

# Sunday schools in Sussex in the late 18th century

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*Most detailed accounts of the early Sunday schools relate primarily to London or the industrial Midlands and North; this article records the experience of a rural county in the South. The evidence of the extent of the 'Sunday school movement' in Sussex in the late 18th century is examined. Sunday schools were then one-day-a-week charity schools. Motives for setting them up were mixed, but in Sussex the dominant motive appears to have been to preserve the social order. They were established more at the instigation of the laity than of the clergy. They evidenced growing acceptance of the idea of more widespread schooling of the poor, financed by the affluent, and the relatively large numbers of children the 18th-century Sunday schools accommodated prefigured the general expansion of elementary education that occurred in the early decades of the 19th century.*

A canon of the Church of England required every parson, vicar or curate to examine and instruct the youth of his parish for half an hour or more every Sunday before evening prayer; and in the service for the making of deacons, the candidate was specifically required, among other duties, 'in the Church where he shall be appointed... to instruct the youth in the Catechism'.<sup>1</sup> In the lax 18th century, it may be doubted whether most incumbents and curates obeyed these instructions, but a number certainly did so; and it would seem that sometimes, in addition to teaching the catechism, they gave some instruction in reading. In 1709, George Keith, rector of Edburton, advised the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge that, although there was no charity school in his parish, most of the children there could read and say their catechism;<sup>2</sup> this was almost certainly as a result of his own teaching. In 1724 the Steyning churchwardens reported that the incumbent, John Mathew, catechized every Sunday afternoon from Michaelmas to Lady day and after recording the number of dissenting families in the parish, they added: 'Note — Many of the Children of these come to Church'.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the children of dissenters came to the church strongly suggests that Mathew gave them some schooling — an early Sunday school open to all denominations. Another example of charity schooling that may have prefigured the Sunday schools of the late 18th century occurred at

Mayfield. In October 1730, James Oldfield wrote to the S.P.C.K. 'That he is endeavouring to introduce Catechising there & last Sunday had about 30 Children for whose Use he desires some Books to be paid for.' In April the following year he ordered some further tracts from the S.P.C.K., noting that he had made 'a good Collection at Mayfield for the poor Children to the number of about 40' and hoped it would become a regular charity school. Later in 1731 he reported that he had 'several Children at School' but could not yet form it into a regular charity school.<sup>4</sup>

One or two Sunday schools had been started in England in the 17th century, and from 1750 a number were set up by both Anglicans and dissenters, and by both clergy and laity. But the 'Sunday school movement' as such did not gather momentum until, in 1784, the *Gentleman's Magazine* published an account by Robert Raikes of how he had founded four small Sunday schools in Gloucester. This account was further disseminated by other magazines and newspapers, and Sunday schools quickly became a widespread form of charity.<sup>5</sup>

Was there a 'Sunday school movement' in Sussex? The difficulty is that we have no certain knowledge as to how many Sunday schools were established in Sussex in the early years of the 'movement'. There was no formal register, and often the only evidence that a Sunday school existed comes from a passing reference. Thus, there was such

a school at Pulborough from at least the beginning of 1786 — possibly the earliest Sunday school in Sussex — but we know this only because the parish accounts show that the parish paid for teaching Sunday school from that time (initially 6d. a week to Dame Sheppard, but from March 1786 until at least November 1799 1s. a week to Nicholas Warner).<sup>6</sup> There was a Sunday school at Bishopstone from 1793 through to the 19th century, the evidence being that the overseers paid Mrs. Clark 1s. a week for ‘Sunday School’.<sup>7</sup> There was one operating at Southover before March 1790, when the parish advertised for a properly qualified person ‘to instruct the CHILDREN of the SUNDAY SCHOOL, belonging to the above parish, in PLAIN PSALMODY.’<sup>8</sup> The *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* reported that a Sunday school was opened at Selsey in October 1788, ‘under the patronage of the Minister’.<sup>9</sup> We know that a Sunday school was started at the Countess of Huntingdon’s chapel in Brighton in 1788 because in September 1913 it celebrated the 125th anniversary of its founding.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that a Sunday school was started at Ditchling in 1788 or 1789 because the Baptist John Burgess noted in his diary for 30/31 January 1789 that he ‘paid Mr Attree four Shilings What I Subscribed toward the Sunday School at Ditchling this is the first year of its been Established’; and we can safely infer that it was a parish and not a Baptist Sunday school, since no Attrees are known to have belonged to the Baptist community there and since the bishop’s transcripts record a John Attree as churchwarden in 1785/6 and 1786/7 (and very likely also in 1787/8 and 1788/9, when the churchwardens did not sign the transcripts). This last example, apart from identifying the existence of a Sunday school, is of interest on two counts: for the support given to a Church of England school by a dissenter (Burgess was a General Baptist preacher) and for the support from a not very successful tradesman (Burgess was a breeches-maker; the income from his trade does not appear to have been very large, and in 1794 his business failed: his 4s. subscription was generous).<sup>11</sup>

