

# EDUCATION IN FENNY STRATFORD

by EDWARD LEGG

Fenny Stratford, in Milton Keynes, was originally a small town at the junction of Watling Street and the road from Newport Pagnell to Leighton Buzzard. Although ecclesiastically part of the parish of Bletchley, it was for centuries a civil parish in its own right, repairing its own roads and maintaining its own poor. The history of education in the town may serve to illustrate a nation-wide process of development and change, from private benevolence and initiative to county and state control.

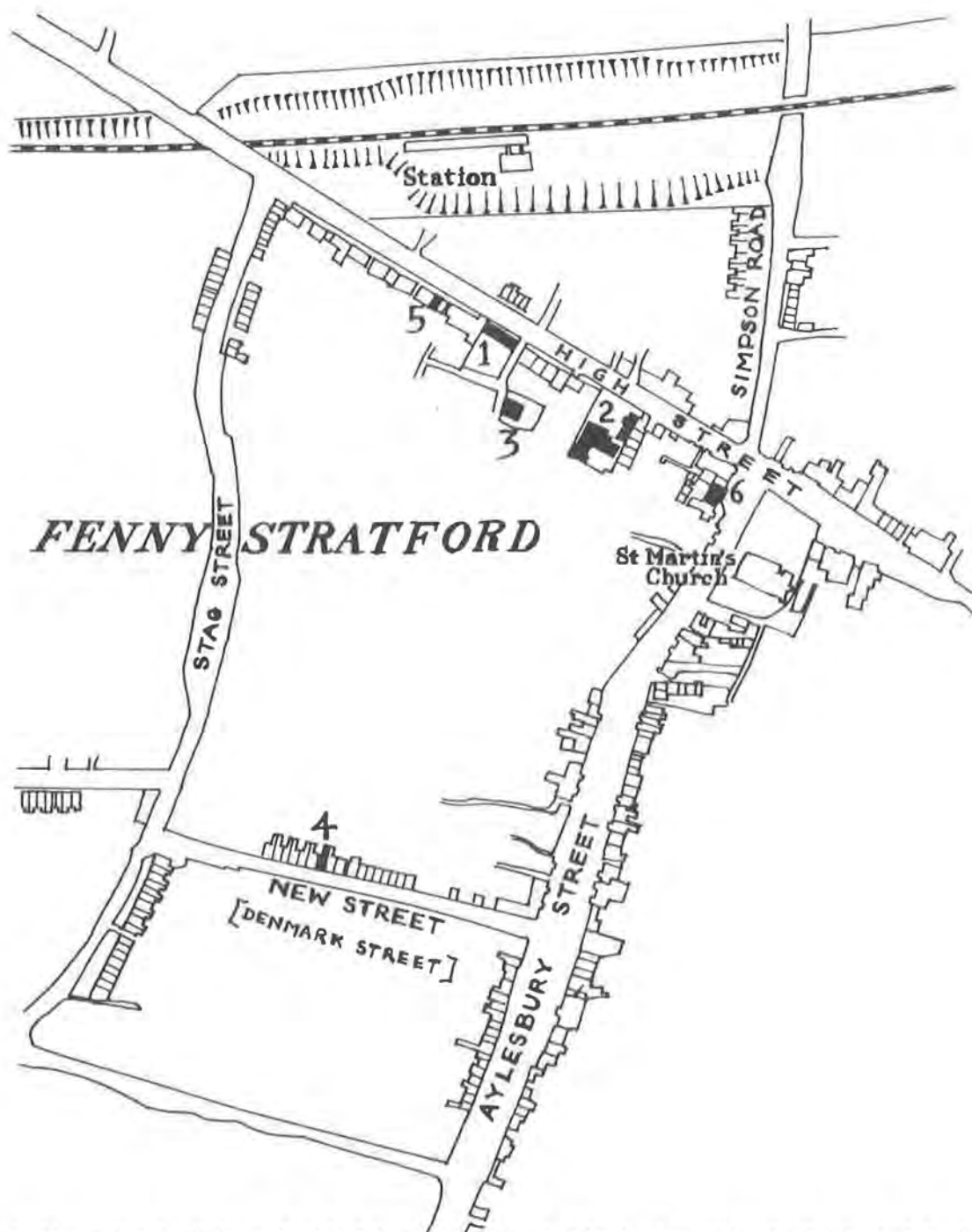
It is of course impossible to say when education started in Fenny Stratford, or indeed anywhere else. The shepherd boy in the tenth century would have received a far more rigorous training in animal husbandry than the modern pupil at his rural science lessons. The farmer at Fenny Stratford market, buying and selling cattle and corn, would have been more adept at arithmetic than the bank clerk with his calculator.

