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OLD NATIONAL SCHOOL

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Early Schools in Backwell

by Norma Knight

The earliest surviving reference to a school in Backwell occurs in 1744 when a schoolroom was being hired in Farleigh for 6d a week. Payments at that rate were made by the Overseer for the Poor at irregular intervals throughout the 18th century. At first the schoolroom may have been at Farleigh Inn (later The George) as the earlier payments were made to John Woodall who was landlord of the inn. Mary Butcher and Mr Barnes were also listed as receiving money "for the schoolroom", although it is possible that they were teachers working in their own cottages. Certainly by 1787 the school was being held in property owned by Sir Charles Kemys Tynte. As well as the school house there was an orchard and a house lying south of the Turnpike Road (now A370) at Farleigh. The cottage survives, lying next to the path leading from the main road to Uncombe Close.

The first teacher about whom anything is known in detail was Thomas Butt. He arrived in Backwell about 1766 from Bisley, Gloucestershire, where he said he had lived for about 20 years and where he possessed two houses and an acre of ground. He had a wife, Ann, and a son, Thomas, baptized in Backwell on 13 October 1769. However, when baby Thomas was six months old his father applied for assistance to the Overseer. He was already teaching but apparently not paid sufficiently well to support himself and his family. In 1769 he had fallen behind in his payment of the highway rate but eventually made it up. The Overseer received his application with sympathy and it was agreed that he should have 2 guineas a year. The Butt family remained in the parish for a further 20 years. In March 1790 the Overseer allowed Thomas Butt a garment, and although it is not clear whether this was for the father or son, the family were obviously not entirely self-supporting. Thomas Butt senior had

died by July 1791 when his widow received one guinea from a legacy of £5-10-6d left to her by a benefactor. Following Thomas Butt, the Overseer's accounts record payments in 1794 and 1796 to George Burnett of "18s for schooling".

These early references to a school indicate that it was a small establishment typical of parish schools of that period, funded out of the rates and by charitable bequests. Education was of the most basic kind, as is made clear by the will of Charles Wilcox of West Town. In 1783 he left 50 in trust. Half the interest was to provide bread for the poor of West Town to be distributed twice yearly in February and December, but the other half was for "the education the English language" of poor children of West Town. In 1809 the capital sum was used to buy a piece of land on Backwell Common which was then let at 50s a year, but again half of that income was put towards the cost of educating the poor children from West Town. In 1815 Hannah Merrick received £1-5-0 for "1 year's schooling for 3 children", and a similar amount went to Ann Moore in 1816, "left by the late Mr Wilcox of West Town". Those children attended the school at Farleigh. Two years later, in a report to The Select Committee on the Education of the Poor, the Curate stated that in Backwell, with a population of 593, there was one small school taught by one woman, containing 7 or 8 children. He added that "the poor have not sufficient means of educating their children and would be glad to obtain them".

The growing national interest in education had led to the establishment of two rival religious societies for promoting the education of the poor. The National Society, founded in 1811, advocated education in the principles of the established church, while The British and Foreign School Society (1814) promoted bible reading but undenominational teaching. Both Societies used the monitorial system of teaching, developed by Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster, whereby the older pupils taught the

younger. In Backwell the church took the lead in founding a new school and it was to be based firmly on the National Society system.

On 16 June 1821 the lord of the manor, the Marquess of Bath, granted the lease of a house at Farleigh, comprising two tenements with gardens and an adjoining building, which had been in use as a Methodist meeting or Chapel, to the Rector, Vicar, and Churchwarden in trust. Part of the property was to be converted immediately "into a school for the teaching and instruction of the children of the parish in reading and writing agreeable to the system in use called Bell's or the National system". The school was maintained by voluntary contributions, weekly payments of 1d. and the income from the Wilcox charity. Any surplus funds were to be used for the benefit of the school.

By 1833 the school was well established. An enquiry in that year, published in 1835, reported that there were 62 boys and 38 girls. The schoolmaster and mistress (usually husband and wife) had a joint salary of 40 a year with a house and garden. It was the largest but not the only school in the parish.

