

## SAMUEL OGDEN — A 17TH-CENTURY DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLMASTER

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The historian of education in the 17th century often has difficulty in finding any but the most limited information on the lives and work of most of the schoolmasters who taught at that time, especially those teaching in the smaller schools. Names in diocesan visitation returns and subscription books, occasional lists of masters in the larger endowed schools, or references in one of the published admission registers of Cambridge colleges are usually the only details available. Occasionally, however, the darkness surrounding one of these men lifts a little, and one is able to catch a glimpse of the schoolmaster and his methods, set against the background of contemporary society.

The career of Samuel Ogden provides such an insight. Ogden, a 17th-century Presbyterian minister, taught successively at Oldham, Buxton, Mackworth, Derby and Wirksworth over a period of more than 40 years. He was born in 1628 at Fowleach, near Oldham, and received part of his early education at Littleborough, where he studied under 'Mr. Taylor'.<sup>1</sup>

The 'private' school attended by Ogden at Littleborough may have been taught by Zachary Taylor, who became master of the nearby grammar school at Rochdale and was later ejected as a Presbyterian from the curacy of Rochdale in 1662.<sup>2</sup> At this time, 'private' schools flourished as the fortunes of some of the larger endowed schools declined during the period of Civil War; many 'private' schoolmasters sent able boys to the universities and in 1648, Ogden was admitted as a sizar at Christ's College, Cambridge.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that he was already attracted to presbyterianism, which flourished in his part of Lancashire; Christ's at this time was also a college where strong anti-royalist views were held.<sup>4</sup> He graduated in 1651, returned to Oldham to teach in the school there and eventually married Hester, the daughter of Humphrey Barnett, the local Presbyterian minister.<sup>5</sup>

Like many graduates at this time, Ogden eventually entered the ministry. He moved to Derbyshire, where he was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in 1653 and presented to the chapelry at Buxton.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he held the donative curacy of Fairfield. In 1657, he became vicar of Mackworth and was ejected from the living there under the terms of the Act of Uniformity of 1662.<sup>7</sup>

Ogden's subsequent career illustrated the ineffectiveness of many of the laws designed to curb nonconformity, particularly their lack of enforcement in some parts of England. Ministers and schoolmasters who did not subscribe to the doctrines of the restored Church of England were proscribed, and the schoolmasters forbidden to teach, yet Ogden and others like him were apparently able to continue in their work unchecked. Before 1662, he had taught boys at Buxton, Fairfield and Mackworth, and some had gone to Cambridge; for example, Hugh Pollett to St. John's in 1654, and John Gill and Samuel Seale to Christ's in 1661.<sup>8</sup> After his ejection in 1662, he continued to keep a school at Mackworth, probably in his house, to which some landed families sent their sons as boarders; for example, the Gorings of Kingston (Staffordshire), two of whom were admitted to Christ's in 1664.<sup>9</sup>

It is not certain how long the school at Mackworth continued, but in 1669 Ogden was preaching at Little Ireton and in 1672, under the terms of a Declaration of Indulgence, he was licensed to preach in the house of Thomas Saunders there.<sup>10</sup> By now, the attitude of authority was becoming more favourable to protestant dissenters.

In 1670 a judgment in the court of King's Bench in the case of William Bates allowed nonconformist schoolmasters to teach without a licence from a bishop, if they were appointed by the founder or lay patron of a school. Also, some schoolmasters were permitted to make a 'partial' subscription to the doctrines of the Church of England, like Samuel Shaw, ejected from the rectory of Long Whetton (Leicestershire) in 1661 and subsequently schoolmaster at Ashby-de-la-Zouch in 1668.<sup>11</sup>

