

## 300 YEARS OF THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL, SAFFRON WALDEN - A FOUR-SITE SAGA

A four-site saga? Galsworthy is perhaps not quite what he was in 1967 when I first used this title to give my Presidential to the Friends' School, Saffron Walden Old Scholars' Association, but those four sites are still there all right - Clerkenwell 1702, Islington Road 1786, Croydon 1825 and Saffron Walden 1879. And when it came to planning an Appeal for a Tercentenary in 2002 and I was on the Committee for it, I had a head start when it came to drafting its objects. So I suggested: 'to commemorate 300 years of the oldest continuously surviving community in the British Isles providing a Quaker education'. And they agreed, very kindly.

But before we actually get there, we must answer a few questions. Exactly what was started in 1702 to justify a 300<sup>th</sup> in 2002? If, as first described, it was a 'workhouse', did it also qualify as a School sufficiently for the whole complex over the years to justify the description given to it by David W. Bolam in his book for the 250<sup>th</sup> in 1952, 'Unbroken Community'<sup>1</sup>? And if so, is there any other current Quaker establishment under whatsoever title that has actually existed without any gap between its sites for 300 years or more, here or anywhere else in the World? And lastly, was there in 1702, and is there now, such a thing as a Quaker education?

Perhaps I ought, first of all, to state my family connections with all this. My grandfather Alexander Radley married a Farrand, originally a French name meaning just Smith - the *maréchal ferrant* (in charge of horses (or mares), the Merovingian *mariscalk*, using *fer*, iron, i.e. farrier, blacksmith). Some came over with the Huguenots but my lot definitely escorted the Conqueror! And one, John, a baker, got married at Peel Meeting House in 1720 where the Clerkenwell boys went on Sundays. Joseph Farrand, 'last and patten maker', accepted the discharge to his care from Clerkenwell of Edward Sweatman in 1781. There were 6 Farrands at Islington Road and 2 Radleys, one of whom, Mary Ann, had, according to the Admission Register, 'hardly learned anything 16 months ago when she came to School' - a good academic start for the family! There were 18 Farrands and 10 Radleys (including Joseph, later Head of Lisburn in Ulster) at Croydon. A Farrand, Isabella, taught at Saffron Walden before, sadly, ending up at The Retreat, and at Walden again my father John Charles was the first (1883-9) to take London Matric and was a Junior Master 1891-4;

and yours truly (1927-33) was in the First Sixth Form to take Higher School Certificate. My cousin Philip, later Head of Ackworth, was arrested at Walden as a Student Master in 1916 for being a CO, and always claimed to have been the first Quaker to spend a night in the Tower since William Penn. And my father came back for an Old Scholars Whitsun Weekend in 1914 and met my mother Helen Louise Howell, who taught Music and had done so before that at Ayton. Not for nothing did a law firm recently write to me as 'Messrs H.A. Farr & Radley'.

### QUAKER EDUCATION UP TO 1702

George Fox in 1668<sup>2</sup> was 'much exercised with schoolmasters and schoolmistresses', warning them 'to teach their children sobriety in the fear of the Lord, that they might not be nursed and trained up in lightness, vanity and wantonness'. And having given attention to the problems of marriage satisfactorily he passed out of London 'into the countries' again and came to Waltham (Abbey) where he 'established a school(for teaching boys)' and 'ordered a women's school to be set up in Shacklewell' (in Hackney) 'to instruct young lasses and maidens in whatsoever things were civil and useful in the creation'. This had gone by 1677, alas, and the boys' lasted not more than ten more years after moving to Edmonton in 1679<sup>3</sup>. But it taught two sons of Isaac Penington, one of Robert Barclay, and a grandson of Margaret Fell. The Master, Christopher Taylor, left for Pennsylvania, as did his successor George Keith, who although a founder of the Penn Charter School there in 1689 blotted his copybook and was finally disowned both in Philadelphia and Britain. So that was the end of Fox's personal contribution, though it came after an early start by George Whitehead in 1653 and at least two schools run by Friends in prisons, at Stafford and Ilchester, for their comrades there.