Elsewhere there was an infants' school with 9 boys and 11 girls, paid for by their parents, and 3 other schools with about 15 boys and 15 girls, also educated at their parents' expense. In addition there were three Sunday schools in 2 of which there were 63 boys and 51 girls who attended the parish church. The other Sunday school, started in 1831, was run by the Wesleyan Methodists and had 37 boys and 29 girls. All the Sunday schools were free. It would seem that by the mid 1830s the demand for elementary education was being met, although it is impossible to say how adequately.

The National school at Farleigh continued to provide instruction for the majority of the children. Among the staff were Thomas

Holbrook, master in 1843, and Mrs Cole, who was the last to teach in that schoolroom. The building which survives as a house, was near the green, south of the main road. Accounts of repairs are recorded from time to time. In 1843 the gate was given a new rail and bars, a latch and posts; a new window frame was inserted and the kitchen ceiling (probably in the master's house) was refurbished. Other equipment provided included a picture frame and flags. These, together with paint, timber, nails and labour, cost £2-8-7d. In 1857 the thatch needed attention. By the late 1850s the premises were becoming too small and were unfit for use. The lease on the Farleigh building was finally surrendered on 2 December 1861 and the Marquess of Bath contributed £140 towards the erection of a new school in Church Town which opened the following year.

Sources

Backwell Parish Records (mainly in the Somerset Record Office) S.R.O., D/D/Rt 395. Tithe Award 1843

Surveys of the manor of Backwell, 1787, 1812, 1837. Longleat W.M.R. Quoted by permission of the Marquess of Bath.

Charity Commissioners' Reports. Somerset 1820-1837

Digest of Returns to Select Committee on Education of the Poor, H.C.224(1819)ix(2) p.772.

Education Enquiry Abstract, H.C.62(1835)xlii p.791.

Nailsea Tannery

by Trevor Bowen

Part 2. Excavation and Provisional Reconstruction.

Looking at the process for converting skins into leather (Part 1) it is obvious that large quantities of clean, preferably running water were needed for the cleaning of the skins and mixing of the tannin liquor.

Could the need for this plentiful supply of water have determined the location of the tannery at Kingshill?

For much of the year there was no shortage of water in any low lying area of the village, so surely the name "Watery Lane" indicates an additional source. Even today the stream which some say originates near Nailsea School still runs beneath the road, and glimpses of it can sometimes be seen between the pavement slabs.

When houses were built on the site in 1985, the Nailsea and District Local History Society retrieved the remains of a hand pump from the roadside, and there were two lengths of cast pipe similar to those used for pumping water from coal mines. We have no date for the bridging over of the stream and surfacing of Watery Lane as we know it. For the record when South West Gas dug a trench in May 1992, David Chappell took photographs of a section outside No 2 Watery Lane and measurements indicated that the underside of the pennant slabs used to bridge the culvert were some 21 inches below the surface.

Oak bark needed for the making of the tannin liquor was most likely brought from the Wyese forests via Chepstow* since by 1799 over 9000 tons annually were being shipped from that port. (* see "*Leather and Oak Bark at Chepstow*" *Chepstow Society 1980*)

In 1985 when Society Members kept a watching brief on the site, ten of the process pits were broken into on the line of the house foundations (Fig.1) Generally these measured 8x5x5 feet deep, approximating to those of the Rheadr Tannery re-erected at the St. Fagans Welsh Folk Museum. Most were lined in brick or coursed pennant stone; one was rendered over stone and still retained water; one was partly timber lined. Further masonry was encountered in the fifty foot interval between the groups of pits but this area was not excavated by the builders.

During site levelling, three mill stones were uncovered, two of which (Fig.2) were removed by the Society and now stand beside the drive to Nailsea House. They comprise a pair of stones, ie bedstone (lower) and runner (upper), which may have been used to grind bark using horse power.

Based on speculation by the present owners of the two remaining oak bark tanneries at Colyton and Grampound, an annual usage of about 6 tons of bark has been arrived at for a tannery employing a maximum of twelve men (1851) and having possibly 25-30 pits. Nor is the output of leather easily estimated, for although the process of bark tanning remains basically unchanged, mechanisation has greatly increased productivity and skins are now bought in already de-haired and fleshed. However the owners surmise that a weekly output of some 20/25 hides would be a reasonable assumption.

From the evidence available, a provisional reconstruction of the tannery can be attempted.

