

WIRKSWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

NOTES on the THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

We have no history of the school through the nineteenth century. The first half of the century was dominated by the headships of Hubbersty and son. Rev. Abraham Bennett, a distinguished scientist, had been the head from the 1776 to 1799, but his brilliant mind was on other matters. The inscription on his monument reads: 'he was the author of a work entitled New Experiments in Electricity which established his reputation for Science among the philosophers of all countries.' He was also the curate in Wirksworth; he regarded the headship as a sinecure and devoted his efforts successfully to scientific research.

Rev. Nathan Hubbersty became the head in 1799, revived the school from its poor state and served till 1828. His son, also Nathan, succeeded him and was in post till 1851, a remarkable span of family service. Hubbersty begins in 1801 as follows.

From the Derby Mercury 5th February 1801

WIRKSWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL DERBYSHIRE

An assistant is immediately wanted, who is perfectly qualified to teach the English Language grammatically, Writing, Arithmetic, and the ordinary branches of Mathematics – He must be a single man; and of unexceptionable character.

The particulars of the situation may be known by personal application, or by letter addressed, (post paid) to the Head Master, the Rev N HUBBERSTY, by whom Letters of recommendation and specimens of writing, will be duly acknowledged.

Mr Hubbersty also informs his Friends that at Lady-Day his house will be ready for the accommodation of Young Gentlemen as Boarders, to whom every attention and assiduity will be devoted to qualify them for the learned professions or trade; he will particularly regard their health and manners, and will studiously endeavour to instil into the minds of his pupils, the true principles of pure Christianity, as the best and most powerful motives of Morality.

TERMS: Board, Twenty Guineas per annum. Education, one Guinea per quarter. Further particulars and the plan of education, may be known by applying to the Rev N. Hubbersty, at Wirksworth.

Wirksworth Jan 26th 1801.

Several points arise from this fascinating advertisement printed 200 years ago. I have typed the words as published, except that the letter 's' is 'f' in the published version.

Note the strong Christian message, at the heart of the school for hundreds of years.

Hubbersty advertises the traditional classics and maths grammar school curriculum, but he soon realised it was an unrealistic demand on many of the boys – no girls, of course – attending a school in Wirksworth. Some were as young as eight.

The expectation in the advert for the 'single' master to serve as assistant is high, but no salary is stated. I suspect there would have been additional boarding duties.

The boarding facility is probably an innovation. It was difficult for children to get into Wirksworth from the villages, so boarding increased the pupils available in an enlarged rural catchment area, kept the numbers up and as a private initiative by the Head Master provided him with some additional, much needed, income.

Where was the Head Master's boarding house? I identify Slaley House, a large and splendid building even in the 21st century, on North End as the most likely location. Boarding would be an issue for many years.

Hubbersty, originated from Kendal in Westmorland and had been educated at Clare College, Cambridge. I know nothing of his previous teaching, but he was 31 on appointment and married Mary Dorothy Tomlinson (daughter of an auctioneer?) from Wirksworth on 28th April 1801. They had six children and Mary survived her husband and lived in Wirksworth till her death in 1852, aged 75.

The new head rapidly increased the numbers to about 100 boys and employed two additional masters. On appointment he was paid £50, raised in the twenties to £70. I am sure that success led to the rebuilding of the school in the churchyard in 1827 at a cost of £1,500; the increased salary was a vote of approval. At this time in an audit by the Charity Commissioners a fund was discovered totalling £900 held by Mr Gell of Hopton, which was properly part of the charity funds. The commissioners urged that the irregularities be corrected, a formal rebuke. There was an instruction for proper audit and a black mark for the Gells.

My reading suggests that Hubbersty was so successful that he was able virtually to set up a second school with some chosen boys, 30 children mostly boarders at £30 a year, under his personal guidance, a kind of private scholarship group following the traditional grammar (Latin & Greek) curriculum on the model of the public schools, no doubt based at Slaley House on North End. The rest of the boys were educated at a lower level by the assistant masters in the old school building, like an elementary school, following a less taxing academic regime: they tended to leave at thirteen. The few who had ambitions to continue in education went to Derby Grammar School, probably as boarders.

Once the new school building in the churchyard was opened in 1827 the school seemed set for a strong period, but suddenly Hubbersty, who had served for 29 years, died aged 61 in August 1828 and his son, also Nathan Hubbersty, took over.

The younger Nathan Hubbersty was only 26 when he became head. His appointment was announced in June 1829 by advertisement in the Sheffield Independent: 'Mr Hubbersty B.A. of St John's College Cambridge, formerly of Shrewsbury School under the venerable Archdeacon Butler has been appointed to succeed his late lamented father Rev N Hubbersty B.D. as Head Master of Wirksworth Grammar School.' He also advertises Boarding & Education at 50 guineas per annum with washing at 15 shillings a

quarter. At this time he was not in holy orders, but he was soon ordained Deacon in 1829 and is Rev N Hubbersty MA (MA no doubt by purchase) and is giving highly praised sermons as priest at Alderwasley and in Derby in 1830.

I have found little in the Derby Mercury relating to the life of the school during his period of headship, which lasted till 1851, apart from the regular notice of terms beginning. There is however interesting information about Nathan on the censuses of both 1841 and 1851. He was married on 28th June 1838 to Margaret Emma third daughter of Richard Hurt of Wirksworth, thus tying himself into one of the top establishment and influential families of the district. Nathan was curate at Alderwasley, where the Hurts were based, so there was a local connection. Emma bore five children, the last in 1845 the year of her death, leaving her husband with five children under seven. Rapidly Nathan married again: December 1845 to Eliza Caroline Hurtop, widow of a clergyman from Eastwell in Leicestershire and born into the Manners family. They were married at Melton Mowbray and Nathan had moved up from marriage to a Hurt to join the family of the Duke of Rutland, the Manners. I know the Hurts had a strong link by marriage to the Manners family, through Francis, the cricketer, so again there is a connection.

