

TWO CENTURIES OF GOING TO SCHOOL IN THE DISTRICT

by

THE WORKING PARTY.

Education has always been an important element in the life of any community. The Alresford district has had the good fortune to have that clement assisted by the Henry Perin Foundation. Henry Perin, a doctor who lived at the Weir House, Old Alresford, left sufficient monies (being the interest on rents for lands) when he died in 1697 for the establishment of a Free School for the education of six poor men's sons in New Alresford five in Old Alresford and four each from Bishop's Sutton and Cheriton.

The boys were to come to the school at the age of nine and be instructed in 'reading, writing, arithmetic and grammar and, if the parents desired it, in the classics'. The school' master had an usher to assist him and might take other pupils 'for his own benefit provided he should not in any way neglect the scholars of the Foundation'. School started early in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the summer hours were 6 to 8.30 when breakfast was provided on the premises; then from 9 until 11 after which the pupils had to find their own midday meal and occupation until 2 pm, when school continued until 5. (Only the schoolmaster and his usher got a cup of tea at the 3 o'clock break). All attended divine service on Holy Days and 'those able were to take notes of the sermon'.

Boys from New Alresford paid an entrance fee of 6d but if your home was elsewhere it cost your parents 1/-. There was a small annual charge to all scholars of 1/-, of which 4d was for rods and brooms, 4d for sweeping and cleaning and 4d for 'candles from Michaelmas wherewith to study'.

The master's house and the School house at the bottom of West Street comprised those buildings which we now know as The Corner Cafe, Perin's Newsagency and Goods the chemist. They were built by the Trustees in 1697 on the site of a property known as Corner Place which had been destroyed in the fire of 1689.

By 1823 the buildings were in a dilapidated state because the then Trustees had connived at a fiddle, allowing one of their number to be tenant of the school lands at a cheap rent and thus starving Perins of essential funds. In 1825, new Trustees arranged the repairs and built on a wing, round the corner in the Dean. Mr. James Ritson was appointed headmaster and Perins was on an even keel again.

But what of the villages where Henry Perin hoped that poor men would make use of his bounty? The Cheriton district was well ahead of everyone else with a grant of £100 by the will of the Rev: Morgan Jones in 1718 and an even more generous bequest from Hinton Ampner in 1729, where William Blake, a domestic in the employ of the Stewkeley family who had married one of his master's daughters, gave £450 to be spent on the erection of a school. Pupils from Hinton Ampner were still winning scholarships to Perin's during the period of the First World War, thus perpetuating 200 years later the good intentions of William Blake and Henry Perin.

But, in particular it was the conscience of the big landowners which was feeling the pinch. Bighton School was started in 1824 by monies from the Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos, Itchen Stoke by the Ashburton family and Old Alresford by the Onslows of Upton House in 1846.

Out at Bishop's Sutton, the Primary school was built by public subscription chiefly through 'the indefatigable exertions of the Rev: Cecil Carton, curate of the parish in 1808. An excellent booklet by Mr. C. Holmes, the last headmaster describes the difficulties and frustrations of the staff in such a school as this. Not only was it a struggle to get school books and the basic equipment but when you did get them you found that the H.M.s Inspector of Schools was more interested in the condition of the offices than of the teaching material. The Inspector had good reason to be concerned; for over fifty years the 'offices' of the school figure prominently in the reports. In 1891 they were neglected, in 1905 'offensive especially when the wind is in a certain quarter, in 1911 they are primitive.' By 1923 they have improved but 'peat moss is recommended in place of ashes. By 1948 although a water borne system has been installed its functioning is 'spasmodic!

School children are much the same in all the village schools but Sutton certainly had its fair share of 'terrors'. For example in 1879, 'Frances Baker was very rude. Next day 'Frances Baker's father came and used very coarse and threatening language. Next week 'the whole school was disrupted by the violent behaviour of Frances Baker and her mother .

