

# The Yealand Friends' Meeting School

## Its history in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries

Sheila Jones, from research undertaken by Dr. Joan Clarke

The Friends' Meeting House at Yealand, because of its importance as one of the earliest meetings, and as one that has continued in existence since its inception, has been much written about. However, some time ago notes of her research on the meeting made by Joan Clarke, one of The Mourholme Local History Society's founder members and a great contributor to our books, were given to us in the hopes that we would write them up as she had been unable to before her death. Joan's subject was the school rather than the meeting itself, and her interests were all-encompassing: the funding, the school's origin, the school premises, the school's place within Quaker education, its continuity, the curriculum, the teachers and the pupils. I will do scant justice to her notes, I am afraid, because she clearly envisaged a more ambitious piece of research than she had yet undertaken, writing notes to herself to pursue some points whereas I have only used what she had produced. Also Joan had background knowledge which I lack. Nevertheless the notes still exist, are in the Mourholme Archive, and are ready for further use by other researchers.

## The Origin and the Funding

Because of the paucity of records, 1709 has come to be accepted date for the formal beginning of the school, when Thomas Withers left £6 annually charged on his Over Kellet estate towards the maintenance of a schoolmaster at Yealand. Yet, Dr. Clarke feels that the date of the will cannot be taken as the origin of the school. There are several other relevant dates. The will is dated 1709, but Withers did not die until 1715; and in 1710 he had "desired to enquire whether Friends (were) willing to continue what they subscribed for the school", as though this were established practice. And there are other records. The Monthly Preparative Meeting of April, 1709 notes Edward Garrett as schoolmaster. A June, 1697 note in Warton Parish Register Episcopal Transcripts and Preparation refers to "A Quaker Schoolmaster at Yealand Conyers whose name is Thomas Armistead". And she quotes the diary of John Kelsall, "...about the latter end of 2<sup>nd</sup> month of 1700 I went to Yelland (about 7 miles from Lancaster) to have taught School there a while on Tryal but understanding not the right method of Friends Schools (having not been at any) I came back from thence." There had clearly at least been attempts to begin a school before the accepted date.

£6 was not a large amount; a hundred years earlier Archbishop Hutton had left £20 p.a. for a master at his school in Warton. However, Dr Clarke suggests the legacy and the terms of the will had a hold over the community, making it feel incumbent on the Friends to keep the school going even when this was difficult to do. There could perhaps have been pressure on account of the very high reputation of Robert Withers as one of the earliest Friends, an associate of George Fox and of Margaret Fell. The Yealand Preparative Meeting of 1733 talks of the "Gift of our dear Friend Thomas Withers ...for the use of the schoole...and the said master is to Teach all Poore children free belonging to the Meeting." There are references to the will in the Yealand Preparative Meetings of 1800 and 1821, in the records of the Lancaster Monthly Meeting as late as 1860, and it is referred to by the Charity Commissioners in 1898, as though it still had weight. All the same, the burden on the community continued to grow, as the bequest became increasingly negligible. A "common collection" had to be taken in 1720 to make up a deficiency in salary which in 1723 was £12, and by 1733 schoolmaster Michael Jenkinson was to receive the interest from another four legacies as well as Withers' sum. A Finance Committee Report of about 1878, found in the Yealand Preparative Meeting Report, gave the master's salary as £130, "£70 of which is Government Grants", so that although references to the legacy are still being recorded, it had become a small fraction of the total salary.

In the mid-nineteenth century there is a record of the schoolmasters' ages and they tended to be in their early twenties, leaving when they married. Dr. Clarke takes this to suggest that the salary offered was not sufficient for a married man. There were periods when the post was not filled at all. There are gaps in the records from 1713-19, from 1793-1804 and further in the early nineteenth century when there was no master in place. There are entries in the Monthly Meeting which mention difficulties in finding a teacher or in keeping the school going. The teacher in a dissenting

school needed a licence from their diocesan and this would have limited the number of candidates for the post (John Yeats, master at Lancaster Friends' School in 1701-5 was imprisoned for not having obtained a licence). Sometimes the school kept going as an institution because a master rented the building from The Friends and set up his own school, charging the pupils directly. From 1822-1829 John Ford was paying rent, as was R. Dickenson from 1836-39. The master charging the pupils as happens in a privately run school goes some way to exemplifying what the Friends probably hoped would happen regularly at Yealand. Withers' will had been set up to teach children of the poor, "others" were to pay. Dr Clarke quotes a reference from the situation in Lancaster: "The fact was that Friends expected the master to make a living from the school...it was expected that good, energetic teaching would bring in pupils whose parents would pay fees thus freeing Friends' charity for poor relief. ...The question of whether the school was a business or a charity was never...entirely clarified." She goes on to say, "it would only have been possible to keep the school commercially successful by the admission of non-Friends". In any event, at some time in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the school decided to apply to the government for a grant.

