

## Life as a child in Hooe during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901).

### *Introduction*

Hooe is a small, sparsely populated parish in Sussex situated near the coast, as illustrated in Figure 1<sup>1</sup>. During the Victorian period there was a centrally populated area around Hooe Common (Figure 2<sup>1</sup>) with some houses spread over the rest of the parish amongst farmland.

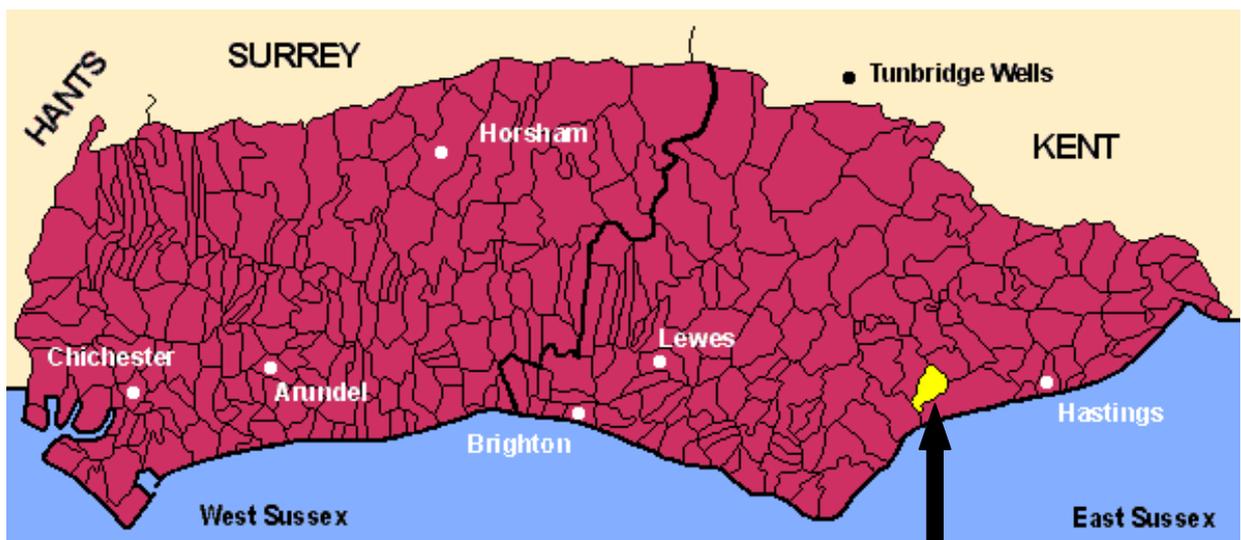


Figure 1: The county of Sussex with Hooe Parish highlighted in yellow<sup>1</sup>

