

RURAL SCHOOLS IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A study from local sources by Roger Cave

“The farmer and the squire are no friends to elementary education. They associate agricultural depression and high rents with compulsory education, and they grudge to pay for that teaching which deprives them of servants and furnishes their labourers with wings to fly from the parish. On the other hand, the labourer has not learned the value of education. The earnings of his children are important to him, and the present shilling obscures the future pound”.

from a Report of 1898 on rural schooling.

Introduction

It is not surprising that the inhabitants of small village communities in the second half of the nineteenth century were preoccupied with the demands of the soil and the seasons. Education must have seemed irrelevant to many villagers. The framework of the education system established by the 1870 Education Act was more geared to large, industrial, urban areas than to small, rural ones.

This study looks at two particular village schools in the period 1870-1903. Pickwell and Somerby are two villages two miles apart in East Leicestershire, about six miles south-east of Melton Mowbray. At Pickwell there was a voluntary National school, and at Somerby there was a newly created Board school.



The National and Historical Background

The first government grant for education had been in 1833 when £20,000 was voted for the erection of school-houses. The money was given to the National Society and British and Foreign Society. Rural areas were neglected from the first by this grant because local subscriptions had to be equivalent to at least half the grant made, the Society had to pay maintenance, and preference was given to large cities and towns and for schools with accommodation for not less than 400 pupils. Also, of course, the demand for money to build schools far exceeded the supply. In 1839 the newly

established Committee of Council for Education made government inspection a condition of grants.

As the Victorian era wore on, it became more and more apparent that a system had to be found whereby state grants to education were supplemented by local contributions. The Report of the Newcastle Commission in 1861 pointed out that the most needy areas were deriving the least benefit from the current system because they were unable to raise the necessary half-cost of buildings and maintenance from voluntary sources. The recommendation of the Commissioners was that the government should pay capitation grants supplemented by local grants from the county or borough rates, based on the attainments of the pupils as assessed by examination by the inspectors. Thus, 'payment by results' was introduced and dominated the nature of elementary education in England for many years to come.

However, the system of education was still inadequate. There was great demand for child labour, and in rural areas employment of children in the fields was very frequent, hence their schooling was neglected. Attempts to create a national system of education resulted in the compromise 1870 Education Act. The Education Department was given power to investigate the available school accommodation in each district (based on boroughs or parishes) and how much accommodation was needed, and, if there was a shortage, the churches were to be allowed until the end of the year to supply it. Government grants were available for this purpose, but local rate aid was not. If the deficiency was not removed, a school board was to be elected by the ratepayers. It would be in office for three years, and have power to establish public elementary schools with rate aid in addition to government grant and rate aid.

Thus, by 1870, there were two main types of rural schools - voluntary and board. Most of the voluntary village schools in 1870 had been in existence for some time. They were mostly local creations of no concern to anyone outside the parish. Usually they were the result of clerical, not secular, enterprise. In 1870 some voluntary schools were taken over by school boards; others could not compete with board schools and so closed; and others responded to the challenge by putting up new buildings.

Whether a voluntary school remained voluntary was a question which was decided by a number of factors. Obviously the most important of these was the person or persons financing the school. The problem of finding enough voluntary subscriptions to make the school viable was another. In some cases a church school was put "on the rates". An HMI in West Somerset wrote in 1876, "In a rural parish, the objections to a school board summarily stated, are the dislike entertained by the great body of the clergy of the established church, and the expense. The former I do not find so prominent

as at first. In many cases the clergyman has accepted his true position, which in a Church parish is that of Chairman of the School Board, and finds that he has about as much power as in a voluntary public elementary school, his colleagues probably taking little interest in education; so that he is supporting the school at other people's expense instead of his own, as was most likely before the board was formed".

Somerby School

Somerby school is an example of a voluntary school turned board school. The two chief reasons for the establishment of school boards were the provision of a school in an area where there was no school already, or to raise funds to supply an existing school with sufficient financial backing or adequate buildings. There were cases where school boards were the solution to the problem of rival schools in the same area, and in other cases the object was to continue a church school 'on the rates'. Somerby Board School was opened on 16 March 1877, but the reasons for the creation of a board in the village are rather shadowy, and so the following explanation must be rather hypothetical.

