

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Cirencester Free Grammar School

by E. A. Fuller
1886-87, Vol. 11, 117-129

© The Society and the Author(s)

CIRENCESTER FREE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

BY THE REV. E. A. FULLER, M.A.

WHILE searching ancient records for matters relating to the Parish Church of Cirencester, I was incidentally led to examine into the history of the Cirencester Grammar School, which, in its earlier days, was appendant to the church.

In towns where the power and influence of a great monastery was supreme, the foundation of a free school was sometimes the act of the monastic body. Thus Jocelyn de Brakelonde tells us in his chronicle that Abbot Samson, of Bury St. Edmonds, in the reign of King John, being desirous that education should thenceforward be free, first provided a school-house, and afterwards a schoolmaster's stipend, so that the scholars should no longer have to contribute either towards the rent of premises, or the salary of teacher. There is nothing to shew that at Cirencester there was any connection between the monastery and the school. Nor is there any record of the original founding of the school; but there would appear to have been a school in the town from an early period, for in the registers of the Abbey of Gloucester¹ is a record concerning a dispute which arose between that Abbey and the Abbey de Lyra. The matter coming before the Pope, he appointed the cause to be heard in Cirencester Parish Church by the Abbot of Eynesham, the Prior of St. Frideswide's, and the Dean, *i.e.* Rural Dean of Oxford, who again nominated three deputies, one of whom was the schoolmaster of Cirencester. This establishes the fact that a school existed as early as A.D. 1282; but I have found nothing concerning the maintenance of the school at that period, nor any other mention of it from that time for two hundred years, when in the register of Robert Morton, Bishop of Worcester,² in a list of contributors from the Deanery of Cirencester in 1487 to a clerical subsidy for the King, among the chantry

¹ I., 281.² f. 14 b.

priests and stipendaries of Cirencester Parish Church appears the name of Master Simon Moreland, Schoolmaster of Cirencester, who has to pay 13s. 4d., *i.e.* a fifteenth of £10. This £10 was an endowment by John Chedworth, Bishop of Lincoln, who died in 1481, and it was paid by the Monastery of Winchcomb, a charge, I presume, on some donation of land to that monastery by the bishop; but I have not been able to find any particulars of the grant, neither the bishop's will nor the Winchcomb registers of that date being in existence. The bishop was a Gloucestershire man, of good family, one branch of which was about that time settled in Cirencester, John Cheddeworth and Thomas Cheddeworth being, in 1460, two of the feoffees of the property of the Lady Chapel in the parish church. The bishop, in 1458, obtained a license to found a chantry in that church,¹ where the Chedworth arms still remain, both carved on a shield in the Lady Chapel, and depicted in stained glass in the tower window, *azure a chevron between three foxes' or wolves' heads erased or*. The chantry, as he founded it, was for a schoolmaster; and in the ecclesiastical valuation made in 1535 for the payment of a tenth to the King, in the account of the parish church, Humfrey² master of the Grammar School of Cirencester, appears as receiving yearly £10 from the Winchcomb Monastery according to the appointment of John Chedworth, formerly Lord Bishop of Lincoln, and the payment of the £10 is entered among the accounts of that abbey.³

Bad times were now at hand for the School. That valuation of 1535 had revealed a large amount of wealth, which the King and his courtiers were eager to appropriate. First fell the smaller monasteries in 1536; and in 1539 the larger houses shared their fate: Winchcomb was suppressed along with the others, and there was an end of the Bishop's endowment of £10, which thenceforward, whatever other use it may have been put to, was utterly lost to Cirencester School. How the townspeople managed

¹ Pat. 35, Henry VI. r. 6.

² Sayvell (?Saville) appears to be the missing name. For the will of R. Osmond, A.D. 1517, at Somerset House (Holder quat. 34) is said to have been drawn by Humphrey Sayvell, at that time Curate of Cirencester.