Although Nathan appears on the 1851 census in Wirksworth, his second wife is not with him, nor is the youngest child, Margaret; I assume both were in Leicestershire at the family estate. By April 1851 Nathan had retired as head of WGS and is recorded on the census of that year as perpetual curate at Alderwasley. In 1861 he is in Leicestershire, having moved to Eastwell Hall near Melton Mowbray, when he is a farmer with 380 acres employing 10 labourers and three boys. I assume that as members of the wider Manners family they had moved to take over the estate, which belonged to the Duke as part of his Belvoir property. In 2013 their house, Eastwell Hall, is a listed building. I speculate that after twenty years at WGS Nathan felt he needed a change and his wife's family gave him the opportunity to seek a different career. In 1861 and 1871 he is on the census in Leicestershire as a clergyman 'without cure of souls' By 1881 now in his seventies, he is back in Wirksworth, living at the Gables on Coldwell Street, also without souls.

Details from the census returns on Rev. Nathan Hubbersty in Wirksworth.

1841 national census. Nathan Hubbersty aged 35 (not accurate, should be 37) living on North End with his mother Mary (60). a wife, Margaret and two young sons, Richard 2 and Charles 10 months. In the house there are seven servants, a school assistant and eighteen boarders aged between eight and fifteen. Among the boarders I notice three Hurts (James 14, John 13 & Francis 8) children of the famous and extensive Hurt family from Alderwasley, most of whom were sent away to board at the public schools, some to Eton, some to Harrow. And, of course, Nathan had married into that family.

Hubbersty's brother Philip also lives in Wirksworth, St John's Street, a successful attorney.

The 1851 census. Nathan Hubbersty, aged 47, perpetual curate of Dethick and minister of Alderwasley. He & his family all born in Wirksworth. There is no mention of being head of WGS. The vacancy was advertised in 1851. He had served for 22 years

following his father, so they covered between them the first fifty years of the century. Family: Richard 11, scholar at home. William 10, scholar at home, Charles 9, scholar; Harry 8, scholar; his mother Mary, 74, annuitant. No mention of the youngest, Margaret, born 1845. There are six servants and two boarders, Bernard 13 (born in Putney) and Theodore Octavius Hurt 11, another Hurt. Theodore was the eight child of Francis the cricketer, born in Duffield, and in 1851 the Hurt family were living at Hopton Hall. Theodore was an unusual young man. He was lame from birth, an easy-going imaginative child who did not manage the traditional Hurt careers in the army or the church, but became a wanderer in life; never found his metier, lost all his money in a failed farming venture in New Zealand, but performed a notable service by writing up the later history of the Hurt family.

The 1881 census. Rev Nathan Hubbersty, a clergyman 'without cure of souls' appears in Coldwell Street; he died in that year at the age of 78. I notice he was living two doors from Wirksworth Hall, where his sister, Agnes Eleanor Wood presided, having married and survived to be widow to a wealthy banker called Price Wood. Her death and funeral at the age of eighty in 1892 was reported in the Derby Mercury with columns of obsequiously deferential praise for her benefactions, her Christian faith and her generosity to her community

I imagine that Nathan in his seventies was no longer able to run the estate and so returned to Wirksworth with his wife and they were sheltered by his sister at the Hall. Nathan died in 1881. So ended the long connection of his family with the town, though his brother, by now an important lawyer, was still living on St John's Street.

I looked further back and wondered where Nathan had gone to school and what was his qualification was for headship in nepotistic succession at the age of 25. I discovered that before he came to Wirksworth he taught at Shrewsbury School. Its Head was Samuel Butler, one of the most famous and influential heads of his age; a man of the highest classical scholarship and in his time at Shrewsbury 'the standard of its scholarship was as great as any public school in England'. It was from this red-hot academic atmosphere that Nathan was catapulted into his father's place at Wirksworth. He must have been a well qualified classicist to have been appointed to Shrewsbury, but I suspect strong influence in his application to Wirksworth. While head at Shrewsbury Butler, amazingly to modern understanding, also held the post of Archdeacon of Derby, surely a rarely visited sinecure. With a vacancy in Wirksworth and a reference from Butler Nathan was the obvious candidate, a shoe in. I wonder if he was an old boy of Shrewsbury School.

Clearly Nathan and his father, both Cambridge graduates in holy orders, were scholarly men and highly academic school masters. They hoped that they could establish a high standard of learning in Wirksworth and to some extent the father seems to have been successful. But there were problems. No school exists in a social vacuum; the community it serves colours its success. In the eighteenth century Wirksworth was coming to the end of its great Georgian prosperity with its handsome town houses and high prestige in Derbyshire society. The town was about to embark on the long slow decline, which was only stopped in the second half of the twentieth century. The wealth from the ancient lead mines was drying up and the community was beginning to find its jobs in textiles (women) and the quarrying industry, producing high quality limestone. There is list of not very well paid textile jobs: 'woolcombers, worsted makers, cotton manufacturers, calico silk and linen weavers, gingham and tape manufacturers'. With

the air increasingly polluted by the dust and dirt from the quarries Wirksworth steadily became a less desirable place to live and work. In the eighteenth century an anonymous 'divine' considered the inhabitants of Wirksworth 'most rough and uncivilised. Nowhere else had he met with such rudeness, indecency and immorality'. The school had never been strong and though it was possible to recruit in satisfactory numbers the abilities of the boys did not match the demands of the dry, traditional classical curriculum with its remote and tedious emphasis on rote learning of grammar. Both Hubberstys and their successor Rev. H.R. Brett, were Christian gentlemen resolute for the highest academic standards, but the needs of their uncultivated pupils were different: they required a more general education which fitted the boys for positions in the local economy. Nationally the academic curriculum of the grammar school barely changed through the nineteenth century while the country rose on the back of its technological achievements to be a world and imperial power. No wonder we lost ground to Germany, which introduced its technical schools as the century moved on. I am sure the wealthy families in Wirksworth, the gentry like the Hurts and Gells sent their sons away to board and to qualify for the army or the professions. When the railway was established ambitious families could send their children easily to Derby Grammar School, which retained its high academic standards. In the nineteenth century the headship of WGS was a struggle. Its gentlemanly holders have my sympathy.

I have found evidence of only one pupil in the Hubbersty years. John Smedley, born in 1803, son of a working man in Wirksworth and later founder of the great family business at Lea Green, attended WGS, but left at fourteen after a 'scanty' education. The classics had not touched him. John like many others needed a different curriculum.

I have found few references to the school in the Derby Mercury, but one significant notice was published.

