

# Schooling Comes To Swannington



## SCHOOLING COMES TO SWANNINGTON

Prior to the reformation education was very largely confined to the landed gentry and to the clerics, themselves often cadet members of the ruling elite. Education had no place in the upbringing of the lower orders. Following the dissolution of the monasteries and with the burgeoning of the arts and the ferment of new ideas seen during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I many grammar schools were established which brought education to a wider although still limited stratum of society. It was during this period, in 1567, that Ashby Grammar School was founded by Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon. Among its first Swannington pupils must have been Thomas Barrodale of the Manor House, who in 1679 gained a place from Ashby at St. John's College, Cambridge.

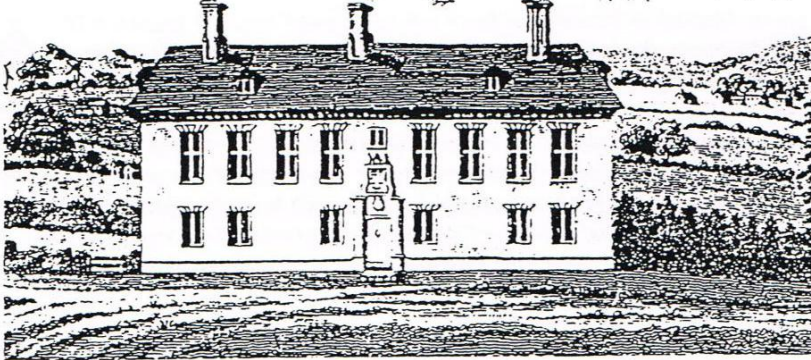
Although government support for, and encouragement of, education continued during the commonwealth, it came to an abrupt end with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Grammar Schools were seen as places where puritan ideas and anti-monarchist feelings could flourish and no further support was forthcoming. Thereafter, though later monarchs may have felt their heads to be more secure, the policy of *laissez-faire* dominated the thinking of successive governments, and the establishment of schools was left entirely to wealthy benefactors, the church, and enterprising individuals. One of the very few significant schools to be established in this area during the period was at Coleorton. By his will, the coal owner, Viscount Beaumont of Swords who died in 1702, left annuities for six poor widows and directions for the building of a free school for children of the parish to be financed from the great tithes of Swannington.

Thus it was that during the whole of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, successive governments saw no role for themselves in the spread of education to the poorer sections of society and no need to introduce a national system of education in England. This was in contrast to our competitors, particularly France and Prussia.

While government stood aside, growing numbers of people were calling for a great extension of education to cater for all our children. At first this was based on the spirit of the Renaissance, the sense of individual human potential, but later



# Schooling Comes To Swannington



Coleorton School

it was for the more prosaic reason of servicing the needs of the Industrial Revolution. These needs were met in part by the introduction of Sunday Schools, Day Schools and Charity Schools. In 1807 The British and Foreign School Society (Non-conformist) was founded followed in 1811 by The National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (Church of England). At the same time there were private schools set up on an ad hoc basis, usually catering for no more than six to ten pupils. John Wordsworth, the son of the poet, started at a dame school at Coleorton in 1806 at the age of three. His aunt in a letter to Lady Beaumont describes his departure "...We sent John to school and a proud scholar he is. He goes with his dinner in a bag slung over his shoulder, and a little bottle of milk in his greatcoat pocket, and never a man was fuller of pride and self-importance."