London Yearly Meeting in 1690<sup>4</sup> was warning Friends 'not to send their children to the World's schools to corrupt them by learning Heathen Authors and the names of their gods. Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses (where they are capable) should take care that they train them in the language of Truth and the plainness that becomes the Truth'. Leonard Kenworthy, the American savant, asked us in 1983<sup>5</sup> to 'imagine a small group of people, many of them illiterate, starting schools in a century where education was considered a monopoly of the rich and powerful. Yet the Quakers did just that'.

And by 1691 there were 27 day schools in England, 3 in each of Scotland and Ireland, with a published Yearly Meeting list of 15 boarding schools, 'scholes kept by Friends'; and one of these was Penketh which must be examined with care, since it affects the

Walden claim to unique continuous survival, along with other contenders opened before 1702.

*Penketh* was a Preparative Meeting boarding school in 1688, one of its later pupils being John Bright. But in 1834<sup>6</sup> it was replaced by an entirely distinct foundation under the joint management of Hardshaw East and West Monthly Meetings, which lasted until 1934 when it fell foul of the Depression, though its Old Scholars' Association lasted until 2000. *Penketh* therefore cannot defeat Walden, and nor can '*Stramongate*' in Kendal, to which my father brought me as a child, as to *Penketh*, as he was on the Committee of both. Opened in 1698 it too died from the Depression, in 1932, prompting that most moving entry in the OSA magazine '*The Old Stramonian*<sup>7</sup>'; 'our school is to close, the oldest of its kind. We believe that her passing will be regretted by a wider company than ours which has known her from the inside. In the end, the school went down fighting; the school tradition taught the school at least - to play the game.'

*Lancaster* was around by 1700<sup>8</sup>, operating for long in the wings of the Meeting House until selling out to a non-Friend body in 1969; this at least had the decency to name it the George Fox School, though it fails now to provide a Quaker education. Another non-competitor is *Sidcot*, although it apparently stole a march on Walden by announcing its Tercentenary in 1999. But this was only a *foundation* as a Monthly Meeting School under William Jenkins, which closed when he retired in 1728. There was then a gap of more than half a century before John Benwell opened a private school there from c.1784 to 1805, and the Headmaster in 1994 has confirmed that the school 'ceased to exist at *Sidcot* for some years! Although re-founded in 1808 as a Quarterly Meeting School it thus loses out to Walden on continuity, much as I regret this personally since I suppose I can legitimately claim to have founded it all myself. As a Student Master there in 1935 I played a part in Evelyn Roberts' '*A Sidcot Pageant*<sup>9</sup>:' I was William Jenkins.

But this is where the New World on the opposite side of the Herring Pond comes in triumphantly, since the official list of United States boarding schools (now totalling 73) compiled by the Executive Director of the Friends Council on Education in Philadelphia, Kaye M. Edstene, traces two already operating before 1702 and still doing so. William Penn had followed in Fox's footsteps as a thinker on education; 'Let my children be husbandmen and housewives; its is healthy, honest and of good example'.

Good education, paraphrases Paul A. Lacey of Earlham College, writing in 1998<sup>10</sup>, is to be found in the study of nature and natural

things, and its methods should begin where nature does and follow at her pace: children should learn things before they learn languages. And this was the motivation for the William Penn Charter School, Pennsylvania, of 1689<sup>11</sup>, which, along with Abington Friends School Pennsylvania of 1697<sup>12</sup>, still flourishes and caused Walden to issue the caveat that its claim to be the oldest continuously surviving community was valid only in the British Isles!

### QUAKER 'COMMITTEE' & 'MEETING' BOARDING SCHOOLS CLOSED

Founded - 17 <sup>th</sup> century	1702	18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> century
<i>YM List (1691) - 15</i>		<i>Leeds (1756-1838)</i>
<i>Long-Term Pre-1702</i>		<i>Gildersome(1772-1815)</i>
<i>Penketh I (1688-1834)</i>		<i>Mountmellick (Ire)(1786-1921)</i>
<i>Stramongate (1698-1932)</i>		<i>Ipswich (1790-1800)</i>
<i>Sidcot I (1699-1728)</i>	<i>Clerkenwell (1702)</i>	<i>Wigton (1815-1984)</i>
<i>Lancaster (1700-1969)</i>		<i>Rawdon (1832-1921)</i>
	<i>Islington Rd (1786)</i>	<i>Penketh II (1834-1934)</i>
	<i>Croydon (1825)</i>	<i>Brookfield (Ire)(1836-1921)</i>
		<i>Ayton (1841-1997)</i>
		<i>Newton-in-Bowland</i>
		<i>(-1844;1868-1911)</i>