## Premises

The usual thinking is that the early school was held at the Meeting House which had been built in 1692; however, another possible site is Backhouse Farm at Hilderstone, which was a centre of Quaker activity and which has a room at the back identified by one resident as the schoolroom. In 1737 there is written confirmation of the school as being situated at the Meeting House in an item in the Monthly Minutes: "Our Meeting House at Yealand being consumed by fire the sixteenth of this month (first discovered betwixt the hours of six and seven in the Evening and generally concluded to be occasioned by that fire in the School kept in the lower End)". Notes state that some thirty years later John Jenkinson and his brother James rented land from the Meeting, and that in 1764 John bought "a dwelling house and also the close called Overcroft". In addition, he paid £30 for the alteration of a house which the Friends bought in 1763 to be converted into a school.

Nevertheless, Dr Clarke concludes elsewhere that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century the school was only taught in the Meeting House, and that "the cottage that later became the schoolhouse was possibly owned by the meeting, but no evidence was found that it was used for the school" until later. In fact, in 1803 the Preparatory Meeting lists the cost of sundries for making the Meeting House fit for a schoolroom. Things were changing by 1861 when E. P. Rothwell reported a payment of £161 for the alteration and enlargement of "the schoolroom" (this was likely the Jenkinson building) and the making of a playground for the children, and later that year "something further was required" to continue the alterations. In 1862 "the schoolhouse" was insured for £200 and the Meeting House separately for £300. Thereafter there are several references to a separate schoolhouse in the monthly minutes. In 1898 a Charity Commission Report gives a useful summary stating the floor above a coach house (i.e. the Jenkinson building), held the original schoolrooms, and above the stable was a *recently* erected large school-room. It also mentioned the playground, "separated from the school premises by the Meeting-house and yard".

## The System of teaching and the curriculum

We have looked at the origin of the school, its funding and its housing. The next point is its place within the Quaker system of teaching. The 1690 Lancashire Yearly Meeting stated: *It is our Christian and earnest advice and counsel to all Friends to provide schoolmasters and mistresses who are faithful Friends to teach and instruct their children. And not to send them to such schools where they are taught the corrupt ways...of the world...but to take care that you train up your children in the good nurture, admonition and fear of the Lord in that plainness and language which becomes the Truth. And parents and masters to be good examples to them in a sober and Godly conversation and plainness of speech...*. The same source, in 1695 referred to, "schoolmasters who are faithful Friends and well-qualified". This is subtle. Does "well-qualified" mean in Quaker beliefs, or in elementary school subjects? If, as is probable, both are intended, which holds more weight? The diary of John Kelsall, quoted above, talks of a "right method", but whether this was grounded spiritually, socially or academically, is not clear and was probably as open to discussion as is ever the case in education.

