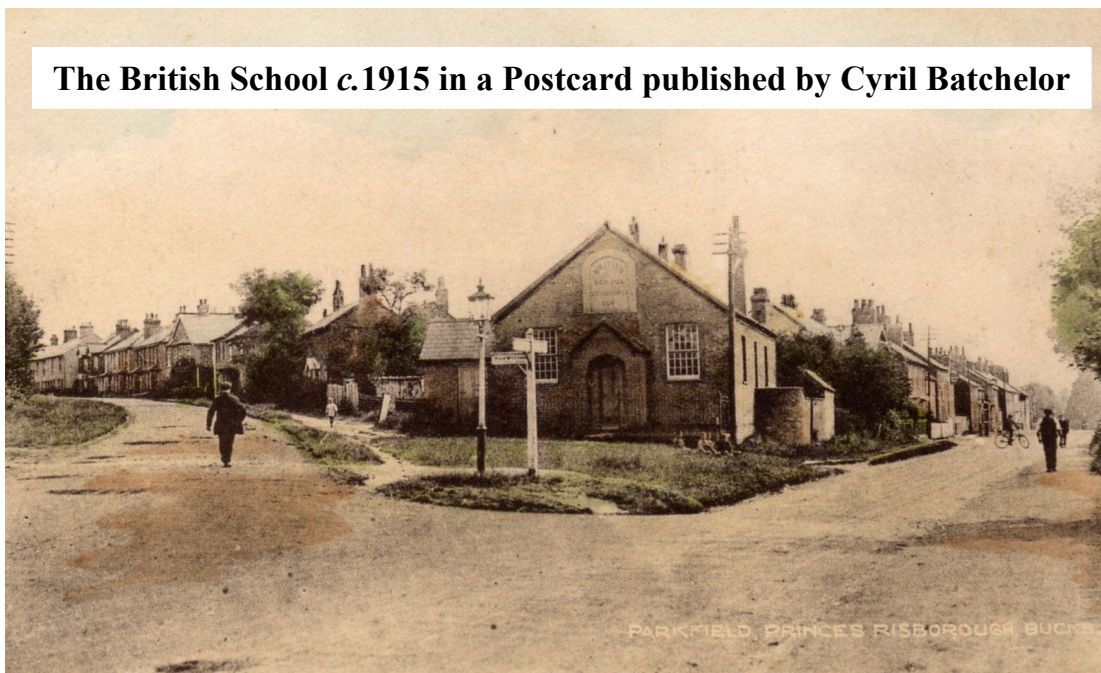


**The British School c.1915 in a Postcard published by Cyril Batchelor**



### **The British School, Parkfield, Princes Risborough**

What is today known as The Old British School has been a familiar landmark at the junction of the main Wycombe Road and Station Road since 1847. In 2013 the Heritage Society persuaded Wycombe District Council to list it as of significant historic and local importance. Despite the building being obscured by modern road trappings, it is still recognisable in the apartment block shown below that replaced it in 2013.

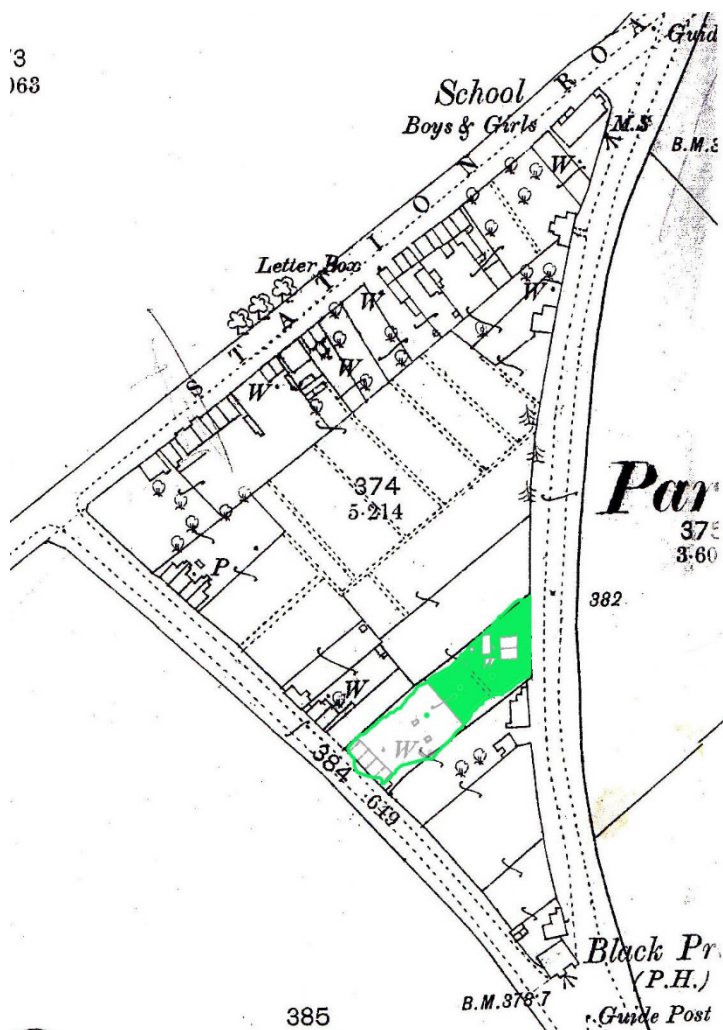


However, this was not the original school building, which opened in 1836 and has been identified in part by two letters written to the Bucks Free Press by Mr. G. Loosley.

