

## A CHEAM SCHOOL BILL IN 1766

BY

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WILLIAM GILPIN (1724-1804) schoolmaster and educational reformer, writer and art critic, was a remarkable man. Educated at Queen's College, Oxford, where he regarded the antiquated methods of teaching in use in the College with hardly more favour than did Gibbon those employed at Magdalen a few years later, he took orders in 1746. In 1752 he took over from the Rev. James Sanxay "a school<sup>1</sup> at Cheam near Epsom in Surrey, which had been of long standing. Cheam is a village on the edge of Banstead-downs, and enjoys so pure an air, that the inhabitants say, it was never afflicted with an epidemical disorder. When the plague raged in London, in the time of Charles II, a master<sup>2</sup> brought his scholars to Cheam to avoid the infection, and taught them in the belfry. After the plague ceased it was found so commodious a situation for a school, that the master took a house and continued there. Since that time the school has never been removed. At the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Gilpin's own Account of himself written shortly before his death and printed by the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archæological Society in 1879. The other details about Gilpin given here come mostly from the same source.

<sup>2</sup> Presumably George Aldrich S.T.P. whose epitaph in Cheam church described him as *Scholæ privatae Chehemensis moderator*, a Cambridge man and a strong Anglican, and as dying in 1685. Richard Rawlinson (1690-1755) the antiquary, whose valuable manuscripts are in the Bodleian, was at school at Cheam, for when he visited Banstead in 1717, while preparing Aubrey's Survey for publication, he notes that the Vicar had two servants "both Serv<sup>ts</sup> whilome to Mr. Henry Daye of Cheame my School Mr." Dr. Sanxay, the father of James Sanxay, built the school, having a 99 years lease which expired in 1818 (Brayley and Britton, *History of Surrey* vol IV p 85 ed. 1844). James Sanxay, who does not seem to have been very successful, became Rector of Sutton on giving up the school, and died in 1766.

beginning of the last century one of the masters built the present house, which is large and fit for the purpose."<sup>1</sup>

The school at first was in very low water, and Gilpin began with only 15 pupils, whose numbers, however, he gradually raised to 80 with the assistance of his excellent wife, whose care for the boys' health inspired confidence in parents at a time when such matters received too little attention.

In the management of his school he tells us he "tried a new scheme, which some might think whimsical; but he himself thought it a very useful one." It was, put briefly, to avoid corporal punishment except for vice or obstinate idleness, and to trust to the boys' honour. He laid down strict rules, and in doubtful cases empanelled a jury of twelve boys to decide, and he used to say that "he never once knew an improper verdict given." Fines were levied, the proceeds of which went to erecting seats in the play yard, paving an extensive fives ground, furnishing bats and balls for cricket, or buying books for a school Library. Cricket he encouraged "as a manly exercise," and the school played usually on a green in the neighbourhood where all the cricket players in the village used to resort, an arrangement which would hardly commend itself to a first class modern school. He also encouraged gardening. He held that "where one boy miscarries for want of classical knowledge hundreds are ruined for want of religious principles," and while he inculcated the latter assiduously he "thought it of much more use to his pupils to study their own language with accuracy than a dead one," a somewhat heretical doctrine in that age, which reflects credit on his independence of judgment. At the same time he aimed at giving his pupils such a foundation in Greek and Latin as would enable them later to read the classics with ease and pleasure.

A number of well-known men were at Gilpin's school, including Addington, who succeeded Pitt as Prime Minister in 1801, and Mitford, the author of that History of Greece, written from an aristocratic standpoint, which held the field till Grote's great defence of the Athenian democracy swept it from popular favour. Mitford presented Gilpin in 1777 to the living of Boldre in Hampshire where he spent the rest of his life. He was succeeded at Cheam by his son William.

<sup>1</sup> A top story has since been put on and other alterations have been made.

