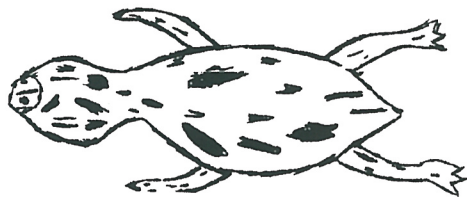


PART FIVE

**EDUCATION
&
SELF GOVERNMENT**



Michael Whitaker, aged 9



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

Introduction

Schooling of any type and education as a necessity of life, are very recent concepts historically. As in any rural community, life in Welborne from the earliest times was lived according to nature's rhythms. In a world that was always harsh and often frightening, continuity and stability were more important than change. Such societies understood the need for socialization (even if they had never heard of the word) but not for education in the modern sense.

In this scarcely changing rural community every individual had his or her place and children learned by watching and doing, just how the society worked and their place in it. Those who could not or would not fit in, faced a very difficult existence unless they could escape to such a different future elsewhere (not an easy option). In such a system the few records that were needed were kept in the heads of the inhabitants and accumulated knowledge was passed through the generations by word of mouth – through verbal instruction and story telling. It is a simplification but essentially accurate to divide these early societies into three groups – those who fought, those who prayed and those who worked. Most of the population of Welborne fell into the latter group. The Lord of the Manor would have employed a literate person to keep his records but a small village was unlikely to have or need more than one or two people who could read or write. Where disputes arose they were more likely to be settled by an appeal to collective memory than to written records.

The one exception to this general pattern was the Church – and what little learning there was tended to be in their hands. But even here it was a very rudimentary thing confined to the select few and of course in Latin. Where it was felt necessary to broaden people's religious knowledge, it tended to take the form of visual imagery such as statues and wall paintings rather than words. This situation changed only very gradually and the changes affected only a small number of people of wealth and prominence until the growth of towns and a merchant class created a stronger demand for literacy. All this is unlikely to have had much influence on Welborne. There was no great monastery nearby where boys of humble background could be schooling, no

large numbers of artisans and merchants to collect subscriptions and start charity schools. Nothing about Welborne's location or historical development suggest that there would be any general interest in a school or schooling before the mid nineteenth century.

When reminiscing about Welborne life in his father's time, Barham Johnson wrote "he could have told nothing [about schooling] for school there was none in those days." [But] he might have been able to tell of the number of farmers who could read and write. All below that rank were of course hopelessly uneducated in either art." He went on to identify the Green children of Hall Farm as having "little or no education being only taught to work for a living." He would have found one or two literate women even outside the farming sector – he described the wife of old Tom Doy, tinker and chimney sweep as "a superior woman who could read and write."

This situation was not a peculiarity of Welborne. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was still a widespread indifference to the issue of education and some very deep-rooted prejudices against educating the lower classes. Nor would the cottagers and labourers of Welborne have seen much need for it. They were excluded from participation in the political affairs of their parish and their nation. They travelled very little outside the immediate locality of their work and home. Books, newspapers, letters and written records were the privileges of the gentry and the responsibility of clerks. Where there was not indifference danger lurked. There were new circumstances where the ability to read was not seen as a virtue, it had encouraged dissenting sects against the authority of the church and radicalism in the face of secular authority. The Rector heartily condemned the farmer Fisher Sendall as "a great reader of Tom Paine's infidel books." *The Rights of Man*, Paine's best known work was not a subject of which Barham Johnson approved.

However, we should not conclude that all the people of Welborne were adverse to the idea of schooling for their children. We find that in the 1820s "it was the habit of some of the children to attend a Dame school at Mattishall near South Green House kept by Gunton's wife." Such actions represent a desire for something better for their children rather than any real progress towards it. One didn't need any qualifications to open such a school and while we know nothing of this specific case we do know that in general they were little more than child minding places."

Nor would the situation have been much better at the Sunday school that John Johnson had started in Welborne, with a non-resident Rector and a curate serving two parishes, Welborne would have considered it fortunate that "an old

shoemaker . . . from Yaxham came over on Sunday to conduct a Sunday school and that was the only provision for teaching reading.” We can wonder about how much reading could be taught to a group of children he saw for a single hour a week and who were also being instructed in the beliefs of their faith. It is therefore not surprising to find the parish register and other legal documents being signed with a X even by relatively prosperous farmers.

That this situation changed in Welborne before the general drive towards making elementary education universally available in the 1870s, is due to one man’s enthusiasm and determination. Among the three resolutions that John Barham Johnson made on being offered the living at Welborne was the resolve to “have a school,” and he set about the task immediately and on two fronts. For the long term a school must be built and staffed but the children shouldn’t have to wait until then. He must make some temporary arrangements that could take effect in the short term. For help in teaching the Sunday class he called on “an old fellow Gunton, a cobbler of Mattishall who taught the boys” and paid for it out of his own pocket. He himself was to teach the other class with the help of “the good woman Mary Howe wife of Henry [a wheelwright] a humble Christian woman.” The two classes were held in the church, one in the Nave the other in the tower room. But while this was an improvement on the existing situation, it wasn’t enough.

For secular education there was a need for a greater use of existing regular day schools. Mr Gunton’s wife ran the Dame School in South Green but the Rector was concerned because he had no control over her. But there was no real alternative so as he stated: “I determined to make use of her as schoolmistress in the weeks until I could get a school erected . . . and engaged that she should be paid so much a child to teach, what I required to as many as I could send her, for I felt that I must be at the expense of sending the greater number who ought to attend if they were to be got to school.” As a second avenue he wrote “as there was a young woman . . . living in the cottages on the turnpike where the Hockering Lane crosses it, who seemed to promise well, I arranged to send some of the youngest to her and so it went on for a time.” The other drawback to a Dame school (conducted out of the person’s home) was the limited number of children who could be accommodated. Real change would await suitable premises.

The School Room

It is commonly believed that while the school was built by the Rector it was paid for by the local farmers. But a closer examination of the financial accounts of the school suggests that this perception is not entirely accurate.



