







Hendreds Pre-School

The History of Hendreds Pre-school 1963 - 2013





From 1963 - 1982

What could be a better idea than starting a local playgroup where children could meet and play with others and give busy mums a brief reprieve? Doreen Wort from East Hendred attended a talk about playgroup schemes and returned enthusiastic to start a group in her village, however it wasn't to be so simple. Many young mothers who had recently moved into East Hendred were excited by the idea but there were no funds and a surprising amount of opposition. Families who had been established for generations in the village thought it was unnecessary and even the first-year teacher at Hendreds Primary School thought it premature to join a formal group before school age.

The founder members that included Natalie Clarke, Margaret England, Hilda Reynolds, Ann Taylor and Doreen Wort persevered and held many coffee bring-and-buy sessions to raise funds and received permission to use the village hall. At the time this was situated in Cat Street where the new cemetery now is but it burnt down in February 1974 just as Snells Hall was being renovated. The fledging pre-school had hardly got off the ground when it was faced by a competitor. A woman living in 'Coulings' decided to open a nursery school in her home which did not need to follow the strict procedures that the pre-school had to adhere to and a few families were lost to her.

Doreen applied to the County Council and after rigorous vetting it was agreed that a start could be made. For some reason the pre-school fell under the auspices of the Department of Health rather than Education and the powers that be were more interested in the distance apart that the coats were hung rather than what the children did when they got there. These bold women did not allow the many difficulties to deter them and in 1963 Hendreds Playgroup opened its doors for the first time. The children who were part of the first intake at the pre-school are celebrating their 53rd birthdays this year!

The pre-school was run on a shoe-string with a paid supervisor and a helper assisted by a rota of parents. The first supervisor was Mrs Edna Meers and the charge for sessions, which were held twice a week in the afternoons, was 3 shillings. Mrs Meers died recently at the age of 86.

East Hendred Nursery Playgroup

The Playgroup is making much progress in assisting pre-school children to develop their capabilities, and to make the transition easier for them. In recognition of the efforts of the Playgroup, the Council made it a grant of £10, at the same time suggesting that preference should be given to East Hendred children when filling vacancies.

Extract from East Hendred Bulletin July 1968

Children were mostly from East Hendred with a few from West Hendred, Ardington, AERE estate and Harwell village. One little boy was put on the bus in Ardington and one of the mums used to meet the bus at The Plough and later send him home on the return bus. One week he did not turn up and the mum meeting him was very concerned. As the family were not 'on the phone' she went to Ardington. It turned out that his mother had broken her leg and was not able to contact anyone to say her son wasn't coming. It is hard to imagine 21st century mums being prepared to put their three year old on a bus alone!



Hendreds Pre-school 1964

The pre-school was very nomadic in its early years and moved to West Hendred Village Hall for a period. Mr and Mrs Jevons who owned Kings Manor offered the use of their barn. This was on the right hand side just inside the gates and was extremely convenient as equipment could remain out. When the Jevons moved out of the village the playgroup found its way to the Roman Catholic Club Room beyond the Presbytery in St. Mary's Road and here again all equipment could be left in situ. Doreen Wort became supervisor when the previous supervisor slipped a disc while passing a plate of crisps to the children during a party. One mum told me how impressed she was with how Doreen dealt with a 'biting episode'. One pre-schooler was a small Italian girl from Harwell who spoke no English. Much to the amusement of the supervisor this child was seen packing all the toy guns into a handbag to take home and it took guite some persuasion to encourage her to give up the pistols.

The pre-school moved to Snells Hall when it first opened after its conversion from the redundant village school building in 1974.



The first Accident Book was a simple red school exercise book and the one book dates from 1968 – 1990! These days pre-schools have to mention many more incidents and each child has to have its own page in the book to respect confidentiality. One example that made me smile was in 1984 a child tripped off the trampoline, hit her head and passed out! She was given a cuddle and mum was called. I imagine that it would be a very different scenario these days.

In the early days of the pre-school the sessions mainly consisted of playing with the other children, sharing and listening to stories without having to attain any early learning goals which are now required.

From 1982 - March 1998

From late 1982 Hendreds Pre-school was accommodated at Hendreds Primary School in one of the empty classrooms. Jean Hoare, who lived on Reading Road and had become the supervisor in 1980, oversaw this transition to the school.

