

# CAKE AND COCKHORSE



Banbury Historical Society

Winter 1970

2s.6d.

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The Society was founded in 1957 to encourage interest in the history of the town of Banbury and neighbouring parts of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.

The Magazine "Cake & Cockhorse" is issued to members four times a year. This includes illustrated articles based on original local historical research, as well as recording the Society's activities. Publications include "Old Banbury - a short popular history" by E.R.C. Brinkworth (2nd edition), "New Light on Banbury's Crosses", "Roman Banburyshire", "Banbury's Poor in 1850", and "Sanderson Miller of Radway and his work at Wroxton", and a pamphlet "History of Banbury Cross".

The Society also publishes records volumes. These have included "Clockmaking in Oxfordshire, 1400-1850"; "South Newington Churchwardens' Accounts, 1553-1684"; "Banbury Marriage Register, 1558-1837" (3 parts) and "Baptism and Burial Register, 1558-1723" (2 parts); and "A Victorian M.P. and his Constituents: The Correspondence of H.W. Tancred, 1841-1859". "Wigginton Constables' Books, 1691-1836", "Banbury Wills and Inventories, 1591-1650", "Bodicote Churchwardens' Accounts, 1700-1822" and "Banbury Politics, 1830-1880" are all well advanced.

Meetings are held during the autumn and winter, normally at 7.30 p.m. in the Conservative Club. Talks on general and local archaeological, historical and architectural subjects are given by invited lecturers. In the summer, excursions to local country houses and churches are arranged. Archaeological excavations and special exhibitions are arranged from time to time.

Membership of the Society is open to all, no proposer or seconder being needed. The annual subscription is 40/-, including the annual records volume, or 20/- if this is excluded. Junior membership is 5/-.

Application forms can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary or the Hon. Treasurer.

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The Magazine of the Banbury Historical Society. Issued to members four times a year.

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**Our Cover:** shows the old Grammar School at Adderbury.

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The first History of Education issue of *Cake and Cockhorse* was published seven years ago, and included articles by Miss Samuels on the village school at Cropredy and by Mr Gibson on the first foundation of the public school at Bloxham. This proved one of the most popular issues of the magazine which has yet appeared, and all copies were quickly sold out. Our second issue on the same theme, which commemorates the passing of Forster's Education Act a century ago, contains only one major article, but we are confident that it will be as popular as its predecessor both among members of the Banbury History Society and further afield.

The log-books of Victorian schools have become in recent years one of the most hackneyed of historical sources. It is all too easy to point out the strange ways of our Victorian ancestors, and derive wry amusement from children's absences from school on St. Valentine's Day or in order to supplement meagre family incomes by picking berries in autumn, or to chuckle at the frequency of beatings. But a study of one school in neither an educational nor a community context is of little value. The great strength of Mrs Horn's article derives from the breadth and depth of the sources on which it is based, not one log book but a number, not educational sources alone but the memoirs of trade union leaders, diocesan records and obscure parish histories. This is one of the most significant contributions to historical understanding which has yet appeared in *Cake and Cockhorse* and we are delighted to publish it.

It is easy to be struck with amazement at many of the oppressive aspects of school life which Mrs Horn describes. The direct physical cruelty inflicted on children has largely disappeared in the 20th century, but many of the repressive attitudes of the late 19th century still lurk beneath the surface of our present educational system. Ten-year-olds in many parts of England (though happily not in Banbury) are still denied access to streams, cowslips and steam ploughing engines, while, like dogs at a circus, they are trained to jump through the hoops of intelligence tests. Punitive fees, which make little contribution to the costs of education, have fortunately disappeared from our schools, but they still stifle the growth of adult education. It is to be hoped that future historians will find such practices as astonishing as readers of Mrs Horn's article will find those of a century ago.

## SOCIETY NEWS AND ACTIVITIES

### *Winter Programme*

*Thursday, 26th November.* "Reminiscences of Old Banbury". Miss Bromley, Mr Anker, Mr Braggins. Chairman, Dr Brinkworth. We hope this experiment at recreating history from living memory will be well supported, as there will be ample opportunity for audience participation. It is hoped to tape-record this meeting and build up a small library of such recordings.

*Tuesday, 19th January, 1971.* "Excavations at Middleton Stoney". Mr Trevor Rowley is already well-known to those who have attended his classes over the past twelve months. He has spoken to us before, and he is welcome both as a skilled archaeologist and as a lecturer able to put his subject across and make good use of his slides.

*Thursday, 25th February.* "Oxfordshire Watermills". Mr John Carter, until recently a committee member, is the local industrial archaeologist. Another energetic enthusiast, he will be well worth hearing on a subject he has made his own. Again, we can expect excellent illustrations from an archaeologist who is also a keen photographer.

*Thursday, 25th March.* "The Gardens of Stowe". Mr George Clarke. Members will recall the very pleasant A.G.M. held at Stowe School some years back. Mr Clarke has done a great deal of research into the well-documented history of the creation of the gardens and park, and the building of the temples which still adorn the school grounds. His exceptionally fine colour slides not only show the buildings and gardens as they are now, often from unexpected and revealing angles, but also the 18th century development of the grounds from maps of different dates. The design and layout underwent some surprising changes in direction and emphasis in the transition from formal gardens to informal park.

*Tuesday, 27th April.* "The Village of Middleton Cheney". See future notices.

All meetings (except that at Middleton Cheney) are in the Town Hall at 7.30 p.m.

