



Wheathampstead History Society

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News and events

- Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday 15 November**. The 10th Earl Cavan (1865-1946) lived in Wheathampstead House for most of his life and had a distinguished military and diplomatic career. In this talk, Ruth Jeavons and Patrick McNeill will describe his life with particular emphasis on his local activities and connections.
- CHAS (**Combined Hertfordshire Archaeological Societies**) programme of talks from next month to March 2024 is available on their website at <https://tinyurl.com/msd3vtve>

100 years ago

October 1923 was a busy month at St Helen's School, as recorded in the school logbook.

5/10/23	The attendance has not been so good. the percentage being 92.
9/10/23	Mr Bloom H.M.I. Mr Hallidie the Rev A Baird-Smith and Mr Lane-Claypon visited the School. The Rector gave his lesson to class.
11/10/23	Mr Turner visited the School also Mr Baird-Smith and Mr Noel.
16/10/23	The Rector read prayers and took his lesson with class.
17/10/23	The attendance is very good. all present in class. There are only twelve absent.
19/10/23	Diocesan Inspection register not marked.
22/10/23	Very wet at noon. Mr Bunn visited the School.
23/10/23	The Rector took his lesson.
25/10/23	Mr Bunn visited the School and brought back the tools which he took to sharpen.
26/10/23	Mr Lee H.M.I. visited the School and examined the registers. Summary admission register and Log Book Mrs Edmunds and Mr Slough came to the school

The school was visited on 9th October by His Majesty's Inspector Mr Bloom, Chief Education Officer Mr Hallidie, the rector Reverend Alexander Baird-Smith and Mr Lane-Claypon, who was a governor and possibly Chair.

At least six governors visited during the month and on the 19th Mr Hudson, the Diocesan Inspector, made his regular visit. On the 26th HMI Lee examined the registers, the summary admission register and the logbook, presumably to check that they were up to date. The two HMIs were from the Local Education Authority which had replaced the School Board in 1902 while Mr Hudson's remit was to ensure that the school, then as now a Church of England Voluntary Aided school, was teaching the religious curriculum correctly. It was probably a relief for the headmaster, Thomas Clark, that Mr Bunn who

visited on 22 October was the LEA's technical adviser and returned three days later with some tools that he had sharpened.

It seems likely that this intense interest from so many official persons was prompted by a highly critical HMI report made at the end of the summer term in July 1922.

"...the progress of the children cannot be considered very satisfactory...Over 60% of the scholars are at present classified below Standard III...Tests given in Arithmetic in Standard V and upwards were on the whole poorly done... the teachers all work hard but their methods of teaching call for reconsideration... the pace of the work is unduly slow..."

The background to this may be that headmaster Thomas Clark had been unwell since March 1919. The entries in the logbook had been brief and made in a different hand since then and HMI reports had become increasingly critical.

Thomas Clark's handwriting reappears in the logbook in September 1922. A year later, it must have been a relief to him that the Diocesan Inspector's latest report says "*I had an informal and most cordial conference with the whole staff (including the Rector)*" at which he stressed "*the supreme necessity of the teacher being quite clear...what is the fundamental truth which he wishes to teach...through material derived from the Bible or History or any other source. A tendency to diffuseness was very marked in the two top classes. In the other divisions I was delighted with the lessons I heard.*"

HMI Bloom's next report, dated 6 January 1925, must also have been reassuring. "*Satisfactory progress has been made since the date of the last report and attention has been given to the points criticised therein...The efforts of the headmaster to secure greater industry among the older scholars has succeeded in raising the standards of attainment very appreciably.*" The report makes some critical points but the overall tone is positive and supportive.