The first schools to cater, to any substantial extent, for Swannington children must have been the Whitwick Free Schools. In November 1819 a meeting of the churchwardens, overseers and principal inhabitants of the parish of Whitwick, which of course included Swannington, was held under the chairmanship of the vicar, the Rev Francis Merewether. It was resolved to solicit subscriptions in order that two school rooms could be built (one for 80 boys and one for 70 girls) in School Lane, Whitwick. Subscribers would be allowed to send as many of their own children as they pleased, non-subscribers, who in the opinion of the subscribers could afford to pay, could send their children for a guinea a year, poor children would be educated free of charge. In applying to the National Society for a grant Francis Merewether wrote: "In this school the National

System of teaching is to be adopted. The Children are to be instructed in the Liturgy and Catechism of the Established Church and constantly to attend Divine Service at their Parish Church... on the Lord's Day unless such reasons be assigned for their non attendance as shall be satisfactory to the persons having the direction of the School. No Religious Tracts shall be used at the School but such as are or shall be in the Catalogue of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge." The appeal was launched and the first subscription list shows a number of contributors from the Swannington area including Thomas Grundy, George Hextall, John Griffin, James and Henry Burton, John Potter and Charles Yeomans. In all some £234 was collected including a grant of £100 from the National Society and £50 from Thomas Monk's Charity at Austrey. While School Lane is on the Swannington side of Whitwick, the walk up Church Lane and along the path over Red Hill was no mean journey even for those days, thus the schools can only have scratched at the educational needs of our village.

Pressure to abandon the *laissez-faire* attitude to education had continued to mount and in 1833 the government's resolve not to interfere appears to have cracked. The Factory Act of that year made it illegal to employ children under 9 years of age in most textile mills and laid down that factory children were to receive at least two hours education a day. The first government grant to assist in the provision of schools by the two societies was also made in 1833. Though the sum was a niggardly £20,000 it was at least a first tentative toe in the water and a highly significant change of policy. By 1846 the grant had increased to £100,000 and by 1859 to more than £800,000.

*'Twas in the month of Swannington, In a village called July,  
The snow was raining heavily, The streets were very dry.  
The flowers were sweetly singing, The birds were in full bloom,  
As I went down the cellar, To sweep an upstairs room.*

By this time there was also provision for education in Coalville, the British School had opened in 1835 and the National School in 1836 while a Sunday School had been provided by the Snibston Colliery Company. We know that Swannington children attended at least one of these schools.

Although by now there were some fee paying establishments in the village they appear to have been on a very small scale. Thomas Drake Babington, incumbent



# Schooling Comes To Swannington



in charge at St George's, was, for example, operating a small boarding school, mainly for the sons of the clergy, in the vicarage. Henry Burton who was born in 1840 recalled that he attended a dame school in the village as a small child and later a boys school before transferring to the Wesleyan Day School at Griffydam. "We had one of the best of teachers in Mr Robert Hazlewood Plowright who not only grounded us thoroughly in the usual English subjects, but who taught us Euclid, mensuration with practical surveying in the fields, and who helped some of us with the Latin *Principia*." As well as these small day schools in Swannington, there was also the Methodist Sunday School, Henry was appointed a teacher there at the age of 15, his job was to teach the infants the alphabet and simple combinations of letters using small wooden tablets on which the letters were printed.

It was in 1856 that Rev Samuel Smith, who had succeeded to the incumbency at St George's five years earlier, determined that a National School was needed in the village. He persuaded Wyggeston's Hospital to donate the site, he launched an appeal and he applied for grants to both the Government and the National Society. His application stated that there was no provision in Swannington for the "education of the poor in Church Principles" and also that there was no provision within the village for "education, gratuitously, or at very small charge, in schools not connected with the Church".

The application was for a single schoolroom to provide accommodation for 88 boys and girls and a school house for the teacher. It was proposed that a fee of 2d (less than 1p) per week should be charged. The estimated cost of the building was to be £676 and it was reckoned that £222 could be raised from local subscriptions. The scheme launched with such high hopes met a number of difficulties. The affairs of Wyggeston's Hospital were in the hands of the Court of Chancery at the time and obtaining the necessary approvals for the gift of a valuable asset proved to be very time consuming; in addition the grant making bodies insisted that there should be an indemnity against damage to the building caused by mineral workings, these problems delayed the conveyance of the site for several years. There were also objections to Mr Smith's proposed management committee. He had planned a committee consisting of clergy from neighbouring parishes claiming that there were no laymen in Swannington "who would be likely to take an interest in the school or to be of any service in the management of it". The authorities took the view that a board of clerics would be altogether too disputatious and turbulent.