### *Autumn Meetings*

Lectures for the 1970-71 season have got off a most successful start. Dr W. Urry of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, gave an enthralling account of the life of Becket. This was not a subject of particular local interest (although there is a famous wall painting of the martyrdom in South Newington Church), but it drew a good audience and no one was left in any doubt that they had heard the foremost authority on this subject. His intense, detailed knowledge was matched by an infectious enthusiasm which absorbed us all for well over an hour and a half.

In striking contrast in many ways was Brigadier Young's account of the Battle of Cropredy Bridge. His enthusiasm and knowledge is also vast, but he has a throw-away style punctuated by amusing imaginary dialogues which never fail to enliven and enlighten. This was Brigadier Young's second visit. We hope it is not his last.

### Christmas Cards and Calendars

Stocks of Christmas Cards published by the Society in past years are once again available - special reduced rates to members are:

Banbury Steeple Chase - 18s. doz.; North Bar and St. Mary's Church - 12s. doz.;

Town Hall and Cowfair - 12s. doz.; Banbury Cross - 9s. doz.

Envelopes supplied. The 1971 'Old Banbury' Calendar, published by the Elizabeth Calendar Company, is also available through the Society, @ 15s. (16s. post free). Cards and Calendar will be on sale at meetings, or on application to Dr G.E. Gardam, 11 Denbigh Close, Broughton Road, Banbury (tel. Banbury 2841).

### THE COUNTRY CHILD – 1850–70

For many working-class children, life in the quiet villages of north Oxfordshire and south Warwickshire during the middle years of the nineteenth century was a combination of school and paid employment – with precious hours snatched from time to time for personal recreation.

Most villages had by the 1860's at least some form of education available for the children of their poorer inhabitants, although the quality and kind of schooling offered varied considerably.<sup>1</sup> Thus, at Hornton, in 1867, the school was "found to be 'as bad as it could be' . . . The schoolmaster was unqualified and was a tailor by trade, the instruction he gave was very limited and there was 'an entire absence of life and animation'; both the children and the school were dirty."<sup>2</sup> At Steeple Aston, before the old endowed school was reorganised in 1862, the education provided was described as 'useless' by a Charity Commissioners' Inspector, who visited the village in 1860. He noted: "The Master was bound to instruct all boys born in the parish . . . but only eight boys from Steeple Aston attended".<sup>3</sup> Certain of the other children obtained a modicum of education at one of the five 'dame schools' which flourished in the village.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, at Mixbury the log book reveals a very different attitude. There, by the end of the 1860's, the children were expected to attend the local school on Saturdays as well as weekdays, and were often required to arrive as early as 8.15 a.m., so that they might attend a Church service before their regular school day began.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, a six-day school week seems to have been exceptional, and elsewhere most children attended five days only, from 9 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, with an hour or so for lunch.

All too frequently, the day began for the country child in a small overcrowded cottage. Here, brothers and sisters, indiscriminately mixed together, hastily dressed before eating a spartan breakfast of bread and lard, perhaps washed down with a little weak tea, or the all-too-common 'tea-kettle broth' – a drink made from burnt bread, which had the appearance, if not the flavour, of tea.

On their journey to school the children would, at the appropriate seasons of the year, pick berries and nuts from the hedgerows, or even munch turnips gathered surreptitiously from a field, in order to supplement their meagre breakfast. But they would also play games with one another as they walked or ran along, anxiously listening for the ominous ringing of the school bell. Those who came from a distance would usually have a dinner basket with them, containing the simple midday meal they would eat at school. Sometimes the older children would bully unprotected younger ones, or, as at Steeple Aston, the boys would misbehave and later have to be warned "against throwing stones at cows and running them",<sup>6</sup> or other similar pranks.

If the weather were wet, attendance at school would normally be seriously affected, for the clothing, and especially the boots, of the children of most agricultural labourers were of poor quality and were ill-suited to keep out the rain. A common entry in school log books on a wet day would be, "Wet day; few children attended", such as was entered at Souldern school on 28th May, 1869.<sup>7</sup>

Although smock frocks were now dying out for the children of labourers, some still wore them. Others were dressed in shabby clothes cut down from those of older members of the family – and for the boys this often meant that they would be made of serviceable cord, which was fast becoming the characteristic attire of the Victorian farm worker. In other cases again, boys might even wear "skirts and pinafores because custom and household economy demanded that (they) should wear their older sister's clothes as they grew into them". A photograph of children from the Warwickshire village of Hill Wootton shows boys dressed in this fashion as late as August, 1890!<sup>8</sup> "The age when you graduated into trousers depended on whether, and when, the family possessed a pair that would fit you."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in the north Oxfordshire hamlet of Juniper Hill, Flora Thompson recalls in *Lark Rise to Candleford* that during the 1880's small boys were normally dressed in petticoats "until they were six or seven" (Oxford,

1963 edn., p.189). And in school, anyway, boys and girls alike would frequently wear pinafores. At Mixbury school the girls seem to have been responsible for making the boys' pinafores, according to an entry in the school log book!