THE HENDREDS PLAYGROUP

Playgroup continues to meet at Snell's Hall on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 9.15 - 1200 for 3 - 5 year olds.

Mother and toddler group meets on Wednesdays from 1000 - 1130 and is open to all mothers, babies, toddlers and mothers-to-be. A baby walker and chair have been recently obtained to cater for younger arrivals.

Playgroup children meanwhile are busy copying Brunel or Picasso or amulating their parents in the Wendy House. Jean and her helpers strive to offer a variety of stimulating activities for the children, while Liz, our minstrel mum, conducts the "choir" in the corner

A very successful Sumr PLAYGROUP made unnecessary the weekly session. Thanks Sue Roberts for organic by continued fund rais Please support our coff evenings if you can.

The Autumn term has been a busy one and has seen changes for the Playgroup. At half-term we were able to move to a classroom at Hendreds' School. Although we were sad to leave Snells Hall after our long association with it, the children have all settled in well and seem to be enjoying their new surroundings. Playgroup sessions are held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 9 - 11.55 a.m. Enquiries to Sue Roberts EH 451

Extracts from East

Hendred Bulletins

1987 (far below)

Feb 1982 (left), Feb

1983 (below) and Aug

HENDREDS PLAYGROUP

The Playgroup children are presently growing sunflower plants. The aim is to find sponsors to contribute money per inch of a child's sunflower and the money raised will help redecorate the playgroup room. (NB. Potential sponsors should bear in mind that sunflowers can grow to 6ft or more!!)

Still on the sponsor theme, our Deputy Supervisor Chris Francis is running a sponsored-slim raising over £40. So, not only will we have an attractive playgroup room, but will also have a slim and pretty deputy - well done, Chris!

It is nearing the end of another school year. Play group has had its ups and downs, but the numbers of children attending remains relatively steady. However, if you have a child between 2½-5 years of age places are still available, so please contact Sue Mulford on 833422 for a registration form.



Hendreds Pre-school 1994

Although sorry to leave Snells Hall it was felt that better facilities were available at the school. This created a close relationship with the older pre-schoolers visiting Class 1 weekly and ensured that the transition to school was seamless. Ms Tansley, the headteacher since 1990, would regularly read stories to the pre-school children and the school didn't even charge the pre-school rent. The age that children could start at pre-school varied during this time to two and a half and then back to three years and I imagine this was due to numbers rising and falling but by 1989 the starting age was three years old and this remained constant.

In 1992 fees were raised from £1.50 to £2.00 per session. The pre-school were members of PPA (Pre-School Playgroup Association) which was the precursor to Pre-school Learning Alliance (PPA became PLA in 1995). This organisation supported and advised pre-school committees. In 1992 the committee adopted the PPA constitution and in 1993 the pre-school became a registered charity and also registered with Oxfordshire County Council. Social Services would inspect regularly to ensure that standards were maintained. Slowly but surely legislation for pre-schools was being increased.

In 1994 Maria Nedelkoff became supervisor as Helen Francis left to have a baby. Fees for pre-school sessions were now £2.25 and numbers were high with about 35 children on the register. However at the end of 1994, the comfortable relationship between the school and pre-school sadly had to come to an end as the school was expanding partly due to the closure of another rural school and they required more space. The school had to ask the pre-school to vacate the classroom. This was a very difficult time for the pre-school and they considered returning to Snells Hall but they would have to fit around the hall's other users which would be complicated and dissatisfying for children and parents alike.



Group needs £30,000 for new home

e Hendreds playgroup is sed with raising \$20,000 for new home before Christ-is because the growing vil-ge school needs extra

lage school needs extra space.

The playgroup, which caters for 36 children, has been at Hendred CE Primary School for 12 years, but its room is needed to accommodate a growing number of school-age pupils.

Parents and organisers were hoping to move to other accommodation in the village after Christmas — when they have to leave — but could not find an affordable alternative.

Now they are trying to raise the money to set up a portable classroom in the school grounds.

Fund-raiser Mrs Dlana Wheeker said they needed about £30,000. "There are various grants we can apply for, but we ourselves need to raise at least £10,000 this year," she said.

The playgroup covers a

Mrs Wheeker said:
"There are a lot of children
needing a playgroup.