At least 18 Sunday schools were set up in Sussex between 1786 and 1797:<sup>12</sup>

- 1786 Pulborough  
Waldron
- 1787 Horsham
- 1788 Brighton (‘Brighthelmston’ in the 18th century)  
Southover (subscription raised before

February 1788; certainly in operation prior to March 1790)

Lewes (subscription raised February 1788; two or more Sunday schools operating by December 1789)

Brighton, Countess of Huntingdon chapel

Selsey

By 1789 Glynde

1788/89 Ditchling

1789 Chichester (two Sunday schools)

1790 East Grinstead (subscription raised and house donated April 1790)

1792 Arundel

1793 Bishopstone

1795 East Dean (West Sussex)

c. 1797 Rottingdean

There were almost certainly others, and we may speculate — on the basis of rather faint clues — that certain parishes may have been among them. Each year at Brighton a charity sermon was preached on behalf of the Sunday school. The preachers were clearly promoters of Sunday schools, and it seems probable that they would have had such a school in their own parishes. In September 1789 Nicholas Turner, instituted that June as rector of Sutton, was advertized to preach the sermon. In the event, the sermon that year was preached by Joseph Fearon, vicar of Fittleworth. He was also master of Cuckfield grammar school and became vicar of Cuckfield in 1801; his influence could well have led to the establishment of a Sunday school there before the end of the century. The sermon in September 1791 was preached by George Pelham, vicar of Laughton since 1790. So there may well have been Sunday schools at Sutton, Fittleworth, Cuckfield, Laughton.<sup>13</sup> Another possible source is the 3rd Viscount Gage’s account book, which records payments for schooling at West Firlie from at least 1793 to the end of the century. One payment, in 1797, is attributed to ‘The Church Children’, which suggests he may have supported a Sunday school there. He also paid sums for schooling children at Alciston, and in 1800 he gave £1.16.0 for the ‘Prayer Book Children’, which may indicate support for a Sunday school. So perhaps Sunday schools existed at West Firlie and Alciston.<sup>14</sup>

Like the subscription charity schools, Sunday schools could fail. In 1789 the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* reported: ‘We hear from Chichester, that two Sunday schools have lately been opened in that

city, under the patronage of many respectable Ladies.' But by June 1796, editorial comment and an article on education in *The County Mirror and Chichester Magazine* make it clear that there was then no Sunday school at Chichester.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, a significant 'Sunday school movement' was certainly under way in Sussex before the end of the 18th century.

#### ONE-DAY-A-WEEK CHARITY SCHOOLS

Sunday schools, at this time, were all-day schools, or one-day-a-week charity schools with a special emphasis on religious instruction. The rules for the Sunday school at Glynde have survived; they were drawn up at some point before August 1789.<sup>16</sup>

The children are to be in the School by nine o Clock every Sunday morning and stop till Eleven and at two in the afternoon & stay till four, except when the Evening service begins at two, then to be at the school at one o Clock and stop one hour before service and one hour after.

Attendance at the church services may be assumed, although this is not mentioned in the rules. It is clear, however, that there was time for teaching the children to read. Discipline was maintained by the threat of expulsion:

If any of the scholars are guilty of lying swearing or talking in any indecent manner, or otherwise misbehaving themselves, the teacher shall point out the evil of such conduct, and if after repeated reproof the scholar shall not be reformed, he or she shall be excluded the said school.

The children were required to be clean and neatly dressed, but the rules show an understanding of the difficulties of poor parents:

The Parents are desired to send their Children regularly to school clean in their persons and as decently clothed as their circumstances will permit.

One other rule, later deleted, is of interest on two counts — firstly, that it was initially included; secondly, that it was later deleted. It required the following admonition to be read to the children before they left the school:

Your benefactors require you to refrain (during the remainder of this day) from Hallowing or making any noise — but those who chuse to amuse themselves behave quietly and soberly,

thus will recommend yourselves to the favor of your betters and incline them to do you many Acts of kindness, which noisy wicked and Illnated Children will be excluded.

The school continued into the 19th century, and in 1803 was being kept by the parish clerk.<sup>17</sup>

We may note that at Glynde the children were referred to as 'scholars'. A correspondent from Waldron, writing in 1788, two years after the Sunday school had been established there, commented as follows:

As to that specious objection which some have made, that young persons instructed but *one day* in seven are not likely even to learn to read, I am happy to have it in my power to lay a-side, as futile and fallacious; for I aver there are at this time several at our Sunday-school, that did not know so much as the letters when they first entered, who are now able to read decently, and *without any other assistance*.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of the proposed Sunday schools at Lewes, agreed at a public meeting in February 1788, was simply 'the Education of poor Children resident in Lewes, and its Environs'.<sup>19</sup> At Horsham, in 1787, the Sunday school children were 'taught reading, and a proper observance of the Lord's day'.<sup>20</sup> At Arundel, in 1794, where 30 boys and 30 girls were being 'attentively educated' at the Sunday school, every Sunday 'the clergyman and committee, or at least two of them, attend regularly to hear them read the lessons of the day, &c. &c.'<sup>21</sup>