The earliest reference to education is to be found in the court rolls of the Manor. In October 1388, 'William Barton complains against Geoffrey atte Halle in a plea of debt whence he complains that he owes to him and unjustly detains 18 d for teaching his son, and Geoffrey acknowledges, therefore let execution be done'.<sup>1</sup> After this the records are silent for another two hundred years.

In 1587 the register of St. Mary's church, Bletchley, records the marriage on 15th March of 'Will(ia)m Dye skoolem(aster) of Bletchley to Joan Pennington,<sup>2</sup> but this seems to be the only reference in both that century and the next. Schooling was almost certainly unavailable within the parish and the documents of the seventeenth century were mostly signed with a mark.<sup>3</sup>

The eighteenth century saw some improvement. Thomas Cox, in 1720, lists a charity school at Bletchley erected for the teaching of twenty boys at the charge of the Patron and the Rector.<sup>4</sup> The Patron was of course Dr. Browne Willis, and it seems that in due course he added two other schools, at Fenny Stratford and Whaddon, to his charge. On 10th October 1726 a Society for Promoting the Instruction of Poor Children in the Newport Hundreds was formed and for some time Fenny Stratford may have benefited from its funds.<sup>5</sup> Browne Willis's interest in education may have been active earlier in the century, for in 1723 twenty one out of the thirty two subscribers to the Oath of Allegiance in the parish were able to sign their names.<sup>6</sup> Thus sixty five per cent of the freeholders, representing perhaps nine or ten per cent of the population, had received some education. This compares with about four per cent, based on a sample of signatures, in the previous century.

There is insufficient information to show whether this school continued on a regular basis. In 1751 Sarah the daughter of Con Bradford, schoolmaster of Fenny Stratford and Elizabeth was buried on 2nd July at Bletchley Church<sup>7</sup> whilst in 1773 Edward Churchley, schoolmaster of Fenny Stratford, was granted a licence to marry



1. National School, later British School; 2. National School after 1861; 3. Fernbank School; 4. Miss Emily Davies' school, 1869; 5. Miss Emily Davies' school, 1877; 6. Hannah Lake's School.

Mary Stanley of Little Brickhill. Finally in 1794 William Lloyd is recorded as a Schoolmaster,<sup>8</sup> so the probability of continuity is quite high.

However at the start of the nineteenth century a regular school was established at Fenny Stratford. This was a Lancastrian or Nonconformist School based on the system devised by Joseph Lancaster about 1796. It was set up on 8th November 1811, when Benjamin and Alice Dumville sold a plot of land five poles sixteen yards long by nine yards wide for £3 10s to Richard Midgeley, Curate of Fenny Stratford, James Croft, Yeoman, Edward Ivens, Innholder, Charles Squirhill, Cabinet Maker, Lynch Conway Gent. Surgeon and Apothecary, Thomas Risley, Baker, William Linnell, Baker and John Knott, all of Fenny Stratford, in order to set up a school on the Lancastrian System. Of these the first four contributed twenty pounds towards the cost while the remainder contributed ten pounds each. Unfortunately they did not enroll the deed as required by law and as a result a new deed had to be made out on 10th June 1817. By this time the school was almost moribund with debts of eighty pounds. Moreover Benjamin Dumville had by then also changed his allegiance, and as a result the school was conveyed to new trustees to be run on Dr. Bell's system as a National School. The debts were then paid off by a group of local gentry including P. D. P. Duncombe, Edward Hanmer, The Revd. Primatt Knapp and others, and vested in M. D. Mansel, Richard Harrison and Edward Orlebar Smith on behalf of the Governors.<sup>9</sup> The new proprietors received a grant of thirty pounds from the National Society<sup>10</sup> towards the cost, but even so part of the cost remained outstanding, for interest was still being paid to the old trustees as late as 1825.<sup>11</sup>

The first schoolmaster appointed was a Mr. Webb, who was paid a salary of £50 per annum. This was raised by subscriptions, usually of one, two or three guineas donated by the local gentry and landowners. In 1819 this amounted to £80 13s 3d. Unfortunately many subscribers quickly got into arrears, and the treasurer, Mr. Gregory Odell Clarke, the local Brickmaker, spent much of his time appealing for these arrears. Nevertheless the Trustees were evidently well pleased with the results when they issued their printed accounts and statement on 1st Feb. 1820.<sup>12</sup>

"The resident Proprietors of the National School Fenny Stratford present at the close of the year, the accustomed statement of its expences and receipts to the Supporters of the Institution and in making the communication they cannot refrain from indulging in an honest pride at the success of their efforts, in spreading throughout this populous neighbourhood a just appreciation of the value of those principles which can alone make a man a real Christian and an honest subject. Though the rival system may to the casual observer appear outwardly liberal and unshackled we doubt whether the advantages which it offers will be found on examination to be at all commensurate with the advantages of this. In this system there can be no mistake. In the last year 107 children partook of the advantages of this establishment, seventy to eighty of whom were in the habit of receiving such instruction as will prepare them to fill respectably the station of life for which they are destined."