### SURVIVING

<u>USA</u>		<i>Lisburn (Ire)(1774)</i>
<i>William Penn Charter (1689)</i>		<i>Ackworth (1779)</i>
<i>Abington (1697)</i>		<i>The Mount (1784-1814:1831)</i>
		<i>Newtown (Ire)(1798)</i>
		<i>Sidcot II (1808)</i>
	<i>Saffron Walden</i>	<i>Bootham (1823)</i>
	<i>(1879)</i>	<i>Sibford (1842)</i>
		<i>Leighton Park (1890)</i>
<i>In 2000 - USA 73</i>	<i>GB 7 - Ireland 2</i>	

(Source : Friends House, London, Library Guide 7 - Quaker Schools in Great Britain and Ireland).

### CLERKENWELL 1702 - THE FIRST OF THE FOUR SITES

The key name here in John Bellers (1654-1725), cloth merchant and active Quaker, who was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1718



(eight years after his son!). Beck and Ball<sup>13</sup> got him right first time; he was 'one of those who never see a wrong without wanting to smite it down - whose minds are ever engaged in shaping schemes for the regeneration of humanity - schemes alas! too often incapable of being realised'.

Ruth Fry published copious extracts from his writings in 1935<sup>14</sup>, followed by George Clarke (in full) in 1987<sup>15</sup> at a remarkable launch attended by representatives of the major European embassies who were given copies in ultimate satisfaction of Bellers' Will. He certainly smote: anticipating the European Union, the National Health Service and fair Parliamentary elections he had turned his mind to a scheme providing 'Profit for the Rich, a plentiful Living for the Poor and a good Education for Youth'. These were his 'Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry of all useful Trades and Husbandry', 1695 with a second (and definitive) edition in 1696.

He had already had experience of working for the poor in Bristol and now sought a wider field, presenting the Proposals (1696 version) to London Yearly Meeting on 29 May 1697. They were recommended 'to the further consideration and amendment of the Morning Meeting and our Meeting for Sufferings' and on 19 June 1699 finally 'approved'.

London & Middlesex Quarterly Meeting were entrusted with implementing the project and after being gazumped for one site and rejecting 'a vinegar house to lett in Islington' they found a 'hous in Clerkenwell' which was felt on 18 August 1701 to be a 'very proper and convienient hous'. A lease was signed on 5 March by John Bellers, Merchant, and John Hopes, Cornfactor, from the executors of Sir Thomas Rowe, who had latterly from 1686 till his death in 1696 run 'The College of Infants', in part of it, of obvious endearment to Bellers. It had been a Workhouse of the 'Corporation for the Better Relief of the Poor in the County of Middlesex' under 1662 legislation, but the actual date of building remains conjectural. Hitchcock<sup>16</sup> goes for 1662: Bolam' for 'forty years before' 1702: Braithwaite<sup>17</sup> 1663: and the Victoria History<sup>18</sup> 1666. But it was paid for by local parishioners to accommodate 600 paupers and a County House of Correction (which he was desperate not to replicate), but had been closed in 1672 as too expensive. No contemporary pictures are available but C.Brightwen Rowntree, the Walden Headmaster 1922-34, did a drawing of the courtyard round what was, writes Hitchcock<sup>16</sup>, 'a commodious and airy building, ideally suited to the use to which it was put', i.e. at the minimum to house the 'Antient Friends' and teach the children trades, which would help them to be apprenticed and provide saleable articles; all in one community.

THE NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY : WORKHOUSE OR SCHOOL?

The 2002 Appeal is clear : Walden was about to celebrate 300 years of a *Community*, and this term was chosen with some care should any challenge be raised that the establishment at Clerkenwell, at least at the outset, did not fall under the description of a *School* in the terms of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet written, in 1902<sup>19</sup>, by James Backhouse Crosfield, Clerk to the School Committee. He had categorically quoted that on 27 July 1702 'two women aged 83 and 75 "were come in from the Bull meeting" and "John Staploe gives account one boy from the Peele is come in", so that this may be regarded as the date of the commencement of the original School'.