Shoes were, however, an even bigger problem than clothes, especially if the children also went out to work in the muddy fields. But school attendance, too, might be interrupted where children had no satisfactory footwear. Thus, in June, 1866, at the village of Launton, a Mrs. Sansome, the wife of a local labourer, informed the schoolmaster that she had been unable to send her seven-year-old daughter, Sarah, to school or to Church on Sunday, "because her shoes were so very bad". She appealed to the master to "let (Sarah) come to school this week (and) she would try to get her some new ones for next."<sup>10</sup> In the winter this problem was particularly acute, and if there were snow or frost, poorly shod children might suffer so badly with chilblains or 'bad feet' that they could not attend school at all.<sup>11</sup>

Once they had arrived at school – and attendance had to be punctual if punishment were to be avoided – the children would normally begin their day with prayers. Then any who had neglected to wash themselves properly before leaving home would receive the unwelcome attention of the master or mistress's stern eye. In the cramped two-, three- or four-roomed cottages in which so many agricultural labourers lived at that time, there was scarcely enough room to wash adequately – even if water were available. And since it very often had to be brought from some distance, parents might be reluctant to 'waste' too much on washing. In some cases, as at Souldern, offending pupils were compelled to wash themselves at the school itself, and the master gave lectures to the assembled pupils about 'coming . . . dirty' to school. At Bloxham parish school, rules issued in January, 1855, made the same point: "All children must come clean, and with their hair combed, and must bring pocket-handkerchiefs".<sup>12</sup>

In other cases, of course, the dirty child might be sent home, to be made 'neat and clean'. The luckless Sarah Sansome of Launton had on one occasion to be sent home twice, for, as the master reported, "she came back the first time as bad as when I sent her home . . ." <sup>13</sup> Another seven-year-old Launton pupil, Joseph Massey, a member of a large family, was even more severely treated; he was beaten before being sent home to be made 'neat and clean'. Significantly, it was recorded that, "he has been sent home every day this week for the same cause".<sup>14</sup>

Given the obvious lack of hygiene and the overcrowding in many homes it is not surprising that epidemics were a regular feature of school life. At Steeple Aston and nearby Rousham and Middle Aston, scarlet fever raged in the autumn of 1863, and measles in the early part of the following year. By the end of January more than half the school were said to be away with the latter disease, and one unfortunate child died of it. Once such illnesses came to a village, the unsatisfactory living conditions of the inhabitants and the lack of resistance to disease caused by poor feeding meant that many young people were extremely vulnerable to attack.

Within the school itself most of the pupil's time would be devoted to the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic), plus religious instruction, and for the girls, sewing. Learning by rote was the normal method, and the standards set were not high. As the mistress at Souldern school resignedly noted early in April, 1869, "the progress of the scholars is very slow . . . ; the parents here do not appreciate learning and fill their children's heads with its uselessness, they send their children to school simply to be free from the care of them . . ." <sup>15</sup> At Launton, the new master who took up an appointment at the school in November, 1865, was disagreeably surprised to discover that, "In the first class there was only one boy who could do simple long division, while most of them were unable to do anything more difficult than simple multiplication with one figure. Gave them a piece of dictation – 5 lines . . . and the least number of mistakes was 5." It would seem that the children here had been allowed to get rather out of hand, for the log book also recorded, "Obliged to use the stick very freely in school today, for without it I could in no way obtain anything like Discipline, as if I simply *spoke* to the children they would stand and laugh at me . . ." <sup>16</sup> Few teachers felt able to emulate the master at Mixbury, who in large, clear letters proudly entered in his book on 14th November, 1870: "Corporal Punishment abolished in the school." It is not known if he kept to this good resolution.

The maintenance of discipline was a problem which, despite their strictness, most teachers had to face. Even the apparently competent Mr. Neale, who remained master at Steeple Aston school from 1863 to 1892, found it necessary to punish the children for such offences as 'throwing paper at one another' in class; walking 'on the forms and school desks, when left in the classroom at dinner time'; stealing pencils from school; and 'behaving badly in Church' – the latter a common fault among the scholars in most villages. Another all-too-frequent cause of punishment, for the boys at least, was truancy.

The temptation to play truant must have been especially strong in the spring time and early summer, when the brightening sunshine, the green grass, the song of the birds and the ripple of the streams presented such an attractive contrast to the tedium of school life, where so much time was devoted to mechanical learning by heart. At Mixbury, it was apparently regarded as a treat even to be allowed to write on *paper* as opposed to a slate, for on 6th July, 1870, the master noted in his log book: "Several boys commenced writing on paper for the first time." In addition, there was also the daunting prospect of 'home lessons', during which large chunks of indigestible prose would have to be committed to memory on most evenings. Given the overcrowded condition of the cottages, which would have made learning difficult at the best of times, and the tedious nature of the work set, it is small wonder that 'home lessons' were often so badly done. A favourite 'home' task was to set the children to learn off by heart the Collect in readiness for the Church service on the coming Sunday. Many were the fruitless struggles waged by schoolmasters in order to get this performed satisfactorily; at Souldern, in the late 1860's, the master even tried to 'bribe' pupils into learning the Collect by offering book prizes to those who proved themselves most diligent!

The unattractive nature of the schoolwork itself was reinforced by the cramming together of all of the pupils, no matter what their age-group or attainment, into a single classroom. The hub-bub was tremendous, as the young Joseph Ashby, of Tysoe in south Warwickshire, was later to recall: "What a noise there used to be! Several children would be reading aloud, teachers scolding, infants reciting, all waxing louder and louder until the master rang the bell on his desk and the noise slid down to a lower note and less volume . . . A specially hard time was the two 'sewing afternoons'. While the girls were collected together for sewing the boys merely did more sums or an extra dictation, just the sort of thing they had been doing all morning. As they craned their necks to see what sort of garments, what colours, were coming out of the vicarage basket of mending, they were unusually tiresome to the poor pupil-teacher, losing their places over and over again, or misspelling words they knew perfectly well – forgetting everything . . ." <sup>17</sup> The situation at Tysoe was probably aggravated by the overcrowded condition of the schoolroom itself; in the spring of 1871, there were 206 scholars in accommodation designed for 180 only! <sup>18</sup>

