

ART. X – *Lowther College 1697-1740: "For none but gentlemen's sons"*. By J. V. BECKETT, B.A., Ph.D.

DURING the 1680s Sir John Lowther of Lowther (created Viscount Lonsdale 1696) decided to rebuild his main seat in Westmorland, Lowther Hall. Unfortunately, to quote his own words, "the hous (*sic*) stood in the middle of the village, the lands belonging to the village surrounded the hous . . . so that without buying in the whole town it was impossible to make anie thing considerable". Consequently he purchased the existing properties and rebuilt the village at a distance. Amongst the new buildings was one which was periodically used for lace, linen and woollen manufacture, until Lonsdale finally abandoned his efforts to promote textiles in 1697. The building was converted into a school, Lonsdale having "from my verie youth thought it the dutie of everie good man to endeavour the wellfare off his countrie, and in order to that when I was verie young I resolved to lie out a considerable summe to that purpose".¹

The school, Lowther College, opened in the summer of 1697 and was intended "for none but gentlemen's sons". Although no register has survived there is evidence to show that during its relatively short lifetime it had a variety of scholars. Robert Molesworth (later first Viscount Molesworth) told his wife in 1700 that the College would be suitable for their four sons then of school age.² Sir Joseph Pennington of Muncaster in west Cumberland sent his son there in the 1720s and recommended it to Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, the Scottish coal magnate. The latter's "Journie to Carlyle and Penrith in 1731" (CW2 lxi, 1961, 202-37) was occasioned by a visit to his second son George who was studying at the College.

Lonsdale settled two estates on the school, the manor of Darnbrook in County Durham and the rectory of Hale in west Cumberland, which together yielded £128 a year. He confirmed the settlement in his will. Out of this income the masters' salaries had to be found, but extraordinary expenses such as repairs to the buildings were met from ordinary estate expenditure.³ The boys were boarded out in the village. By eighteenth-century standards this was a generous endowment. Robert Molesworth noted that the masters were well paid and, by way of comparison, Eton College had to support a provost, vice-provost, seven fellows, seventy scholars on the foundation, and a full choir for the chapel, with officers and servants, from its settled revenue of £5,000 a year.⁴

For reasons explained in the document printed below, Lonsdale intended to have two masters who would share an annual salary of £100. Gabriel Trant, a Frenchman and one-time Catholic priest, was the first headmaster, and his colleague was a Mr Withers. The latter left in the summer of 1698, and Trant was joined later that year by Thomas Lodge, formerly headmaster of Heversham, Lancaster and Preston grammar schools. Trant died in June 1705 and Lodge, who succeeded him as headmaster, worked alone until early in 1706 when he was joined by Charles Lost. A Mr Maturin became second master after Lost

left in 1712. The record fails from then until 1715, by which time both Lodge and Maturin had left and William Wilkinson was sole master.⁵

Wilkinson (1685-1751), a native of Crosby Ravensworth, was educated at Queen's College, Oxford. He is reputed to have used classical dramatic performances as a medium for teaching, and Sir John Clerk described him as "a very fit man for his business in all respects". From 1715 until 1740 Wilkinson was paid for doing the work of both masters at the College, although to help him out a writing master was employed for between four and six weeks during August and September each year. In the spring of 1739 Wilkinson made known his desire to leave the school, and the third Viscount Lonsdale decided to re-convert the building to a manufactory. According to Sir James Lowther of Whitehaven, Lonsdale thought this would "not only do more good to the county but be more pleasing to the country in general as it will employ a good deal of the coarse wool and consume more provisions".⁶ Wilkinson left during the summer of 1740 and in September that year the manufactory re-opened.⁷

The first viscount's hopes for the school were set out in a document printed below and evidently composed some time between Lodge's arrival late in 1698 and his own death in the summer of 1700. It is interesting from many points of view, although we cannot be sure how far Lonsdale's theory was put into practice. Perhaps the most significant point about his intentions is that he had clearly been influenced by the views John Locke expressed in his treatise on education published in 1693. He may have been echoing Locke, whose manual was written "for the breeding of a young gentleman", by stipulating that his school should provide character training for "gentlemen's sons". More specifically Locke's influence can be seen in Lonsdale's views on the curriculum and discipline. Locke believed French and Latin should be supplemented by "arithmetic, geography, chronology, history and geometry", and that poetry should not be included. Lonsdale suggested that history, chronology and the rudiments of mathematics should be amongst the subjects taught, and he "would not take up their time or incline their thoughts to poetry or fiction". On physical punishment, Locke championed the view, which was beginning to gain ground in the later seventeenth century, that excessive corporal punishment was self-defeating and educationally harmful.⁸ For his part Lonsdale recommended that discipline should be mild and gentle.

