

Schooling in Regency Shrivenham and District

By Neil B. Maw

From the end of the 18th century to circa 1830, known generally as the Regency period, it was an interesting time in the history of Shrivenham. Education in the form of literacy and knowledge of the arts and sciences was generally only available to those who could afford it. There were some successful attempts during the 18th century to increase literacy among the youngsters of Shrivenham, and this is ably covered by the research of the late, Shrivenham History Society Secretary, Edith Jeacock, (a retired teacher) and listed on our SHS catalogue No N394. From the year 1717, a charity school was set up to provide basic education to the children of Shrivenham, Bourton and Watchfield, and as far as we know, it continued through the rest of the 18th century.

In her research on the '*Foundation of Shrivenham School*,' Edith Jeacock made reference to events at the beginning of the 19th century, when a new schoolroom and masters house was built at Shrivenham, '*on a piece of land conveyed by deed of 17th October 1799 for the residue of 500 years from 1792 for this purpose.*' The source of her information from the 18th century was from the archives of the '*Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*,' and although we have no reference, it is highly likely that this information came from the same source. She further added that the schoolhouse and cottage were provided partly from subscriptions and partly by the parish. We know that both buildings were in St Andrew's churchyard and are still standing today. The schoolhouse now has a tiled roof but confirmation that it was originally thatched came from an entry in the parish records. A Vestry meeting held at Easter 1851 noted that E. Curtis had been paid for thatching the schoolhouse (SHS N359 P.96). If we accept that the average thatch can last for 30 years or perhaps more, then an original build date of circa 1800 is credible.

But it's in the Regency period that education became more prevalent and organised, with separate schools for girls and boys. It was also a time when private boarding

schools were flourishing throughout the country including Shrivenham. The National Society for promoting the education of the poor in the principles of the established church in England and Wales was founded on the 16th October 1811. But there was no government fund for the setting up of schools, it was left to individual parishes, or mostly, local wealthy benefactors to provide money. We have documentary evidence also for schooling in Watchfield. The ancient Chapel there was located literally, on the High Street. The road in front of present-day Parsonage House, by the old School House, went around both sides of the old chapel. (See below) All through the 18th century the vestry meeting minutes noted regularly of its poor condition. In 1788 it was decided to pull it down before it fell down, and the materials from it were sold. The money was invested and the interest was used by Rev. Barfoot Colton, the Vicar of Shrivenham, for linen to make clothes for the poor and to subsidise the price of bread (WRA D1/24/330/8). After Rev. Colton died in 1803, Rev. Edward Berens took over, and in 1804 at a vestry meeting at Watchfield, he mentioned that as the money invested came from a religious source, the old chapel, then it was only fitting that it should be dedicated to the service of religion. He accordingly suggested that a Sunday School for boys and another for girls should be set up for the advancement of religious knowledge. This was done and Sunday Schools continued for a few years. But at a vestry meeting of 29th July 1810, it was decided to discontinue the girl's school and the School Mistress, Deborah Reade was paid £5.10.0 for her services and dismissed. But what we don't know is where the schools were meeting. At that time there was no church and no schoolhouse had been built.



Over at Shrivenham, the earliest documentary evidence we have for operational schooling is from George Merryweather, the Steward of the Beckett Estate from 1815 – 1821. In his 68 letters, published by Shrivenham Heritage Society, there are numerous references to schools, girls and boys, and being taught separately. In 1815, he stated to Lord Barrington that, *“the school for poor girls is a good thing and also the Sunday School.”* In the same letter he quoted costs of £8 per quarter for schooling Lady Barrington’s girls and £6.6.0 for Joseph Hughes for his Sunday School. (Letter No 14, dated 20th Nov 1815). In another letter he quoted the words of young Richard Killard who said, *“all of the boys of the school know of it as well as me.”* (Letter 27, 19th April 1816.). Merryweather’s financial accounts also provided the information that Mary Saunders was teaching Lady Barrington’s Charity children. (SHS N703). That was in May 1815, just a few months after her husband George had become the next Viscount (5th). The Schoolhouse was built by the Rev. Edward Berens, and it was erected behind the ‘*Poor House*’ which was 13 High Street that we know today, on the corner of High Street and Hazell’s Lane. (Treatment Rooms). This property was purchased by the Parish circa 1800 and used as a Schoolmaster’s and Parish house. (Directory dated 1859 SHS). The Schoolmaster was Joseph Hughes who was also the Parish Clerk and featured regularly throughout the Churchwardens records covering that period. (SHS N359). The school for girls was erected in the churchyard, also by Rev. Edward Berens, as mentioned above.