Ogden's subscription was recorded in 1676, in the parish of St. Alkmund's, Derby, and he was licensed as a schoolmaster, although it is unlikely that he fully conformed. His name was entered at the bishop's visitations of Derby in 1676, 1679 and 1682.<sup>12</sup> He opened a 'private' school in the town, separate from the school endowed in the 16th century, and by this time his reputation as an able schoolmaster and an excellent scholar was firmly established. He was 'skilled in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, mathematics, natural philosophy, music and divinity', and some of his pupils went on from Derby to Cambridge; for example, Thomas Wells to Trinity in 1679 and John Hope to St. John's in 1682.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately for Ogden, his flourishing 'private' school aroused the opposition of Thomas Cantrell, the headmaster of the local 'grammar' school, who probably saw some of his potential scholars attracted to a rival establishment. Cantrell took steps to have Ogden's licence withdrawn by an action in the Archbishop's court in 1685. Ogden, however, moved to Wirksworth as the master of the endowed school there, and thus came under the protection of the Gell family, firm supporters of nonconformity, one of whose members, Anthony Gell, had originally endowed the school in 1579.<sup>14</sup>

Although Wirksworth was smaller than Derby, the school there evidently flourished, and soon Ogden was joined by an assistant, Zachary Merrill, who married his daughter Rachel. Merrill kept a notebook in which he described Ogden's method of teaching, and from it may be learned something of the content of education in a small country school in the late 17th century, as well as the way in which Ogden taught.<sup>15</sup> The curriculum was firmly based on Greek and Roman classical authors and Merrill described the study of Aesop's *Fables*, Cicero's *Epistles*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Erasmus' *Colloquies* and the works of Suetonius, Seneca, Xenophon, Aristophanes and Demosthenes. There was a large amount of rote learning, and Merrill recorded that 'no sooner could a boy read his accidence well and distinctly but he (Ogden) would have him begin to learn it by heart'. There was also frequent oral testing of Latin conjugations and declensions. With the younger pupils, Ogden used Comenius' well-known *Orbis Pictus*, and composed little verses as an aid to learning.

On most days, lessons began with the calling in of exercises and corrections, 'writ very fair'. Then followed a verbal examination of Latin or Greek grammar and the study of classical texts. Friday afternoons were set aside for the conjugation of Latin verbs, and on Saturdays the catechism was studied, with the boys standing and repeating the answers aloud. Ogden then reminded them of their duty to God and their parents and urged them to attend church on the Sabbath. As 17th-century schools were places where it was intended that the foundations of religious belief should be laid and since many schoolmasters at this time were in orders, it was common for schools to place a strong emphasis on religious observance. At Wirksworth, lessons ended in the morning and the afternoon with a reading from the Bible, usually the Book of Proverbs or Ecclesiasticus. No public prayers were said in the school, but as soon as Ogden came in each morning, 'he sat down, took off his hat, and, looking upward, prayed for a blessing'.

The harsh discipline which was common in many 17th-century schools appears to have been absent at Wirksworth. Merrill described Ogden's discipline as 'not severe', the schoolmaster 'very seldom whipping any unless for some gross miscarriage, as truancing or laughing or impudence'. If he whipped any, 'it was with so much mildness

that a boy of four years of age might well abide it'. Ogden also used the ferule for punishment and 'sometimes he would walk to and fro and then by no means suffer any to stare him in the face, or laugh'.

By the end of the 17th century, many schoolmasters in the smaller country schools were teaching English and occasionally accounts, but Merrill made no mention of this at Wirksworth and the classical curriculum apparently prevailed. Nothing is known either of the number in the school at this time or the ages of the scholars, although Ogden's reputation attracted the sons of prominent Derbyshire families such as the Willmots, two of whom were admitted from the school to St. John's, Cambridge.<sup>16</sup>

Ogden died at Wirksworth in 1697 and was buried there. In his will he is described as 'clerk' and there is no reference to him as 'schoolmaster'.<sup>17</sup> He was apparently prosperous and left lands in Markeaton, Darley and Wirksworth to his widow, as well as gifts of money to his three daughters. A silver tankard, a silver cup and a gold ring were other bequests, and his books included a dictionary, a Greek lexicon, a thesaurus and 'Mr. Tallents' chronographical tables', which had probably belonged to Francis Tallents, ejected from Shrewsbury in 1662, who later preached at Wirksworth under the protection of the Gell family.<sup>18</sup> To a grandson, John Lowe, he left £4 and a collection of school books, in the hope that he would become 'a sound scholar in God's calling', a description which provides a fitting epitaph for Ogden himself.

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