A scheme was made by a Court of Chancery in 1844 relating to Wirksworth Grammar School which provided that it should not be compulsory for any scholar to learn classics or mathematics, but the head should be a graduate of one of the universities. I think this 'scheme' from Nathan's time reflects the reality that few Wirksworth pupils were managing the traditional classical curriculum and acknowledges the realities of the split school established by the older Hubbersty.

My final Hubbersty snippet relates to the younger. Via a family website I found the following: 'He (ie Nathan) also had a number of correspondences and even a hike or two in Wales with Charles Darwin.' That sets my imagination running.

A personal diversion. CRICKET AT WIRKSWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Oddly the other reference in the newspapers to the headship of the second Hubbersty relates to cricket, In 1849 Wirksworth Cricket Club was formally established by Francis Hurt and in the first season I discovered two references to a school match; in May the Derby Mercury reports that the game was postponed. In Hurt's unpublished diaries Francis records a game against Hubbersty's school in June.

Wednesday 6 June: 'Played in match against Hubbersty's school and got beat. Our bowling very bad and theirs little or no better. A very fine day.' The club beat the school in the return match.

To continue the theme. There are two other cricket references over the years. In 1878 a match is reported between the school and Alderwasley with a full score card; won easily by the school. I sense another Hurt initiative in a different generation.

There is also a game in 1890 against Cavendish School in Matlock, which was spoiled by rain, though not before young Blackwell had distinguished himself by scoring 28 and taking the two Cavendish wickets that fell before the rain. Blackwell later played for the county, but died young in 1900. Was he the first 'old boy' to play for the county. Not the last! You can see his memorial plaque in the church.

The match:

9 July 1990 Cricket. Wirksworth Grammar School v Matlock Cavendish School.

WGS 52 (Blackwell 28); Cavendish 8/2 when rain stopped play.

WGS team: Evans, Blackwell, Steel, Tatlow, T Walker, J Walker, W Hooke, L Beesley, E Beesley, Harrison.

We have the names and scores of the players in both matches. Blackwell was the son of a local tradesman, typical of the entry through many years. Also in the team note two Beasleys, Lawrence and Ernest, sons of the local bank manager. Lawrence, having moved to Derby Grammar School went to Caius College Cambridge where he took a first in Natural Sciences. He returned to Wirksworth to teach science for two years and after moving schools was involved as a passenger survivor on the Titanic: he wrote a successful book about his experiences. Although Beesley's story comes much later in time his transfer to Derby for advanced study is typical of the move necessary for an able and ambitious Wirksworth boy throughout the nineteenth century.

Cricket is the only game, sport or physical activity I have found relating to the school during these years. Why? Drill would have been basic in the curriculum. The public school governors would have been keen on cricket, a morally acceptable sport to Victorians.

We will find another reference to science teaching at WGS later, but for now we are back with the Hubberstys and their distinguished successor, Rev F.H. Brett. Bluntly Nathan was fed up with slogging on in a persistently unfavourable climate; the fields of Leicestershire must have loomed most attractive.

But another highly academic successor was to take his place.

The post was advertised in 1851 (Derby Mercury) at a salary of £120 and the Rev. F.H. Brett was appointed. The payment is significantly more than was recorded previously. I do not know what the younger Hubbersty was paid, but I suspect the cash-strapped governors saw his boarding business as an additional emolument. No wonder he married money. So did his successor!

I suspect that the school had begun to struggle after the golden years of the first Hubbersty and there was a policy to improve the position. I have no record of numbers at this time, but Nathan's decision to change direction was convenient. The governors

who guided that decision were almost certainly from the town establishment, the upper class, which rejected the grammar school for their own boys, but wanted to offer the old mix of religion (CoE) and the classics as a generous benefit to local children. The situation was common across many country grammar schools. There was no assessment of the needs of children as the momentum of change in Victorian society speeded up: – perhaps there was, but the powers that be got the wrong answer. I learn that Gladstone was un- interested in the education of the masses and at first opposed the 1870 act, though he was devoted to Oxford, Homer and the classics. Had his mighty intellect and energies been turned to education the world might have been different.

There is some uncertainty about Brett's dates; his obituary identifies his term of office as 1854-1859, but the newspapers prove his arrival in 1851. His first advertisement set the scene. Note the similarities with the advertisement presented by the first Hubbersty fifty years earlier.

The message to potential parents was the same regime of traditional academic rigour. F. H. Brett came from another highly academic environment at Stamford Grammar School and was better qualified and even more learned than the Hubberstys. You did not become a Cambridge Wrangler, a high status mathematician, without being a top level scholar. He also continued the Hubbersty tradition by holding an ecclesiastical appointment as curate at Carsington and marrying into a wealthy family. Brett was married in 1853 to Annie, daughter of Thomas Smith of Bladon Castle; a son was born in 1854 and a daughter in 1858. Bladon Castle at Newton Solney near Burton survives as a ruinous folly. I suspect that Brett, who does not appear on the 1861 census in Wirksworth or Carsington may have delivered his parish duties from Newton Solney as there was not yet suitable accommodation in Carsington. His eldest son was born and christened in Newton Solney.

FRANCIS HENRY BRETT HEAD MASTER
WIRKSWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Advertisement in the Derby Mercury 1851

The Rev F. H. Brett, MA, (late Scholar of St John's College Cambridge, Wrangler BA 1845 and for several years second master of Stamford Grammar School) having been appointed Head Master of the above School, intends to offer to the public the advantages of a sound Education in Classics, Mathematics, Modern Languages etc., preparatory to the Universities, the Professions or the naval and military schools on very moderate terms.

The School is situated amidst beautiful scenery and the neighbourhood is remarkable for its salubrity; no case of fever, or other serious illness having occurred in the School for fifty years. Every attention will be paid to the religious training of youth and also to their domestic comforts.

The School will re-open on Monday July 28th. Prospectus with terms sent on application.

There is, strangely, no reference to boarding in his initial announcement, though he was living on North End. The encomium of the healthy climate and the avoidance of fever seems rather desperate, though some Victorian boarding schools had suffered badly and had moved or even closed after a wave of infection. The theme is pursued in a January 1855 advertisement for the school. On this occasion boarders are mentioned. Note the teaching of the elements of science, a particular interest of Brett and the bid for 'the attention of the gentry of Derby'.