There is no doubt that Samuel Smith was an irascible character but one cannot but have sympathy with his frustration by 1860 when he wrote to the National Society complaining about the delays which he laid at the door of the committee of the Privy Council which was then responsible for educational grants "I am afraid I shall have to choose between giving up the building altogether or erecting some more humble building without their assistance." He goes on to say "In the meantime the school is going on in a most unsuitable building, hitherto a barn, and the attendance even there averages 68 although the accommodation is neither healthy nor convenient." Eventually the problems with the conveyance were overcome and Samuel Smith backed down on the composition of his committee, it seems there were some solid citizens in Swannington after all. Building work was commenced and in July 1861 the formal stonelaying was undertaken by Lady Beaumont in a ceremony that involved a good deal of prayer and even more drinking of toasts. Progress must have been swift for on 30th November 1861 the Ashby News reported "The new National Schools at Swannington are now almost finished, and a very pleasing addition they are to the general features of the village. We understand the total cost of the schools and teacher's house will be about £700. They are certainly the cheapest schools of the kind we have ever seen, and do great credit to the architect.." who was Mr T W H Miller of Leicester. The final cost was £691.12s, the government grant was £276.12s, the National Society contributed £25 leaving £390 to be raised by subscriptions and collections. The school was opened in 1862 apparently with Eliza Beasley as schoolmistress.



Schoolroom



# Schooling Comes To Swannington



The government's involvement in education continued, under pressure, to increase. Inspectors were appointed to report on grant aided schools, schools that did not measure up could have their grants reduced or even withdrawn. In 1856 the committee of the Privy Council, which had been formed to oversee the expenditure of the grant aid, was reorganised to become the Education Department. The 1870 Education Act aimed to ensure that a school was within reach of every child in England and called for a census of elementary schools. The act also provided that where there were not sufficient places Board Schools were to be built and a rate levied. The return for Swannington reported that provision was adequate, there were 114 pupils at the National School and there were a further 172 places in schools outside the village but available to it. The schools in this category were the National School and the Roman Catholic School at Whitwick; the National and the British School at Coalville; the Church of England School at Coleorton; the Wesleyan School at Griffydam and the National School at Thringstone. Though the authorities may have been sanguine the managers were not, they had two problems, the quality of the education at the school and also the quality as well as the amount of accommodation for a rising population. Between 1851 and 1871 the number of children in Swannington, in the age range of 5 to 13, had risen from 169 to 326. Perhaps more important for future planning the number under 5 years of age had also nearly doubled in the same period.

The Inspector's report for 1870 noted that discipline and order were good, that there had been improvement throughout the school but that arithmetic still required much attention. The grant aid was conditionally continued but the certificate of competence to the Mistress was withheld "until the Inspector is able to report further improvement of the instruction, especially arithmetic." Apparently the situation did not improve sufficiently for on 7th June 1872 the chairman of the Management Committee, by this time Rev F T Pearson, writing to Wyggeston's Hospital for help with repairs reported that "...the school only languishes while a mistress is at the head of it, I have just engaged a master at a salary of £80 who is going into residence in a fortnight's time."

This action was clearly a success, by 1874 the inspector was concerned with more mundane problems "...The earth system should be applied to the offices which are very offensive and a stove substituted for the incurably smoking grate..." The following year the report recommended that it was "...high time to increase and improve the accommodation afforded to the infants so that they may receive livelier instruction without interfering with the older children."

The Governors, while conscious of the need to enlarge the school for the convenient accommodation of the existing pupils, must also have been aware that compulsory education was in the wind and that this would affect the demand for places. In 1876 Sandon's Act imposed on parents a duty to see that their children received an education and in 1880 school attendance was made compulsory for children from 5 to 10 years old.