Fox and Penn early developed an interest in founding schools offering a wide range including both natural science as the study of God's creation, and classical languages. Latin was the lingua franca of natural science and was also needed to teach children to read Court hand, lawyers' Latin, writs etc. In 1686, Fox said a school at Shacklewell was, "*sett up to instruct young lasses and Maidens in whatsoever things was civil and useful in Creation.*" Fox wanted a school to teach languages "*together with the nature of herbs, roots, plants and trees*" that "*boys might grow up in the knowledge of God's creation.*" The contrary view held as its basic tenet that learning was in no sense necessary for ministry and might indeed hinder it; further, that it was of greater importance to inculcate the plain language of truth and keep children from evil influences. Where the school at Yealand found itself in educational philosophy or where it wanted to be, undoubtedly fluctuated over the years and depended on the social, and particularly the Friends' movement's influences at a particular time, and on who was the teacher. Dr. Clarke found no information about spiritual teaching as such – records of religious studies lessons only told which Bible passage was being taught, and certainly it was thought desirable, at least in the mid-nineteenth century, that each child should have a Bible -; however, there was an effort always to have Quaker masters whom, it would be expected, would develop the Friends' ethos by example. A few references touch on moral standards: children were warned not to tease a boy with a speech impediment; boys were punished for ill-treating a ram on Summerhouse Hill and "spoken to" about the cruelty of bird-nesting; there was a subscription raised in 1870 for the soldiers fighting in the Franco-Prussian war. All the same, with one exception caning was accepted by teachers as the serious punishment for boys, whereas girls were "kept in" or "deprived of usual play". This was the norm and inspectors always wrote of the school as having good discipline or good behaviour or "tone". In 1866 the teacher, Orlando Pearce, sensitively wrote of trying to reduce the amount of corporal punishment by using positive reinforcement of good behaviour.

What about the academic programme? Without records throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries this is difficult to ascertain. In 1727 Nathan Robinson was to teach English, writing, arithmetic and Latin. Dr. Clarke found no school information about John Jenkinson, but in 1788 the antiquarian William Hutchinson wrote of Mr Jepkinson (sic) "*who conducted a great seminary at Yelling [!], where he teaches the languages*". Since his brother was a publishing natural scientist in Kendal, we could expect that subject also to have been touched on also. The 1729 Preparatory Minutes raised the question of teaching reading; was the school a secondary school like Archbishop Hutton which would not admit a pupil unable to read, or was it a primary school? Such a basic piece of information is not clear. Research on the school in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is suddenly made easier because of the maintenance of a record book.

Some of the entries are dry, but many entertaining and enlightening. We can read there of the inestimable Orlando Pearce almost instructing himself in an effective method of using phonetics in the teaching of reading in the way he details the steps he plans to take. Then there's a good idea which was found effective, of having a little drill and marching probably at the beginning of the day, only mentioned twice. Was this lack of consistency, of time, or did it actually become a regular but unmentioned part of the day? Burns' poem, "The modest tipped crimson flower" was studied; but was it a good choice one wonders? A nice touch is the Monitors being ordered "*to set down on the slates hanging in the window, the next page or lesson so that no time may be wasted in remembering what was done last*". An American Organ was purchased, and this would have been to raise the music standards which were, at that time, deemed unsatisfactory. The only other "piece of equipment" mentioned is a New Map of England purchased by the "friends of the Institute".

In 1894 John Hartley visited the school and took a special lesson on New Zealand illustrated by Magic Lantern Views. Hartley was of the Quaker grocery business in Millhead.

## The Continuity of the School

We have stated that there were periods when the school was not in operation at all. This was perhaps not unusual before schooling became compulsory and also before government support would keep schools with low attendance open. Although there is no corroborative evidence at Yealand, there has been a suggestion (Early Lancashire Friends) that “*in (a) period of interregnum(1705-1719) at Lancaster that local Friends in fact sent their children to be taught by the Quaker schoolmaster Edmund Garrett at Yealand*”. Even Lancaster Boys’ Grammar School which had been founded in 1469 and which is said to have had 54 pupils in 1554, closed for a period 17 years later for financial reasons. In Yealand’s case, the school’s insecurity lasted almost throughout the period of its existence.

## Changes after becoming a British School in 1866

It was noted, above, that the school applied for a government grant and this was probably in 1865. Receiving a grant carried with it obligations and the school was now subject to the 1862 Code which gave grants according to results. The results were assessed by inspectors who tested the pupils, watched lessons, and checked the log book. These log books, dating from April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1866, are still available at the school and are a tremendous resource. When seeking a grant it was necessary to apply either as a National School or a British School, the monies being channelled through one of two voluntary societies: the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in England or the British and Foreign Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of every Religious Persuasion. Yealand of course applied to be a British School and thenceforth had to be known as Yealand Friends British School. Its intake now had to be determined by the social class of the pupil applicant, not by the child’s religion. Its religious teaching probably continued with no change (the British Society had grown from the work of a Quaker, Joseph Lancaster). It was classed as a Voluntary Elementary School, meaning that it could base its teaching within a particular faith, but it had to allow children to be withdrawn from doctrinal teaching on conscientious grounds. It also had to accommodate the faith practices of non-Quaker children. For instance, the November, 1869 log-book explains poor attendance by noting, “*very wet. Also Catholics away for All Souls*”. Catholics were the most likely non-Quaker attendees since there were many in the area because of the protection of landowners like the Middletons and the Townleys, and they had no school of their own. Anglicans would likely have gone to Warton.