³ Val. Eccles. II. 447, 459.

during the next five years does not altogether appear ; but it is quite clear that they did not find it an easy thing to raise a stipend of £10, equivalent to about £120 now ; and in 1545 they diverted the endowment of the Lady chapel in the Parish Church to school purposes ; at any rate they made the chantry priest keep school for his stipend of £7, besides saying mass, he having from other sources a pension of £4. They were not, however, out of their troubles yet, for the greed of the king and his courtiers remained unsatisfied as long as there was any property of any kind left in connection with the church which could be seized ; and two Acts were passed in 1546 and 1547, which confiscated to the king all the property of every chantry, guild, &c.

Commissions were issued, and reports made by the commissioners under both these acts concerning the property of the various chantries, &c. ; and as matters began to look serious, and there was great danger lest the town should again be deprived of the Schoolmaster's stipend, the people made interest with the commissioners under the act of 1547—who were a number of Gloucestershire gentlemen, some of them belonging to the neighbourhood—and induced Thomas Sternholde the king's surveyor to append to his final report the following memorandum.¹

“ That this saide Towne of Cyrencestre is an ancyent Boroughe Towne. The greate number of people and the contynuall accessse of the nomber repayringe to the same Towne consydered, the Inhabytants there are most humble Sutours that it may please the King's majestie and his most honorable Counsell to lett them have therein stablyshed some learned man to teach a grammer Schole for the vertuose bryngynge up of the youthe thereabout where are many chyl dren which heretofore hath been very rudely and ignorantly and for lack of such a teacher symplye brought up and without knowledge till within these three yeres paste ; Sythens which tyme the aforesaide parishioners with their whole assente dryven thereunto of grete necessitie did appoynte one of the abovesaide services in their said churche called our Ladye Service to be counted to the keeping of a Schole, and the Incumbent

¹ Augmentation Office, Certificate of Chantries, 23, No. 40.

thereof named as abovesaid Syr Thomas Taylor hath very diligently applyed himself in teachinge of children and hath hadd for his salarye yerely vij li^b. and his mansion house. In which saide Towne till the dissolution of the monastery of Wynchecome there was graunted and payed oute of the same monasterye one yerely pension of x li^b. to and for a free scole there to be maynteyned and kept. Sythens the dissolution of whiche monasterye the same yerely pension of x li^b. hath been withdrawn and not payed unto the grete discommoditie of the same towne of Cirencestre.”

Sternholde supported this petition by naming Cirencester as one of the “Townes where it is thought moost necessarye and to be placys moost mete to have grammer scoles newleye erected.” Accordingly when this report came before the Council in London that the disposal of the property might be settled, they determined that the school should be continued with the accustomed wages till further orders.¹ This was in the first half of 1548, and the final settlement was not long delayed. On June 20th in the same year, a commission was issued to Sir Walter Mildmay and Robert Kelway, to determine about the grammar schools, and they on July 20th appointed that the long established school at Cirencester should be continued, that Thomas Taylor should continue to be schoolmaster at his previous stipend of £7, which should be paid him by the receiver of the court of Augmentations for Gloucestershire.² No doubt it was thought that matters were all safe now, but there was another turn in fortune’s wheel for the school yet. Queen Mary came to the throne, and after Michaelmas 1555 there was no more stipend to be got out of the crown receiver. The school, however, was not allowed to drop, the master did his work, and was maintained somehow by the townspeople, in hope of better times returning. It does not appear how or when Taylor vacated the school, he was only thirty-three in 1548, but in January 1560, Elizabeth having then been more than a year on the throne, William Arden, Schoolmaster of Cirencester appeared before the

¹ A marginal note was made to this effect on Sternholde’s Report—*continuetur the schole quousque*.

² Lord Treasurer’s Remembrancers’ Roll, Excheq. Record, 2nd Elizb. Hil. pars. 1. rot. 6.

Barons of the Exchequer, told the story of the settlement of the stipend, and complained that though he and his predecessors had always done their work well and faithfully, yet since Michaelmas, 1555, the crown receiver had steadily refused to make the appointed payment. Whereupon the Barons having searched the records of the Court of Augmentations ordered the arrears to be settled, and the stipend to be paid regularly in future.¹ From this time forward there was no difficulty about the £7, and before long local funds were available for its increase.