Hooe Parish

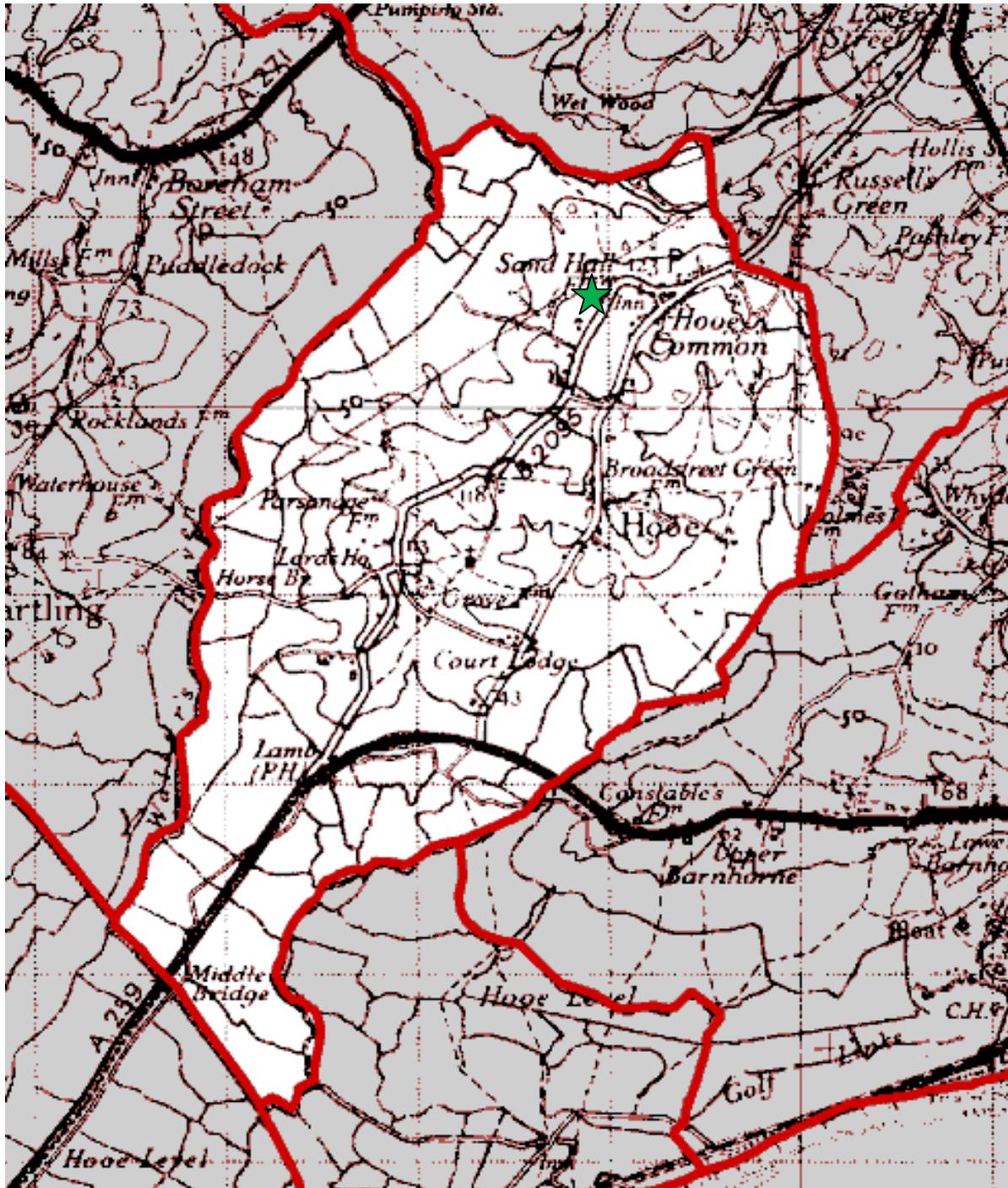


Figure 2: A more in detail map of Hooe Parish including its borders<sup>1</sup>

★ = The approximate location of the school. Situated quite high up in the village so some children living further out would have quite a way to walk in the mornings

The village was self sufficient since most of the supplies used by families were made and grown within the village. Massive amounts of farmland owned by farmers provided the many impoverished inhabitants of Hooe with poorly paid agricultural jobs<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately this meant that many people remained in poverty.

### ***School Life***

Hooe was fairly lucky to have its own school, since many parishes in England were not so lucky<sup>3</sup>. The school itself was a National School which was built between 1865 and 1871<sup>4</sup>. Before this date it was likely that the children of Hooe travelled along the road to Ninfield School or didn't attend school.

The Elementary Education Act (EEA) 1870 made school attendance compulsory for 5 – 13 year olds. Until 1891 education was not free, therefore parents were forced to send their children to school and pay for their education, which many could ill afford<sup>5</sup>.

The layout of the school seen in Figure 3<sup>4</sup> consisted of two main rooms; the smaller of which was used for the infants (Standard I) and the larger used for the rest of the children (Standards II-IV)<sup>4</sup>.