Welborne School

On the 22nd March 1844 Barham Johnson wrote: "I am about to make application to landowners and farmers for subscriptions and donations for the proposed school." The results of his efforts are recorded very specifically in the Treasurers Account 1844-47. Of the Landowners Mr Onley provided £10, Mr J.K.Gooch £5, Miss Leeds £2, Mr John Green £1, and W.B. Donne of South Green 2 guineas. Of the remainder we find Mr Lock "promised but not given," Mr Howard "no reply" while Messrs S. Gooch, Tim Edwards and G. Vassar were "not applied to." (Of these men only John Green was an owner occupier). The Lord of the Manor James Cuddon "refused on conscientious grounds, he being a Roman Catholic." The response from the occupiers (the tenant farmers) was less enthusiastic. Mr Palmer gave £1.10.0 but no contribution was recorded to the initial request from Messrs Charles Green, J. Edwards, N. Sands, S. Wilkinson and W. Stackwood, either because they saw no benefit in a school or they lacked the financial means. We should note that many of the tenant farmers did provide in kind what they were unable or unwilling to provide in cash. The accounts show the following contribution without charge of material for the building: Messrs Palmer and Gowing loads of stone, Mr Webster bricks, Mr Palmer fetching timber and deals, Mr Wilkinson fetching tar and Mr Sands fetching nails. The Rector, as a land

owner made a direct financial contribution £5 but also contributed indirectly e.g., in March 1844 he undertook to take the service “at Reymerston during the illness of the Rector. In return he will give a few pounds to my proposed school.”

Just how much money did the Rector need to find? The accounts show the final situation as follows: “TOTAL COSTS – Building by Contractor £179.17.2, fittings indoor and out £57.13.5, [i.e.] £237.10.7.”

The contract for the building of the school is one of the few individual documents in the Parish Chest: “Norwich August 13, 1845. Sir, We are willing to undertake the *building of a School room* at Welborne in the county of Norfolk according to plan Specification finishing all the different Artificers Works in a sound and workmanlike manner for the sum of *One Hundred and seventy two Pounds, Seven shillings and two pence*. C. Cattermoul & Son, Builders.” We can notice a difference of £7.10.0 between the quotation price and the sum finally paid and assume that in the course of construction changes were made that involved additional costs.

With regard to the fittings the accounts record payments for timber for playground fence and rails and internal fittings, iron and blacksmith’s work for desks, gates and locks, carpenters work for fence and desk, levelling of site and playground, stone mason and bricklaying jobs, paint, tar and oil. Specifically we can highlight an Arnott Stove costing £4.10.0 with an additional £2.4.0 for installing it, a school bell £2 and a clock paid for by the Rector costing £1.18.0 to fit. This was the total capital outlay until 1867 when a further £31.15.0 was spent on a new boarded floor, lining of walls, new Gallery and alteration of desks to meet government inspection standards and in 1878 when more desks were needed.

Returning to the issue of funding the total of £237.10.7 was made up of private subscriptions £147.3.6 and grants £90.7.1. of the former, £20 was donated by the Rector and his mother who was the patron of the living; £105.11.0 by the rest of the Johnson and Morse families and their friends, including 12 clergy, £21.10.0 by the Welborne landowners and occupiers. Broken into specific amounts we find only £7.16.0 came from donations under £1 and £29.7.0 from donations between £1 and £5, the bulk £110 came from amounts of £5 and upwards.

With regards to grants, the school benefited from the increased concern of the established church with maintaining its monopoly over elementary education of the poor. It received £10 from the Norwich Diocesan Society and a further £8.7.11/2 from its Attleborough and Hingham Branch. From the National Society for The Promotion of Education of the Poor in the Principles

of the Established Church, one of the two big educational societies, they received a further £30. The Rector was further able to take advantage of the governments decision to establish a Special Committee of the Privy Council (1838) to give additional grants to schools which had been able to raise funds by voluntary contributions. This £42 carried with it the proviso that inspectors could be sent into schools, which received state help.

Raising the money for the building solved part of the problem now Johnson had to get a site. His choice fell on a piece of glebe land: "I propose by God's blessing to raise a school in the corner of the churchyard, facing the three cornered green space" he wrote on May 1844. But he didn't own the land and more than God's approval was required for him to get possession of it. Changing the status of this 11 perches of glebe involved a complex legal agreement under the terms of "An Act to afford further facilities for the conveyance and endowment of sites for schools" passed during the 5th year of Queen Victoria's reign. The incumbent Barham Johnson along with his mother Maria, patron of the living and the Bishop of Norwich in whose Diocese it lay, all had to renounce all and any claims they had to the land. A further group of three Rectors from other parishes had to inspect the land and confirm that it was as described in the document and the plan that accompanied it. Finally the Rector had to appear at the Chancery Office in London to have the deed stamped and recorded. The document also laid down the use of the premises to be built on the site in specific terms. Not only was it to be "a school for the education of the Poor Children of the Parish, but also it was to be "conducted upon the Principles of the Incorporated National Society . . . [i.e] the principles of the Established Church."

It also outlined the management structure providing that "the Rector and Church Wardens of Welborne and their successors should hold the land for the purposes stated . . . and that such education and also the management of the said school . . . be under the superintendence and direction of the Rector . . . provided that . . . The Bishop [so wishing] a Committee of Parishioners being Subscribers to the School and members of the Church of England should be united with the Rector . . . for the management of the School." We found no evidence that a separate committee was ever formed in Welborne. In later years the issue of school finances was considered at general Vestry meetings or at specific rate payers meetings called for the purpose. The very small number of rate payers attending meetings and required to hold official positions was such as to preclude any additional bodies being created, even if the rate payers were strongly interested and there was no evidence that they were.

The School at Work

The organisation, teaching methods and curriculum.

The teachers at the school were paid quarterly but we think it is safe to assume that the school year was organized into three periods as it is today. In 1874 we find that the school reassembled on September the fifteenth and continued until December when there was a two week holiday break. Another break of one week occurred at Whitsun with the long or harvest break being five weeks. We have no record of the length of the school day. Days without school within these terms were rare. The visitors book records a school treat on the afternoon of the 22 July 1863, no school 13 October 1874 because the teacher was at a conference at Yaxham (Bishop's visitation) and that the school was closed for two weeks in April 1873 when the teacher left and her replacement hadn't arrived.