This address was plainly meant to reassure the clergy and landowners that what the children were learning was in accord with the established religion and unlikely to produce such discontent as was then widespread throughout the country.

In the following year Mr. Webb left and his post was filled by Mr. H. W. Wynn, who taught there until 1828,<sup>13</sup> not without difficulties, particularly late payment of his salary, although the income was now augmented by the collection taken after an annual sermon at St. Martins Chapel, and a yearly donation from the Pigott charity at Simpson. In 1825 he suffered some criticism to the effect that the number of fee paying boys had decreased in his time; this he refuted strongly, showing that the receipts amount to £5 6s 6d in that year compared with £3 14s 8d in 1820.<sup>14</sup>

Three years later the school was in real difficulty. Subscriptions were falling badly, despite an appeal to all the old benefactors. Mr. Wynn left, probably toward the end of summer, and a new schoolmaster was appointed at a lower salary, the opportunity being also taken to regularise the running of the school as the following report shows.<sup>15</sup>

Resolutions entered into by the Committee in Behalf of the  
Subscribers of the National School Fenny Stratford 18th of  
Oct<sup>r</sup> 1828.

1 Every Subscriber of a Guinea & upwards shall nominate one  
Boy for each Guinea so subscribed and the Boy is to pay 2d pr  
week to the Master every Monday Morning.

2 That Tickets of Admission signed by the Subscribers be a suff-  
icient Voucher for the Master to admit a Pupil.

3 The Boys shall go into School at Nine O'Clock in the Morning  
and out at Twelve – at two in the Afternoon and out at five from  
Lady -day to Michaelmas and from Michaelmas to Lady Day half  
after one and out at half after three in the afternoon.

4 The Vacations are to be a Fortnight at Christmas and a  
Fortnight in the harvest.

1828 October 18th Agreed with Mr. Askew as Master to the  
School at 10/ pr week to be paid from the 2d Boys weekly pay  
which sum if not sufficient to be made up by the Subscribers.  
The master to have the liberty of taking Boys at 6d pr week not  
exceeding Twenty. He is also allowed to keep an Evening School  
for his own Benefit Three Months Notice to be given by either the  
Committee or Master before leaving the school.

Signed Tho<sup>s</sup> Askew P.D. Duncombe President      In behalf of the  
Rich<sup>d</sup> Pain, Edward Jones      Subscribers

Despite the new arrangements the finances of the school continued to decline. In 1830 a total of forty guineas was written off. There are a few bills from this period showing the costs of repairs. Window panes usually cost between 9d and 2s 9d; furniture was mended for 2s and 1s 6d. There was one unexpected windfall in 1830. The Commissioners of the Hockliffe and Stony Stratford Turnpike Trust acting on the advice of Thomas Telford decided to flatten the top of the hill in Fenny Stratford in order to ease the gradient for the coaches. As a result they had to buy a small piece of land adjoining the front of the school for £20. The school purchased 900 bricks to

rebuild the front wall for £2 3s 0d, and paid John Mims 15s to erect it, but the rest helped to make up the costs of the running of the school.<sup>16</sup>

By now Mr. Askew's health was failing. In 1829 he had been taken ill; Mr. Richardson and Mr. John Bliss had been called in to assist at the school, and by the following year the latter had become the new master. He was perhaps not very popular, for in the next two years the attendance dropped from 55 to 22 pupils, all aged between six and fourteen.<sup>17</sup> That year saw the first government grant to education, which was continued on an annual basis from 1834 onwards. Whether any came the way of Fenny Stratford seems doubtful, for over the next few years the school slowly became moribund and may even have closed.

In 1839, the Lord of the Manor, Philip Duncombe of Great Brickhill, called a meeting in the town to revive it, this time on a mixed basis.<sup>18</sup> This was evidently successful, for in 1842 there was a Master, John Turner, his wife Elizabeth being the Mistress.<sup>19</sup> Although a native of Tibworth, he had lived in the town since 1830.<sup>20</sup> His tenure was relatively short however, for by 1847<sup>21</sup> he had taken over the Navigation Inn (where the Bridge Inn now stands) and was also the local postmaster. By now the Government grants were being made by the Committee of the Privy Council on Education, set up in 1839, but any grants would have come via the National Society.

John Turner was followed by William Gaudern, a native of Bletchley, who had lived at Drayton Parslow, and Little Brickhill.<sup>22</sup> The school had 103 pupils and was still provided for by subscriptions, the children's weekly pence and the annual school sermon at St. Martin's Church.<sup>23</sup> Mr. Gaudern was still in charge in 1854<sup>24</sup> and may have remained into the sixties.