Somerby had Town Estates, and White's Directory for 1863 says that "since the enclosure the Town Estate has consisted of about 18 acres of land, two houses, and a blacksmith's shop, let at rents amounting to £41 per annum of which about £36 is applied in schooling poor children". A Charity Commissioners report discloses that "for many years" the disbursements of the Estate included, "The Schoolmaster £15.0.0". White's Directory of 1846 says that "a National School was built in 1842".

Harrod's Directory of 1870 mentions only one school in Somerby, a "British school". Nowhere else is there a reference to a British school, so this must be erroneous. White's of 1877 reports that "Somerby School Board was formed in 1875.....they have erected a school at a cost of £1500."

There was obviously a school of some sort which was replaced by the Board

School. When and why? There is an extant account book of the Town Estate which records the last payment of a small salary to the schoolteacher in 1875. It then seems likely that the school was closed. This can be borne out from the attendance figures of Pickwell School at the same time. For



the week ending 14 Jan 1875 the average attendance at Pickwell was 23.6; by 2 July it was still only 28. By 26 July it was 32.3, by 15 October it was 37.6, by 19 Nov 44.6, and it continued at this high level until April 1877 when the new school at Somerby was opened and the average attendance dramatically slumped to 19.7. It thus seems likely that for nearly two years there was no school at Somerby and some of the children went to Pickwell instead.

In 1875 the Somerby school managers applied to demolish the blacksmith's shop which was next to the school in order to extend it. This implies that the school buildings had not come up to the new requirements after the 1870 Act. Permission was, however, refused. This seems to have resulted in a situation where a new site (opposite the old) had to be bought and a new school built. Obviously the income from the Town Estate was far too small to support such steps, and so application would have had to be made to borrow from the Public Works Loan Commissioners. Only a school board could do this, and so a board there had to be in Somerby. The rector was elected in 1875 as chairman of the board, and the other four members were three farmers and the local doctor and registrar.

There seems to have been links between the church and the former school at Somerby. How far did the church's influence affect the Board school? The most common way in which it might have was in religious education. On 31 August 1887 the managers of Somerby School resolved that the "Rev MacManus' offer to assist Mr. Pike in giving religious instruction (Mondays excepted) be accepted. 24 Bibles and 24 Testaments to be ordered from the Bible Society for the use of the school".

The 1870 Act forbade examination in religious instruction by HMIs. and so paid diocesan inspectors were appointed. Whether or not these were allowed to visit board schools varied from time to time, often depending on whether the rector was on the board or not. This was the case at Somerby. In 1892 when Rev MacManus was the chairman of the board it was resolved that "the Clerk write to the Organising Secretary (a diocesan official) to ask to give a day to examine the school". And for the next three years the diocesan inspector visited Somerby School.

However, the election of a new board, which did not include Rev MacManus, (which had dramatic effects in more than one way, as will be seen), was quickly followed by the resolution that "the diocesan inspector's request to be allowed to extend his examination be not acceded to". There are no more reports of the diocesan inspector written up in the log book after that date.

Other examples of the activities of the church affecting the running of the school are such as the entry for 18 October 1883, "The Registers were closed this morning at 8.45 a.m. on account of the opening of the Church Chancel". On 14 February 1889, "The school opens in the afternoon at 1 p.m.

instead of 1.30 p.m....This will continue till the Mission closes which lasts a fortnight.” On 7 October 1892, “the school was closed this afternoon on account of the Harvest Thanksgiving.”

Not all the interruptions in the normal daily round were due to the activities of the established church. On 19 July 1897 “a half-holiday (was) given this afternoon in consequence of the Chapel treat which would have caused the absence of over thirty children”. On 3 March 1898 “in consequence of the opening of the new chapel at Somerby, the school was closed this afternoon”.