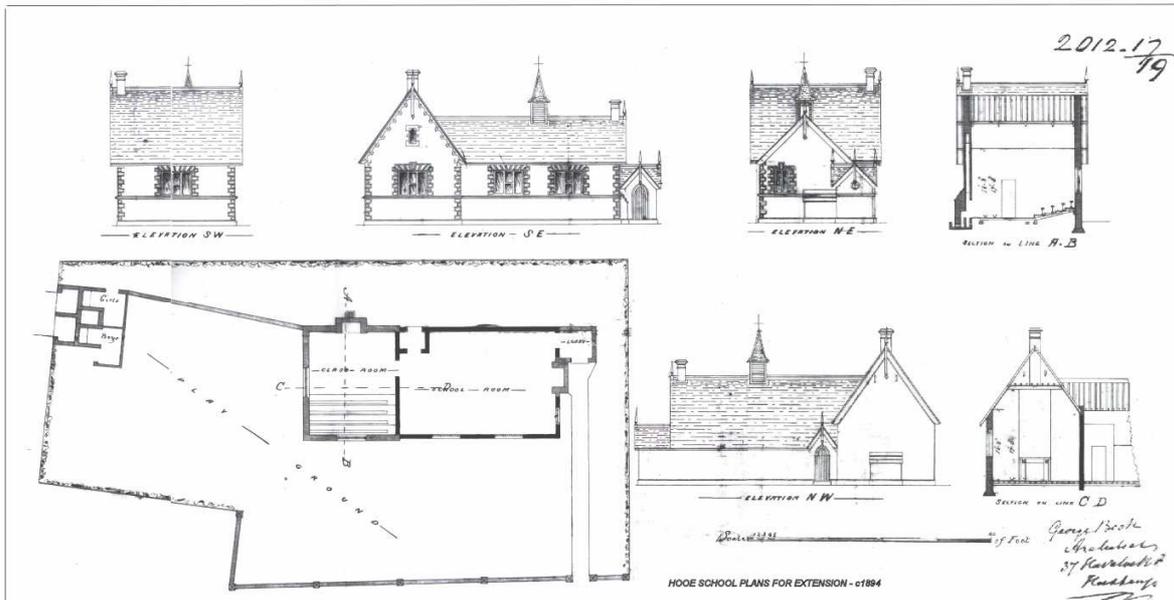


Figure 3: Plan of Hooe School drawn in 1894 showing what the school looked like up until then<sup>4</sup>

Two open fires that were situated in each room were the only form of heating. Unfortunately the Winter months brought harsh North-Easterly winds that blew smoke back into the building. Windows would have to be opened or the school evacuated, which wasn't particularly favourable in the cold weather<sup>4</sup>.

The actual building itself was of poor quality which reflected the wealth of the village quite accurately. Children had to sit in cramped noisy conditions on benches and did their work on slate. Paper was quite a rarity due to its expense<sup>2,4</sup>.

Most of the children walked in to school and for many the journey was long. Clothes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were very heavy and soaked up water (Figure 4<sup>4</sup>), therefore many children did not attend school during times of bad weather<sup>6</sup>.

