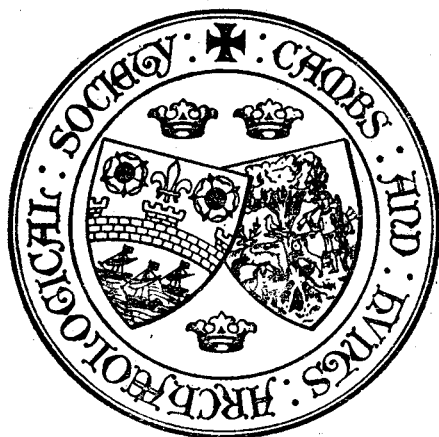


Transactions
OF THE
Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire
Archæological Society
(FOUNDED A.D. 1900)



VOLUME VII, PART IV.

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RECTOR OF ABBOTS RIPTON AND LITTLE STUKELEY, HUNTS.

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ALCONBURY HILL, ALCONBURY WESTON, HUNTINGDON.

ST. NEOTS
PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY BY
TOMSON & LENDRUM, LTD.

1952

PRICE (NON-MEMBERS) ONE HALF GUINEA

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THE FOUNDATION OF THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Also preserved amongst the Grammar School documents is an important triparite agreement dated 1565 (see appendix "B") which may be claimed as the foundation document of the school, and contains the earliest surviving mention of a grammar school in the town. It is an agreement between Sir Anthony Bartelmewe, Master of the Hospital, and Robert Blinkerne and John Richardes, Bailiffs of the Borough of Huntingdon on the one part, and George Richardes of London on the other (who was a relative of John Richardes), whereby the ruined buildings of the former Hospital are leased to George Richardes for a period of sixty years. The rent for the first ten years is to be £4 per annum, and £13-6-8 thereafter on condition that the Hospital buildings are adapted for the purposes of a Grammar School and a suitable almshouse is erected for old people of the town. These buildings, when completed, are to be kept in good repair for the period of the lease. In addition, George Richardes is given the right to nominate and present the parson to St. John's Church (which was then standing). A more domestic stipulation is that he shall not be allowed to keep more cattle on the common fields than any ordinary burgess is allowed to keep, which clearly indicates that he would be admitted to the "Freedom" of the town by the Corporation. It will be noticed however, that the existence of a then-existing school is mentioned, and it is possible that some enterprising person may have been conducting an "unofficial" school on the premises, which the Corporation wished to reconstitute on their own lines and under their control.

Richardes thereupon seems to have taken the ruined buildings in hand for he apparently removed the aisles and eastern bay of the Hall and the chapel which projected to the east. He blocked up the arches of the two remaining bays on either side and divided the now compact but truncated building into two storeys, the ground floor becoming the schoolroom and the upper the schoolmaster's house. His alterations were carried out in the rich red brick of the period and he completely encased the west front of the hall giving it a picturesque "Dutch" gable to the High Street.

The gatehouse which stood to the north of the Hall, and which had been the residence of the Hospital Masters before the Dissolution, also appears to have been destroyed at this time. Its site is partly occupied by Cromwell Cafe.

Though Richardes seems to have carried out his part of the contract, it would appear from statements made in the "Holmead" document that the foundation did not prosper at first. An earlier document of 1570 (see appendix "C") is a Certificate concerning the release of the Hospital and Grammar School from payment of First Fruits and Tithes, which indicates that there must have been some trouble over arranging the finances.

