

The George Monoux School Scandal



Left: The George Monoux school & Almshouses by Alfred Bennett Bamford

For the best part of five hundred years, the George Monoux school has played a part in Walthamstow education. It was founded eighteen years after King Henry XVIII came to the throne and has provided education for Walthamstow children through the reign of two Queen Elizabeths.

The school operated for 349 years in St Mary's churchyard until it closed in 1878. It reopened and moved firstly to West Avenue in 1886 then to High Street in 1889 and finally to Chingford Road in 1927.

Endowment & Trustee Mismanagement



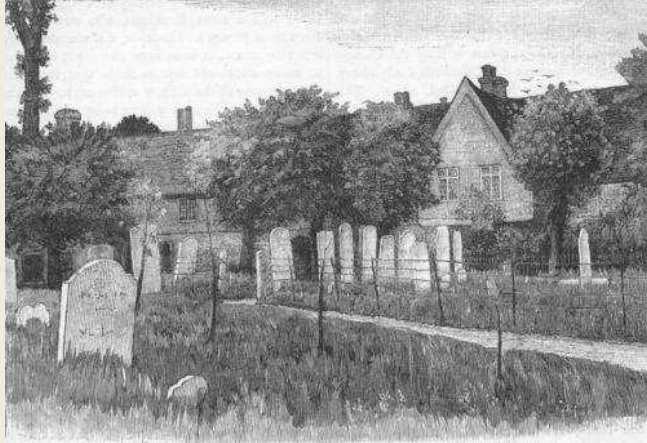
When it started in St Mary's churchyard in 1527, Wealthy business and land owner George Monoux made provision for the employment of school master to provide education of a thirty pupils from the Parish of St. Mary, Walthamstow and when he died he left sufficient money for this purpose. As seems normal for similar charitably endowed schools, there were many financial and educational ups and downs caused by the inefficiency and mismanagement of the trustees.

IN 1782, after a long period of neglect by the trustees, there was a determined effort to regulate the affairs of the school with the appointment of new trustees and the use of the Monoux and Maynard endowments, that at that time there were twenty two pupils.

Left: The George Monoux Grammar School by Alfred Bennett Bamford, by courtesy of the Essex Record Office .The Original is in the Waltham Forest Museum

The Rev. James Roberts Looks After Himself & Neglects His Duty

We know more about the affairs of the school from 1815 when the Trustees started to hold regular meetings and the details of the meetings were recorded in the Minute Books. From these we learn that the school went downhill during the regime of Rev James Foulkes Roberts, who was employed as Alms Priest to the Alms House occupants and schoolmaster. He was employed in 1819 but severely neglected his teaching duties and was dismissed and re-employed several times.



According to George Bosworth's 1916 history of George Monoux : 'It was during the headmastership of Mr. Roberts that the Charity Commissioners made their enquiry into the School, and they reported that there were only five boys on the foundation, three of them brothers, and the other two were the master's sons. It appears that Mr. Roberts had had no boys under Maynard's Charity, and but few under Monoux's. Mr. Roberts taught Latin and Greek to every scholar, but made an annual charge of six guineas to each scholar for instruction in reading, writing,

arithmetic, geography, history, and mathematics. The unsatisfactory state of the school called for special notice by the Commissioners, who suggested that Mr. Roberts should give gratuitous instruction in the common branches of English education to all those poor scholars who should be appointed by the Monoux and Maynard trustees. Mr. Roberts, however, refused to do what was wanted, and, after much forbearance on the part of the trustees, we find in 1836 the following resolution was carried into effect : " That Rev. J. F. Roberts be forthwith dismissed from the situation of alms priest schoolmaster." This was the end of the career of Mr. Roberts, who had shamefully neglected his duties as schoolmaster, who had frustrated the intentions of the Founder, and who did not "read prayers in the Church, or assist the vicar or curate in the performance of service there.'