A problem that was bound to face rural school boards was that many of the members of the boards would be the larger ratepayers in the district, particularly farmers, and they may well have been more interested in keeping expenses down than in the educational benefits for the children. There is no evidence that this was the case in Somerby. The farmers did have a large part in the board, though. White's Directory for 1877 gives the names of the original board. The Board minute-book until 1883 is lost. The board members were as follows:

1875 Britten (rector); Webster (tailor); Fryer (farmer); Jackson (doctor); Robinson (farmer)

1883 Gifford (farmer); Saunders (?); Baines (tailor); Webster; Peake (butcher and farmer)

1884 Fryer replaced Baines

1885 Baines was co-opted to replace the deceased Gifford

1887 Rev MacManus replaced Baines

1890 Plant (?) and Smith (?) replaced Webster and Saunders

1893 Webster, Chamberlain (farmer) and Lane (?) replaced Plant, Smith, and Baines

1896 Jackson and Catley replaced MacManus and Lane

1897 Peake's seat declared vacant because of continued absence (see below)

The Board members were all representatives of the well-to-do, landowners predominating. Noteworthy features are the active role played by Rev MacManus who, apart from teaching Religious Knowledge and Algebra, was both Chairman and Clerk of the Board; and the dramatic consequences of the 1896 election which resulted in the sacking for obscure reasons of the long-serving headmaster, Mr. Pike, and the subsequent withdrawal from the Board of Mr. Peake in disgust.

Some school boards ignored the statutory requirement of monthly meetings. In the period covered by the extant minute-books, this was certainly not the case at Somerby. There were often two meetings

a month, and on only one occasion was no business transacted because the meeting was inquorate. In 1895 there was a move to have meetings only quarterly and twice two months elapsed before meetings were held, but the election of the new board in March 1896 stopped these tendencies.

The school was financed by government grant, rate aid, and fees. Its catchment area was primarily Somerby itself. Some children came from Pickwell, as has been mentioned above. An entry in the log book for 9 April 1897 records that "two boys played truant in order to attend Burton races. The boys were punished on their return to school and their parents, who live at Pickwell and Little Dalby informed by letter". So, there were presumably some children from further afield. In the period under study the school had only two head teachers, one for nearly twenty years. There were often two female assistants, as well as monitors. The staffing situation was much better than at the smaller school at Pickwell.

Pickwell School

The voluntary school at Pickwell, did not find it necessary to go 'on the rates'. About 1790 there had been a Sunday School at Pickwell "recently started", but there is no evidence of a day school at that date. A day school was in existence by 1832, however. In 1835 a National School was built by subscription. In 1883 it was enlarged to accommodate 50 children. In 1929 the seniors were transferred to Melton Mowbray. The school was closed in 1933 and the building converted into a village hall.

The voluntary school was financed by the government grant, the school pence - an entry in the log book for May 13, 1881, reveals that school fees were raised to 3d. and 2d. a week - and subscriptions. There seems to have been quite a lot of local interest in the school from the people who mattered in the village. The log book records scores of visits by the rector and his family, and by the ladies of the landowning families round about.

The catchment area of the school was larger than the mere village confines. The hamlet of Leesthorpe was part of the parish of Pickwell and children attended the school from there. There are also references in the log book to children "from the Lodges". A look at the Ordnance Survey map reveals that there are lodges up to four miles distant from Pickwell from which children must have made the long journey to the school. Also, as mentioned above, there were, at least till 1877. considerable numbers of children from Somerby, and even after the Board School had been opened at Somerby in 1877 children from there must have attended at Pickwell. The log book at Pickwell records the visit of the Attendance Officer from Somerby on 20 August 1886 to enquire about the

attendance of a family named Hunt.

The only admissions register still extant covers the period from 1900. From 1 Jan 1900 to 1 July 1903 29 children were admitted to Pickwell School. Of these, 8 came from Leesthorpe, 19 from Pickwell, and the home of two is not stated. Four of them were aged three, three aged four, three aged five, five aged six, five aged seven, four aged eight, three aged nine, one aged ten, and one aged twelve. Four of them later left to go to Somerby.