A small oak bark tannery of some 25 pits operated from the late 17th century or earlier until the 1880s. Skins of cattle and horses were brought from the surrounding area, and after a process of tanning lasting up to 18 months or even more, the resulting heavy leather was sold locally for the making of boot soles and uppers, harness, colliery buckets, engine drive and transfer belts and other industrial, agricultural and domestic uses requiring strong and durable heavy leather. About 25 hides per week was the likely output. The tannery and village supported a significant boot, shoe and clog industry of some 11- 33 persons over the 1841 - 1881 census period, although these were likely to have been outworkers not centred upon a workshop.

A visitor would be aware of a stillness that was tranquil if not oppressive. Men would work in pairs drawing hides from one pit, loading them onto a hand trolley and depositing them into another. When a pit was topped up with stronger liquor, the brown liquid ran along an inclined wooden trough which could be moved about as required. Water for the initial and final washing of the hides, and for the mixing of the tannin liquor and slaked lime, was pumped from a stream which flowed alongside. The silence would occasionally be broken by the barking of a dog or the scratching of a rat. Infrequently the mill was started up and the plates of bark fed into the revolving cutters. Fine dust would fly everywhere. Some newly delivered skins could be seen pegged to the ground for the mastiff dogs to bite off the fats.

Even more noticeable than the silence was the smell which could not easily be described; not of leather but of bark and tannin. It permeated the clothing and would linger with the visitor until he reached home and bathed his body and discarded his clothes.

Mr Ivor Grimsted of Whitchurch (Bristol) has made a study of the Bedminster tan yards and I am grateful to him for the following

information on the Cox family and its involvement with the Nailsea yard:-

James Fitchew Cox was born in 1807, the second son of Stephen and Martha Cox of Court de Wyck, Claverham. In 1833 he married Ann White, both of them by then residents of Nailsea, and by 1836 James was referred to as "tanner of Long Ashton". A year later he took out a patent with a William Harepath for "a roller and belt process".

By 1839 he was living at Nailsea House - previously occupied by John Tanner, leather merchant and tanner of Bristol. James entered into partnership with his brother Stephen and by 1842 the business was registered as J & S COX (Patent Roller and Belt Process). In the same year Stephen built a tannery at Court de Wyck. James died in 1852 aged 45, but his brother who lived in Goss Lane Cottage (Nailsea) continued the family business. It is likely that he moved into Nailsea House following James' death, he was certainly living there from 1857 onwards.

The business was styled COX BROS with the main yard at Bedminster and smaller concerns at Ashton, Yatton and Nailsea. Stephen retired in 1877. In 1878 the Bedminster yard was taken over by Thomas Ware who today trades as Thomas Ware and Sons, Clift House Tannery, the only survivor of the eight tanneries in the Bedminster area of Bristol.

With only two workers recorded in the 1881 census, we can assume that the Nailsea yard was all but closed.

Henry Burgum of Bristol and Tickenham

by David Chappell

Part 1 finished by referring to Henry Burgum's country "place" now again called Tickenham House*

Part 2. The House

When Tickenham House was sold in 1982 as part of Hale's Farm, it was described by the agents as late 18th century, built by Burgum, and a listed building. Whether Burgum built it from scratch is not clear; it could have been a development of an earlier farmhouse. More recently the parapet clearly shown in the 1982 brochure has been removed.

By 1806 it was in the Gordon family ownership, with John Alvis the tenant, the first of many Alvis's to live in Tickenham. In the 1840s Dr Davis lived there, and a small building in front of the house described in 1982 as a "slated summer-house", was his surgery. In 1883, another John Alvis, and a tenant died; his gravestone is clearly readable from about half way along the path in Tickenham churchyard. But by now the farm and houses were part of Smyth's Ashton Court estate, and the new tenant was Henry Marsh.

In 1910, Hale's Farm was taken over by Mr Thompson, the manager of the Estate, for a few years until 1918 when William McEwen-Smith came over from Aust. He took up the tenancy as he thought, only to be told two years later by Napier, the agent, that it was to be sold, and, if he wanted to stay, he would have to buy. This was but another of the sales by the Ashton Court Estate at that period.

William McEwen-Smith's son Eric was born in the house, and still lives in Tickenham. As a youth he can remember his father triumphantly coming home one day to say that he had made the final payment, and the place was his.

