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**'The only resource for honest poverty' Charity Schoolmasters of  
the Stroud Region 1760-1830**

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## ‘The Only Resource for Honest Poverty’: Charity Schoolmasters of the Stroud Region, 1760–1830

By NICHOLAS HERBERT

Among the many features that distinguished Gloucestershire’s principal industrial region, the cloth-producing valleys of the western Cotswolds, from the agricultural parts of the county in the Georgian period was the number of its parish charity schools. In the northern part of the clothmaking region, formed of 14 parishes that looked to Stroud town as their centre,<sup>1</sup> only one parish, little Pitchcombe, lacked provision for charity education by the 1760s; and some of the larger parishes, like Minchinhampton and Bisley, had two or more funds or endowments for that purpose.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, in a group of 13 parishes lying around Tewkesbury in the northern Vale – the parishes of Tibblestone Hundred and the lower divisions of Tewkesbury and Westminster hundreds – only Tewkesbury itself and two others had any kind of educational charity;<sup>3</sup> while of the 12 parishes that formed Brightwells Barrow Hundred in the east Cotswolds only two had any such provision.<sup>4</sup> The contrast reflected not only the greater proportion of wealthy inhabitants in the Stroud valleys, but also a difference of attitude in an area where the long dominance of the cloth industry had broken down the traditional pattern of rural society. In farming areas the gentry and yeoman farmers who might have made bequests or given subscriptions saw little point or wisdom in educating the farm labourers’ children of their villages. In the Stroud valleys the clothiers, who with other leading tradesmen were responsible for gifts for charity education, probably had as one of their motives the need to maintain a pool of basically literate and numerate young men who could undertake the more responsible, supervisory tasks of their industry.

Its many educational charities gave the Stroud region an unusual concentration of schoolmasters. It is probably only in late Victorian times that the parish schoolmaster becomes a readily recognizable figure in the history of rural society. Still a rather anomalous figure, distinguished by his learning from the bulk of his fellow parishioners and by his comparative poverty from the gentry and clergy, he nevertheless by then had an accepted role and status in the community. Earlier, schoolmastering was an ill-defined and ill-regarded occupation, and the schoolmaster is an elusive figure in the local records. For the Stroud valley parishes, sources such as parish vestry minutes, newspaper advertisements, and the few surviving school records do provide some detail of the charity schoolmasters of the late Georgian period, and this article will examine what is revealed about their background, status, and livelihood.

To trace the history of the charity schoolmasters of that period is to describe the pivotal feature of the schools themselves, for most schools then had a nebulous institutional identity. The pupils attended for only two or three years, and often irregularly; the schoolrooms, in an aisle of the parish church, in part of the workhouse or other parish building, or in the master’s own house, were inadequate and unsecured; the finance, from a modest endowment or from an annual subscription-fund was meagre and often absorbed almost entirely by the master’s salary; and the administration, by the parish officers or by a self-perpetuating body of trustees, was generally lax. The charity schools can be defined as a separate category of school by virtue of

providing free education for poor children, but some were indistinguishable in other ways from the dame schools where elderly women taught poor children for a small fee, while a few were more closely akin to the private academies where clergymen or teachers of an established reputation boarded and taught children from wealthier families. Often the charity schools existed beside, or as part of, such other establishments. In a few cases, as with the Stroud charity school society founded *c.* 1700, the funds were provided by the subscriptions of the wealthier parishioners, or by church collections taken at an annual sermon preached in aid of the charity; in most cases, however, the funds came from an endowment in land or stock under the will of an individual founder. The bulk of the foundations fell within a period of about 12 years after 1698, the year of the formation of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, with one of its main aims the provision of religious education for the poor. The S.P.C.K. attracted some influential adherents in Gloucestershire, and perhaps some of the Stroud region benefactors took their lead from Maynard Colchester, a founder member of the Society, who started a school in his own parish of Westbury-on-Severn, or sought the advice of the diocesan bishop Edward Fowler, another early supporter.<sup>5</sup>

The way in which the parishes employed their educational bequests varied from place to place. Only some of them had what would be recognizable to modern eyes as a village school, held in a centrally-placed schoolroom, under a 'professional' schoolmaster (to use the description in a very basic sense), and sometimes with uniform clothing to distinguish the charity children. Some foundations dispersed their funds among a number of teachers of a more or less suitable nature – 'dames', poor tradesmen, disabled parishioners with a little education – who each taught a few children in their cottages. Education could be a cottage industry, sometimes carried on beside the more usual cottage industries. P.H. Fisher, the Stroud historian, recalled a visit to a cottage somewhere in the Cotswolds in the early years of the 19th century where children were shouting out their reading lessons in order to be heard over the noise of the teacher's spinning-wheel.<sup>6</sup> One of the small schools supported by the Eastington parish charity at the same period was taught by a weaver in his cottage against a background of the hammering of the loom and the shouted interruptions of his journeyman.<sup>7</sup> In the larger parishes of the region, the system of dispersing the funds among such cottage-teachers had at least the advantage of making education available to poor children in the many outlying hamlets that the cloth industry had spawned. During the 18th century, the Stroud charity school society supported little schools in the hamlets of Thrupp, Paganhill, Whiteshill, Ruscombe, and Quarhouse, as well as one in Stroud town itself; and in the 1790s Ridler's charity for Bisley parish employed women teachers at Chalford, Eastcombe, Oakridge, and Bisley village.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the charity schools were very small. Their founders in the early 18th century, long before the promotion of the aim of universal education for the poor, were concerned to benefit only a modest number of the 'deserving poor'; typically they provided for the teaching of six, eight, or ten boys. Among the largest of the older schools was the Free School at Painswick, where the founder in 1707 gave his £200 for ten boys, on condition that other parishioners raised a similar sum for another ten, and where by the start of the 19th century the number had been raised to 26.<sup>9</sup> Some of the later foundations, which, as at Eastington (1764) and Stonehouse (1775), were almost always endowed as a joint enterprise of a group of subscribers, taught up to 40 children.<sup>10</sup> The syllabus followed, often specified in the founder's will or trust deed, was usually limited to reading and writing and simple arithmetic ('casting accounts'). Those founders influenced by the S.P.C.K. usually provided that the teaching should be 'in accordance with the principles of the established Church', the instruction favoured by the Society being based on the catechism. If girls were included as objects of the charity, the donor might stipulate instruction in knitting and sewing, which would help to equip them for

employment as domestic servants. The boys usually went on to apprenticeship to small tradesmen, which for children of journeymen weavers, poor labouring men, or destitute widows would be to improve their prospects by one degree. For the Stroud Red Boys School, a charity that also provided the apprenticeship premium for its pupils, a series of indentures survives. They show the 24 boys apprenticed between 1785 and 1812 entering the following trades: cordwainer (12 boys), tailor (4), carpenter (2), carpenter and wheelwright (1), boot and shoemaker (1), basket maker (1), corkcutter (1), soaper and tallow chandler (1), and maltster (1).<sup>11</sup>