How it was that the lands belonging to Jones' Chantry were preserved to the church does not actually appear. I presume it was owing to the fact that it was not founded as a perpetual chantry, but only for a term of 60 years, of which 40 were already passed at the time of the confiscation of the chantry lands, at the end of which period of 60 years the feoffees were directed to make other uses of the money. It would almost seem that as soon as the chantry services ceased in the reign of Edward VI., the feoffees were accustomed to devote some of the income towards the school; but at any rate when the term of 60 years expired in 1567 and a new enfeoffment was made, then £7 or £8 were appropriated to this purpose; the town taking a great interest in the school. The condition of the school about that time may be gathered from a return made by John a Pennington, and other inhabitants of Cirencester, in answer to questions put by the Bishop of Gloucester, in 1579, as commissioner appointed by the crown to enquire into the condition of the grammar schools in his diocese.²

“First (say they) we find and testifye that we receive yearly the sum of seven pounds, deducting the portage money, to the use of our grammar schoole of Cyrencester. Item we find and testifye that our school at Cyrencester is well, tidily, and decently kept, continued, and maintained. Item we find and testifye that our Schoolmaster named Anthony Ellys a bachelor of arts is a sufficient, meet, well approved, and hable man to teach grammar, and teacheth his scholars diligently. Item we saye and believe

¹ Same reference as before.

² Special Commissions, Excheq. 12th Eliz. 875.

that the said grammar school cannot be placed in any other place more conveniently than where it is placed for the increase of learning." The whole stipend is returned as 20 mares, *i.e.*—£13 6 8; and from another record the school would appear to have flourished under Ellys with from 100 to 120 scholars in attendance, sons of gentlemen and others. ¹

A further increase of stipend was made by the crown in 1583 at the suit of George Lloyd, gentleman, and others, on whose application Sir Walter Mildmay, the treasurer, advised the Queen to increase the £7 up to £20,² at which sum the endowment by the crown has since remained. It will be seen by this account that Cirencester does not owe much to the crown with regard to the grammar school endowment. The first interference of the crown, was a distinct robbery of an old school endowment of £10 a year. The next was, when confiscating land and houses, the clear annual income of which then in 1548 amounted to £66, simply to confirm an already existing appropriation of £7 of that amount, for a schoolmaster's stipend. It was thirty-five years after before that miserable pittance was made up to £20.

The augmentation out of Jones' lands was not yet definitely settled. Thomas Helmes, who succeeded Anthony Ellys, seems to have been an incapable man, so the local authorities gave him notice to go, and the augmentation was withdrawn. Thereupon litigation ensued, and Helmes appealing to the Barons of the Exchequer, in 1587, complained of Christopher George, Esq., Henry Elrington, Humphrey Bridges, and others, as treasurers, churchwardens, and feoffees of Jones' lands, for detaining his stipend. He recited the confirmation of the first £7 to Thomas Taylor, declared that in 1567 the feoffees had by deed indented assigned £8 to the schoolmaster's stipend, and alleged that about eight years ago, Henry Elrington, for seven years running churchwarden, envious perchance at this stipend of £8 disposed to so good a use, did along with the others begin to oppose the payment, and afterwards when the crown had increased its endowment to £20, they had retained the £8 unthankfully as towards

¹ Excheq. Bills and Answers, Elizab. 90.