As to teaching, we know from development throughout the country that there was a heavy reliance on rote learning "the mechanical process of instilling a number of facts" due both to a shortage of trained teachers and an unresponsiveness to alternative methods being advocated by radical educators. We find evidence of the monitorial system, (the older children teaching the younger), persisting in Welborne school long after it had fallen out of favour elsewhere. It was of course the cheapest means of providing a basic education and also practical when children of so many different ages were collected together in such a limited space. We find later the use of pupil teachers, a kind of apprenticeship system, and the operation of the system of payment by results introduced by the Department of Education (est. 1856) and associated with inspection and examination "applied in a narrow mechanical way."

The government role in supervising the school was minimal even after the passing of the Education Act of 1870 which is considered the first step towards compulsory education. Welborne as a church supported denominational school, was left relatively untouched as it would have been deemed to have been "working well and meeting local needs." But such freedom from national supervision didn't mean that the rector had a free hand regarding curriculum. The deed transferring the land specified that "the instruction at the said school shall comprise at least the following branches of school [secular] learning (namely) Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, History and Needlework." And as you would expect religion had a prominent place: "it shall be a fundamental regulation and practice . . . that the Bible be daily read therein by the children and that all the children . . . shall be educated in the principles of the Christian religion according to the doctrines and disciplines of the United Church of England and Ireland . . ."

We have also found a printed syllabus of religious knowledge approved by the Bishop of Norwich in 1886 stating which specific areas should be studied by which classes: "Children under standard II will be expected to answer easy questions in the Old and New Testaments and on the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and The Ten Commands." The Top Grade Std VI the Book of Genesis, Gospel according to St Mark, The Church Catechism and the order for morning Prayer." We can end this subsection with the memories of a student of the 1880s: "I went to Welborne church school. That was two pence a week. One governess taught the lot of us in one room, with a pupil-teacher to help and the vicar used to come in to teach us the catechism. All of us girls learnt how to make a buttonhole, how to put a patch on and how to darn. I left when I was twelve – that was the age then."

The Teachers

To be the mistress of a small rural school such as Welborne, would have been a fairly good position for the daughter of a poor but respectable lower middle class family and would certainly be more comfortable and less onerous than the occupations available to unmarried women. But for all that it could have been a very lonely and stilted life. She was unlikely to be able to afford to do more than return to her family during the school vacations. She would have no transport to visit friends who did not live within walking distance and in a class-conscious society no clear place. One reads in the Johnson family papers of the governess socializing with the family to a limited extent but no mention of social activity involving the school mistress even when she was boarding at the parsonage. The church and its associated social activities is likely to have been the only social centre of her life. Due to the priorities of the record keepers we know little of her daily life though we know to the halfpenny how much was paid for her expenses.

So who were the individuals to whom Welborne parents entrusted their children and what do we know of them? Unfortunately not a great deal. The first individual, named Sophia Stibbard appears in the school accounts in 1852 when she was 28 so we can assume that she had had experience as a teacher elsewhere although probably no training. The 1861 census lists her as a 37 year old spinster born in Norfolk and at that time living at the Parsonage. Her salary was 9/- a week with her lodging costs being covered by a separate allocation and expenses which included cooking, coals and candles.

It is not clear from the records whether there had been one or two individuals serving as teacher before her arrival. In either event we know that the salary in the period 1847 to 1851 was £12 a year and that payment for

expenses when the schoolmistress lived in the parsonage covered tea, sugar and washing compared with coal, candles and linen when she boarded in the village.

Miss Stibbard had the help of a number of assistants, generally local girls. In 1852–3 Ann Norton is shown as receiving 19/6 and £1.9.3 per Quarter. We can assume that this experience didn't encourage her to aspire to become a schoolmistress as the 1861 census shows her occupation as dress-maker. In 1854 the job was held by Anna Porrett, the daughter of Richard, although she could only have been fourteen or so at this time. The salary was 13/- a quarter to begin with but she received £1.7.0 in 1856. Mary Wilson who is listed for three quarters in 1858 does not appear in the census. Nor do we have any information concerning A. Howard who finished out the 13 weeks of 1858 and received 1/- a week for 1859.

By 1867 the Rector was expressing concern that the outlay of £36 to £50 a year "had provided only an untrained and inefficient mistress at an annual salary of £25" and that he determined in "the Autumn of 1866 that the school should have a mistress qualified to secure it Aid from the Parliamentary Grant." In 1871 the schoolmistress is named as Rachel Haydon a 27 year old spinster born in Norwich and living in a staff cottage behind the Rectory. We can presume that she represented the step to improve the educational standards in line with the Education Act of 1871 and we assume she took up the post in 1867. She is also the first to benefit from the "payment by results bonus: "the agreement with her providing that she shall receive the half of any Grant the school may obtain from the Government, in addition to her annual salary". For the 1867–8 school year this amounted to £9.15.31/2 giving her a total salary of £31.19.11. Her share in 1872–3 was only £3.10.0 reflecting either fewer children taking the exam or fewer children passing. She was assisted for the first few years of her appointment by Sarah Smalls (she would have been 15 in 1869). She left the job in 1872.

As the appointment of Misses Greaves, Pole and Mott occurred between the census we know nothing about them except for their relatively short tenure. Miss Greaves received only £2.18.6 in grant money in 1872–3 and only stayed until seven weeks into the 1873–4 years. She was replaced after a two week period when no classes were held by Miss Pole, who completed that year and three quarters of the next before being succeeded in turn by Miss Mott in 1874–5. They had the help of unnamed monitors in 1872–5 and of Laura Green the daughter of Henry. The visitors book in 1879 states "W. Tucker last lesson" but provides no other information and the name does not occur in any other records.

Caroline Carter the 23 year old spinster shown as Schoolmistress living in the staff cottage in the 1881 census, introduced an element of the exotic into Welborne as she had been born in Gibraltar. She is also distinctive in that she remained in the village after she married Francis Neve. She died in 1955 age 92, and is buried in the Welborne Churchyard.

Agnes Curtis is the only schoolmistress to whom we can put a face although we know little in the way of personal detail. We do have in our Parish records some detail of her training viz an Archbishop's Certificate, dated 22 November 1884 certifying that after an examination in Divinity she was placed as an Acting Teacher Second Class, and an Education Department Teacher's Certificate of the Second Class which states that she served the required period of probation in the Welborne National School. It is not clear how long she spent at our school after this date. A letter sent to the Rector in August 1977 adds one further point to our knowledge. It was from the great niece of a Kate Mann and stated that "in 1886 a young Miss Agnes Curtis came to Welborne and lodged with Kate Mann living . . . in the house which was then a shop opposite the Curatage (where Miss Ann Symonds now lives)." Finally we can note Florence Green 17 year old shown as a pupil teacher school in 1891.