The 1862 Code stressed the 3 R’s and initially the inspectors only examined in reading, writing and arithmetic, subjects which will have filled the bulk of the day. There was much grammar and parsing and mental arithmetic. One note said, very precisely, that reading was to be taught with “*special attention to the aspirate*”, but on the other hand, there was a log book note of a geography lesson teaching the countries of Northern Europe and their capitals although this subject was not liable for inspection. The early requirements of the Code were relaxed as time passed, and the curriculum broadened. In fact, in 1871 the inspector said the grant would be reduced unless he were satisfied music was being taught. This deficiency was only gradually put right, and it was not until 1893 that “singing by rote” was described as successful. In 1891 history became a valid subject, and in 1892 drawing, according to the Code. Sewing was also valued in inspector reports. For example, the July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1873, report states, “*Elementary knowledge is generally sound and accurate, and the special subjects are well-prepared. Sewing is particularly good...*”

There must have been some latitude, and the Code itself will have been interrogated to decide if it were a satisfactory tool for assessment. In those inspectors’ reports which Dr. Clarke has included, dating from 1872 to 1893, the subjects mentioned are various elements of English, geography, mathematics (including Euclid), sewing, music, and history. So either inspectors were examining outside the Code, or the Code itself was quite quickly becoming more inclusive. As always, some teachers will have been more inspired, will have stretched the curriculum, and worked at developing increasingly effective teaching methods. Orlando Pearce (1863-1869), the same teacher who was concerned about corporal punishment, advised a young monitor “*to use concrete numbers in arithmetic as a help to the more backward children*”. He gave the pupils an opportunity of witnessing an eclipse and explained how it was brought about. When they littered the classroom with leaves on Oak Apple Day, he explained what the day meant, as

well as making them tidy up. The log-books offer a few images like these that give a picture of master and classroom, and some data, but still the entries might be vague, i.e. as noted above, limiting a description of a scripture lesson to the Bible story taught. The Preparatory Meeting minutes of 1867 have a note that it was “*thought desirable to find ways of teaching the children of the Meeting the fundamental principles of our religious society*”, and one would have enjoyed a reference to a follow-through in other minutes or in the log book.

## The school hierarchy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Other matters of interest to the inspectors were discipline, “tone”, the correct keeping of the register, and the training of pupil-teachers. Older pupils were chosen to be monitors, sometimes on a rotational basis and monitors could go on to become pupil-teachers, with the plan of training to become full teachers. Monitors were expected to work to a standard. In 1867 “R. Walling cautioned and then punished for idleness as a monitor”. There are often negative comments in the log books, but also positivity; “F. Bainbridge, as monitor of the 4<sup>th</sup> class, evinced considerable skill, and showed signs of being a good teacher”. Not all monitors went on to become pupil-teachers. If they did, they were bound, as happened with Isaac Burrow in August, 1871. “*The Indenture or agreement signed by Isaac Burrow, Richard Burrow, Roger Preston and Edward Payne Rothwell all in the presence of George Spear*”. He did not progress satisfactorily at first, but by the September of the next year when the teacher was absent for a whole week due to illness and he was left in charge, he managed well. In December, 1876 he obtained a post as an assistant master (we do not know where), by which time Yealand had a new pupil teacher. This was a paid position and a stepping-stone to training at a Teaching College. If a pupil teacher failed to gain a place at Teachers’ College the fault was deemed to be that of the class teacher.

Beyond the classroom, there was a higher stratum in the system: the school managers. In the mid 1890s when the school was failing badly, inspectors laid the blame at the managers’ door for “the surrender of all authority”. They should have “tested the Registers at least quarterly and “seen that their Pupil Teachers are carefully and regularly taught”.