"Some parents are very involved and very willing to help and there has been a lot of support from the community, which is nice."

Mrs Jill Childs, the group's chairman, said they had been strongly involved with the school over the years and hoped fund-raising efforts would be successful within the year.

The group's next fund-nising event is tomorrow at nell's Hall in East Hendred

It is a favours auction where goods and services do-nated by people are auctioned off to the highest bid-der. Offers include a jacket and tie once owned by Jona-

Article from Wantage Herald 10 Nov 1994

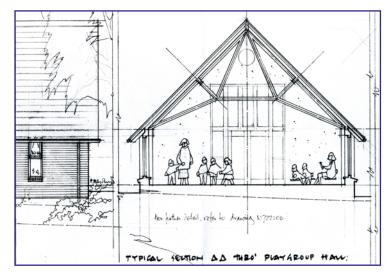
The pre-school needed a permanent home and the committee decided to raise £30,000 to purchase a Portacabin to be situated on Hendreds School grounds. While this money was being raised, they moved to West Hendred Village Hall, the predecessor of the current hall. Although it was inconvenient to move to another village it was felt this was a temporary measure and in January 1995 the pre-school opened in West Hendred. The building was dilapidated, damp and the conditions in the kitchen were questionable. Heating was extortionately expensive and at times the pre-school was running at a loss just to pay the heating bills. Numbers at pre-school dwindled as parents felt it was inconvenient to travel to West Hendred. The list of woes continued with lack of storage, sand and water play having to be temporarily suspended and parents not paying their fees. West Hendred villagers complained about the temporary orange fencing between the playing field and the road. However, one enterprising committee member approached Corpus Christi College who own much of the land in West Hendred and persuaded them to cough up and pay for a wire fence. A particularly low moment must have been when Maria reported that mice were at large!

The only reason the pre-school was passed by Social Services was because they had nowhere else to go and it was stressed that this was a temporary move. Parents and committee were fundraising hard to finance the Portacabin and plans had been developed as far as drawing up detailed site plans. However there was light at the end of tunnel as at the end of 1995 the committee heard that due to new legislation Snells Hall had to become accessible to the disabled and Snells Hall Management Committee were applying for a grant to ensure the building complied. It seemed an ideal opportunity to combine financial resources to the mutual benefit of the pre-school and the village hall. The details

were fleshed out and it was agreed to work together. In September 1996 the pre-school moved back to Snells Hall so that more villagers could access it and it was hoped that numbers would improve. Ofsted, who took over inspections from Social Services, was first mentioned in the April 1997 minutes as carrying out an inspection. In those days pre-schools were pre-warned, these days Ofsted always arrive unannounced.

The committee and parents renewed efforts to raise money with 'begging letters' to all on the electoral role in the catchment area, charitable trusts, businesses and anyone in authority interested in the plight of pre-schools including Viscount Falkland in the House of Lords. The temporary lease between Snells Hall Management Committee and Hendreds Pre-school was signed in March 1997 and building commenced in April 1997. Throughout that year the pre-school parents were still baking cakes, selling raffle tickets and holding barn dances and pub quizzes to raise money so that the children could have a purpose-built home.

It was an important time as new obligations were being placed on pre-schools and the payment for four year olds by the government meant that far more stringent conditions had to be adhered to. The greater emphasis placed on pre-school education and the learning environment meant that a purpose-built building would help fulfil these criteria. By September 1997, after three years of exhausting fundraising, the pre-school had raised £55,000 to build the shell but still needed money to complete the internal work. Hannabys were employed by Hendreds Pre-school and Snells Hall Management Committee to construct a water-tight shell. It was estimated with needs scaled down to the bare minimum that to complete the works of electrics, plastering, internal doors, water supply, heating and decoration £8,000 - £10,000 would still be needed. Many villagers lent a hand with their expertise. Architect Bogdan Nedelkoff (Maria's husband) spent long hours at the drawing board and then was out with a shovel as well.



Proposed elevations for Hendreds Pre-school 1996



Other parents helped lay the floor, painted the walls, assisted with sanding and plastering and laid the patio and garden path. On 21st March 1998, the building was officially opened and the name was changed from Hendreds Playgroup to Hendreds Pre-school. Finally the village children had their own space and a new era at pre-school began.