Most of the schools in north Oxfordshire and south Warwickshire villages were at this time run in accordance with the principles of the National Society, a Church of England organisation, and the local clergy normally exerted a considerable influence over the life of the school and its scholars. At Launton, the incumbent insisted upon the attendance of week-day scholars "over 7 years of age" at Church on Sundays, and those who failed to attend without good reason were to be excluded from the day school. In 1866 at least one child was in fact sent home from school because she had missed Sunday Church attendance for eight weeks. At Bloxham, similarly, the school rules issued in January, 1855, provided that: "All children of Churchmen that attend the week-day schools must also attend the Sunday Schools, which commence at half-past 9 in the morning, and at 2 in the afternoon, when punctuality of attendance will be insisted upon equally as on weekdays." <sup>19</sup>

In most Church schools, the incumbent, his curate or his wife, would be regular daily visitors, overseeing the running of the school and, in particular, supervising the teaching of the Scriptures and the Catechism. It is possible, too, to see clerical influence behind the strictures of schoolmasters against children playing marbles in the street on Sundays, or behaving 'irreverently' in the street on that day. Significantly, at the time of the consecration of Bourton Church in November, 1863, the pupils at Cropredy and Bourton National School were granted a whole week's holiday in celebration. <sup>20</sup>

For convinced Nonconformists like Joseph Arch, the agricultural trade union leader and former hedgecutter from Barford in south Warwickshire, this close control over the affairs of the school by the clergy was a matter of deep resentment. Years later, Arch bitterly wrote of his own children's attendance at Barford School in the 1850's and 1860's and of the 'tremendous fights' he had had to reduce the interference of the parson's wife in the running of the school.<sup>21</sup> Of course, in some villages there *were* dissenting schools as well as Church of England ones; at Bloxham, in addition to the Anglican schools, there were apparently three Nonconformist ones in 1860, catering for working-class children. They contained "about 25 a-piece". And at both Hook Norton and Launton, 'Dissenting schools' similarly existed; in the latter village a Congregational Day School had been established in 1845. It was held first in the Zion Chapel, and then, from 1852, in a new purpose-built school. Even in 1878 its supervisory committee claimed an average attendance of from '30 to 40 children'.<sup>23</sup>

But, in general, few labouring parents (or children) seriously objected to clerical intervention in the running of the village school. They regarded it as one of the facts of life, to be accepted without any strong emotion. Some may even have been grateful for the interest taken. This patronage also had its material compensations. At Mixbury, Mrs. Palmer, the wife of the rector, regularly bought the girls pinafores, dresses and bonnets – a valuable bonus for parents who could ill-afford new clothes for their children. At Finmere, similarly, the children were well cared for, provided they attended both the Sunday and day schools. For them, soup dinners (half an ox-head at a time) were supplied by the rector on two days per week, each child was given a complete outfit of clothes, and 'teas and other meals' were provided on special occasions.<sup>24</sup> More trivially, at Shutford, the curate gave an orange to "each child who attended (school) twice on . . . Valentine's day", and at Launton, the incumbent provided the boys with a cricket ball and a field in which they might play cricket.<sup>25</sup> Sunday school 'treats' were further ways in which the local clergy might provide a little excitement and pleasure for village children. The 'treats' might take the form of an outing, or, as at Tysoe, of a tea on the vicarage lawn. The young Joseph Ashby later recalled with relish: "There was cake at this tea – a wonderful change from bread and lard. Games on the slope of Old Lodge, the beloved familiar hill rising behind the Vicarage, finished the day for the young children."<sup>26</sup> It made a very welcome change from the normal daily routine.

If school remained a basic fact of existence for most children, at least from the age of about five or six until around ten, they were by no means always able to take *regular* advantage of it. Family incomes were too small and the demands of agriculture too great to permit of children going to school if there were work for them to do. Even the timing of the summer holiday – significantly always called the 'harvest holiday' – was varied so as to coincide with the ripening of the corn. If, as in 1867, bad weather had caused it to be 'backward', then the commencement of the holiday might be delayed to the middle of August, but in other, more favourable, years the break would come at the end of July or the very beginning of August. Nevertheless, many children were away from school at other times of the year as well, adding to the family income as bird scarers (for a wage of perhaps 4d. per day), or as potato pickers, stone pickers or weeders. Bird scaring was a desperately lonely job, and like the young Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, many boys, even when they had wooden clappers, would instead shout to frighten the birds, so as to hear the sound of a human voice. "This method had another convenience; you couldn't cry while you shouted."<sup>27</sup>

June was normally the haymaking month, and this, too, affected attendance at school – frequent entries in the log books reading, "Children absent on account of haymaking". At hay harvest time both parents and children started work at a very early hour, often being out in the fields by four o'clock. The men, under the direction of their chosen leader (the 'King of the Mowers') would steadily work away, cutting the tall grass; there was a solemn rhythm in the way that they swung their scythes, and a conscious pride in their own skill. The children had a more humble role assisting their mothers in raking the cut swathes, or occasionally helping to load the hay on to waggons.

Schoolmasters accepted these sometimes protracted seasonal absences of their pupils as unfortunately inevitable – not as misdemeanours to be punished, in the way they regarded straightforward truancy. Their attitude towards field work is shown clearly by the matter-of-



fact way in which the master at Mixbury recorded on 26th July, 1870, that some of the children had "asked leave of absence till after the harvest". Similarly, his colleague at Souldern referred on 12th July, 1869, to the fact that, "on account of the great quantity of work in the fields there (was) only a small attendance", and at Steeple Aston, on 18th September, 1863, there was reported to be a "very small school the whole week. Children employed gleaning and getting up potatoes". As the last example shows, at this time women and their children still regularly went out gleaning, searching anxiously for ears of corn which had been left behind by the harvesters, and collecting any precious grains they discovered in bags, or, if the ears were large enough, in bundles. The grain would later be sent to the miller for grinding into flour, thereby saving the bread bill for a week or two.