The salaries paid to their schoolmasters by most of the charities were paltry. At the start of the 19th century, the master of the Stroud Red Boys School received £15 a year, the master of the Bisley Bluecoat School £15, and the master of the Bisley Free School £10.<sup>12</sup> At Rodborough, where in the early 19th century the same master, Charles Kemp, was employed by all three of the parish's educational charities, his combined income was still only £22, or 8s. to 9s. a week which, as was said, was not even 'equal to the wages of handicraft labour.'<sup>13</sup> It was accepted, therefore, that a charity schoolmaster would, if he could attract them, take paying pupils to supplement his meagre income; and most masters played a dual role as employee of a charity and as educational entrepreneur. To some extent the two things were complementary, for the charity gave him a secured basic income and in most cases some kind of schoolroom in which to teach all his pupils, while the fees of the paying children made his salary up to a living wage. The size and quality of the accommodation provided by the charity was one of the principal factors that determined the master's prospect of forming a successful private school. Before 1817 the Rodborough charity pupils were taught in a dilapidated building – in its single ground-floor room, which was also the living room used by the master and his family;<sup>14</sup> if the master had any paying pupils, they were probably few in number and from a background only a little removed from that of his charity pupils. At Painswick the master of the Free School had exclusive use of a decent-sized room in a complex of buildings known as the town hall or stockhouse. That other parts of the buildings were the town lock-up and the parish workhouse<sup>15</sup> would scarcely recommend the situation to modern educationalists or parents, but was probably not seen as a drawback in the 18th-century context.

The Painswick schoolmasters also had the advantage, when seeking the custom of paying pupils, of operating in an attractive and reputedly healthy town, and one that had a large number of fairly wealthy inhabitants. The trustees of the Free School gave the master unrestricted use of the rent from the endowment of lands, which provided him with a modest basic salary, £26 a year in 1798 and £32 10s. in 1817. His private pupils were said to bring his income up to £63 in 1793, and five years later the post was said to be worth £80–£100. Thomas Rushworth Ward, who was appointed master in 1806, probably earned a good deal more than that, assuming that his advertisement for boarders at 18 guineas a year met with a reasonable response. In 1826 he had private day pupils as well as the boarders.<sup>16</sup> Painswick in late Georgian times was evidently fruitful ground for the educational entrepreneur, and during the whole or most of the period supported a second private school, taught by clergymen.<sup>17</sup> Minchinhampton, a smaller town but similar in situation and character, was another place in the region that offered good prospects for schoolmastering. Daniel Witts, master of the Minchinhampton Free School, moved to a larger house in order to accommodate the boarding school he taught in conjunction with it in 1765.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Sheppard, the Free School master in the early 1820s, ran a boarding school for both boys and girls, with the help of his daughters. He died in 1826, owning a personal estate valued at £450.<sup>19</sup>

It might be thought that the presence of charity children in a school limited the master's ability to attract private pupils from the higher reaches of local society, and there is some

evidence of that in an advertisement placed by the Stonehouse schoolmaster John Elliot in 1789. He had, he announced,<sup>20</sup>

obviated the dislike that many respectable people have formed to boarding their children at this school, by reason of a charity being taught here, which he has now removed, and appropriated the whole house to the more genteel accommodation of boarders.

That kind of appeal to snobbery, however, was not always necessary. In the 1760s sons of local gentry were among those who shared a schoolroom with the charity children of the Stroud Red Boys,<sup>21</sup> and in the early years of the 19th century the masters of the Painswick Free School and St. Chloe's School at Amberley in Minchinhampton, both of whom were able to attract paying pupils from a fairly wealthy background, taught them in the same room as charity boys.<sup>22</sup>

In the attempt to build up a successful private school the schoolmaster of St. Chloe's school was the most fortunately placed of all local charity masters. Unusually, the endowment of that school included a substantial house, the old manor house of Seinckley (later known as St. Chloe or St. Loe) on the Minchinhampton side of the Woodchester valley, as well as 44 acres of land. During the 18th century, the schoolmaster was allowed an enviable degree of control over the charity's assets by the trustees. One wing of the house, which still has the tall windows and bellcote added at its conversion to a school soon after 1699, formed a spacious schoolroom, and the remainder of the building was at the master's disposal, enabling him to run a large private boarding school. He also had almost unrestricted administration of the lands, taking the whole rent; in 1794 the annual rent received was £41, which, after deducting the maintenance costs of the house, rates, and other overheads, gave him an income of £32 17s. 6d. This 'plum' among charity masterships was eagerly sought and not surrendered lightly. During the first 150 years of its history, St. Chloe's school had only four masters. The Revd. Richard Bond, nominated to the post by the school's founder Nathaniel Cambridge, was succeeded by his son the Revd. Nathaniel Bond, who died in 1758: both men also served the poorly-paid curacy of Rodborough parish but doubtless derived their main livelihood from the school. The younger Bond was followed by Joseph Hort, at whose death in 1813 the job was sought by a number of local schoolmasters, the successful candidate, Edward Wall, remaining master until his death in 1849. During his long tenure Joseph Hort, aided by his wife and one or two ushers, taught about 60 private boarders alongside his charity boys. In 1784 the private pupils each paid £12 a year for their board and tuition in reading, English, grammar, arithmetic, surveying, and accounting, and for an additional 2 guineas classics could be studied under a visiting clergyman.<sup>23</sup> Hort thus became a fairly prosperous man: in 1798 he was in a position to lend £200 on mortgage to a local millowner.<sup>24</sup>

