Graham Marshment found this article, from the BURTON OBSERVER AND CHRONICLE of Thursday March 19th, 1964. The paper was in poor condition, and I've succeeded in transcribing all but part of one sentence that proved unreadable.

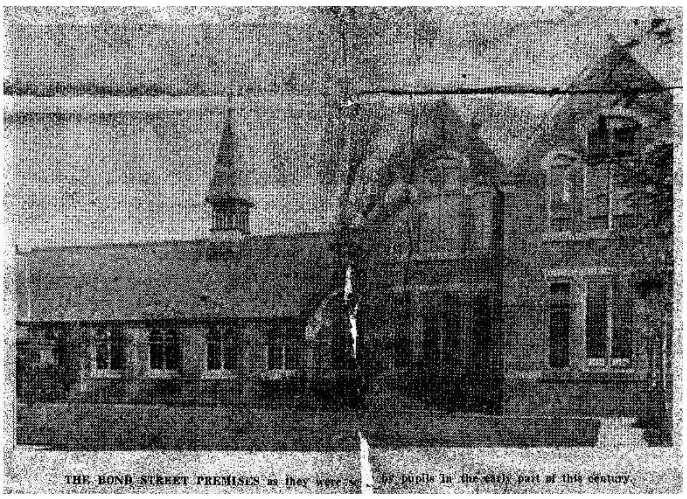
# BURTON'S OVERCROWDED GRAMMAR SCHOOL—IN 1858

## Head Was Accused of Pocketing Assistant's Salary

One of the most significant dates in the four centuries of Burton Grammar School history was the year 1858.

It was in that year that this ancient seat of local learning ceased to be a free grammar school, under a new scheme of management approved by the High Court in Chancery, which allowed for the charging of capitation fees of £7 for the Upper School and £2 for the Lower.

From that time, the only boys who were admitted free were the five boys whom the trustees were empowered to admit to the Lower School from any other school in Burton, who together with five others of the Upper School, were selected by the trustees for free education.



THE BOND STREET PREMISES as they were at the time of pupils in the early part of this century.

At the beginning of 1857, however, the title of the school was still "Burton Free Grammar School," and so it was called in January, when, in the "Burton Weekly News," it was announced that the following gentlemen of the town had been appointed be trustees in place of some who had resigned and some others who were deceased : Messrs H. Allsopp, Abram Bass, R. S. Belcher, J. S. Clay, T Goer, T. Poyser, R. S. Tomlinson, T. F. Salt, R. Thornewill and W. H. Worthington.

The school, though not prospering, progressed quietly under the headmastership of the Rev. Henry Clay, with Mr. Henry Hodson as his second master, as there were as yet none of the rumblings of the discontent that was to break towards the end of the year, and would rage throughout 1858.

By the Autumn of 1857, however, rumours that the scholars were soon going to have to pay to enter the Free Grammar School were beginning to circulate, and the matter came to a head when, on October 2nd, 1857, the following letter, from "A friend of the Working Classes," appeared in the "News":– "Dear Sir,– Can you or any of your readers inform me in your next publication whether the trustees of the Burton Free Grammar School have decided upon destroying its freedom by the introduction of the following capitation fees, viz., £10 for the upper school and £6 for the lower school? I have had an intimation that such is the case. Sincerely trusting that it is not so, I am, etc."

But either no-one knew, or no-one cared to confirm the rumour, for in the next week's "News," all was silence on this subject, nor was it again mentioned in print until five months later.

Then, on February 26th, discreetly tucked away at the very bottom of a leader article headed "Notes on the Week," which discussed the Palmerston Ministry, the Chinese riots, troubles in India, the Burton small pox epidemic and a proposed new Burton bridge, the following few lines appeared: "The grammar school, we believe, is at length settled to be re-modelled in

accordance with the wishes of the petitioners, and henceforth will not be free, but a charge of £2 to the lower, and £7 to the upper school will be requisite for admission."

That started it. The first blow was struck by "An Anxious Father," who, hitting out at the abolition of freedom, also caught the reverend Mr. Day an ungentlemanly one below the belt.

"I noticed in your paper two weeks since," he wrote "an announcement that the new plan of the Grammar School has been adopted. Now, nothing at all has been said to any of us who are chiefly interested in the subject, and we have had no public notification of the change.

"I believe it is well known that about £450 per annum was left to educate gratuitously 60 boys of the town—that 20 of these were to be admitted gratuitously to the upper school, and that the headmaster sometime since, wishing to make the benefit more general, obtained leave to take extra pupils at a certain rate, providing for their instruction by an additional assistant.

