

# THE HISTORY OF NEWCHURCH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

1701 - 1913

BY

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The foundation of this school at the beginning of the eighteenth century did not occur in an educational vacuum in Rossendale. In 1677 the parish registers record the death of Charles Howorth, who is affectionately called *ludimagister noster de Rossendale*. This worthy had acted as the 'parish register', i.e. the official elected by the chapelry to be responsible for the registration of baptisms and marriages in the period of the commonwealth.

In 1692 the dissenting body from which the Baptists in Rossendale sprang erected a schoolhouse in Bacup, but little else is know of the school conducted there. In 1701 John Kershaw of Wolfendenbooth Fold (i.e. the area around the 'Jolly Sailor' Inn) removed certain lands "lying in Ye Healde and Old Meadows within Bacupbooth" from the hands of one set of trustees and conveyed them to another set of three trustees, who were to devote them "to the use and behoofe of a master of a free school for ever, who is to teach ye English, Lattin and Greek tongues at Wolfendenboothfould in Rossendale and be qualified both in learning and good government and be diligint to ye schools". A photograph of the deed is kept in the study of the present headmaster.

John Kershaw also left lands to be sold for the erections of the School - the lands in Bacup being intended to provide an income for the master. These lands lying along the east bank of the Whitewell were a collection of fields whose names have a familiar ring - the Sysse (Sissclough), the Tod Carr, the Gag Hill and the Mythe Holme - and it is pleasant to speculate how the endowment of the School would have increased in the nineteenth century if they had been retained and the outlying farms in Bacup sold.

John Kershaw was buried on the 1st February 1701, aged 85 years, and -his wife An (*sic*) on the 4th January 1709. On their tombstone at Newchurch is inscribed:

They lived long beloved  
And dy'd bewailed  
And two estates  
Upon one school entail'd.

## The Finances of the School

It is rather disappointing that the type of material which survives about a school is most likely to be information of a somewhat legal nature and hence lacking in human interest.

One would have liked to know more about the curriculum and how the School was conducted, but such information is totally for the eighteenth century. We can, however, infer the sort of thing that went on from what is known of other local schools, such as Burnley Grammar School. In these schools it was customary for the scholars to pay the master "cockpenny" on Shrove Tuesday for the privilege of conducting a cockshy in the school yard - this brutal sport consisted of throwing stones at a tethered cock, which had had some training in avoiding them. In many schools there was also the custom of "barring out" the master on one day a year by the pupils and, at Accrington, "smoaking" was encouraged in the hope of reducing the risk of smallpox infection.

From the beginning the School, like many others, suffered from two handicaps: an inadequate endowment and lack of successions amongst the trustees. The endowment was, from the first, unfortunate. The trustees were unable to secure payment for the lands that Kershaw had meant to be sold for the erection of a schoolhouse, since bankruptcy overtook the buyer before he could pay, and the trustees were involved in litigation, which lasted until 1742, before they could recover the money. For the first two years after An Kershaw's death, therefore, the trustees devoted the income from the Bacup farms to the building of a schoolhouse, so that the School did not actually open until 1711.

When the trustees did get the money, they loaned it out on the mortgage of a warehouse. This mortgage failed and they were left with the warehouse. This they converted into cottages, which they let out to rent.

In 1787 the trustees bought some land in Newchurch and erected a new school upon it at a total cost of £163, raised by public subscription. They converted the old schoolhouse in Boothfold into cottages which were let. The rents from these properties were applied to the master's salary.

In 1828 James Thornley, of Disley, left £100 to the School. This money, together with subscriptions from others, was used to build a house for the master, but the house proved unsuitable and was let, the rent going to augment the master's salary. In 1858 the Boothfold cottages were sold for £56. This was applied to the alteration of the existing master's house at a cost of £250, the balance being raised by public subscription again. All this solicitude for the domestic comfort of the master in the nineteenth century is very touching. In 1880 the School's building was evidently so unsuitable that the School was being conducted in Baltic House, Waterfoot.

The last building to house the Newchurch Grammar School was erected in 1889 and is still in existence, now being St. Peter's Primary School in Turnpike. This was extended in 1894, so that by then it included a main schoolroom which could hold a hundred, classrooms, a Chemistry laboratory, and a completely equipped gymnasium. The total cost was £3,500.

**(Part II of this history of Newchurch Grammar School will appear in the next edition of the B.R.G.S. Associate).**