

YOUNG GENTLEMEN'S EDUCATION

by M.M. GUNSTON

I decided to investigate the way in which children of the landed gentry in the mid-18th century were brought up and educated. A suitable local family were the Blathwayt children from Dyrham Park. Dyrham Park is one of the larger estates, now in the County of Avon, previously Gloucestershire, a few miles north of Bath. The present house was built by William Blathwayt, Secretary of State to William III. He married Mary Wynter in 1686, heiress to the original Tudor house, which later he rebuilt as we see it today. Dyrham Park remained the property of the Blathwayt family until 1956 when the house, furniture and gardens were acquired by the nation and transferred to the National Trust.

Many records of household accounts remain, including bills for the education of the three grandsons and granddaughter of William Blathwayt, namely William, James, George and Penelope. From these accounts we can get a fair picture of their education although, of course, there are many breaks in continuity of facts.

The first grandson, William was born in 1751. We know that at the age of 14 he was being educated by a Reverend Mr Grand in London. Boarding and tuition for one year was £22 plus such items as £1 17s 6d for the dancing master, £1 10s 0d for the writing master, stage coach to London £1 7s 0d, mending shoes 6 times 3s 6d, cutting hair 5 times 2s 6d, a chest of drawers 8s, 2 pairs of new shoes 9s 6d, paid for bathing 15s, a Christmas box to sexton of chapel 1s. He later went to St. Mary's Hall, Oxford, where included in a bill for one quarter for over £82 were amounts for battels (college accounts for board and provisions supplied from kitchen and buttery) for over £16, dinners and suppers £6 3s 8d, wine £6 18s 6½d, borrowed from the principal at different times £22 1s 0d, mercer's bill £8 6s 2d, hosier's £3 0s 0d, bedmakers £1 4s 3d, tutor for 2 terms, however, £10 10s 0d.

At the age of 23 he left Oxford and a letter sent to his father asked for a contribution of William's caution money towards the expense of £200 being spent to take down and rebuild one side of the Quadrangle and repair the whole Hall of the college. He procured a degree and later on the death of his father took over the running of the estate.

James, the second son, was born in 1754. He was educated in London by the same clergyman as his elder brother. An account for books includes such items as an English Grammar 2s, French Grammar 2s 6d,

Dilworth's Arithmetic 2s, and a Bible and Prayer, neatly bound 10s 6d.

At the age of 17 he was an ensign in the Coldstream Guards, later promoted to lieutenant and at the age of 22 served in America during the War of Independence. After this only hair-dressing bills appear for Captain Blathwayt, e.g. £1 1s 6d for one bill.

Penelope, the only surviving daughter, was born in 1755, her mother dying the same year. She was educated at home in writing and arithmetic at 1 guinea for 3 lessons and also had dancing lessons at a cost of £2 2s 0d for the half year. This is the only reference in the records to her education.

George was born in 1759, son of his father's second wife. He, like his elder brother, was educated by a clergyman probably in London, but at the age of 14 was at Winchester. Breakings-up were evidently always, we learn, for five weeks and three days. Four years later at the age of 19 he was at Merton College, Oxford where he received a bachelor's degree. We have an account for £8 8s 0d to defray the expenses of his degree. He later became rector of Dyrham.

There was evidently strong family opposition to Penelope's marriage to a Mr Crane. She was in her thirties and they went to Scotland to get married. Her maternal uncle writes "it is out of our power to prevent it and we have nothing to do, but to make the best of this unforeseen event". It is evident that there was distinct distrust of Crane as the letter says "I am apprehensive, however, that he is worth nothing, and that this was his last effort to gain subsistence". There was a suggestion that the Reverend Blathwayt make enquiries into Crane's affairs when he went to London. When her uncle died Penelope was left a legacy of £5,000 but later she must have been in dire circumstance as she wrote to her brother, William, owner of Dyrham, for help but was refused. He writes that he expended the annual income of his estate and always intended doing it. She received a little financial help from a cousin who wrote to say he is sorry that Mr Crane's affairs are so bad a situation and that none of Pen's relations will do anything to assist her.

Penelope had one son, William, born in 1794 and when he was three Penelope's brother, William, owner of Dyrham, wrote to his sister stating that "his nephew will be of an age in the Spring proper for inoculation". He suggested that she took him to him at Bath and that Penelope stayed with her son "till his recovery". He then suggested that she left young William with him "I shall begin to think of educating him and will take same care of that and everything concerning as if he was my own".

At the age of 6 William was sent away to school at Gosport and later at the age of 10 he went to Winchester. Printed accounts from Winchester give the master's and tradesmen's names alphabetically, e.g. Belin, French Master; Bishop, Hatter; Bower, Writing Master; Flight, Glover; Jacob, Scourer; Lee, Dancing Master; Robbins, Bookseller; Wickham, Surgeon; Wells, Taylor; White, Shoemaker; etc, etc. Letters from Winchester regarding his progress and conduct were sent to his uncle at Dyrham. At the age of 19 he was at Trinity College, Cambridge. William's uncle, owner of Dyrham died in 1806 and he became the owner of Dyrham. In 1819 at the age of 25 William took the name of Balthwayt.