A Nice Little Earner - The Chestnuts in Church Lane

Soon after his appointment, James Roberts rented a large house on the other side of the school and churchyard, this was called 'The Chestnuts in Church Lane' We learn from Walthamstow Antiquarian Society's Publication Number 20 in 1928, the following:

'This interesting old house is almost opposite to The Walnuts, and the grounds extend eastward along Church Lane to the boundary of Winchester House. The house occupies one of the best positions in the town. It is close to St. Mary's Church, and has a very extensive view in the direction of the Forest. The property was formerly copyhold of the Manor of Walthamstow Toney, but was enfranchised in 1911. This family residence is a product of the eighteenth century, and is typical of what a City man wanted in those days. It is protected from the road by a brick wall; it is approached by a carriage drive; the house has ample accommodation on three floors; there is the usual stabling and coach-houses; and there are extensive grounds, secluded, well timbered, and laid out with lawns, flower beds and borders. What more could a wealthy person desire in such a delightful neighbourhood as Walthamstow in those far off days.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was the residence of a City Merchant, Mr. Richard Bright, who was Churchwarden of St. Mary's, and one of the Trustees of the Monoux School. After his death the house and adjoining fields were let to the Rev. James Foulkes Roberts, who, besides being Head Master of the Monoux Grammar School

for sixteen years he was constantly in trouble with took in boarders at this house. As Almspriest and Schoolmaster he received a stipend of £65, and for a period of his trustees.....

Here I propose giving some account of this Boarding School at the Chestnuts almost in the words of one of the pupils, Edward Lyon Berthon, who describes graphically his sufferings in this establishment in "A Retrospect of Eight Decades."

With regard to the food he writes, " Every Saturday a large lamp of salt beef was brought in, and an iron dish of potatoes, preceded by another iron dish containing what was called by the Master, 'pudding,' but by us, 'stickjaw.' Hard as the beef was on Saturday, it was harder still when cold on Sunday. Being very durable it appeared as the only meat till Saturday came round again, when the beautifully simple course was renewed. What wonder if we grew weak and ill! I think we only lived by spending our pocket money on penny rolls, cheese, treacle, red herrings and eggs

If our dinners were bad, our other meals were no better. Hunches of stale bread, with an almost invisible scrape of butter on one of their six sides, were our only food morning and evening, washed down with milk and water We were never so wild or unreasonable as to expect tea or coffee, the former being then about eight shillings a pound, and the latter a luxury for the rich. As for cocoa or chocolate, I don't think they were known in those days."

'Mr. Berthon describes the relations of the boys with Mrs. Roberts, who was anything but "motherly" to her young charges. As a revenge the boys had a glorious night before breaking up. Let me tell it in Mr. Berthon's own words.

"We all set to work and smashed every bit of crockery (there were basins in those bedrooms, you remember) that we could lay our hands on; and a jolly night we had, singing 'Dulce Domum' in the wreckage.

But the next morning the Head Master had his revenge. Instead of going home for the holidays, the boys were driven across the churchyard to the schoolroom, and Old Bob came in, black as thunder, followed by a man carrying a brace of the most exquisitely constructed birch rods that ever graced the hand of a pedagogue. 'No holidays! I'll flog the lot of you! First Class, strip!' But when he looked upon half-a-dozen big fellows quite ready for a shindy, he began to hesitate. He then declared he would flog the ringleaders, who were commanded to stand forth. Of course, no one volunteered for the honour. At last a happy thought struck him — we should all draw lots, and the two who got the prizes should take them out in four and twenty cuts of those lovely rods."

"Now," continues Mr. Berthon, " the two smallest boys in the school were my cousin Ben and myself, both eight years old, having been born on the same day. How anxiously we watched the faces of the boys as they drew their lots, beginning with the eldest and so down. Smiles of relief abounded as one after another they drew a blank.

But at last the bag came to us, with only two lots in it, and on opening the folded paper we read 'to be flogged.' How we blubbered, repeating what we had heard the elder ones say, "Didn't do it with any malicious intent. Sir." Old Bob commanded us to strip, but at the sight of our wretched little skinny backs his fury seemed to leak out, and after a few

whisks of the rod in his hand, and the pretty music it made in the air, he threw it down, saying, "There, go home! I'll pay you off next half." So happily ended the only rebellion in which I ever took part. But though we escaped the flogging, we were each ordered to write out an imposition of many hundreds of lines in the holidays....."

The Long Overdue Sacking of The Rev. James Foulkes Roberts.

The appointment of Mr. Roberts was terminated in 1836.... the trustees appointed the Rev. Thomas Waite to the vacant office, after he had made a declaration that he would conduct the school in strict accordance with the regulations, and that he would resign the office whenever he was required to do so by a majority of the trustees. At this time there were about twelve boys in the school, and in 1838 Mr. Waite obtained leave to appoint a deputy.