There is no reason to doubt that parents chose the school for their children because of its proximity to their home. There is no indication that nonconformist parents living in Pickwell sent their children to Somerby School rather than to the National School at Pickwell.

Apart from the initial influx of children from Pickwell School there are only isolated instances of children transferring from one school to the other. On 24 May 1880 "four scholars left the school today for Somerby School". These were presumably the "several children.. .admitted from Pickwell" recorded in the Somerby log book on 28 May.

Some children appear to have attended the two schools alternately. For instance, on 17 January 1881 "Henry Harris and John Thomas Hyde returned to school this afternoon after being away at Somerby School for some time". In the Pickwell log book on 29 October 1883 it is recorded that "Arthur Meadows has left to attend Somerby School, his parents being of the opinion that a schoolmistress cannot manage boys and that his education requires the supervision of a master". His parents must have changed their minds, however, because on 17 December of the same year is noted, "Arthur Meadows...has returned and been re-admitted".

Schoolmistresses were a feature of Pickwell School in the period. From January 1874 till June 1897 there was a succession of eight mistresses, followed by two masters. Only two of them stayed longer than two years. There was an open market for teachers, so, naturally enough, those schools which could pay the most got the best. At small villages such as Pickwell, however, the staff consisted of "a succession of transient young girls with provisional certificates or men unable to compete for anything better".

Having looked at the general nature of the two types of school, I shall now turn to examine some of their features in more detail.

Buildings

Buildings of rural schools varied greatly in size. Many had only one room, the infants being accommodated in a gallery. In the 1890s the Education Department required that infants should be taught separately, and so buildings were often enlarged then. The HMI who visited Pickwell in March 1874 advised that “the erection of a small Gallery will be found advantageous”. In 1876 the HMI reported that “the Infants require a classroom of their own. At present their gallery takes up too much space in the schoolroom and they must necessarily interfere with the instruction of the elder children”.

In 1883 it was found necessary to extend the school at Pickwell. The school re-opened after the harvest holiday in October 1883 “at the mistress' house, the schoolrooms being as yet unfinished”. On 17 December the mistress was able to report that “the alterations which are now completed render the schoolroom in every way more convenient and suitable for the purposes of education.”

Unfortunately, there is no information as to who paid for the alterations. This could be a problem even with the help of the rates, as the School Board at Somerby found. On 20 December 1892 they resolved “that application be made to the landowners of this Parish asking for contributions towards the very heavy expenses incurred of late for necessary repairs to the school premises and yard beside the annual repayment of £63.18.9 loan and interest”. But only one donation of £1.1.0. is recorded following this appeal.

Inspectors frequently remarked on the state of the school buildings, and the managers had to make urgent steps to get the faults put right before the next inspection. The interior of the buildings did not escape the eagle eye of the Inspector. In 1894 the schoolmaster at Somerby wrote to the Board to call their attention “to the washing of the schoolroom. It has not been washed since last summer. I feel sure that if we get a ‘surprise visit’ from HMI complaints would be made. The smell this afternoon was extremely disagreeable.” The Board resolved “that the schoolroom be washed each quarter, the first washing to be on next Friday or Saturday”.

The Curriculum

By the Revised Code of 1862 the scheme of work for elementary schools was graded and organised far more definitively than it had been in the past. The schools were divided into six standards. A child entered Standard 1 at the age of about six; at the end of each year he or she was examined and

passed on to the next standard. Each child had to make 200 (later 250) attendances to qualify for examination.

This regulation meant that, especially in rural schools, most of the children tended to be in the lower Standards. The ability to withdraw children after they had passed Standard 4 also reduced the numbers in the upper standards. In small schools with a small staff it was impossible to teach each standard separately, so the practice of dividing the pupils into three groups grew up: Infants; Standards 1, 2, and 3; and Standards 4, 5, and 6.

From 1876 the school could offer, apart from the obligatory 'Three Rs', one or two class subjects, which were judged for grant on general class performance. If they were failed, they might bring down the 'Three Rs' pass rate.