Within the general framework of a Sunday school, there were in the country as a whole many different types. Regional differences were important; motivations and practices in the industrial north appear to have been different from those that were predominant in the south. Above all, the ethos of such schools could vary widely. There is no evidence in Sussex of any of the extreme evangelical persuasion, such as that at Southwark where Thomas Cranfield, addressing his pupils, would give such scope to his feelings that he himself would be overcome, and 'both teachers and children were excited to tears'.<sup>22</sup> Nor in 18th-century Sussex is there evidence of Sunday schools, such as some created by the Wesleyan Methodists, which subjected poor children to 'a pitiless ideology of work'.<sup>23</sup> Mary Fletcher, a Methodist schoolmistress, said of a charity school in 1764: 'As our Design is to fit them for good Servants, we endeavour as early as possible to inure them to Labour, Early Rising, and

Cleanliness... We never use the Term Play, nor suffer any to give those Toys or Playthings, which Children are usually brought up to spend half their time in.<sup>24</sup> Despite John Wesley's concern for education, and his several visits to George Pike's school at Robertsbridge in the 1770s and early 1780s, no Wesleyan Methodist Sunday schools were started in Sussex until 1809, when two were opened, one at Brighton and another at Lewes.<sup>25</sup>

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Malcolm Dick has written: 'The origins of Sunday school provision lie in the atmosphere of moral alarm which entered the mental world of the English propertied classes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.'<sup>26</sup> As in the charity schools, Sunday school children were to be taught that their social duties — that is, their social subservience — and personal well-being were the same. William Wilberforce in *Practical Christianity* (1797) asserted that Christianity rendered 'the inequalities of the social state less galling to the lower orders'; it instructed them 'that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties and contentedly to bear its inconveniences.'<sup>27</sup> But there was more to it than this. Robert Raikes was moved to set up his Sunday schools after seeing ragged poor children at play in a street, lamenting their misery and idleness, and being told that on Sunday 'the street is filled with multitudes of these wretches who, released on that day from their employment, spend their time in noise and riot and playing at chuck, and cursing and swearing'.<sup>28</sup> Thomas Laqueur has observed:

Three sets of ideas or feelings influenced to varying degrees the founding of Sunday schools. For some, the new institution was an instrument for the moral rescue of poor children from their corrupt parents, thereby at one stroke insuring the happiness of the little ones and the regeneration of society. Others saw in the schools primarily a means of spreading the Word of God, an end valuable for its own sake. Thirdly, a new, soft, kind, more optimistic and sentimental view of children and childhood induced benevolent men and women to direct their attention to the young.<sup>29</sup>

All three 'sets of ideas' are evidenced in Sussex. Illustrating the evangelical appeal with its consequent social benefits, the correspondent from Waldron reporting in 1788 on the Sunday school there, saw the purpose of Sunday schools as 'to rescue the children of the poor from ignorance, idleness, and vice, and to instruct them in the duties of morality and religion ... to lead them, by a pious and moral conduct, to happiness on earth, and to everlasting glory and felicity in the world to come ...'. The evangelical motive did not preclude giving poor children some education, that is, teaching them to read. Nor did it preclude a genuine concern for, even compassion for, the children of the poor. Ten months after the Sunday school at Brighton was set up, the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* reported:

The attention shown to the poor children of the Brighthelmston Sunday-School, by the ladies who condescended to dine at their table on Christmas-day, was truly laudable, and affords an example for the imitation of others, whereby these useful seminaries may be rendered as permanent as they are promising to the cause of Religion and Virtue.<sup>30</sup>

The word 'condescend' has a pejorative meaning today; it did not then. Within the rigid class structure of the 18th century, the action of these ladies in giving up their time on Christmas day, and in sitting down with the poor children and eating with them, was, indeed, 'truly laudable'.

But in Sussex those who founded and supported Sunday schools appear to have done so primarily to preserve the social order: a Christian indoctrination of children of the poor was seen as a means to this end. The priorities were clearly stated by the inhabitants of East Grinstead in April 1790, on the occasion of a celebration of 'the anniversary of his Majesty's recovery':

In the course of the day, the following resolutions were entered into:

1. That the happiness and prosperity of the kingdom depend upon the morality of its people.
2. That the meeting considered it a duty incumbent on them, to instil morality into the minds of the youth of the said parish: they therefore agreed to establish a Sunday School, and immediately entered into an annual subscription for that purpose...<sup>31</sup>

The value of enforced observance of the Sabbath was stressed by the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* in 1788:

Had Sunday Schools been instituted a century ago, after the manner they are now diffusing themselves throughout the kingdom, we much question if the records of the Old Bailey had been so voluminous as they now are. A strict observance of the Sabbath Day (which Sunday Schools are so admirably calculated to enforce) is certainly very essential to the well-being of society, as hath been made manifest by the dying declarations of numberless unhappy wretches who have made their exit at the gallows and who attributed all their misfortunes to an early abuse of the Lord's Day.<sup>32</sup>