The School In Disrepair & Misappropriation of Parish Money

The buildings fell into disrepair, and it was not till 1842 that the funds were obtained to put them into proper condition. The Northern and Eastern Railway had purchased part of Church Common from the Parish for a railway cutting and in payment, there was a residue of £429, and this was appropriated to put the Monoux building in proper repair. they had re-provided some land the sum of £450. (See my earlier article on Selborne Park) After paying expenses

After the dismissal of James Roberts there were a number of different appointees to the position until 1869 when the Henry Griggs (born 1808), who had been the deputy school master for about twenty years, took the job. He remained in post until his death in 1879.

Henry Griggs Schoolmaster

Although most of the focus about the failings of the George Monoux school have been on the Parish appointments of the various Alms Priests/Schoolmasters, it seems clear that, for the most part, these men didn't carry out much of the actual teaching. Indeed, the principle complaint about the post holders seems not to have been about their failure to carry out their teaching duties but more about their failure to conduct prayers in the church. However, in 1838, the Parish appointed a deputy to the Alms Priest/Schoolmaster post. This was a Norfolk man named Henry Griggs and he was the mainstay of the school for about thirty years until he died in late 1879.

A Private Fee Paying School

George Bosworth tells us: *'It was during Mr. Griggs's tenure of office as deputy-schoolmaster that the school was visited in 1866 by Mr. Fearon, one of the Endowed Schools Commissioners. We learn from his report that the deputy-master received £30 from the endowment and £4 4s. a year from each scholar. There were seventeen day scholars but no boarders, and the course of instruction was modified to suit the boys' subsequent careers. The school work began and ended with prayer. Promotions were by efficiency and examinations were held twice a year by the almspriest. The report adds that the punishments were impositions, confinement, and rarely caning; that there was no playground, and that no boy had gone to any university within the last five years. The school time occupied 43 weeks per year, and the study covered 28 hours each week. Mr. Griggs reported to the Commissioner that*

unpunctuality and irregularity of attendance were his chief difficulties, and that reading, book-keeping, and arithmetic were the best subjects of the school. It will be gathered from this report that the school under Mr. Griggs had become, to all intents and purposes, a private school subsidised by a small endowment'

From the above, it is very clear that the school had moved a long way from the intent of George Monoux to provide free education for poor Walthamstow children. Instead, it had become a fee paying private school that was subsidised by endowments from various Walthamstow charities that were meant to benefit poor Walthamstow children.

Monoux School is Closed And Re-opened After Financial Jiggery Pokery

George Bosworth goes on to say: *'After the death of Mr. Griggs, the school was closed, and in 1880 the Walthamstow Charity Governors came into possession of it. The endowment consisted of about £36 a year, the master's house, and a school building, which was picturesque but unsuitable for school purposes.*

The school was reorganised under a scheme of the Charity Commission in 1884. An increased endowment had been provided by the Vestry voting £130 a year to the school from the Inhabitants' Donation Trust, and by the Churchwardens and Overseers giving £50 a year from the surplus income of Wise's Gift, a fund left for the repair of a tomb. The new scheme provided that not less than twenty scholarships should be maintained in the school, and as



the old school was found to be unsuitable for school purposes, the governors were empowered to hire premises pending the erection of new 'buildings.

Left: A painting of George Monoux school in the High Street

The school was reopened on the 14th January, 1886, in the Trinity Schoolroom, West Avenue, under the headmastership of Mr. H. A. Allpass, B.A., who subsequently took orders and became curate of St. John's. It may be as well to say that the great success of the school

was almost entirely owing to the personality of the headmaster. The Rev. H. A. Allpass became a real social force in our parish, and the school was soon filled to its utmost capacity. The temporary premises were vacated in 1889, when the building in High Street was opened. The foundation stone of the new school was laid by Mr. J. F. H. Read, J.P., on July 13th, 1889, and the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of London were at the opening ceremony on December 18th of the same year. This was a red-letter day in the history of the school, for in the evening the prizes were distributed at the Victoria Hall by Lady Leucha Warner, and the music was under the direction of Mr. J. F. H. Read, a musician and composer of considerable merit. The words of the Monoux School Song had been specially composed, and Mr. Read set them to music. Since that first opening of the new school, the annual winter prize-giving has been one of the events in the social life of Walthamstow, while the athletic sports in the summer have always attracted a large number of parents and friends'.

