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**An Episode in the Reform of Gloucestershire Endowed Schools
1869-1871**

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In her essay on the grammar schools of Gloucestershire, Dr Alicia Percival suggested three main reasons for the decline of those schools in the 18th and early 19th centuries.¹ Apart from that study there have been no investigations of the county's endowed schools in relation to each other. Even A.F. Leach's work in the *Victoria County History* provided only a sequence of individual school histories;² and Platts and Hainton's brief book is selective rather than comprehensive on the subject of middle-class or secondary education.³ There are some admirable histories of single schools,⁴ but in none of them has there been a thorough attempt to provide a 'county' context for the school's development.

Educational historians have treated the county as an important administrative unit only in the period since 1902 when county and county borough councils were first made responsible for secondary schools in their areas. Consequently, experiments in county administration of an unofficial yet significant kind have been overlooked in studies of local 19th-century developments. This essay is an attempt to modify the conventional picture of the pattern of reform in secondary education during the mid-Victorian period: by reference to Gloucestershire it will be suggested that, in the late 1860s, important local efforts were made to construct a system of relationships between the grammar schools of the county, and that these efforts did not, as is commonly supposed, imply local resistance to the reforming aims of the agents of central government.⁵

In 1864 the Schools Inquiry Commission was appointed to inquire into the education given in those schools which, according to their founders' intentions ought to have been supplying the educational needs of the middle classes.⁶ The Commissioners elected to investigate the endowed grammar schools county by county, and the greater part of their 21 volume report was taken up by their findings in relation to the work of each of more than 700 schools in England and Wales. The picture thus revealed was bleak and unpromising, and the recommendations which the Commissioners made in 1867 have been described as radical proposals.⁷ A surprisingly large proportion of these recommendations was incorporated in the Endowed Schools Bill which W.E. Forster, on behalf of Gladstone's government, introduced in February 1869. The more controversial part of the Bill, which would have set up a central Council of Examinations for inspecting the work of the grammar schools, was shelved at the committee stage. However, Part I, which established the three-man reforming Endowed Schools Commission, became law in August 1869.⁸

The three Endowed Schools Commissioners had the task of reforming the endowed grammar schools of England and Wales, on principles earlier laid down by the S.I.C. Report, in only three years. They were to determine the status and subsequent work of each school according to a tripartite classification: first-grade schools, teaching Latin and Greek to pupils up to 18 or 19 years of age; second-grade schools, teaching Latin and 'modern' subjects, up to 16 years; and third-grade schools, teaching the rudiments of Latin with an English curriculum, up to 14 years

of age. They also had to decide upon the composition of the governing body in each case, the level of fees, the proportion of free to fee-paying places, and whether the school should take day-boys, boarders, or both. The Commissioners could also redeploy endowments for the benefit of girls and convert redundant non-educational endowments to educational purposes. Since Forster, in introducing the 1869 Bill, had declared that religion was no longer a difficult issue in education, it was expected that, in most schools, the Commissioners would institute conscience clauses enabling parents to withdraw their children from the teaching of religious formularies.

These were considerable powers which might almost have seemed calculated to arouse the defensive fervour of local interests, particularly among trustees of endowments. However, two of the Commissioners, Arthur Hobhouse, a West Countryman and formerly a Chancery lawyer and Charity Commissioner,⁹ and Lord Lyttelton, Gladstone's brother-in-law, were known, by the end of 1869, to hold radical views about what should be done in the cases of decadent or out-of-date endowments.¹⁰

The work of reform was apportioned among the three Commissioners by regions. Arthur Hobhouse was given the southern part of England and Wales and had as his Assistant Commissioner the experienced Joshua Fitch.¹¹ Bristol and Gloucestershire came within the scope of their work; and so it is interesting that when, a few months after the appointment of the Commission, the influential Social Science Association¹² held its annual conference at Bristol, in October 1869, one of the papers there on middle-class education should have been delivered by Fitch.¹³ In Bristol Fitch was among colleagues, even friends; for the former H.M.I.s, J.P. Norris and Henry Moseley, were canons of Bristol Cathedral and governors of Clifton College. Other residents with national reputations in the field of education were Mary Carpenter, Canon Edward Girdlestone and Matthew Davenport Hill.¹⁴ This lends weight to the notion that Bristol was better equipped with educational expertise for co-operating with central government than any comparable provincial centre. On the other hand Bristol enjoyed a larger income from its educational charities than all other towns except London. It was therefore likely to be one of the earliest targets of the Endowed Schools Commissioners who were particularly anxious to get rid of the more corrupt hospital schools, of which Colston's was an outstanding example.