The completed pre-school building

From March 1998 - 2006

As the pre-school finally had their own premises they were able to increase the number of sessions offered and these were geared towards different age groups. Afternoon sessions were aimed at older pre-school children (Rising 5s) to prepare them for school. The local schools still had a staggered intake so children would leave pre-school the term before they turned five. Morning sessions would be mixed ages or for younger pre-schoolers only. Although this meant sessions could be focused it was a logistical nightmare of juggling numbers, staff, parents' demands and also ensuring that the pre-school didn't run at a loss.

1999 brought more changes with the implementation of the minimum wage, national insurance payments and the necessity of setting up a formal salary system which we now take for granted but it was a steep learning curve and increased the workload for the committee. It became imperative for staff to be formally trained and it was at this time that two key staff members were completing their training as well as working hard at pre-school. But it was also a good year with a brilliant outing to Legoland which tied into the transport theme and with 41 children on the register it was one of the boom years.

It is interesting to note how the educational landscape has changed in the last 15 years as it is now seen as essential to involve families as much as possible in their child's pre-school life as well as being flexible and responding to opportunities as they arise. In the late 1990s the staff were very much in control and an offer to demonstrate a Japanese tea ceremony by a Japanese mother was turned down as it would not fit in with the projects the children were then studying. Although parents were requested to help with sessions and an opt-out fee of £10.00 was introduced if they didn't help, they were not encouraged to attend Rising 5s sessions as it was felt that the children may not concentrate if their mothers were present.

One of the fundraising events in 1999 was a balloon race. Helium filled balloons were sold and then released and the sender and receiver of the furthest balloon received a cash prize. I wonder whether releasing plastic into the environment would be acceptable these days – but it did raise £630! Someone suggested baking cakes and taking slices to local businesses in exchange for a donation. The first two 'cake runs' were held in 2005 and raised £200 each time. This money-spinner was repeated in 2006, 2010 and again in 2013 each time with fantastic results. The pre-school also hosted large fêtes with many activities and themes such as 'Alice in Wonderland' or 'Rumble in the Jungle'. The last one was held in 2005 with a Halloween theme but by then the coffers were more comfortably full. Due to the increased workload to run the pre-school and grant funding, fundraising was not a priority and it became a way to promote the pre-school and to support local events rather than primarily to raise money.

In the early 2000s Oxfordshire County Council introduced the 'Oxfordshire Foundation Stage Child Profile' which was a complex document to be filled in by staff to assess the children before they went to school. However the staff always prioritised the children and their needs. At the end of the year they directed a children's nativity play to entertain the parents at the Christmas party.



Hendreds Pre-school 2006



There was the Queen's golden jubilee to celebrate and the children created works of art to be printed on tea towels as well as planning to participate in the procession of floats. Equipment was continually being improved with items such as outdoor scooters, tricycles and a parachute as well as many indoor resources.

Numbers of children at pre-school continually rise and fall and 2002 numbers were low again which meant fees had to be increased, staffing levels reviewed and budgets reduced. After the concerns of 2002 the numbers in 2003 rose to 38 children on the register. This should reassure future staff and committees that numbers peak and trough. 2004 brought a big challenge to many pre-schools in Oxfordshire as the council announced that there would now be a single point of entry into school. Instead of a regular trickle of children leaving pre-school there would now be a dramatic drop as all four year olds would leave in July to go to school and numbers would be very low at the start of the academic year in September. This is an issue that the pre-school still has to contend with and sufficient funds are necessary to balance the sudden drop in numbers.

2005 appears to be the first year that our friends at Ofsted arrived unannounced. Isobel Watson, a faithful member of staff for more 16 years, retired and was given a lovely send-off party and Maria, the pre-school supervisor for 12 years, left in 2006 to pursue her dream of a RHS horticulture diploma.

From 2006 - 2013

When Maria left Sarah Cousins and Tracy Taylor became the joint supervisors and under their leadership the pre-school became computer literate with ICT related toys which were regularly used by the pre-school including a children's digital camera and a BeeBot robot game. Children were also able to access a computer independently. The committee created a simple website



Hendreds Pre-school 2006



Hendreds Pre-school 2010

and an email address and it became the norm to email information to parents rather than to send letters home.