Towards the end of 1875 Mr Pearson applied to the National Society for a grant towards the cost of building a new wing for the infants. He noted that while there had been an increase in the population of the village the need for the extension was "...chiefly owing to the stimulus given everywhere to education, and to the efficient service of a master during the last three years, the attendance has been so good that we have been obliged to turn children away for want of room." He said that Wyggeston's Hospital had promised £100 and asked the Society for the remainder of the estimated cost, £150. By 1877, Mr Pearson was able to report to the Hospital Trustees that the rear Classroom was being built to accommodate the infants and asked for the provision of sand from Red Hill to mix with the lime. It would be hard to overstate the debt owed by the Managers to Wyggeston's Hospital during this period; from the original gift of the land and the provision of the indemnity, the Hospital Trustees provided help with repairs when needed as well as making a regular capitation grant towards the running costs of the school.

Although the population of the village fell slightly between 1871 and 1891 the pressure on school places did not abate. Fees at Church and Board Schools were abolished by the "Goschen Act" of 1891 and the leaving age was raised to 11 in 1893 and to 12 in 1899.

*Remember, remember, the 5th of December, no more school pence to pay  
For good Mr Goschen, has brought in a notion to sweep all school pennies away.*

In 1894 a fine new building was completed, detached from the main school; it had a modest belfry and steeple at the east end and apparently a chancel arch and an apse-like structure at the upper or west end. It was licensed for the conduct of church services.



# Schooling Comes To Swannington



It seems quite likely that the stimulus to build this further extension was as much to have a place of worship for the Established Church in the centre of the village as it was for the undoubted educational needs. Both the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists were established close at hand whilst St. George's was a good step on a bleak morning and defects in the structure would by now be making it both uncomfortable and distinctly chilly. An added attraction would undoubtedly have been that the Mission Hall could provide separate accommodation for the infants with their own head teacher. It may be that because the extension was not exclusively for educational purposes, grants were not available from the government or from the National Society and that is why we are short of original source material in this case. Be that as it may, there is impeccable anecdotal evidence that an extensive programme of events was organised in the village to raise the funds needed to pay for the Mission Hall.

The new Building was opened at 11.15am on Tuesday 28th August 1894 by the Bishop of the Diocese which at that time was still Peterborough. Clergy were instructed to bring Surplice, Hood and Stole (white), and were advised that there would be "Luncheon at Lady Beaumont's House for the Clergy of the Deanery." The offertories were to be devoted to providing additional furniture and for the work of the Mission. The Coalville Times reported: "The new School recently erected at Swannington for the purposes of educational and mission work was opened on Tuesday. In the morning a service was held in the Schoolroom, the Bishop of Peterborough being the preacher. There was a large congregation and the eloquent address of the Bishop was greatly enjoyed. In the evening Canon Denton, Vicar of Ashby de la Zouch, preached. On Wednesday evening another service was held, and the Rev. G. Crossley, Vicar of Breedon, delivered an excellent sermon. Last night the Rev. H. Broughton, Vicar of Hugglescote, preached in the school, and services will also be held to-night and on Sunday."

From their inception, there had been a good deal of tension between the new Board Schools and the longer established Church Schools. The Church was critical of the non-denominational religious teaching prescribed for Board Schools and especially unhappy with the Cowper-Temple clause, which allowed parents to withdraw their children from Scripture lessons in Church Schools. The Church was understandably jealous of its responsibility for the religious content of the teaching. It is not known whether it was these tensions that led the managers to oppose Wyggeston's Hospital's suggestion, in 1897, that the composition of the school's management committee might be strengthened by the addition of the Parish Church Warden to their number as an ex-officio

