

### Educational opportunities for poor children in Lutterworth from 1700-1800

In 1630 Robert Poole 'enfeoffed to John Poole, Thomas Insley, William Wightman and Thomas Kerby, two cottages in Leicester ... and all the lands of him, the Said Robert Poole'.<sup>1</sup> In 1839, these lands consisted of four messuages in Leicester, with various shops and a bakehouse. The schoolmaster and his successors at the church school were to receive the rents for 'educating and bringing up in good learning eight children'.<sup>2</sup> These eight children were 'nominated by the vicar and churchwardens',<sup>3</sup> and the rest of the scholars at Lutterworth's church school paid for their own instruction. For instance, in 1790, when Samuel Oliver was master of the church school, the cost of instruction was eleven guineas.<sup>4</sup> Two other charities were connected with this school. The income from Mrs Bent's charity of 1693 was applied to the putting out of four poor boys to the church school.<sup>5</sup> John Durrad, by his will proved in 1726, 'gave and bequeathed to the parishes of Harborough, Great Bowden, Blaby, Lutterworth, Kimcoat and Misterton, in the county of Leicester, the sum of £20'.<sup>6</sup> This was entrusted to the overseers of the poor and the churchwardens of Lutterworth; and they applied it to the putting out of two poor boys to the church school. These two poor boys could be the children of dissenters, thus children from poor dissenter families were not excluded from receiving an education. A total of fourteen poor boys could be instructed at the church school free of charge due to these charities.

Between 1781 and 1782, the church school was rebuilt by the town masters, whose accounts shed light upon the expenses of reconstruction. For instance, on 17 November 1781, 10s. 6d. was paid to Mr Barrows for 'loading 21500 bricks'.<sup>7</sup> A further 4s. 6d. was paid to Mr Barrows for 'diging out Foundations... making a Gutter, leveling the Ground, & covering Bricks with Straw'.<sup>8</sup> On 13th April 1782 James Dones received a payment of £1 7s. plus ale worth 1s. for 'Sealing Plaistering & laying School Floor'. These accounts also reveal who subscribed towards the cost of building the church school and school house. Within a long list of donors, subscriptions by Lord and Lady Denbigh totalled £4 4s.,<sup>9</sup> Richard Shuckburgh subscribed 10s. 6d., whilst Peter Dunkley subscribed 2s. 6d.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Charities*, Parl. Papers 1839 (163) p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>4</sup> Z. Crook and B. Simon, 'Private Schools in Leicester and the County 1780-1840' in B. Simon (ed.) *Education in Leicestershire 1540-1940*, (Leicester, 1968) p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Charities*, Parl. Papers 1839 (163) pp. 137-8

<sup>6</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Charities*, Parl. Papers 1839 (163) p. 133, 222.

<sup>7</sup> Leicestershire Record Office, DE 914/ 1, The Accounts of the Townmasters, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

By the mid-eighteenth century, the poor boys of Lutterworth were no longer competing for the fourteen free places at the church school. Edward Sherrier's will gave £200 'to pay for this schooling of Five poor Boys in the free school of Lutterworth'.<sup>11</sup> With the overplus of money trustees were to 'buy Bibles Common Prayer Book and the Whole Duty of Man' and these were 'to be given to the most deserving of the said children'.<sup>12</sup> The Report of the Commissioners of Charities outlines that these children were to be 'taught to read, write and cast accounts, and the Catechism of the Church of England, and to be well grounded in the principals of the Christian religion'.<sup>13</sup> Sherrier willed to give 'Daughter Mary... all my estate situate in Church Over' and his wife 'the sum of Twenty Pounds per annum'.<sup>14</sup> However, if his daughter died before the age of twenty one, and his wife died or remarried, he willed that 'the said sums of Two hundred Pounds ...shall go towards the building of the said School and Schoolhouse'.<sup>15</sup> The widow and daughter of Sherrier both died before the year 1732. Rents that derived from the estate at Churchover, Shawell and a close in the parish of Lutterworth on the east side of Leicester Road were devoted to the establishment and maintenance of a charity school and schoolhouse for many poor boys. A document named 'records of the meetings of the trustees', offers an insight into how the trustees fulfilled Sherrier's will. On the 10th of May 1733, trustees recorded that 'a Lease shall be made to us from the Town masters for one and twenty years of the ground whereon the alms house and School house were proposed to be built ... Such a Lease will be a Sufficient Title for us to build upon the said Ground'.<sup>16</sup> From this source we learn that the six trustees were very attentive to the establishment of the school and that Sherrier also wished to endow an almshouse. It can be suggested that Sherrier had a general concern for the poor as this house was used to maintain 'four almsmen'.<sup>17</sup> This was not atypical, as Seaborne argues 'the link between endowed schoolhouses and almshouses seemed to have become more general'.<sup>18</sup> Evidence of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) influencing Edward Sherrier and his endowment is demonstrated within the Report of the Commissioners of Charities. There was much emphasis upon teaching the young poor boys the Established Church catechism and the reading of high church Anglican texts such as *The Whole Duty of Man*.