Eric can also remember seeing dates of around 1760 cut into the lead on the roof; so that could suggest that the house had been built by then. In one part of the cellars, there is a glazed window in what was the outer wall, but then had a wall against it which was part of a catchment tank for rainwater from the roof. This served the household for some time, as mains water did not reach the village until 1921, though some Estate houses were served some thirty years earlier.

Water is of course a most important factor in the running of a farm carrying livestock, and a policeman of before the first world war called Duck was a proficient water diviner. He thought that wells at Hale's Farm, Wellhouse Farm, Batch Farm and Luggards Cross Farm were all fed by an underground stream starting from a spring on the ridge to the north. One of the Hale's Farm wells was over 100 feet (30 metres) deep and cut into sheer rock after the first few feet.

Not long after the second world war, the local historian Gray Usher ("Moorman" of the Mercury) with some archaeologists found the foundations of some sort of foundry on Mog's Ground just above the house. Now Henry Burgum was a pewterer, and worked with other metals. Have we come back to the beginning again?

(With acknowledgements to Mr and Mrs E McEwen-Smith. For further background see "The Making of A Manor" (Forrest)).

Edward Youd of Wraxall; Drowned off Cherbourg 1880

by David Youd

(Here we have a story of the circumstances surrounding the death of a local man told at some length. David's ordered approach and the information so gained is a valuable lesson to others embarking on researches into both local and family history. Editor)

Edward Youd the youngest son of William and Harriet Youd of Wraxall was drowned off Rock Rozel on the coast of France on 3rd March 1880. He is commemorated on a grave stone in the churchyard of All Saints, Wraxall. (Also mentioned on the stone are his mother who died 20 Mar 1875 aged 57, his brother James aged 22 years and his father who died 18 March 1895 aged 75).

I wondered, when I first saw the stone, what Edward was doing to be drowned in the English Channel. After 60 years I had time to discover the circumstances of his death. The purpose of this article is to explain how it was done.

A visit to St Catherine's House in London and an examination of the Marine Death Registers showed that Edward was serving on the Edward P Bouverie when he died. Other entries revealed that Edward was not alone and that eleven others died at the same time. It was deduced from this that the vessel had most probably been wrecked and that Edward had not fallen overboard.

The deduction was proved right when his death certificate was obtained and revealed that Edward Youd Apprentice was drowned when the vessel was wrecked on 3rd March 1880. A visit was made to the Public Record Office (PRO) at Kew to

examine papers relating to seamen apprentices, where under ref BT156/46 it was found that Edward Youd when aged 17 was bound apprentice to Cummins and Co of Bristol on 4th August 1877 for a period of four years.

A register of effects of sailors that died at sea is indexed under ref BT 150/20 f 32. It was found that Edward was drowned at a place called Rozel on 3 Mar 1880. This information had been sent to the Board of Trade with a note to the effect that his account was in credit to the sum of £11-16s-3d.

Lloyd's List was the next source to be consulted and three entries summarised below were found, all emanating from Cherbourg:

4/5 Mar 1880 A British barque out of Bristol foundered after striking a rock at Rozel. Crew supposed drowned. The barque was the Edward P Bouverie with a cargo of sugar.

9 Mar 1880 The Edward P Bouverie (Captain Evans) from Samarang and Lisbon previously reported wrecked 21 miles SW of this port. Dismasted and disabled prior to stranding, four bodies and thousands of empty baskets and many bundles of rattan have come ashore.

3 Apr 1880 The wreck had been sold and nothing of the cargo saved.

More information was found about the events leading to the wreck in the abstract of returns of Sea Casualties made to the Board of Trade 1879-1883. These showed that on 3 March 1880 the Edward P Bouverie of 941 tons and A1 at Lloyds was carrying a cargo of sugar to Havre from Samarang in Java when she was driven ashore by a force 6 wind from ENE at Rozel Point. The crew of 19 lost their lives.

To obtain more background information it was decided to look at newspaper reports and by consulting Palmers Index to the Times newspaper two letters were found that had been published concerning the wreck.

The first of these from Mr H P Vereker the British Consul in Cherbourg was dated 23 March 1880. In it he stated that all 19 bodies had been recovered and after religious ceremonies had been decently buried in his presence in the cemetery at Surtainville. Identification and indications had been taken from the bodies before they had been buried in marked and individual graves.