## The Teachers

Dr. Clarke found snippets of information about some teachers, but this was often no more than that they needed their half-yearly wages to be paid. We have mentioned the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Armstead and John Kelsall. The first to be mentioned in the Yealand Preparatory Meeting minutes is Edwd. Garrett in 1709, and Ann Hadwen had already succeeded him by 1712. Nathan Robinson (master, 1719-1729) says that he charged pupils 2/6 per quarter for teaching Latin, which characterizes him as well-educated. The contract with Michael Jenkinson who followed him is interesting, showing how poor children’s education was paid for: in 1732 it states that he is to have £9 per annum for “*teaching all poore children free belonging to this Meeting*”, all others to pay per Quarter “*as has been usuall in years past*”. In addition, and this comes from the 1733 agreement, he was to receive the Withers’ £6 and the interest from several other legacies. John Jenkinson, his son, cited above as running “a great seminary” succeeded him and was so enterprising that an advertisement he placed in the Newcastle Chronicle has been found:

**Yealand School, near Lancaster.**

**T**HE TRUSTEES having erected a large and commodious new School, and the Encouragement the present Master hath met with induced him greatly to enlarge his House, and make it suitable for the Reception of Boarders. These Conveniences, and the remarkable healthy and pleasant Situation of the Place, make him take this Method to acquaint the Public, that those who please to favour him with the Education of their Children, may be assured that he will take proper Care of their Morals, as well as to instruct them in their Learning. The Branches of Learning taught by the Master and proper Assistants are, English, Latin, Greek, Writing, Arithmetic Vulgar and Decimal, Book-keeping, Geography, the Use of the Globes, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Navigation, Surveying, &c. The Terms for Boarding, and Schooling, are from 10l. to 12l. per Annum, according to the Part of Learning they study. There are also good Lodgings to be had in the Village, on reasonable Terms, exclusive of the Master's House.

The Encouragement given him by those who have favoured him with their Children, and the Trustees of the School, is most gratefully acknowledged, by

*Their most obliged Friend, &c.* JOHN JENKINSON.

N. B. The English Grammar is taught at the said School grammatically, and in such a practical and concise Method, that any Boy of a tolerable Capacity may in a very short Time be qualified for Business, so as to spell and write with Correctness and Propriety, without the Help of any other Language. †

In Green Garth, the house in Yealand Conyers that the Jenkinsons owned, initials in scholarly writing are carved on doors and walls and Carol Shaw (Mourholme Magazine, 1992) suggests these could have been inscribed by pupils...perhaps boarders. This influx of pupils during his tenure would justify the description (see above) of the school as “a great seminary”. Jenkinson proposed “to give up the school” in 1792, and, sadly, there was apparently no master at all until 1804. .

Thereafter, as narrated above, the school in the nineteenth century was in some disarray. This reflects a general decline in Quakerism which Angus Winchester refers to as the “quiet period”. Masters stayed in post for a relatively short time and there were further periods when the school closed. The problem may well have been an insufficient salary, as Dr. Clarke concluded, leading to the application for government funding, but the grant did not solve all financial problems. George French, who was appointed in 1877 had a long tenure, until 1895, but it was not altogether happy. In 1886 he wrote to the school committee pointing out that he had been paying out of his own pocket for books and material for the school, that his income was falling because of the lowering of the school grant (this would have been because of inspectors’ dissatisfactions, (the report of 1885 states that “*the staff should be at once strengthened so as to meet the requirements of Article 83*”), and lastly that he was finding it difficult to manage a salary paid annually in one lump sum. The first grievance was redressed seven years later when the committee purchased from him all materials and books he had bought that were in use in the school. Relationships continued to be sour, one can deduce, by the fact that in 1895, “*On 4<sup>th</sup> mo. 1<sup>st</sup>. two of the managers visited the School tested the Register and were hissed on leaving by the master, G. French, who also asked the children to hiss. Signed John Escolme*”. This was the period when the inspectors, although acknowledging the Master’s failures, also blamed the Managers for their abrogation of responsibility.

The number of staff must have gradually expanded and are formally listed in 1883 as Mr French, certificated master; Richard Dandy, assistant master; Robert Butler, pupil teacher 3<sup>rd</sup> year (i.e. his 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the role); Agnes Wearing, sewing mistress. The staffing was very volatile. Agnes Wearing and George French both had a great deal of illness, and the role of assistant seems to have been quite hard to fill. There were dramas apart from Mr French having the class hiss at official visitors; in 1892 a Mr Fletcher who had been taken on to fill in during one of French’s illnesses had to be taken home because “he lost his reason”! The last entries Dr. Clarke records were in 1896 when George

French was dismissed. The committee still had not paid him for blinds or coals used in school. He accepted a position in Northamptonshire and left, "Blinds taken". One hopes they fitted somewhere in his new home.