Agnes Curtis (School Mistress)

Attendance

With all this effort by the Rector and his friends, the charitable societies, the government and the landowners to give Welborne children a school, how did the parents respond? We can compile from the census 1851–1891 the following statistics.

Table 1 Children Designated as Scholars

Year	Boys	Girls	Youngest	Oldest
1851	26	20	4	16
1861	16	18	4	14
1871	11	12	4	14
1881	23	18	4	15
1891	13	14	4	14

Table 2 Age Profile

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
4	1	1	3	1	2
5	4	2	2	5	4
6	3	6	2	5	3
7	8	5	1	9	4
8	6	5	5	6	3
9	–	1	1	5	4
10	6	5	3	3	1
11	3	4	3	2	3
12	5	3	2	2	1
13	2	–	–	2	1
14	7	1	1	–	–
15	2	–	–	1	–
16	1	–	–	–	–

If we look at the general picture we find that eighteen families in 1851 had all their children of school age at school, fourteen in 1861 and 1871, seventeen in 1881 and thirteen in 1891.

Looking specifically at the families whose children were not at school, we find in 1851 that Richard Porrett was the only farmer whose children (four under 9 years) were not at school. As we might expect none of the children of the poor widows Mary Woodhouse and Hannah Dobbs or the unmarried Hannah Tilney were at school. A more common pattern was for the girls to be

at school but for the boys aged 9–12 to be at work. In 1861 two small holders R. Breeze and R. Hall sent none of the children to school, and in 1871 nor did two agricultural labourers Francis Balls and Charles Elliot. This pattern was repeated in 1881 by John Humphrey (four children 4–13) and John Holley (five children 4–12) despite the fact that both had children of fifteen who were unemployed.

The Rectors comments and concerns throw further light on this situation. In response to the Government Inspection concern about the number of children presented for examination in higher grades (1868) he observed: “at this time our parish contains very few children of an age to be placed in higher standards and that Mattishall is sending us chiefly younger children like our own. We can only wait patiently, and in a year or two the evil complained of will have remedied itself, provided parents are not so short sighted for their children’s best interests as to take them from school early, in order to earn money by them.” He made an earnest appeal to them: My friends, if you remember what a grievous thing you have found the want of education to be in your own case, – how it has stood in the way of your bettering yourselves in life, and how, perhaps it is now leading you to labour hard at Evening School, that you may be able to read your Bible, and to write a letter, and to add up an account, – you will be very loathe to deprive your child of school, before you are driven to do so. Mothers, think twice, yes, think a great many times, before you take your girls away from their books and their needle; keep them where they are . . . parents are far too ready to detain their children from school for half days and whole days, – a most mischievous practice, which occasions great inconvenience to the teachers, often obliging us to repeat next day lessons upon which we have bestowed great pains when some of the class were absent; and which proves a great hindrance to the children’s progress. On an average sixteen children are absent each week; during the quarter ending Nov 30, an average of twenty-four were absent weekly, – a most unreasonable number, as all must consider it. I would call attention to what I said on this subject . . . last year, earnestly begging you who are parents to abandon your present habit, that I may be spared the necessity of returning again to the system of fines in order to ensure regular attendance.

The cost of carrying on the School during the year 1868 has been £53.13.0d., and the average attendance thirty-three; therefore the cost of each child’s schooling, for the forty-five weeks that the School was open during the year, was £1.12s 6d., or rather more than 7d. a week. If the number of children were twice as great as it is, the cost per head would be half what it has been last year, as it would not be more expensive to educate a school full than one

half full, and there is room enough and provision for the education of from sixty to seventy children. There are now on the Register fifty-one names, twenty-one children from our own parish, and thirty from Mattishall.” We assume that these children from outside the parish came from the Heath and South Green area and that their parents found it easier to sent them to Welborne at this time.

The only other details of actual numbers found are forty-eight in November 1868, thirty-three children at the Diocesan Inspector’s examination in September 1874. As a sober reminder that numbers on the books doesn’t always mean a full classroom, we have the note for October 2nd 1874 that only three children attended that day. Any one who has ever attended a function at the Welborne School Room may wonder how they managed to accommodate even thirty-three children with their desks and seats along with two teachers and their desks and seats in such a small space. Obviously it was not just the houses which were crowded.

Examinations, Inspections and Visitors

Because the Welborne school received finances from several sources it was subject to two official inspections as well as the more casual reaction of visitors. In November 1886 the Rector expressed his misgivings to his daughter about the probable results. “I fear we must not expect as many to pass this year.” He goes on to imagine how it might have looked from the children’s perspective, “fearing lest several of those presented might fail in passing . . . through fear, not being able to show what they did know to the strange gentleman whom their imaginations pictured to them as a person greatly to be dreaded.”

We have the most detailed description of the visit of the Revd Frederick Meyrich on 19th March 1868. Twenty five children (including five under six) were presented for examination in four standards – each being “examined in the subjects proper for each standard eg. the 4th or highest standard were examined in: reading, “in the reading book proper for this standard,” writing, “on paper from dictation,” arithmetic, “in compound rules (money),” Scripture, “old testament (history of Elijah), new testament (the four gospels),” Liturgy, “catechism and prayer book service.”

We’re sure everyone was relieved when every child passed and not just because the level of government assistance depended on it. Welborne received £19.10.7: £6.10.0 for average attendance, £11.5.4 on examination and £1.15.3 on infants present. The examiner expressed himself as “particularly pleased with the Holy Scripture, Catechism and Liturgy and well satisfied . . . in the

other subjects.” The letter accompanying the grant further noted, “the school room is satisfactory, the children are well taught and are in very good order. The state of the school does credit to the Mistress.” The Committee of Council did comment, “My Lords hope to find a larger proportion of the scholars presented . . . in the higher standards next year.” Three months later the school “was examined by the Diocesan Inspector the Revd M.J. Anderson, who reported favourably of it to the bishop.”