For the children themselves, these working days were, no doubt, welcome. There was the excitement of toiling alongside the adults and there was a joyous freedom from the restraints of school. Yet, this was no easy option. The days were long, and few parents could afford to make concessions to their children's age or capacity for work, when the need to earn extra money was paramount. For on the harvest earnings of the father and the extra shillings secured by the mother and children at the busy seasons of the year, the family depended for the clearing up of any small debts run up during the previous winter, or for the purchase of additional clothing and boots in readiness for the difficult months which lay ahead.

As has already been indicated, most children attended school for at least part of the year up to the age of about ten, although the irregularity of their attendance was a matter of concern to many schoolmasters and mistresses. Nevertheless, there were some children who left school even before they reached that tender age. At the 1861 Census of Population there were 290 male agricultural labourers employed full-time in Oxfordshire in the age group 5-9 - out of a total male agricultural labouring work force of 20,861 at that date. In addition, there were 7 male shepherds, 4 male farm servants, and 8 female agricultural labourers employed in that same youthful category. By 1871, the number of 5-9 year old agricultural labourers working full-time had fallen to 104; and there was only one male shepherd and no farm servants at all under 10.

More specifically, at the time of the *Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, 1867-69*, it was reported that at Adderbury (in 1869) boys were employed "from 9 to 10 years of age as plough boys". Similarly, at Alkerton (where children had to attend school in nearby Shenington), boys were not "generally employed . . . until 9 years of age", but after that age work was found for them. In this village, the boys usually started their employment "at the spring seeding to keep birds off corn, to mind sheep on the side of the roads, or as plough boys". At Steeple Aston, the early age at which some of the boys left school meant that all too often, "knowledge once acquired (was) lost". No young girls were employed regularly in the fields in any of these villages, although they no doubt helped at the busy seasons of the year. Most girls would, indeed, only leave school to obtain work as domestic servants - as surviving school records demonstrate. However, where a local craft existed, they might be employed on that instead. At both Mixbury and Souldern, cottage lacemaking was carried on fairly extensively, and many of the girls became lacemakers. In 1851, there were said to be 30 lacemakers in Souldern alone, and special lacemaking schools existed in the village. At Mixbury some child workers were even accepted as regular 'half-timers', and were apparently only expected to attend the local school on half of each day.<sup>28</sup>

In south Warwickshire, a similar situation existed in the late 1860's. At Snitterfield, the schoolmaster, a Mr. Baker, noted that from the age of 7 or 8 the children of agricultural labourers only attended school about "half the times the school (was) open". At Tysoe, the master, Mr. Dodge, estimated that the sons of labourers "usually (left) school finally at the age of 10, . . ." And for the county as a whole, the average age for leaving school was said to be under ten, for the children of farm workers.<sup>29</sup>

Appendix 1 gives further details of school attendance at the time of the 1861 Census of Population in six sample Oxfordshire and Warwickshire villages.

Irregular attendance and an early severing of their links with school thus remained the norm for most labouring children until the 1880 Education Act finally closed all loop-holes and made

it compulsory for every child to attend at least to the age of ten, and beyond that age, up to fourteen, unless he or she could demonstrate by examination that a specified minimum level of education (known as Grade IV) had been reached.<sup>30</sup> Not all parents welcomed this step when it came. Many resented the loss of their children's small earning powers, and it is significant that as late as August, 1891, agricultural labourers were being summoned for not sending their children to school or permitting them to work in breach of the Education Acts.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, some children were unable to attend school not merely because their parents needed their earnings, but also because if there were several children in the family, an older girl might be kept at home to look after the younger ones. Then, again, certain parents might not be able to afford even the small school fees demanded, of perhaps 1d. or 2d. per week. Although most schools were basically maintained by the subscriptions of well-to-do members of the community (among whom the local incumbent would normally be prominent), by Government grants and by the endowments of long-dead benefactors, school fees were usually charged as well; they contributed in a very minor way towards the cost of running the school.<sup>32</sup>

It is significant, therefore, that at Steeple Aston school, during the severe snow of February, 1865 – when agricultural work would be short and unemployment widespread – at least two children were recorded as absent “for want of money”.<sup>33</sup> Again, at Launton, on 8th August, 1866, the unfortunate Sarah Sansome was ‘sent . . . home for her schooling money’; perhaps not unexpectedly, she did not return to school with it. It is certain, too, that these children were not alone in their financial difficulties; others, likewise, would share this embarrassment. And in some villages, such as Bloxham, even larger sums of money might have to be found for education. According to rules issued in January, 1855, at Bloxham school: “Apart from the 28 free scholars, children of poor parents paid 2d. or 1d. a week according to age and the size of the family and those in better circumstances had to pay 4d. or 6d. The entry fee of 2d. was recharged if a child was away for more than two weeks without sufficient excuse . . . Books had to be bought by the children and could be obtained at reduced prices or on hire purchase if necessary. They could be re-sold to the master if, when the children left school, they were clean and whole.”<sup>34</sup> To a labouring family, where every penny counted, such hire purchase of books might seem an intolerable burden!