² Same reference as before.

the crown, contrary to all equity and good conscience, and dead to the hindrance of good learning. A commission of enquiry was upon this issued to Sir Henry Poole and others, when Henry Ehrington and the rest who were impleaded made their answer. They said there was no certainty about Thomas Taylor's appointment, but that after him, one Baker, schoolmaster, and his successors had been nominated, chosen, and admitted by the bailiff, treasurers, churchwardens, and others the masters of the town, with a stipend of £7 from the exchequer, and £6 or £7 more added by the said bailiff, &c. The schoolmaster had always been removable upon a quarter's or half year's notice by the churchwardens, with consent of the bailiff and others, if there were cause of dislike. John Jones having directed, that at the end of the term of 60 years, the churchwardens, &c., should dispose his money to the repairing the body of the parish church, making and repairing of high ways, gifts to the poor, &c., at their discretion, they had in 1567, when a new' enfeoffment was made to the above uses, thought good to increase the £7 out of the exchequer to £14, if the schoolmaster should be one they liked, until other help might happen to be provided. But when the Queen augmented her £7 to £20, the treasurers, &c., thinking that to be enough, had employed their £7 in repairing the church, at the present greatly in decay, and likely to be more ruinous if it be not forseen, also in amending some of the decayed houses of Jones' trust, in repairing of highways, and the poor. Moreover Thomas Helmes is so unskilful and slack that his scholars do not profit, and the school has dwindled down to 40 scholars, all which being considered by the Bishop of Gloucester and the defendants, they gave half a year's notice to Thomas Helmes before the augmentation up to £20 was settled, so that they might provide a better schoolmaster. Albeit he Thomas Helmes hath heretofore proudly said that he will be schoolmaster in spite of the most part of the parishioners; all which indiscreet speeches, and lewd bearing, and other causes considered, they prayed the court to let them as before have the nomination of the schoolmaster. As to the £7, when the half year's notice was expired, as they much disliked the contempt and obstinacy of the man in not departing, they had detained it, as was lawful according

to the terms on which it was granted, but it was detained for no other cause, and not at all for the hindrance of learning. Thereupon the court considering that it was needful to have an usher in the said school, ordered the disputed stipend, which they fixed at £8, to be employed ever in maintaining an usher in the said grammar school, and the schoolmaster for the time being to be content with the £20 given by her majesty. It was also ordered that Helmes should be examined by the Bishop of Gloucester, and Dr. Rudd, the Dean, concerning his abilities to teach and aptness to train up scholars, with power to remove him if they thought good. They were also to settle about the arrears, and the bishop from henceforth was to have the appointing of schoolmaster and usher.¹

The result of the bishop's visitation, of which there is no account, must have been that Mr. Helmes was continued as schoolmaster, for his name appears as such as late as 1614, at which date the regular entries in the vestry book commenced. But the churchwardens, &c., as plainly resisted the order concerning the payment of the £8; for on complaint of Helmes to the Lord Chancellor, in 1603, another commission of enquiry was issued under the Charitable Uses Act, of 1601, to Sir Henry Poole, Sir John Hungerford, George Master, Esq., and others; when a jury found that the churchwardens and others as feoffees of Jones' lands, had by deed indented in 1567, apportioned £8 yearly to the free grammar school, which £8 having been regularly paid to the schoolmaster from 1567 to 1583, had since that time been withheld and detained.² A decree now finally settled the payment of the £8 as obligatory, and it would seem that at first under the order power was given to the master to receive the £8 from the tenants of Jones' land direct; but afterwards on petition to Lord Chancellor Bacon by the churchwardens, &c., this order was varied and the payment was again entrusted to the feoffees.

Somewhere about 1615 the mastership was vacant, and Henry Topp was appointed, presumably by the bishop on the authority of the foregoing order, certainly not by the appointment of the churchwardens, &c., as in former days.³ This appointment was no

¹ Excheq. Decrees and Orders, Vol. 14, f. 33a.

² Vestry Book, 122 a. b. ³ *Ibid.*, 57b.

happier than the former one. In April 1639, Mr. Topp was complained of, and the vestry ordered him to be more diligent and forthwith to provide an usher; and in the next month as he had paid no attention to their order they gave him notice to leave, but he paid no more attention to this order than to the former one. Then they tried to pay him out, and in 1641 he agreed to go for £80; but he was a clever fellow, and having got the £80 he still held on, and did not finally give up possession till early in 1649;¹ when the school being again vacant, and there being no Bishop of Gloucester, the treasurers, minister, churchwardens, constables, &c., as of old exercised the right of election,² and Hector Foard, M.A., was appointed. The same manner of election was followed in March 1660, when John Hodges was appointed,³ after which there is no note of the manner of appointment, which since the middle of last century has been claimed by the crown. But the following is a list of succeeding masters mostly from other sources:—⁴

John Gwynne, about 1666. John Parkinson, about 1678.