Diocesan Inspectors reports existed for three years in the 70's and four years in the 80's and the comments are generally favourable: 'very fair order', 'very good order and discipline', 'good order and discipline', 'very satisfactory condition' 'children conscientiously and reverently taught'. The inspector P.P. Gwyn in 1875, noted “all the scholars appear to be also well instructed in secular education.” The religious knowledge was variously 'very efficient', 'very fair indeed – giving proof of careful training and teaching,' 'very creditable' and satisfactory.' Only one comment had a sting in the tail, observing in 1874, “the younger children also fairly well acquainted with scripture subjects, prayer book and church catechism considering their attendance is irregular.”

With regard to visitors the Rector noted that, “those who have from time to time visited it, have expressed themselves much pleased with the neat and orderly appearance of the children, with the excellent discipline which is observed and with their general intelligence and their attainments, when they have questions,” at the same time he tried to persuade more of the locals to visit the school, arguing “it is an encouragement both to the Mistress and the children, when they see that their parishioners beside the Clergymen and their families, take an interest in what passes within the school walls. . . . I shall be very glad if any of you will occasionally visit the school for such a purpose.” An overview of the visitors book shows only one or two visitors a year between 1869 and 1872 all friends or relatives of the Rector.

Running Costs

We have noted how the Rector managed to raise the money to finance the building of the school. With that job complete and the school finally opened in 1847 he was faced with the task of meeting the annual expenses of running the school. Twenty years later we find a memo from him that the school was carried on at an annual expenses of about £36 having cost the Rector nearly £180 over and above his annual subscription of £5. We know also that Mr Onley had been a generous subscriber beginning with an annual subscription of £2 which was systematically increased to £2.10.0 in 1849, £3 in 1858, four

guineas in 1867 until it reached a high of £5 the year he sold the estate. Contributions from other landowners were more spasmodic eg. Leeds 10/- a year 1873 and 1874. From what other sources could money come? Parents' contributions reached a high of £12.12.1 in 1855 but ten years later had fallen to £9.1.9. Fines were never more than a token amount ranging from a low of 4d in 1848 to £1.3.8 in 1856. There was also a small income from the sale of children's needlework 6/- in 1848, 1½ in 1849 and in 1848 5/11½ was raised from the sale of copy books.

How was this money spent? Obviously teachers and their assistants were the major drain on resources especially when we add the cost of the schoolmistress' board and expenses to the salary bill. Among maintenance costs we notice 6/- spent painting the palings in front of the school in 1849, 4/- and 5/6d for new door mats 1850 and 1861, painting the blackboard 3/- and making bookshelves 99d in 1853, whitewashing the school 3/6d in 1854. Among the supplies we find blotting paper and ink 2/5d in 1850, a new set of reading books for 9/9d in 1862 while fuel for the year 1866 cost 15/-. The sundries listed in the expenses for 1848 amounted to £2.2.6½ and included carriage of books 3/3d, worsted for girls knitting 6/5d, material for covering books and maps 10/7½, mending clock 5/6d, cleaning clocks 2/6d, repair to lock 3d, mending form 1/- and an insurance premium of 7/6d.

Clearly deficit financing could only go on for so long and in 1867 the Rector once again expressed the hope that the landowners might be induced to come forward and share the burden with him. His hopes were only partially realised. C.G. Cobon, Mrs Hudson and John Neve appear as subscribing landowners in 1867 and 68, while occupier Henry Balls also contributed in both years. The rest of the subscribers were once again the Rector and curate, their family and friends and some Mattishall landowners. The non salary expenditures continued in a similar vein and with the exception of the clock cleaning and repairs the money spent in maintenance went into local pockets, Mrs Holly, Ball, Green and Smith receiving 1/-, 8/-, 2/- and 5/- respectively for cleaning, sweeping and washing while Charles Doy, J.O. Neve, H. Green and Francis Smalls were all employed at some time. Before we leave the expenses it is interesting to note that it wasn't all academic or structural. While 1872-3 brought a major expense for renewing the playground fence (£41.13.0) the Rector also spent £3.4.2 for children's games and 9/10d for swing chairs, presumably both outdoor play equipment.

By 1871 it could no longer be pretended that existing sources of finances could meet the needs of the school and the Rector brought the problem before the Vestry meeting in April, announcing his intention to call a ratepayers

meeting to consider the issue. Nothing seems to have been done before April 1878 when the issue of a voluntary rate was raised in the face of a seven-year deficiency amounting to £95.13.5. At the meeting called specifically the next month, the Rector announced that “the deficiency was such that he must decline to have to meet it as in former years”. He made an offer to continue on another year, making no request for any reimbursement of assistance [already made] . . . “providing the Ratepayers will attend voluntarily at the end of the next school year . . . and should there be still a debt consent to liquidate the same.” At the meeting he added a memo to the minutes that in the 31 years of the schools existence the deficiency of income he had made good had been £284.3.9. Nevertheless his determination was not diminished: “There is a hope that though a pupil teacher who must be added to the staff will increase the cost of the school, the increased government grant may cover it.” The following year with the account overdrawn by £28, it was agreed that a special meeting should be called. On 11th June 1879 on the “motion of Mr J. Dring seconded by T. Lindsey Green a rate of 4d was made for liquidating the debt of £28.5.0 with the Rector engaged to wipe out the debt of the previous years. A voluntary school rate varying from 1d to 3d was levied up to 1896 as part of the effort to keep the school a voluntary one.

The problems we have identified were not specific to Welborne. At Rurideanery meetings in 1871 and 72 the clergy discussed the problems of financing the diocesan inspections and the respective spheres of activity of diocesan and government inspectors deciding that the whole secular sphere should be left to the latter. They further advocated the voluntary rate system and opposed compulsory education.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

GOVERNANCE

The Vestry Meeting

Originally established for the management of church affairs and the imposing of the Church rate, this body developed naturally into the vehicle of local self-government from the early sixteenth century onwards. While its ecclesiastical duties continued to hold central stage, it was by the end of the eighteenth century the repository of an extensive array of local government responsibilities and this situation continued until the end of the next century. The religious origins of this body ensured that the rector would be “the nucleus around whom the whole parochial organization was to develop.” As the one individual present in every parish, the clergyman was a natural recipient of ‘delegated responsibilities and granted authority.’ As the duties of the Vestry meetings increased, he was joined by a “new level of Vestry officials”: The Guardians and the Overseer for the Poor. The lay work of the Vestry was placed under the supervision of the Justices of the Peace, but the incumbent as Chairman and minute taker, was the key figure in local self-government and the official keeper of the records.