Charity schoolmasters less enviably placed than Hort of St. Chloe often resorted to forms of employment outside teaching in order to supplement their incomes. For the humbler class of master there were various posts to be had under their local parish. Charles Kemp, the Rodborough master, became superintendent of the parish workhouse at a salary of 25 guineas in 1801 and parish clerk at a salary of c. £15 before 1817, which together with his master's salary of £22 from the educational charities gave him the reasonable annual income of c. £63.<sup>25</sup> One of Kemp's successors, John Stephens, also became clerk at Rodborough, but according to a minute of the parish vestry in 1829 he had resorted to 'very improper steps . . . to get himself appointed to this situation by false representations to the parishioners.'<sup>26</sup> In 1794 George Harmer, master of the Randwick charity school, became assistant overseer of the poor there at £8 a year. Apart from collecting the rates and keeping the books, it was a post that involved occasional absences when conveying paupers to their place of legal settlement, or making enquiries about parish

paupers who were living elsewhere; and in 1799 the Randwick vestry agreed to find a substitute teacher to mind the school when Harmer was away.<sup>27</sup> Only the most needy schoolmasters resorted to the more unattractive posts under the parish poor-law administration, but many masters doubled as parish clerk, a post that carried a measure of local prestige. At least two masters of the Stroud Red Boys took that office in their parish.<sup>28</sup>

Some schoolmasters had specialist professional skills with which to supplement their income or, as perhaps was more accurately the case, they were professional men who found it necessary to teach school as a sideline. John Merrett, who surveyed and mapped estates for landowners and kept a private school at Frampton on Severn and later at Gloucester, applied for the mastership of the Stroud Red Boys in 1776. He claimed that he was offered the post by the trustees and then withdrew his candidature when he failed to find a suitable house, presumably one where he could board private pupils.<sup>29</sup> John Elliot, master of the Stonehouse school until 1798, was another surveyor and mapmaker.<sup>30</sup> Accomplishments common to all schoolmasters could be used to earn money in clerking and accounting posts: the Stroud region's many small clothmaking firms and other related businesses probably offered much part-time employment of that kind, and Thomas Ward of Painswick was acting as clerk to a local turnpike trust in 1823.<sup>31</sup> Less obviously, Samuel Harmer, master of the Bisley Bluecoat School from c. 1778 until 1815, traded as a linendraper and haberdasher, giving up that business in 1788 to concentrate on building up his private boarding school.<sup>32</sup> Clergymen, often masters of endowed grammar schools where their classical education could be put to use, were rarely compelled to resort to posts in parish charity schools: no example has been found of a clergyman in such a post in the Stroud area after the time of the Bonds at St. Chloe, a school where classics were probably a usual part of the syllabus for the private if not the charity pupils. Many clergymen, however, kept schools in the area on a purely private basis, including the succession of men who taught at Painswick during the later 18th century.<sup>33</sup> In 1803 the Gloucestershire antiquary the Revd. Thomas Fosbrooke, then an indigent curate at Horsley, advertised for private pupils,<sup>34</sup> and others who took private pupils included the ministers serving the large Congregational chapel at Nailsworth.<sup>35</sup>

The average quality of parish charity schoolmasters of the late Georgian period was not high, nor was it expected that it would be. Schoolmastering was often regarded as an almost menial occupation, undertaken by those unfitted for more respectable employment. There were then, of course, few facilities for training teachers and no professional qualification. Most who became charity masters had first spent some years as usher (i.e. assistant teacher) in a school, having often themselves been educated as charity or private pupils in a school of similar character. It was the view of Sir Thomas Bernard that any boy leaving such a school with a proven aptitude for his letters and figures would be off to find work as a clerk or accountant, and that only those lacking in enterprise or ability would seek a teaching post.<sup>36</sup> When the post of master of the Bisley Bluecoat School fell vacant in 1815, a Mrs. Evans of Coleford wrote to the trustee Nathaniel Clifford on behalf of her husband who, she admitted, was so defeated by life that he lacked the confidence to make his own application. He had, she wrote<sup>37</sup>

been unsuccessful in every effort to acquire a reputable subsistence during a period of fifteen years adversity. Born and educated with the happiest prospects, by a series of unavoidable and accumulated troubles, notwithstanding every exertion on his part to extricate himself, my husband has been necessitated to teach school, the only resource for honest poverty that has not been brought up either to trade or labour.

If schoolmasters generally lacked a sense of vocation, they were for the most part competent for the very basic task required of them. The charitable foundations expected them only to

teach reading, writing, and mathematical skills at a level restricted by the short stay of the pupils in the school, usually about three years. Most masters provided the same basic syllabus for their private pupils. Extra subjects taken by the private pupils were often supplied by specialist teachers, such as the dancing master who advertised his services to schools in the region in 1764, and a Stroud man who taught French at a number of schools in 1808.<sup>38</sup> The only proof of ability that the school trustees usually required took the form of specimens of writing, and some kind of character reference was usually sought. Nathaniel Clifford, though (as will be seen later) regarded by the Bisley parishioners as too little connected with the Bluecoat School for his position as sole trustee, nevertheless insisted on written testimonials for the candidates who applied to him in 1815. One application, from an army veteran, was supported by the candidate's brother in a letter that suggests that information of an unfortunate kind had already come to Clifford's notice or would be difficult to conceal from him:<sup>39</sup>

It is proved by the last two years' experience that my brother can now settle to useful purposes – viz. one year's close service at Gloucester as clerk in the military establishment there, under Mr. Hall, and the last year in attending to a small school of his own at Stonehouse – and his conduct has been uniformly good for that time at least and indeed I believe it has been bad only formerly to himself and me. Though a sergeant [soldier *deleted*] 20 years, he was never addicted to drinking to excess.

Not surprisingly, that candidate did not get the job but ironically the man who was chosen by Clifford turned out to have a drink problem.