We have evidence that there was private schooling going on just a few miles south in the village of Ashbury, when an advertisement appeared in the newspaper, placed there by Mrs Batt. (See below Oxford Journal 14th July 1804). She seemed to be offering paid instruction to local children with parents that could afford it. The advert below is from 1804 and the wording suggests that she had been operating even earlier.

ASHBURY, BERKS.

MRS. BATT respectfully informs her Friends and the Public, that her SCHOOL will re-commence on MONDAY the 23d of July Inst.

But we get more information in another advertisement that appeared in the newspaper five years later. It made clear that she was teaching girls and was also boarding them as well. (Oxford Journal 14th January 1809).

ASHBURY, near FARINGDON, BERKS,
January 5th, 1809.

MRS. BATT, grateful to her Friends and the Public for the very liberal encouragement she has received since her residence at Ashbury, begs leave to inform them that she continues to board young Ladies, and instructs them in the Elements of the English Language, Geography, the use of the Globes, and fashionable Works.—Dancing, Music, French, Writing, &c. as usual.

The day appointed for the young Ladies to meet, after the present Vacation, is on Monday the 23d inst.

Wanted,—An Apprentice and Half-Boarder.

Letters, post paid, addressed as above, will be duly attended to.

A local man had been having thoughts of educating the poor children of the parish of Ashbury even earlier. Christopher Povey originally made out his Will in September 1802, and in it he left £600 to be invested and the interest used by his Trustees to, *'choose a Master and Mistress to teach all the poor of this parish and appoint something yearly for books.'* His appointed Trustees were Thomas Brown of Ashbury, William Brown of Kingston Winslow, Rev. Thomas Stock, the Vicar of Ashbury and Thomas Pearce of Idstone. When he died in March 1809, his named Executors were unable to carry out their duties but appeared instead to make oath were, Thomas Phillips of Ashbury, Gentleman, and Richard Batt of Ashbury, Schoolmaster; The Will was proved on the 16th May. The wording of Christopher Povey's Will is interesting with regard to the school, *'It shall be in the Trustees power to direct what children shall have the benefit of this charity. What I mean by School or Schools, if the Trustees choose to keep it on as it is now, it will be Schools, but if they think best to let a man and his wife have it both, they shall have power so to do. My will and desire is that the children be taught all the year except five or six weeks in the harvest and two weeks at Christmas. If the Master or Mistress do not teach to the satisfaction of the Trustees they shall have the power to turn them out and choose others. And I hope Lord Craven will be so good as to let the house and premises be under the care and inspection of the Trustees.'* The paragraph creates many questions and it would seem that Mrs Batt and Richard Batt, Schoolmaster, were probably man and wife. And the advert that appeared in the newspaper two years later creates even more speculation. (Oxford University & City Herald 26th October 1811).

Sales by Auction.

ASHBURY, BERKS.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By Mr. FAULKNER,

On the premises, on THURSDAY NEXT, the 31st day of OCTOBER, 1811, and following day, at 11 o'clock,

ALL the neat HOUSEHOLD-FURNITURE and other effects, belongiag to Mr. Batt, who has taken to a boading school near London; comprising 16 four-post, tent, wardrobe, and other bedsteads, 16 good feather-beds and bolsters, counterpanes, quilts, and blankets, mahogay chests of drawers, dressing tables, pier and dressing glasses, two capital grand pianos and one harpsicord, pair of globes, excellent sofa, with bolster and cover, mahogany dining and Pembroke tables, and chairs, stove grates, fenders and fire-irons, china, glass and stone ware, an excellent eight-day clock, 30 hour ditto, kitchen range, oven and stoves, large dining tables and forms, pewter, brewing and washing cop-pers, suitable mash tubs, wort tubs and coolers, good iron-bound hogsheds, &c. &c.

Particulars will be expressed in Catalogues, which may be had at the Inns in Faringdon, Highworth, Wantage, Lambourn, and of the Auctioneer, Hungerford.

It would suggest from the above advert that Mr & Mrs Batt were running the boarding school at Ashbury together. With 16, 'Good feather-beds,' to sell off, the property that they operated from must have been quite substantial in size. But which property was it?

A few years later in the Regency period, there was a Daily and a Sunday School at Ashbury that opened in 1821 with 15 girls and 31 boys, and those numbers remained fairly consistent. They met in the cottage by the present school (Now the village hall), boys and girls being together, but then divided into three or four classes. A report book noted that on 13th December 1824 writing slates were introduced into the Day school. (Information courtesy of Marion Turner of Ashbury).