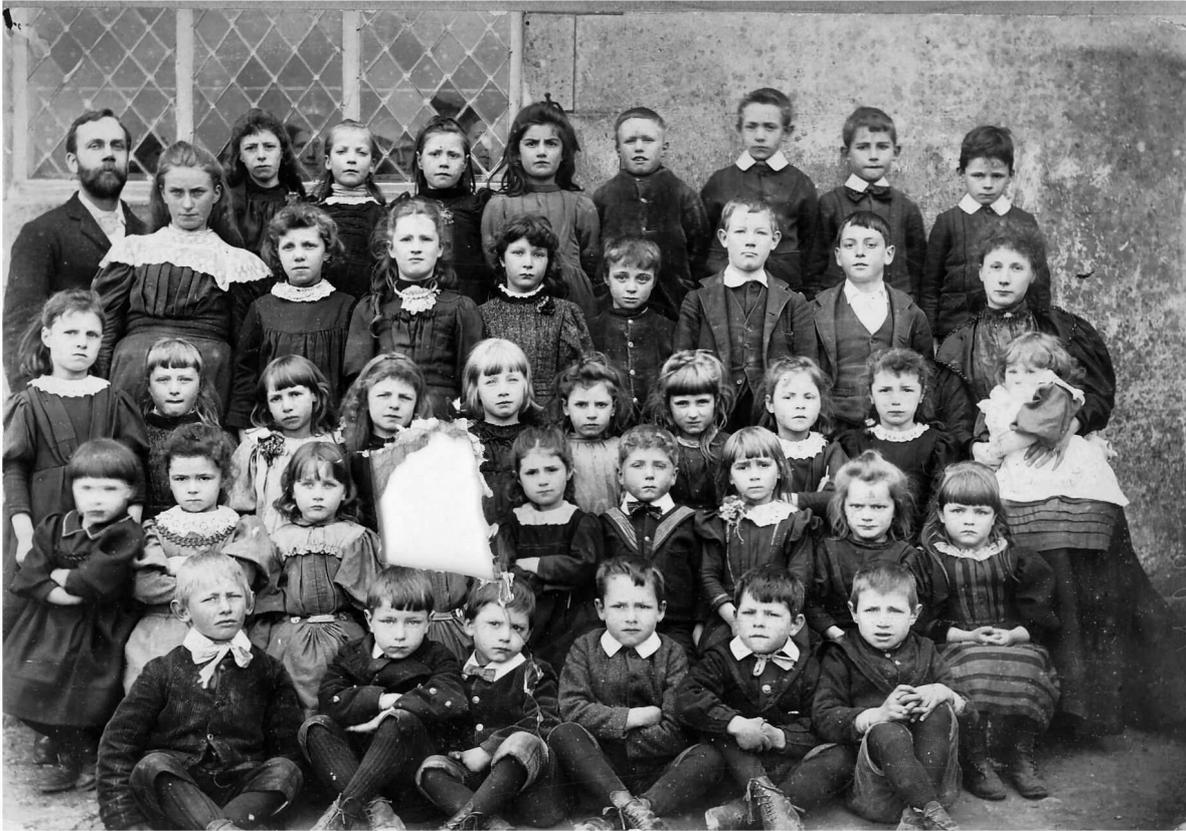


Figure 4: Photo of Hooe School children taken in 1897<sup>4</sup>

Children at the school were divided into Standards: I, II, III, IV, V and VI. This split was probably organised by age. The Standards apparently reflected the level of knowledge that was required by the end of each school year by the scholars<sup>4</sup>.

Hooe School had a School Master who organised the classes and also taught some of the subjects. He also wrote in a logbook which was made compulsory after the EEA 1870 regarding the day to day activities of the school. Interestingly the vicar played a very important part in the school. He visited at least once weekly and would express his views on the behaviour and progress of the children. Additionally there were a couple of teachers who taught the children and supplied them with work. The School Master appointed

several older scholars as pupil teachers. They helped teach some of the younger scholars and many would later become teachers themselves<sup>6</sup>.

The main subjects taught in the school were known as the three R's: **r**eading, **w**riting and **a**rithmetic<sup>2-4</sup>. The scholars were examined in arithmetic once monthly and it was generally considered to be the most important out of the three since it would have been needed by the children in various jobs when they grew up. Singing was an important part of the curriculum; each week a new song was learnt and sung by the children to the vicar. The girls also learnt needlework and sewing. Most of them would aspire to get married and then become housewives. The boys learned other subjects such as Geography and Science which were relevant to the work they would eventually end up doing<sup>3,6</sup>.

Homework was set once weekly, however somewhat unsurprisingly this was unpopular among many of the parents<sup>6</sup>. Poor families needed their children to earn money and help out with housework after school rather than do homework. Additionally, the majority of the children would not go to college or university so education was seen by many to be a waste of time<sup>5</sup>.

School attendance fluctuated a lot throughout the year due to different factors, however it mainly exceeded 100. Even with the introduction of the EEA 1870, many children were off school in the Spring and Summer for tasks such as hop pole laying, potato picking, blackberrying and bird tending. During the winter months attendance was poor due to bad weather and illness<sup>4,6</sup>.

The school holidays during the Easter and Christmas period were only a few days long usually. An 8 week summer holiday appears quite appealing, however, the children were expected to work during these times<sup>6</sup>.

Hooe had fairs each year during the Spring and Summer which were always official school holidays. On Hooe Club Day villagers would bring their livestock to Hooe Common where they would buy and sell them, stalls would be set up and activities such as a coconut shy would be set up. Entertainers would also perform throughout the day<sup>2,6</sup>.

### ***Children and work***

Hooe was almost entirely poverty stricken during the Victorian times. Families relied heavily on sending their children as young as 9 to work the fields to earn money<sup>7</sup>. The EEA 1870 was supposed to take children of school age out of wage labour<sup>8</sup>, however the introduction of the Act does not seem to have made much of a difference to the amount of children employed (Figure 5<sup>7</sup>).