Wirksworth Grammar School
Francis Henry Brett MA Cantab Head Master

The above School will re-open for boarders after the Christmas vacation, on 29th January,

In addition to the usual Grammar School course of Classics, Mathematics etc. instruction is likewise given in the elements of Chemistry, Botany and other natural sciences. English Grammar and Composition are also duly attended to.

The attention of the gentry of Derby and the neighbourhood, is invited to the advantages offered them by the above School, in the salubrity of its situation and in its quiet and picturesque locality, so conducive to habits of thought and study.

Prospectus, with terms, testimonials etc. will be forwarded on application.

I have found a similar notice of November 28th 1855 which names the distinguished governors who might attract the gentry of Derbyshire.

Governors in 1855.
Sir Henry Fitz-Herbert Bart;
Peter Arkwright Esq.;
The Rev T.T. Smith, Vicar of Wirksworth;
Captain Goodwin MA;
Thomas Poyser Esq.;
William Walker Esq.

Much of the advert is repeated from January, but there is reference to 'sound and careful training in the Greek and Latin languages. The 'salubrity' is 'peculiarly adapted to the pursuits of Academical and general education'. Boarding is in the Head Master's house.

The governors are an impressive and gentlemanly team. Fitz-Herbert from Tissington, Arkwright, a member of the famous family; the Vicar to add to the Christian ethos and Capt Goodwin with a MA degree, who will appear later in the story.

I looked up Poyser and Walker on the 1851 Wirksworth census. Thomas Poyser is a surgeon in General practice living on Coldwell Street. I found several William Walkers, so that identification is uncertain, but the most likely candidate is a farmer from Ildridgehay. Would he qualify as Esq., the mark of a gentleman?

The three press notices are the only evidence I have of Brett's tenure, but there is a fulsome obituary published on his death in 1899 in Carsington.

He was curate of Carsington from 1851 –1859 'when the Bishop of Lichfield gave him the living of Carsington'. This relieved him of his post at the school and enabled him to spend the next forty years as rector of this tiny village parish with 250 souls. He raised the money and built a new rectory house opposite the church where he lived and he 'materially contributed' to the church restoration. He was considered to be one of the most learned men in the whole district, being not only a mathematician, as his Cambridge degree testifies, but an excellent classical scholar, skilled also in chemistry and botany and other subjects. He was a firm adherent to homoeopathy, and had long studied it, and the parishioners had in him one who was ever ready to give them remedies for their ailments.'

Brett is buried in the churchyard at Carsington.

'It sounds,' said a friend, 'like Jane Austen.' What a comfortably agreeable life style, giving much time to his scholarly pursuits and honoured in his community, a pleasant contrast with labouring to teach the boys of Wirksworth the elements of Latin and Greek grammar.

From 1860 Mr H Harris M.A. Oxford was Head Master and when he left in 1867 there were '47 boys, of whom eleven were in the upper school and learnt Latin and 36 in the lower school receiving a commercial education'. Clearly the recommendations of the 1844 scheme of the Court of Chancery had produced some change at last in the curriculum and organisation of the school. There were eighteen 'foundationers', who, I assume, received a scholarship and remission of fees, 'selected with regard to poverty'.

The income of the charity, mainly from ownership of and rents from land holdings was £340 per year; how tiny it seems. There are several notices of the sale of a field at this time in the newspapers. The income from some small holdings was nugatory.

In the 1861 Wirksworth census Herbert Harris, 40, is a lodger at Church Street, adjacent to the school. He is recorded as Head of Wirksworth Grammar School. I note that he is not in holy orders; surely an error, not a change of policy. Harris is a bachelor and, unusually, described as a lodger. Later in the newspaper reports of the Wigwell Grange murder he is referred to as Rev. Harris. Harris seems to be living on his own, though his 'landlord' could be away for the weekend. There is no sign of boarders. Was someone else running the big house in North End? I read that Harris as head, refused to take boarders 'though the trustees and the parents desired it'. In 1861 Mr Peal was the second master; perhaps he was running the boarding house. Then in 1864 there was an advertisement in the Derby Mercury that Mr Baxter, second master, I suppose newly appointed to the post, takes boarders at 20 guineas per annum. Perhaps this was an effort to resolve the boarding dispute with Harris.

In his seven years of headship Harris was involved in two of the most famous stories of the school in the nineteenth century.

There was a clash of personalities and a big row in the 1860s when Mr Harris, the headmaster, had a strong disagreement with his assistant, Beeson, who was dismissed. Beeson, who was highly regarded by the parents, left and with his wife established his

own school nearby in what we now know as Greengates, a house on Coldwell St., barely a hundred yards from the school. Beeson's school even took girls! He even started 'night classes for art, writing and mechanical drawing which were a great success'. I can understand why the young Beeson clashed with his conservative head.

The story, (see the 400th magazine) passed down in Wirksworth legend, is that the Head Master found his assistant asleep in front of the roaring fire one afternoon when he should have been teaching the boys in the lower class, who were still playing in the playground outside. Was there even a whisky bottle in view? The young teacher was popular (too popular?) with pupils and parents and Beeson's Academy in Coldwell St. attracted pupils away from the grammar school by offering a less formal curriculum and preparing boys for 'business'. I recall seeing the boys' coat pegs in Greengates. I am sadly not sure of the original source of this magnificent story, but I suspect it was the catalyst for the decline in numbers at the grammar school recorded in 1867. Significantly that was the year that Harris left.

The other remarkable event was Harris's involvement in the Wigwell Grange murder.

THE WIGWELL GRANGE MURDER

In 1863 Miss Goodwin a young woman, aged 22, living at Wigwell Grange, on the way to Longway Bank, was murdered by a young man 'of good family', Mr Townley. This was a cause celebre and the death penalty was imposed at Derby Assizes, though not carried out. Mr Townley was arrested and kept in the town lock up, now a posh b&b. Amazingly the headmaster of Wirksworth Grammar School became involved in this 'dreadful story'. You can find a full account in the Derby Mercury and other papers in August 1863.

Mr Harris, headmaster of the grammar school, was an interesting witness, because Townley called upon him before the murder. Harris gave evidence at the inquest and I quote the report from the Derby Mercury, 26 August 1863.

'The Rev Harris was the first witness.

