



## News and events

- Harpenden History Society have given us a number of copies of each of the six volumes in the series *Wheathampstead and Harpenden*. Published in the 1970s, they were the result of research done by the Harpenden and St Albans branches of the Workers' Educational Association. If you would like a copy of any of these volumes, please email us at [whs@wheathampstead.org.uk](mailto:whs@wheathampstead.org.uk).

## Wheathampstead schools

With Beech Hyde School marking its fiftieth anniversary this year, it seems relevant to take a look at some of the earliest schools in Wheathampstead.

Thomas Seabrook of the Place School seems to be the earliest recorded schoolmaster. His school was recorded in 1689 and Thomas is mentioned in the 1714 will of his pupil Richard Smith, who died young and appointed Thomas Seabrook, his 'trusty and well-beloved Master and friend', as his executor\*.

By 1800 a Sunday School was established in the vestry at St Helen's Church to teach Reading, Writing and Scripture to the children of the poor. It was paid for by 30 subscribers, with prayer books and testaments donated by the rector's father. In 1815, one of the earliest National Schools in the country, founded by the National Society for Promoting Religious Education, was built on The Hill for 100 cottagers' children at a cost of £183. Miss Dixon, its first teacher, was paid £15 a year, with 10s. paid to her landlady for board and lodging.

Reverend Douton ran a Gentleman's Boarding School on the present site of Wheathampstead House in 1826 and 1839, and George Gifkins ran a boys' day school in 1837. Between 1859 and 1862 Edward Edwards ran a prep school for boys in Sheepcote Lane, and Eliza and Fanny Hooper were running a ladies' school between 1845 and 1882. Eliza was also the landlady at the Bull Inn. A boarding school for ladies run by Hephzibah

and Jayne Wynter, next to Town Farm on The Hill, survived 40 years between 1851 and 1895. The 1851 census records 25 pupils, many from London.

There were also a number of plaiting schools in the parish. Though nominally responsible for teaching some basic reading, few did so.



The new school on Church Street opened in 1863 with 100 children in the main school and 50 infants. Labourers' children paid 2d., tradesmen's children paid 6d., and farmers' children paid 1s. a week; they were taught drawing, reading, scripture, gardening, music and needlework. Children were sent home if they forgot their school money and the government paid schools 4s. for every child in average attendance.

The number of pupils soon increased and a small school was opened for the children of Gustard Wood in 1875. It closed in 1932 when a new senior school for children aged 11 to 14 opened on the site of the present St Helen's Church of England School.

Ruth Jeavons

\**Wheathampstead: An Eighteenth-Century Village*, p.54