One of those who listened favourably to Fitch's paper at the Bristol conference was Dr John Percival, headmaster of Clifton College which, while enlarging its pedagogical reputation, was still financially insecure. Probably bearing in mind his school's need for greater security, Percival later suggested to Fitch that in Bristol there was already a natural example of the three-tiered system proposed by the S.I.C.: Clifton, though proprietary, would be the first-grade school; Mr. Caldicott's already efficient grammar school would serve as an excellent second-grade school; while the ruck of the hospital schools and other educational endowments would provide the bases for the third-grade part of the local system.¹⁵ Such was Percival's enthusiasm that he travelled to the Newcastle conference of the Social Science Association in October 1870, to deliver a very progressive paper entitled, 'By What Means can a Direct Connection be established between the Elementary and Secondary Schools and the Universities?'¹⁶ This, one of the most far-sighted educational documents of its time, suggested a true 'scholarship ladder' from the elementary schools for the poor to the ancient Universities. Percival was to embody in himself the practical possibilities of this idea, since he was one of the first members of the Bristol School Board, established under the 1870 Elementary Education Act; while on the other hand he was instrumental in helping to found the University College at Bristol.¹⁷ Eventually, however, Hobhouse thought it injudicious to place Clifton above the Grammar School in any official scheme for Bristol.¹⁸ When the final schemes for the city's charities were published, in 1875, Clifton had no formal place in the system the Endowed Schools Commissioners had created.¹⁹

Nevertheless the presence in Bristol of influential national figures, like Percival, Girdlestone and Moseley, helped to smooth the path of the Commissioners through a thicket of complexities and reactionary, ill-informed local opposition.²⁰

As in Bristol, so in the wider rural county of Gloucestershire there were enlightened liberal men who thought first of co-operating with, rather than opposing, the Endowed Schools Commissioners. At first, in fact, it was proposed that Bristol and the county should unite to meet the Commissioners. A fortnight after the Social Science Association conference at Bristol in 1869, the Gloucester diocese held its annual meeting in the same city. The most important section of the diocesan meeting was that devoted to 'Middle-class Education', which was addressed at considerable length by Earl Ducie, Lord Lieutenant of the county and a close friend of Lyttelton, the chief Endowed Schools Commissioner.²¹ Ducie was not concerned with the upper ranks of the middle classes who sent their sons to Cheltenham, Marlborough and Clifton, but with those who oscillated between the better elementary schools and the private schools. He hoped for much from the 1869 Act, but warned that 'local prejudices, vested interests, and obstructiveness of the ordinary, parochial type' would be encountered before it would be fully applied. His speech was essentially an attempt to interpret the main principles of the Act to an audience which would have contained a fair proportion of lay and clerical trustees of endowments. Ducie's most suggestive proposal was the creation of a County School for Gloucestershire, similar, it might be thought, to those already set on foot in Devon and Surrey,²² which would be fed by scholarships based upon the older endowed schools. His proposal showed that at this stage he was anticipating considerable opposition to external reform from the entrenched trustees of ancient endowments. He was supported in principle by two of the subsequent speakers, Percival and Canon J.P. Norris, H.M.I.

Local prejudices did soon rear up and were expressed most cogently in a letter from a Gloucester city councillor, J.P. Heane, who referred to the County School idea, for which vast funds would be required, as 'a sort of Great Eastern ship'.²³ On the other hand, one of the county Liberal M.P.s and a leading supporter of the 1869 Act, S.S. Dickinson, contributed a very useful letter to the *Gloucester Journal* in which he attempted to prepare a smooth path for the Endowed Schools Commissioners. He wrote:

. . . It seems in every way desirable that the trustees of the various . . . schools within a compact area such as a county offers, should consult with each other and with the Commissioners to agree upon some system of reorganisation and rearranging of the existing schools of the county, so as, in the language of the Act, 'to render them most conducive to education.'²⁴