The second letter was dated 3 April 1880. It was from Cummins and Co of Bristol who expressed their thanks to Mr Vereker for his work at Surtainville.

It is assumed from these documents that when the Edward P Bouverie entered the English Channel to sail to Havre the weather conditions were such that the Captain could not fix his position and he was unable to round the Cherbourg Peninsula. He would have been driven south west by the prevailing winds to run aground on Rock Rozel opposite Jersey where all 19 members of the crew were drowned.

Correspondence

The first issue generated a lot of comment. Now that we have correspondents a space will be allocated in each issue for letters, questions and answers. We welcome letters on anything pertaining to Local History. If you require a written answer please enclose a self addressed stamped envelope.

We will try to deal with simple family history enquiries relating to local families. When making such enquiries subscribers should enclose 3 first class stamps, non-subscribers should enclose 6 first class stamps .

The article on Richard Baber brought forth an interesting letter from Mr Moore of Felton.

Richard Baber of Backwell, Clockmaker.

"I am researching the history of early Somerset clockmakers and enclose a few notes that I have about Richard Baber which perhaps will be of interest".

The earliest record discovered so far is in the Kingston Seymour Churchwardens accounts for 1776 and 1777 " Pd Baber for the clock 6-0", then in 1780 "Pd. Baber for keeping the clock clean 6-0." He continued to receive 6-0 per year until 1786. During the next 23 years various people worked on the clock including Wm Nevitt of Chew Stoke, Joseph Moor and Samuel Jeffry until an entry in 1809 " Rich Baber for repairing the Church Clock 12-0".

The Long Ashton churchwardens accounts reveal that Bristol clockmakers were usually employed to look after the church clock but as mentioned in the original article he worked there in 1806 and 1808.

In Wraxall there are three references in 1801, 1802 and 1805 "To Richard Baber for repairing the church clock", the amounts being £2-5-0, 12-0 and £1-5-0. Previously Nathaniel Wade had been used, in 1803 we find Joseph Moor again. Moor was also used in 1817.

At Easton in Gordano Nathaniel Wade was also used from 1759 to 1765 being paid sums varying from 2-0 to 13-0 for "Mending

ye clock" and then no maker is named until 1780 when the entry "Richard Baber for the clock 11-0" appears. No name is mentioned for six years until "William Bilbie for repairing the Church clock £4-14-6" is entered.

Finally at Yatton in 1791 Richard Baber was paid £5-5-0 (a considerable sum for the time) for "repairing the Clocke".

It was an irritating 18th century practice to name the eldest son after his father. Younger sons would also often name their second son after his grandfather. It can be difficult to sort out one from the other. Clearly there must have been several Richard Babers as one was an adult in 1730 and another was recorded as working in 1809. A 79 year working life is unlikely.

A 39 year working life was not impossible but perhaps there might have been two clockmakers of that name. 1776, and 1809 are only the first and last recorded dates, so there could be a Richard Baber, Clockmaker for a much longer period.

In any case it was becoming uncommon for anyone to actually make a clock. Improved transport links and roads that were usable throughout most of the year had made it economic for clock movements and dials to be made in large numbers in Birmingham for distribution throughout the country. The clocks could be assembled locally and put in a locally made case with the sellers name painted on the dial. Brass dials could still be engraved and made up in Bristol but might well be attached to be a Birmingham movement. It is unlikely, faced with competition from clockmakers in Bristol and other villages, that Richard Baber was a full time clockmaker. His skill must have been appreciated within a limited area but demand would have been small. He would be in competition with Wade and Moor, also the Bilbies, Nevitt and Williams of Chew Stoke and at least twenty Bristol clockmakers who were working at that time.

"I hope to publish a book about the clockmakers of Somerset and Bristol 1650-1900 next year".

The following is from a letter written to the EDITOR by Henry ABBOTT 26 Bendysh Road Bushey Watford :-

The SS Nailsea Meadow, a Gunner's wartime voyage

by Henry Abbott

The NAILSEA MEADOW's displacement was approximately 9,500 tons quite a good size for a cargo ship, I am not sure how many crew members were aboard but there were two R.N. Gunners and four army gunners of whom I was one. Our relations with the crew and officers was good.