At this time the town was growing quickly owing to the influences of the canal, the brickworks and the railway.<sup>25</sup> The school was overcrowded and there was no room on the site to expand. Searches were made for a new site and finally in 1857 the problem was solved, when the Trustees of the Bryne and Willis Charity received the consent of the Charity Commissioners to dispose of a property in the High Street.<sup>26</sup> Negotiations were protracted and it was not until 5th October 1859<sup>27</sup> that the trustees, 'without valuable consideration', granted and conveyed to the Minister and Churchwardens of Fenny Stratford "All that piece of land with the cottages and buildings thereon situate in the Parish of Fenny Stratford containing One thousand and sixty yards for the purpose of permitting a School for the education of children and adults or children only of the labouring, manufacturing and other poor classes in the parish of Fenny Stratford". The deed also declares that the school shall be open to inspection by the Inspector of Schools and conducted according to the principles of the National Society for promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. The superintendance of religious and moral instruction was to be under the minister and his licenced curate, if appointed, the Churchwardens if members of the Church of England, and six others. These were named as Sir Philip Duncombe Pauncefort Duncombe, the Revd. James Charles Left Court of Little Brickhill, John Maffey, farmer, Gregory Odell Clarke, wharfinger, John Holdom, farmer, and Robert Holdom, maltster, all of Fenny Stratford, provided they continued to pay one guinea per annum to the funds of the school. Future vacancies were to be filled by persons elected by the subscribers, who paid ten shillings per annum. Decisions were to be made by majority vote. Disputes on religious matters were to be decided by reference to the Bishop of



the diocese; other disputes were to be referred to a committee of three, consisting of an inspector appointed by the Lord President of the Council, a clergyman appointed by the Bishop, and a magistrate appointed by the inspector and the clergyman. The committee was also empowered to appoint a committee of seven ladies every January to assist in the management of the Girls and Infants school. This deed was duly enrolled in Chancery ten days later and approved by the Charity Commissioners on 18th November 1860.

The new school, with a schoolmaster's house, was designed by E. G. Burton of Beaumont Street, London.<sup>28</sup> His plans were approved in 1860 and during that year the old building on the site was demolished. This was a former inn known as the Angel, built in the seventeenth century or earlier and converted in the early eighteenth century into two charity cottages. During the nineteenth century the central arch had been let out to a blacksmith,<sup>29</sup> James Rogers, for his forge. All this was swept away, and was replaced by a white brick building with red and black facings, lancet windows and three high rooms: a boys' room, a girls' room, and an infant's room, each seating forty pupils. At the rear were large playgrounds for boys and girls, separated by a high wall; on the East stood the schoolmaster's house. The total cost was £800, raised by grants from the Government, The Diocesan Society and the National Society, who gave £16.<sup>30</sup> The remainder was raised by local subscriptions under the guidance of the Vicar, the Revd. Thomas Pym Williamson. Sheahan states that "the money was raised chiefly among his friends, the parishioners contributing very little".<sup>31</sup>

The new school was opened in January 1861<sup>32</sup> and was immediately well filled. Unfortunately the next five years are completely unrecorded, which is a pity since nationally it was a particularly important period. Following the publication of the report of the Commissioners on Popular Education in March 1861, the Privy Council Committee on Education established a Revised Code of Regulations, which, when they finally came in in 1862, changed the whole course of education in this country. They led to the system of regular examinations and the establishment of the payment-by-results method of support whereby grants depended on examination results. The following year saw the introduction of the conscience clause whereby dissenters were admitted to Church schools in parishes in which there was only one school. Both of these changes affected the Fenny Stratford National School, although the latter only for a short period, for reasons given below.

Locally, the next event of interest was the arrival of Mr. Skipp as Master and commencement of the School log book on 27th August 1866, since this gives the first real insight into activities in the classroom. It shows reading, writing, arithmetic and scripture as the main subjects, with occasional lessons in geography and singing. The boys were also drilled in the playground. Sewing is first mentioned in 1869, and drawing started in 1875. In September 1866 a swing was set up in the boy's playground. This was a new experience for some of them and on the following day Charles Bowler was sent home ill from too much swinging.<sup>33</sup> Mr. Skipp was assisted by Miss Batchelor until she left in 1867. There followed a succession of ladies, the last of whom, Mary Ann Knowles, became Mrs. Skipp in 1869.<sup>34</sup> In 1867 problems of punctuality were tackled by erecting a bell tower on the roof. Further excitement occurred in March 1868, when the Bishop of 'Tennessee' (sic) visited the school.

The following three years were uneventful, with good reports from the inspectors, but in August 1871 £20 was deducted from the grant, owing to the inadequacy of the teaching staff.<sup>35</sup> A strong recommendation was also made for starting work on the proposed addition to the School building, to accommodate the growing attendance. This was begun in September, and continued through to November.