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
0-16	267	270	240	249	212	208	146
% 0-16 in work	21	11	11	13	14	15	12

Figure 5: A table showing the percentage of children in work as recorded by the censuses between 1841 and 1901<sup>7</sup>

Looking at some of the statistics in Figure 5<sup>7</sup> it is shocking to see the proportion of children between 0 and 16 working. Many of these were probably school leavers over 13 years old, however this is still a strikingly low age for children to be expected to work. These figures are probably an underestimate. Considering the attendance of the school was approximately 100 for the earlier part of Victoria's reign this would mean that many parents lied on the census and were sending their children to work rather than attend school<sup>8</sup>. A good proportion of these children would also have worked in the 'holiday' period between school and this would not have been mentioned on the census<sup>6</sup>.

It is also interesting to note that even after the introduction of the EEA 1870 the proportion of children in work did not significantly decrease. This is an indicator of the difficulty for families to survive during that time<sup>6,7</sup>.

The jobs that the children were expected to do were mainly agricultural, however some of the poorest families often sent their children to live with a wealthier family so they could work as servants<sup>9</sup>. Even though restrictions were made regarding child labour during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it would have been difficult to enforce these rules in a remote village such as Hooe. One law made in 1868 made it illegal for any child under 8 to be employed in a gang of farm workers<sup>8</sup>.

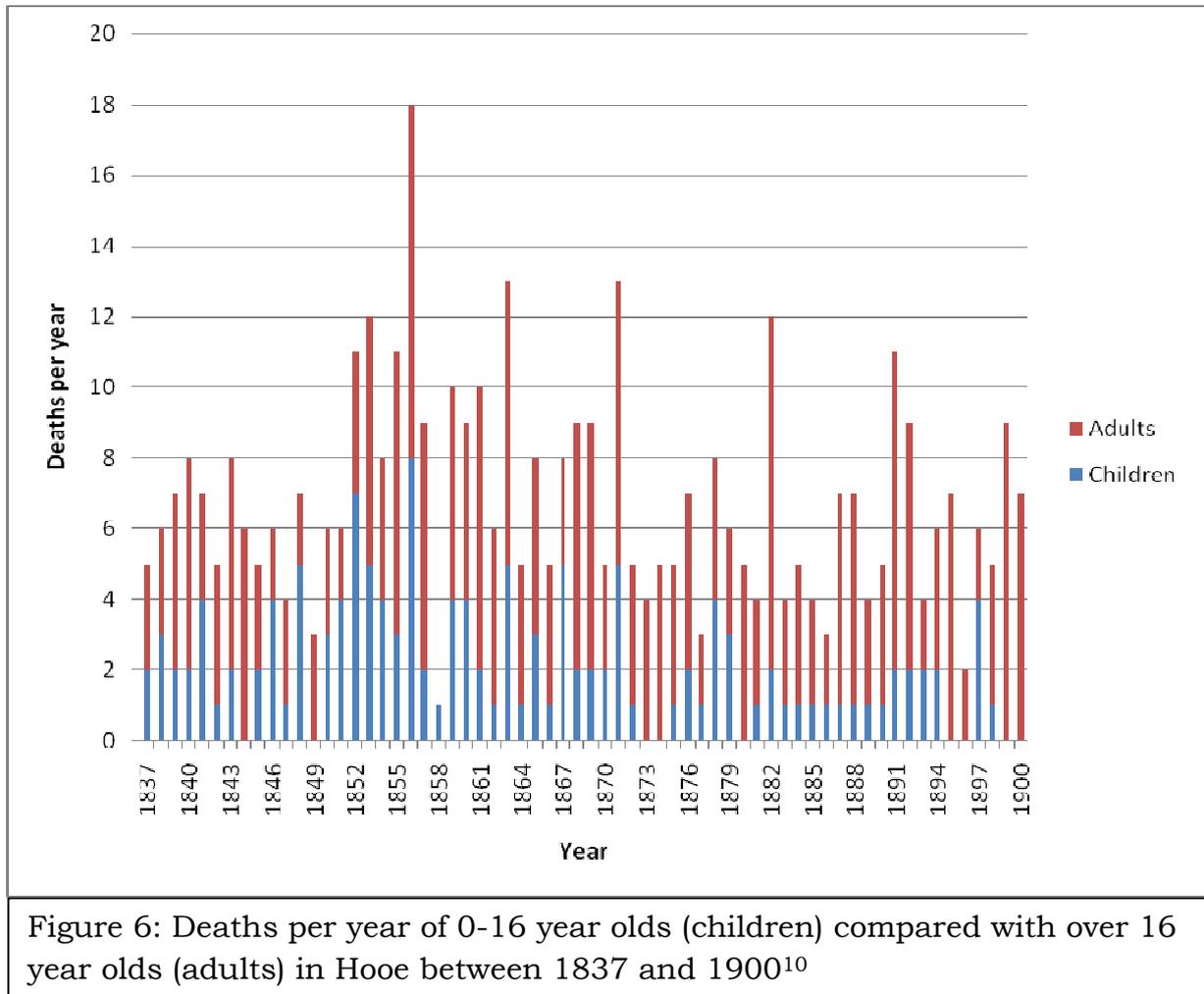
It appears from Hooe records that the workhouse made under the Poor Act was removed from Hooe before Queen Victoria's reign. Between 1830 and 1833 £3000 was spent on the paupers so in 1833 those who lived in the workhouse were shipped off America and given a small amount of money. The poor rate was still used, and many of the paupers were given work on the land<sup>2</sup>.