The large number of schools concentrated in the same area meant that the task of weeding out the blatantly unsuitable candidates was not an arduous one, even for the most lax of school trustees. Most applications were from masters or ushers of nearby schools seeking advancement or a change of prospects. References could in most cases be readily checked, and many applicants were no doubt already known to the trustees. A fairly small group of men seems at times to have circulated among the available posts. Daniel Witts, who was appointed master of the Minchinhampton Free School in 1763 had kept a private boarding school at Hyde in that parish;<sup>40</sup> John Hyde, a former charity master at Rodborough, became master of the Stroud Red Boys in 1776;<sup>41</sup> John King, charity master at Rodborough in 1788, had run a private school at Bowbridge, in Stroud;<sup>42</sup> Thomas Ward was an usher at St. Chloe before being appointed master of the Painswick Free School in 1806; and Edward Wall moved to St. Chloe from the Stroud Red Boys in 1813, when other applicants for St. Chloe included Ward and one of the then ushers.<sup>43</sup> At Randwick when George Harmer died in 1791 after teaching the charity school for 44 years, his successor was his son George, who had no doubt acted as his father's usher.<sup>44</sup>

It was unusual, therefore, for school trustees to find it necessary to appoint a master who was a stranger to the district or a man without teaching experience of any kind. A wool-loft man at a local cloth-mill applied for St. Chloe's School in 1813 and an employee at another mill applied for the Bisley Bluecoat School in 1815,<sup>45</sup> but neither was appointed. One man who seems to have been both an incomer to the district and a recruit from the ranks of humble tradesmen was Charles Kemp, master at Rodborough, for he was described as formerly a tinman (i.e. tinker) of London. No more detail of him is known, and he remained something of a man of mystery to his employers. When he died in 1817 the Rodborough churchwardens advertised in the Gloucester, London, and Liverpool newspapers for a relative to come and claim his belongings, but no response was forthcoming, and a Stroud shopkeeper who was owed money by Kemp undertook the administration of his estate.<sup>46</sup>

Although for many schoolmasters the occupation was one for which they had little ability or

enthusiasm, taken up only through pressure of circumstances, there was one man at least who had a particular aptitude for the task and apparently a genuine vocation, seeing that he continued to teach when he had the means to live in comfort and ease. In the 1760s the Red Boys charity school held at the market house in Stroud was taught by Samuel Purnell, who had considerable success in attracting private pupils. P.H. Fisher records that his pupils included the son of the lord of the manor of Stonehouse (the future Rear-Admiral Sir Alexander Ball, 1757–1809), junior members of the Kingscote family of Kingscote, and the sons of other local gentry, as well as sons of Stroud's leading tradesmen.<sup>47</sup> In 1767 Purnell, who by then styled himself 'gentleman', was in a position to buy for £2,600 an estate comprising a farmhouse, several cottages, and about 150 acres of land at Nupend, in Eastington. Presumably he had acquired by inheritance or otherwise some private means; if he was able to make the purchase with the profits from his private teaching he was indeed a very remarkable schoolmaster, not just an unusual one. It is surprising enough that for nine years after buying the estate he continued to teach the school at Stroud. Early in 1776 he took a large new house in the town for his boarders and advertised for an usher to assist him; but, conscious that his established reputation was the main asset of the enterprise, he informed potential customers that no part of the teaching would be left solely to the usher. Later the same year, however, he changed his plans and closed his Stroud school, resigned his charity post, and moved to Nupend. He hired a farm bailiff to manage the farm and opened a boarding school in the house, charging £14 a year for each pupil, more even than Hort of St. Chloe was asking a few years later. Purnell had evidently become a rather grand sort of master to be teaching a charity school, and his parting from the Red Boys School trustees was not on the best of terms: their advertisement for a replacement referred testily to his departure 'at short notice . . . to enjoy the fruits of his labours'.<sup>48</sup> Samuel Purnell died at Nupend in 1797, a prosperous man, having settled over £500 on each of two sons and arranging for the sale of the estate in order to raise £1,200 for his widow, and funds for other children.<sup>49</sup>

A master's success in building up a private school was often a commentary on the failure of the charity trustees. All too often in the 18th century, the active and energetic involvement of living parishioners that was needed to perpetuate the wishes of their dead predecessors was not forthcoming. The lax attitude of trustees enabled masters to devote the assets of the charities, and an unequal amount of time, to their paying pupils. The most glaring examples were provided by some of the ancient endowed schools of the larger towns in other areas. Samuel Rudder, the historian of Gloucestershire, writing *c.* 1780 lamented

the present declining state of free schools (especially of those in which the master is settled for life), the duties of which are too often remissly discharged, or totally neglected. Many masters, wishing to enjoy the salary without the trouble and confinement of a school . . . neglect or abuse [their] scholars, who, making no progress or conceiving a dislike for the master, are taken from school by their parents, and thus the wished for business is completed, and the office designedly and wickedly reduced to a sinecure.

At the grammar school of his own town of Cirencester, according to Rudder, the schoolmaster's discrimination in favour of his paying boarders had driven away most of the town boys meant to be educated on the foundation.<sup>50</sup> Gloucester's ancient Crypt grammar school was in a similar state in the early 19th century: all pretence of its being a charitable foundation had been abandoned, the master refusing to teach any boys on the foundation.<sup>51</sup>

The failures of the trustees of the charity schools of the Stroud area were generally less blatant. A small foundation in Leonard Stanley parish is the only school known to have lapsed,

and then it was only temporarily.<sup>52</sup> All other trusts continued to provide free education, but often in a manner that allowed the waste or misdirection of some of the funds and assets. At Bisley in 1797 it was found that an accumulation of funds of Ridler's educational charity had been allowed to languish in a bank for over 20 years, unapplied and producing only 3% annual interest rather than the 5% it might have earned if invested in stock.<sup>53</sup> The trustees of the Bisley Bluecoat School, founded in 1733, failed to perpetuate their body by drawing deeds of feoffment to new trustees. By the beginning of the 19th century administration of the trust had passed, as by hereditary right, to one man, Nathaniel Clifford (formerly Winchcombe), grandson of one of the four original trustees.<sup>54</sup> The trustees of the Painswick Free School – on the evidence of what passes for their minute book – took their responsibilities to involve no more than meeting when necessary to appoint a master or enfeoff new trustees, leaving the whole management of the school and the administration of the trust property to the master. They minuted no meetings at all between 1741 and 1798.<sup>55</sup> At Painswick, too, the use made of a gallery in the parish church assigned by the parishioners in 1726 to 'the use and benefit of the charity school' typified late-Georgian charity administration, which so often roughly observed the letter of a trust while losing sight of the spirit in which it had been established. In the early 19th century the master was allowed to use the gallery for his paying boarders, and to lease the seats left over to other parishioners.<sup>56</sup>