He said, "I saw the deceased alive on Friday 21st inst at her own house and have not seen her since. George Victor Townley (the prisoner) called on me about half past one pm, at my house and he asked me if I was aware that he was engaged to Miss Goodwin. I told him I was not, when he said she had written to him to break off the engagement, and had refused to see him. He said he called upon me as Miss Goodwin's friend to tell me how matters were. I said anything I knew of Miss Goodwin was in confidence. I declined to tell him, though he asked me more than once, if Miss Goodwin was at Wigwell. I told him she was there on Wednesday. He asked me if there was a clergyman staying there and what was his name. I told him there had been a clergyman staying there, but declined to give his name; he said he had written to Miss Goodwin to release her from her engagement, but he insisted on hearing from her own mouth that she gave him up; he must see her sooner or later. It was then about two o'clock, time for me to attend to my school. I told him I would see him again about half past four, when he called again, and I suggested he should write to Miss Goodwin asking her to see him in the morning, or if he went up that evening no doubt he might see her. He decided to go that evening, and left me; he asked me if I should be in all evening; I said I should. The last thing he said was that he would call on me again."

The Foreman.

To whom did you suggest that he should write a note? – To Miss Goodwin.

Did he seem in an excited state? - No cool and calm as possible.

Did he intimate any revenge? – Not at all, he said he did not wish to stand in Miss Goodwin's way.'

My further questions and comment.

Why did Townley call on you?

Did you yourself have close relationship with Miss Goodwin?

Were you the clergyman at the house on Wednesday?

Harris must have taken this event hard, especially as he knew the family well. The following event illustrates how the new bachelor head was welcomed by society in 1860 at the home of Miss Goodwin.

There is a report of the Wirksworth 'volunteers' gathering at Wigwell in September 1860. Harris was there in a place of honour at 'a very sumptuous entertainment given by its worthy owner'

The 10th Derbyshire (Wirksworth) Company of Rifle Volunteers had been established by Philip Gell as a local defence force, with only the more prosperous citizens in membership; they had to be able provide their own equipment. 'Known and respectable householders only were to be admitted into the force.' The company had been invited in 1860 by Captain Goodwin, owner of Wigwell Grange and estate, to exercise in his grounds. After their drills 'the gallant captain invited the corps to dine with him on that day'

'Captain Goodwin took the chair supported on his right by Capt Hurt and W Webb Esq. M.D., surgeon to the corps, and on his left by Rev J Harries (sic) M.A. and Lt Walthall.

There was a series of toasts.

The gallant captain proposed in eloquent terms the Rifle Volunteers of Great Britain. Captain Hurt proposed the health of the gallant chairman ('drunk with three times three and musical honours), The company then toasted Dr Webb. 'Finally the health of Rev J Harries (sic) Head Master of Wirksworth Grammar School followed.'

'Many of the Wirksworth Corps are musical and their songs..... enlivened the proceedings.'

Harris had joined and been accepted by the gentry of the town: Goodwin, Hurt, Walthall, Webb is a parade of the establishment. It sounds like a convivial evening.

I suspect Harris was less happy at school with Beeson causing him problems and eventually a controversial dismissal. His refusal to manage boarding did him no favours.

It is recorded that Marcellus Peal was his second master in 1861 and on 8th May 1861 there is an advert for a master to teach writing and commercial subjects @£45 per annum but 'will receive all charges of boys in lower school numbering 22'. I assume this was replacement for Peal, then rising sixty, with Baxter becoming second master. Did this mark the fateful arrival of the charismatic Mr Beeson?

Let us look now at Baxter, Peal and Beeson, the assistant masters.

Mr Baxter, second master at WGS, advertised for boarders in 1864 and appears in Wirksworth on three censuses 61, 71, 81, revealing an interesting career progress.

We begin in 1861 when James Baxter aged 31 is a school master living in School House, on North End Street. He was born in Wymondham in Norfolk and his thirty year old wife Alice was born in Mortlake (on the Thames, where the boat race ends) and she is a school mistress. He has two young children, two servants, no boarders, but a pupil teacher, Ellen Evans, aged thirteen (amazing) living in the house.

It is hard to identify the school house; on the census it is placed next to the cemetery, (surely the Lock Up is next door) but that may mean it was facing. The houses are not numbered and I do not trust the order. I note that on North End Street, which was the main road through the town, there are three pubs: The Royal Oak, which survives, The Swan Inn, also next to the cemetery in numerators' order, and the Cheshire Cheese Inn. Both Baxter and his wife came from a distance when most inhabitants of Wirksworth were born in or very near the town. This was the time when the first teacher training colleges were opening in London, including a famous one at Battersea, down the river from Mortlake. Clearly both Baxters were professional teachers. I wonder if they had been trained or taught together, married and come to Wirksworth to work together, as did many others in later years. Their children were all born in Wirksworth. I am puzzled that Marcellus Peal is named as second master in 1861, though he is 59, according to the census, so ready to retire; perhaps Baxter was promoted when he took on the boarding responsibilities. A trained teacher would have been an innovation at the school, but I guess as he had no degree, headship would not have been a possibility: a post reserved for graduates of an English university – and to sustain the CoE hold on education a minister of the established church. I wonder where Baxter's wife was teaching.

Baxter was valued in the town. In 1871 the family had moved and, living on Coldwell Street, he is identified as a school master and clerk to the burial board. He has five young children (four girls and a boy, all scholars) and one servant. Alice is still a school mistress.

In 1881, aged 52, he has progressed and is both school master and registrar of births and deaths, a most responsible position, as well as clerk to the burial board. His son James aged 18 is a chemist's assistant (surely working at Paynes!) and two elder daughters are dress maker and milliner. He is now living at Middle Peak View on Cromford Road. No trace in Wirksworth of any family members in 1891, but he had stayed long enough to win respect in the town. There is no reference to his work in boarding pupils.

Now for James Beeson, who only appears on the 1871 census, where he is named as a school master, aged 44 born in Derby, married to Ann (born in Turnditch) with two young children both born in Wirksworth. On the census he is next to Mrs Wood (of the Hurt

family). I know he was running his school in Greengates and Mrs Wood lived at the Hall, so illustrating my point about the haphazard order of recording.

A final piece of speculation on these two schoolmasters. I wonder if once Beeson had started his school on Coldwell Street Baxter, perhaps with his wife, joined him from WGS and took over some time before the census of 1881. No evidence, but they could well have been allies against Harris, reflecting the issue of Harris and his relationships at the school.