"This additional assistant was kept by the last two chief masters, but the present one, Mr. Day, has taken the extra payments without fulfilling the conditions, and last half I believe there were 40 boys in the upper school for him alone to teach. Of course, the quality of the teaching may be imagined.

"What I now wish to learn is whether there will be some *certain* arrangements made for fresh teachers, or whether we shall still be handed over unconditionally to this same Mr. Day. and our children taught by one, two or three, just as he may choose?

"It is an important matter to us townspeople, and we all feel much anxiety about it."

'Pon our souls, it does look as if they had the problem of overcrowded classes even in the 1850's—doubtless as the result of the "bulge" caused by the Crimean War ! Add to that the insinuation that the headmaster was pocketing the salary of the non-existent assistant master and you realise that the Victorians could have used a few Robbins, Crowther and Newsom reports.

The anxious father who wrote the letter grew a little angrier a fortnight later, for no action seems to have been taken on its contents.

So he wrote again "I must trouble you with a few more remarks, as no notice whatever has been taken of my previous letter. I wish to know what guarantee we townspeople have that, under the new plan, our children will be better taught or have more masters than under the old one.

"I should decidedly object to its being left to Mr. Day1 to settle how many and what masters must he employed, for, if instead of the number of scholars increasing it should diminish, it is hardly to be expected that he will show the liberality of paying teachers, when he himself gets less remuneration.

Judging from the past, one must be brought to the very opposite conclusion, for if (as is the case), he has taken the additional fees of extra pupils without getting the assistant agreed upon, he will most probably go on without even one more until he sees a chance of making it pay him well.[two lines unreadable] Yet I think we have every reason to believe that he will not be more generous than the men of his generation, but that he will count the cost first to his own pocket before he thinks of doing a benefit to the town."

Thus uneasily did the town prepare to accept the fact that its sons must now pay to be educated at the Grammar School. Even the "News" itself now grew a little unhappy about the situation, and commented: "Our Grammar School is still a vexed question, as the letters of our correspondents show, and we wish the authorities would set the matter at rest by some public notification of their intentions.

"We dislike giving insertion to complaints, as much as anyone can, but a journal is bound to become the channel of expressing the opinions of all who honestly communicate them."

Grammar School affairs took a brighter turn in May, 1858, when the “News” announced that Messrs Bass and Co. had subscribed .£1,000 towards the erection of a new school and residence for the scholars and masters.

But still there remained the gnawing doubt as to whether the teaching staff was large enough to ensure an adequate education, and so, in the same month, one who signed himself “Index,' and who appeared to know something of what was in the silent trusts' minds, was writing thus:–

“I wish to say nothing that is not just and impartial, and do not desire to take any part in the disputes which have arisen or may arise out of it.

“The matter as ar as I understand it stands as follows: The Petitioners have obtained the sanction of law to alter the foundation, henceforth a charge of £7 or £2 will be made, new buildings are to be erected, the one for the school-house, the other for the master's residence.

“To accomplish this, a sum of £4,000 is required, a part of which has already been given by the liberality of Mr. T. Bass, Esq., M.P., and in course of time a good and efficient staff of masters will be employed.

“By these means it is hoped that the character of the education given will be raised, and the institution will be made more generally beneficial to the town.

“I cannot see that this scheme is so liable to the corrections so strongly urged against it. I am aware that the townspeople have been accustomed to look upon the School as free, and they will he apt to construe its change as a violation of that.

“But if by the new plan the instruction be improved and the design of the founder more fully carried out, if, further, the cash of persons who take advantage of the school be such as can afford easily to pay the charge intended; surely the alteration is proper, well-advised, and is likely to prove useful, and it becomes those who expect to reap benefit from it to exert themselves in promoting its accomplishment.

“Without considering whether or not all the proposed measures are necessary, I may conclude by remarking that upon one point loth. parties must agree—that two teachers are totally inadequate for the large number of 70 or 80 boys who attend the school, and that therefore some means of improvement are really called for.”

The controversy was only just beginning, and so far the trustees of the Grammar School had remained silent, both concerning their plans for the future of the school, and upon the troublesome problem of adequate staffing.

What is more, there had been no rejoinder from the Rev. Henry Day either to the charge that he was deliberately keeping the school understaffed so that he could pocket the assistant master's salary, or that, as a direct result, the scholars were being inadequately educated, and the classes over-crowded.

The battle of the correspondents was only just beginning to warm up, and Burton's once-free Grammar School was one of the main topics in the letters column of the “Weekly News” throughout the year—nor did the heated arguments abate even on Christmas Eve.

The rest of the story-of this tumultuous year, as the wind of change blew through the hitherto unruffled precincts of the little school in Friars' Walk, will be told next week.

| But it can’t be, as this is all we have |
|---|