The establishment of Sunday Schools was 'an English social revolution, one which propelled mass schooling – the notion that all the children of the poor should be formally instructed – into the

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<sup>11</sup> The Will of Edward Sherrier, Leicestershire Record Office, Probate Records, Wills and Inventories 1731, MicroFiche: 22+, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Charities*, Parl. Papers 1839 (163) p.133.

<sup>14</sup> Leicestershire Record Office, The Will of Edward Sherrier, Wills and Inventories 1731, MicroFiche 22+, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Leicestershire Record Office, ES/211/24, Meeting of the Trustees on 10th of May 1733, f. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Education Enquiry*, Parl. Papers 1835 (62), p. 492.

<sup>18</sup> M. Seaborne, *The English School: Its Architecture and Organisation, volume I, 1370-1870* (London, 1971) p. 115.

experience of working class boys and girls'.<sup>19</sup> In Lutterworth by 1818, there were 'two Sunday schools for boys and girls; in the boys school there are about 90, and the girls about 120'.<sup>20</sup> The popularity of these schools is demonstrated by the voluntary attendance of such large numbers of children, both boys and girls. It is probable that these Sunday schools were founded before 1800. By 1780 the Church of England was significantly active in founding new Sunday Schools across England, especially within the midlands. Lutterworth Sunday School was dependent upon voluntary contributions and 'about £40 per ann.' was raised by contributions and collections.<sup>21</sup> Here, poor children would have been taught reading, spelling and religion probably for four to six hours each week.<sup>22</sup>

In 1818, Lutterworth's rector, R.H. Johnson, commented that 'the poor have nearly sufficient means of educating their children'.<sup>23</sup> It is logical to agree with this statement. As we have seen, from 1630 onwards Robert Poole's endowment, Mrs. Bent's charity and Mr. Durrad's gift provided fourteen poor boys with an education at the church school and from 1753, Edward Sherrier's charity school endowment offered approximately one hundred poor boys' a free education moulded by the SPCK.<sup>24</sup> Lutterworth also had four Sunday schools, which were fundamental in creating mass literacy before the 1870 Education Act. However, there was a lack of educational provision for poor girls in Lutterworth prior to 1800. No females could attain one of the fourteen free places at the church school and no females could be admitted to Sherrier's charity school; they could only attend the Sunday schools. It was not until 1815 when Henry Ryder, former rector of Lutterworth, established Bishop Ryder's school, that poor females were taught 'reading, writing, arithmetic and needlework'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> M. Dick, 'Religion and the origins of mass schooling: The English Sunday school, c. 1780-1840', in V.A. McClelland, *The Churches and Education* (Leicester, 1984), p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Education of the Poor Digest*, Parl. Papers 1819 (224) p.458.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> W. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914*, (United States of America, 1998) p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Education of the Poor Digest*, Parl. Papers 1819 (224) p.458.

<sup>24</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Charities*, Parl. Papers 1839 (163) p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Charities*, Parl. Papers 1839 (163) p. 136.