The Old Monovians history of the school tells us *'The re-founded school was further financed by a complex scheme of the Charity Commissioners, made in 1890. By it, the school was subsidised further by the diversion of funds from yet other Walthamstow charities, notably the dole charities of Rigg, Sims, Banks, Legendre, Collard, Harman and Bedford, and the Apprentice Boys' Charity of Mary Newell. These charities produced about £145 annually.'*

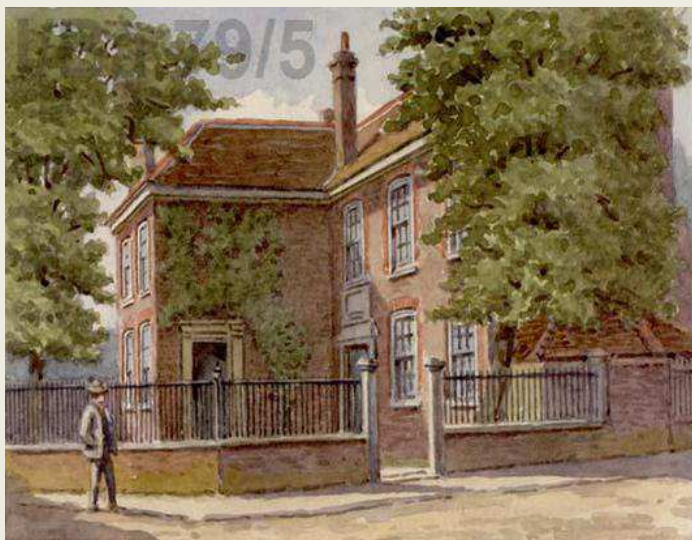
What this detailed account from George Bosworth tells us is that:

- Parish monies from the sale of Church Common land were misappropriated and used to subsidise the school.
- The school was closed for seven years between 1879, when Henry Giggs died and 1886 when it re-opened in West Avenue. Some Parish money was used to re-finance the school's re-opening.
- A number of the bequests/endowments left by benefactors for specific uses to benefit poor Walthamstow people were diverted to the exclusive use of re-establishing and maintaining the George Monoux school.

The Governance & Population of Walthamstow

Originally, the Parish of St Mary was the governing body for Walthamstow. This consisted of the vicar and members of the vestry. These were the church officials who were local land owners.

As the population grew, the Board system evolved out of the old Parish council system and its members was elected by a small number of people who owned property in Walthamstow. In



1873, when the original 12 member Board had been elected, the population of Walthamstow was under 12,000 people and the Board met in the Vestry House in Rectory Road (Now the Waltham Forest Museum) In 1876, the public hall in Orford Road was bought and enlarged as a Town Hall.

In 1891, the population had increased to 47,000 people. At the same time, the number of people on the local Board was increased to 18 and the district was divided into 4 political

Above: Image by courtesy of Essex Record Office. (Original at WF Museum) Vestry House, Rectory Road, Walthamstow that was where the original Parish Vestry meetings were held and was once the local Workhouse. Now Waltham Forest Museum

wards. Between 1891 and 1901, the population more than doubled to a total of nearly 97,000 people. In 1894, Walthamstow became an Urban District Council and another wing was added to the Town Hall.

The transition from being a Parish Council to an Urban District council wasn't easy.

In the 1880-90s, much of Walthamstow was like a building site. Big landowners like the Warners family were building large estates for rent and small landowners sold fields for builders to develop. Everywhere there were unmade roads. Taking advantage of the railways that now made Walthamstow easily and cheaply accessible from London, new people were pouring into Walthamstow to enjoy a better standard of living in a semi rural setting.

In many ways the situation was similar to that faced today by many people in areas where there have been a big influx of immigrants and the situation created a big division between many of the 'old' property owning Walthamstow residents and the 'new' residents who, for the most part, rented their homes. The town had grown fast but lacked the infrastructure to support the large numbers of new residents. Many of the roads needed to be 'made up' and sewerage systems were often inadequate to deal with the demand. There was a huge lack of school places and medical and other services lagged behind the need.

In this situation it was inevitable that there would be clashes between the 'old' established property owning residents and the new residents who predominantly rented their homes. Understandably, the new residents were vociferous in their demands that the members of the Walthamstow Board should address the problems but they didn't have any way of making the Board take the necessary actions. The Board was elected only by residents who owned their own property and this meant that the vast majority of the new residents didn't have a vote. Indeed, as most of the 'old' voting residents were comfortably well established, they didn't want a large amount of Parish money to be spent on meeting the needs of the incomers. After a number of clashes between the spokespeople for the new residents and members of the Board on a number of issues, the situation came to a head around the Board's actions to resurrect the failed George Monoux school.