The Stroud region does provide at least one example of a school where the trustees remained true to their responsibilities. Samuel Rudder, who as shown above had such matters at heart, himself attested its quality in his county history. In the small parish of Randwick, mainly inhabited by poor weavers, he found a school that was 'well inspected and conducted, and is of great use in this poor place'.<sup>57</sup> The Randwick school was a cherished enterprise of the wealthier parishioners, and probably of many not so wealthy, endowed by a series of gifts over the years and receiving many small donations and subscriptions from those who wished to perpetuate the aims of their predecessors. Significantly, when the gravestone of the original founder Thomas Vobes (d. 1707) in Standish churchyard began to decay, the school trustees took the trouble to repair it.<sup>58</sup> The trustees were a large and active body, and here there was no shortage of people willing to be involved. When a new feoffment was made in 1801 no fewer than 28 trustees were named. In the 1770s the trustees held quarterly meetings to admit and discharge pupils, maintaining the numbers in the school at around 40. The conduct and attendance-record of pupils were carefully enquired into, and those found satisfactory presented with a bible on leaving, while others, because of poor attendance were discharged early. Part of the funds was used to provide books for the school and other books were donated by parishioners. The schoolmaster's income was a middling one – £36 in 1807, and since 1750 he had had free use of a dwelling house.<sup>59</sup> George Harmer, the long-serving master of the Randwick school, died a poor man in 1791, leaving legacies totalling £10 10s. to four close relatives and the remainder of his personal estate, valued at under £10, to George, his son and successor.<sup>60</sup> His poverty and the younger George's acceptance of the post of parish overseer suggests that neither man took any paying pupils, and it would be in keeping with what is known of the Randwick trustees if they should have determined to preserve their school as an unalloyed charity school.

With other charity schools efforts to rectify shortcomings, take a firmer grip on administration, and make more effective use of assets began at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. A growing national concern with educational matters had been evident for some time, and the new ideas and attitudes generated were abroad among those responsible for the schools of the Stroud region. The idea that education for the poor could be a potent means of improving society by reducing crime and poverty had acquired some of its impetus not far away: the Sunday School movement started at Gloucester by Robert Raikes and the Revd. Thomas Stock

in 1780, and cleverly promoted through Raikes's *Gloucester Journal* newspaper,<sup>61</sup> soon spread its message over the hills to the clothmaking country. The problems inherent in the existence of a large, poor, and landless industrial workforce in the region gave Raikes's didactic editorials a particular interest for the minor gentry, farmers, clothiers, and shopkeepers who filled the parish offices and carried most of the burden of the poor rates. Stroud, Minchinhampton, and Painswick were among the first places in Gloucestershire to start Sunday schools, all of them in 1784<sup>62</sup> when a severe depression in the cloth industry put hundreds out of work and concentrated the minds of the wealthier classes on the search for more permanent remedies than parish workhouses and voluntary relief funds.

Nationally, the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing and Comforts of the Poor, founded in 1796 to distribute information on a bewildering range of pet schemes for alleviating poverty, became increasingly interested in promoting day schools for the poor. The Society's leading activist Sir Thomas Bernard turned his attention to the old charity schools, urging a more effective use of their resources in aid of enlarged parish schools. His favoured methods of widening the scope of the instruction offered were those promoted from 1797 by the Anglican clergyman Andrew Bell. The main feature of the system of Bell and the similar (but non-sectarian) system of Joseph Lancaster, the use of partly-trained older children as 'monitors' to instruct the younger children under the schoolmaster's overall supervision, had the very practical advantage of enabling large numbers to be taught at very little cost, and the ideas of Bell and Lancaster for the improvement of teaching techniques and for frequent tests and examinations were also taken up by Bernard and his fellow reformers.<sup>63</sup> The new ideas began to make an impact on the charity schools of the Stroud area in about 1812. Those chiefly responsible were representatives of a new breed of Evangelical clergy then becoming influential in the Gloucester diocese and also a prominent Stroud Valley magistrate – in many ways the leader of local society – the indefatigable reformer Sir George Onesiphorus Paul.

Sir George Paul, the son of a successful Woodchester clothier, is chiefly remembered for his role on the county stage as a prison reformer; but he also found time to concern himself, often in minute detail, with the affairs and institutions of his own immediate area. His home, Hill House in Rodborough parish above the Woodchester valley, adjoined the St. Chloe estate and not surprisingly the charity school held there became one of the objects of his zeal for reform.<sup>64</sup> He became a trustee of the school, and by 1794 he was probably goading his fellow trustees into playing a more active role and exerting more control over the master, Joseph Hort. In that year the trustees 'recommended' that Hort reduce the number of his paying pupils, questioning whether the use of the house for 'a large private boarding school' was in conformity with the founder's intention. Paul himself took a lease of the trust land, and he no doubt kept a watchful eye on the school until Hort's death in 1813 gave him an opportunity for a determined effort at reform. The advertisement for a new master stipulated that the number of private boarders should be limited to 20, and that they should not be taught any subjects that were not also open to the charity boys. Paul also had ideas for the improvement of the curriculum by laying greater stress on practical mathematics, and he urged the adoption of Bell's system, about which he wrote for advice to two of its leading advocates, Sir Thomas Bernard and Shute Barrington, bishop of Durham, vice-president and president of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor. Paul, who was himself a subscriber to the S.B.C.P.,<sup>65</sup> was already well-acquainted with both men; the bishop had until recently been a fellow Gloucestershire landowner through his marriage into the Guise family of Elmore and Rendcomb.

Unfortunately, the new schoolmaster of St. Chloe, Edward Wall, once appointed, seemed determined to enjoy the same free hand as his predecessor, and made clear his resentment at Paul's attempts to maintain close supervision over the management of the trust estate. In his

efforts to discipline Wall and reform the school, Paul found some of his fellow trustees, particularly the local millowners William Halliday of Fromehall and Sir Samuel Wathen, less than co-operative. He complained bitterly of their attitude to his friend and chief ally on the board, Nathaniel Clifford:<sup>66</sup>

In this state of things, with Mr. Webb beyond call to attendance, yourself an invalid, Mr. Halliday avoiding all responsibility, Sir Samuel alarmed lest what he has done, or may do, should involve his purse, the school must be abandoned unless we call in the aid of a new trust.