Types of Meetings

Regular or annual meetings were held for the appointing of parish officials and for setting the rates to finance parish expenses. They also became the occasion for the settlement of disputes between individual ratepayers and the parish official collecting the rate. Special or irregular meetings were held to deal with unsatisfactory performance of duties by officials, to deal with unusual financial demands on parish funds or when the Rector felt that a problem needed wider ratepayer input. It was also natural that any other problems that arose would be dealt with at this meeting e.g. Trespassing 18/9/1851.

“A complaint having been made by several owners and occupiers of land, to the effect that William Varsar, John Varsar and George Varsar had at various times been guilty of trespassing upon lands in the parish in pursuit of game: it was resolved that notice to the following effect be sent: “You are requested to take notice that a complaint having been made . . . the parish of Welborne, in Vestry assembled, warn you against so doing and if, after this date, you are

guilty of trespass upon the said lands, the said parish will have to take further measures, according to law, to recover full penalties for so doing." No further mention was made of the matter so we assume the problem ceased.

The Vestry meeting was also the logical place to discuss the question of whether the parish should have some form of community activity on special occasions. In April 1887, a meeting was called "for considering what steps (if any) shall be taken to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee in the Parish. Several suggestions were made but nothing was settled." In February 1901 the minutes record the "Special service to commemorate Queen Victoria. . . .A goodly number of persons attended. Pulpit and desk draped in black, Black stoles on the Altar Cloth." Finally we can note that the Vestry meeting occasionally even considered the distribution of parish alms. "30 December 1852. Apportionment of the coal money was decided upon. First gift made amounting to £6.6.0."

Attendance at Meeting

We estimate that in the period covered in the surviving minute book, around 60 parishioners were entitled to attend Vestry meetings. A rough survey of signatures in the book suggested that sixteen ratepayers attended only one meeting; thirteen between two and five; four between eight and thirteen times with the prizes for attendance going to W.K. Green (19), Charles Cobon (24) Thomas Green (25) and T. Lindsay Green (38). If we look at the numbers present at any one meeting, the average appears around three or four, and meetings with just the Rector and one official were not uncommon. Of course signatures are a source liable to deceive." In September 1853, Mr Sands and Mr Stackwood were present but, "objected to signing their names lest they should appear to approve of the proposal to equalize the land tax . . . to which they objected."

Even when they were willing, the weather often made life difficult or uncomfortable. The meeting of April 8, 1858 was "holden at the parsonage to which place it was adjourned from the Vestry [in the Church] owing to the coldness of the weather." But at least this meeting was held. That of January 1867 was only one of a number cancelled because of weather: "This meeting should have been held on this day fortnight but owing to the roads being blocked by snow no one attended." Finally we should note that not even the clergy were blameless. The entry for June 1867 reading, "no one but the Overseer . . . Rector and curate absent from Welborne."

Collecting the rates

Because the Vestry meeting levied three different rates and the fact that money was set, collected and accounted for quarterly, meant that the actual task of

physically collecting the rates and banking the money was time consuming for the parish officials. It would therefore seem quite natural that they should receive some recompense. Thus we find a memo attached to the minutes of March 1848 recording, "it was agreed . . . that the sum of £4 should be charged to the rates in payment of the Overseer for his trouble in collecting the rates." This was an 100 per cent increase on the amount granted two years earlier but apparently was not found to be entirely satisfactory. Rate collecting was obviously time consuming and it was time that the officials concerned were unable or unwilling to spend away from their own property. The obvious solution was to pay someone else to do it.

"At this meeting [March 1857] an arrangement was made with Mr Raynor Howes of Mattishall that he should undertake the making out of the Poor Rate and gathering the same . . . paying it to . . . the Overseer from whom he will receive the sum of £4 . . . the remainder of his salary being paid out of the Surveyor's rate . . . " The Overseer was still left with the task of bringing the books before the auditor, "half yearly for the usual charge of 3/- each time and to pay the quarterly contributions into the bank in Norwich without charge to the parish."

In 1861, it was decided to change collectors: "the outgoing Overseer proposed that, a new collector . . . be appointed [and that] an offer should be made to Mr Colls . . . he engaged to undertake the office for twelve months at the same salary, namely £4, to be paid in part from the money allowed for journeys in the Overseer's Book, namely 22/- and the remainder out of the surveyor's rate." The manner of providing for it however, had created a problem. In June 1868 it was reported "Mr Colls having . . . his £4 . . . disallowed by the auditor wished to know where he was to look for payment." The matter was postponed until the next meeting, where it was agreed that, "Mr Colls must look for it from a voluntary rate from the rate payers and that in future a proper assistant Overseer must be appointed."

Obviously the Vestry had no objection to nepotism and agreed to the appointment of John Colls Jr. as assistant Overseer at the same salary with 22/- for journey. In some ways this was a surprising decision, given that nearly twenty years earlier "the magistrates refused to allow the item in the accounts, as the circumstances of the parish do not demand an assistant Overseer." As the population of the parish was decreasing, they could hardly expect a more favourable response. However, they appear to have been luckier this time, for it was a further eight years before the matter was raised again. Following the lead of the Church warden, who decided to collect his own rate, the meeting of March 1875 decided: "that the Overseer and surveyor will, for the time to

come, collect the Parish rates themselves and dispense with the office of paid assistant Overseer and that notice be given to Mr John Colls [Jr] that he shall vacate the office at Michaelmas 1875.

The matter continued to rumble on and an additional dimension was added the next year, when correspondence was received from the local Government Board, "respecting the faulty keeping of accounts of the Assistant Overseer [and a motion was proposed again] that the office be dispensed with . . ." Mr Colls was not happy with the decision and argued that "he had a right to a year's salary." The meeting was unable to reach agreement on this matter but Colls agreed "to deliver up the books to the Overseer . . . and pay the balance to the Treasurer," at the same time. The chairman undertook to write to the Board. "Three months later the Vestry was presented with the reply from the Board," approving the revocation of Mr Coll's appointment as assistant Overseer. Mr W.K. Green informed the meeting that "Mr Colls had handed over £6.8.9. which he had in hand and also the books." It appears that he also got his years salary though there was no specific resolution put and carried on the matter.

