

THE WIDNES GAZETTE

SPECIAL REPORT ON THE STATE OF WIDNES DOCK SCHOOL

INSPECTION ORDERED: 29th
March, 1841

DATE OF VISIT: 13th April, 1841

REPORT FILED: 20th May, 1841

GENERAL CONSTITUTION & PREMISES

1. Correspondent & Chairman	Rev. William Jeff, on behalf of the school Committee.
2. Parish Location	Farnworth Chapelry.
3. Nearest Post-Town	Prescot.
4. Date of Establishment	Erected and established in the year 1839.
5. Original Promoters	Rev. William Jeff, Thomas Kidd, Esq., and Mr. Thomas Shaw.
6 & 7. Connexion & Aid Granted	In connexion with the National Society; aid was promised accordingly.
8. Tenure of Site	Held securely under Freehold tenure.
9. Church of England Connexion	No; not erected on ground belonging to the incumbent as a spiritual corporation sole.
10 & 11. Alternative Appropriations	Used for Divine Service on Sunday Afternoons; explicitly recognized in the trust-deed.
12, 13 & 14. Execution & Enrolment	Trust-deed duly executed and enrolled on the 18th of January, 1841.
15 & 16. Trustee Appointment & Renewal	Named by original promoters. Vacancies filled via election by surviving trustees.
17. Extent & Bounds of Site	A frontage of 7½ yards, running 19 yards back from the railroad. Bounded by the railroad on the west, houses/yards north and south, and a low brick wall on the east. Built entirely upon the railway embankment.
18. Sanatory State of Situation	On both east and west flanks lies an open marsh; situation highly questionable.
19. Choice of Neighborhood	Surrounded closely by roughly 40 huts tenantless of all but 'flatmen' (barge workers).
20 & 21. Building Materials	Substantially constructed of Brick with a Slated roof.
22 & 23. State of Repair & Age	In Good repair. Erected originally in 1839.
24 & 25. Building Funds & Accounts	Erected via Treasury grant of £20 and local private subscriptions. • Contractor's Accounts (Bare Walls): £109 15s. 2d. • Internal Fittings & Furnishings: £77 0s. 11½d.

MECHANICAL ARRANGEMENTS

26 & 27. Dimensions & Gallery	Chief school-room measures 36½ feet by 18 feet. Contains no specialized instruction gallery.
28 & 29. Classrooms & Ventilation	No separate classrooms provided. Room is sufficiently warmed and ventilated.
30 & 31. Lobbies & Exercise Ground	No lobby or closet for cloaks/bonnets. A small exercise yard exists on the east side.
32, 33 & 34. Playground Conditions	Extent is perhaps 40 square yards. Enclosed by a low brick wall. No gymnastic apparatus.
35 & 36. Teacher's Residence	Yes; the basement floor of the school-house is applied as a domestic residence for the teachers.

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL DISCIPLINE

37 & 38. Daily Worship & Bible Reading	No daily psalm or prayer at assembly. Holy Bible read daily by the upper class.
39, 40 & 41. Catechism & Liturgy	Private home prayer is not taught. Children thoroughly instructed in Church Catechism and Liturgy.
42, 43 & 44. Sunday Attendance	Most attend Sunday afternoon service held inside the building. Sunday-school teachers ensure orderly behavior.
45 & 46. Pastoral Oversight & Intercourse	Scarcely any inquiry into spiritual profit. Teachers maintain no standard intercourse with parents outside hours.
47 & 48. Progress in Knowledge	The religious attainments of the children are but small; answers are delivered mechanically and by rote.
49. Attention to Junior Classes	Unequal; junior classes and lower pupils receive insufficient individual attention.

MEANS OF INSTRUCTION & METHOD

50. Books & Literature Utilized	Testaments and small educational booklets provided by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).
51 & 52. Apparatus & Training	Basic forms and a schoolmistress's desk. No systematic gymnastic training.
53, 54 & 55. School Organization	Children classed according to proficiency. Taught consistently by the same teacher rather than a succession of masters.
56 - 59. Teaching Staff & Monitors	One single schoolmistress. No monitors, pupil-teachers, or associated remuneration.
60 - 63. System of Rewards	No system of rewards exists to incentivize intellectual or moral proficiency.
64 - 67. Punishments Employed	Corporal punishment is explicitly employed via the rod. Inflicted publicly before the school.

68 - 73. Methods of Tuition	All instruction delivered by the schoolmistress without much system. No mutual, simultaneous, or interrogative system systematically managed. Lessons are not properly tested via written or memory abstracts.
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78 & 79. Works of Industry	Both boys and girls are gainfully employed in Knitting, Sewing, and marking.
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ATTENDANCE, FEES & TEACHER PROFILE

