

# *Chesterfield & District Local History Society*

## HISTORY PAPER NO. 4

### THE BRITISH SCHOOL, HOLLIS LANE, CHESTERFIELD

#### L. GARLIC

The history and information on early schools is rather scanty but some time ago I came into the possession of a report of the British School in Hollis Lane, Chesterfield, for the year 1860-1. The school was built in 1843 and modernised in 1850. It consisted of two large classrooms and the usual amenities. It provided education for about 200 boys.

Until the Education Act of 1870, the school was under the direction of a Committee whose names are listed in the Report. In 1871 the first School Board in Chesterfield took over the school at a rent of £25 per annum. In 1873 the school was closed and the scholars transferred to a new school in Hipper Street. The old school was condemned as being unfit but part of it was again used as a temporary school from 1894-1901. The officers and committee members listed in the report have a strong religious flavour. They were supported by tradesmen from the town and nearby. The founder of the school was William Bingham, a Quaker and tallow chandler, who lived in St. Mary's Gate. At this time he acted as Treasurer. The Secretary was Michael Connal, a brewery manager and Congregationalist. Heading the Committee were four men of the Church, The Rev. R. W. Selbie, B.A., of the Independent Church residing in Queen Street, The Rev. Francis Bishop, a Unitarian who lived in Abercrombie Street, The Rev. John Hanson, the Minister of the United Methodist Free Church living in West Pool Place and the Wesleyan Minister the Rev. James Fairbourn who lived in Saltergate. The following gentlemen and tradesmen were also members of the Committee;

Mr. Clay Hill – Newbold Road  
Mr. John Silcock – Spar Lane  
Mr. J. Furness  
Mr. R.W. Henderson  
Mr. R. Ward  
Mr. John Harrison – Chemist – Low Pavement  
Mr. John Kent of Hackett and Kent, Needle Manufacturers of Brampton, living in Queen Street  
Mr. Robert Parker – Draper – Low Pavement  
Mr. John Lambert – Coal Merchant – St. Mary's Gate  
Mr. James Pearson – Pottery Manufacturer and Unitarian – Lordsmill Street  
Mr. Thomas Mason – Tobacco Manufacturer – Low Pavement  
Mr. Charles Tucker – Silk Thrower – South Street

The following tradesmen received the various sums of money for services rendered or materials supplied

	£	s.	d.
Robert Bradley – Plasterer of Stockinger's Alley	1	7	0
Henry Hall – Joiner of Lordsmill Street	1	3	½
Dudley and Son – Ironmonger of Vicar Lane		9	

John Walton – Stationer of Low Pavement	18	2
William Britt Ironmonger of South Street	12	8
John Hovland Gas Fitter of Knifsmith Gate	6	6
Thomas Greenwell	2	2 3

The Headmaster of the school was Mr. George Arthur Early who resided in West Bars and received £100 per annum. The Junior Master was Mr. H. Johnson who was paid only £32 10s. per annum. Ann Greenwood received £1 19s half yearly but her duties are not stated.

The Secretary's report stated that *'the income of the school daring 1859-60 equalled its expenditure and warned that the subscription list was continually suffering by the inroads of death and removals from the town and that constant effort was required to enlist new subscribers so that funds may be kept up to maintain the school at a high standard.'*

The funds for maintaining the school were derived from the fees received from the scholars and by subscriptions received from the sponsors not named in the report. These accounted to £105 3s. 10d. and £54 0s. .6d. respectively. The accounts for the school also included £6 11s. 1d. spent on school materials, 16s. 4½d. for the monitors' tea, a loss of 13s. 9d. at the annual tea and 10s. 6d. for two tons of coal.