Paul did eventually succeed in getting new trustees appointed; but it was not until the 1840s, long after his death, that the St. Chloe trustees achieved a degree of control and reform that would have satisfied him.

The educational charities of his own parish of Rodborough also came under Sir George Paul's scrutiny. In 1817, after the death of Charles Kemp, whom he described as 'the late inefficient master', he chaired a meeting of the parish vestry, called to discuss the appointment of a successor. Several applicants for the job were ruled out as insufficiently qualified and any future applicant was to be required to show that he

has been, in some sort, professionally educated in those acquirements of which he undertakes to be a teacher, and further that he has had such practice and experience in teaching as may be acquired by being usher or assistant in an established school

The minimum qualifications remained fairly basic, therefore, but the meeting also decided that preference would be given to candidates who had been trained in the Bell system or who would promise to attend a course of training at one of the schools run by the National Society, that is the Anglican society formed in 1811 to promote new schools on that system. Paul also addressed the possibility of rebuilding Rodborough's dilapidated school building, writing in exhaustive detail on the subject in April 1818 while on a visit to Bath.<sup>67</sup> He died in 1820, but Rodborough parish did succeed in reorganizing the school a few years later, when a new building was provided, with both a spacious classroom and living rooms for the master and his family.<sup>68</sup>

The first charity in the region actually to employ schoolmasters trained in the new system seems to have been the Stroud charity school society, which also erected one of the earliest purpose-built schoolrooms and, from 1818, published annual reports and accounts. The charity had probably always been fairly efficiently managed, seeing that it was one that relied on the subscriptions of the living rather than the endowments of the dead, and in the early years of the 19th century it benefited from the leadership of the assistant curate of Stroud parish, the popular and energetic Evangelical, John Williams. At an extensive reorganization in 1813, the society built a new school at Whiteshill, fitted up another building in Stroud town, and, having appointed new masters for the schools, sent them off to train at the National Society's schools at London and Bristol. It later reported difficulties in introducing a full monitorial system, as so many of the children were taken away at the early age of 7 years to help their parents in weaving or other branches of the cloth industry; but the Stroud and Whiteshill schools were each teaching over 70 children by 1816.<sup>69</sup> Most of the other old charity schools of the region, being Anglican by foundation, eventually adopted the National system; but the non-sectarian system of Joseph Lancaster was adopted for a new school that was started at Minchinhampton in 1816. It was founded and supported by the new squire of that parish, the political economist David Ricardo, and by 1818 it was teaching up to 250 children.<sup>70</sup>

Attempts to make better use of the resources of Bisley's Bluecoat School began about 1810 under the leadership of the vicar there, Edward Mansfield, evidently a man who shared the views and aspirations of John Williams of Stroud.<sup>71</sup> With other members of the parish vestry, Mansfield set in hand a general enquiry into the management of the charities of the parish. They were soon at odds with Nathaniel Clifford, the surviving trustee of the Bluecoat School, whom they wanted to replace with new trustees from among resident parishioners. It was paradoxical that Clifford should have found himself under attack as a representative of the old style of charity school management, for he actually had an honourable record in that field, and was sympathetic to the new ideas that were gaining ground. Clifford had inherited from an uncle a clothmaking business together with a good house at Bownhams, on Rodborough hill,<sup>72</sup> and he was a magistrate and leading figure in the local community by 1784 when, in succession to his friend and near neighbour Sir George Paul, he became chairman of the committee set up to coordinate poor-relief measures during the trade recession.<sup>73</sup> Besides his trusteeship of the Bluecoat School, he was a trustee of the Eastington charity school, a trustee and for many years treasurer of the Stroud Red Boys School, and a trustee of St. Chloe's School, where, as mentioned above, he supported Paul's attempts at reform. In 1788 he founded a Sunday school at Paganhill,<sup>74</sup> where he owned the Stratford estate. However, when he inherited the Frampton Court estate, at Frampton on Severn, in 1801, he left the immediate neighbourhood and, though he continued to take some pains with the running of the Bisley school, in his later years he managed to make only an annual visit to inspect it. The parish vestry's case for more local control of the charity was strengthened in 1815 when Clifford appointed George Osborne as schoolmaster. On the face of it, the appointment was a suitable one: Osborne came with good recommendations from Tewkesbury, where he had kept a school, and he was apparently trained in the new educational methods; but he turned out to be a drunkard, and the vestry accused him of other, unspecified, failings. In 1817 Mansfield and other parishioners began a suit in Chancery to secure the appointment of new trustees and, aided by the death of Clifford the same year, achieved their object in 1819.<sup>75</sup>

During the next few years the other educational charities of the region were similarly affected by the spirit of reform, and in 1826 any remaining irregularities or misapplication of funds were brought to light and remedies set in hand by the visit of the 'Brougham Commission' on charities. Most parishes were not content simply to reform the management of their charities, but also took steps to widen the scope of application. Purpose-built school premises were the most obvious manifestation of the new spirit: King's Stanley, in 1817,<sup>76</sup> was the first of the parishes of the area to take advantage of the building-grants available from the National Society in aid of new school buildings; and Eastington and Horsley followed in 1824. At Eastington the several small cottage-schools formerly supported by the charity were replaced by a new schoolroom with separate classrooms for boys and girls; and at Horsley the new schoolroom, also with separate classrooms, replaced an old, inconveniently-sited charity school building. Two years after its opening, the Horsley school was attended by 100 children, compared with the 25 who had been taught by the old school.<sup>77</sup> New sources of income were now being tapped in most parishes, including annual subscription from the wealthier parishioners and the collection of weekly pence from children whose parents could afford to pay. The parish clergyman, the leading mover in most of the new projects, often made up any shortfall of income from his own resources. By the middle of the 19th century almost all of the old charity schools had been absorbed in such enlarged and re-organized parish schools.