80 - 83. Library & Clothing Clubs	A clothing club and library are connected to the Sunday-school at the parish church. Books are permitted to be taken home to parents.
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85. Attendance on Day of Inspection	Only 3 Boys and 15 Girls were present.
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86 & 87. Regular Attendance Numbers	No official book of attendance is kept. Average attendance estimated at roughly 20 of each sex.
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88 - 91. Enforcement of Attendance	Numbers are somewhat on the increase, but regular or punctual attendance is completely unenforced.
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92 - 94. Rate of School Fees	All pay for admittance; some few at 2½d., the rest at 2d. per week.
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96 & 97. Cleanliness & Demeanor	No. They are the children of 'flatmen'—a very low, unsettled class passing much time on river flats and barges.
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99 & 100. Age Limits of Scholars	Admitted usually at 3 years of age; generally remain until 10.
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102 - 106. Profile of the Schoolmistress	No master; schoolmistress is Anne Robinson. She is married, living rent-free with fuel and candles provided in the basement residence.
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107 - 110. Background & Training	Devotes her whole time. Former occupation was a shoemaker's wife with no peculiar calling. Received zero training in the art of teaching at any training-school; entered office at age 25.
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111. Official Opinion of the Teacher	The mistress is essentially the keeper of a traditional dame-school; very imperfectly instructed and possesses no system. Inquired to be a religiously minded woman, though noted as not very neat in her personal appearance.
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112 - 116. Appointment & Ejection	Appointed by the Trustees at their absolute will without written agreement. If needed, they may be easily ejected from the cottage as tenants-at-will.
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GOVERNMENT, INCOME & EXPENDITURE

117 & 118. Management & Governance	Vested entirely in the Trustees: Rev. W. Jeff (Visitor, Patron, President, Secretary), Thomas Kidd, Esq. (Treasurer), and Mr. Thomas Shaw.
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119 - 123. Committee Activity	Trustees meet periodically. General meetings of subscribers are non-existent. Rev. W. Jeff acts as the sole active superintendent.
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124 & 125. Public Examinations	None organized; no periodic public testing to impact teachers or children.
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126. Annual Institutional Income	No annual subscriptions, collections, or endowments. Income derived purely from school fees, averaging 4s. to 5s. per week.
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127 - 129. Institutional Expenditure

The stipend of the mistress consists solely of the pence collected from the children. Zero funds expended on repairs, furniture, apparatus, books, or fuel.

MR. STOKES' COMPREHENSIVE REPORT FOR 1862

A formal catalog outlining the historical updates, grants, and subsequent structural transitions affecting primary school localities conducted by former students in England.

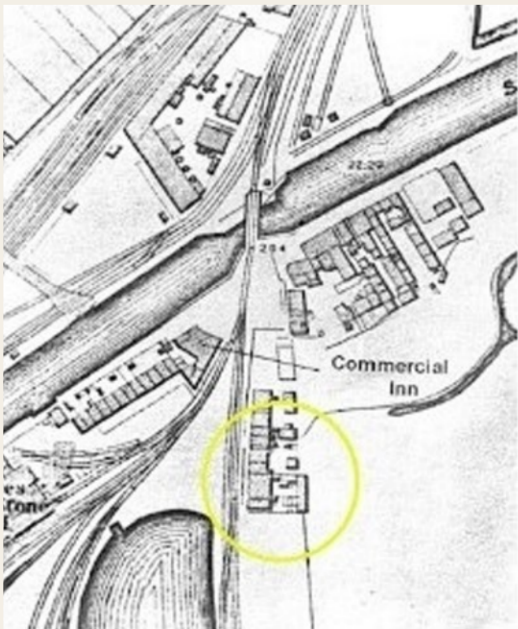
Name and Denomination of School	Grants for Building, Enlargement, etc. (Amount)	Date of Payment	Grants for Apparatus, Maps, Diagrams	Annual Grants
Widnes Dock - N.S.	£30 0s 0d	1841	£0 16s 7 1/4d	—
Widnes Dock, St. Mary's - N.S.	—	—	£10 15s 7d	£336 18s 18d
Widnes Dock, St. Marie's - R.C.	£302 10s 0d	1861	—	£20 8s 9d

ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL CHRONICLES & NOTES

The Emergence of the Industrial Docklands: The Widnes Dock School, founded in 1839, stands as a prime artifact of early Victorian educational enterprise during a period of massive socio-technical transformation. Positioned directly atop the railway embankment, the schoolhouse sat at the epicentre of the industrial transport frontier. The immediate proximity to the expanding lines of the St Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway subjected the school room to severe vibration, soot, and structural vulnerability, rendering it 'useless' by 1862.

Socio-Demographic Landscape of the Flatmen: The inspector's notation regarding the 'flatmen' highlights the transient, labor-intensive river culture of 19th-century Lancashire. Flatmen were operators of Mersey flats—broad-beamed wooden sailing barges that navigated the River Mersey, the Weaver Navigation, and the Sankey Canal. Deemed a 'very low class, unsettled in their abode,' their nomadic waterborne commerce deeply destabilized regular school attendance, explaining why only 18 children out of an estimated average of 40 were present on the day of inspection.

The Role of Dame Schools and Transition: Anne Robinson's description as the keeper of a traditional 'dame school' reflects the pre-professionalized era of working-class education before the systematic rollout of the pupil-teacher system. These schools were often run by local women out of domestic spaces (here, the basement floor) focusing on basic literacy and moral instruction. The transition to St. Mary's National School on Waterloo Road in 1862 marks the absorption of these informal neighborhood institutions into highly organized, purpose-built school structures backed by larger parliamentary grants and the National Society.



This map shows the West Bank Dame School circled in yellow, with it's surroundings in 1850.