This may seem an exaggerated claim, but as Malcolm Dick has noted: 'There was a widespread belief that the misuse of the Sabbath led first to idleness, then to drink followed by disorder and crime. Sabbath-breaking, Raikes wrote, "appears by the declaration of every criminal to be their first step in the course of wickedness".'<sup>33</sup>

At the Quarter Sessions held at Lewes in October 1792, 'the Chairman in his charge to the Grand Jury observed and lamented, that of late felonies had much increased in this division of our County; and as a means of preventing them in future, he recommended attention to *Sunday Schools*.'<sup>34</sup>

In December 1788 the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* proposed that pressure be put on the poor to encourage them to send their children to Sunday schools:

'Tis submitted to the consideration of those who at this inclement season, may have the distribution of charitable donations, whether it would not be proper to discriminate a little between the parents of poor families who show a disposition to religion and morality by sending their children regularly to the Sunday Schools, and those who do not; as such discrimination might produce a good effect on those who through indolence or a vicious habit, refuse their children the advantages which are so liberally offered to them through the medium of those useful seminaries.<sup>35</sup>

Not all thought Sunday schools 'useful'. There was opposition to them because they taught the poor to read. John Byng, later 5th viscount Torrington, who put his son Henry to school at Victor Raymond's French academy in Lewes in 1788, wrote in his diary for 13 June 1790:

I have met some of the newly-adopted Sunday-

schools today [in Stockport], and seen others in their schools; I am point blank against these institutions; the poor shou'd not read, and of writing I never heard, for them, the use.<sup>36</sup>

After the start of the French revolution (1789) and more particularly after the execution of the king and the subsequent terror (1793), there were in England increased fears that teaching the poor to read would lead to subversion. Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, published in two parts in 1791 and 1792, was regarded as especially subversive. The second part included Paine's proposals for 'improving the condition of Europe' and particularly of England; among them were: a large reduction of administrative expenditure and taxation; provision for the aged poor; family allowances; allowances for the education of the poor; maternity grants; funeral grants; a graduated income tax; and limitations of armaments by treaty.<sup>37</sup> Paine, at one time a schoolmaster, lived in Lewes for six years, being posted there as an excise officer in 1768; in 1771 he married at Lewes, as his second wife, Elizabeth Ollive, a young schoolmistress, daughter of Samuel Ollive in whose house he had lodged.<sup>38</sup> Fears of subversion may have been exacerbated in Sussex by the Paine connection and by the closeness of the county to France, especially when in 1792 the war with France resulted in a great influx of militia and regular troops all along the coast. But these fears would have also added impetus to the drive to combat the threat of social disorder by indoctrinating the children of the poor — through charity schools and Sunday schools — with 'the principles of the Christian religion', and in particular with the divinely ordained subservience, or subordination, of the poor. The schools increased.

#### THE 'GENTLEMEN, CLERGY, AND PRINCIPAL INHABITANTS'

The Sunday school at Selsey was 'under the patronage of the Minister'; and that at Rottingdean was established c. 1797 and superintended for over 40 years by the vicar, Thomas Hooker;<sup>39</sup> but in general the Sussex Sunday schools appear to have been initiated and supported primarily by the laity. The establishment of the largest such school, that at Brighton (1788), is credited to Nathaniel Kemp, gentleman, of Preston Manor and later of Ovingdean Hall; and the school of industry started there in the same year and supported by the same subscriptions,

was under the patronage of his wife, Martha, and other ladies.<sup>40</sup> At Chichester, the two Sunday schools that were opened in 1789 were 'under the patronage of many respectable ladies'. At Arundel, where the Sunday school was started in 1792, 'Mr. Bushby, Mayor of that Town, and Mr. Thomas Coote, have the credit of the Institution'.<sup>41</sup> At East Grinstead, in 1790, 'the inhabitants of the town' agreed to establish a Sunday school and immediately raised an annual subscription of over £16 and William Tooth, one of the gentlemen present, offered to supply a house, worth at least £8 a year, in which the school could be kept.<sup>42</sup> The managers of the Glynde Sunday school were the vicar and five of the leading laymen in the parish. At Lewes, in February and March 1788, a number of meetings were held 'of the GENTLEMEN, CLERGY, and principal INHABITANTS' with a view to establishing Sunday schools there; the meetings were under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Blackman; subscribers of one guinea annually were entitled to be on the committee. The 16 members of the committee nominated to solicit and receive subscriptions were all laity, their occupations being:

Sir Henry Blackman, wine-merchant  
 John Boys, Esq., probably the gentleman freehold farmer at Ashcombe, near Lewes  
 William Sisson, Esq., of Lucan, Ireland, and later of Chester  
 Thomas Harben, Esq., ironmonger and banker  
 Bamster Flight, Esq., banker  
 Mr Richard King, soap-boiler and banker  
 William Cooper, Esq., Mr W. B. Langridge and Mr John Hoper, jun., attorneys  
 Mr Henry Verrall, surgeon  
 Mr Samuel Snashall, probably rentier and former surgeon  
 Mr R. P. Rickman, brewer, coal-merchant and grocer  
 Mr William Lee, printer and newspaper proprietor  
 Mr Thomas Funnell, draper  
 Mr T. Rickman, jun., corn-miller  
 Mr Joseph Morris, jun., soap-boiler and tallowchandler.<sup>43</sup>

#### FINANCING THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS

Like all charity schools, Sunday schools depended on money. But a village Sunday school could be operated at very little cost. As has been noted, some were paid for out of the poor rate, at 6d., or more usually 1s. a week — or, allowing a little for primers,

at a cost of £2 to £3 a year. The bishop of Chester observed: 'The whole expence of instructing twenty children, including books, rewards, and every other charge, will not amount to five pounds a year; a sum so trifling and so easy to be raised that it cannot create the smallest difficulty.'<sup>44</sup> At other larger and more elaborate Sunday schools a very different order of cost was involved. The largest and most ambitious 18th-century Sunday school in Sussex was that at Brighton.

In January 1788 a subscription for a Sunday school was 'set afoot' at Brighton and the early response was 'upwards of twenty guineas'.<sup>45</sup> An address was circulated to every householder in the town, which began: 'The intended objects of this institution are infant children of either sex, or of any denomination, whose necessities require this assistance'.<sup>46</sup> On 12 February, 128 children were admitted to the school — 54 boys and 74 girls — and two mistresses and one master were engaged; the school began on Sunday, 17 February.<sup>47</sup> By September that year a school of industry had also been set up, and from that time all fund-raising activities were for both institutions, the Sunday school and the school of industry. The latter was initially established in the Town Hall; by 1813 it was in Church Street, and was educating 46 poor girls; by 1818 it had 150 girls, 70 of whom were clothed (in green, according to one report).<sup>48</sup> Advertisements placed by the charity suggest that the school of industry was concerned to teach girls to read, sew, knit and spin.<sup>49</sup> In 1789 and 1791 Miss Paine was responsible for the children of both schools, who were under her 'care and tuition' and on whose 'respectable appearance' she was commended (she later kept her own school in Brighton).<sup>50</sup> In an advertisement in 1797 for a mistress for the Sunday school and school of industry, the salary was described as 'considerable'.<sup>51</sup> Efforts were made to give the schools an identity, and the children were provided with uniforms. On the first anniversary of the Sunday school, in 1789, 'the Children appeared in their little uniforms, with the addition of a blue favour, worn in commemoration of the day. - They were in number near two hundred, and walking in procession, made a very neat and respectable appearance'.<sup>52</sup>

The institution was fortunate in having, from the beginning, the public patronage of 'His Royal Highness the PRINCE of Wales', and later of 'their Royal Highnesses, the PRINCE and PRINCESS of

WALES'.<sup>53</sup> But despite the royal patronage and the annual subscriptions, the schools were dependent on funds raised by concerts, charity sermons, and even charity plays given by the theatre. (The idea of the theatre managers and their companies, at both Brighton and Lewes, giving performances for the benefit of the Sunday schools, 'originated with Lord Eardley, whose contributions have been very liberal on the occasion'.<sup>54</sup>) Within a month of its opening, the Sunday school advertised a concert and ball, with the assistance of the band of the 11th Regiment of Dragoons: 'Tickets 3s. 6d. (Tea included)'.<sup>55</sup> But the most important supplementary contributions came from annual charity sermons preached at the parish church or, from 1795, at the Chapel Royal — at the opening of which on 2 August, there was a charity sermon for the children of the Sunday school and school of industry, and 'Their Royal Highnesses the PRINCE and PRINCESS of WALES were present'.<sup>56</sup> These services sometimes had added attractions: on three occasions solos were sung by Mrs Barthelemon, accompanied by Mr Barthelemon on the violin; on another 'Master Welsh ... sung divinely'. Always, the children sang their own hymns; in 1789 these were by two Sussex poets of national reputation, Charlotte Smith and William Hayley (both of whom had been scholars for a time at Chichester).<sup>57</sup> The service in 1788 raised more than £60, in 1789 £46, in 1790, £66, in 1794 'upwards of fifty pounds', in 1797 more than £60.<sup>58</sup> The dependence of the Sunday school on the collections at charity sermons is clear from the following report on that preached in 1797:

The excellent discourse of the Bishop of Rochester, on yesterday se'nnight, at the Chapel Royal, Brighton, for the benefit of the Sunday Schools and School of Industry, established in that town, was followed by a collection of more than £60. The good Prelate, added example to precept, by a very liberal donation to the charity; and the Committee who superintend the school, are indebted to his Lordship for a continuance of the institution, which without his pious exertions in its behalf, must have sunk under its almost exhausted funds.

