

The original National School opened in the village was situated on The Hill, where Walnut Court (next to Hill House) stands today. Built in 1815, it cost £183 to build, paid for by donations and public subscription. It was a long low building, 36 feet by 15 feet, with brick floors and was designed to hold 100 cottagers' children. In 1833 it was reported that 50 children of each sex attended regularly.

In 1846 it was noted in a local newspaper that the Congregational Minister, the Reverend T. Gilbert, opened another school because "the National School was closed against all who would not consent for their children to learn the Church Catechism and attend at the Established place of worship on a Sunday". There was a large Congregational element in the village.

Towards the end of its days the building was described by Canon Davys in his autobiography, 'A Long Life's Journey', as poor and shabby. In a wonderful description he stated that "the most conspicuous piece of furniture there being a wooden armchair with a footboard, which was always hurriedly brought forward whenever a visitor entered the school, the climb up Wheathampstead Hill being supposed to bring on a dangerous exhaustion".

In 1862 the school moved to the new flint building on Brewhouse Hill. The old school was pulled down leaving the site to be used as a drill and playground until it was sold in 1899.

Source: W.E.A. (1976) *The Story of Harpenden and Wheathampstead; Number VI - The Schools* W.E.A.

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'One of the first schools in Hertfordshire to be aided by the National Society was built at Wheathampstead in 1815. Here the Society gave £55 towards the total cost of £185 5s. 6d. incurred in building a school measuring 36 ft. X 15ft. X 8ft.6in. designed to accommodate 100 children. The local builders apparently took the advice of the Society's building sub-committee by using a barn as their architectural model. The floor and foundation were of brick, while the walls were 'brick with band timbering round the room'. Furthermore, while the carpenter's bill was £97 6s. that of the bricklayer was only £65 14s. Other items in the total bill suggest that the school was built on common land. The promoters incurred a legal fee of £2 for obtaining permission to build on waste land and a charge of £4 5s. for filling up a hole and laying the foundations. The remaining items were £7 14s. 6d. for the plumber and £6 6s. for two stoves. The total cost included 'the expense of erecting the necessary accommodations attached to the school ... [and the provision of] writing-desks, forms and cupboards'. The National Society found that the school had one great drawback: 'The plan does not succeed so well when boys and girls are mixed promiscuously in the classroom.' A school built on the pattern of a barn was presumably windproof and waterproof.'

Source: Hurt, J.S., (1972) *Bringing Literacy to Rural England: The Hertfordshire Example* Phillimore & Co. Ltd.