Vestry Disputes (i) Assessment

As rates, tithes, taxes and other levies tended to be set at so many pence in the pound, the value at which property was assessed, could make a considerable difference to the actual sum that had to be paid by each individual. Consequently, we should not be surprised that a high proportion of disputes brought before the vestry concerned property valuations.

In January 1851 at a meeting where the payment of rates had been the main issue discussed, the Rector noted, "Subject of a new valuation of the tenements of the parish has again been brought up, as it had been frequently before, desirable . . . much dissatisfaction with present scale. Parish meeting to be called and fit and proper person appointed to make fresh valuation." The minutes of a meeting two months later had added to them a memo to the effect that, "the Rector in the course of the following day, drew out for the use of the Overseer a paper showing the new scale at which the meeting had assessed the tenement and likewise the reduced sums upon which he will in future gather the rate . . . appears that £5.5.0 would be sacrificed by the changes agreed. But alterations made to Leeds and Wright assessment would mean the alternative [is] equal to an increase of £1.5.0."

The Brick-ground property gave rise to regular disputes. In April 1851, "Mr William Webster attended to complain of his assessment being too high owing to the depreciation in the value of his brickyard of late years." A

reduction was agreed. Thirteen years later it was the new owners turn to raise the matter: "Mr Smalls attended this meeting to complain that the brickyard and cottages, six in number, are rated too high in proportion to other property in the parish . . . decided that the matter be enquired into before another rate made."

Question of whether empty cottages should be charged was raised on a number of occasions e.g. "Edward Howe having claimed to be exempted for his cottage, which has stood empty since vacated by Mrs Balls March 1854 and for his other cottage empty since vacated by Drew, Michaelmas 1855." [allowed 27/12/1855]. The collector appears to have been reluctant to implement this decision as Mr Edward Howe attended again in March 1857, "to complain that the Overseer demanded poor rate for his empty cottage. It was directed that the resolution of December 1855 be carried out. . . ." It was not just the small resident tradesmen who disputed assessments; the meeting of March 1870 was presented with a letter reflecting dissatisfaction: "I do hereby give the Assessor of Land Tax for the Parish of Welborne notice that I intend to appeal against the charge of Land Tax on the land property at Welborne on the ground that it is higher assessed than other Property in the Parish." J.B. Dring. The issue must have lingered on for some time for we find the whole question being considered two years later.

The Rector at this meeting stated that he had ascertained from the Land Tax Redemption office as to what portion of Mr Dring's estate had been redeemed and that the portion on which the Farmhouse stands is part of it and that he has also ascertained from that office that "The Parishioners in Vestry have nothing to do with making a fresh Land Tax Assessment, that the District Commissioners are the proper authority."

Vestry Disputes (ii) Who should pay

Once it had been decided how much rate or tax had to be paid, a secondary dispute might arise in the case of rented property as to the person on whom the obligation lay. Landowners were happy to pass the demand on to the tenant if they could.

The question of the assessment of the brickyards mentioned above, might also explain partially, the dispute about who should pay, that erupted between Francis Smalls and his tenants in 1875 and lingered into the next year. The story begins at the meeting in March, when Mr Howard reported that Mr Smalls, "has declined paying the surveyor's rate upon his six cottages saying that application must be made to the occupiers who are under agreement to pay the Surveyor's as well as the Overseers rate. It was decided that . . . Mr Cobon

should enquire of the Magistrate's Clerk, whether Mr Smalls could legally refuse payment as it is generally understood that cottagers are not liable."

The following February, William Howard again complained that he could not get the surveyor rate assessed upon the Brickyard Cottages which "Mr Smalls the landlord has required his tenants to pay as he has the Poor rate. The Rector undertook to discharge the amount for the two past years amounting to 4/1½d and to give the tenants to understand that he did so on condition that they pay the rate now made or they would be summoned before the magistrate as the Surveyor must not be allowed to be out of pocket."

Having made up the deficit personally, Barham Johnson had a special interest in getting the matter settled. Two months later he reported that "on enquiring" he found that "Mr F Smalls' tenants . . . declared that he had never given them any notice that they will be required to pay the Surveyor's rate on their cottages but only the Poor rate and moreover that Mr Small had advised his tenants not to pay the Rate. As it is the custom in the Parish that the landlord pay surveyor rate upon the cottages. The meeting is unwilling to break through it and they wish the Surveyor to represent this to Mr Small requesting him again to pay . . . and informing him that if he declines his only course will be to summon him."

The Changing Tide

The growth of the dissenting churches and the weakened position of the Anglican Church, in terms congregations, along with the increased complexity of local government tasks, meant that delegation of secular responsibilities to this essentially church organization had reached its limits long before the end of the nineteenth century. It was therefore not unexpected that the Local Government Act of 1894 chose to withdraw from the Vestry, all secular responsibilities and creating new organizations to carry out these tasks. A very lively discussion took place at the Decanal Meeting of March 1896. The key issue was who should now be allowed to attend Vestry Meeting i.e. should rate payers who were not church members now be excluded. The debate broadened to consider whether it was advisable to form Parochial Church Councils as a body of faithful laity, who could give advice to the clergy. The Revd A.W. Upcher, son in law of Barham Johnson, described an experiment he had tried, "Inviting members of the congregation of both sexes to express their views." This radical suggestion of giving women a voice was not well received. Other clergy opposed the whole idea of such bodies, warning that they would provide "a field for the busybody, mischief-maker or fanatic." As we know the PCCs did come to pass and fortunately did not fulfil the gloomy prophecies,

attracting concerned and conscientious parishioners who have contributed a great deal to the parish of Welborne.

The Vestry and the Poor Laws

The problem of how to deal with the poor and prevent social unrest associated with poverty, was one that concerned lawmakers through the centuries. The Great Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 had placed the burden of responsibility on the parish and thence the Vestry. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 put this work under the supervision of three Poor Law Commissioners, but the problem remained one that was to be dealt with by local government until the twentieth century. The Welborne parish official, who had to deal specifically with the provision of relief, was the Overseer of the Poor and his financial resources were provided through the levying of a poor rate.