Pickwell taught the 'Three Rs,' as was usual. In 1882 "the Rector has decided that English should be taught in the school (as a class subject) and as much as can possibly be done to reach the requirements of the Code. The children have no knowledge whatever of Grammar. Therefore Standard 5 will have all to learn in one year."

The teachers had to write the formal curricula for the year in the log book in the 1890s for the Inspector's consent. The programme for 1897 at Pickwell was to be: "Object Lessons: Coal, Tea-cup, Kettle, Five Irons, Five Spoons, Feather, Rabbit, Window, Snow, Lead Pencil, Sealing Wax, Looking Glass, Needles, Pillar Box, Cork, Matches, Sheep, The Cow." The recitations show the division of the Standards into easily-managed blocks. "Standards 1, 2, and 3 'The Beggarman'; Standards 4, 5, and 6, 'Llewellyn and his Dog', 'The burial of Sir John Moore', and 'The Village Blacksmith'." The class subject was to be Geography. Standards 1 and 2 were to do Definition; Standard 3, the County of Leicester and England; and Standards 4-7, Australia and Canada.

At Somerby, the list of Object Lessons given by Mr. Pike in his twenty years there varied little from year to year. For instance, the 1883 list was: Wheat, Coffee Tree, Willow Tree, Oak Tree, Walnut Tree, Cyprus Tree, Cotton Plant, Flax Plant, Hemp Plant, Cork Tree, Oysters, Pearls, Sponges, Sugar, Ox and Cow, Calf, Sheep, Horse, Goat, Rabbit, Whale, Birds, Silkworms, Honey Bee, Bricks, Iron, and Coal. Two class subjects were regularly offered - English and Geography. The Geography course for 1884 was: Standard 1, plan of play yard and Cardinal Points; Standard 2 Geographical terms to be illustrated by England; Standard 3, England with special knowledge of district; Standards 4-7, British Isles and Australia. In 1888 Algebra was taught to the upper standards by the Rector. In October 1892 Musical Drill was commenced. On 23 November 1893 "Military Drill is taught after

4p.m. by Sgt. Amey for half an hour weekly.” The Infants 'Varied Occupations' for 1896 were “paper-folding, cubes and beads, drawing with colours and crayons.”

There is little evidence of any scientific subjects being taught in either school, except for a note in the board minutes at Somerby that Mr. Pike had reported “that the County Council are willing to place a set of chemical apparatus and a set of standard weights and measures of the metrical system in the school room if the board find suitable cupboards. It was resolved to accept this offer.”

The Board was also attracted by extensions to the curricula which might not be considered to be quite as educational as the scientific subjects. On 31 July 1894 “a circular letter from Lord Templetown regarding the introduction of Temperance into the Lesson Books used in schools was read. The Clerk was directed to reply expressing approval of the steps proposed, and promising the co-operation of the Board.”

Small rural schools also required a sewing mistress. If the head teacher was a master, this was often his wife, as was the case with Mr. Pike at Somerby. Sewing was regarded as being a very important subject - it was grant-earning - because many of the girls would make their own and their family's clothes. As a grant-earning subject it was examined by the Inspector, and his remarks upon this feminine craft seem out-of-place in the forbidding world of HMI's reports. For instance, from the 1892 report on Somerby school: “Unless there is an improvement next year I shall be obliged to report the school as inefficient. The Needlework of the older girls is good, but a chain edge should be shown in the knitting of the first standard, and single thread (not penelope) canvas should be used for teaching darning and herring-boning stitches.”

There seems to be little difference between the curricula at the two schools - the quality of teaching of them is another matter. In both schools religious instruction was taught, and certainly for a time, in both schools it was taught by outsiders - at Somerby by the Rector, and at Pickwell by the wife of one of the most important landowners. The need to earn government grant did not allow any opportunity for curricula experiments or deviations from the regimented norms of the payment by results system. It is therefore not surprising that the subjects taught in the two schools were more or less the same.