Ashbury centre. Photo by Neil B. Maw

In 1822 in Shrivenham, Mrs Tuckey seemed to be doing a similar thing. And from her advertisement we can learn just how much she was charging for her services. But which property in Shrivenham was she using? When all the information is studied concerning possible buildings that could fit the description, we can deduce that it was highly likely to have been Elm Tree House. (See below).



Another advertisement eight years later provided the information that the ladies Akerman were then offering a similar service, but had they taken over from Mrs Tuckey?

SHRIVENHAM, BERKS.

M**R****S. TUCKEY** returns her most sincere and grateful thanks to her friends and the inhabitants of Shrivenham, for the high patronage and very liberal support she has experienced since the opening of her **SCHOOL**, and hopes, by an unremitting attention to the health, morals, and improvement of her-pupils, to merit the approbation and support of those parents whose Children are confided to her care.

Terms:—For boarders above ten years of age, Sixteen Guineas per annum; under ten, Fourteen Guineas per annum; Washing, Two Guineas. No extra charges. Weekly and Day Boarders accommodated. Parlour Boarders at Twenty-five Guineas per annum; and superior accommodation for Parlour Boarders, thirty Guineas per annum. French, Music, Dancing, and Drawing, on the usual terms.—The House is very large, and in the centre of the beautiful, healthy, and pleasant village; the rooms are lofty and spacious, the Garden extensive, and the premises are in every respect replete with conveniences for a Boarding Establishment.

Vacations, Midsummer and Christmas, one month each. After the present Vacation the Duties of the **SCHOOL** will recommence July 22. [238]

Above: Salisbury & Winchester Journal 8th July 1822
 Below: Oxford Journal 26th June 1830

SHRIVENHAM SEMINARY
 FOR YOUNG LADIES,
 Conducted by the Misses **AKERMAN**,
 SHRIVENHAM, BERKS.

THE Misses **AKERMAN**, in expressing their grateful acknowledgments for the liberal support they have experienced, respectfully solicit the attention of Parents and Guardians to the Terms of their Establishment, assuring them that while they remit no attention calculated to facilitate the improvement of their Pupils, they are alike solicitous to promote their happiness by liberal treatment and maternal kindness.

TERMS.

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Board, and Instruction in the English Language, grammatically, Writing and Arithmetic, History and Geography, with plain and fancy Work ... | } 15 Guineas. |
| Under 10 years of age | 14 ditto. |
| Weekly Boarders | 12 ditto. |
| Day Boarders | 6 ditto. |
| Washing, extra | 2 ditto. |
| The French Language, Music, and Dancing, each ... | 4 ditto. |
| Drawing | 3 ditto. |

A limited number of Day Pupils are received, and instructed as Boarders in the Establishment, on very moderate terms. Writing and Arithmetic are taught by a Master, who has had several years' experience in London, where he attended many Families and Seminaries of high respectability.

N. B. Young Ladies finishing their education at this Seminary have the advantage of being taught the Lancasterian system of running hand, free of any additional charge.—A quarter's notice, or the equivalent, is expected previous to the removal of a Pupil.

Bills to be punctually discharged half yearly.

* * * The duties of the Establishment will be resumed on Tuesday the 6th of July.

Around the district there were many similar private schools. The Highworth Commercial Academy was up and running by Mr Dyke, who advertised in the Berkshire Chronicle for 18th June 1825. His academy provided education in the English language, Arithmetic, Writing, Mensuration, History, Geography, Book-keeping, and every essential necessary to prepare the Pupil for the Counting-house - price 16 Guineas per annum. And at Faringdon, schooling for the affluent really took off in 1825 by Joseph Bowles, who in January graduated with the degree of Doctor of

Laws. A newspaper article explained that, 'A convenient Mansion called, "Faringdon Hall" has recently been purchased by Dr Bowles'. Another sentence in the article helps us to identify where it was located when it stated that it is, 'delightfully situated on the western slope of Faringdon Hill.' This must be present day Sudbury House Hotel. (Berks Chronicle 16th July 1825).