The Overseer

The office had deep historical roots and probably existed in English parishes before the law of 1597, which made this official “entirely responsible for the management of the poor for more than two centuries.” (Tate.1960: 190). While we know that there must have been Overseers in Welborne earlier than the nineteenth century, it is only after the arrival of Barham Johnson and the passing of a law that required minutes of Vestry meetings to be kept, that we get any insight into the men who served. The list is incomplete but it does show considerable turnover and the prevalence of broken rather than consecutive terms. Given that candidates for office could only come from men considered as ‘substantial householders,’ it is not unexpected that we find that 86 per cent of all the Overseers were farmers. In fact, it was only after 1878 that we find any non-farmers at all. The Overseers were generally younger men, the bulk of them serving while in their thirties and forties.

To understand some of the action of the parish and Overseer, we need to be aware of the restrictions that have existed in the free movement of people at certain times in our history. The manorial system had basically been one, which tied individuals to a specific location. When it broke down, most people, including the poor, could move to find work wherever they could. After 1662, this ceased to be true for the poor. Concern about who would have to pay for their care, if they were unable to work, led to restrictions on the right to look for work outside the home parish. Individuals, who did move, would have to have a certificate from their parish, agreeing to be responsible for their maintenance, should it become necessary. Without it, job seekers could only settle in a new parish if the parish was prepared ‘to pick up this tab.’

Unfortunately, we did not find any of these settlement certificates in the Welborne papers but there were several incidents where their existence could be inferred. One of the tasks of the Overseer, would have been to examine, and to participate in the granting of those certificates, and to identify individuals who should be sent back to their own parishes. He could apply the various tests for eligibility and where necessary, commit individuals to Houses of Correction or later to Workhouses. While in earlier centuries he would have exercised considerable independence, legislation in the eighteenth century subjected him to increased supervision.

If we look at what the law of 1781–2 said he could not do, we can imagine what he might have been doing prior to this date: “No poor could be sent to a workhouse more than ten miles from their own parish. No children less than seven were to be forcibly separated from their parents, orphans and other children might be boarded out with . . . relatives rather than being sent to the workhouse, paupers could be excused the wearing of the badge [P] upon proof of very decent and orderly behaviour. (Tate.1960: 192–3).

Further insight can be gained from a letter issued by the secretary of the Poor Law Commissioners in November 1834, concerning duties which they are by the existing laws required to perform and suggested: (1) able-bodied paupers . . . should, if possible [be] set to work . . . task work . . . preferred; (2) The allowance to be given to the pauper in return for parish work . . . should be considerably less than the ordinary wages paid for similar work to an independent labourer; (3) if it be found impractical to set [them] . . . to work, one half at least of the relief given to them should be in food or in the other necessities of life . . .; (4) If it is the practice in your parish to make an allowance to labourers in respect to the number of children . . ., you should make them in kind, rather than money; (5) If the parish possesses a workhouse . . . you may make the offer of relief within the house to any such pauper who shall apply for parochial aid, and such offer will exonerate you from the necessity of offering other relief.” It is clear from this brief glimpse at what the Overseer had to do that it was a very onerous and time demanding office, requiring him to be both judge and social worker. While we have no surviving evidence of the Welborne Overseer actually creating jobs for those who could not get work, we do have records of the important decisions which were made, as to whether an unemployed man in this parish would be given outdoor relief (which allowed him and his family to stay in their home) or whether help was dependent on them all moving to the Workhouse (indoor relief). Without the Overseers book, we also have no knowledge of how many were denied any help at all.

The Poor Rate

The more onerous of the local taxes, this rate was introduced in 1601, to provide a more reliable means of financing poor relief than earlier voluntary schemes. While the parish remained solely and individually responsible for the care of its own poor, the Welborne Vestry had control over the rate set and the amount of help that they would provide. This situation changed when the Vestry decided to join the Forehoe Union and participate in the scheme to construct a House of Industry (Workhouse), for the hundred at Wicklewood. Rate setting became a question of deciding what figure would generate the income necessary to meet this parish's obligations to the union.

You can see the process at work in the following record of "the General Quarterly Meeting of the Directors, and Acting Guardians of the Poor within the said Hundred at the King's Head Inn in Wymondham on . . . the First Day of January One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty Seven." The House of Industries financial needs were identified as: paying dividends or interest on moneys . . . borrowed (to build and maintain the structure); the expenses of maintaining the poor within the hundred for the current quarter and the running cost (staff salaries etc.) The total sum needed at this time was £1,807.3.6. This figure was then divided amongst the parishes in the Union. Welborne was assessed at £15.3.5 compared to Wymondham's £810.17.6. Warrants were then issued to each parish, requiring them to pay the sum to the Corporation Treasurer by 10th February. That some parishes failed to do so, can be seen from the fact that on the 2nd October the same year, a number of Overseers were summoned to appear before the next quarterly meeting and fined for neglecting to pay. We found no record of Welborne ever having been delinquent.

Welborne's contributions for the period between 1827 and 1829 came to between 0.81 per cent and 0.92 per cent of the total. As Welborne inhabitants made up 1.75 per cent of the population, 1.81 per cent of the assessed land values and 1.87 per cent of the total size of the hundred, these figures seem to support our general observation that fewer Welborne inhabitants were involved in poor relief than most of the other parishes in the hundred.

The decisions made at the weekly meetings of the Overseers of the hundred, as to who should receive indoor rather than outdoor relief, obviously affected those costs. The money paid to the poor as outdoor relief, was lower per head than the cost of indoor relief even where the cost of food, clothing and medical attention was offset by the earnings of the inmates. But in Welborne's case, the difference in the numbers of the two groups may have negated this advantage. In the period between 1839 and 1846, the numbers receiving outdoor relief

ranged from 8 to 37, while those receiving indoor relief averaged 3 with a peak of 8 in the last quarter of 1846. In monetary terms this was a difference between a high of £5 for indoor relief with nine quarters with no payment at all and a high of £45 for outdoor relief, with no quarter being less than £19. If we add the length of stay to the indoor relief figures, the picture changes. While it is true that some people stayed at Wicklewood for no more than a week, the average stay was around 90 days in the 1840's, with one individual living in the House for 405 days. Despite considerable variation in costs from quarter to quarter, the poor rate tended to average around 6d in the £.