These then are the views of an aristocratic school proprietor, and they reveal some of the intentions with which Lowther College was established even if they provide only an inadequate substitute for the absence of more information about its forty-three-year history.

A Copy of the Right Honorable the Lord Viscount Lonsdale's Constitutions for his new erected College and Free School at Lowther.

My design in erecting this school is not onely that such gentlemen's sons and others, who shall be instructed in it, may learn the most necessary languages, as Latin, Greek and French, but (which I value millions of times more) that they may be render'd in it perfectly religious, vertuous, honest and honourable men; more desiring and intending the good of their souls than all other worldly ornaments or advantages. But because also those have their just value, I would and hope they may grow up together. I would with the greatest innocence of life have all the requisite qualifications taught that may render them of use and ornament to their country and therefore, if my ability would have given me

leave, I would have nothing left unprovided for that might have conduced to soe great and publick a benefit. But since my fortune and circumstances have set limits to my design and that the perfecting soe great a design must either be the work of time or of a very great estate, I hope that either the bounty of the prince, or the blessing of God upon my posterity, may compleat what I have been onely able to lay the foundations of.

In order therefore to have this great work of education and instructing of youth performed with vigour and chearfulness, I have provided for two masters to relieve one another and by turns to undergoe the labour. As well knowing that it must be a very great labour of the mind (which requires as much refreshment as the body) for a master all day to be intent upon soe great an exercise and the consideration of that labour, which is to be endless and without relaxation, must needs render it unpleasant. It cannot also but create a dulness in youth, since there is nothing more natural than to have the mind slacken'd and the attentions diverted from objects and things that admitt of no variation. Wherefore if half the day be at the master's own disposal the other half I hope may be employed in the school with application and spirit. The schollars also by little refreshments betwixt the times of the masters' changing turns and by learning from another master another thing will have their minds unbended, their spirits excited as well as their attentions, and the usual vivacity which attends minds that are pleased will appear. But besides this advantage that may arise to their learning it will afford the masters by turns leisure to attend them in their sports and exercises, things absolutely necessary for their healths, and which are to be indulged to them soe far as may agree with innocence and health.

And in this piece of duty lies the great hopes I have of the success of my design and prosperity of my undertaking: for in vain shall prayers be read, in vain shall masters preach religion or morality if they be suffer'd at the hours of play and liberty to contract vicious habits and converse with idle and profligate persons and in vain is all learning and knowledge that does not tend the conducting of us from the love of this short, uncertain and uneasy life to the contemplation of that great and eternal God, the author of all things and who hath everlasting life in his disposal.

Therefore it is that with the strictest injunction and preferable to all other things I would have one of the masters always attend the schollars when they are out of the school that soe noe swearing, noe strife, noe lying nor the least immodest word or action may be discover'd amongst them. Thereby will the masters be acquainted with the true temper and disposition of the youths; what vices to guard against, what vertues to encourage, and many other profitable observations to their good and advantage: especially if freedom and familiarity be allow'd, as by all means I would advise at such times, for the masters will be soe far from losing their authority thereby, that they will encrease it. They will gain the better motive of respect by it which is love, fear causing but an unwilling obedience when the authority is exercised, but love makes our submission our choice, which operated even unrequired. And I do extremely wish and desire that the discipline of the school may be carried on with as much mildness and gentleness as may be being most proper for the forming in the mind good dispositions and moderations of passions, which is a thing necessary for all degrees of men but especially gentlemen, and it is for gentlemen especially that this school is designed. Now for the making a th(o)rough impression of vertue and all goodness in the minds of the young men I would advise that their themes and exercises be always upon that subject and I would wish that the masters (besides their private admonitions) would make some oration or formal speech upon some vertuous and