The liveliest part of Dr Clarke's notes, for me, was in her examination of the log-books, when she grouped the entries she chose as Lessons, Treats, Amusements, Reasons for Absence, Employment – which refers to pupil employment occasioning absence-, Books and Apparatus, Teachers and Monitors, and, inevitably, Miscellaneous. We have already treated some of these subsections, but others make no appearance until there are log-books.

## Treats and Amusements

Dr. Clarke extrapolated from the logbook entries that give a delightful side to the pupils' school experience. There were many day and half-day holidays, although it is unclear when the school closed for longer periods (the "usual three weeks" is mentioned in the summer of 1877). These odd days and half-days were sometimes, no doubt, a welcome absence of school experience, (and Dr. Clarke's classifying them as Treats made me wonder at her childhood feelings about school!) occurring sometimes "with no reason given", sometimes on a Holy Day, sometimes because the schoolroom was needed, or because repairs were being undertaken. There was a whole week off because "no assistant found", and another, tantalisingly "owing to an explosion taking place in the classroom"! In 1892 the school closed from September 23<sup>rd</sup> until October 12<sup>th</sup> on account of the master's wedding. Many of the "absences" were shared pleasures. In January, 1867, the children were "allowed ½ hour in the afternoon for sliding on Mr. Ford's pond and then given biscuits and sweets by the good man. In 1869 the children were "taken for a scramble on Summerhouse Hill after sweets and gingerbread" again given by Mr. Ford of Leeds. The next year we hear of a half-day closure to allow the older children to go to a wild beast show at Burton, and the same year there was a half-day off to allow children to attend "Sunday School treats". There were half-holidays for the North Royal Agricultural Show, for the Burton and Milnthorpe Show, and for the Carnforth Flower Show; holidays for funerals of benefactors and those of local importance; and for the Whit Wednesday Burton Club Walk. Some treats were in school and could be edifying, for instance "the microscopic entertainment" in 1871 or the magic lantern show, "The Overland Route to India", when "all seemed pleased". A treat could be used as a bribe to attend it would seem from the 1888 entry: "School told of treat to be given by the Hartley Bros. of Carnforth to those who attend this week". (Hartley's being the grocer). Many in-school treats involved food. We read of a "fruit feast", a "coffee feast", coffee and cake annually, an orange and nuts treat, sweets, tea, new milk. Sometimes the children and their parents were all given a tea party, and once the "usual coffee feast" is referred to as being held on lawns in front of Morecambe Lodge. Some children could be taken out, for instance the 30 to Warton to a panorama and lecture in 1866. In general I noted the number of times these lighter sides of school life connected them to their local community.

There is a wonderfully understated word, "cautioned" with regards to some of the boys' play activities. That the boys were "cautioned about going on Mr. Preston's pond, throwing stones and breaking the wall down" seems quite mild, and "a caution" almost criminally so when the "boys were cautioned about using gunpowder in the playground"! These quotations occur in a section that Dr Clarke has headed "Amusements", which they were, but most of the amusements she lists are transgressions (save the 1868 one, for example, in which "Several children at Lancaster to see the laying of the foundation stone at the new Idiots' Asylum"). There was a great deal of throwing, mostly of stones but also of various nuts, including walnuts which is interesting, and it was made clear that this was wrong "even with no guilty intent". The children walked to school unaccompanied by an adult, of course, which was a situation ripe for cultivating friendships, independence, perhaps a love of their countryside, but also for "rough behaviour...vulgar talk and quarrelling". Two boys were to be sent home an hour early on a regular basis it seems, to avoid "fratching" on the way; and they instead left, or were taken out of school which pleased others. There were many late arrivals for very pleasurable reasons: nutting, playing on the hill, sliding on Holmere Tarn, on the road, or on a neighbour's pond, and six were punished for truancy as they witnessed visitors arriving at a garden party at Leighton Hall. Boys brought knives to school, and pipes. In 1879 the Master discovered that most of the upper boys smoked. It all speaks of a freedom which our children lack; the freedom to misbehave, but also to have self-generated fun.