One would think that children in the countryside had a better life than those in the towns and cities, however, they still had to deal with the unpleasant weather, awful working conditions and poor sanitation of hard outdoor labour<sup>9</sup>.

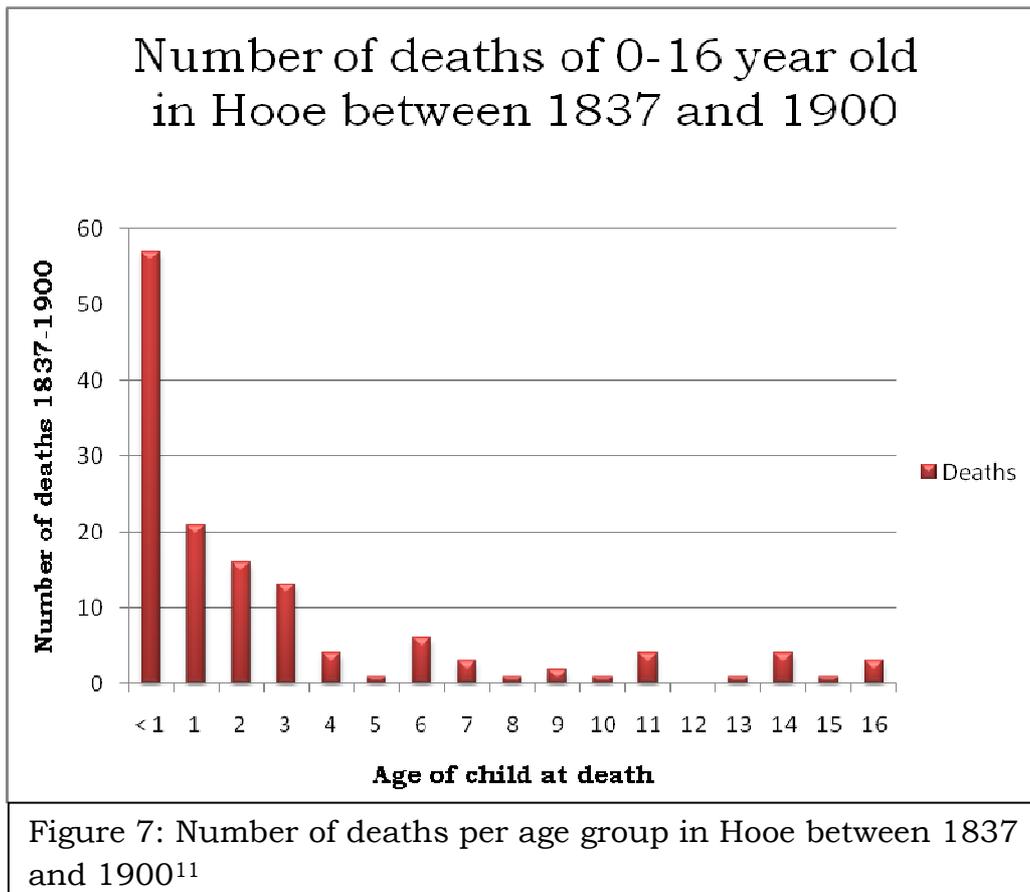
## **Disease and death**

Between 1841 and 1901 the average population in Hooe was 497. Until the latter part of the century approximately half of these were children<sup>7</sup>. This was probably because the families in Hooe expected many of their children to die through disease or work related accidents<sup>9</sup>. Alternatively there could have been lack of education regarding contraception.