The committee could not have anticipated a contribution that had come to them in 1792. At Brighton races on 3 August, Lord Egremont's horse, Felix, won the £50 plate. Immediately after the race he asked some gentlemen who stood near him whether there was a Sunday school at Brighton. He

was told there were two, and desired that the plate might be equally divided between them.<sup>59</sup>

The Brighton Sunday school was started in February 1788: in that month and in March there were meetings in Lewes set up with a view to establishing a Sunday school there. On 28 February, 'a very liberal subscription was entered into';<sup>60</sup> but Lewes, containing a number of parishes, was faced with a problem that had not arisen at Brighton, namely '... whether one general School, under the direction of a Committee of Subscribers at large, or distinct parochial Schools, were the most eligible'.<sup>61</sup> The meetings were concerned with 'Lewes, the Cliffe, and adjacent Places', and thus with seven parishes; one of these, Southover, had already entered into a subscription for a Sunday school. At a meeting in March, officers were appointed and procedures agreed, and it was resolved:

That it be recommended, (and it is herein accordingly recommended) to all Ministers, Churchwardens, Overseers, and other Inhabitants of the Town of Lewes, the Cliffe, and Neighbourhood thereof, to open and establish SUNDAY-SCHOOLS, within their respective Parishes, for the Instruction of poor Children, of all Denominations.

That parochial Schools opened as above recommended, on proper Application being made to the Secretary, be entitled to the Benefit of the general Fund, raised for the support of this Institution, in such Proportion as their Exigences may require, or as a Committee at their Meeting shall judge proper.<sup>62</sup>

Lewes, then, adopted central funding for the support of individual parish Sunday schools. No doubt such were established, but it is not known how many, or when (there were two or more operating by December 1789).<sup>63</sup>

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS

The most important characteristic of the Sunday schools was the large number of children that they taught. The Sunday school at Brighton, even without its associated school of industry, was by far the largest school of any kind in Sussex at that time. The Sunday school at Waldron was even more remarkable. By 1801, the population there was 752; in 1788, two years after its beginning, the Sunday school had 134 children, aged from 7 to 16, both

boys and girls, of whom more than 100 would be present on any one Sunday — an unprecedented number for any type of school at any Sussex village prior to that date.<sup>64</sup> There are only three other early Sunday schools for which we have numbers: at Horsham (1787) there were ‘upwards of sixty poor children, of both sexes’, and at Arundel (1792) 30 boys and 30 girls; at the small village of East Dean (1795) there were 40 children.<sup>65</sup>

The significance of these numbers is two-fold. In the first place, they show that poor parents were willing, perhaps anxious, to put their children to school. When a subscription was first raised for a Sunday school at Brighton, and before such a school had been established, the organizers received nearly 200 applications for places.<sup>66</sup> The support of the parents may have been attributable to the fact that these were *Sunday* schools, that did not interfere with a child’s work or earnings during the week; but this nevertheless expressed a positive response to the idea of schooling, when this was practical. The correspondent from Waldron, previously cited, made a shrewd point regarding the interaction that could be generated between children at a Sunday school and their parents:

Besides, when children have books given to them, and have the *name* of going to school, their parents will do all in their power to instruct them, when at the same time, but for the Sunday school, they would not, of themselves, have taken the trouble of teaching them a *single letter*.

We can note, as evidence of the potential of home instruction, that in East Sussex in the second half of the 18th century, in 73% of families either the father or mother (or both) could *write* — at least, as far as signing their name — and there would have been a higher proportion of families where one of the parents could read.<sup>67</sup> The fact that Sunday schools could act as a catalyst prompting home instruction is part of the ground swell that preceded the great increase of primary education in the early decades of the 19th century; at the very least they encouraged poor parents to take an interest in the education of their children. The correspondent from Waldron claimed that the effects on the parents went further than this:

Our Sunday-school has not only been the means of instructing the children to read, and giving *them* an idea of Morality and Religion, but even their *parents*, who before were too

apt to spend the sabbath in sloth and idleness, and sometimes in riot and intemperance, have since the commencement of this laudable institution, been pretty regular in their attendance at public worship.

The second significant aspect of the relatively large numbers of children catered for by the Sunday schools, is that, in Sussex at least, this education was paid for by the charity of the gentry and the middle classes. They also, of course, paid most of the poor rates, out of which some small Sunday schools were financed. The Sunday schools showed what could be done at a modest cost. In the early 19th century, two factors combined to promote a rapid expansion in the provision of elementary education. The first was the growing recognition and acceptance of the value of such education for the poor, and the second was the trick — used in both Joseph Lancaster’s undenominational schools and Andrew Bell’s National Church of England schools — of keeping the cost down by using older pupils to teach the younger. (Older pupils had been used as monitors in Sussex charity schools throughout the 18th century and this extension of their role was not all that extraordinary.) That many of those who supported Sunday schools were genuinely concerned with the education of the children, and not just with keeping them off the streets on Sundays, is evidenced from the beginning of the ‘Sunday school movement’ in Sussex. At Waldron, two years after the opening of the large Sunday school there in 1786:

Our annual subscription is on so *liberal a plan*, that besides the expence of a master to attend at the Sunday-School, and other incidental charges, we are able to send from fifteen to twenty to a *day-school* all the year.