The schools were now better housed and more effectively funded, but an improvement in the status of the schoolmasters was slower in coming. Most of the charity trustees and other managers were unwilling to provide salaries that would attract more effective masters,

exclusively committed to their posts. A charity school in Gloucester called the Poor's School, when it was reorganized in 1813 under the direction of Robert Raikes's brother, the Revd. Richard, took the unusual step of paying its master a living salary of £63 so that he would not need to take private pupils.<sup>78</sup> It was an example that few other schools followed at that period. The Stroud charity society's reorganization in the same year extended only to paying their Stroud town master £30, and he was to be permitted to continue to take private pupils, though the trustees did reserve the right to limit the number.<sup>79</sup> It is not clear whether the masters of the new National schools of the 1820s were allowed, or expected, to take private pupils or have other jobs. The joint salaries paid to the married couples who were employed to teach the boys' and girls' classes at Eastington and Horsley, £50 and 50 guineas respectively without accommodation provided,<sup>80</sup> suggest that they may have continued to do so. At Rodborough, the advertisement for a master of the reorganized school in 1827 envisaged an income of *c.* £50 with free accommodation and also promised candidates the opportunity of a good income from private pupils; in 1830, however, the parish vestry recommended to the school trustees that the master should not be allowed to take private pupils.<sup>81</sup> At Bisley, the new Bluecoat trustees, who took over in 1819, had to apply most of the funds for several years afterwards to legal costs, and to rectifying lapses in property-management from the years when the Chancery suit was pending. In 1826 their master received only 12 guineas a year, and the trustees envisaged only doubling his income when their finances had recovered.<sup>82</sup> Thomas Ward at Painswick received £51 15s. a year after 1826, apparently then about the norm, though in his case £13 of the sum was paid as expenses to meet his cost in providing writing materials for the charity children. He was allowed to continue his private school, and – less usually for the period, presumably because of his proven character and ability – the trustees left him in control of the charity property. Ward was the last of the old-style charity schoolmasters of the Stroud region, finally retiring in 1853 when the Free School was united with the Painswick National School.<sup>83</sup>

Extension of the facilities for the professional training of schoolteachers also lagged behind the improvements in administration and buildings, becoming an established feature of education only in the mid 1840s with the opening of new training colleges and the introduction of the pupil teacher system. On the eve of those developments W.A. Miles, reporting on the Stroud valleys for the Commission on the Handloom Weavers in 1839, recorded that only a handful of local teachers had attended a training school. He also – somewhat gratuitously in the context of his brief – made a comment that echoed the words of Mrs. Evans of Coleford quoted above:<sup>84</sup>

When men, however ignorant, may have failed in any pursuit and calling, they adopt as a last resource the calling of a schoolmaster.

The image of the ill-qualified, impecunious, and reluctant Georgian pedagogue had become firmly established and proved difficult to erase.

### *Notes and References*

1. Avening, Bisley, Eastington, Horsley, Minchinhampton, Painswick, Pitchcombe, Randwick, Rodborough, King's Stanley, Leonard Stanley, Stonehouse, Stroud, Woodchester. The homogeneity of the group was recognized in 1832 when those parishes, except for Eastington, which had originally been recommended for inclusion, were formed into the new parliamentary borough of Stroud: *Parliamentary Representation: Boundary Report*, H.C. 141, pp. 195–8 (1831–2), xxxviii; *Parl. Boundaries Act*, 2 & 3 Wm. IV, c. 64, schedule (O).

2. For the general history of the educational endowments and schools of the area, see *Victoria History of the Counties of England: Gloucestershire*, **10** (1972) and **11** (1976), 'Education' sections; *14th Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire Concerning Charities*, H.C. 382 (1826), xii; *16th Report . . .*, H.C. 62 (1828), xx (1).
3. *V.C.H. Glos.* **8** (1968), 110–290, 'Schools' sections.
4. *Ibid.* **7** (1981), 5–136, 'Education' sections.
5. *A Chapter in English Church History: minutes of the S.P.C.K. for 1698–1704*, ed. E. McClure (1888), 2, 11, 27–8, 162; *V.C.H. Glos.* **10**, 87, 101.
6. P.H. Fisher, *Notes and Recollections of Stroud, Glos.* (2nd edn., 1891), 291.
7. A.E. Keys, *A History of Eastington* (2nd edn., 1964), 114.
8. *V.C.H. Glos.* **11**, 38, 142.
9. Glos. Record Office, D 1379 (records of Painswick Free school, including minute book, account books, and trust deeds).
10. *V.C.H. Glos.* **10**, 138, 288.
11. Glos. R.O., D 149/R 64.
12. *V.C.H. Glos.* **11**, 38, 142.
13. Glos. R.O., P 272A/VE 2/2, min. 15 Nov. 1813, and letter from Sir G.O. Paul, 23 Apr. 1818.
14. *Ibid.* min. 4 June 1817.
15. *V.C.H. Glos.* **11**, 59.
16. *Gloucester Journal*, 14 Jan. 1793; 25 June 1798; 6 Oct. 1806; Glos. R.O., D 1379; *14th Rep. Com. Char.* 65.
17. *Glouc. Jnl.* 26 Nov. 1781; 27 June 1785; 17 Oct. 1791; 30 Dec. 1793.
18. *Ibid.* 1 Apr. 1765.
19. *Ibid.* 14 Jan. 1822; *18th Rep. Com. Char.* 341; Glos. R.O., G.D.R. wills 13 Dec. 1826.
20. *Glouc. Jnl.* 28 Dec. 1789.
21. Fisher, *Stroud*, 66–7.
22. *14th Rep. Com. Char.* 65; Glos. R.O., D 2219/5/2, min. 7 July 1815.
23. Glos. R.O., D 2219/5/2 (minute book of St. Chloe school trustees 1794–1849); *V.C.H. Glos.* **11**, 191, 205, 232; *Glouc. Jnl.* 12 July 1784.
24. Glos. R.O., D 3076/1.
25. *Ibid.* P 272A/VE 2/2, mins. 29 June 1801, 15 Nov. 1813; letter from Sir G.O. Paul 23 Apr. 1818. Kemp's combined income was roughly that regarded by a Gloucester charity as a living wage for its master in 1813: see above, p. 186.
26. Glos. R.O., P 272A/VE 2/3, mins. 27 Oct. 1829, 5 Oct. 1831.
27. *Ibid.* P 263/VE 2/1.
28. Fisher, *Stroud*, 57, 66.
29. *Glouc. Jnl.* 28 Aug. 1769; 11 Nov. 1776; 6 Apr. 1778.
30. *Ibid.* 8 Jan. 1798.
31. *Ibid.* 24 Mar. 1823.
32. *Ibid.* 25 May 1778; 22 Dec. 1788; Glos. R.O., D 149/R 38, R 40.
33. See above.
34. *Glouc. Jnl.* 26 Dec. 1803; cf. P. Ripley, Introduction to T.D. Fosbrooke, *An Original History of the City of Gloucester* (new edn. 1976).
35. *V.C.H. Glos.* **11**, 216.
36. T. Bernard, *Of the Education of the Poor* (1809), 27.
37. Glos. R.O., D 149/R 38.
38. *Glouc. Jnl.* 20 Feb. 1764; 11 Jan. 1808.
39. Glos. R.O., D 149/R 38.
40. *Glouc. Jnl.* 12 July 1757; 20 Oct. 1764.
41. *Ibid.* 1 Jan., 28 Oct. 1776. P.H. Fisher gives a short character sketch of Hyde (*Stroud*, 68): 'a thin, spare man, of pompous speech, manner, and mode of walking; which was said, of old, to be after the true pedagogic fashion, whether natural or acquired. He was sometimes so violent in reproving and