Yet, if life for many country children was oppressive, there were some pleasures. Even though truancy was normally firmly punished, some of the more daring pupils were prepared to risk punishment for a day of freedom. Then, too, most children managed to snatch extra holidays – over and above their month-long summer vacation and the week or ten days allowed at both Christmas and Easter. They might, as at Shutford, Cropredy and Steeple Aston, be given a May Day holiday, so that they could take part in the traditional celebrations. Indeed, a holiday on 1st May or thereabouts was very common in north Oxfordshire villages, and the children would spend long hours of careful preparation – as at Swalcliffe – in making their ceremonial garlands from “wallflowers, daffodils, cowslips, blue bells, violets, forget-me-nots, . . . The garland was large and heavy, carried on a pole . . . ‘A Queen of the May’ was elected from one of the school girls who wore a long white veil and there was a King who had a broad blue sash over one shoulder and a money box in his hand, into which each house put their contribution.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, children from the Brackley area frequently converged on that small town for their May celebrations. As the *Oxford Chronicle* of 7th May, 1870, recorded, “On the 2nd the town was alive with children carrying garlands, with a view to obtaining the customary ‘copper’. Many schools from neighbouring villages also brought garlands, which they exposed at the doors of houses, singing appropriate songs. The Turweston school brought a very handsome one.” With the money they collected the children might, as at Steeple Aston and Cropredy, later celebrate with a special ‘school tea’. Thus on 1st May, 1863, the pupils from Cropredy and Bourton National School went round ‘with the Garland’ and collected the considerable sum of £3. 9s. for their ‘tea’.<sup>36</sup>

If May Day provided one traditional holiday, other dates could be marked in a similar fashion. Local feast days or special Church feasts were frequently greeted with a day, or half-day release from school. The wise schoolmaster or mistress granted these holidays legitimately, for the children would certainly take them, if they felt inclined. Thus, ‘Barton

Feast', 'Banbury Fair' and 'Deddington Fair' all provided excuses for absence from Steeple Aston school in 1863 and 1864. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* for 15th October, 1864, said of the Banbury Michaelmas Fair: "Our great hiring and pleasure fair was held on Thursday last, when there was a numerous attendance both of shows, stalls, &c., and of the rural population." Presumably, the Steeple Aston truants were among the latter! At Cropredy and Bourton National School, on the other hand, the master was apparently more realistic, granting a regular holiday at the time of Banbury Fair.

However, whilst the schoolmaster might accept truancy for these traditional junketings with a certain amount of equanimity, his attitude towards other absences was rather different. For example, when sixteen boys "came late in the afternoon" to Steeple Aston school in November, 1863, "having been after the hounds", the master, Mr. Neale, treated the matter very seriously and the whole School was "warned against doing the same again". A similar cause for censure was the lateness of boys who had "stopped to see soldiers pass", or had been "to see steam ploughing machine at work".<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as the last examples indicate, in the quiet backwaters in which many children spent their life, anything new or different was exciting and worthy of note – while school, by contrast, was dull and tedious, organised on lines of the strictest – if not always the most consistent – discipline. As Miss M. K. Ashby notes in connection with Tysoe at this period: "Standards could be very inconsistent: for example, children dared not come late to school, but they absented themselves altogether for every sort of reason. Girls could be kept at home on the weekly washing day; boys would go to every flower-show, every meet of the hunt within seven miles. When the cowslips bloomed both boys and girls would be taken out by their mothers to pick the flowers for wine and for a cowslip pudding . . . School was so unreal. That explained the truancy and the caning and much else, and yet there were only one or two families whose children did not go at all, twenty years before compulsion came. All the parents wanted their children to learn to read. . . ." <sup>38</sup>

For most poor country children, then, despite inevitable hardships resulting from inferior food and clothing, and cramped cottage homes, life had much to offer. If working days were long, there was at least the joy of leisure hours, when with companions they could roam through the fields or along may-covered hedgerows, seeking the tracks of wild animals or the nests of birds. They could pick wild flowers or fish in the nearby brooks. Local fairs and feast days, or visits to the nearest town, provided a modest cause for celebration and a break with the daily round. But for the rest, their lives were governed by the demands of agriculture and the unchanging pattern of the seasons. Only the children of the tradesman or the craftsman would escape this close linkage with agriculture. For them, regular attendance at school would be a possibility – although even here, from time to time, a harassed parent might keep his son at home to help when business was exceptionally brisk or labour in short supply.

Pamela Horn.

#### References

1. The accommodation in which education was provided might also vary very considerably in character. At Barford St. Michael, the vicarage kitchen and scullery acted as the village school during the period under consideration. At Bloxham, the vicar's loft apparently served the same purpose for a time; and at Fritwell, a stable in the vicarage garden was similarly utilised. – See D. McClatchey – *Oxfordshire Clergy – 1777–1869* (Oxford, 1960), p.155. At Hempton, near Deddington, the north aisle of the Chapel was used as a school room for the hamlet, and at Hanwell a cottage provided accommodation for between "30 and 40 pupils" until 1868. See H. M. Colvin – *A History of Deddington, Oxfordshire* (London, 1963), p.112; *Victoria County History for Oxfordshire*, Vol.9 (Oxford 1969), p.122 and MS.Oxf.Dioc.Pp.d.180 – 1860 Clergy Visitation Returns, Oxford Diocese – in the Bodleian Library. Significantly, in the Bloxham Hundred of Oxfordshire only Alkerton parish was without a school of its own by the early 1850's – and the children from there attended Shenington School. Elsewhere gaps did exist, however. At Shutford, the school was only established in 1869, and at Cottisford in September, 1857.
2. *Victoria County History for Oxfordshire*, Vol.9 p.139.
3. Rev. C. C. Brookes – *A History of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston* (Shipston-on-Stour, 1929), p.310.
4. Clergy Visitation Returns – Oxford Diocese – 1860. Bodleian Library, MS.Oxf.Dioc.Pp.d.180.
5. See School Log Book for Mixbury – T/SL.35(1) – Oxfordshire County Record Office – Entries for 1–12th December, 1870, for example.