Dishonesty & Corruption

Many Walthamstow residents, led by James Joseph McSheedy, bitterly opposed the Charity Commissioners complex scheme to finance the refounded George Monoux school by diverting charity money to educate the sons of 'well to do' gentlemen with money that was originally intended to help the poor people of Walthamstow. He accused the school Governors and Walthamstow Board of financial mismanagement and dishonesty. Behind this lay a total unwillingness to accept that money left to the poor of Walthamstow should be diverted to "educate the sons of gentlemen", as one of McSheedy's round robins dated September 1891 had it.

His point of view was certainly justified. By the 1884 and 1890 schemes, there were to be about 25 free places at the school. On the basis of the school fees at this time being £6 per

annum, the income lost to the authorities was some £150. Over £300 per annum, however, was being appropriated from charity accounts originally intended for relief of the poor.

The social composition of the school in 1890, though not quite of a nature accurately to be described as "sons of gentlemen", was not representative of the town as a whole. In 1887-8 no less than 67 % of the fathers of boys admitted were in the professions, clerical workers, or retailers. In 1902, this figure was 79 %. In the national census, these groups accounted for but 13 % of Walthamstow's population.

William George Cluff

In 1879, fifty three year old William George Cluff was elected to Walthamstow Board . At that time he living with his wife, two unmarried daughters and a domestic servant at the Yews in Hoe Street. His occupation was that of a 'house proprietor'.

After this time, Walthamstow Board meetings were seldom without controversy. William Cluff passionately believed that the dealings of the Board should be transparent and open to inspection. He proposed publication of the Board's accounts, proper custody of its records, and admission of ratepayers as spectators at Board meetings. He pressed for legal action against builders who were contravening the by-laws and for the use of direct labour on the Board's own work. As the Board's Returning Officer in 1883, he criticized malpractice at a local election. He had a considerable following outside the board and in 1879, a public meeting of ratepayers endorsed the course adopted by him and his two most constant supporters; yet in 1883, the board's chairman, W. E. Whittingham (Remembered for the school names for him), condemned them as a minority aiming to *'usurp the authority which must repose in the majority'*. Nevertheless, by 1894, Cluff's persistence had secured acceptance of all the most important matters raised by him.

James Joseph McSheedy

James McSheedy, was a firebrand. He was one of a number of young radical Irish men who came to work in England in the latter half of the 19th Century. He was born in 1853 in Clonmel, Tipperary. Ireland and married Mary Agnes Worth in 1873. They had two children, James in 1885 & Mary in 1886. In 1881, he was employed as a Certified Teacher in Ashton under Lyne in Lancashire. He came to Walthamstow between 1881 and 1891 and In 1891, he was living at 114, Queens Road, Walthamstow (Where he lived until he died in 1923) In 1911, he was the highly regarded Head Master of Winns Boys school.

McSheedy was a 'progressive' and worked to unite other local residents in opposition to the elitist Walthamstow Board. Because the *Walthamstow Guardian* sided with the traditional property owning voters, he started and edited a local newspaper called the *Walthamstow Reporter*. The focus of his work was to campaign against the perceived corruption of the Board's administration of local charities as typified by the Monoux school situation, a campaign that continued until 1895 and gained some success with the forced resignation of William Houghton, the Vestry Clerk.

Walthamstow Urban District Council.



The situation changed dramatically under the Local Government Act of 1894, Walthamstow became an Urban District Council and the local Board was replaced in 1895 by an elected Urban District Council of 18 members representing 4 wards. The election was fought on 'party' lines between the Ratepayers Association (Later called the 'Moderates') and the Radical & Progressive Society. The 'Progressives' were led to victory by McSheedy who sat as a Councillor from 1894-1904.

Above Walthamstow Town Hall in Orford Road

The George Monoux School Reborn

As a result of the jiggery pokery with the Charity finances, the George Monoux school was resurrected and in 1899 moved to a new purpose build premises in the High Street. It had a good Headmaster, a new board of Governors and now was partly funded by Essex County Council. It is from this point that the excellent reputation of the school begins.

Bill Bayliss

March 2014

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