The specimen of Gilpin's school bills which follows is from the papers in my possession relating to the estate of John Lambert, who died aged 20 on 10 October 1772. He was the youngest son of Daniel Lambert (1714-1765), who lived at Rooksnest (now Rosehill School) in Banstead and in Savage Gardens (near the Tower) in London. The bills, which were sent to his elder brother Daniel, cover the period from 27 January 1765 to 27 October 1767, *i.e.* only after his father's death, but he seems to have been sent to school before 1765. It was customary to send the boys to school at Cheam, for certainly two, and probably all three of his elder brothers were at school there, and two of his great-uncles had been at school there in Rawlinson's day.<sup>1</sup> In March 1768 John having left Cheam was apprenticed to a Mr. Rogers in London where he attended an Academy to learn accounts. He fell ill and died in London and was buried at Banstead. His funeral expenses amounting to about £75 or, including the mourning rings which were customary, to £100 afford, when compared with the school bills, a curious commentary on the relative values attached at the time to knowledge and to ceremonial.

SIR

CHEAM Jan 27. 1767

Please to pay to Mess<sup>rs</sup> Cassels & Whateley or their order y<sup>e</sup> sum of thirty p<sup>d</sup> 19/2 on y<sup>e</sup> acc<sup>t</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> humble serv<sup>t</sup>

WILL. GILPIN.

TO DANIEL LAMBERT ESQ<sup>r</sup>  
IN SAVAGE GARDENS.

[Enclosure]

Mr Lambert's acc<sup>t</sup> fr<sup>m</sup> Jan. 27 1766 to Jan. 27. 1767

	£		
For board and tuition .. .. .	25	-	-
writing and arithmetic .. .. .	2	-	-
dancing .. .. .	-	-	-
drawing, and materials .. .. .	-	-	-
weekly allowance .. .. .	-	16	-
paper .. .. .	-	6	-
coals .. .. .	-	6	-
tayl <sup>rs</sup> and shoem <sup>rs</sup> bills .. .. .	1	6	8

<sup>1</sup> See note on page 80.



January 1766	
	Cutting his hair .. .. . £- 1 -
	½ lb tea for Mrs Gilpin .. .. - 8 -
	2 Pair of Shoes .. .. . - 7 -
	A coach to school .. .. . - 3 -
[? date	Cutting his hair .. .. . - 1 -
missing]	3 Handkerchiefs .. .. . - 2 -
May	Cutting his hair .. .. . - 1 -
August	2 pair of shoes .. .. . - 7 -
	Garters .. .. . - - 5
	Black leather breeches .. .. - 7 -
October	Gloves .. .. . - 1 -
	2 Hatts .. .. . - 18 6
	3 pair of Shoes .. .. . - 10 6
Dece <sup>r</sup>	Cutting his hair .. .. . - 1 -
£3 - 8 - 5	

Even if, as would appear to be the case, John grew very quickly out of his shoes it is clear that the cost of maintaining a boy of fourteen at Cheam was very moderate. The cost of hair-cutting and of the hats seems oddly disproportionate.

We have seen that Gilpin encouraged cricket. Thomas Lambert, one of John's elder brothers who had preceded him at the school, evidently carried his love for the game with him to Oporto. Writing home on 13 April 1765 he refers to a cricket match got up by the English Colony in which he and a cousin had been playing and adds:

P.S. Shall be glad if you would be so kind as to send me 2 cricket bats about 3 ft 3 inches long and the other about 3 ft 4 inches. Makers name Will<sup>m</sup> Pett, Sevenoaks, Kent, which you'll find marked on the Head of them. I would have them light—they are to be had at Mrs Downier at the Catherine Wheel in Old Bedlam—you'll likewise speak to M<sup>r</sup> Ingram<sup>1</sup> to get me one of the best Balls.

Thomas Lambert's letters are not remarkable as literary productions, but at least in his case Gilpin seems to have turned out a keen cricketer.

<sup>1</sup> Probably the man who kept the Woolpack at Banstead: see S.A.C. vol xxxiii p. 78.