In the first letter, dated 6<sup>th</sup> March 1911, Mr Loosley said that “he attended the British School from soon after its opening”. It was then for boys only and in an upstairs room of the house of Solomon Lacey, the first headmaster, reached by stairs from an outside room called a ‘shed’.

The second letter, dated 21<sup>st</sup> March 1913, described how Mr. Lacey “not infrequently would come up through a trapdoor to complain of the noises during the dinner hour”. The house was about halfway between the present building and the *Black Prince* public house, close enough that on sunny days some boys would “repair to the flap of the *Black Prince* cellar and sit there to eat their dinners”. On one occasion he lost his dinner to the *Black Prince*’s pig! There were then only a few houses on the north-west side of that section of Wycombe Road and none on the south-east side due to it being a fairly recent diversion of the old turnpike created in the 1820s. This spared travellers from having to follow Station Road and negotiate the sharp and dangerous turn into Poppy Road.

In 1852 Solomon Lacey’s house was almost destroyed by fire, but fortunately for future historians a sale notice in the Bucks Herald entitled “The Late Fire in Risborough Field” gave details of the damage and of neighbouring properties. This enabled identification of the precise location, marked in green on the 1881 O.S. map below that also shows the later school and the *Black Prince*.



The Sale Notice in the Bucks Herald stated:

“Lot 1: The remaining portion of Two Freehold Cottages, (the interior and roof having been destroyed by Fire), with large piece of garden ground adjoining ... close to the turn-pike road from Wycombe, late in the occupation of Mr. Lacey, British School Master. NB The doors and frames, sashes and frames, and other effects saved from the fire, will be included and may be seen at Mr. Callam’s, Risborough.”

“Lot 2: Four freehold tenements, built of brick, flint, and slated, with woodhouse and garden to each, abutting on the north-east to the garden of the former described property, and facing the high road on the south-west, near to the Black Prince public house in Risborough Field, now or late in the several occupations of Wm. Meakes, Mary Walker, Wm. Lacey and Sarah Parslow, at rents amounting to £14 per annum.”

Finding the neighbours in the 1851 Census led to identification of Solomon Lacey’s house as the pair of cottages at 76 – 78 Wycombe Road, whose front lower brickwork shows discolouration suggestive of upper storey rebuild of a fire-damaged original.



76 – 78 Wycombe Road and the discoloured brickwork that extends across the whole of the front.

By 1839 it was noted that “the average attendance, during the past year, is 72. The want of a more commodious room is now very much felt. It is feared the health of the master, as well as the comfort and progress of the children, are very much affected by the numbers crowded in so small a space.” To remedy this an association of “Friends of the British School” was formed, led by Lord Nugent, MP for Aylesbury, and Sir George Stephen, of Collins (now Loosley House), Loosley Row, with the aim of providing more commodious premises.



The earliest known photo of the new British School, by Leonard Pauling c.1890

The local Press of the day records that progress towards a new school was slow and at times led to acrimonious correspondence from supporters of the National or Church of England School. The necessity for it was, however, plain and extracts from a report in the Bucks Herald 1839 of a Meeting to promote a new schoolroom for the British School, otherwise known as The Princes Risborough School for Boys stated:

- It should be open to all denominations, with reading lessons from the Authorised Version of Holy Scriptures.
- Sir George Stephen lamented that in free and constitutional England the year 1839 should find the peasantry without adequate means of receiving instruction.
- Rev. Dorney of Missenden hoped for a time when every man, without the aid of Statesman or Priest, would know right from wrong, both theoretically and practically, the peasantry and labouring population be placed on an equal with those of Prussia, or even Ireland, for even in that distressed country he had found the starving population differing in intellect from the rural population of England as wide as the poles.

Robert Gibbs, in his *Local Occurrences*, says that on 'April 26th, 1848, there was a new British School opened at Risborough' and elsewhere it was said that 'The new British schoolroom is a credit to the town of Princes Risborough, and a boon to the neighbourhood'. It was managed under the monitorial system of the British and Foreign School Society, formerly the Lancastrian Society, founded by a Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, in 1808, with older pupils supervising younger ones, and was still used in village schools into the 20<sup>th</sup> C. allowing one or two teachers to cope with, in this case, up to 139 pupils.