In two further letters Dickinson sought to explain the particular recommendations of the Schools Inquiry Commission.²⁵

Ducie convened a general meeting of trustees of Gloucestershire schools at the Shire Hall, Gloucester, in November. It is clear that by then his original aims had been modified: having abandoned the County School idea, he now suggested a plan of 'judicious reform' of existing endowments. Of the Endowed Schools Commissioners he said, 'I have the authority of Lord Lyttelton for saying that anything we submit to them will receive due consideration.'²⁶ The bishop proposed the first resolution,

That it is desirable for the educational endowments of the county . . . to be organised in such a manner as, while having due regard to the educational interests of the localities in which they are situated, to provide for the educational wants of the county at large.²⁷

The Bishop's resolution was seconded by Dickinson, who hoped that Bristol might have been included in their plans; but he uttered the first indication of a possible separation when he said that, even without Bristol, the county had a population of 300,000. Indeed, judging by the

speeches made by Gloucester men, Heane and Whitcomb, at this meeting, it seemed that the city of Gloucester, as well as Bristol, was about to secede from the county discussions, and the mayor immediately called a Gloucester city meeting.²⁸ Nevertheless, Gloucester continued to participate in the larger county meetings and discussions.

In December Ducie presided over a meeting attended by the bishop, Lord Redesdale, the county M.P.s, Mr Stanton (who had reported upon the county's schools for the S.I.C.), and the Mayor of Gloucester.²⁹ The Lord Lieutenant announced that it had been thought unwise to press Bristol to join with the County Committee, 'having regard to the amount of Bristol endowments, and the large number of intelligent persons residing there'. This was probably interpreted by some prominent citizens of Gloucester as a calculated slight to themselves. Certainly such a remark reflected the attitude of many traditional leaders of the county towards urban middle-class men whom they considered to be their natural inferiors in matters as sophisticated as the organisation of middle-class education.

The bishop moved for a local committee of inquiry into the current condition of Gloucestershire schools; and the members appointed included Ducie, the Earl of Harrowby, Redesdale (who, typically, promised not to attend), the Dean of Gloucester, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, Canon Tinling of Gloucester (another former H.M.I.), Moseley (despite the earlier 'secession' of Bristol), the Mayors of Gloucester and Tewkesbury, and several headmasters of endowed schools (who, it might be argued, were hardly suitable members of a committee to inquire into some of their own schools). By this time the intensity of interest in reform in the county had come to Lyttelton's notice, and he permitted two of his letters, to Ducie and Winterbotham, another County Liberal M.P., to appear in the *Gloucester Journal*.³⁰

The County Committee further refined its activities by appointing sub-committees for dealing with three main parts of the county – the Gloucester district, the Cotswolds, and the Wotton district. But the relatively easy passage of events was interrupted by the publication of Fitch's initial proposals for the reform of Bristol schools. These were described in a *Journal* editorial as 'a revolution' and 'a very alarming and monstrous innovation indeed.'³¹ Also, while the County Committee was at work, the Cathedral Chapter, led by Tinling, and the Gloucester City Council were proposing their own scheme for the city's schools, which would have involved the amalgamation of Crypt, the Cathedral School and Sir Thomas Rich's Bluecoat School.³² Nothing came of this plan until 1882 when, by a scheme of the Charity Commissioners, the city's endowed schools, with the exception of the Cathedral School, were put under one trust.

At a meeting of the County Committee with Assistant Commissioner Fitch, in December 1870, Ducie was most conciliatory to Gloucester interests. Canon Tinling described the city plan for amalgamation of its schools, and reported upon his discussions with the Commissioners in London. For his part, Fitch outlined the principles he expected the Commissioners would apply to the reform of the county's endowed schools.

Later, in January 1871, Ducie published the results of the local inquiry, and a set of proposals which allocated a precise role to each endowed school in a scheme of middle-class education for the whole county.³³ Introducing these detailed plans, which represented the fruit of considerable collective effort, Ducie said that their first principle had been that

. . . if the Endowed Schools Act is to be carried on in Gloucestershire on the principles recommended by the Schools Inquiry Commission, and if it be true of the county as of the Kingdom in general 'that at present each school is taking a line of its own, with little reference to the needs of the place in which the school stands. . .';³⁴ and if we agree with the Commissioners 'that it is essential to efficiency that the schools over a considerable district should be dealt with in relation to each other', we may be satisfied that a complete and systematic organisation of our Endowed Schools is necessary.

