

THE POOR SCHOOL, GLOUCESTER

by J.M. Price

The school, originally at the Eastgate, was established for the education of poor children of the city, under the management of the Governor and Guardians of the Poor of Gloucester, by a series of local Acts from 1702 onwards. It was endowed by Timothy Nourse, whose will, dated 1698, devised land in trust for the building and maintenance of a workhouse and the education of poor children in reading and writing, and by Dorothy Cocks (1711) and John Hyett (1713).

The early history of the school is obscure since the minutes of the Governor and Guardians have not survived for the period 1749-1857, but the Charity Commissioners reported in 1826 that the school met in Lower Northgate Street, in a room built by the Revd. Richard Raikes [c. 1813], which could hold 'about 200 children, which is generally the number on the school-roll.' Parents were asked to contribute 1d. weekly towards the purchase of clothing, and at the end of the year the Governors contributed an equal amount, giving each boy a ticket entitling him to obtain clothing from a Gloucester tradesman. The education provided was 'agreeable to the system adopted by the British and Foreign School Society; reading, writing, arithmetic, and the elements of religious knowledge, being the major subjects of instruction.' The boys educated were the children of the poor, and were aged from 6 to 15 years. The School was inspected weekly by Visitors appointed by the Governor and Guardians. The report concluded: 'we have reason to think that the establishment is superintended and conducted in a very judicious and praiseworthy manner.'

Extracts from the minutes of the Governor and Guardians of the Endowed Free School, alias the Poor School, Northgate Street.

31st October 1870

The following extract from the will of Mr. Charles Lloyd, late of Surrey, was ordered to be entered in the minute book:

'I give and bequeath to the Trustees or others the Managers of the Poor School at Northgate Street, Gloucester, originated by the late Robert Raikes (in which I was when a boy) the sum of one hundred pounds to assist in carrying on or extending the benefits of the said school.'

13th February 1871

At a meeting of the Governor and Guardians of the Poor School a letter was received from the Headmaster:

'I beg to tender my resignation as Master of the above School which I trust I have managed to your satisfaction for nearly 57 years and beg to give a month's notice from the end of January.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your Old and Obedient Servant,

Thomas Holmes'

[An advertisement for a Schoolmaster at a salary of £65 a year was inserted in the Gloucester Chronicle, Journal, Mercury, and News. Mr. Frederick Charles Blackman was appointed Headmaster on 29th September, 1871.]

1st May 1871

It was agreed that the school should be for poor children and should be carried on as before, as far as this could be consistent with the Education Act, 1870. The poor children were to be taught reading, writing and arithmetic.

10th August 1876

A general meeting of the Governor and Guardians was held to consider the desirability of purchasing a site for building a new school, it being agreed that the present school was inadequate, ill-ventilated, and had a stone floor which became damp in winter. The site considered was situated in Park Street, 'a district thickly populated with the class of children likely to attend the school.'

19th September 1876

It was decided to purchase four plots of land in Park Street as a site for a new school building. [It was never erected because premises in Deacon Street became available (see below)]

28th December 1876

The Governor and Guardians of the Endowed Free School decided to place the school under government inspection and to make it an efficient school to enable scholars to obtain the Certificate of Competence under the First Schedule of the Elementary Education Act of 1876. They stated that 'the Conscience Clause is adopted and a register of attendance is kept, and the education is free of charge in accordance with the will of the donor.' Enclosed with their letter to the Department of State was a summary of the education returns of the city of Gloucester showing that the schoolroom contained space for 130 scholars.

[The school was inspected in 1877 but found to be inefficient because of the lack of qualifications of the staff. The inspector's report stated that 'Mr. Blackman is unfairly weighed in this large school of rough boys without any proper or efficient help.' The school was therefore refused recognition and threatened with closure.]

The Deacon Street Premises

10th May 1877

A letter was received from the Managers of Gloucester Industrial Ragged School who originally wanted to hand over their premises [closed 1876] to Gloucester School Board. The Dean and Chapter, who gave the site for the Ragged School, had objected that the terms of the deed of gift of the site stated that the premises were to be used as a school for the education of children of the poorer classes, "preferring children who were destitute or without other means of earning an honest livelihood." Gloucester School Board declined to accept the transfer on such terms and suggested that the terms of the foundation deed would be met if the school was transferred to the Governors of the Endowed Free School. Such an approach was now made.

27th July 1877

The Managers of the Industrial Ragged School resolved to convey the school to the Trustees of the Endowed Free School, to be used as a school for poor and destitute children in accordance with the original trusts of the Ragged School, 'the instruction at the said school comprising the Holy

Scriptures, reading, writing, arithmetic and geography, but
no child shall be required to learn any catechism or other religious
formulary or to attend any particular Sunday School or place of worship.'

16th August 1877

The Governor and Guardians of the Endowed School resolved to accept the
transfer on these terms.

30th November 1877

The trust deeds of Gloucester Industrial Ragged School were handed over
to the Governor and Guardians, who afterwards went to inspect the Deacon
Street school, and drew up a list of repairs and alterations necessary to
meet the requirements of the Education Department.

21st December 1877

Mr. Blackman, who had failed to pass the examination for his certificate,
was dismissed, and Mr. R.A. Rogers was appointed Schoolmaster on
27th December.