In 1872 discipline came to the fore, when the people living next to the School complained of children using their pump to collect water, and as a result several boys were detained. Later in the year there was an outbreak of stone throwing, which was also dealt with severely. In January 1873 William Owen, the pupil teacher, was dismissed and his place taken by Robert Kemp at a wage of 2/6 per week.<sup>36</sup>

Lessons throughout this period continued to follow the established pattern. On one occasion it was commented that 'mistakes were being made in division of sums such as 182 acres 3 roods 27 poles 18 yards 7 feet 120 inches by 13.' There are several references to the songs taught at the school during this period, ranging from 'Rule Britannia' to 'Drive the nail aright boys'. In 1875 a holiday was given to the pupils to enable them to go to the Fenny Stratford Flower Show. That year the School roll was swollen further, owing to the closure of the British School in the town. A further burden arose from the Act of Parliament of 1876, making it the duty of parents to see that every child received elementary education.

The following year Mr. Skipp resigned and his place was taken by Mr. Cowlshaw on 2nd October.<sup>37</sup> John Cowlshaw was trained at Saltly Training College, where he completed his training in Dec. 1868. He taught at a number of schools in the Midlands before moving to Castleton in 1875, from whence he came to Fenny Stratford.<sup>38</sup> Despite the reopening of the British School in 1877 his task was very much an uphill one; as the Inspector recorded on 5th July 1877: 'Mr. Cowlshaw is doing all that can be done with this overcrowded School'. Some of the pupils caused rather extreme problems. In 1878 one of the boys was summonsed to Newport Pagnell and sentenced to seven days imprisonment for writing indecent words on the palings at Bletchley. This failed to improve his behaviour for in the following year he was punished for kicking a boy in the eye.

By now the school was getting seriously overcrowded, as the new streets near Bletchley station started to be built over and occupied. In 1881 the numbers had reached 151 and the managers were beginning to look at the possibility of enlarging the premises. There were now new members: Matthew Stubbs, the local Coal and Corn merchant, had been appointed in place of the late Gregory Clarke, George Holdom in place of John Maffey, and Francis Parmiter in place of the Revd. Left Court.<sup>39</sup>

Their meetings were dominated by the proposed enlargements, and finally on May 30th a full Vestry meeting was called at which it was resolved that the school be enlarged to accommodate 65 extra pupils and that the cost be borne by means of a voluntary rate. Mr. Harley Gates, the local builder, was ordered to prepare the specifications. A voluntary rate of sixpence in the pound was levied and the approval of the Education Department obtained, subject to the provision of sufficient latrines. There was a slight delay owing to the recalcitrance of the second largest ratepayer in the parish, but finally on 8th November 1881 Harley Gates signed the agreement and promised completion on the 15th January. The site chosen was a disused playground on the south west side. The logbook records a week later, 'The Workmen have

commenced digging out the foundations for the new School, Girls are obliged to enter through the Infants door'. At Christmas the pupils were given an extra week's holiday because of the works, and the building was finished in the following month.

In June 1882 the school was again visited by the H.M. Inspector, but although he was satisfied with the work, he complained that the Infants had too much room and the others too little. He suggested that the rooms be exchanged and this eventually took place in November.<sup>40</sup> On 19th May the Headmaster wrote 'School somewhat interrupted. Great Paul a large bell being conveyed through Fenny became fixed for two days on Brickhill Hill. Many children went to see it.'

The year 1882 saw many changes in the school's surroundings. Immediately behind it was the farm yard attached to Home Farm in Aylesbury Street, a farm which stretched almost to Bletchley Station. John Holdom, the owner, decided to build a new house at Yards End, in the middle of his land; he sold the old farmyard to two solicitors from Leighton Buzzard, who set out Church Street and George Street on it.<sup>41</sup>

In the same year, the infant school mistress, Miss Jackson,<sup>42</sup> left to take a post in Rochester. The managers advertised the position, but on two occasions the appointed candidate decided to take a higher paid post elsewhere. Finally they obtained the services of Miss Wilding, who was at that time working for the Simpson and Woughton School Board, but she only stayed for a year before resigning. Her place was then taken by Miss Maria Slough from Luton.

This was not the end of the managers' troubles, for in April 1884 the Newport Pagnell Rural Sanitary Authority condemned the cesspools attached to the school and these had to be repaired with old gas pipes after thorough disinfection with quicklime.<sup>43</sup>

During the 1880's the town grew rapidly, especially in the vicinity of the station. Park street was developed in 1879 and the streets from there to Cambridge St. followed in the next three years.<sup>44</sup> This in turn brought more pupils and this, coupled with the 1880 act, by which local authorities became responsible for attendance, meant that the premises were again becoming overcrowded. This is reflected in the Inspectors' report. "The general condition of the School is fair. It is far too crowded to use much above this level, in fact it is so full that teaching must be a matter of infinite difficulty. The desk accommodation is insufficient. One hardly expects to find tables or trestles pressed into service for the examination day in a School of this sort".<sup>45</sup> The Roll now totalled over two hundred and from the 16th December onwards the overcrowding and the difficulties of teaching recur constantly in the log book.