He being master, a patent under the great seal was obtained for him, for the payment of £20 for his life;⁵ but he resigned and was succeeded by

John Turner, about 1683,

who was again, as others, his predecessors, paid the £20 warrant of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.⁶

John Reeves. Richard Arthur, about 1725.

George Whitwick, about 1750. ———James, about 1755.

He was the last appointed in the old way. Party feeling ran very high at that time, and an application was made to the crown;⁷ the result being that James was ousted, and a patent was issued to

¹ Vestry Book, 56b.-65b. ² *Ibid.* 65b. ³ *Ibid.*, 73b. ⁴ Kilner MSS.

⁵ Vestry Book, 85b. ⁶ *Ibid.*, 92b.

⁷ Lord Bathurst had at a previous election tried to secure both seats for the borough, for his two eldest sons, he having always before been content with one seat. This had produced great irritation, and the town in general was in opposition to Lord Bathurst. The calling in of the Crown was a bit of retaliation. Lord Bathurst's second son, Henry, afterwards second Earl, was made Sergeant-at-Law, and appointed a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in 1754; and he was commonly said in Cirencester to have been his father's chancellor long before he was the King's.—*Kilner MSS.*

William Matthews, about 1756,
 who was succeeded by his stepson,

John Washbourn, about 1765,

in whose time according to Rudder,¹ for many years there was not a single scholar in the school; not as Rudder explains, because Washbourn was incapable, or because the people did not care for education, but they sent their children elsewhere. Dr. Washbourn would seem to have considered boarders from the country more profitable than town scholars, who were accordingly discouraged, and the few that did offer themselves, besides being made to pay quite otherwise than free scholars used to pay, were by him excluded from the free school seats at church, and put upon a very different footing from the boarding scholars who numbered between 20 and 30. Umbrage was taken at this, and about 1780 the churchwardens began to charge him the same price for sittings as they charged other persons. In 1783, Dr. Washbourn dismissed all his boarders.²

Dr. Washbourn was succeeded by the following gentlemen, under whom the Grammar School continued on its old footing with varying fortunes:—

Rev. J. Buckoll - - - 1805 Rev. H. Wood - - 1823

Rev. — Grooby - - - 1807 Rev. E. Wood - - 1835

Rev. W. Bartrum - - - 1851

It will have been noticed, and possibly with surprise by those familiar with county history, that I have said nothing about Bishop Rowthall. The truth is that his name never appears in connection with the school, till Anthony a Wood in his *Athena Oxonienses* says, that the bishop in his old age founded a grammar school, and gave a house with £7 a year. What authority Wood had for this statement I know not; but he passed through Cirencester on his way to Bath in 1678, and, as his manuscripts in the Bodleian Library shew, made a great many notes about Cirencester Church, &c. I expect that he made a mistake; he possibly heard something about an old endowment by a bishop, he saw Rowthall's arms very large on two shields in the nave, and mixed his information wrongly. One might have thought that

¹ History of Cirencester, p. 309.

² Kilner MSS.

the townsmen had by that time forgotten the true story, and themselves given him wrong information about Rowthall; but though what in all probability is their version, at that time, of the settlement of the stipend, is wrong in attributing it to Philip and Mary, yet even in that there is no mention of Bishop Rowthall.¹ At any rate the history which I have given above is taken from official documents.

