to allow the money to be available for wider purposes such as the maintenance of the Reading Room. These failed, but under rules drawn up by Parochial Church Council in 1991, the trustees are able to use the funds to contribute towards the costs and maintenance of the Reading Room 'either directly for religious education or indirectly by provision of the Reading Room for religious purposes, or for any other lawful purpose or purposes (whether religious or not)'. The capital was indexed from December 1989 to 1993 in line with the Retail Prices Index to main its real value, and subsequently investments were made from which an annual income is derived. Besides supporting a Sunday school, the fund has been used to support the choir, the local baby and toddler group and study books for the Church house group.

## HEAD TEACHERS

? - 1855	Mr William Robertson
1855 – 1866	Miss Maria Gale
1866 – 1870	Miss Sarah Ann Ketteley
1870 – 1878	Miss Ellen A. Turner
1878 – 1880	Miss Bailey
1880 – 1886	Miss Harriott Rachel Shakespeare
1886 – 1910	Mrs Eliza Emma Thorpe
1910 – 1938	Miss Florence Keal/Mrs Coulson
1938 – 1964	Miss Rhoda Alice Euston
1964 – 1968	Mr L. Steel
Summer Term 1968	Miss Anne McConnell (Acting Head)
1968 – 1979	Miss Marjorie Alberta. Yeomanson
1979 – 1981	Mrs Janet Brearley (Acting Head)



## SOURCES USED

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Ferns, D. (1999) *Buckland 1000-2000* (privately published)  
Kelly's Directories for Surrey, 1855-1938  
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### Archives of St Mary's Church, Buckland and Buckland Parish Council

Collection of school papers, correspondence and newspaper cuttings kept by the late Mary Wade Bishop, a school manager, 1979-1981  
Correspondence and documents relating to the selling of the school, 1981-1990  
Minutes of the Parish Council, 1864-1890  
Minutes of the Parochial Church Council, 1947-58  
Parish Chronicle/Magazine, 1932-1984  
Trust Deed, 25 January 1862

### Surrey History Centre, Woking

Account book for school, 1855-1880  
Admission Register, 1865-1952  
Buckland Tithe Map, 1846  
Census returns, 1841-1901  
*Dorking Advertiser*, 28 February 1980, recording a former pupil's memories from early 1900s  
Inspection reports, 1904-75  
Log books, 1921-1981  
Managers' Minutes, 1903-33 & 1959-1981  
Miscellaneous papers, including correspondence, invoices and financial accounts  
Newspaper cuttings  
Papers relating to the opening of the enlarged school on 17 May 1958  
Parish records  
Punishment Book, April 1913-February 1964  
Rector's cash book, 1855-80  
*Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 17 May 1958, relating to the opening of the enlarged school  
Surveyor's report, 25 October 1905  
*The Surrey Teacher*, July 1958, relating to the opening of the enlarged school

**The National Archives, Kew**

Correspondence relating to the Johnson Trust

Inspector's report, 8 November 1971 and 17 December 1909, and related correspondence

Order of Exchange of Land, 5 September 1861

**The National Society for the Promotion of Religious Education/The Church of England Record Centre, London**

Copy of Trust Deed, 25 January 1862

Indenture, correspondence and other documents relating to the Johnson Trust

Correspondence and other documents relating to grants from the National Society

Miscellaneous documents on the school's income and expenditure

Local newspaper cuttings relating to the closure of the school