honourable subject illustrating the discourse drawn from history of brave and generous actions with their examples, or of some pious and godly men, without suffering in their own discourse, or in the exercise of their scholars, any quotation of the heathen gods or of fabulous history, but presidents of authentick history and, where the subjects will bear it, from personages of our own country; and this at least once a week. I would have the scholars frequently repeat their themes or orations upon such subjects either in the English, Latin or French tongues, in which languages all business forreign or domestick is negotiated. I would have the style perfectly plain and expressive, divested of all affectation or rhetorical expressions, plain sense and plain words being only of use in all great business. I would have the elocution particularly regarded, that it be distinct and vigorous, but without tone or affectation. I would not take up their time or incline their thoughts to poetry or fiction, or anything they must unlearn when they are men, as other schools do, but would have their studies such as every man (that bears a character in the world) must know. Wherefore regard being first had (as I have said before) to religion and vertue, and to that end they being more acquainted with Seneca and Cicero than Virgil and Ovid, I would desire that they might learn geography and the general scheme of history and chronology and that such as have a genius for it and are capable of it may be instructed in the common rudiments of the mathematicks, that seem to me infinitely more usefull than all the fables of Jupiter and the heathen gods and the poetry of Homer, Virgil and Ovid. These things must be learned by men the other must be forgotten. I would advise that their judgments should be more exercised than their memories. I had rather they made a good theme on one page than repeated a hundred verses. I would have honorary rewards for those that make the best exercises but much more for those who doe the most modest and vertuous actions, that as there should be all mild inducements to incline them to learn and study soe there should be all rigour in the punishment of vice. But perhaps punishments where the crimes are not publick and notorious are best in private lest the publick chastisement should rather harden them and make them obstinate than reform them. 'Tis true that open and known faults for a terrour and example to others must openly be punished and all commendations, which ought to be as little forgotten as reproofs, should be publick. I will endeavour to provide occasionally for Thursdays and Saturdays in the afternoon a dancing master to teach them a little the air and garb of gentlemen, well considering that since custom of the world hath made several motions and gestures decent and others ridiculous, that theirs is the best age for learning such things nothing being more inconvenient than for young men when they should be applying themselves assiduously to the study of the law or public business, or some other useful and proffitable knowledge, to have their thoughts diverted, their time mis-spent and their morals debauch'd by an exercise which nothing but the custom of the age (with which 'tis a necessity for us in many things to comply) could render sufferable. But since some travail to noe better purpose and almost everybody is at that great expense about it for their children and that at unseasonable ages, I hope it may be of use to anticipate the expense of so much money and time.

And thus if I can have our young men goe out of our school endued with all religious, vertuous and honest dispositions, with knowledge of the Greek, Latin and French tongues, with such knowledge of history and geography and parts as every man must or ought to learn with the fashion and deportment of gentlemen, then I hope I have obtained a point not yet soe much as undertaken, *viz.* in any publick school. Then will they be

ready for all the advantages of travail without the laborious exercise of learning the language or for any of those studys or employments by which men become usefull to the publick, to themselves, or their friends and relations.

To reduce this therefore to practice under our present masters from whose vertue, prudence and care I (by God's blessing) in the least doe not fear good success, I would desire that at six of the clock every morning the school may be open'd beginning with prayers: that one of the masters as may best agree with their convenience and health may teach till half an hour after eight, that there be then a cessation for half an hour, that then the other master doe resume the school and soe continue till half an hour after eleven, that after dinner also they alternatively ease one another, till six of the clock at night, when the school is to break up with prayers.

That Mr Lodge's care be to teach the Greek and Latin tongues according to the age and capacity of the boys, with regard also to the proper writing and speaking of English, both as to the orthography and stile, as also out of such authors as he shall judge most proper for those parts of learning I have in this paper desired may be taught.

And that Mr Trant's care be to teach the Latin, Greek and French, in the manner abovesaid.

Lonsdale⁹

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Notes and References

¹ C.R.O. D/Lons/L, Memoranda Book, Lord Lonsdale's second letter to his son. A1/19.

² Hist. MSS. Comm. *Various Collections*, viii, 221.

³ C.R.O. D/Lons/L Wills and Settlements 1585-1706, "A particular of my Lord Lonsdale's Estate, July 1700". There is a copy of Lonsdale's will in the Record Office under reference D/Lons/W Bound Volume of Copy Wills. D/Lons/L/A2/5.

⁴ D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1962 ed.), i, 312.

⁵ C.R.O. D/Lons /L/A1/19, A2/2, 6. F. J. G. Robinson, "Trends in Education in Northern England during the Eighteenth Century: A Biographical Study", (Universty of Newcastle upon Tyne, Ph.D. thesis, 1972), T.373, L.332, 378, W.543.

⁶ W. A. J. Prevost, "A Journie to Carlyle and Penrith in 1731", CW2 lxi (1961), 205, 209-10.

⁷ Quarterly payments of Wilkinson's salary can be traced through the D/Lons /L estate accounts (A2 series and the "Monthly Accounts") in Carlisle Record Office. The last payment was on 31 July 1740. J. V. Beckett, "The Eighteenth-Century Origins of the Factory System: A Case study from the 1740s", *Business History*, xix (1977), 57.

⁸ J. L. Axtell (ed.), *The Educational Writings of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1968), 52, 183, 283-5, 289.

⁹ Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ballard MS 10, fos 202-5. The document is not in Lonsdale's hand.