Campbell Stewart echoed this in 1957<sup>20</sup>: 'this school (i.e. Walden) had its beginning in 1702, a very oblique result of the remarkable suggestion of John Bellers. It was St James Workhouse in Clerkenwell, London, refuge for a few old and infirm people and a boarding school for some young children'.

Yet the actual title of the community at its beginnings was undoubtedly a *Workhouse*. The wording of the note in the margin of the Minutes of 26 December 1701<sup>21</sup> of the 'Meeting for the business of the poore' appointed by the Quarterly Meeting referring to the 'Hous in Clerkingwell' is simply 'Worke Hous'. The Steward from 1711 to 1737, the writer of *Richard Hutton's Complaints Book* just refers habitually to the 'house' but had the management committee of thirty meet at 'the workhouse of the people called Quakers at Clerkenwell'.

By 1739 however the historian Maitland<sup>23</sup> distinguished between the 'Quaker Workhouse, being both an Hospital and Workhouse' and the 'Quakers School' (belonging to it), and in 1746 one Timothy Bevan, an apothecary, of Plough Court Pharmacy writing 'with the full support of the Committee', calls his book *An Account of the Rise, Prgress and Present State of the School and Work-house maintained by the people called Quakers in Clerkenwell*'. This shift continued moreover and a Committee Minute of 2 December 1772 simply refers to 'the Charity called the Quakers School and Workhouse situate in Clerkenwell'. And every boy on leaving after 1778 was given a paper, *'Advice on quitting the Friend's School and Workhouse at Clerkenwell, London'*.

This would have pleased Bellers, who never liked 'Workhouse' and already in 1718 in *'An Epistle to the Quarterly Meeting of London and Middlesex'* felt it 'necessary to change its name from a Work-House, to either an Hospital or a College, but rather the latter : because some Parents will not put their Children to so Contemptible a Place of Education as a Work-house or an Hospital. The first sounding too

much like a Bridewell and the second like an Almshouse, whereas a College bespeaks a more Liberal Education'. This is one he lost, I fear.

### WAS THE EDUCATION 'QUAKER'?

Bellers, like Penn, had practical views on education: 'beyond Reading and Writing a multitude of Scholars is not so useful to the Public as some think'. Yet Clarke<sup>15</sup> feels that 'his proposals regarding education were the most serious attempts made during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to provide for a full and caring education for all children, rich and poor'.

The children went to Meeting at Peel, built in 1721 and when demolished by enemy action in World War II the oldest in London. There was a schoolmaster and a schoolmistress to teach the three Rs in two-hour periods, and the Committee reported on 1 January 1707/8 for example, that 'the children have a suitable education'. Bolam<sup>1</sup> is clear: 'the fundamental aim of all teaching was religious. Both the technique and the aims were the same as those of the contemporary charity schools except that the catechisms used set forth a distinctive Quaker interpretation of life'. The mainstay was Robert Barclay's, but the Committee member, John Freame, a founder of Barclays Bank, supplied material like this : Q: 'What saith the Apostle of the Righteous undergoing Tribulation?' A: 'We must through much Tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God. Yea, and that all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer Persecution'. This must have spoken closely to the condition of children with parents under duress or in jail. And this was clinched by a Committee Order of 25 December 1709,<sup>1</sup> 'for the benefit of the Family and the advancement of Piety and Godliness therein, that after the boys are dressed at the direction of the Steward they read as many chapters in the Bible as he shall see meet. The same also to be observed in the evenings, and as often as may be, to be called together to wait upon and Worship God'.

### CLERKENWELL ASSESSED

Bellers as a social economist was highly regarded by Karl Marx. His '*Capital*' of 1867 sees him as a 'veritable phenomenon in the history of political economy', and this must have received a greater world-wide circulation than any Quaker work as such. The contemporary Russian academic Tatyana A. Pavlova<sup>23</sup>, who attended the Clarke launch as a Quaker, equally pays tribute but gives the reason for his lack of recognition in his lifetime and his 'assignation to oblivion until Marx'. This was his 'tragedy in attempting to fuse

two incompatible things, maximum advantage for the rich and welfare for the poor'. He did not 'think in terms of undermining the pillars of the existing set-up', but gave him credit however for his pedagogic ideas, which were 'more democratic and humanistic than those of the contemporary philosopher John Locke'.