The following year the Inspector was even more forceful: "An overcrowded school and insufficient desk supply are circumstances that can be remedied and I definitely must ask for a remedy. The formation of the room is peculiarly ill adapted to allow so many children to be taught with success and I have no hesitation in condemning it as being unsuitable. The Offices have been condemned by the Sanitary Authority. The Managers should enlarge their schools, have them properly painted and cleaned, obtain a complete supply of desks and provide new offices".<sup>46</sup> An accompanying letter stated that "Under the circumstances my Lords are compelled to reduce the grant by one tenth and they cannot undertake to recognise the premises as any longer satisfying Article 96(a) unless they are altered and improved in accordance with the last paragraph of H.M. Inspectors report".<sup>47</sup>



As a result of this report the school immediately ceased admitting new pupils, whilst an unheralded visit by Mr. E. M. Kenney Herbert, the senior Inspector, produced further comments on the use of infants toilets by the older children.

In October 1886 the Managers met to consider the problem. Up till then, although they had prepared plans for a two storey addition to the school, they had deferred further action as they were unsure of the intentions of the largest ratepayer, the London North Western Railway. They were having difficulty in finding sufficient water for the engines at Bletchley station and were thinking of reducing the engineering establishment. This would have meant the removal of a large number of employees from the town and a reduction in the number of children attending Fenny Stratford school. A public meeting had been held in July approving the extension but making it subject to the Railway paying its fair share. The Railway company was not keen and neither was the other large landowner, the owner of Bletchley Park. Finally the company intimated that they would no longer pay the voluntary rate, saying they would prefer to deal with a properly constituted school board.<sup>48</sup>

The managers bowed to the inevitable and on January 31st 1887, the school was given a half days holiday to enable it to be used for the first School Board election.<sup>49</sup>

### *The British School*

Before going on to deal with the School Board it is time to look at the influence of the Nonconformists on education in the town. They had already had one attempt at establishing a Lancastrian school in the early part of the century, but they were then small weak groups barely able to build and maintain their own chapels. This had changed as the century progressed; they became more united, more respectable and more stable, and able once again to consider establishing a small school in the town. The opportunity came in 1864. The old National School had been closed in 1861 and was used for a year or so as a parish hall and reading room under the name of St. Martin's hall.<sup>50</sup> However permission had already been received from the Charity Commissioners for the sale of the building, and new trustees had been appointed by the County Court on 20th September 1860. These were the Revd. James Left Court of Little Brickhill, the Revd. George Wingate Pearce of Walton and the Revd. Edward Hill of Great Woolstone, who finally sold the building in January 1864 to the Revd. C. W. Barnett Clarke and his wife, Mary, for £100. They, in turn, sold it for £80 to Nathaniel Stonhill, who conveyed it to the Trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel next door for £100.<sup>51</sup> These refurbished it and let it out as a British (Nonconformist) School, which opened there on 1st January 1865. The first Headmaster was Mr. William Woodhouse, who had been trained at the Borough Road College in London.<sup>52</sup>

Very little is known about this school. It was used from October 1868, as the meeting place of the Mutual Improvement Society,<sup>53</sup> presumably an extension into adult education, but nothing is directly recorded. In 1869 it was educating about one hundred pupils and was being supported locally by means of bazaars etc. It was managed by a school committee, which besides the Wesleyans may also have had representatives from the Baptists and the Primitive Methodists, recently established in the town. They paid a half yearly rent of £4 until 1872, when the Wesleyans spent £70 on improvements. The committee paid £20 as their contribution and their rent was then increased to £5 10s. A further £4 10s was spent on the provision of

closets in 1874 for which the committee contributed £2 10s.<sup>54</sup> However the school closed in 1875: an entry from the National School log book records "School reopened after Vacation, attendance fair. Several new admissions in consequence of the closing of the British School".

It did not reopen for two years, as the Log Book records: "Sept 3 (1877) Attendance lessened owing to the opening of the British School". This in turn led to a reduction of staff: "Sept 10 In consequence of the opening of the British School and a reduced attendance the services of Annie Tracy are not required".

The school remained open for a further two years but entries in the National School log book suggest that it was again being run down.

- Jan 21 Admitted Christopher Jones from British School.
- Apr 28 Admitted the two Taylors girls and Walter Warren from the British School.
- July 30 Bazaar at British School.
- Oct 6 Admitted several fresh children from the British School.