The armament was one 12 pounder which the R.N. operated if necessary mounted on the rear of the ship and two Oerlikon 50mm machine guns mounted on either side of the bridge.

Our voyage was from Swansea to Montreal with a cargo of anthracite. We set sail Mid November 1941. The convoy assembled near the Firth of Clyde and the voyage across the Atlantic was uneventful as far as action by the enemy was concerned. This was probably because of the bad weather we encountered.

When we got near the Canadian coast The Nailsea Meadow left the convoy and sailed to Montreal up the St Lawrence river where we had ten days of freedom while the ship was being unloaded, and cleaned, to receive a cargo of wheat .

After this we went back on board the Nailsea Meadow and she sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia to join a convoy forming there.

Once again we were lucky in that the weather was bad as we sailed a northern route that took us near to Iceland to avoid enemy aircraft. Eventually we docked in London.

I spent 27 days on board the Nailsea Meadow but after 50 years I regret that I cannot remember much about her

(Editor's Note - The Nailsea Meadow was not the only ship bearing the name of the village. In later editions we shall meet the SS Nailsea Court and HMS Nailsea).

Do You Remember.....?

1. FARLEIGH before WW2

by Vera Waite

The Bristol to Weston super Mare road was rather dusty and did not look the same as it does today.

In the 1920s the road was considerably altered and this led to the high banks being formed on the southern side of the road between the George Inn and the Backwell crossroads.

She went on to mention Mr King who, about 1912 she believes, built "Bank House" as a butcher's shop. Around the corner was the Slaughter House (now The Little Thatch"). Vera remembers, with some regret, that, with many of the other children of the village, she used to look over the fence to watch the animals being slaughtered. How times have changed.

A few yards along the road and probably four years earlier William Harrill who kept "The Fairfield Inn" * built Uncombe House and a blacksmith's shop on the main road. The building which contained the Blacksmith's shop remains there today bearing a builder's name plate.

William Carter was probably the second Blacksmith to work there and he stayed from about 1914 to the mid 1930s. Vera remembers watching him work and is fairly certain that the knowledge she gained would have enabled her to have shod a horse if she had been given the opportunity. She does remember being allowed sometimes to work the bellows. How many children who now attend the nearby school could claim the same I wonder?

**"The Fairfield Inn" was the subject of Research Paper No 4 written by Peggy Harris and published by Nailsea and District Local History Society in 1988.*

2. A Wraxall Secret of World War II

by Phyllis Horman

Knowing of the Editor's interest in local events that took place in the period 1939-1945 Phyllis Horman recently asked me if I had heard the rumour about a secret passage in Wraxall and its use in the war to store something secret.

I hadn't so she explained.

In the Avenue is a large, almost semi circular stone, set at an angle into the bank. There was also a smaller flat stone sticking out at the top. This was the "Devil's Stone and Seat". It is very overgrown now with weeds and brambles. Behind the stone is supposed to be a secret passage to either Charlton House or Naish House (now gone). It was in this passage that it was rumoured "something" was stored.

Unfortunately it seems most unlikely that there was a secret passage. If there was what was stored in it is still an official secret.

3. Death on the Line

by Clifford Kortright

I remember an incident when I was a child. At Four Gables at the end of the house facing about South there is a big bedroom with four windows. My mother was working in the bedroom when

we heard an aeroplane which was a very rare thing in those days. She sat me on the window ledge so that I could see it. I was watching it when all of a sudden my mother said

"Look at that train, I think it's going to hit that man on the line!"

I looked and the train did hit him I saw it knock him down and the aeroplane landed in the field beside the line. It appeared that the pilot had been trying to attract the man's attention to indicate that a train was coming but he had failed.

Anyway the man's name was Mr Lock from West Town and he was killed in 1920 so I can date that incident.

4. A POW returns to Nailsea

I have had the opportunity to speak to an ex POW who was repatriated from Backwell in 1946. He believes that he was in a camp near Brockley. Does anyone remember German POWs in or near Backwell/Brockley? Enquiries that I have made have failed to produce conclusive evidence of where they stayed. Was it near Brockley cross roads as the ex-POW thought?

I have been told by Mr Parkes of German POWs being marched along the main road.