Kenworthy<sup>5</sup> regretted that his experiment in a 'radical approach to education' was short-lived, and Clarke<sup>15</sup> finds the Workhouse in both name and application a 'pale shadow of Bellers' all-embracing concept'. It was Ruth Fry's<sup>14</sup> view in 1935 that in Bellars' first scheme, children were to be educated in the college, a simple book education being combined with training in handicrafts. His later editions omit mention of children and the place becomes a labour colony'.

The Board of Education Report on its 1905 inspection of Walden, quoted by Stewart,<sup>20</sup> states that it was originally a Workhouse School for poor London children, but in this form it does not seem to have been very successful'. And Hubbard,<sup>3</sup> although stating definitely that it is the 'oldest Friends' boarding school', felt that 'at no time during its first century did the workhouse have much influence on the general course of Quaker education and no other school (under the workhouse or any other title) was founded in imitation. The workhouse was one effort to solve the problem of poor children's education within the Society, but at no time did it reach more than a small proportion of these'.

Hard words indeed: but Hitchcock<sup>16</sup> is positive: 'Bellers was not alone. He was part of a much wider intellectual movement in the 1690s and 1700s, and neither he, nor his contemporaries, failed to use their ideas as the basis for practical experiments'. Moreover Stewart<sup>20</sup> praises 'the minority of schools founded 1695-1725<sup>1</sup> for 'playing a vital part in the educational history of the Society in keeping alive the spirit of an earlier enthusiasm during the period of decline around the 1720s'. This was caricatured in a cartoon of the day showing a Quaker leaning on two sticks just marked 'Sinless Perfection' and 'Infallibility': the caption was 'Quakerism Drooping'.

And perhaps the strongest tribute of all came from one who was benefiting most from this droop. In 1744, John Wesley, who was enjoying the kind of popular favour which Fox had the century before, is quoted by Maitland<sup>22</sup> as regretting that time did not allow a visit to the Quakers' Workhouse, but that it was said 'to be the best to take a plan from of any in London'.



### THE CLERKENWELL SITE AFTER 1786

Health was not the governing factor in the Committee's decision to find a new home, as it would be for the next two moves. It was simply the Antient Friends, who were by now inhibiting the development of the children and who after a spell at Plaistow and back finally left altogether in 1811. The topographer Malcolm<sup>24</sup> wrote in 1803 of the 'ruins of the Quakers' Workhouse' which had 'fallen into decay many years past, and what remains is let to poor occupants at very low rents'. It was in fact pulled down in 1805 and the site became a series of prisons.

There had been a Bridewell nearby since 1616, hived off from the parent House of Correction in Blackfriars (St Bride's Well), a concept which Bellers found particularly abhorrent, and this was replaced progressively by a New Prison in 1775, a 'New' New Prison in 1818, and the Middlesex House of Detention from 1845 to 1877. This last building was crammed into the area in such a way that some Irish Fenian prisoners nearly escaped after the outer wall was blown up in 1867; the ringleader Michael Barrett was the last to be publicly executed in this country. A commemorative plaque is still there.

All was cleared for the new London School Board School, named after Hugh Myddelton (creator of the New River of 1616, a pioneer supplier of water to London) which opened in 1892 and spawned an Infants next door. But in 1981 it started sharing with the (Further Education) Kingsway Princeton College, (Sans Walk Site) which got into debt : and everything above ground moved out by 1998, when a property company started turning it into luxury flats. But the dungeons had been taken over for School staff rooms and photographic darkrooms and the like and were latterly organised as a great tourist attraction - the 'House of Detention 1616-1990 - London's Underground Prison'.

John Bellers couldn't complain : at least it had been *called* a College!

### ISLINGTON ROAD 1786-1825

You would think that this means the Road to Islington. But the best contemporary map-maker, John Rocque in 1744-6, shows *two* parallel roads (St John Street and Goswell Road) with the name, also given to the Pentonville Road as well! Moreover, once you get to The Angel going North, it all changes again. And it was never in Islington anyway - only Clerkenwell, part of Finsbury until it became the London Borough of Islington. And although documents such as the School Report of 1817 give *Islington Road*, both Crosfield and Bolam in 1902 and 1952 just put Islington on their title pages, and then go on

in text to add the Road! And without question the site was the Islington Road Estate, on Hermitage Fields, and owned by the Worshipful Company of Brewers, from which the community took over the remaining 148 years of a lease in 1786.