6. See School Log Book for Steeple Aston – T/SL.5 – Oxfordshire County Record Office – entry for 18th March, 1864. On 22nd June, 1864, the master punished “5 Rowsham (sic) and Heyford boys” for “knocking down cherries; stealing them”. Robbing an orchard would of course be another way of supplementing the daily diet.
7. School Log Book for Souldern – T/SL.46 – Oxfordshire County Record Office.
8. G. Winter – *A Country Camera – 1844–1914* (London, 1966), p.20.
9. *Ibid.*
10. School Log Book for Launton – T/SL.32 – Oxfordshire County Record Office – entry for 27th June, 1866.
11. School Log Book for Steeple Aston – T/SL.5 – 22nd February, 1865.
12. Oxfordshire school records at the Public Record Office – Ed.7.101.
13. School Log Book for Launton – 12th February, 1866.
14. *Ibid.* – 28th March, 1866. At Steeple Aston, on 18th January, 1864, on the other hand, the girls had to be warned “against coming (to school) with their hair curled in paper . . .” – T/SL.5.
15. School Log Book for Souldern – 6th April, 1869.
16. School Log Book for Launton – 14th and 15th November, 1865.
17. Miss M. K. Ashby – *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe* (Cambridge, 1961), pp.17–18.
18. See Education Returns for 1871 in Parliamentary Papers, 1871, Vol.LV.
19. Oxfordshire school records at the P.R.O. – Ed.7.101.
20. Log Book for Steeple Aston school – 15th February, 1864, and for Souldern school – 23rd November, 1869. Eileen Samuels – ‘Cropredy and Bourton National School in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Cake and Cockhorse*, November, 1963, p.87.
21. Joseph Arch – *The Story of His Life Told by Himself*, (3rd edn., 1898), p.50.
22. Clergy Visitation Returns – Oxford Diocese – 1860. Bodleian Library, MS.Oxf.Dioc.Pp.d.180.
23. V.C.H. for Oxfordshire, Vol.6 (Oxford 1959), p.242, and Launton School Records at the Public Record Office – Ed.21/14486. Information on Hook Norton school was obtained from Clergy Visitation Returns – Oxford Diocese – 1857. Bodleian Library – MS.Oxf.Dioc.Pp.d.179; about one-third of Hook Norton’s inhabitants were said to be Nonconformists.
24. D. McClatchey, *op.cit.*, p.156.
25. Shutford School Log Book – T/SL.45 – Oxfordshire County Record Office – 16th February, 1870 and Launton School Log Book – 11th June, 1866.
26. M. K. Ashby, *op.cit.*, pp.43–44.
27. *Ibid.*, p.24.
28. Log Book for Mixbury – T/SL.35(1) – Entries for 5th and 11th July, 1870, for example.
29. *Second Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, 1867–69* – Parliamentary Papers 1868–69, Vol.XIII, concerning Warwickshire, etc., pp.59 and 280.
30. In 1857, however, the then Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, spoke out “on this outcry against taking children away from school to the land”; he declared that, ‘they did not want everyone to be learned men, or to make everyone unfit to follow the plough, or else the rest of us would have nothing to eat’. – Quoted by D. McClatchey, *op.cit.*, p.143.
31. *Oxford Chronicle* – 15th August, 1891. Six cases were heard at Deddington Police Court on 7th August, on this question; each offending parent was fined 5s.
32. At Souldern, in 1856/57, for example, school fees contributed a mere £6. 12s. to the total annual income of £56. 13s.; endowments made up the rest. – Clergy Visitation Returns – Oxford Diocese – 1857 – MS.Oxf.Dioc.Pp.d.179 – Bodleian Library. At Launton in March, 1848, the annual income from school pence was £10, and from voluntary subscriptions £7. 12s. The rector made up the rest, to meet an expenditure of £80. 5s. – although later Government grants were secured. See Launton School Records at Public Record Office – Ed.7.101.
33. Steeple Aston Log Book – 22nd February, 1865. On the other hand, on 5th April, 1864, the master had noted: “Punished W. Woods for playing truant and keeping back part of his school money.” Unfortunately a similar entry had also to be made on the following 1st June. Again, on 30th November, 1864, Amelia Cross of Steeple Aston was found to have been “robbing her father and spending the money in sweets &c. M. Durran received 3d. from her knowing her to have stolen it Locked them up the whole day after mak(ing) their parents acquainted with the circumstances.”
34. V.C.H. Oxfordshire – Vol.9 and rule book at Public Record Office – Ed.7.101.
35. Dorothy G. M. Davison – *The Story of Swalcliffe* (Banbury, 1943), p.24.
36. Eileen Samuels – ‘Cropredy and Bourton National School in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Cake and Cockhorse*, November, 1963, p.87.
37. Steeple Aston School Log Book – entries for 8th April and 3rd May, 1864.
38. M. K. Ashby, *op.cit.*, p.20.

## Appendix

*School Attendance for Children aged 5–10 inclusive at the  
Time of the April, 1861, Census of Population*

Six sample villages in north Oxfordshire and south Warwickshire

(In each case the Public Record Office Reference No. for the individual village census returns has been given before the name of the village is quoted.)

Village	<i>At School</i>		<i>At Work on the land</i>		<i>At Work elsewhere</i>		<i>At Home, being neither at school nor at work</i>	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<i>R.G. 9.915</i>								
Alkerton*	17	11	1	-	1**	-	3†	3
Horton	18	19	6	-	-	-	13	8
<i>R.G. 9.916</i>								
Ratley	39	29	5	-	1	-	2	2
Shutford††	10	8	8	-	-	-	10	19
<i>R.G. 9.898</i>								
Souldern	38	27	4	-	-	4†††	3	2
<i>R.G. 9.913</i>								
Bloxham	75	69	4	-	-	-	23	24
<i>R.G. 9.899</i>								
Launton	55	36	-	-	-	-	10	12

\* Alkerton had no school of its own; children attended at Shenington.