At Brighton, in the same year that the Sunday school was opened (1788), the charity was extended to provide also, out of the same funds, the regular school of industry for girls.

Malcolm Dick, referring to the country as a whole, has written:

An English social revolution started in the 1780s. These years and subsequent decades witnessed a take-off in educational provision which propelled mass schooling — the notion that all the children of the poor should be formally instructed — into the experience of working-class boys and girls. The Sunday school was the first major expression of this



process; it spread rapidly between 1783 and 1840 providing education for large numbers of children.<sup>68</sup>

By 1818 there were 91 Sunday schools in Sussex, and 6750 children were enrolled in them.<sup>69</sup> Impressive though this is, when set against the number of poor children in receipt of charity education during the 18th century, we may note that Sussex was far from the forefront in this development. In 1818, in terms of the percentage of the population enrolled in Sunday schools, of the

41 English counties Sussex was ranked 32nd equal.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, in Sussex as elsewhere: 'Despite some concern that teaching the poor to read was socially dangerous, Sunday schools enabled mass schooling to secure acceptance within the traditionally minded upper and middle classes. They were created when these classes feared England faced moral and political collapse' and they 'transmitted a culture which attempted to reproduce conservative values and social relations in opposition to the pressure of accelerating change.'<sup>71</sup>

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## NOTES

Abbreviations used include:

- Dick M. Dick, *Religion and the origins of mass schooling: the English Sunday School c. 1780–1840*, in V. A. McClelland (ed.), *The Churches and Education* (1983)
- ESRO East Sussex Record Office, Lewes
- Laqueur T. W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability — Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780–1850* (1976)
- SWA *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*
- WSRO West Sussex Record Office, Chichester

- <sup>1</sup> Laqueur, 30. Book of Common Prayer.
- <sup>2</sup> Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Abstract Letter Books (hereafter SPCK, ALB), vol. 1B, no. 1830.
- <sup>3</sup> WSRO, Ep.1/26/3, 16–17.
- <sup>4</sup> SPCK, ALB vol. 15, no. 10,973; 16, nos 11,213 & 11,302.
- <sup>5</sup> Laqueur, 23, 25. Raikes account appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 54, Pt. 1 (1784), 410–11; it was originally in a letter of November 1783 from Raikes to Col. Townley of Bolton.
- <sup>6</sup> WSRO, Par 153/31/1.
- <sup>7</sup> ESRO, PAR 247/31/1.
- <sup>8</sup> SWA, 22.3.1790.
- <sup>9</sup> SWA, 6.10.1788.
- <sup>10</sup> *Sussex Daily News*, 29.9.1913.
- <sup>11</sup> L. J. Maguire (ed.), *The Journal and Correspondence of John Burgess 1785–1819* (privately published 1983), 69. K. Twinn, personal communication. Bishop's Transcripts at WSRO.
- <sup>12</sup> Sources are given in other notes relating to these schools.
- <sup>13</sup> SWA, 21.9.1789; 28.9.1791; 3.10.1791. Clergy Index at Sussex Archaeological Society Library, Lewes.
- <sup>14</sup> ESRO, SAS/G/ACC 741, which also records Viscount Gage subscribing £2 2s. to the Sunday school at East Meon, Hants, in 1793.
- <sup>15</sup> SWA, 1.6.1789. *The County Mirror and Chichester Magazine*, June 1797, 226, 228.
- <sup>16</sup> ESRO, PAR 347/25/1. The document included a list of six managers, one of whom was the vicar, Thomas Davies, who died August 1789 (Sussex Record Society (1924) 30, 72); the other five were laymen.
- <sup>17</sup> *1st Report of the Commissioners on the Education of the Poor*

(1819), Appendix, 384–5.