21st November 1878

[The Governor and Guardians had for some time been considering opening
an industrial training school]. Mr. T. Barwick Lloyd Baker attended the
meeting and explained his views on industrial training. He was in favour
of boys being employed on the land, considering it to be healthy exercise
which would strengthen the muscles and system generally. It was resolved
to add 'one or more branches of industrial training' to the curriculum.

Extracts from Deacon Street Boys' Free School log book

'The boys of the Endowed Free School, Northgate Street, were transferred
to the building in Deacon Street (now known as the Endowed Free School,
Deacon Street), under the Mastership of Robert A. Rogers, who opened the
school with 99 boys on 25th February, 1878.' [By the end of the year
there were 134 boys, and attendance rapidly increased until there were
217 boys on the roll five years later.]

19th May 1878

I commenced giving lessons to the Monitors this morning at 7 a.m., leaving
off at 8 a.m., this arrangement to continue during the summer months.

10th March 1879

I have 113 present this afternoon, and only one monitor to assist, therefore
I am obliged to disregard the real Time-table work for the present and work
by a temporary one until more assistance is obtained.

20th September 1883

The want of an Infants' School is greatly felt in this school, Standard I
being the drawback, At the beginning of the year the boys knew nothing,
the majority of them having been to no infant school.

23rd October 1884

The City Coroner, A.M. Sydney Turner, surgeon, paid a visit to School and
informed me of his intention to provide dinners three times per week to

twenty of the poorest boys in this school. He also mentioned that he would endeavour to organise penny dinners for the School as the majority of boys stand in great need of such.

27th October 1884

Doctor Sydney Turner....agreed to find free dinners for 60 boys each day next week provided the Managers would agree to continue the penny dinners. [The scheme was rejected by the Managers].

6th December 1886

School to be closed on Wednesday afternoon and the boys taken to the Albert Hall of this city to see Poole's Diorama.

6th October 1887

Some bigger lads and girls caused a great deal of confusion especially in Standard II by throwing stones at the doors, and rubbish in at the classroom windows, shouting etc.

3rd December 1890

The Soup Kitchen having been opened for the winter season, to enable boys to fetch soup, on Tuesdays and Fridays we commence with secular work.

9th February 1891

I decided to open and close school one hour early this afternoon in order to secure a good attendance, there being a strong attraction to keep the boys away - the grand Football Match, Gloucester v. Hull.

6th August 1891 [Abstract of a newspaper report]

The boys for the first time ever were given an outing. The gathering took place in a field near the Dog at Over, The boys led by St. Mark's drum and fife band marched through St. Mary's Square and Westgate Street to the field. Balloons were sent up, races were organised, each winner receiving an article of clothing as a prize.

6th November 1891

The number on the books is now 170 or about 20 less than the corresponding date last year. This is partly due to the fact that since the new Education Act (Fees Grant) came into force, several boys have left this for schools nearer their homes, and partly because lately there has been a scarcity of work in Gloucester, and many families have left the City to seek for work elsewhere. Sickness and 'boating' also affect the attendance of many whose names remain on the school books, so that I find it well-nigh impossible with present staff to maintain the efficiency of the School.

Staff for 1892: Headmaster, assistant, pupil teacher.

5th July 1893

In the afternoon the Governor distributed the medals and coins commemorative of the royal wedding to the boys and infants of whom there were altogether 191 present. The boys sang the National Anthem and "God Bless the Prince of Wales".

Thursday 6th July

A holiday for the royal wedding.

17th August 1893

This afternoon thanks to the kindness of the Governor and several of the Guardians and other friends of the School, the boys' annual treat took the form of an excursion by train to Haresfield Beacon. Here an ample provision had been made for the lads, who were well looked after by the Guardians and many ladies, who had attended in order to make the day a very enjoyable one for the young excursionists. Much of the time was spent in racing for prizes which had been presented by well-known friends of the boys.

5th December 1893

This being the date of H.M. Inspector's visit, the Governor and Mr. Farley very generously gave all the boys and infants a free breakfast. There was therefore a very good attendance and the children being well fed were in very good order, and answered the questions put to them much more brightly than I have seen them answer before, whether at an Inspection or in the ordinary school work.

1896. [Extract from H.M. Inspector's report for 1895]

The boys attending this school belong to the poorest and roughest class of the population, and cannot be properly controlled or taught by female teachers. [The staff were all female with the exception of the Master].

13th March 1896

This school is now beginning to feel the effect of the outbreak of small-pox. Till this week, the district and the homes of the scholars have been singularly free from the disease.

[The school was closed during April-June because of the epidemic].

1899

Two boys were found guilty of pick-pocketing. Having been previously convicted for stealing, both were sent to the reformatory for four years. An accomplice (Standard I), received twelve stripes with the birch rod. One boy sent to Harwicke Reformatory for stealing a bundle of Citizens.

Boys absent from school illegally working, carrying boards and walking horses along the towpath.

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In April 1899 the school ceased to be known as Deacon Street Boys' Free School and became Deacon Street Board School (Boys).

References

16th Report of the Charity Commissioners (1826/7)
Glos. R.O. US 19713
Glos. R.O. GBR Education Department records
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