THE FARINGDON SCHOOL,
FARINGDON HALL, BERKS.
*Established under the Patronage of his late Royal Highness
the Duke of York.*

DR. BOWLES, LL.D. F.L.S. and H.S. solicits the attention of Parents and Guardians to the Plan, Terms, and Situation of his Establishment. The course of Education includes the Classics, the Modern Languages, the Mathematics, and all the ordinary branches of School learning. The Classics are taught on the system pursued by the Rev. Dr. Russell, head master of the Charter-House, and which has been kindly committed by him to Dr. Bowles. The terms are exceedingly moderate, and the number of pupils limited and select. The situation and domestic accommodations are of a very superior kind, the Mansion and Grounds having at an expense of some thousand pounds been purchased, and expressly fitted up for, and entirely adapted to, a Seminary of the first respectability. — Detailed particulars, and references of unquestionable character, may be had on application, either personally or by letter, at the Hall. — *Faringdon Hall, 20th June, 1828.*

N. B. The School will Re-Open on Tuesday the 22d day of July.
Bath is 40 miles from Faringdon. Coaches daily. 1828.

Catering for the gentry – Dr Bowles at Faringdon Hall.
Bath Chronicle 26th June 1828

Dr Bowles at his school was educating only young men. In another advertisement he stated that, 'Detailed particulars and references to gentlemen of the highest character, whose sons have been educated by Dr Bowles, will be forwarded to any inquirer.' (Reading Mercury 7th December 1829). And Dr Bowles was very happy to advertise the names of those who had distinguished themselves in the examinations. (See below Berks Chronicle 4th July 1829).

FARINGDON HALL SCHOOL.—At the usual half-yearly examination, the pupils who particularly distinguished themselves in the classics, and obtained prizes, were the sons of Lady Dick, Sir David Ogilby, Dr. Christie, Major Brooke, the Rev. Craven Ord, J. Bellamy, and R. W. Crowdy, Esqrs.



Sudbury House. The older buildings nearer the road were most likely to have been by Dr Bowles' Faringdon Hall School. Photo by Neil B. Maw

And in stark contrast to the above, in a general round up of news and information, it was reported that, *'We are sorry to find that the National School at Faringdon stands in aid of the benevolent to support the object of the Institution.'* (Oxford Journal 9th Sept 1826). At this point in history, there was still no real state controlled, organised education for all.

The trend at this time was to use large country houses for the schools, in order to be able to offer boarding and generally have plenty of space. At Stanford near Faringdon, Miss Hill, of Stanford Hall, advertised that the duties of her school would resume on 15th January 1827. But there were smaller schools such as Miss Lamdin's Cottage below. (Oxford Journal 21st June 1828).

Select and cheap School for Young Ladies.

AT Miss LAMDIN's Cottage, Faringdon, Berks, ten young Ladies are received, and carefully instructed in the English and French Languages, Geography, Needle-work, and every other requisite of a domestic and useful Female Education. The Pupils are well treated, and a liberal table is kept.

TERMS { Under eight years of age, 16 Guineas per Annum.
 { Above that age,..... 18 Guineas ditto.

☞ Unexceptionable references can be given.

Letters to be addressed (post paid) to Miss Lamdin, Faringdon.

At the end of what we are calling here the Regency period, it can be seen that, generally, good education was only available to those who could afford it. The state had yet to get organised but it was on the way. In 1833 parliament authorised sums of money to be provided for poor children to be educated but it wasn't widespread. We finish with an advertisement for the Westbrook Academy in 1831. The address is Faringdon, but at the moment we have no indication of its exact location.

WESTBROOK ACADEMY,
 FARINGDON, BERKS,
 Conducted by **Mr. MACARTHY.**

TERMS.

For Board, and Instruction in English Grammar, Writing, Arithmetic, Book-keeping, Geography, and History,

Boys { under 10 years of age, ... 20 Guineas per Annum.
 { over 10, 24 ditto.

Washing, 3 ditto.

Books and Stationery are the only extra charges.

AS Mr. M. has been engaged for nearly 20 years in conducting the CLASSICAL and MATHEMATICAL studies of youth, Parents designing their Children for professional life, and desirous of observing economy in their education, will find his Establishment possessing advantages which few Schools can offer.

The House and Grounds are spacious, and the situation is cheerful and salubrious. The Pupils breakfast and dine with the family, and are treated in every respect with kindness and liberality.—References may be had to the Parents of the Pupils at the School.

In submitting the Terms of his School to the public, Mr. M. feels particular pleasure in offering his sincere thanks to his friends in Faringdon, and its vicinity, and to mark more strongly the sense he entertains of their liberal and active support, he will gladly, after the present recess, instruct any of the Pupils hitherto under his care in Greek, Latin, or the Mathematics, (if the Parents so desire) without adding to the present charges.

N. B. The School will re-open on the 16th of January.
 Faringdon, December 30, 1830.