Marcellus Peal on the 1861 census is a schoolmaster, living on Coldwell St., born in Wirksworth, with his wife Betty and daughter Sarah, aged 22 a school mistress. There is a servant and James Harrison, a nephew, is a school boarder. Peal is also recorded as 'registrar'. Then in 1871 he is living on St John's Street aged 69 with no family, one servant, and described as a 'savings bank actuary'. By 1881 he is 79 and is a 'bank manager', living on North End. I think that means he was in charge of the savings bank. Did Peal hand on the job of registrar to Baxter, his successor at school?

I see these three teachers as a trinity of good schoolmasters who contributed to our town.

Harris left in 1867 and I know no more of him.

He was succeeded by in June 1867 by Rev C. H. Collyns of Park Chapel, Bath. From the published announcement it is not clear that he was at the time in headship. I wonder if Park Chapel later became at Prior Park School at Bath. In the notice of his death in 1882 in the Leeds Mercury he is referred to as the former head of King Edward School, Bath. Collyns had been educated at Oxford, was in holy orders and was a fellow of his college, Christ Church; another scholar of distinction. The only reference to his teaching is a notice about Mr F. Potter of Cromford (Derby Mercury December 1889) which informs us that Potter had passed the London University second exam for BSc, prepared for the Logic and Philosophy papers by Rev Collyns.

From the census.

1871 Charles H Collyn, 50, living on North End, HoWGS, born in Exeter. His family. Mary 40 born in Poole, Dorset. Charles, 7 scholar, Bath Edith, 4, scholar, Bath. Arthur, 2 born in Wirksworth. There are two servants and one thirteen year old boarder. NB I am sure his name is Collyns, numerator's error.

There is no indication that Collyns was living in the school house or accommodating many boarders; though it could happen that the census was taken in the Easter holiday. My best guess is that the few boarders involved were parcelled out in small groups to friendly landladies – that is how the public school house system began. Not until the mid eighties, when the school house was built on the Hannages, was satisfactory boarding accommodation provided.

The other recorded contribution by Collyns locally arose when he attended the licensing session of the Wirksworth magistrates in September 1873. 'There was a large attendance of inn and beerhouse keepers applying for the renewal of their annual licences.' Collyns presented a petition, signed by ratepayers and residents, urging the magistrates not to grant any new licences.

He was supported by a clergyman from Matlock Bath - unsuccessfully. He may have been a man of principle, but it was, surely, a silly thing for the Head Master to do. As his intervention could have closed off all the pubs in thirsty Wirksworth, Collyns's temperance policies would hardly have been popular with the masses. I doubt the governors were pleased at his intervention. I am not sure when Collyns left, but he had gone by the end of the year 1875, perhaps earlier.

Collyns carried on campaigning. In 1876 & '77 he addressed public meetings (reported in the Sheffield Independent) at Keighley on vaccination and at Nottingham on vegetarianism. He spoke often on Temperance and at his death in 1882 was national secretary of the British Temperance League. He lived at Grange Crescent, Sheffield and was a stalwart member of the Liberal party. Unusually for a cleric he was in favour of the disestablishment of the Church of England. Collyns's unusual enthusiasms would have hardly recommended him as a member of the, no doubt, staunch Tory local establishment, so I am not surprised that his Wirksworth tenure was brief.

This is a good moment to look at the national scene. We have noticed how Wirksworth Grammar School had adapted to local needs by establishing a commercial department. However it was still required by their statutes that grammar schools teach 'grammar': ie Latin & Greek. When the Clarendon Commission inspected the top public schools in their report (1864) they criticised the curriculum; 'their course of study, sound and valuable in its main elements but wanting in breadth and flexibility.....a young man is not well educated if all his information is shut up within one narrow circle.'

Subsequently the Taunton Commission (reporting in 1868 in twenty one volumes) inspected nearly 800 endowed schools, including WGS: 'the course should be broadened to include mathematics, modern languages and science'. The report on Wirksworth informed us that there were 47 boys in the school and Harris would not take boarders.

Reform was coming, but with glacial slowness and at Wirksworth numbers were desperately low. Wirksworth Grammar School needed a more comprehensive intake if it was to serve its community properly. I note that the British School in Wirksworth, established in 1860, had three hundred pupils, though the head in his 1876 report (Derby Mercury) deplored the poor attendance; often only 200 were regular attenders.

We now come to the mysterious headship of Rev. Timothy Johnson. I knew nothing of him until I began to research this paper. Then I discovered in the Pall Mall Gazette, 23rd February, 1876 the announcement of the death of the wife of Rev Johnson, Head Master of Wirksworth Grammar School and Vicar of Kniveton. I have found no notice in the press that Johnson had been appointed and there is no notice of his departure. Strangely his wife's name is not given in the death notice nor did it appear in local papers. Johnson is not on the 1871 Wirksworth census when Collyns was head, but I found him in 1881.

1881 Timothy Johnson, 41 vicar of Kniveton. His wife is Ellen, 31, and he has two children (aged 5 & 2) and two servants. The family is living on Rise End in Middleton.

I can only assume he had re-married speedily after his first wife died. Crucially as evidence it is not recorded that he was head of WGS, so I assume he had left. I further

discover that there was a new vicar at Kniveton in 1882. That information enables me to conjecture that his term of office fell within the parameters of January 1876 and December 1880; not long.

There are two references to the school during that time.

The cricket match against Alderwasley (see above) took place in September 1878 and there is a report in the Derby Mercury of an accident in November 1876.

'ACCIDENT AT WIRKSWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL. Yesterday afternoon an accident happened to a boy named Thomas Else, resident at Wash Green, and a pupil in the commercial department of The Wirksworth Grammar School. The boy was sliding down the handrail guarding the staircase to the upper school, and fell over into the passage underneath, breaking his arm and dislocating his elbow. He was at once taken to Dr Milligan, who rendered all necessary assistance.'

Thomas Else was ten years old and Dr Milligan lived at hand on Coldwell Street. Why did such a minor incident hit the press on the day after it happened? A disgruntled parent?

In 1882 there was a local petition to the governors which suggested there had been incompetence from Johnson. I wonder if the report of the accident may have been placed to discredit the head, who was not managing his job, though it was soon after his wife's death.