Foundation Stones of Lord Nugent and Sir George Stephen



A Group Photo from a less motorised age, c.1910



Another from post-WWI, showing improvement to the road verge



The photo above shows Clement East, born in 1891 and looking about 6-7 years old, 3<sup>rd</sup> from the right in the front row. Note the boys' smart dress with "Eton Collars" that were almost standard school uniform throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

No photo of a British School classroom has been found, but the one below of the National School that opened at Church End in 1841, was taken in 1906. At that time Samuel Dyer was the Master and the photo gives a good idea of the formality of how education was run at that time.



From the beginning pupils at such schools had been required to make a small weekly contribution to their education, initially one penny leading them to be widely known as Penny

Schools. By 1891 costs had risen to the extent that at the British School children of farmers and shopkeepers had to bring sixpence each week, those of journeymen, mechanics and foremen fourpence and of labourers twopence with infants in all groups paying twopence.

The British School remained active until 1914 when its pupils transferred to the new Council School in Bell Street. The building was sold for £350, which was invested in fixed gilts in a charitable scheme dated 22 December 1914 – The Princes Risborough Old British School Fund – to provide financial assistance for the education of children or young persons resident in the ‘Privileged Area’ defined as the Parishes of Princes & Monks Risborough, Ilmer, Saunderton and Horsenden, who had spent not less than two years at any time at Public Elementary Schools. The first Trustees were Rupert EAST, coal merchant and brother of Clement in the 1891 photo above, John EGGLETON, farmer at Culverton, William SILSBY, miller at Park Mill, and Joseph THOMPSON, farmer at Summerleys.

Subsequently the school building has had a varied and interesting life. In 1920 Goodearl Brothers Furniture Ltd., established in Wycombe in 1870, opened a second workshop in the former British School Risborough, assembling and finishing chairs. Mr. Ronald Goodearl kindly provided basic details of the family business, which was so successful that in the same year Goodearl moved to a larger site between Picts Lane and the Station, adding a sawmill, and in 1924 was incorporated as Risboro’ Furniture Ltd. That business closed in 2001 and was re-born as Whiteleaf Furniture.

For an official history of Goodearl-Risboro’ Ltd. see

<http://www.petergoodearl.co.uk/laceygreen/prisboro/risbfurn/arfhist.htm>

**WHITELEAF**  
Home Page

Goodearl Bros  
**Risboro' Furniture**  
The Sawmill  
Goodearl-Risboro'

**GOODEARL-RISBORO' LTD**  
The story of a Buckinghamshire furniture company.  
From its beginnings in 1870 until closure in 2001  
and its rebirth as **whiteleaf ltd.**

whiteleaf ltd  
today

Part 1: **Risboro' Furniture Ltd.** Expansion on a new site.  
Mostly taken from an account by WMG.  
With further information from L.J. Mayes book:  
'The History of Chairmaking in High Wycombe'.  
Additional research by Mr. Ken Goodearl.

**Risboro' Furniture Ltd**

**Princes Risborough Bucks**

AFFILIATED WITH GOODEARL BROS. LTD., HIGH WYCOMBE

**RISBORO' FURNITURE LIMITED**

"IDEAL" "SUPAREST"

Telephone and Telegrams: 33  
**PRINCES RISBOROUGH, BUCKS**

Directors:  
A. J. Goodearl  
P. J. Goodearl  
E. S. Dean  
E. Dean

**CHAIR AND SEATING SPECIALISTS**  
Makers of Patented and Registered Design Models

Goodearl was succeeded at the British School by Risborough’s first cinema, called the Chaplin Kinema. The proprietor of the Kinema is as yet unknown but on 30 June 1923 he or she placed an advertisement in the Bucks Herald seeking a pianist for three nights a week for dances and pictures.

# CHAPLIN KINEMA,

FOR TOP-HOLE PICTURES.  
PRINCES RISBOROUGH.

:: PLEASE NOTE. ::

15th, Thursday, Two Performances, 5.45 and 8 p.m.  
16th, Friday, One Performance, 7 to 9 p.m.  
17th Saturday, Matinee, 2.30 (KIDDIES HALF - PRICE).  
Evening, 5.45 and 8 p.m.

SECOND EPISODE SERIAL.

## "PIRATE GOLD."

"DYNAMITE."

PATHE COMEDY.