\*\* Basket maker.

† All three boys were aged 5 only.

†† Shutford only acquired its own village school in October, 1869.

††† Three of the four girls employed in Souldern were lacemakers.

**Oxford Stone.** By W. J. Arkell. Reprint 1970 of 1st Ed. of 1947. S. R. Publishers, Wakefield, 223 pages, £2.10.0.

Many members of the Historical Society will know Dr. Arkell's fine study of the materials used in the buildings of Oxford and of the ways in which they have been quarried, mined and carved over the centuries. *Oxford Stone* has been out of print for a number of years and its re-appearance is very welcome. It includes detailed plans of quarries at such places as Pudlicote, Taynton and Charlbury, and a splendid range of photographs, including some very revealing close-ups of walls, decaying and otherwise, and an evocative picture of a group of Stonesfield slatters at the pit head about 1890. The ways in which stone has been cut and dressed are thoroughly examined, and there are valuable studies of the tools used by Oxford masons. The study ranges as far afield as Bath and other distant sources of Oxford building materials, but most readers of this magazine will value this book as a fine study of Oxford's buildings and as a thorough and sensitive record of one of the county's principal industries.

B.S.T.

**The Tudor Parliament**, by R.K. Gilkes. London History Studies No.5. London University Press. 11s paperback. 15s boards.

R.K. Gilkes is a native of Banbury. He was educated at the former Grammar School and now teaches history at Bristol. He is a member of the Banbury Historical Society. "The Tudor Parliament" is his contribution to the London History Studies Series which consists of books of about 200 pages, surveying specific topics "which continue to attract the attention of historians and arouse argument among them".

The book is well designed and clearly presented. First, the author gives a broad and rapid introduction to the origins of Parliament, and goes on to survey the different interpretations of the nature of Tudor monarchy. The second section deals with the mechanics of Parliament, its composition, elections, officers and procedure. The final section takes the reader through the story of the growing rivalry between Crown and Parliament, and more particularly between Crown and Commons. There is a good bibliography of secondary sources and recent articles. The index and chronological lists of events are clear and helpful.

"The Tudor Parliament" is aimed at a particular market - six form students working for the Advanced Level examination in History. It will also be used by undergraduates and even by schoolmasters who lack the time to keep up with the controversies which rage in "Past and Present" and the "English Historical Review". It is therefore a book which is open to use and abuse. As a rapid introduction to a major topic, it is excellent. The danger is that it will be taken as a "potted guide", equipping the student to make facile judgements while dropping some of the "right" names - Cooper, Hinton, Henry Williams and, inevitably, G.R. Elton.

This is a real danger, although not the fault of the author who has achieved a remarkable feat of condensation and selection. He rightly shows that although the Tudor period was a crucial one for the development of Parliament, the medieval period when Crown and Parliament co-operated and became mutually dependent, especially over taxation, was equally vital. Perhaps the uniqueness of this Crown-Parliament relationship needs greater emphasis, which might have been achieved by a closer examination of the fate of similar institutions in France, Spain and Germany.

The section dealing with the mechanics of Parliament is by far the most interesting. Even the general reader would be intrigued by some of the detail collected here, and could make striking comparisons with Parliament today. Here we learn of M.Ps. being fined for non-attendance at debates, starting their sittings at 8.00 or even 7.00 a.m., "hawking and spitting" in disapproval of a speech, and even daring to claim wages. Even in Tudor times the House of Commons could show just how exclusive a club it was. A stranger who had entered the House in 1584 for two hours was brought to the bar and "stript to his shirt, his pockets searched and then remanded to the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms". It is not all merely "bizarre detail", as sombre examiners are apt to call these trivial but memorable incidents. The development of Parliamentary procedure, the duties of officers and the highly undemocratic elections are well explained. The growing economic power of the members, particularly the gentry, ought to have been stressed more vigorously. As a contemporary wrote, "they (the Commons) were able to buy the Upper House thrice over". Many historians would regard this as a fundamental cause of the growth of the power of the Commons.

As it is, the author takes his reader at an exciting gallop, giving him glimpses of Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell, Somerset, Northumberland, Burghley, those Elizabethan fire-brands Cope (of Hanwell), Wentworth and Strickland, as well as the monarchs and their struggle to control "that noise" as poor James I called the Commons. The run-down from 1603 to 1629 in 20 pages is really at break-neck speed, but almost all the recent research is touched upon. Unfortunately the impression is given that England was on the brink of civil war in 1629, and while this is a tenable point of view, it is one which is open to serious doubts, and needs a more thorough examination. The growing religious tensions are not brought out strongly enough, and to some extent the author fights shy of the knotty problem of Puritanism, and the word does not appear in the index.

The Tudor Parliament certainly fulfils the Editors' aim of clearly stating the problems and surveying for students "the fruits of modern scholarship". It is less successful as "an aid to a clear understanding of the methods of the historian". This is claiming too much. There is no survey of primary sources, and several interesting quotations are left irritatingly anonymous.

But "dog does not eat dog", and as a schoolmaster himself, the reviewer is filled with admiration for the amount of work Mr. Gilkes has put into producing this remarkably inexpensive volume. It is a lively summary of a vast area of historical scholarship. There are even two references to Banbury, which draws one to the inevitable conclusion that future study at a local level is probably the most rewarding way ahead in this, as in so many other fields.

The activities and publications of some or all of the following bodies should interest readers:

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