In conclusion the Committee desired to thankfully acknowledge the support so kindly given to the Institute. The Committee were also able to say that the school certainly had never been more fully attended and they believed it had never been more efficiently conducted. The Visitors' Book shows that members of the Committee visited the school from time to time. They reported most favourably as to the discipline and good order of the scholars, of the efficiency of the teaching and of the high standard in the subjects of instruction. The Institute would endeavour to influence the character and conduct of the pupils by the lessons given to them daily from the Scriptures. Since its establishment in 1843 there had been entered on its Roll 2779 names. A small portion of this number comprised scholars who left the school for a time and then returned but undoubtedly at least 2,500 boys had been taught-in this school since it first opened. During 1860 there were 200 names enrolled on the register with 172 names cancelled and 172 new names entered so that the number remained the same as the previous year. The weekly attendance averaged 170.

The boys were grouped into three sections. The highest numbered 50, of which 30 paid 6d. per week and 20 were free scholars. The second class contained 80 boys who paid 4d. per week. 70 were in the lowest section paying 2d. per week. The highest group were engaged weekly in the composition of letters, calculations (mentally and on the slate) relating to the value of commerce and the work done by artificers, the practice of drawing from objects, the study of geography, the history of England and her colonies and the study of the Scriptures.

At the Annual Tea Meeting essays on various subjects composed and written by the most advanced pupils were examined and read. The authors of the best efforts were rewarded with prizes of books, kindly donated by Mr. William Bingham, the founder of the school.

The school had a well stocked library for the use of the scholars and the senior boys built up a small museum in a corner of the classroom.

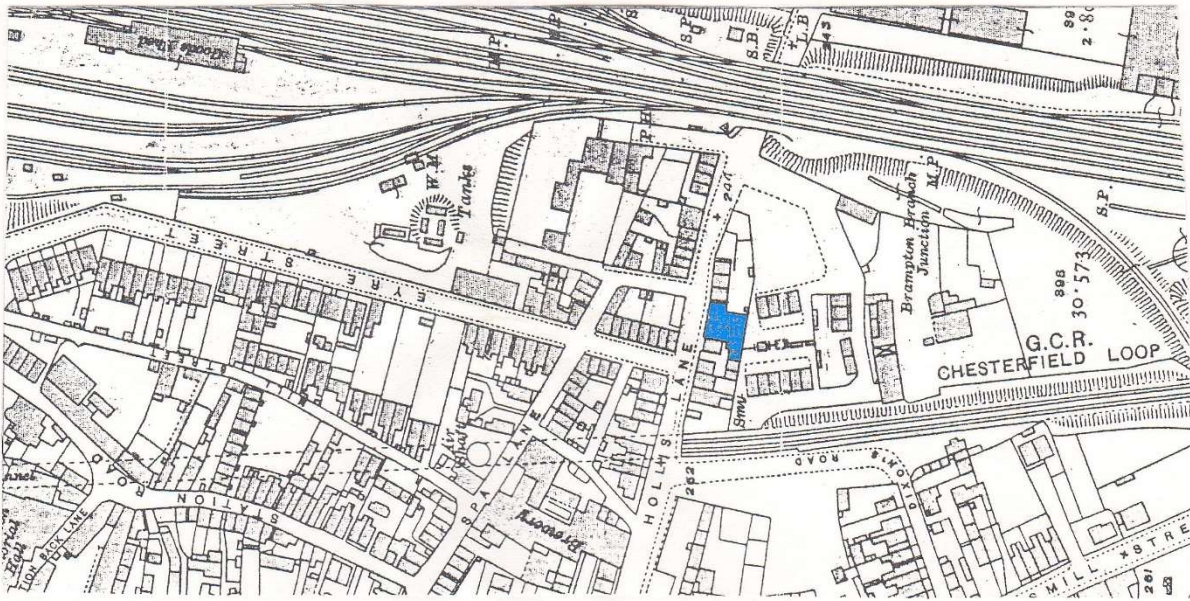
At the time of its foundation the area around the school was very different from today. The North Midland Railway had only been opened to the public for two years. Very little industry then operated in the valley and the town had not expanded towards the east. Before the coming of the railway most of the land east of the town was fertile meadow stretching from the junction of Rivers Rother and Hipper, and the Spital Brook to Bishop's Mill near Crow Lane and further down the River Rother. These meadows were known at that time as St. Mary's Meadows and were liable to flood. St. Mary's Bridge was destroyed by the floods and in 1832 the present Spital Bridge was built to replace it. The site of the school was almost opposite the Bridge Inn and in the meadows on a part known as Oxcroft (opposite Markham's Offices) the boys had their playing fields. They competed against the boys of the Victoria School in Vicar Lane (the Blue Coat School). From the fields and along a pleasant footpath along the east side of the River Rother they could eye with favour the pupils from the Misses Mugliston's Private School for Young Ladies, which was situated in Spa Lane. Across from the school, in Hollis Lane, was Mrs. Taylor's Tuck Shop from which the boys obtained sweetmeats on 'tick'. At the top of Hollis Lane on the site of the Old Ship Inn, the boys were oft to challenge and to be challenged by the boys of the rival school. One unfortunate scholar from the Blue Coat School challenged Mr. Early's son to a fight in which the young Early was rather beaten up. This so roused 'Daddy' Early's wrath that certain proceedings were threatened. It was later reported that the other boy and his parents had left the district.