member; in all the circumstances a small enough concession one might have thought. Their negative response, citing the terms of their Trust Deed, left the managers in the uncomfortable position of being firmly impaled on the prongs of Morton's Fork. The solicitors to the Hospital were able to point out that apart from the ex-officio chairman no single member of the committee was, nor had been for 30 years, qualified to serve under the terms of that deed which required each manager to be a communicant of the Church of England, to contribute at least £1 annually to the school and to own property in or near Swannington. Writing to the National Society, the Chairman, Rev John Bailey, was very clear. "The introduction of an element on the committee representing popular opinion in a colliery parish where dissent and radicalism are rife may lead to very undesirable consequences." The managers' dilemma was apparently resolved by the 1902 Education Act which established Local Education Authorities; but this was not in time to heal the breach with Wyggeston's Hospital whose subscription had been withdrawn in 1899. The new LEAs had responsibilities for the oversight of both Board and Church schools and for funding their running costs, and the managers resolved to reconstitute themselves under the new act. They had briefly flirted with the idea of retaining to themselves control of the Mission Hall but wiser counsels quickly prevailed. The new Management Committee consisted of the incumbent as ex officio chairman, a manager appointed by the County Council, another appointed by the Parish Council and three Foundation Managers, thus retaining a very significant element of continuity. The new managers were appointed on 1st July 1903 and met for the first time on 24th September.

If the foundation managers thought that, sheltered under the capacious wing of the Local Education Authority, they would be relieved of the enervating task of raising money for the fabric of the school they were very quickly disabused. There can be no doubt that the school was overcrowded and in some disrepair. Above all the sanitary facilities, close by the classrooms, could not cope with the greater numbers and were foul and noisome. At the turn of the century the school had to be closed down for short periods due to outbreaks of disease and as early as 1904 the managers were considering sinking a well and moving the closets away from the teaching block. They also proposed that the infants should be moved from the Mission Hall to the smaller rear classroom and that the main school should use the vacated Mission Hall which would be joined to the other buildings by a connecting annexe providing cloakroom and office accommodation. The proposals would increase the capacity of the school from 245 to 286 or to 317 if a new classroom was also built. As an alternative the



# Schooling Comes To Swannington



managers had considered building an extension but the Wyggeston's Hospital Trustees refused to grant any more land. Negotiations between the managers and the education authority and, through them, with the government were protracted and less than productive. It must have been intensely frustrating for the managers. In 1906 they reported that they could not accommodate 18 children who were awaiting admission, yet the Board of Education had refused to sanction the plans that had been drawn up. By 1907 the LEA threatened to decline to recognise the school due to its insanitary condition. An inspector reported that the offices were in a filthy state, he said that the Headmaster would not go near them and so a bad state of affairs was likely to get worse. The managers maintained that the criticisms were exaggerated and that in any case the proposed alterations were being held up by the LEA.

At this distance it is impossible to determine who was to blame, documents were mislaid, letters went unanswered and negotiations dragged on and on. Some relief to the overcrowding was achieved when a temporary Council School was set up in the new Wesleyan Chapel, which must have been a bitter pill for the Foundation Managers. In 1910 the Board of Education wrote to the LEA saying that they could not continue to recognise the "Swannington Temporary Council School" for long. The letter also emphasised "...the serious defects in the existing premises. Those in the Swannington Church of England School are to be found in the heating, lavatory arrangements, playground, absence of water supply and general disrepair; those of the Swannington Temporary Council School in the heating and in the fact that the infants and older children are all taught in one room, the Wesleyan Chapel."

