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From the Bourne School Minute Books

by 'Beorcham'

Every year, for more than two centuries, a special service has been held in St. Peter's Church, on December 16th, to honour the memory and recall the gifts of one of the town's greatest benefactors, Thomas Bourne.

He was born 297 years ago, and spent almost the whole of his life in London and Surrey. His associations with our town were slender, and apparently limited to occasional visits to his sister, Mrs. Sarah Rolfe, who lived in Berkhamsted. The townspeople must have been as puzzled as they were delighted to learn that a comparative stranger bequeathed £8,000 for founding a charity school for 20 boys and 10 girls. By 18th century reckoning it was a princely gift, the equivalent of perhaps £30,000 at the present time. We can only conclude that Thomas Bourne favoured Berkhamsted because his home town of Camberwell already had a charity school.

LOSS AND GAIN

The executors wasted so much time before carrying out Bourne's directions that John Cowper, rector and father of the poet, took legal proceedings against them. In 1735, six years after Bourne's death, the Attorney-General ordered that the money should be paid, and thanks to the delay and to wise investment, the sum of £8,000 had grown to over £9,000. Schoolrooms and apartments for the teachers (rebuilt 101 years ago, and now occupied by the National Provincial Bank) were erected at a cost of £700. In 1737, the first master and mistress, Edward and Eliza Eastmead, started their duties with stipends which amounted to but 11s. 6d. and 5s. 9d. a week, respectively.

The history of the Bourne School charity—which, in a new guise, still

benefits local children—was related in the *Review* some years ago. I do not intend to go over the same ground again, but to draw attention to a few minor but interesting incidents in the life of the school. This is made possible by the kindness of Mr. Edward Popple, secretary to the trustees, in allowing me to inspect early minute books.

THE SCHOLARS' "CLOATHS"

Once the school was opened, the duties of the trustees were seldom onerous. They were bound to meet once a year, at Easter, and sometimes additional meetings were held. Business was mainly concerned with the selection of new scholars, the apprenticeship of school-leavers, and other routine matters. Of course, there were troubles from time to time, and an erring master almost lost his job!

Many are the references to scholars' "cloaths." Thomas Bourne, in his will, directed that, at Easter, each of the 20 boys was to have

One coat of grey kersey woollen cloth
One woollen waistcoat
One pair of leathern breeches
One black woollen cap
Two linen bands
Two shirts
Two pairs of shoes
Two pairs of woollen stockings.

At Easter, each girl was to have

One grey woollen gown and petticoat
One flannel under-petticoat
Two linen shifts
Two blue and white aprons
Two linen bands
Two pairs of shoes
Two pairs of stockings
One pair of boddices (*sic*) (to serve each girl for the space of two years).

SHOES FOR HALF-A-CROWN

Thomas Bourne intended that £75 should be set aside each year for clothes, but for many years the cost varied between £42 and £50. For example, in 1753 the sum of £44 was paid to Thomas Wilkinson for "cloathing the children this year," and the following prices were mentioned:—cloth at 2s. 6d. a yard, Dowlais (coarse linen) for shirts at 1s. per ell, shoes 2s. 6d., breeches 2s. 6d.

The quality of the clothing was sometimes questioned. In 1759, Wilkinson was asked to provide "the strongest worsted stockings instead of yarn," and leather "boddices" were specified, as those in use "did not answer their intended purpose." Even in the 18th century it was not unknown for prices to rise, for an item dated 1754 states: "In consideration of the dearness of the materials, two guineas be given to Thomas Wilkinson over and above the sum of £44 usually paid to him for cloathing the children."

And here is a tell-tale item of 1762: "Ordered that the Receiver advance money to the person who makes the children's cloaths at his discretion, to enable him to buy with ready money."

Prices continued to rise. In 1782, an extra 6d. per pair was paid for shoes

"of improved goodness." Five years later, Thomas Norris was supplying breeches of grained lamb at 5s. a pair, 1s. 6d. above the 1753 price.

"VERMINE" A PROBLEM

In 1789, an order was made requiring the churchwardens to examine "the new clothing for the charity children on every Good Friday." Even so, some of the children went to school in a ragged condition, and the master was directed to get the clothes repaired and deduct the cost from the small allowance made to the children's parents. It was further directed that "the best cloathes be worn only on Sundays for the first year."

But the trustees had to consider a worse problem than ragged clothes. In 1755, parents were warned to take care to keep the children clean and "send them to school clean and free from vermine, otherwise they shall forfeit their pay till they shall amend in that respect, upon complaint to any two of ye Trustees by ye Master or Mistress."

This was no idle threat. We find a frank entry concerning a girl who "comes in a nasty condition and lousy to school notwithstanding a former order made." The trustees ordered that "a month's pay be suspended and that notice be delivered in writing by the Receiver to her parents that unless the cause of complaint be removed, she will be expelled ye School and that if any of the parents sell any of the school cloaths their children be expell'd the school." After repeated complaints, the trustees ordered that the girl "be removed from her parents into ye Workhouse and the pay be henceforth given to the Master of the Workhouse."

LOST ALLOWANCES

The loss of the cash allowance must have been a bitter blow to poor parents. I wonder how many shillings were stopped (and good hidings administered) following this order of 1779: "That such children who break the windows in the school be made to pay for them out of their monthly allowance, and that this Order be stuck up in the School."

Incidentally, in the middle of the 18th century, parents of the Bourne School children complained to the trustees that their allowances were two years in arrears, and petitioned for "immediate relief." It was stated that "several parents of the children... have borrowed several sums of money of several of the Inhabitants of Berkhamsted, and for want of payment of the said charity money are putt to great straits and difficultys and that George Leatherland, an inhabitant of the parish of Berkhamsted, who has a child on the foundation in the said school, is now a prisoner for debt in Hertford gaol and would be discharged if he could gett the money now due to him from the said charity for his said child." At that time the sole surviving executor of Thomas Bourne was one Nathaniel Oldham, who lived in—Scotland Yard.

Medicine and Food

Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine now operating in Berkhamsted is as follows:—

CHEMISTS' ROTA

The week-day evening (6-7 p.m.) and Sunday morning (11.30 a.m.—12.30 p.m.) service rota adopted by Berkhamsted chemists for the dispensing of medical prescriptions, is as follows for the current month:—

December 27—January 2, 1954: Boots.
January 3—9: Figg.
January 10—16: Dickman.
January 17—23: Taylors.
January 24—30: Boots.

FOOD OFFICE

The Food Office, in the Town Hall, is open on four week-days as follows:—
Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 to 5 p.m.
Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

All Welfare Foods are also obtainable from Gossoms End Stores.

LIBRARY OPENING TIMES

The Berkhamsted Branch of the County Library is open in Prince Edward Street on the following days and times:—

Monday and Friday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.; 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 5 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.
Thursday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Saturday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

ALTAR SERVERS

FOR JANUARY

3rd, 8 a.m. C. Mayo; 10 a.m. E. C. Alsop, A. Grafham and M. Smith (Cross: L. Mitchell); 10th, 8 a.m. C. Kent; 10 a.m. L. E. Crook, A. J. Binge and C. Mayo (Cross: J. D. Hildreth); 17th, 8 a.m. R. Farn; 10 a.m., J. D. Hildreth, E. C. Alsop and A. Pangbourne (Cross: A. Grafham); 24th, 8 a.m. G. McGregor; 10 a.m. S. R. Meager, L. E. Crook and E. Mitchell (Cross: A. J. Binge); 31st, 8 a.m. C. Mayo; 10 a.m. E. C. Alsop, L. Mitchell and R. Farn (Cross: L. E. Crook).

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