May 2007 was a wake-up call for Hendreds Pre-school after receiving a very unpleasant Ofsted. The staff and committee realised what was expected of a 21st century pre-school and after a year of consolidation, the pre-school was back on track and were able to meet the high standards required by Ofsted even when run by parent volunteers. It was hard with only six children at the pre-school in September 2007 after the previous bumper year and the committee were not sure whether it was due to a very low birth rate or the bad Ofsted report and started tapping into training and support that was being offered by Pre-school Learning Alliance.

In 2008 the Early Years Foundations Stage (EYFS) was made statutory by the government and all pre-schools had to follow this framework which set out six key areas of learning around which activities should be based. There were now at least 36 policies including a 'nappy changing policy' that the pre-school were required to hold and review.

This all provided a lot of work for the staff and committee but the most important aspect of pre-school was still the children. They continued to have many wonderful opportunities including visiting the local farm to see lambing, having the vicar visit at Christmas time and visits from the local police and fire brigade. The children loved having a go at shooting water from the very powerful fire engine hoses right across Snells Wood. Each term the children would follow a theme around which activities and discussions were based. The topics varied from 'Autumn' and 'Dinosaurs' to 'The Three Little Pigs' and 'We're going on a Bear Hunt'. Each summer the committee paid for a coach and parents, siblings and children would head off for a grand day out at Cotswold Wildlife Park, Beale Park or somewhere similar.





Forest School in 2009

Sarah and Tracy's love for the outdoors initiated the introduction of 'Forest School' in early 2009. The children would regularly visit and explore the same enclosed area of land watching it change with the seasons and participating in activities such as bug hunts, climbing trees, making mud pies and even having a fire to cook toast on. It gave children an opportunity to learn more about nature as well as learning strong social skills. I remember watching Mhairi MacGillivray-Edwards, a qualified Forest School leader, teaching three year olds to cut with a saw and seeing their excitement at being free to explore the woods and find treasures. As well as focussing on the outdoors the pre-school became much more eco-friendly with an emphasis on recycling.

The pre-school has used Penney playpark for many years but is also fortunate to have its own garden. This has created challenges for committees as far back as 1998 when the newly laid grass did not survive and was replaced with bark chippings. These eventually disintegrated to dust which stuck to hot little children. In 2007 the committee merrily grassed it over not realising this had been tried before and yet again even with the most tender care the grass died in the shade. Eventually they resorted to 'As Good as Grass' and in 2011 covered the area with artificial turf which requires vacuuming!

July 2011 presented a unique opportunity and challenge for the pre-school. Although it was still in a strong position both financially and educationally over the years it had become increasingly difficult for a volunteer committee of parents to run. Although controversial the committee voted to explore the possibility of merging with Hendreds Primary School. Despite much effort from all parties the school concluded that it would not be financially viable to merge because of local and central government funding arrangements. The pre-school continues to maintain strong links with both village schools however it remains independent.

In October 2011 Fiona Brown started at the pre-school as the new supervisor with a team of assistants - Lindsey Denly (deputy), Ros Tingley and Claire White. Fiona has introduced many ideas to help the pre-school function more effectively. They reorganised the room as it is amazing how much extra and obsolete equipment you can build up over the years. Little Ladybird books printed in the 1960s were no longer relevant to the children and had become more historical than educational. Optional sweatshirts with the pre-school logo were introduced to protect home clothing, although it was interesting to read in the minutes that this idea was first mooted in 1990. Afternoon sessions were introduced so that children were able to stay at pre-school from 9:00am - 3:00pm. Fees are now £3.73 per hour for children aged three but children are entitled to 15 free hours each week after their third birthday funded by the government. In April 2013 the pre-school is lowering the age that children can start pre-school to two years old.

Hendreds Pre-school is now 50 years old and has seen countless children through its doors and helped to create their earliest happy memories of education. It is worth remembering that the future success of the pre-school depends on parents using the service and giving up their time and expertise to assist in its running. Many parents and staff have met and made lifelong friends through the organisation. It has provided new careers, confidence and skills for staff and parents. There have been challenges, personality clashes, lack of funds, mice and government bureaucracy but what comes through all of the difficulties is the commitment and the love of children that has helped Hendreds Pre-school to thrive.