With the closure of the British School in 1873, Mr. Early was transferred and became the Headmaster of the Boys' Department at the new school in Hipper Street. He retired in 1887 having served as a headmaster for 42 years, 28 in the Hollis Lane School and 14 years at Hipper Street. Mrs. Early served as Matron at the Hipper Street School.

The building which started life as the British school had a chequered history after 1873. It was for a time a private school of which Miss C.J. Ball was the mistress. In 1881 it was the Gospel Army Mission Room and as mentioned earlier it was used as a Board School from 1894-1901. Later it was a Spiritualist Meeting House, a dance hall, and, during the last war, a warehouse for food. Finally it was a car repair depot before being demolished for the building of the by-pass road in the 1970s.



The British School building just before demolition in the 1970s



School building shown in blue

#### A PUPIL'S NOTEBOOK

I have also been able to see an exercise book dated 1858 used by a pupil of the school, one Luke Slack. The book is well-bound and backed with hard covers. The fly-leaf bears a printed design with a space for the owner's name and other particulars which are entered in a copperplate hand;

Luke Slack,  
British School,  
Hollis Lane,  
Chesterfield.  
Derbyshire.

The subjects taught appear all to be in the one book and in the following order;

Geometry, Arithmetic, Art and Science, History, Spanish Dominions, Mexico or New Spain, Religion and Translation from the Scriptures.

One exercise in Arithmetic is as follows;

100 birds cost 100 pence.  
Sparrows cost  $\frac{1}{4}$  pence each,  
Larks  $\frac{1}{2}$  pence each  
Pigeons 4 pence each  
How many sparrows, larks and pigeons were bought?

Sparrows 10 @ $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	= $2\frac{1}{2}$ d
Larks 75 @ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	= $37\frac{1}{2}$ d
Pigeons 15 @ 4d	= <u>60</u>
	100

The slate was used to work out the arithmetic questions and the answers copied into the book. The present owner of the notebook is Mr. Donald Slack, a descendant of Luke. Luke was born in 1846 so would have been 12 years old at the time he was using the notebook. He lived with his parents in Bank Street, Brampton. His father was also called Luke and was working as a bricklayer in the Clay Cross Tunnel when he was killed in 1860. He was buried in Trinity Church Yard on March 12th 1860. That same year young Luke left the British School.

N. B. The British Schools were those schools supported by the British and Foreign Society. They provided education for poorer children in the nineteenth century and were non-denominational but with religious ideals. The other organisation at the time providing schools was the National Society whose pupils were from families of the Church of England attendees.

We would like to thank Mr. Donald Slack for permission to quote from the notebook of Luke Slack.

Published by Chesterfield and District local History Society March 1994