

Northchurch in Early Victorian Times

FREE CLOAKS FOR THE SCHOLARS

By 'BEORCHAM'

OCCASIONALLY I have the good fortune to tap a new source of information. Researching for additional facts about a former curate of Northchurch, I sought the help of the Rev. Bernard Hughes. Unfortunately, the parish registers added little to my knowledge, but my visit to the vestry was not wasted. Mr. Hughes also produced a small accounts book which enabled me to picture some of the little events which meant so much to the people of Northchurch in early Victorian times—treats for the children, gifts to the poor, evening classes for adults who had probably never been to a day-school. The book also gives the prices paid for food, fuel and clothing.

Free uniforms were provided for children attending Northchurch Sunday School. In 1844, sixty-two girls were given black and white check woollen cloaks, the cost being set out as follows:

74½ yards of cloaking at 4s. 6d. yard	£16 14 1½
13½ yards Gingham for bonnet strings at 10½d.	11 3½
Cotton, binding, etc.	4 9
6 bonnets at 1s. 3d.	7 6

In May, the cloaks were brought back by the girls, to be stored until the following winter. A white shawl was given to each girl for the summer. Mr. George Day supplied 6 dozen shawls at 11s. per dozen.

FROCKS FOR BOYS

It was not nearly so expensive to equip the boys, fifty of whom were given dark olive green round frocks, the price per garment varying from 1s. 9d. to 3s. 3d. There is no mention of a summer outfit for the boys.

And what of the grown-ups? In 1832, a Blanket Fund was started and 40 pairs

were purchased at a total cost of 17 guineas, the price per pair varying from 6s. 6d. to 9s. The blankets were distributed 'to the poor of the parish most in need of bed clothing'.

Some more prices. In 1854 a kind parishioner gave £8 for the poor. There were 47 beneficiaries, some of whom received cash grants. But many of the gifts were in kind, including a stiff petticoat, 3s. 1d.; a gown, 4s.; 2 shirts at 2s. 6d.; a pair of sheets, 3s. 6d.; 8 yards calico, 3s. 6d.; 3 yards flannel, 2s. 9d.; blanket, 4s. 3d.; apron and stockings, 3s. 6d.

CHILDREN'S DINNER

In 1838, the parish collected £10 18s. 6d. to give a dinner to the children of poor families, a very pleasant way of commemorating Queen Victoria's coronation. Ages ranged from four to fourteen years, and Mrs. Mantor had the task of providing the dinner, *including beer*, at 1s. a head. Beer for the children? Not for the younger ones, surely. The mere thought would have horrified later Victorians.

Gossoms End and Dudswell children were also invited to the feast. They were requested to attend in their best clothes, with a plate, knife, fork, drinking cup, and clean hands.

Any balance that remained after providing the dinner was to be given 'to those old men and women of the parish who most need a pittance'.

Another dinner was given to poor children on Queen Victoria's wedding day, 10th February, 1840. No doubt a

more sumptuous feast was provided, or perhaps a larger number of children were invited, for £17 6s. 6d. was subscribed. Once again any surplus was to be given 'to the poorest'.

ORANGES AND NUTS

9th April, 1844, was another great day for the children. £4 10s. was collected to give them a treat. £4 6s. 6d. was spent as follows:

21 doz. oranges	1	3	0
1 peck nuts		6	0
1 basket of dough, with currants, sugar, butter, spice, etc.	1	14	1
6 quarts milk		5	5
Oil for lamp			7
1½ lb. tea		7	6
10 lb. sugar		6	3
Bats and halls		3	2

ADULT SCHOOL

For a long time I had been aware that one of the first technical schools in the county was started at Northchurch; woodwork classes were held in a barn at Durrants Farm in 1892, and at the same time drawing classes were started at the village school.

Some of the young men who went to those classes may have been the grandsons of villagers who attended evening school as long ago as 1843. In that year - and the Northchurch book told me something I had not found in Berkhamsted records - an adult school was opened for men and women of the two parishes. From December 1843 until March 1844, evening classes lasting two hours were held twice a week at the National School (in the Court House).

The Northchurch contribution to the cost of running the adult school was £1 19s. 3d., as follows:

Half ton coal at £1 a ton	10	0
1 gallon best oil	7	11
1 gallon common oil	3	4
3 doz. copy books at 3d. each	9	0
1 doz. ditto	3	0
100 pens	5	0
10k	1	0

In October 1844, the adult school was

Continued on page 9

BEORCHAM (from page 7)

'opened at Mr. Price's school', and continued until March 1845, except for a period when it was closed 'on account of the small-pox'. Perhaps the change was made because Mr. Price's school was in or near Northchurch, thereby saving a long walk along the unlit highway to the Court House; but that is only a guess on my part. There was a two hours' session for men on Wednesday evening, and a similar period for women on Friday evening.

Unlike the National School, which had oil lamps, Mr. Price's school was lit by candles. The heaviest expenditure was 10s. on candles. In addition, the parish paid 3s. for 1 dozen copy books and 1s. for pens. Mr. Price donated the cost of the fuel -10s. for half a ton of coal.

NO SUNDAY DIGGING

On 1st April, 1847, poor parishioners were given an opportunity of buying seed potatoes at the cut price of 2s. 6d. a bushel. The rector paid £3 15s. for 15 bushels, which were all immediately sold at half price to the needy poor.

Throughout the period covered by the account book, and for many more years, the rector of Northchurch was the Rev. Sir John Hobart Culme-Scymour; his ministry lasted from 1830 to 1880, a local record. A rich man, he provided a 'garden ground', or allotment gardens, for poor parishioners, and drew up the following rules:

The Land to be cultivated by the Spade.

Not more than two-thirds of the Garden to be sown yearly with Potatoes.

No Tenant is to work on his Land on Sundays, or at hours belonging to his Master, without his leave.

Every Tenant is expected to attend Divine Service regularly.

The Land will be forfeited, if any of these Rules be broken; if a Tenant be guilty of Drunkenness, Dishonesty, or other misconduct; or if he offend against the Laws.