- <sup>18</sup> SWA, 11.2.1788.
- <sup>19</sup> SWA, 18.2.1788.
- <sup>20</sup> SWA, 4.2.1788.
- <sup>21</sup> SWA, 10.3.1794.
- <sup>22</sup> Dick, 42, quoting R. Cranford, *Memoir of Thomas Cranford by his son* (1840), 258–9.
- <sup>23</sup> Dick, 34, quoting E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968), 412.
- <sup>24</sup> V. E. Neuburg, *Popular Education in Eighteenth-Century England* (1971), 36–7, quoting Mary Fletcher's pamphlet published anonymously in 1764, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr John Wesley*.
- <sup>25</sup> E. Austen, 'John Wesley, the 'Pikes' and early Methodism in Robertsbridge ...', *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 15 (5), (1926), ESRO AMS 6361/2, copy with many MS annotations, by Austen. R.C. Swift, 'Methodism in Sussex', M.Phil. thesis, University of Sussex (1984), 91.
- <sup>26</sup> Dick, 35.
- <sup>27</sup> Dick, 40.
- <sup>28</sup> Laqueur, 23.
- <sup>29</sup> Laqueur, 4.
- <sup>30</sup> SWA, 5.1.1789.
- <sup>31</sup> SWA, 26.4.1790.
- <sup>32</sup> SWA, 4.2.1788.
- <sup>33</sup> Dick, 39.
- <sup>34</sup> SWA, 8.10.1792.
- <sup>35</sup> SWA, 22.12.1788.
- <sup>36</sup> F. Andrews (ed.), *The Torrington Diaries* (1954 edn), 246.
- <sup>37</sup> This summary of Paine's proposals is taken from P. Harvey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 3rd edn (1946), 667.
- <sup>38</sup> A. Williamson, *Thomas Paine* (1973). W. H. Godfrey, *At the Sign of the Bull* (1924). ESRO, PAR 414/1/1/3.
- <sup>39</sup> R. Tibble, 'Rev. Thomas Redman Hooker DD (1762–1838)', *Sussex Family Historian* (Dec. 1988) 8 (4), 151.
- <sup>40</sup> J. C. Michell, in his dedication of the 1829 edn. (re-edited by him) of A. Relhan, *Short History of Brighthelmston*, V. A. Dale, *Brighton Town and Brighton People* (Chichester, 1976), 15. SWA, 8.9.1788. C. Wright, *Brighton Ambulator* (1818), 111–12. *Sussex Notes and Queries* (1944) 10, 80.
- <sup>41</sup> SWA, 19.3.1792.
- <sup>42</sup> SWA, 26.4.1790.

- <sup>43</sup> SWA, 18.2.1788; 3.3.1788; 17.3.1788. I am indebted to Colin Brent for identifying the occupations of these people.
- <sup>44</sup> R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1982), 314.
- <sup>45</sup> SWA, 4.2.1788.
- <sup>46</sup> SWA, 25.2.1788.
- <sup>47</sup> SWA, 18.2.1788.
- <sup>48</sup> F. Shoberl, *The Beauties of England and Wales* (1813), 113. C. Wright, *Brighton Ambulator* (1818), 111. J. Erredge, *History of Brighton* (1862), 355.
- <sup>49</sup> SWA, 16.4.1792.
- <sup>50</sup> SWA, 5.10.1789; 3.10.1791; 21.5.1792.
- <sup>51</sup> SWA, 23.10.1797.
- <sup>52</sup> SWA, 9.3.1789.
- <sup>53</sup> e.g. SWA, 21.9.1789; 25.9.1797.
- <sup>54</sup> SWA, 21.12.1789.
- <sup>55</sup> SWA, 17.3.1788.
- <sup>56</sup> SWA, 3.8.1795.
- <sup>57</sup> SWA, 2.8.1790; 3.10.1791; 20.8.1792; 1.9.1794; 21.9.1789.
- <sup>58</sup> SWA, 29.9.1788; 16.8.1790; 8.9.1794; 9.10.1797. *The Lewes and Brighthelmston Pacquet*, 1.10.1789.
- <sup>59</sup> SWA, 6.8.1792.
- <sup>60</sup> SWA, 3.3.1788.
- <sup>61</sup> SWA, 18.2.1788.
- <sup>62</sup> SWA, 17.3.1788.
- <sup>63</sup> SWA, 21.12.1789.
- <sup>64</sup> 1801 Census. SWA, 11.2.1788.
- <sup>65</sup> SWA, 4.2.1788; 19.3.1792. The East Dean reference is from the *Portsmouth Gazette*, 31.8.1795; the report of the opening of the Sunday school does not identify which East Dean is referred to, but since it appears under the byline 'Chichester', the West Sussex village is clearly meant (a school house had been erected there in 1782, with the date and Richmond arms on it, so there was an established interest in schooling in the village).
- <sup>66</sup> SWA, 4.2.1788.
- <sup>67</sup> From my unpublished analysis (1990) of the marriage registers of 18 parishes in East Sussex, 1754–1810, involving 5230 marriages and 10,460 adults. The parishes were, by 1801 population size of parish or town embracing more than one parish: (over 2000) Lewes St Michael, Lewes St John sub Castro, Battle; (1001–2000) Mayfield, Wadhurst, Fletching; (601–1000) Ewhurst, Seaford, Chiddingly; (301–600) Westham, Brightling, Hooe, Newick; (0–300) Ripe, Patcham, Falmer, Bodiam, Pevensey.
- <sup>68</sup> Dick, 33.
- <sup>69</sup> *A Digest of Parochial Returns made to the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Education of the Poor, 1818* (1820), \*1171, summary table ('THIS TABLE is calculated from the Digests and Tables for the different Counties, the incomplete returns being filled up by means of Averages deduced from those which are complete'); this table gives for Sussex 90 Sunday schools and 6492 children. Additional returns (p. 1494) add one Sunday school and 260 children.
- <sup>70</sup> Laqueur, 49. Kent and Surrey were even lower, both at 35th equal; Hampshire was a little higher in the list, being ranked 26th.
- <sup>71</sup> Dick, 48.