

School Fees:

In the report for 23rd July 1877, the head reports fees for three children from the same family were 8d (*just over 3p*) and for each additional child another 2d (*just under 1p*). Whilst these seem trivial sums now, a newspaper article from 1912 gives this statement 'The fishermen of Port Isaac are very poor indeed. Seven and sixpence [37½p] a week was mentioned to me as by no means an exceptionally low scale of earnings.' Whilst school fees were determined locally by a school board comprising locally elected people who presumably had an idea on what could be afforded by local families, this was not an insignificant sum to many. In May 1887, presumably as a result of mounting unpaid fees, the board enforced a 'No Fee, No School' policy and sent children home if they had no money. There was a growing national recognition that school fees were an unfair policy that affected primarily the poor. The effect on teachers was also recognised, with them having to be the hard-faced debt collector who turned away children whose parents wanted them to be educated but did not have the money to pay. Not until the Free Education Act of 1891 was introduced did these iniquities disappear. The government set a maximum amount they would pay per family per week of 10s (50p), which suggests the fees set in Port Isaac were very low.

The Standard 30th April 1891

Mr. A. B. Forwood, M.P., who was present yesterday at the annual meeting of the Liverpool Constitutional Association, said he believed the present Parliament would be continued till its natural expiration, unless some extraordinary contingency should occur, such as obstruction to the Free Education Bill, eliciting an indignant cry from the country, in which case the Government might dissolve. No measure of modern times would appeal so directly to the people as the new Education Bill, for under its provisions hundreds of thousands of struggling poor families would be relieved of the burden of the weekly school fee, and the schoolmaster exempted from the invidious task of having to extract the pence from the poorly-paid labouring man. Free schools at one time were synonymous with secular schools, and were regarded as destructive of the denominational system. It was on these grounds the Conservative Party opposed them. Now, however, they had the assurance that the measure would not be detrimental to the great system of religious education or to the best interests of the denominational schools. The extreme Radical Party had declared war against the Bill unless all the elementary schools assisted were placed under popular control; and a very limited number of Churchmen were also opponents of the measure, because they feared it might be injurious to Church schools, thus prejudging its character. Quarrels over systems of management would quickly be brushed aside if an appeal were made to the electors. To his Church friends he said that nothing they could do would stop the granting of free education, and that it was far better to accept a measure framed by the best friends of denominational schools than to await the Bill of their most bitter opponents.