Probably the school closed at the end of that term for the entries for rent no longer appear in the Wesleyan Treasurers accounts and the building was eventually sold to the Simpson and Woughton School Board in 1882.<sup>55</sup>

### *The School Boards*

Fenny Stratford in the eighties was in two parishes. The larger part, on the south western side of the Watling Street, was in Fenny Stratford parish but the rest was in Simpson. In 1875 Simpson had joined the neighbouring parish of Woughton to set up a joint school board with a school midway between the two villages.<sup>56</sup> This obviously served both places well but was of no use for the children living in Simpson Road, or on the northern side of the Watling Street. A school was required in Fenny Stratford, and on 29th March 1882 the board purchased the old British School for £400.<sup>57</sup> The first Headmistress was Miss Adelaide Wilding,<sup>58</sup> who left in 1883 to join the staff of the National School. Her place was probably taken by Miss Emily Wall, who is described as headmistress in 1887 and 1891, by which time the school was said to be capable of holding 90 pupils, but with an average attendance of seventy.<sup>59</sup> No further account of the school's activities has yet come to light and it was closed in 1901. The building was sold by auction and ended its days as a paper coil factory, before it was finally burnt to the ground in 1912.<sup>60</sup>

The second school board was the Fenny Stratford School Board, elected in January 1887.<sup>61</sup> It consisted of seven members and probably gave rise to the first really democratic local election in the town. The most interesting candidate was one put up by the local railwaymen. They had met earlier in the year at the hall above the Cooperative stores in Albert Street with the sole purpose of getting their own representative. Mr. George Hall took the chair and it was resolved that 'In the event of a contest, this meeting pledges itself to vote for and use every endeavour to induce all railwaymen to support Mr. A. Read, Goods Yard Inspector, as their representative on the Fenny Stratford School Board. At the same time we are desirous of avoiding a contest or any unnecessary expence and with this object in view we suggest that an equal number of Church and Dissent Candidates be nominated with Mr. Read as an Independent

Candidate.<sup>62</sup>

This resolution did not prevent an election but it did give Mr. Read a total of 674 votes, which was over double the number awarded to any of the other candidates. The other six elected included four Churchmen, the Revd. Alfred Barrow, Vicar of St. Martin's, Mr. George Holdom, the brewer in the High Street (and a church warden), Mr. Rowland the timber merchant from Simpson Road, and Thomas Tidmarsh, a draper with a shop in the High Street. Mr. James Baisley of Kelso represented the Baptists and Mr. Thomas Kirby the Methodists and the Temperance interests.

The Board's first meeting was held in February 1887 when it was resolved to enter into negotiations with the trustees of the National School to lease their premises. The National Society requested that the lease be modified to give twelve months notice on both sides, and also that a clause be added requiring the written consent of the Managers, before any alterations could be carried out. As the Board were proposing to spend a large sum of money on improvements they were not happy about the clause relating to notice. However, after the insertion of a compensation clause for any alterations, the National Society agreed to waive the twelve months notice, and the lease was sealed by both parties on 24th October 1887.<sup>63</sup> In the following year the School was enlarged by the School Board at a cost of £100 which was borrowed from the Public Works Loan Board.

Even with these extensions, the school could no longer cope with all the children growing up in the streets around the Station, and the next year was spent in finding a piece of land which would be more convenient for that end of the town. Mr. Barrow even offered the use of his mission church but this was not suitable as it had no lavatories, although it was used for adult classes including the teaching of carpentry. Eventually in 1889 an acre of land in Grave or Gravel Close was purchased from Sir Henry Duncombe as a site for a new school. The land had a rather irregular boundary on its eastern side where it abutted on the vicarage paddock, and further negotiation took place to arrange an exchange of land, to give the present straight boundary between the school and St. Martin's hall, which now stands on the paddock.<sup>64</sup> The building was put out to tender and was assigned to the lowest bidder, Mr. Henry Martin of Northampton, at a cost of £2853.<sup>65</sup> Work started almost immediately and was completed in the following year. The finished building remains much as it was originally built, although the balance of the original frontage has been spoilt by the modern extension at the western end. To this building were brought the Infants and Girl's schools under Miss Maria Slough and Miss Annie Freeman respectively. It had accommodation for 450 pupils, while the old school in the High Street accommodated up to 200 boys under the supervision of Mr. Cowlshaw, the normal attendance being 156.<sup>66</sup>

This accommodation sufficed for the next six years, despite the continued growth of the town, but eventually it was decided that a new boys school was required and a further site was purchased in Queensway, or Bletchley Road as it then was, adjoining the other two schools. The building was again advertised for tender and the eight offers ranged from £3087 up to £5717.<sup>67</sup> The lowest, from Slaymaker and Harlow of Northampton was accepted, and under the eye of the architect, Mr. John Chadwick, the building was erected. According to the Foundation Stone, the school was opened on 6 Oct 1897 but it was not brought into use until 19 November 1897.