But it was an academic area without doubt - near the 1613 Dame Alice Owen Boys' School, whose site became the Crown and Woolpack Pub at 394 St John Street, now closed, but where Lenin plotted his mischief in 1905. In 1840 it moved to the north of the New River which was not culverted until 1862. The Girl's school started in 1886 when our Islington Road School had left, but in their time all could enjoy an uninterrupted view of the River. Both Dame Alices moved out in 1976 to Potters Bar and the Girls (blitzed in 1940 and rebuilt in 1963) is now the Dame Alice Owen Building of the City and Islington College (Further Education).

The building was beautiful, with a bay window in the Robert Adam style which later graced all Barnsbury. Malcolm the topographer in 1803<sup>24</sup> said it 'had the appearance of a villa, surrounded as it is by pleasure grounds, gardens and trees'. And don't forget that it was right in the Spa area of Sadler's and other Wells, and only round the corner from the old Workhouse. And it was here that emancipation took place, both from the Antient Friends (only seven left by then) and the name of Workhouse. For in 1811 it became the 'Friends' School, under the care of the Quarterly Meeting of London & Middlesex'. Even the local maps changed from 'Quaker Workhouse' to 'Friends Schools'.

It hadn't moved there for health reasons, as was to motivate it twice later, and Malcolm had gone on to note that 'the cielings (sic) were remarkably high, and the windows large, consequently the rooms are perfectly dry and well aired'. But Cromwell in 1828<sup>25</sup>, after it had gone, begged to differ. 'The ceilings of all the rooms are not remarkable for their height: and it is a fact that the Society have been induced to remove the institution to Croydon, in Surrey, partly, at least, on account of the dampness of the lower apartments, and their fears for the health of those who occupied them. This removal took place at Midsummer, 1825; since when the structure has been deserted'.

And the Committee gave a building lease to one Christopher Cockerton, who pulled it down and constructed a labyrinth of streets and slums - now, no doubt, worth a million pounds each. The rent sustained Croydon and when the 148 years were up to 1934 there was a windfall that enabled the school at Walden to build an Assembly Hall and to get the Old Scholar architect Paul Mauer to turn the old Lecture Hall into a Library. And if you go back to the Islington Road

now you will find a Friend Street on the old site. How attentive! Only a pity that he happened to be one George Friend, who ran the Finsbury Dispensary for the poor on the corner there. At least he was in the right stream...

#### CROYDON - 1825-1879

The Committee took over another beautiful house here, this time almost as old, 1708, as the date we all started. But they had learned : on 19.1.1824 they minuted that 'it is desirable that the rooms in the wings (i.e. the new additions) be not less than 13 feet in height and those of the dormitories no less than 12 feet'. The splendid glass negatives taken before it left in 1879 by Bedford Lemere, President of the Old Scholars Association and architectural photographer to Queen Victoria, show the spaciousness of it all, with that beautiful long garden stretching out apparently into infinity.

My uncle Alfred Alexander Radley was there before emigrating to Canada and becoming President of their Methodist Conference. 'I speak', he wrote to me, 'of my experience as a child during five years (1867-72) in a boarding school under the control of the Society of Friends. Games were encouraged. Cricket, football, shinny, paperchase and others. Nature study was stimulated by long walks into the country and the collecting of specimens; plants, butterflies, shells, birds' eggs. Budding literary genius found its opportunity in the "Select Society" to which the older boys were admitted on the approval of the Teachers' Meeting. All of which was good.

But over against this, put the fact that we had no organised physical drill or athletics; anything like the Boy Scouts or Cadets would have been frowned upon; dramatics were taboo, as also was the singing of secular songs (and even hymns for a while); no music, vocal or instrumental, was taught or even allowed; novels were absolutely forbidden; theatre-going and public entertainment (except lectures) were not to be thought of and anything like games of chance, such as cards etc., were equally regarded'.