It is impossible now to discover how much influence Fitch exerted upon Ducie; but in the

'county' scheme published in January 1871, Ducie proposed that efforts should be made to bring Cheltenham College, a proprietary school, within the small circle of proposed county first-grade schools. The similarity between this and the earlier Fitch-Percival proposal in relation to Clifton is undeniable.

Copies of the county scheme were sent to the Endowed Schools Commissioners and to each set of trustees in the county. And that is the last that was heard of it as a practical proposition. Two factors probably account for the ensuing silence and official inactivity. Firstly, the Elementary Education Act, 1870, raised questions of definition, as between endowed grammar and endowed elementary schools; and, since the latter Act also introduced the concept of rate-aid, local rate-payers began to resent the idea that they might have to support directly elementary schooling for the poor, while endowments existed which, having been created for 'the poor', were now being transformed to support secondary schooling for the middle classes. Thus it was that in 1871 for the first time the cry, 'Robbery of the Poor', was raised against the reforming work of the Endowed Schools Commissioners. Mr Heane of Gloucester was particularly vociferous on this issue in the local press.

The second factor was even more significant. An isolated enunciation of the 'Robbery' claim might soon have collapsed, had it not been for the reinforcement it received from a campaign conducted on a national scale which cleverly used local fears and prejudices to create hostility towards the Endowed Schools Commission. On 29 April 1871, the *Gloucester Journal* published its first notice of a particular controversy which was to inhibit the remaining work of the Commissioners – the Emanuel Hospital Case. In 1869 Arthur Hobhouse had chosen as his first targets for reform two corrupt, inefficient institutions in Westminster, Emanuel and Greycoat Hospitals, which were under the trusteeship of the Court of Aldermen of the City of London. He could hardly have selected more jealously powerful or more vindictive opponents. His attempt to remove the charities from the patronage of the City Corporation led to a national campaign of vilification of the Endowed Schools Commission organised by the City of London solicitor, T.H. Nelson, who sent to every charity in the country notices of what the Commissioners proposed to do in the case of Emanuel Hospital, and asking all trustees to petition Parliament on behalf of the Court of Aldermen.³⁵ This sustained campaign against the Commissioners gave a much sharper focus to the hitherto vague obstructiveness of bodies like the Gloucester City Council and the trustees of the Crypt School.

The Endowed Schools Commission was abolished by Disraeli's government in 1874, with less than half its allocated work completed, and its functions were taken over by a less powerful Charity Commission. Conventionally it has been suggested that the Endowed Schools Commissioners encountered universal opposition throughout their work of reform. But while it is certainly true that they achieved little in Gloucestershire, except for their controversial Bristol schemes, the county provides positive evidence that among the traditional leaders of county society, both ecclesiastical and lay, and among trustees of educational endowments, there was a considerable desire to co-operate in, rather than resist, the process of general reform being undertaken by the agents of the central government. It was only when other external forces were set to work, forces which had little to do with Gloucestershire circumstances, that obstructive opposition reared its head in an effective way. The proposals of the committee under Earl Ducie represent the first local attempt to provide a general pattern of reform for Gloucestershire's endowed schools; at that time there was no other agency in Gloucestershire sufficiently well informed to put forward a plan for the county. After 1871 the work of co-ordinated reform was not revived in Gloucestershire until 1902 when the County Council took over responsibility for education.