Holmead makes a number of proposals to the Corporation in the Depositions, which clearly show that at the time he signed the document (about 1585) the Grammar School was not functioning, as he makes a definite offer to found a "Free School" in the town. If this is accepted he will find a duly qualified master to teach the scholars or else will provide a salary of £10 to a master approved and chosen by the bishop. In addition, he will leave in his will a yearly sum of £10 for the foundation of a scholarship to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, for a pupil from the school. Furthermore, he will erect three almshouses and endow them with 5 marks (£3-6-8) a year for ever. This last offer indicates that, in any case, the almshouses provided for in Richardes' agreement had not been built. Holmead then finishes with the curious suggestion that either he or "Richardes" should be allowed to carry the plan into effect. It would appear that the "Richardes" referred to was the Rev. Thomas Richardes, M.A., appointed Master of the Hospital in 1583 and, apparently, a relative of both George and John Richardes previously mentioned. Whether any of these plans were ever carried into effect is unknown, but a search of the records of Emmanuel College might solve the problem of the scholarship and give additional information about the proposed school. Who Henry Holmead was is not known, nor do we hear anything more of him or his proposals. But one may pose the question as to why he should offer to found a school if the one set up by the document of 1565 had been then operating satisfactorily. Possibly he saw that things were going badly for the new foundation and thought

he might be able to make a success of it, if allowed to, both for the townspeople and himself. In any case his offer may have stirred the Corporation to look into matters and no doubt, by 1599, when the Rev. Tobias Bland was appointed Master, the Grammar School had become firmly established.

It may not be inappropriate to mention here that only the sons of Burgesses (i.e. "Freemen") of the borough were admitted to the school free of charge, and this regulation survived until the passing of the first Municipal Corporations Act in 1835, when all such privileges were abolished.

In 1604, the famous Dr. Thomas Beard, Cromwell's schoolmaster, succeeded the Rev. Tobias Bland but we know little of his mastership. He was followed in office by the Rev. Henry Cooke, Dr. Beard's nominee, in 1625. This Henry Cooke was not a very satisfactory person, and he was sued by the Corporation in 1639 for grave dereliction of duty. Contrary to established custom and his agreement with the Corporation, he had left the town and was residing elsewhere, one of the conditions of his appointment being that he should live in the schoolhouse in the town. He had also been remiss in not teaching in the school, as was his bounden duty, but he was paying an unsatisfactory substitute £10 a year to do so. Neither did he relieve the poor nor preach in the town churches as Dr. Beard had done. These matters must have been satisfactorily settled because he remained Master until 1655 when he was succeeded by Francis Bernard, M.A. It would appear that in addition to his ordinary duties, the Master was also the "Lecturer" or licensed preacher for the town.

From 1565 to 1655 the Masters of the Hospital were also headmasters of the Grammar School, though they often employed an usher or under-master to assist them. The Hospital Masters had to be in Holy Orders and they taught in the school. In 1655 an Order of the Corporation made the Mastership of the Hospital a lay office and from that date the Hospital Masters no longer taught, but appointed schoolmasters with the approval of the Corporation. This arrangement lasted until 1835 when, after a lawsuit, the Hospital Master was authorised to make the appointment of the schoolmaster without reference to the Corporation.

CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN AND THE FREE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

On 2nd September, 1678, the Corporation drew up a list of rules and regulations to govern the Hospital and Grammar School. Copies remain with the Corporation and School records and are printed in extenso in appendix "D."

These rules enact that the Master of the Hospital shall be elected for life, but he must give a bond for £200 on election, and must resign if called upon to do so by the Corporation. He must keep correct accounts and present an annual balance sheet for inspection at an appointed Council meeting. None but poor people recommended by the Corporation are to be taken into the almshouse, and vagrants are to be relieved only on the Mayor's order. The schoolmaster is to be appointed by the Hospital Master with the approval of the Corporation, who will sanction the salary to be given. The property of the Hospital and School is only to be dealt with as directed by the Corporation. Lastly, the Hospital Master is to receive as an honorarium, £4 a year if his conduct is satisfactory. By now the Mastership of the Hospital had become a part-time job of supervising the almshouse and school. The salary was raised to £20 in 1777, £30 in 1803 and £50 in 1835 when his duties became more onerous.

From the above Constitutions, it will be seen that the Corporation were exercising strict control of the charity, an arrangement which led them into serious trouble later on.