chastising his pupils, as to provoke their resistance and open rebellion; but at other times he exhibited feelings of great tenderness; and it is only just toward a good man, to suppose that his harshness to his scholars, as well as to others, might have been partly owing to the constant irritation of a wounded spirit, – labouring under the straightened circumstances of an unavailingly laborious life.’

42. *Glos. R.O.*, P 272A/VE 2/2; *Glouc. Jnl.* 16 June 1777.
43. *Glos. R.O.*, D 2219/5/2.
44. *Ibid.* P 263/SC 1.
45. *Ibid.* D 2219/5/2; D 149/R 38, letter from John Perrin 18 July 1815.
46. *Ibid.* P 272A/VE 2/3, mins. 4 Mar. 1817, 12 Feb. 1818; *ibid.* G.D.R. wills 2 Apr. 1818; *Glouc. Jnl.* 9 June 1817.
47. Fisher, *Stroud*, 67.
48. *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 130; *Glos. R.O.*, D 2957/118.22; *Glouc. Jnl.* 19 Feb., 14, 21, 28 Oct. 1776; title deeds at Nupend House, Eastington. I am indebted to the present owner of the house, Dr. R.R. Wethered, for allowing me to check some details in the deeds.
49. *Glos. R.O.*, G.D.R. wills 1797/16.
50. S. Rudder, *A New History of Glos.* (1779): proof copy in Gloucester Divisional Library, *Glos. Colln.* 35243, MS. notes at Preface (p. vii) and p. 366. – See further, below p. 192 [ed.]
51. R. Austin, *The Crypt School, Gloucester* (1939), 71–3; *V.C.H. Glos.* 2 (1907), 349–50.
52. *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 267; *16th Rep. Com. Char.* 74.
53. *Glos. R.O.*, P 47/VE 2/2.
54. *Ibid.* D 149/R 44.
55. *Ibid.* D 1379.
56. *Ibid.* G.D.R., vol. 279A, ff. 77–8; *14th Rep. Com. Char.* 65.
57. Rudder, *Glos.* 619.
58. *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 229–30; R. Bigland, *Historical, Monumental, and Genealogical Collections Relative to the County of Gloucester*, 3, no. 247.
59. *Glos. R.O.*, P 263/SC 1; *16th Rep. Com. Char.* 76–9.
60. *Glos. R.O.*, G.D.R. wills 1791/45.
61. For Raikes and his schools, see F. Booth, *Robert Raikes of Gloucester* (1980).
62. J. Williams, *An Account of the Sunday and Weekly Charity Schools in Stroud* (Stroud, 1815), 18–19 (copy in *Glos. Colln.* 31749); *Glouc. Jnl.* 8 Nov. 1784; *Glos. Colln.* RF 229.21.
63. For the Society and its ideas, see J.R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief 1795–1834* (1969), 91–8, 195–6; Bernard, *Of the Education of the Poor*; and the Society’s published *Reports* (5 vols. 1798–1808).
64. For what follows on Paul and St. Chloe’s school, see *Glos. R.O.*, D 2219/5/2; D 149/E 90, E 92.
65. *Reports of the S.B.C.P.* 1 (1798), 424; 4 (1805), 185.
66. *Glos. R.O.*, D 149/E 92, undated letter.
67. *Ibid.* P 272A/VE 2/2.
68. *18th Rep. Com. Char.* 347–8.
69. Williams, *Charity Schools in Stroud*, 10–16; *Report of the Charity Schools at Stroud, 1815–1818* (copy in *Glos. Colln.* 31749); Fisher, *Stroud*, 281–3.
70. *V.C.H. Glos.* 11, 206.
71. Cf. Fisher, *Stroud*, 282.
72. For Clifford (who until 1801 was surnamed Winchcombe), see *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 145; 11, 118, 219; Public Record Office, PROB 11/1074 (P.C.C. Webster 53).
73. *Glouc. Jnl.* 26 Jan., 2 Feb. 1784.
74. *Glos. R.O.*, D 1376/1; D 149/E 90, R 64; Williams, *Charity Schools in Stroud*, 19, 23.
75. *Glos. R.O.*, P 47/VE 2/3, mins. 23 Apr. 1810, 6, 27 Mar. 1817, 22 Apr. 1819; D 149/R 38, R 44; *Glouc. Jnl.* 1 July 1816.
76. *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 256; *Glouc. Jnl.* 18 May 1818.
77. *V.C.H. Glos.* 10, 138; 11, 183; *16th Rep. Com. Char.* 66; *18th Rep. Com. Char.* 337.
78. *V.C.H. Glos.* 4 (1988), 341.

79. Williams, *Charity Schools in Stroud*, 10.
80. Glos. R.O., D 1376/4; *18th Rep. Com. Char.* 337.
81. *Glouc. Jnl.* 14 July 1827; Glos.R.O., P 272A/VE 2/3.
82. *14th Rep. Com. Char.* 56.
83. *Ibid.* 65-6; Glos. R.O., D 1379.
84. *Reports from Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers' Commissioners, Part V*, H.C. (1840), xxiv, pp. 487, 489, 495.

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