Tessa Case (Chairman from 2007-2012) February 2013

The pre-school is dedicated to the children so I would like to dedicate this article to all the staff and committee members who have worked tirelessly for Hendreds Pre-school over the last 50 years. Thank you to everyone who shared their memories with me. If you have a story, an anecdote or a correction to this history I would love to hear from you at tessa@casebase.co.uk.



Two 2013 pre-schoolers



Acknowledgements & References

Jean Hoare, Maria Nedelkoff, John Sharp, Margaret Sharp, Ann Taylor, Clara Williams, Doreen Wort Thank you to all parents who gave permission to use recent photographs.

Minute books from 1989 - 2012 AGM reports from 1991 - 2012

Newspaper articles, reports and letters from 1994 - 1999 Articles from Wantage Herald 14.02.1974 and 10.11.1994 East Hendred Bulletins from 1967 - 1993

Notes: The pre-school was called Hendreds Playgroup from 1963 - 1998 when it changed its name to reflect its status. For ease of reading and consistency, I have referred to it as a pre-school throughout this article.

Pre-school Supervisors

1963 - date unknown	Edna Meers
Approx 1970 - 1973	Doreen Wort
Approx 1974 - Dec 1976	Mrs Hutton
Jan 1977 - July 1980	Ruth Pepler
Sep 1980 - 1987	Jean Hoare
Approx 1987 - Approx 1989	Chris Francis
Mid 1989 - July 1994	Helen Francis (née Wood)
Sep 1994 - July 2006	Maria Nedelkoff
Sep 2006 - July 2009	Sarah Cousins (joint supervisor)
Sep 2006 - Aug 2011	Tracy Taylor (joint supervisor until 2009)
Sep 2011 - Oct 2011	Mhairi MacGillivray- Edwards (acting supervisor)
From Oct 2011	Fiona Brown

Dates are accurate from 1994 from the AGM minutes. Earlier dates are approximate and may not include all supervisors. I want to acknowledge the many committed assistants and deputy supervisors who have also worked hard to support the pre-school.



Hendreds Pre-school 2010

Pre-school Chairmen

Approx 1963 - 1966	Doreen Wort
Approx 1967	Ann Taylor
Early 1970s	Margaret Sharp
Approx 1973	Jean Hoare
Approx 1984	Helen Milton
Approx 1987	P Gardner
Oct 1988 - Oct 1991	Mrs C Belcher
Oct 1991 - Oct 1992	Di Bellinger
Oct 1992 - Oct 1993	Amanda Barton
Oct 1993 - Oct 1994	Diana Wheeker
Oct 1994 - Oct 1995	Jill Childs
Oct 1995 - Jan 1997	Nicola Wilson
May 1997 - Oct 1998	Samantha Pentin
Oct 1998 - Sep 1999	Patsy Jenkins
Early 1999 - Sep 1999	Samantha Pentin
	(assisting Patsy Jenkins)
Sep 1999 - Sep 2000	Jackie O'Rourke
Sep 2000 - Sep 2001	Lynne Collins
Sep 2001 - Oct 2002	Gavin Beaumont
Oct 2002 - Nov 2003	Rachel Hutt
Nov 2003 - Sep 2004	Miranda Hawkins
Sep 2004 - Nov 2005	Carole Ramle
Nov 2005 - Sep 2007	Dawn Barksfield
Sep 2007 - Sep 2012	Tessa Case
From Sep 2012	Lucy Hanna
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Many of the chairmen served in another capacity on the pre-school committee before and in some cases after their term of office as chairmen. There have also been many committed parents who have taken officer roles and worked unceasingly to ensure the smooth running of the pre-school. Dates are accurate from 1988 from the AGM minutes, earlier dates are approximate.

Locations of the Pre-school

From 1963	Old Village Hall in Cat Street
Early/mid 1960s	Kings Manor's barn
During 1968	St. Mary's Club Room
During 1971	Old Village Hall in Cat Street
During 1972	Old West Hendred Village Hall
July 1974 - 1982	Snells Hall
1982 - 1994	Hendreds Primary School
1995 - Sep 1996	Old West Hendred Village Hall
Sep 1996 - March 1998	Snells Hall
March 1998 - present	Purpose-built building attached to Snells Hall