That there was a library recorded from 1866 onwards is a great source of satisfaction. It was attached to the school but for the use of the whole community. Dr. Clarke made several references to its operation: books being circulated, new ones being purchased, and books under repair. There was an effort to give children reading material, even if it were only for the convenience of getting rid of it. So, they were handed old “British Workmen”, “Cassell’s Family Paper”, “Band of Hope” (interesting that they were freely given Salvation Army material). All of this is dry for children, but it may have been read at home. Old and worn out books were also given away. The notes comment on various readers that were purchased for classroom use, of “home-lesson books” on English History, and of poetry and spellers. In August, 1875, each child was requested to buy a reading book, with the majority complying. However, in early September the Richardson boys from Borwick left rather than do so, although “The father is well able to afford the amount”.

## Reasons for Absence:

As stated above, Catholics were absent on Holy Days, and reported as such in the log book, although it is not clear how such absence would appear in the register. The major reasons for absence centred on illness, naturally, and on farming. There were some major outbreaks of illness during the period the log book was kept. Scarlet fever occurred in the winter of 1876, and in 1886 measles kept the school closed for three weeks; but generally the problems were with coughs and colds. The rural, self-supporting life style meant children would be kept away to help with many agricultural tasks; they were reported to be housing the corn, busy with potatoes and peat, turnip thinning and weeding, peeling bark, picking stones and weeds, picking fruit, or just gardening, although that chiefly with potato planting and lifting. The period of Whit (despite its being a moveable feast) was so busily used for farming and attendance so scarce, that what had been a day holiday on Whit Wednesday in the 1860s became a week’s holiday in 1872, according to the log. There were agricultural events too, such as the Lancaster Cheese and Cattle Fair, the Burton Agricultural Show, a ploughing match at Holme, for which the school did not close but which occasioned general absence. Some reasons for staying away are sad to read. In May, 1866, “*Tenant’s mother sent word that he would not be able to attend school again till after the Midsummer holidays – busy peeling bark*”. (There are no dates for Midsummer holidays until 1876, when they are about a month.) A few children are absent “in service”; we do not know how old they are. Annie Barton had attended school but then had to remain at home to help, and so her sister Jane came in her stead. Two girls left for service but with plans to return for the examination. In 1874 Henry Baines of Carnforth returned for the winter months. An education would be hard to achieve in those circumstances. There was a school attendance officer, but no mention of repercussions for truancy.

## Last Words

Dr. Clarke has no notes beyond this date in any area of her interest. The meeting itself was moving into a period of renewed vibrancy, according to Dr. Winchester, and perhaps the school took on a different character. To overcome the abruptness of stopping with no ending, I will select a few notes from the “Miscellaneous” section of her notes which have historical interest. Compared to today, how briskly some things used to be done! On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1869, E. Thistleton’s umbrella “taken from school. A woman suspected. Policeman ‘on the scent’”. On November 5<sup>th</sup> “Umbrella found in possession of woman suspected, Mrs. Clemenson of Warton. E.T. has to appear against her tomorrow”. And then an age-old solution to an age-old problem: February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1868, “Spoke to Mr Rothwell about a curtain to divide the girls from the boys during sewing-time to prevent their attention being taken off their work”. A health issue we would not encounter in 1866: “Children told about lowness of water supply in cask downstairs. Advised not to drink it”.

The notes were a delight to read and a huge task on Dr Clarke’s part. Reading old documents written in faded longhand is not easy and she has left us with a wealth of material that might otherwise not have been accessed. As always when reading contemporary accounts, one is aware of human nature as an enduring quality not tied to any historical period. In the records there are highs and lows and a great deal of “getting by”. It is good to be grounded in an awareness of this when one is too seduced by “progress” or “nostalgia”.



Apologies are in order for inadequate referencing but this was inevitable when working from incomplete notes. As I said at the beginning, these notes are available in our Archive and there is much more than I have extrapolated. In addition, the log-books are available on application at the Meeting House and notes from the Lancaster Meeting which Dr. Clarke used will be available there. In all there is a richness of source material.

Sheila Jones, August 2018