The old High Street schools were now empty and the Managers requested the School Board to return the buildings to their control. The board were agreeable<sup>68</sup> and on 21st February 1899<sup>69</sup> the buildings were retransferred by the School Board to the Revd. Henry Oliver, David Edward of Aylesbury St., Butcher and Churchwarden, John Hill of High St., Bootmaker and Churchwarden, Joseph Brown of The Elms, Merchant, Thomas Rowlands of Rhondda House, William Rowlands of Ropley House, Timber Merchants, Charles Deynes of The Gables, Surgeon, and Edward Holdom of Waddesdon House, Farmer, to hold upon the former trusts. The building subsequently had a variety of uses including a Sunday School and a Masonic Hall, and use by the Royal Engineers during the First World War, before it was finally sold in 1925.<sup>70</sup> It was eventually purchased by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation from the Masonic Trustees and demolished in 1978.

During 1900 there was considerable interest shown in a proposal to amalgamate the Fenny Stratford and The Simpson and Woughton School Boards, but nothing came of it in the end. However, the Fenny Stratford Board did take over responsibility for the Adult Evening Continuation School which had started in the mid Victorian period and as such had presumably received some help under the Technical Instruction Acts of 1889 and 1890.

The final expansion of the schools took place in 1901, when a further piece of land adjoining the recreation ground was purchased from Sir Everard Duncombe for the erection of a separate Girls' School. Again the design was left to Mr. Chadwick. This time the tender went to a local builder, Mr. Alfred Taylor, who had his workshop in George Street. He completed the work in the summer and autumn of that year and the new school was opened in October 1901,<sup>71</sup> finally solving the problems of overcrowding that had dogged education in Fenny Stratford for more than twenty years.

The following year saw the passing of the 1902 Education Act (Balfour's Act) which abolished the School Boards and placed local education under the control of the County Council. The old order was swept away and the Board replaced by the present system of School Managers, but effective control was removed from the town to Aylesbury and the Board of Education in London.<sup>72</sup>

#### *Private Education in Fenny Stratford*

The establishment of private education in Fenny Stratford is a development of the mid nineteenth century. Until then even the children of the prosperous, unless they went away to school, were taught at the National School alongside the labourers' children.

The earliest private school of which any record has survived was started in the 1840s, when Harriet Andrews opened a day and boarding school.<sup>73</sup> Very little is known of her venture. She may have been related to the Andrews of Harris and Andrews, the general merchants and local baptists: a few years later a school was being run by Hannah Lake, whose mother was a member of the Harris family.

Hannah was born in Leighton Buzzard in 1807.<sup>74</sup> When she married Mr. Lake they emigrated to Virginia, where their children were born. Her husband died, and Mrs. Lake returned to England, where by 1851 she was running her school in Aylesbury Street, in a house on the site of Durran's Court. The school remained there for at least a further fifteen years, but by 1869 it had moved to the High Street under the charge



of Mrs. Lake's daughter.<sup>75</sup> It was still there in 1871,<sup>76</sup> but closed shortly after.

The 1860s saw two other girls' schools open. The earliest was a ladies' seminary run by Mrs. Williamson, the Vicar's wife, at her home in the High Street. Though mentioned by Sheahan in 1861<sup>77</sup> it had presumably closed by 1864, when the Williamsons moved to Little Brickhill.

The second was opened by Miss Elizabeth Davies in Denmark Street in the latter part of the decade. Miss Davies was born in High Wycombe in about 1821.<sup>78</sup> Her early life is uncharted, but by 1869 she was in one of the small terraced houses on the north side of Denmark Street. In that year these houses were sold, and she moved her home and school to Napier Street. She moved again a few years later to one of the four houses adjoining the Wesleyan chapel, where she was in 1877.<sup>79</sup> Her final move was to Simpson Road, where she is recorded between 1883 and 1887.<sup>80</sup> There is no record or recollection of her teaching, and it seems likely that hers was little more than a dame school. A school was also run from a house in Mount Pleasant, called Fernbank, where Miss Florence Green taught girls in 1883 to 1887.<sup>81</sup>

In 1883 however a new type of private school was opened in Fenny Stratford. Professor Alfred Holloway opened Dunmore House School on the corner of Cambridge Street. Here he educated boys up to Entrance Examination standard. The school started badly, with an outbreak of diphtheria,<sup>82</sup> but in later years it grew, becoming first Dunmore College and then Bletchley Hall. In 1899, under the latter title, it added a Ladies' College at what is now the Conservative Club. It had a fine string orchestra and described itself as 'probably the first college in the Kingdom for commercial and technical education, and languages', with 21 gold, silver and bronze medals gained in public examinations.<sup>83</sup> In the present century it changed its name first to St. Martin's School and then to Bletchley Grammar School (not to be confused with the Local Authority grammar school opened at Bletchley Park.)

It remains only for me to express my thanks to the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, Mr. H. Hanley, the County Archivist, the Revd. K. Wright, the former vicar of St. Martins, Mr. E. J. Davis, Mr. H. Hudson, and the late Sir. S. F. Markham for their help and advice on various aspects of this article.

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Note: Since this article was written the documents at St. Martins Church have been deposited at the Bucks County Record Office.