Still the negotiations continued. Eventually in 1913, on behalf of the Foundation Managers, the Chairman, Rev John Bailey (he who had virtually rebuilt St George's single handed due to lack of funds) issued a *cri de coeur* to the people of Swannington. Unless £200 could be raised towards the cost of structural

<i>As May-day morn is breaking,</i>	<i>We do not come to rifle,</i>
<i>The glorious sun a-waking,</i>	<i>So please to give a trifle,</i>
<i>The times our homes forsaking,</i>	<i>And help us to be joyful,</i>
<i>We come with garlands gay.</i>	<i>For it is the First of May.</i>

*Hail, hail, hail, we hail the first of May.*

repairs to the school the Board of Education would close the existing school and build a new council school in the village costing some thousands of pounds. "...Three fourths of the cost of this would be charged to the rates of Swannington, and for many years the Ratepayers and Occupiers of houses in Swannington would feel the burden of such an addition to public expenditure." In a second appeal he said that the managers had only ten days to decide whether they would be able to afford the improvements required, subscriptions from as little as 1d per week would be accepted. It must have been a close run thing but £175 was raised and the work was put in hand. A further £115 was raised from the Diocesan Board and the National Society but cost overruns left the Foundation Managers with a debt of £200 which they had great difficulty in clearing, it was still a burden to them into the 1920s. The apse-like structure at the end of the Mission Hall was demolished and the connecting block constructed more or less as we see it today. Separate lavatories were built at the rear of the school. Mains water did not come to Swannington until 1938 and even then it was not connected to the school until after the second world war.

In 1907 the Council School at New Swannington was opened, and from that time some of the pupils of Swannington School could be and indeed were transferred to New Swannington School at the age of 11. This must have reduced the pressure on the old school to some extent but not on the pupils. Girls living in the village would have to walk to New Swannington for their lessons, on days when Domestic Science was on the time table they would then have to walk from New Swannington to Griffydham and back for those lessons. Boys, incidentally, had to walk from Swannington to Coalville for their woodwork lessons. In 1918 education was made compulsory until 14 and LEAs were given the power to raise the leaving age to 15.

In 1928 the separate status of the Infants school was ended, the head-teacher resigned and the two schools were combined under Mr Page's headship. Under the 1907 Free Place System the Government had begun to fund a very limited number of scholarships to grammar schools but it was not until the late twenties and early thirties that secondary education became widely available. The Hadow report of 1926 recommended that children should move to secondary school at the age of 11. These recommendations seem to have been adopted in Leicestershire fairly quickly, from 1934 children were transferred from Swannington to a Grammar or other secondary school according to their perceived aptitudes. In 1935 a new Bridge Road School was opened, the first headmaster being Mr Page who, together with colleagues Sol Willett and Miss

# Schooling Comes To Swannington



Hickman, moved from Swannington to start the new school. Nationally, by 1939, two thirds of all children were receiving some form of secondary education. The Butler Act of 1944 formalised the Hadow recommendations, secondary education was provided free for all and the 11-plus exam was introduced; from 1947 the school leaving age was increased to 15. Although the dual system of Church and LEA schools was retained by the Butler Act the funding of Swannington C of E School became altogether more secure when, in 1947, the move was made from 'aided' to 'controlled' status.

One may reasonably hope that the duties of the school governors, while remaining onerous, will never again be as taxing as they were in the formative years of the school. One must be grateful to their predecessors who had sufficient faith and determination to fight for the survival of the institution in which they so profoundly believed and who bequeathed to us a school of character and quality.

## SCHOOLDAYS IN THE TWENTIES

Ray Fowkes

The teaching staff when I started school in 1924 was:-

Mr Page	<i>Headmaster</i>
Miss Robinson	<i>Scholarship class</i>
Miss Hickman	<i>Standard two</i>
Mrs Hammond	<i>Standard one</i>
Mrs Rowse/Miss Smith	<i>Infants</i>
Mr Willett	<i>Special Needs &amp; Sport</i>

Mr Page, Miss Robinson, Mrs Hammond and Miss Smith all lived in the village, and as in those days teachers were held in the very highest regard and respect we knew that any indiscipline out of school could well come to their notice.

After September 1934 Swannington became a junior school taking pupils up to the age of eleven; those who passed the scholarship went on to the grammar school usually until the age of sixteen, those who passed the next grade going to Broom Leys Central School until the age of fifteen, whilst the remainder went to Bridge Road School, leaving at fourteen.