The school shared in a motley collection of educational establishments at Croydon, from the Military Seminary of the East India Company through a Dame School, a 'School of Industry' (very much up our street), a Ragged School sponsored by Lord Shaftesbury, and the Warehousemen and Clerk's School similarly by the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Russell.<sup>26</sup>

But eventually the local illness struck again - this time typhoid-hence another move in 1879. After a series of lesser schools in the building came the solid preparatory St Anselm's in 1904 which

pulled down the wings but left the 1708 core and added a Memorial Hall for WWI. And then in September 1940 it all went, along with the Head's house and the Friend's Meeting House; providentially the school had been evacuated.

The Germans had dropped a landmine captured at Dunkirk from the British stores, and out of respect for its origins it refused to explode on landing; but on removal it did, though luckily no-one was hurt. The only survival was the 1708 front gate, which had allowed the blast to whistle through it. And its most likely craftsman, Thomas Robinson, who had worked at St Paul's Cathedral, had already designed two masterpieces in the neighbourhood at Carshalton Park and Beddington. Both were exported to the USA in the 1900s but from the replica of the latter, insisted on as part of the deal, we can compare a trick in its tracery, a U motif, with one of ours, thus clinching its origin by Robinson, described by the expert Raymond Lister as 'representing the greatest achievement of pure English blacksmithery'.

The gate had been carefully guarded during the War by Ernest Allen, a Croydon Friend living in the country, but when it came to reinstatement the London Borough of Croydon had pre-empted this by building its new high-rise municipal headquarters on our site! And the Meeting House couldn't accommodate it either owing to a road-widening scheme involving the delightfully re-designated Friends Road. So it ended up at Walden, with a plaque now on it recalling its 1976 reopening by Duncan Fairn, the Clerk of London and Middlesex General Meeting, in the presence of two former Clerks of London Yearly Meeting, Redford Crosfield Harris and Godfrey Mace, an Old Scholar, and the acknowledged pioneer in the tracing of these four sites, George Edwards. Some wags put up a token resistance to Duncan's actual opening, but Friendly Persuasion overcame all.

#### SAFFRON WALDEN 1879-

George Fox's contemporary, the diplomat known for his successful mediation, Sir William Temple Bt (1628-99), wrote : 'The spirit of saffron is of all others the noblest and yet the most innocent virtue. I have known it restore a man out of the very agonies of death when left by physicians as wholly desperate'.

And saffron has always been with the School. There is a Saffron Hill in Clerkenwell and the very name of Croydon is supposed to be of Saxon origin, with Sanderstead as the valley where the wild saffron grows. And Chipping Walden was saffronised in the mid-14<sup>th</sup>



century with cultivation until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and extra wealth to add to the wool trade. For it remains one of the most expensive materials: a whole field to make a pound's weight, since only the stamens are used for the yellow colour : the Old Scholars Association badge of the 30s got it wrong, with the crocus all in yellow, but the current Appeal has learned and its petals are now correctly purple...

But when Croydon became too unhealthy with typhoid and even a death from rheumatic fever the Committee explored Alton and Chelmsford before Walden, though none of them was within the purlieu of London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting, the owner. But in 1876 came an irresistible offer from a Walden Friend, the banker and former Mayor, George Stacey Gibson, of a site there - and free too! 'It is beautifully situated ... on an open breezy hill above the town, near the railway station and within a very easy distance of the Meeting House'. And what clinched it after the Croydon experience was that it had 'a good supply of water from a deep artesian well'.

It was breezy all right, and early photos show it in splendid isolation, with nothing even remotely near it. The architect was the Leicester Friend, Edward Burgess (1847-1929), that is to say a Friend until he fell foul of Westminster Meeting. He built the School in 1879, the local Grammar School in 1881 and a Training College in 1884. But Pevsner, the latter-day guru, in his inimitable 'Buildings of England' series<sup>28</sup>, didn't think much of them : 'the three educational buildings are of red brick, in a Tudor style, and have little to recommend them architecturally'. Ah well - at least the 1863-6 Hospital in the town was 'Gothic, symmetrical, red brick' - and the architect? None other than William Beck, of Beck and Ball . . .

Croydon had bequeathed the 1872 clock which had graced the garden front, and it is now proudly seen from the School walk, the Avenue, in the view immortalised in the Quaker Tapestry depicting all the Friends' Schools of its day. There came also the Barometer, one in a group given to all the Friends' Schools in 1871 by the first Quaker Member of Parliament, Joseph Pease. But the real treasure remains the 1787 clock; made two years before the French Revolution, it came from the Islington Road.

