

Local Education since 1800 : IV

## WHEN SCHOOL FEES WERE TWO PENCE A WEEK

By 'BEORCHAM'

LOCALLY, the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 had important repercussions. Berkhamsted Grammar School came under review, and after long, tiresome negotiations a new scheme was adopted which gave the ratepayers the power to elect three representatives to serve on the board of governors. The scheme also provided for the establishment of a girls' school as part of the ancient foundation, though it was not until 1888 that Berkhamsted School for Girls opened its doors.

In contrast to these long delays, no time was lost in forming a School Board to meet the requirements of the famous Education Act of 1870. The Government, which had made limited grants to voluntary schools since 1833, at last accepted the principle that every child should have the opportunity of attending a school. If insufficient places were available in any locality, a School Board was

to be elected to make good the deficiency and maintain schools at the ratepayers' expense.

### Mr. LONGMAN'S DEFEAT

A poll was taken and by a majority of ninety the parish decided to form a Board consisting of five members elected by the ratepayers. The first election took place in March, 1871, and the successful candidates were the Rev. James Hutchinson (rector), the Rev. E. Bartrum (headmaster of Berkhamsted School), Col. Smith-Dorrien, Mr. John Havers, and Mr. Henry Nash. There was one unsuccessful candidate: Mr. William Longman, the publisher, who lived at Ashlyns Hall.

By the terms of the foundation, trustees of the National (Church of England) schools were precluded from placing their schools under the Board. But by submitting to Government in-

spection and complying with the 'conscience' clause of the new Act, our C.E. schools were classed as public elementary schools within the meaning of the Act, and therefore received grants from the Government, but not from local rates.

Thus there was only one school for the Board to take over—the British School at Park View Road corner. It was a timely rescue operation, for the managers, lacking liberal subscribers and endowments, could not renovate the buildings and staff the school in a manner which would have enabled them to take the Government grant. Under the Board, however, the school would receive both the grant and contributions from the rates. As will be shown later in these articles, the subsidising of this school from the rates provoked acid comment from some supporters of the church schools.

### MATTHEW ARNOLD

The Education Bill of 1870 was piloted through Parliament by W. E. Forster, and it is interesting to find that his equally famous brother-in-law, Matthew Arnold (son of the great headmaster of Rugby) came to Berkhamsted as Her Majesty's inspector of schools. He visited the British School in 1870 and again in 1871, when it was renamed the Board School. Matthew Arnold found 'much tendency for copying, and the boys ill behaved'.

As in earlier times, absenteeism was rife throughout the 1870s. Attendance was not made compulsory until 1880, and parents were still expected to pay

small weekly fees until 1891. These fees, known as 'school pence', undoubtedly caused many parents to keep their children at home; a census taken locally in 1871 shows that not more than a third of the children who ought to have been at school were in regular attendance.

In 1873 the master of the Board School reported that many parents were too poor to pay the weekly fee of 2*d.* One mother said she would not pay the arrears for anybody, and if she or her husband called at the school the master would both hear and feel them.

### COUNTING THE COST

In 1874 the Berkhamsted Parish Magazine published a reminder that the Government grant depended to a large extent upon local subscriptions, for it was one of the rules that the grant was not to exceed the aggregate amount of voluntary subscriptions and school pence. Children at the church schools were receiving for 1*d.*, 2*d.* or 3*d.* a week an education which cost the school 9*d.* a week, and unless they attended often enough (250 times a year) to receive the Government grant, they were a dead loss in money to the school.

Inability to pay the school pence was not the only cause of absenteeism. In September, 1870, the British school log-book mentions a little boy who was kept from school to plait straw, two others to mind the baby, and two more for pig-keeping. A boy was kept at home because he had no shoes. Several scholars were absent to pick acorns and blackberries. A girl left because her parents thought it was time she helped to earn her living. And all too frequently numbers were depleted by epidemics.

### PENNIES AND PINAFORES

School log-books, an unfailing source of interest, show that the gentry called from time to time. There were happy moments at Potten End when the Hon. Mrs. Finch, of Berkhamsted Place, distributed pennies and pinafores. Lady Brownlow called and 'played two tunes on the harmonium, which she wished the children to learn'. At a time of simple, home-made entertainment, school concerts, treats and prize-givings were much appreciated, and at rare intervals visits were paid to places of interest. For instance, twenty-three of the 'largest scholars' of the Board School and two ex-scholars spent a few hours at Kenilworth Castle under the patronage of the Earl of Clarendon in 1871.

Of course, there were naughty boys who threw stones and broke windows, or committed the grave offence of striking a monitor. Pupil teachers were not above suspicion; one was found using a catapult in the playground, and as he had also been brought before the magistrates on a charge of poaching he was given notice to leave.

Girls would be girls; a saucy minx went to Potten End school 'in curl papers' and threatened to leave when told to take them out.

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### CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Parents were less keen on sparing the rod than they are today. The attitude taken was that if teachers administered corporal punishment, the child nearly always deserved it. But a certain Mr. Benn thought Miss Brant, mistress of the Board School, should not have used 'a willow twig, 15 in. long and as thick as a common drawing pencil'. The School Board investigated the complaint, and Miss Brant said she found the cane when she came to the school the previous year. She had used it only three times, two girls receiving two stripes each and one girl six stripes.

Miss Brant could not have had an easy time. Girls and infants were taught in the same room. There was trouble when the inspector found the register 'not kept carefully', the infants 'insufficiently instructed', and arithmetic 'very defective'. An unpleasant sequel was a reduction by one-tenth of the Government grant to this department, all because the arithmetic was defective. But all was well in the boys' department: there were 120 boys on the books and their progress was 'considerable'.

### NIGHT SCHOOL FOR BOYS

At a School Board meeting in 1877— at which a letter from the Education Department was read on 'how to act in the matter of children sent from Italy to earn money in the street'—it was stated that the Board school received £150 from the local rates. School fees amounted to £52 6s. 4d., and fees paid by the Board were £2 12s. 4d. Garments made in the girls' department and sold to the children raised 19s. 10d. for the upkeep of the school.

Compulsory education was foreshadowed at the first meeting of the Local School Attendance Committee in 1877, when it was resolved to meet again in a month's time to appoint a school attendance officer.

An admirable step forward was the starting of evening classes 'for such boys as are engaged in labour during the day'. According to the parish magazine, 'the necessities of life force many boys to leave school just at the age when they are most likely to benefit from its advantages', and it is cheering to find that the night school at the Court House, run by Mr. Peters, Superintendent of the National School, was described by an inspector as the best of its kind in the county. (To be continued.)