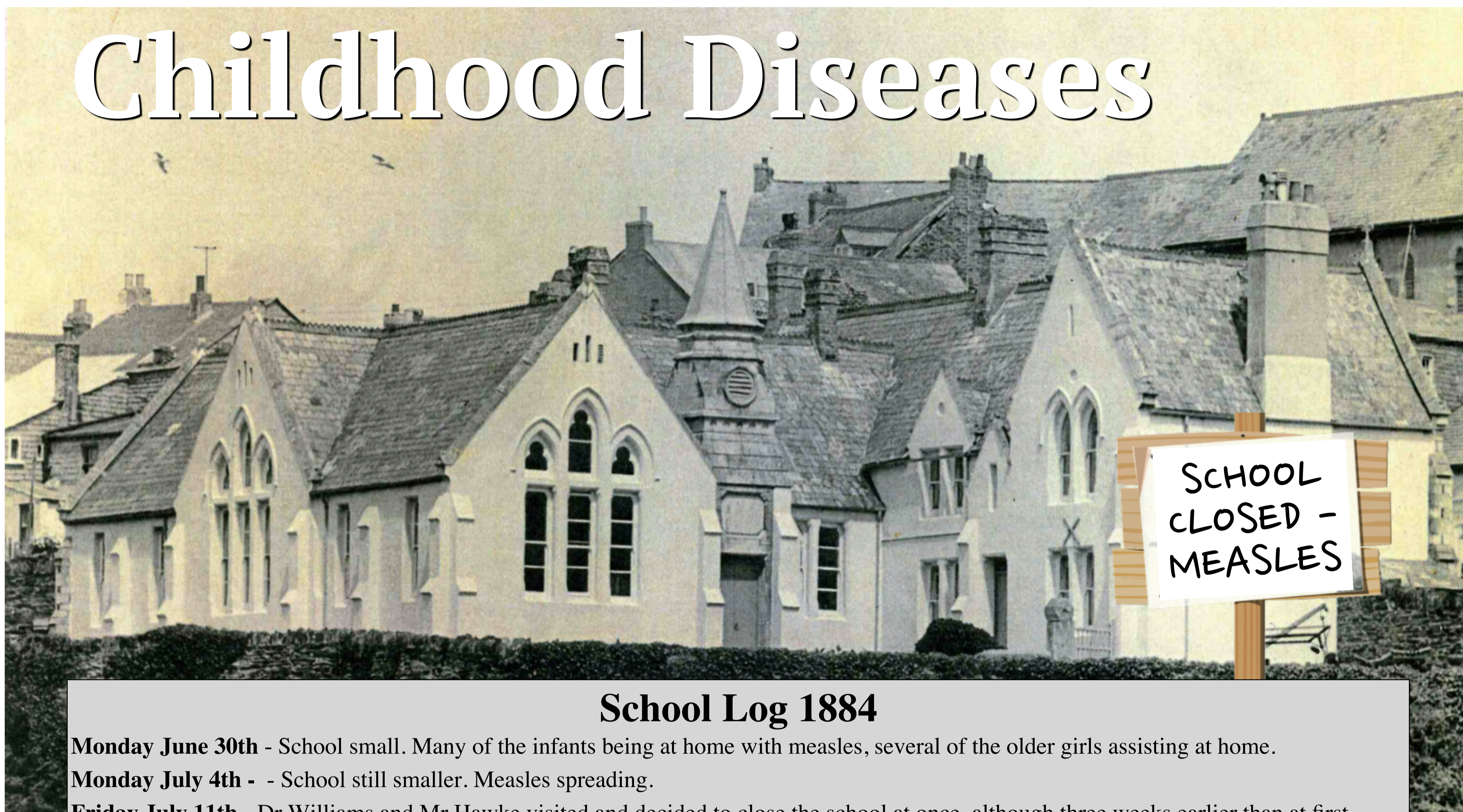


Childhood Diseases



School Log 1884

Monday June 30th - School small. Many of the infants being at home with measles, several of the older girls assisting at home.

Monday July 4th - School still smaller. Measles spreading.

Friday July 11th - Dr Williams and Mr Hawke visited and decided to close the school at once, although three weeks earlier than at first proposed.

Monday August 11th - School reassembled this morning after a month's vacation. Dr Williams visited and decided that, although there were cases still of measles, it would be advisable to carry on the schools. Attendance very small - several of the scholars in the harvest fields.

In the early Port Isaac school journals the headmaster regularly reported outbreaks of illness amongst the children. For the most serious epidemics, medical officials required the school to close so the spread could be slowed or halted. Before the introduction of modern antibiotics and mass immunisation, highly contagious childhood diseases like Measles, Mumps, Rubella (German Measles), Whooping Cough, Diphtheria and Scarlet Fever spread like wildfire, especially in crowded living accommodation or the confined space of a schoolroom. As late as the 1950s, catching measles in childhood was regarded 'as inevitable as death and taxes'.

In 1886, there was an outbreak of Scarlet Fever (Scarlatina) which closed the school from June 4th to July 12th, when presumably it had abated, although it was still present in late August. This is a bacterial disease particularly affecting young children around 4 to 8 years old. Before the advent of antibiotics Scarlet Fever was most serious and could be fatal, although the headmaster reported no deaths at the school.

Later that year, December brought Whooping Cough to weaken the children further. This is an extremely debilitating disease, with severe uncontrollable coughing fits interspersed with a high-pitched 'whoop' as the child struggles to breathe in. This can last 6 to 8 weeks before subsiding ... There was a further outbreak of Whooping Cough in April 1911 when the school was closed for three weeks, and more illness later that year as Diphtheria broke out in November. Diphtheria is a highly contagious disease which can be fatal. A serious outbreak of Diphtheria occurred in December 1917 when the Medical Officer of Health ordered the school closed in December. The whole school was disinfected in January, but remained closed until February 1918.

School Log 1886

July 16th - School reopened after being closed for 5 weeks owing to the prevalency of scarlatina.

August 20th - More children unwell with scarlatina and sore throats. Several others at home harvesting.

December 10th - Very small attendance owing to the heavy gales of wind and rain, also to colds and whooping cough.

December 17th - Much sickness amongst the children.

School Log 1894

February 23rd - Fewer children still at school this week. Many are suffering from influenza and others are kept away on account of the Typhoid Fever, the parents being afraid to send them. Frank Brewer, one of the Upper Class boys died this week from Typhoid Fever.

March 2nd - Seven cases of typhoid in the place, three are children belonging to the school ... The board met this afternoon and decided that in consequence of the small attendance of children, and on receipt of an order from Dr Mudge, the Medical Authority for this district, to close the school at once. The schools were therefore closed for a fortnight this afternoon.

March 22nd - School reopened on Monday morning but the attendance has been very poor indeed, the average being 95 out of 218 on the books. Several cases of Fever in the place still and the people are afraid to send their children. Another boy died last week.

April 6th - Several fresh cases this week.

April 13th - Children gradually coming back to school but there are several families now who are keeping their children separate. Fever still prevailing.

April 20th - Two more cases of Fever amongst the children this week.

April 27th - More children attending this week. Only 63% this month. Fever still prevailing and there are several cases of Measles.

May 11th - Another case of Typhoid Fever reported.