The Old Scholars' Association, of which my grandfather Alexander Radley had been a founder member in 1869, took the lion's share in the Bicentenary Appeal of 1902, for which the Clerk of the School Committee James Backhouse Crosfield wrote his commemorative booklet<sup>19</sup>. The tangible result was the Swimming Pool, now the main target of the 2002 Appeal for refurbishment. It is of some sorrow to me that there is no possibility financially of restoring one of its main pleasures, the diving board, since officialdom proclaimed long ago

that the depth was too shallow. But no-one ever had any accident of any kind and we are still deprived of that most magnificent sight - a weighty Friend doing a Honeypot off the top board and splashing nearly every one near!

The unique magazine '*Past and Present*'<sup>29</sup>, the only one ever to cover *all* the Friends' Schools, carried an article by Albert G. Linney (of Stramongate) in 1907 commenting that the 'premises are splendid, though I am told that if anyone wants to benefit the School there is still lacking a forge, an art room, and a separate hospital'. The art room came in 1921 when Fred Rowntree built one over the new Boys teaching block. The Old Scholars Association furnished the two convalescent wards in Burgess' 1913 Sanitorium, now the flourishing Gibson House, for Infants and Juniors. But we still await the forge, which would have given me, Farrand, the *maréchal ferrant*, the blacksmith, a unique chance to shine.

The Committee Minute had referred to the Meeting House, and one of the extra things for which we thank the donor of our site was that he enlarged the 1791 building to allow of the School's participation en bloc every Sunday morning. And in the First World War it became a canteen for the troops, who also took over the School entirely for a few months in 1915. The Committee were advised to put in a large bill for damages in the expectation that they would get half : they submitted what they considered to be a strictly fair estimate, and got it in full.

For the subsequent history of the School as a going concern over the hundred years 1879-1979 one must consult the former Head John C. Woods' work<sup>30</sup>, with its unique selection of Committee activities reporting on the School life. And for the progressive unfolding of the buildings and amenities the Old Scholars' Association Archivist Roger M. Buss has now prepared for the forthcoming book on the whole three hundred years, to be edited by the Old Scholar Hilary Halter, a fascinating illustrated account which is highly commended and, what's more, relieves me of the need to write it all down again here. But one charming detail stands out as typical of the care shown over all this time for human, even Quaker values. When Burgess was called back, even in his 70s, to make additions he built a new spur housing the boys' music practice cubicles. They were far enough away from the main block to be *almost* sound-proofed.

#### QUAKER EDUCATION NOW - HOW DOES SAFFRON WALDEN STAND?

Does the school still 'provide a Quaker education' and thus justify the Appeal wording in every respect, if I have indeed satisfactorily

addressed the claim to be 'the oldest continuously surviving community' doing just that in the British Isles?

The Old Scholar John R. Reader, who became Head of Ayton, delivered the Swarthmore Lecture in 1979 on 'Of Schools and Schoolmasters'.<sup>31</sup> 'The point has been made that Friends have not produced a distinctive philosophy of education throughout their history and that they are divided in their views today. They have always been clear, however, about the spirit in which education should be practised even if they have fallen short at times in the way they have expressed it'.

Britain Yearly Meeting is now actively concerned with establishing Quaker Values in Education and the former Head, Sarah Evans, was a speaker at a recent Conference. She had already in the Annual Report of 1994 declared that 'At the heart of the school's aims is to see that of God in every one', and London & Middlesex General Meeting minuted in 1996 that 'despite a minority of Friends on the staff and among the scholars or residents it maintains a distinctive Quaker ethos which all who become involved recognise. There is a palpably happy atmosphere and a determination that everyone within its environment should be treated equally : it is seen to be essentially Quaker'.

I have always nursed my private definition of education as e-ducation, the art of extracting ducats, or cash, out of parents. And if you look at an old wall board at Walden you may indeed wonder why parents still allow it. For it bore the names of (boy) Senior Scholars (including my father) and Athletic Champions from 1885 on - until 1910, that is, when it just said 'Co-education', drew a line, and ended. So with no more studies and no more sport, why should they?

*Farrand Radley*

*Presidential Address given as a Magic Lantern Lecture during Britain Yearly Meeting, 28 May 2000*

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