The other notable event at this time was the death of the younger Hubbersty, buried with great honours in the Wirksworth church. The funeral of the former head was attended by two distinguished 'old boys' Messrs Wass (Mill Close Mine) and Walthall, from Alton Manor.

1882 is the year of the great petition. In September a group of influential local people waited on the governors to express their concern about the running of the school and the inability of the governors under the present constitution to replace a failing head. The original Derby Mercury report is attached.

The petitioners included:

Dr Webb, the surgeon we met at Wigwell Grange;
Rev Harwood, vicar of Middleton;
Rev Stallybrass, congregational minister;
Mr Beasley, bank manager and parent;
Dr Harvey, GP on West End;
Mr Wheatcroft; mill owner at Miller's Green and the biggest employer in town;
Mr William Hall; draper and school parent, Market Place.

With eighty persons having signed the petition urging the adoption of a second grade scheme (effectively relegation and a less demanding curriculum) of the Charity Commissioners for the future of the school this was a heavyweight group, too important to be ignored. (I assume the vicar of Wirksworth was on the governing trust, but he would, surely, have know of the manoeuvres.)

The petitioners came because 'as townsmen they had observed the very unsatisfactory state of the school. It seemed to have got as low as it could be.'

They sought an expanded and more widely representative group of governors, instead of the small group of trustees. 'Dr Webb disclaimed the slightest reflection on the present trustees. They were gentlemen of the highest position and integrity, and the inhabitants had the most perfect confidence in them.' Humm!

They proposed a board of thirteen governors.

The deputation was concerned about scholarships to the school. In a complex section they argued that as well as the fee payers there should be competitive examination to the school, open to children at an elementary school. This was a straightforward attempt both to increase the numbers and to widen the social intake.

Under the new scheme the head master must be a graduate of a British University, but he need not be in holy orders. I sense the determination of Stallybrass and Wheatcroft here. Wheatcroft was a staunch dissenter. This was an effort to move, however little, direction of the school away from the Church of England. Although religious teaching should be that of the Church of England, there is an emphasis on the right of scholars to be exempt from any religious services on grounds of conscience. We would find it hard to imagine in these ecumenical days the strength of hostile feeling on the religious issue in our community through the nineteenth century.

The head master 'is to sign a document on election that he will consent to removal and give up all property of the school at any time to the governors'.

The deputation asked that the appointment of a new head be delayed until the new scheme could be adopted.

The governors said they could not delay the appointment, but they agreed to involve three of the petitioners in consultation on the appointment: Dr. Webb, Rev. Harwood & Rev. Stallybrass.

This was an earthquake.

The full press report, no doubt written by the petitioners, goes into much fascinating detail, but the position is clear. Under Rev. Tim Johnson, Vicar of Kniveton, the school had collapsed. The trust had failed to intervene and local dissatisfaction burst forth. This was a serious challenge to the closed group which had run the school into a decline. I am intrigued that it had been difficult to remove the head when he proved incompetent. The CoE tradition was under fire with the emphasis on pupil withdrawal and the removal of the obligation to appoint a man in holy orders. Stallybrass was on the appointing panel.

A final sad thought. Baxter was still in town. Was he still on the staff? He was a respected and experienced man. Was he acting head? But I am sure he was a non-graduate, so however skilled in his job, surely good enough to deliver the less academic curriculum, he could not be appointed.

The result was the appointment of Mr Alfred Berridge: again his dates are uncertain, but I assume from 1883, an outsider aged thirty two. He was not in holy orders: he came from Aberwystwith and served into the new century, until about 1906. Did he have a Cambridge degree? On the 1891 census he is living in school house (on St John's Street) with his wife and three children, all three born in Lower Norwood, London. His younger daughter Muriel was eight in 1891, so born in London in 1883. Obviously these calculations of age are approximate, but it probably puts Berridge's appointment as Autumn term 1883.

We have a copy of the new schedule for the second grade scheme approved by the Charity Commissioners and adopted by the school governors in 1887. This is a detailed thirteen page document, which meets the criticisms of the 1882 petitioners. I assume that negotiations on the detailed wording took some time and the draft disappeared into the bureaucracy of the office of the Commissioners. Berridge was appointed bearing in mind the new thinking of the school governors following their 1882 shock and he signed up to the revised schedule when it was formally adopted in 1887.

There are many fascinating points in the schedule. The trustees are still responsible for both the school and the almshouses. I am sure that was a weakness in the school governance. Though the school is known as Wirksworth Grammar School the foundation is for The Free School of Anthony Gell Esq.

The foundation governors in 1887 are Rev. Tunstall Smith Vicar of Wirksworth, H.C. Pole Gell of Hopton Hall (the Gell Family), Frederick Arkwright of Willersley (the ubiquitous Arkwrights), Charles Wright, the successful business man, who ran the Vaults and was a great benefactor of the town and William Webb M.D. St John's Street, whom we have met before. There are in addition now five representative governors with responsibility for matters relating to the school, a compromise on the splitting of the charity and the kind of improvement sought by the 1882 deputation. Detailed responsibilities are laid upon governors relating to money (including wood and mineral rights!) and to appointment procedures.

The sections on the school and the conduct of Head Master deserve to be included here in full. They seek to address the dissatisfactions of the petitioners on the management of the school and to tackle some of the abuses. Was Dr Webb, who led the delegation, the driving force in these reforms?

I note particularly the following points.

1. The school shall be a day and boarding school. See my further note re boarding.
2. The governors will, as soon as possible, build accommodation for sixteen boarders.
3. A clear procedure is laid down for the dismissal of the Head Master.
4. There is no requirement that the Head Master be in holy orders.
5. The Head must sign a declaration relating to his duties on appointment.
6. He will dwell in the school house.
7. He will not hold any other office.
8. Neither he nor the staff will receive additional remuneration from pupils.

I thought School House and the boarding wing were built in 1886, but this '87 document suggests the building had not been completed. It was certainly operating in 1891 when

Berridge and family are in residence, though there is no reference to boarders. Again I conclude that the census was taken in the Easter holiday. Certainly we have a photograph of Berridge posing splendidly on the lawn with his family – suitably apart from the thirteen young boy boarders. In 1901 four boys are recorded on the census as boarders, two born in Georgetown, British Guiana, perhaps boarding while parents served abroad.

