

Local Education since 1800 : II

THE BRITISH AND NATIONAL SCHOOLS

By 'BEORCHAM'

LOCAL HISTORY often repeats itself. As was mentioned in last month's article, the town's first Sunday School, opened in 1810, was quickly followed by two other Sunday Schools. Similarly, a short time after the first large elementary day school was opened in 1834, the parish decided to provide a second day school. Once again this capacity for taking two or three giant steps forward at a time is shown in the provision of Middle Schools; the first was opened last year, the *third* may be built next year.

Perhaps the outstanding local event of the nineteenth century—of greater importance to the inhabitants than the building of the railway or the saving of ancient common rights—was the rapid improvement in the town's educational facilities just before and at the start of the Victorian era.

In the early 1830s, hundreds of poor

children received no schooling at all apart from a little instruction at Sunday Schools. Yet by the end of the decade, places were available for all children who, for one reason or another, were not prevented from attending school.

KEPT AT HOME

Many parents sent their children out to work at a very early age or kept them at home to plait straw or help mother. As for the boys and girls whose names were in the school registers, many attended irregularly, and some were absent for long periods. In any case few children of poor families stayed at school after their eleventh birthday. Over thirty years were to elapse before compulsory education was introduced.

It must not be thought that no one cared during the long years of neglect before the schools were opened. Education was, in fact, a much discussed

subject, but the emphasis was on Mr. Augustus Smith's campaign to end the scandal which had closed the Grammar School. This involved a long legal wrangle and the final decision rested with the Court of Chancery. The provision of parochial schools, on the other hand, depended entirely on local effort, and here again Augustus Smith took the lead.

A GOOD RESOLUTION

His triumph—and it was largely a personal triumph—came at a Vestry meeting on 25th March, 1833, one of the great dates in local history. A resolution to start a school, carried unanimously, opened as follows:

'It is of the opinion of this Vestry that it is of the utmost importance for the welfare and improvement of the labouring classes, that a good parish school should be established, where both boys and girls should be taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, and useful work.

'That whereas numerous charities have been left at different times by benevolent individuals for the benefit of the poor of the parish, without any particular limitation of the mode in which it should be applied, it is the further opinion of this Vestry that such funds could not be more usefully expended than in securing a sound system of education for the children of the poor'.

To provide additional funds, subscriptions were invited, and the management and conduct of the school was to be left to parish officers and subscribers, provided that 'the system shall be such as

shall enable all religious denominations to avail themselves of it'.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Later on, some heat was generated by the proposed use of the proceeds of an old charity for the new school. A resolution to this effect was passed at a Vestry meeting with three dissentients, one of whom was the Rev. John Crofts, rector of Berkhamsted. Having signed the churchwardens' book, as chairman, he added the following footnote: 'I think it my duty to state, to the proposed alteration in the mode of appropriating the proceeds of a charity which has so many years been expended in distributing bread to the poor, in the church, on Sundays, was passed in direct opposition to my wishes'.

The conflict widened, and in January, 1835, a poll was taken, 197 parishioners voting for Col. Deacon's proposal that the charity should continue 'as it was and has been distributed by order of Vestry since the year 1757', and 170 supporting Mr. Augustus Smith's proposal to use the charity to support the school. So the town's hero did not always have his own way!

BRITISH AND NATIONAL

In July 1834—only fifteen months after the first resolution was passed—the school was opened. The original building still boldly advertises its date—1834—at Park View Road corner. So much chalk was used in its construction that it was nicknamed the Chalk School, but officially it was the British School, thereby linking it with the undenominational British and Foreign Bible Society. In 1870 it was called the Board School, and in 1912 the Council School. It is now known as Park View School.

The British School was open to all boys and girls who attended a Sunday School, and the minister of any denomination had the right to call and instruct children belonging to his congregation. After giving this school their full support the rectors and curates of Berkhamsted and Northchurch, with many prominent churchmen, decided to start a Church of England School near the parish church. Adjoining the Court House, classrooms and a house for the master (afterwards the verger's house) were built on land which was conveyed upon trust by the Countess of Bridgewater in 1838. Like other schools established through the Church of England National Society, it was known as the National School, and was intended for the children of both Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

SCHOOL HOURS

The rules and regulations of our first church school are of such great interest that they are reprinted almost in full:

1. All children, *without any exception*, above the age of five years, will be received into the School, on application being made by their parents or guardians at the School-house, on any Monday morning between the hours of nine and eleven.

2. The children are to be punctual in

their attendance, and never to absent themselves without leave. . . .

3. The School hours are from a quarter before *nine to twelve* in the morning, and from *one to four* in the afternoon, throughout the year; the children who plait must, however, be in the School at *eight* in the morning.

4. The children are expected regularly to attend the Sunday School at their Parish Church, in the morning at *nine* and in the afternoon at *two*.

SHORT HAIR

5. All children sent to the School are expected to be clean-washed and combed with their hair cut short, and clothes clean and neatly mended.

6. Parents are expected to conform perfectly to the regulations, and to be willing that their children submit to the discipline of the School; and if the Parents have any complaint to make,

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5 WAY

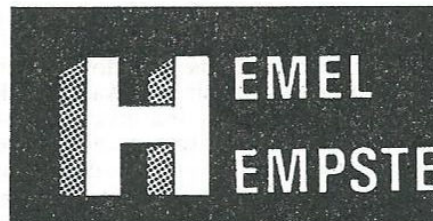
MASTERPLAN	7%
PAID-UP SHARES	5%
SUBSCRIPTION SHARES	5½%
DEPOSITS	4¾%
S.A.Y.E. SCHEME	7%

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they are requested to make it to the Committee *only*.

7. The children are instructed in READING, WRITING and ARITHMETIC; in STRAW-PLAITING, NEEDLEWORK, MARKING and KNITTING—all of which will be taught the children *without any charge being made*.

8. Parents having girls at the School are permitted to send their own, or their children's clothes to be mended at the School, but they must take care that whatever is sent, be brought perfectly clean.

9. There will be a *month's* holidays at Harvest, a *fortnight* at Christmas, and a *week* at Easter.

10. There will be an Annual Public Examination of the Children, which the Parents and Friends are earnestly invited to attend, in order that they may judge of the progress of the children, and be present at the distribution of the Rewards.

(To be continued.)