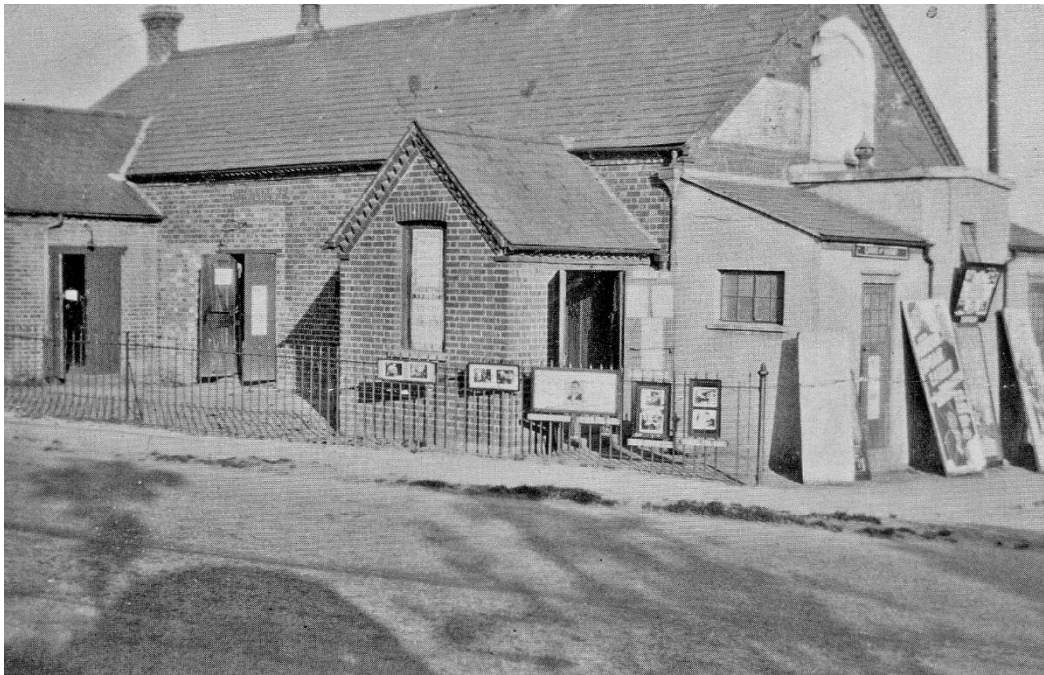
## "AN ACCIDENTAL AFFAIR."

SPECIAL EXCLUSIVE (See Posters).

"EVE'S FILM REVIEW" AND  
"PATHE PICTORIAL."

Popular Prices: 6d., 9d., 1/3, and 2/- (including tax).  
CHILDREN HALF-PRICE IF ACCOMPANIED BY ADULTS.

Within three months the Kinema had been taken over as the Prince's Cinema by brothers Horace and Leonard Wright, who had moved with their mother from the Isle of Wight. Leonard, was 13 at the time, but what might today be called a "cinema buff". He spotted an advertisement for the Chaplin Kinema and persuaded the family that it would be more profitable than the island grocery business which was very dependent on seasonal trade.



This involved an extension replacing the front porch to act as a projection room, seen in the above photo, and Leonard recalled a hilarious moment when a John Wayne film broke only a few minutes before the dramatic finish. Rather than stop the projection he let it run on and ended up with hundreds of feet of film coiled round the room and in the fire buckets. He also remembered a dog that became a faithful member of the audience, having discovered that sweets were available from the children.

The cinema was fitted out with Windsor chairs from the former Goodearl factory stock, which had been advertised in the Bucks Herald as '200 good strong chairs ... first offer of £30 buys the lot'. They were fixed to the floor in batches of four or five as an early Health & Safety measure. The Prince's Cinema survived until 1939, when it was unable to compete with the



newly opened Carlton, opposite Park Street. The brothers continued to use the building for a time by laboriously laying a Maplewood floor to convert it into a roller-skating rink and occasional dance hall, but were eventually forced to close by the onset of World War II.

In 1940 the London-based company of Aston & Full (paper packaging manufacturer) wanted to re-locate to a safer location and acquired the old school, through the introduction of Henry Laidler, of Cheverton & Laidler. The timing was fortunate, because its London factory was destroyed by a bomb in August of the same year.

Aston & Full later moved to what had been built as a wartime reserve Meteorological Station at Mill Lane, Monks Risborough, part of a site later developed as Social Housing and now modernised as Courtmoor Close. The former British School became home to a succession of small businesses until, in 2011, an application was made for demolition or conversion of the building to be replaced by three residential units.

As previously mentioned, the Heritage Society was anxious to preserve the general appearance of the original building and a sympathetic design eventually gained District Council planning approval. There were some heart-stopping moments during construction in 2013, as the photograph below shows, but the retention of the original side walls and particularly the front gable end achieved the desired outcome of preserving the school's familiar appearance as one approaches it from the town.



Only two significant historical elements have been lost, Sir George Stephen's foundation stone and bricks with the original date of 1847 scratched in are lost from the Station Road side, though possibly only hidden under rendering.



Lord Nugent's stone was re-set on the left of the front porch, and the front gable end still proudly proclaims

BRITISH SCHOOL ESTABLISHED 1836

