

Recently, a file of historical papers was handed over to the Village Hall. Among the papers was a history of the building when it was a school. It is unknown who wrote it or when. Extracts from that history are shown below.

## **THE WHITECROSS VILLAGE HALL**

*Anon (undated)*

Before being converted into a village hall, it was of course a school. The site on which it stands belonged to Francis Buller Howell, Esquire of Ethy, and others, before 29th September 1895. On that date they sold a 99 year lease on the land to the newly formed School Board of Lanteglos-by-Fowey. Their intention was to build a new school on the property to replace the former school which was situated at Bodinnick, and was later converted into a private dwelling and is now known as the "Old School House".

The lovely building that is now our village hall was built during 1896 by a builder called Willie Pitt from East Taphouse. He contracted to build it for £600 but instead of making a profit actually lost some money over the deal. At least one person is still alive who came to Whitecross School when it was brand new. His name is Mr Sydney Ball. He must have also been a former pupil of the Bodinnick School, and he also was the secretary of the exploratory committee set up to acquire the building if and when it should no longer be needed as a school.

Whitecross (or Whitta Cross as it was first known) school was an "all range school" which was intended to cater for children of all ages, from 5 to 14 years who lived in the country part of Lanteglos but some children came to the school from outside the parish boundaries – from Penpol for instance. Very few children who were taught here ever had a secondary education. Fowey Grammar School was the only secondary school in the area, and because this was a "fee" paying school, only the very fortunate had parents who could afford the £44 a year fee (a great deal of money in those days).

The maximum capacity of the school was 80 pupils. The building was divided up to form 3 classrooms. There used to be a sliding wood and glass partition capable of dividing off an area not much larger than that which is occupied by the present stage. This was the infant room. The rest of the main building was divided by a sliding curtain with classrooms for the other main age groups.

The head teacher taught the top 3 "standards", as they were called, at the East end of the school.

Another assistant, usually a lady, took the middle section of the school in the other classroom.

The girls and boys took lessons together but were segregated at playtime. The boys over seven years old were allowed to play in the playground at the East end whilst the girls and infants occupied the playground at the West end. The older boys were also allowed to play on the Village Green during dinner time. The side rooms in the main building were all cloakrooms, with separate pegs for each child. There were 2 washbasins which were supplied with rain water from a slate stone tank.

At a later date a large, two section, open sided shed was build to the rear of the main building in which the children could play when the weather was bad. No children were

allowed in the classrooms during dinner hour or playtime whatever the weather. There was no form of artificial lighting in the school. For most of its time as a school no drinking water was on tap in the school. All drinking water had to be fetched from a pump nearly 200 yards away down the hill towards Pont. A well was dug, not long before the school was closed, in the corner of the playground on the West end of the property.

A large bell, which was hung in a bell tower on the roof, ..... the pupils to school and could be heard from a mile or more away. Many of the children who lived near enough went home to dinner and because the bell rang for 3 or 4 minutes, set off for school when they first heard it ringing and thus got there just in time! This bell tower has since been taken down and the bell sold. There were of course no catering arrangements at the school, and children either took packed meals, which they ate outside, or went home to dinner.

The only sanitary arrangements were in the outside sheds and were always of the earth bucket variety. The school was heated by two open fires at first; a room heater was added at the East end at a later date. The school had a very good record. Hardly any children who had passed through this school, couldn't read or write and all had a good grounding in arithmetic. This was all in spite of the fact that the majority of the teachers had no college training and not even a secondary education. They were quite often just "pupil teachers" who had been taught at the same school and were employed first as monitors, to help the other teachers, and then became full time teachers. They often made excellent infant teachers but the authorities did not play fair with these people because they only ever had half wages for all of their teaching lives.

As far as we can gather the first head teacher was a lady – Mrs Shane. During the Great War the head was again a lady Mrs Teague. She was followed by G. E (Skipper) Griffiths who was headmaster at Whitecross for many years.

The school only had about 12 pupils and the teacher (Miss Barbara Stephens) at the time that it was closed. It closed as a school in June 1948, but the Education Authority decided to sell the property at that point. A committee had been formed to consider the possibility of acquiring it for use as a village hall – whose first secretary was incidentally the same Mr Ball. They offered it to that committee on a three year lease – providing no structural alterations were done to the building. They finally relented however and sold it to the V. H. Committee. The remaining 44 years of the lease for 1/- on 16th May 1949. The freehold was purchased from the then owner, Col Peter Shakerley, for the princely sum of £450. Col Shakerley also gave a donation to the funds of £25 so the effective price was £425. The Solicitors, Messrs Graham & Graham agreed to do the work for the Hall Committee for no payment. That was the way we lost a school, but gained a very nice Village Hall, all these years ago.