

Education in Gosport in the early 19th Century

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The beginning of education in Gosport in the early years of the 19th century was associated with the work of the Rev. Dr. Andrew Bell and with the charitable efforts of the Church of England in the area.

Dr. Bell was a chaplain stationed at Madras in India, where he became the honorary superintendent of the local school. He hit upon what seemed to him a revolutionary method of teaching, but what would appear to us as incredibly naive. It became known as the monitorial system. The idea was to bring the older children with some obvious ability into a small class, to instruct them in the lesson for the day and then for them to teach the other pupils who came later. Dr. Bell explained his method in a pamphlet in 1797 called *An Experiment in Education made at the male Asylum at Madras suggesting a system by which a School or Family may teach itself under the Superintendence of the Master or the Parent*. When he returned to England and became Rector of Swanage in Dorset, Bell elaborated his ideas in 1808 into a large book of some 380 pages advocating a cheap, easy but effective means of teaching masses of illiterate children to read. At first he was suspicious about them learning to write, it was learning to read the Bible that was his great objective and which attracted the interest of the Church of England authorities.

The first school to be established functioning on his principles was in Aldgate in East London about 1810. But arising out of the popular interest in his methods there was formed, in 1811, The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. The Society acted vigorously and by 1813 there were some 230 'national' schools (as they became called) working on the lines laid down by Dr. Bell. They were all charitable institutions depending almost entirely upon local voluntary efforts for enough money to hire premises and pay teachers.

ANNUAL REPORT,
OF THE
GOSPORT & ALVERSTOKE SOCIETY
FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE INFANT POOR,
On the plan of the Rev. Dr. Bell, and in the principles of the Established Church.
With a List of the Donors and Benefactors.

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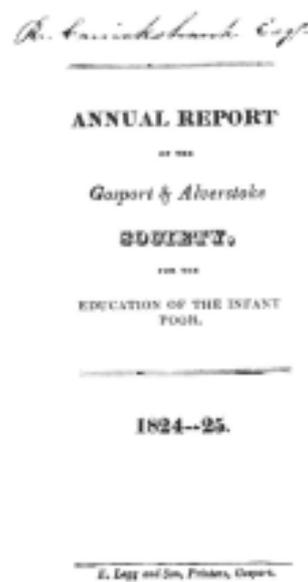
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One of the very earliest of these Schools, established in 1812, was at Gosport. We have no records of its actual foundation, but the annual reports of the Committee responsible for its organisation for the years 1818-19; 1822-23 and 1824-25 are available. The Committee consisted of about 14 local dignitaries. By 1819 it was claimed that nearly 1,000 children had been educated at the school. In that year there were 188 in attendance (103 boys and 85 girls). The total cost of running the school for the year was £142 of which £80 was the cost of the salaries of the teachers, £32. 10. 0. the rent of the school room, which was adjacent to the Chapel (Holy Trinity Church) in Gosport. That the scheme was cheap cannot be denied, it worked out at 15 shillings a child each year. Where did the money come from? Local people raised subscriptions which amounted to £66. 12. 6. (mainly in amounts of £1 or less). Collections at churches were an important source of revenue. On the 4th April 1819 the Rev. Matthew Arnold preached at Gosport Chapel and the collection in aid of the school amounted to £30. 14. 10. Collections after sermons at Rowner Church on the 24th June came to £3. 3. 6. and at Alverstoke Church on the 18th July were £4. 17. 0. On the lighter side, a Ball at the Assembly Rooms, Gosport, on the 22nd October 1818 realised £13. 19. 0. and another at the Dolphin Inn on the 4th June 1919 produced £5. 0. 0. A play at the Gosport Theatre realised £5. 14. 6. on the 4th January 1819.

Even so, the Committee had to report an overall deficit of £63 and said 'with regret we find it necessary to state that the present funds are inadequate fully to support expenses and have therefore to request the strenuous exertions of the charitable to prevent an institution so closely connected with the moral welfare of the town from being cramped in its energies'. "To assist the distressed state of the School, the shareholders of the school house, notwithstanding the engagement made

with them previous to their purchase, of receiving a clear £5% on their expenditure, have liberally consented, for the present, to reduce it to £4%. Despite financial restrictions the Committee were able to express their "sincere pleasure that the progress of the children in their learning, and the regularity with which they attend both church and



school have been highly satisfactory."

By 1822-23 the 'Gosport and Alverstoke Society for the Education of the Infant Poor on the plan of Dr. Bell and in the principles of the Established Church' was in a bad way financially. Subscriptions had fallen to £50. The Committee stated that they were under the necessity of pressing, in an especial manner, upon the attention of the subscribers and of the parishoners generally, the depressed state of their fund and the very inadequate means afforded to them of continuing an establishment which has been for several years of the highest advantage to the children of this populous parish". They pointed out that there was a deficit of £30. 18. 0. for rent of the school room and salaries to the teachers. It has become a painful and anxious consideration with them, whether the school can be continued".

The people of Gosport (as on many occasions later) responded to the call and rallied round. A year later, in August 1824, subscriptions increased considerably so that the income rose to £519. It was possible to pay a year (and the back quarter) salary to the schoolmaster, in total £44. 10. 0. and a year's salary to the schoolmistress £20 and to purchase the school premises from the original trustees for £400.

In August 1825 the Committee had pleasure in announcing that although the annual subscriptions had not equalled those of the last year, 'yet they have been enabled to discharge the balance of £22. 8. 61. due to their Treasurer and to meet all expenses of the present year'. The Committee were much indebted to the Rev. Robert Grant 'for the powerful interest which he excited in behalf of the schools, by his enlightened and excellent sermon preached in Gosport Chapel.' This was on the 19th August 1824 and the collection produced £25. A play in Gosport Theatre on the 25th January 1825 realised £6. 1. 0. and a Ball organised by the army and navy authorities in the town resulted in a contribution of £24. The salary of the schoolmaster for the year was still £33 and for the schoolmistress £20.

But, by 1825, some 12 years after it's original establishment, the Society was able to claim that upwards of 1500 children had been afforded religious and other proper instruction" at the schools. Looking at the list of 111 subscribers it appears that some of the family names have remained until today.

An interesting feature of this early type of education was that it was intended to be practical as well as devoted to learning to read and write. Not only did it include practical needlework but the pioneers of education sought to make an income from the work of the pupils as a contribution towards the cost of their own education. In 1818-19 they published a list of the prices at which work was taken in at the school. The work was to be sent

to the school with a written account of the articles to be made. Work was done for ready money only. ' The Mistress has orders to send home a bill with the parcels and is empowered to receive the amount'. Fine shirts were 1/4 each, boys shirts 10d, pockets 3d a pair and a child's frock from 4d to 8d. Knitting was undertaken at 2d per ounce to strangers and 1d per ounce to parents. It wasn't a very profitable effort. During 1822-23 the total receipts from this work came to 4/1.

The image shows a document with a header that reads "AN ACCOUNT OF THE RECEIPTS OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE GOSPORT SCHOOLS, FROM THE YEAR 1822 TO 1823." Below the header, there is a table with multiple columns and rows of text and numbers, which is too blurry to read accurately. The document appears to be a historical financial record.