I discovered that when Thring a famous Victorian revolutionary head went to Uppingham, not dissimilar in size to Wirksworth, he found only 25 pupils. He persuaded his staff to take in boarders and eventually this tiny country grammar school expanded to become a school for three hundred boys with a number of boarding houses. Wirksworth lacked that kind of vision and inspirational leadership. We just toddled along in the old ways.

Berridge's stipend was £150 with a capitation payment of £2-4 per pupil. Boarding fees were £42 per annum and only boys aged eight to sixteen could be enrolled in the school. This reflects the requirements of the new scheme relating to sixteen year olds and the reality of a division into a pre-prep unit and a main school, but with no sixth form. Pupils such as Beesley moved on to Derby Grammar School for higher study.

This is the undertaking Berridge had to sign under the new scheme.

I name declare that I will always to the best of my ability discharge the duties of Head Master of Wirksworth Grammar School during my tenure of office, and that if I am removed therefrom I will thereupon acquiesce in such removal and relinquish all claim to the mastership and its future emoluments, and deliver up to the Governors, or as they direct, possession of all the property of the school then in my possession or occupation.'

I am sure Berridge was seen as a new broom; the first head not to be in orders and a Welshman from south London. There is no reference to high academic qualifications. His task was to deliver a sound education within the limitations available in Wirksworth, above all avoiding the unhappy incidents of recent years. I am not sure how successful he was. We had moved into the era of external examinations and now schools could enter pupils for both College of Preceptors and Oxford & Cambridge local exams. The public schools opposed an expansion into a national examination system, because they feared government intrusion and payment by results, which had been so unpopular in elementary schools. However Berridge took advantage of a friendly press to publish the successes of his pupils on a regular basis. I spotted in the lists a Harwood, W.T. Taylor, certainly a scholarship boy, who became secretary of Derbyshire County Cricket Club and Beesley of Titanic fame. Those granted scholarships to the school by the County Council also had their their day of glory in the Mercury.

The Derby Mercury reports in July 1893 a meeting of the Technical Committee of Derbyshire County Council. 'A scheme for setting up a small laboratory at Wirksworth Grammar School has been submitted and the committee have decided to grant an amount not exceeding £50 towards the cost of the scheme.'

With the arrival of county councils the educational scene would change significantly. Science in WGS!

There is little colour in the items emerging in Berridge's headship. We know Mr Nutt was second master in 1889 and there is in the same year a press report on the cricket match against Cavendish. Berridge's son appeared on a Wirksworth Cricket Club scorecard at the turn of the century. My only other Berridge personal snippet is that I was told he belonged to an unusual religious sect, perhaps Plymouth Brethren, and Wirksworth found this strange. He went to gatherings the other side of the Meadows. A Wirksworth tale with, alas, no evidence. I notice that Mr G A Marsden became clerk to the governors in 1895. But trouble was coming.

The key event during Berridge's period of office as the twentieth century arrived, was the Balfour education act of 1902, the inspiration of a gifted civil servant, Sir Robert Morant, who set himself to bring some order to the organisation of secondary education. The 1902 act endeavoured to tidy up the variegated provision which had developed, especially in secondary education, and for the first time gave the newly established local authorities responsibility for the organisation of schools, in this case Derbyshire County Council. A major influence in the re-organisation was Sir Michael Sadler, professor of education at Manchester University and previously an inspector of schools. As Derbyshire began to review their schools Sadler visited Wirksworth. He produced a dispiriting report and concluded that the school should be closed and the small number of grammar school boys transferred to the growing community of Duffield. They could travel by train. There were only about thirty boys on roll and, with the town dirty and depressed, relying on poorly paid work in textiles and quarries as sources of employment in the dust bowl at the top of the valley, Sadler saw little hope that the school would be able to entice enough boys with parents willing to pay for grammar school education. The buildings were poor, the numbers persistently low and the standards dreadful. The main career route was to work as clerks on the Midland Railway, and nobody stayed beyond sixteen.

The town was, of course, outraged that closure should be suggested and a committee was formed to save the school. The target was one third of the £4,500 estimated cost of a new building, with Derbyshire County Council contributing the balance. Money was contributed by local worthies and £1,037.5s was raised. To me as a supporter of the cricket club the names are familiar! The affluent town establishment rallied. The chairman and chief donor was H Walthall Wathall from Alton Manor. Other famous names were two Wheatcrofts from Haarlem Mill, Marsden, Arkwright, Dr Broster, even the Duke of Devonshire. Charles Wright from the Vaults, the fantastically profitable wines and spirits business on Coldwell Street contributed £25. They, in co-operation with the county council, built the new school, a handsome building, which we now know as Gell block, faced with Wirksworth bricks and Black Rock gritstone.

The building was designed by the distinguished county architect George H Widows, who also designed the junior school and many other fine school buildings in the county.

Until the 1902 act Wirksworth Grammar School had operated as an entirely independent organisation. Its financial situation was precarious with its small income arising from the fees paid by pupils, some scholarships and from the not very wealthy original trust.

There had been various additions from bequests, usually of land, which was rented out and produced some income over the years, but it was clear in Wirksworth, and in many other towns through the country that, if a strong system of education was to be established as national policy to sustain a great empire, there must in some way be state support. This was channelled through the local authorities which were now authorised to raise money through the rates for education. Henceforth there was greater financial support for the school from the county and a number of competitive scholarships had been established, which made places available to those who could not afford the fees and could now move from the elementary school into the grammar school at eleven, though some fee-paying pupils were still admitted. This re-organisation, almost re-founding, raised the standard to the benefit of the whole community. The school maintained its independent governing body and made its own decisions until the Butler act at the end of the second war.

I reflect how the three major education acts of the twentieth century were pivotal in the history of our school: 1902 Balfour, 1944 Butler, which abolished fee paying in the grammar school and the 1965 Crosland comprehensive education act.

The governors, in wisdom, but no doubt in consultation with the county, made two crucial decisions regarding the new school. They decided that the Wirksworth Grammar School should become mixed and girls should henceforth be admitted, a remarkably progressive policy in the 1900s, and Rev. Lauritz Hansen Bay should become Head Master from 1907. He and his wife had the necessary energy and vision. Onward.