Notes

1. A.C. Percival, 'Gloucestershire Grammar Schools from the 16th to the 19th centuries', *TBGAS* 89 (1971), 102.
2. *VCH Glos* 2, 313–448.
3. A. Platts and H.G. Hainton, *Education in Gloucestershire: a short history* (Gloucester, 1954).
4. For example, C.P. Hill, *The History of Bristol Grammar School* (London, 1959); D.J. Watkins, *The History of Sir Thomas Rich's School, Gloucester* (privately printed, 1966).
5. For a more extensive development of this argument, see D.J. Allsobrook 'An Investigation of Precedents for the Recommendations of the Schools Inquiry Commission . . . 1864–7' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Univ of Leicester, 1979), chapter 11; D.I. Allsobrook, 'The Reform of the Endowed Schools: the work of the Northants Education Society, 1854–74', *History of Education* 2.1 (Jan 1973).
6. The terms of reference of the Schools Inquiry Commission were: '. . . to inquire into the education given in schools not comprised within the scope of Your Majesty's Letters Patent bearing date respectively the 30th day of June 1858 and the 18th day of July 1861, and also to consider and report what measures if any, are required for the improvement of such education, having especial regard to all endowments applicable or which rightly can be made applicable thereto . . .' *S.I.C.*, 1, 1. The 1858 Commission was the Newcastle inquiry into elementary schooling for the poor; while the Clarendon Commission, 1861, had investigated the nine great schools.
7. For example in W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipose* (London, 1968 edn.), 200–201: '. . . a remarkably radical-collectivist document . . . what they proposed was infinitely more radical than anything that has come to pass . . . since their report was published'.
8. *An Act to amend the Law relating to Endowed Schools and other Educational Endowments in England, and otherwise to provide for the Advancement of Education*, 32 & 33 Vict. c. 56, 2 Aug 1869.
9. See L.T. Hobhouse and J.L. Hammond, *Lord Hobhouse: a memoir* (London, 1905).
10. Arthur Hobhouse, *The Dead Hand* (London, 1880), 'Lecture on Charitable Foundations', 1–48.
11. *Report of the Endowed Schools Commissioners to Her Majesty's Privy Council* (1872), 7.
12. The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science had been founded in 1857, and subsequently held annual conferences in leading provincial towns and cities. See Brian Rodgers, 'The Social Science Association, 1857–1886', *The Manchester School* 20 (1952), 3.
13. *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1869 Bristol Conference* (London, 1870), 375.
14. Girdlestone, who had initiated reform of educational charities in two Bristol parishes, delivered a paper on his work, published in A. Hill (ed), *Essays on Educational Subjects . . .* (London, 1857). See also P.R.O., ED 27/1274, Colston's Hospital file, letter from Girdlestone to *Daily News*, 10 July 1858.
15. P.R.O., ED 27/1263. Clifton College file, letter of Percival to Fitch, 27 Mar 1870.
16. *Trans National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1870 Newcastle Conference* (London, 1871), 310–17.
17. See W. Temple, *Life of Bishop Percival* (London, 1921); O.F. Christie, *A History of Clifton College, Bristol* (1935).
18. P.R.O., ED 27/1263, Clifton College file, letter of Fitch to Hobhouse, 18 Nov 1870.
19. *Western Daily Press*, 12 Apr 1875: a public notice of official acceptance of the schemes.
20. In addition to information contained in the P.R.O. files, opposition can be traced in *Bristol Times and Mirror*, *Western Daily Press*, *Western Times*, *Bristol Gazette*, and *Bristol Post*; though, as several *Western Daily Press* leaders noted, between 1871 and 1874, most Bristolians were apathetic about the destinies of their very valuable charities.
21. *Glos Journal*, 16 Oct 1869, 'The Diocesan Conference.'
22. For an account of these two schools, see J.P. Roach, *Public Examinations in England, 1850–1900* (Cambridge, 1971), 51–55. The schools were West Buckland (Devon County School) and Cranleigh (Surrey County School).
23. *Glos Journal*, 23 Oct 1869.
24. *Ibid.*, 6 Nov 1869, 'The Endowed Grammar Schools'.
25. *Ibid.*, 13 and 20 Nov 1869.
26. *Ibid.*, 27 Nov 1869. 'The Endowed Schools of Gloucestershire – Conference of Trustees.'
27. *Ibid.*, loc. cit.
28. *Ibid.*, 18 Dec 1869, 'Gloucester and the Endowed Schools Act.'
29. *Ibid.*, 25 Dec 1869.
30. *Ibid.*, 15 Jan and 5 Feb 1870.
31. *Ibid.*, 9 Apr 1870.
32. Gloucester Cathedral Chapter Minute Book, meeting, 31 Mar 1870; also, P.R.O., ED 27/1382, Gloucester United Charities, interview memorandum (Tinling) 2 Dec 1870.
33. *Glos Journal*, 21 Jan 1871, 'Gloucestershire Endowed Schools'.
34. *S.I.C.*, 1, 630.
35. *The Times*, 27 Apr 1871.

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