So also about the house, I have no evidence earlier than Anthony a Wood's account, a hundred and fifty years after Rowthall's death, which mentions his name. The earlier school would appear to have been held in Dyer street, for in a list of unsold feefarm rents, arising from ancient chantry lands, &c., in 1649, appears a tenement in Dyer Street, called the Schoolhouse.² Possibly the school outgrew the original house, and Bishop Rowthalle gave a larger house on the outskirts of the town, in Lawditch Lane: but the school there would seem to have been enlarged or rebuilt in 1534. For in that year, Elizabeth Tolle, widow of Robert Richard formerly bailiff of the town and founder of the chantry of St. Anthony, bequeathed £10 towards "the repairing of a new schoolhouse."³ The word repair is similarly used in a will of 1492, concerning the new porch of the church, "ad reparationem novi porticus."⁴ Whatever was done then, the building was much out of repair at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but owing to the general dissatisfaction with Mr. Helmes nothing was done to remedy matters. Accordingly in May, 1609, he wrote as follows:

"To the right honorable the Earle of Salisbury Lord high Treasurer of England. Maie it please your good Lordship to understand that after many petitions exhibited to the late Lord Treasurer for the repairinge of the Kinges Majestie's free grammer schoole within the Towne of Cirecester he graunted a survey to be made of the same schole, which survey was accomplished and delivered to his Lordships handes accordinge to his commandment,

¹ Crown Auditor's Report for Gloucestershire in the warrant of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. — *Vestry Book*, 92b.

² Harleian MS. 5013, f. 76.

³ Will at Somerset House, Hogan, quat. 17.

⁴ Will at Somerset House, Doggett, p. 118.

and the content thereof was, that 200 poundes would not repair it, with a letter from my Lord Davers¹ to justifie the needfulnes thereof. Your poore supplicant Thomas Helmes, schoolemaister driven to povertie by reason of a suite dependinge betwixt him there, being and some of the chiefest of that towne, for the recoverye of eight poundes by the yeare due unto the saide schoole, which suite did continue for the space of twentie and one yeares, being nevertheless contenanaced by the right Hon. the old Lord Treasurer, your father, and doctor Master,² as long as they did live, most humbly therefore pray your good Lordship to be a meane to our most gracious Kinge which favoureth all goodnes, to bestow in timber or ells what shall seem good unto his majestie for the repairinge thereof, and your said supplicant shall according to his bounded dutie daily praie to God for your honnors' health and prosperitie.³

He did not get much by this letter for the endorsement on it is:—

“I am not to sollicite his majesty in other men's suites, especially in matters of this nature.”

R. SALISBURY.

So the school buildings continued out of repair apparently during the remainder of the tenure of Mr. Helmes, and through that of Mr. Topp, with whose appointment as not being their own, the town was evidently much displeased, and accordingly the vestry were unwilling to use the church funds for the purpose, so that any repairs executed were at Mr. Topp's own cost.⁴ But when in 1641 he had agreed to go on payment of £80, a good deal of money was spent on the buildings.⁵ On Mr. Hodges' appointment, it was ordered in 1661 that in future he was to keep the school in repair, but both in 1663 and 1665 bills for repairs

¹ Henry Lord Danvers, afterwards created Earl Danby, was at that time the owner of what is now Lord Bathurst's Home Park, and built the first house there. His father, Sir J. Danvers, had bought the estate from Sir T. Parry, steward of Queen Elizabeth's household, who was the original grantee from the crown of that part of the abbey property.

² Dr. Master, physician to Queen Elizabeth, bought the site of the abbey with certain lands, and built the original modern Abbey House. He died in 1588. George Master, mentioned in page 106, was his son.

³ Domestic Papers, Jas. I. Vol. 45, No. 78.

⁴ Vestry Book, 67b.

⁵ *Ibid.* 60a, 61b.

⁶ *Ibid.* 74b, 75b.

were ordered to be paid.⁶ After this date nothing appears of particular interest in relation to school buildings.

This paper was written some ten years ago. Since then, on the death of the Rev. W. Bartrum in 1881, a new scheme has come into force. A certain amount of the endowment given in 1722 by Mrs. Rebecca Powell for another kind of school has been diverted to the Grammar School ; the old buildings in Lawditch Lane have been sold, and larger school buildings have been erected in the New Road.