The register at Bishop's Sutton gives the reasons for absenteeism which would be common to any rural community - haymaking, shooting parties, carrying of May Day garlands, Fair days, circuses and even a Missionary exhibition, all took their toll on attendance. Throughout it all - the awful loos, the lack of chalk and pencils, the Frances Bakers - devoted teachers battled on. Their only reward was that occasionally a pupil won a scholarship to Perin's, as William Sensier did in 1902 from Bishop's Sutton.

As Perin's became established as the centre of learning in the district, children came on to there from the 'dame' schools of other villages. For example at Swarraton and Northington in 1816 a shoemaker named Green ran a private school in the drawing room of the rectory By 1824, the 1st Lord Ashburton had built a cottage school for 45 children where they received instruction - not only in the three R's - but also in sewing and straw plaiting.

"The children were clothed by Lady Ashburton; the boys in round smocks and their own plaited hats and the girls in striped prints and straw bonnets. Christmas morning was chosen as 'fashion parade day' for the village children in their new garments. It must have been a chilly performance! In 1859, the 2nd Lord Ashburton, feeling that the cottage school was inadequate, converted a large building halfway up Northington hill into a school which could accommodate more than 100 children. He must have had a lot on confidence in local productivity!

In the meantime, Perin's had started to take boarders. By 1861, 7 boys were being boarded and in 1878 an advertisement in the Hampshire Chronicle offered places for boarders at 30 guineas a year for the under twelves and 36 guineas for over that age. In 1893 the details of a scholarship offered for competition amongst New Alresford children by the late Mrs Covey, one of the town's major benefactors, was published in the parish magazine. The examination was to be held under the direction of the Town Trustees who have had some influence in Perin's from its foundation right up to the present day, when their trust funds are still used to help pupils of the Comprehensive School.

Early in the nineteenth century the general public began to feel uneasy about the lack of education amongst the masses and re-acted through the medium of the Churches. The Church of England was first to feel the urge and, in 1811, set up the National Schools to 'confer upon the children of the poor the inestimable Benefits of Religious Instruction combined with such other requirements as may be suitable to their station in life and calculated to render them useful and respectable members of society. Alresford got the benefit of this sanctimonious claptrap by 1834 in the shape of the school which we now know as the 'late school in the Dean'.

The non conformists were quick to follow suit with the British School in 1854. This was also in the Dean; the building now being used by Wild Brothers, builders, as a workshop. When the National and British schools were amalgamated in the Dean School in 1888 the British school building was used as a drill hall by the Hampshire Volunteers.

The Dean school lasted for over a hundred years but its parallel at Old Alresford still survives, having adroitly changed its nature with each turn of the educational wheel. Built in 1846 at the sole expense of Miss Onslow, it was soon under part control of Parish and County councils, but the village parents remained staunchly independent. For example, when Mrs. Perry was dismissed by the managers in 1906 as a result of the Inspectors report,' the parents countered by presenting the lady with a magnificent clock 'in appreciation of the excellent work she has done in the school'.

Old Alresford believed in Empire Day, and on that day assembled at the school to sing patriotic songs while Miss Mills of the Nythe presented the children with a penny and 'some- times a bun'. However, their independence came to the fore again in 1939 when Wellington Place School was evacuated to the village from Portsmouth and the two headmasters are recorded as being at loggerheads.

Although the Education Act of 1870 meant that there was more public control of Alresford schools, it also meant that more money was available. Considerable extensions were made to the Dean School (now the Board or Elementary School) between 1888 and the end of the century.

There seems to have been keen competition amongst the local worthies to be elected to the Board of this school. A satirical broadsheet survives in which the first verse describes the candidates

'Of whom there are eight

Some arc precocious and some sedate

Look at them all, they are a mixed lot,

Some hardly good enough to be shot!

Parsons and lawyers fight hard to win,

Cobblers and drapers try hard to get in.'

Status symbols have changed a lot since those days!

Meanwhile at Perin's a dramatic change was taking place. It was about to become the pioneer public co-educational school in Hampshire. In 1899, there were only seven boarding

pupils and the management decided that if the school was to survive at all something drastic must be done. They came up with the bright idea that girls should be admitted! Perin's was at the lowest ebb in its history, it needed both the County Education Board and the girls to give it 'the kiss of life'. How this was applied will be the subject of a subsequent paper.