

## **Emma Sandon and the Willington village school**

### **Emma Sandon**

Miss Emma Sandon came to the school in 1889 and stayed here for 23 years until she retired in 1912. She was appointed on a salary of £50 per annum and also had a furnished house next door and fuel provided. She came from Biggleswade and had previously taught and played the organ in West Stow in Suffolk.

We have the memory of an ex pupil who left a description of Emma Sandon in her last year at the school. She wore black, her hair was then snow white and neatly arranged with a velvet bow on top. The bow wobbled when she got cross. She addressed the girls as Gal Usher or Gal Golder and so on, while the boys were referred to as old so and so, as with old Jack Harrison.

Emma was a presence in the village as well as its school mistress. She sometimes played the organ in the Church and Chapel, including at the funeral of the vicar's wife, Caroline Orlebar. She helped out with the teas at the vicar's treats and was involved in collecting money for the gift he was given on his 50th anniversary as vicar. At various times, she went with the choir to festivals in Bedford, Cambridge and Ely. Music appears to have been an important part of her life.

The Bedfordshire Times and Independent for December 6th 1912 has the following entry:

"The late mistress of the school has retired this week after a period of 23 years' service. Miss Sandon is being succeeded by Miss Buckingham. On Monday Miss Sandon was presented with a dressing case and trinket box subscribed for by past and present scholars."

### **The school**

When Emma came to the school, there were 41 pupils present on her first morning. The school had been built in 1867 by the architect, Henry Clutton for the 8th Duke of Bedford at a cost of about £1000. In 1875 it was taken over by a school board, who

a year later signed an agreement with the Duke for hire of the school and the adjoining teacher's house. The board were to be responsible for the school until 1903, when the County Council as the newly formed Local Education Authority took over responsibility.

The county surveyor's report on the school in 1904 reported "these premises are excellent in build and upkeep... well lighted, lofty, airy and well warmed." There were open fire grates in both classrooms but the only water supply was from a jack pump in the offices that was questionable as drinking water.

There were two rooms, the classroom for the infants and the school room for the older children. The pupils sat at desks on staging. There were open fires in each room. Once children left the infants classroom and came into the school room, lessons centred on six standards relating to reading, writing and arithmetic. Children were examined against these standards by a school inspector and the funding the school received depended in part on their success. Object lessons formed a mainstay of the teaching. In Emma's time, drawing was introduced for the boys and there was needlework and knitting for the girls. There is also a record of older girls going to Cople for cookery lessons. And one of the first things Emma did was persuade the board to buy a harmonium for the school. Singing, poetry and drill were features of school life. There was an annual prize giving and children received prizes for passing standard IV and above and for regular attendance.

The school is an example of the growing number of schools that were built in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Elementary education was spreading. The 1870 Foster Act set out to ensure that schooling was available across the whole country. The spread of elementary education was driven by the idea that some basic education and moral instruction were the best ways to avoid unrest and revolution.