

Local Education since 1800 : V

THE CLOSING OF THE BOURNE SCHOOL

By 'BEORCHAM'

IN 1871 THE PARISH decided to seek a new scheme for the administration of the Bourne Charity. Thanks to a handsome bequest by Thomas Bourne, a charity school, opened in 1737, had for over 130 years provided free education and free uniforms for twenty boys and ten girls. Parents received 1s. or 1s. 6d. a week for each child at school, and financial help was given to boys who were apprenticed on leaving school. The staff consisted of a master and mistress, who had the opportunity of giving scholars more individual attention than was possible in the newer, larger, crowded elementary schools.

Before the famous Education Act of 1870, it is doubtful whether anyone ever thought that the Bourne School would cease to be carried on in much the same way as the founder intended. Indeed, public subscriptions were invited in 1853 for the provision of a new classroom

behind the original building. The cost was £391, £200 of which was contributed by General Finch, of Berkhamsted Place. In the following year the General defrayed the entire cost of rebuilding the original school, which was in a dilapidated state.

CAPS AND BONNETS

But the years of the Bourne School as a separate institution were numbered. In 1871 application was made for a new scheme, and four years later all the boys and girls were transferred to the National School in Back Lane. For several years other uses were found for the Bourne School building, which, in 1888, became the first home of Berkhamsted School for Girls. It is now the National Westminster Bank (222 High Street), one of the most attractive buildings in the town.

Only minor provisions of Thomas

Bourne's will were retained. The most important new departure was the creation of scholarships worth £5 per annum for a limited number of boys and girls attending Church of England schools in Berkhamsted and Potten End. By passing a fairly simple examination they became the new 'Bourne scholars'. The traditional uniform was abandoned in 1875, but distinctive caps and bonnets were worn until 1914, when the annual Bourne dinner at the King's Arms Hotel was also discontinued.

THE LOWER CLASSES

A sum not exceeding £20 per annum was to be applied in making 'suitable rewards' to boys and girls who were 'most distinguished for regularity of attendance' at the Church schools; these rewards were not limited to Bourne scholars. It is interesting to find in an old copy of the Parish Magazine that £1 per quarter was distributed among children of the Chapel Street Infants' School who were not absent once during the school quarter. As a rule the reward was 1s. a head, but when numbers were large, older children were given a shilling and those in the 'lower classes' received 6d. each. Apparently the wage differential had upset some of the parents of children in the 'lower classes', a description which today would cause much indignation.

The Bourne charity was again reviewed after the second World War and with the consent of the Charity Commissioners the trustees found new, private

ways of keeping to the spirit if not the letter of Bourne's bequest.

Now we turn to the Elementary Education Act of 1876, which, among other matters, dealt with one of the major causes of unsatisfactory school attendance, the employment of very young people. Employers were liable to a fine of £2 for allowing any child under nine to work for them, or any child under 11 who had not passed the second standard or had not attended school 250 times a year for two years.

HABITUALLY IDLING

The Act did not forbid the employment of young children out of school hours, in the holidays, or at special times, such as the harvest. Parents were liable to a fine of £2 for employing their own children and ran the risk of paying a fine of 5s. every fortnight for any child over five years of age who was found habitually idling in the roads or in bad company.

If any child was too poor to pay the usual fees, application was to be made to the Board of Guardians; and if any child under 11 had passed the fourth standard the Government would pay his school fees for a period not exceeding three years.

NORTHCHURCH SAYS 'NO'

A flurry was caused in church circles by a proposal in 1879 to form a School Board for the parishes of Berkhamsted and Northchurch, the existing Board being limited to Berkhamsted, with only the Board (Park View) School under its control. A poll of 'duly qualified rate-payers' of the parish of Northchurch was taken at the Town Hall and a resolution for the proposed union was defeated by 251 votes to 175.

This result gave much satisfaction to the writer of an article in the Parish Magazine in 1880. He stated that a notice had been received from the Education Department to the effect that additional accommodation was required in the two parishes for 230 children. It was claimed that subsequently a census was taken showing that no such additional accommodation was wanted in Berkhamsted, though the article went

Continued on page 8

on to say that a new school at Gossoms End (for Northchurch parish) would accommodate 131 children and that new classrooms were being arranged at the Court House for another 100 scholars. Just one more than the number suggested by the School Board!

COUNTING THE COST

e Thus the Church of England con-
t. tinued to keep ahead of the School
Board, but not without regret that no
contribution to voluntary schools came
o from the rates. In 1884, at a prizegiving,
d it was said that under the existing law
e the competition between voluntary and
y Board schools was unfair. 'If our
schools need enlargement, or other
o extra expense is necessary, we have to
d go to our friends for increased subscrip-
1 tions, which are often hard to get,
- whereas the Board School has practic-
ally an unlimited reserve fund in the rates'.

o This theme was pursued in an article
d printed in 1886, when it was said that the
o expenses of the Board School for the
o year amounted to £747 for an average
; number of 260 children, an average cost
- of £2 17s. 6d. In the Court House and
o Chapel Street schools the cost was £778
r for an average attendance of 424, the
l cost per child being £1 16s. 8½d.

f The main difference between the two
statements of accounts, continued the
- article, was that the Board School re-
- ceived £450 from the parish rates. 'We
; make these remarks in no spirit of
: hostility to our School Board, but if as
: is desired by those who are opposed to
: religious education and are in favour of
: a universal Board School system, our
: voluntary schools were closed, the addi-
: tional cost would be some £700 or £800
: per annum, the greater part of which
: must come out of the ratepayers'
: pockets'.

SCHOOL MEALS

o One of today's controversial subjects,
o school meals, was familiar in Victorian
times. A School Board report of January,
1887, states that 'the cooking accounts
were passed'. Not, of course, a reference
to the cooking of accounts, but confir-
mation of the very economical way
Miss Read, 'superintendent of the cook-
ing at the kitchen', had watched both
the school's and the children's interests.

o During the year 950 dinners had been
o cooked for £10 9s. 1d. Total expenditure
in this department was £12 7s. 2½d., the
income was £9 13s. 10d., and the defic-
iency was 'more than covered by the
grant earned'. The price per meal was
between 2½d. and 2¾d.

o In the same year (1887) it was reported
o that Mrs. Howland had offered to
superintend arrangements on behalf of
girls from the National Schools, who, it
was believed, 'would be prepared to
attend and be taught cookery in March'.

o Here, at last, was some liaison between
o the Church and Board schools: girls
attending the Court House School paid
regular visits to what we now call Park
View School, using interdenominational
pots, pans and plates.

(To be continued)