The statistics shown in Figure 6<sup>10</sup> show that in the earlier part of the Victorian period the deaths of 0-16 year olds each year almost equals the number of deaths of the adults<sup>10</sup>. Due to cramped living spaces and poor sanitation infectious diseases could spread easily amongst families. It wasn't unusual for multiple children to die in one family. Towards the end of the century there was a Medical Officer at the school who would have been able to identify and treat these diseases more<sup>6</sup>. This may account for the drop in the numbers of deaths of the children in the latter part of the century.



Children under 3 years old were most likely to die from disease (Figure 7<sup>10</sup>). At this age children are more susceptible to infection as their immune systems are not fully developed. Few vaccines was another possible cause of these high death rates<sup>11</sup>.



There was no village doctor; only a doctor who served Hooe and other surrounding villages and towns<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, if a child became ill there would be no medications at close hand which could cure them until the doctor was able to see them. The main way that infection was dealt with was to isolate the infected person and decontaminate their belongings<sup>11</sup>. The school was fumigated with sulphur a few times due to outbreaks of different infections<sup>6</sup>.

Some of the epidemics mentioned in the school logbook are mentioned in Figure 8<sup>6</sup>. It's hard to believe that there were no infectious diseases among the children between 1876 and 1886 and also between 1893 and 1897, however it may be that they simply were not recorded as they didn't know what the diseases were. In around 1887 a Medical Officer becomes a lot more involved with the school therefore diseases are identified much more often giving the

children a better chance of survival. For a lot of the winter months children were also recorded as being away due to heavy colds<sup>6</sup>. This is possibly what would now be recognised as pneumonia<sup>11</sup>.

Year	Illness
1876	Ringworm
1886	Measles
1887	Bronchitis, whooping cough, ringworm
1888	Strange eruption of the skin
1889	Diphtheria
1890	'The Russian Epidemic'
1891	Influenza
1892	Whooping cough, diphtheria, measles
1893	Mumps, scarlet fever
1897	Whooping cough
1898	Chicken pox
1899	Measles
1900	Ringworm
1901	Smallpox in Sussex

Figure 8: Epidemics recorded in the Hooe School Logbook<sup>6</sup>

The outbreaks of infection mentioned in Figure 8<sup>6</sup> are some of the most common diseases recorded in England during that time<sup>11</sup>. Figure 9<sup>11</sup> shows the numbers of deaths of children from 0-19 years old that died from some of the most common diseases. Interestingly, smallpox still caused a great number of deaths despite there being a vaccination. It may be that the vaccine had not yet reached all of the poor families by that time<sup>11</sup>.

Cause of death	< 1	< 5	5 - 9	10 - 14	Total
Pneumonia	57,956	107,831	5,096	1,684	172,567
Diarrhoea	53,072	76,660	1,896	774	132,402
Scarlet fever	7,540	72,056	31,066	6,543	117,205
Whooping Cough	24,824	58,254	2,664	153	85,895
Bronchitis	22,345	40,506	1,756	605	65,212
Measles	8,875	44,003	3,857	516	57,251
Smallpox	9,219	24,961	4,748	1,224	40,152
Influenza	2,737	4,552	400	233	7922

Figure 9: Table showing the leading causes of death in 0-19 year olds in England and Wales between 1848 and 1855<sup>11</sup>. These figures can be related to the most common epidemics in Hooe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>6</sup>.

## ***Summary***

Children living in the Victorian period in Hooe certainly did not have an easy time. The lives of many of the poorer children would have been similar to that of the adults as they would have had to work hard to earn money for their families. Older children who had a strong sense of their own values would have been conscientious that education was taking away their ability to contribute to their families' economy<sup>8</sup>.

Education was certainly not valued as highly as paid work since the majority of children would not use the education they gained to go on to study at college or university<sup>3,5</sup>. In essence the poor families remained in a poverty trap.

Infection and death was prevalent among children, especially the younger children. Poor living and work conditions would have contributed significantly to these statistics.

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