The 19th century history is remarkable for the proceedings in Chancery against the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses for grave mismanagement (to put it mildly) of the Hospital and School finances. Gross irregularities had taken place and the facts were brought to the notice of Parliament who recorded that it was "the worst and grossest of all cases of robbing the poor" which had ever come to their knowledge. The investigations resulted in a new scheme of management which was carried into effect in 1836. The Master of the Hospital was in future to be presented by the Mayor and Corporation, as Patrons, to the Bishop of Lincoln for institution, thus reverting to the old method which had fallen into disuse in the 17th century. The appointment of a suitable schoolmaster was to be made by the Master of the Hospital alone.

RESUME OF THE RULES ADOPTED IN 1835

The Master of the Hospital is not to be a member of the Corporation; he must be at least a B.A. and a member of the Church of England. His salary is to be £50 a year.

The schoolmaster must also be at least a B.A. He must live in the schoolhouse provided, and his salary is to be fixed at £100 a year, paid half-yearly.

Sons of inhabitants, or deceased inhabitants, of Huntingdon shall receive free instruction in Greek and Latin. English, Writing and Arithmetic are considered extra subjects, and each boy who wishes to be taught them is to pay 15/- a quarter. Sons of non-burgesses are to pay double these fees. All children are to provide their own books, pens, paper, etc. If the undermaster teaches these extra subjects, he must be duly qualified to do so.

Almshouses for four widows are to be built on Hospital land in Huntingdon. (They were built in George Street in revived "Gothic" style where they yet remain). The unsuitable buildings in the school yard are to be demolished. No poor woman is to be eligible for admission till she be 50 years of age and has resided in the town for three years. One poor woman is to be chosen from each of the four Huntingdon parishes by the Master of the Hospital, and she is to receive 5/- weekly from the Hospital funds. The Master is to make rules for the regulation of the almshouses.

Lastly, the accounts are to be audited annually by the incumbents and churchwardens of the four parishes, but not by the Master of the Hospital or the Schoolmaster, and a proper balance sheet is to be drawn up.

The Schoolmaster's salary was £10 in 1639, £20 in 1680, £25 in 1818 and £100 in 1833. It was usually paid at Lady Day and Michaelmas.

Little is known of the school's history outside the Corporation minute books and the documents which survive. All the registers of the 19th century are missing as are the account books.

In 1892, after surviving nearly 750 years, the office of Master of the Hospital was abolished. Walden's Charity School, founded in the early 18th century, was absorbed by the Grammar School in 1895 and a new scheme of management was drawn up, the foundation

being placed under a Board of Governors. Walden's School was known as the Green Coat School from the distinctive colour of the uniform worn by its scholars. It had a somewhat chequered history, and the buildings were on the west side of the High Street almost opposite Germain Street. Some of them have been incorporated in modern warehouses.

The Hospital charity was separated from the School foundation in 1905 and went its separate way as an almshouse. The Grammar School then became a modern secondary mixed school. New premises were built in a field opposite Hinchingsbrooke which were first occupied in 1939, but not by the school alone—for it shared the buildings with an evacuated school from London during the war years. Finally, under the Education Act of 1944, fees were abolished in 1945.

The former school buildings in the town were subsequently converted into County Council Offices, the old Norman building alone being excepted and it is now used for meetings, exhibitions and the like and still remains in the hands of the Corporation.

There were only 17 boys in the school in 1866, but eighty years afterwards the number of pupils had risen to nearly 400. This fact alone shows the great changes in the progress of education in the county which have occurred almost within a lifetime.

In the 18th century the upper floor of the Hall became the senior school, the juniors taking over all the ground floor, and a new headmaster's house was built on the north side of the precinct adjoining the almshouses. This house was rebuilt in 1804 (a small portion may yet be seen) and again in 1878, being enlarged in 1905. The school buildings were restored in 1878 by Dion Boucicault in memory of his son who was killed in the Abbots Ripton railway disaster two years before. The 18th century brick facing of the Hall was then removed, bringing to light the beautiful 12th century west doorway of the original Hospital. During the restorations the entire building was taken down to the ground and rebuilt, being raised two feet in the process, to bring it up to the road level. The inserted floor of 1565 was removed, the Norman doorway was blocked up, the Norman windows above were opened out and drastically restored and the building left in much the state it remains to-day.