Teachers

The curricula might have been similar at the two schools, but it seems likely that the standard of teaching was not. I have already pointed out that the more a school was able to pay its teachers, the better the teachers at that school were likely to be. Board schools with their rate assistance were

more likely to be able to offer more than were small voluntary schools such as that at Pickwell. Teachers were usually paid a salary plus half the grant gained. It was thus a 'Catch 22' situation, since the poorer school would get the worse teachers, who would earn less grant and thus lessen their salaries.

Unfortunately there is no record of the salaries paid to the teachers at Pickwell. However the amount of grant for some years is recorded. In 1887 it received £21.14.1.; in 1888 £24.2.6.; in 1889 £19.7.2.; and in 1891 £34.17.6. (with £10.0.0. fee grant). Compared with the grant received at the larger Somerby school, which never went below £61 and reached as high as £99.19.0., it can be seen that the income of the teachers at Pickwell was likely to be far below that of those at Somerby. This would help to explain the succession of female mistresses with provisional certificates at Pickwell, most of whom did not stay more than two years.

For Somerby we do have records of the amount paid to the staff. In 1887 Mr. Pike's salary was raised to £68 a year plus half the government grant, which averaged £70. In addition, he lived in the house adjoining the school. When a new headmaster was appointed in 1896 he was offered a salary of £110 per annum without the schoolhouse. In 1898 he was given a £5 bonus for gaining a satisfactory report from the HMI, and later that year his salary was increased to £120 per annum. Also, there was usually one assistant mistress, often two, the salaries of whom averaged £40 throughout the period. Monitors were paid at £5 or £6 as well. It would seem likely that the pecuniary rewards of the teaching staff at Somerby were far better than those offered to the staff at Pickwell.

Staff at Pickwell School	
..... to 14 June 1875	Anne Shepherd
14 Jun 1875 to 20 Dec 1877	Hannah Barker
7 Jan 1878 to 6 Jan 1880	Eliza Smith
6 Jan 1880 to 25 Apr 1881	Eliza Bacon
25 Apr 1881 to 7 Jul 1882	Edith Pitt
10 Jul 1882 to 15 Aug 1884	Annie Hillier
18 Aug 1884 to 21 Mar 1890	Sarah Parker
21 Mar 1890 to 11 Jun 1897	Miss M E Fox
24 Jun 1897 to 30 Oct 1902	Charles Barnes
30 Oct 1902 to	William Palmer
Staff at Somerby School	
16 Mar 1877 to 23 Dec 1896	Henry Pike
23 Dec 1896 to	William Watts

As has been said, assistant mistresses were common at Somerby, but there is no record of there being any assistants at Pickwell. It was necessary to call in voluntary help, although, occasionally. Miss Fox wrote on 18 April 1890, "my sister has been assisting me this week as the children are in such a backward condition" and her sister continued to assist her for several years.

Other assistants available to teachers were monitors and pupil-teachers. Pupil-teachers were selected boys and girls from the age of 13, indentured for a five years apprenticeship. Grants were made to the teachers for training them, and the pupil-teachers were to be examined annually by the HMI. They received approximately seven and a half hours instruction every week before and after school hours, and they were occupied in teaching or some other activity for five and a half hours a day. At the end of the apprenticeship pupil-teachers could compete for Queen's Scholarships to be held at a training college. Little more than a quarter of the pupil-teachers passing the Queen's Scholarship examination actually went to training college. Those with a first class pass and an HMI's recommendation of efficiency could have a provisional certificate to teach not more than 60 children immediately. They still had to pass the two annual certificate examinations. The issue of a parchment certificate to provisionally qualified teachers after their second inspection in the same school is frequently recorded in logbooks. This happened at Pickwell, and in each case the mistress left the school almost immediately - her new qualification meaning she could now command a better salary than Pickwell school could offer.

In this period it was still common to find monitors assisting the teacher. Somerby school regularly had monitors, as did Pickwell. The system of setting children to teach children had always had its drawbacks, and this was still true in this period. For instance, at Pickwell on 19 January 1883 "Annie Birch a girl in Standard 5 has been selected by the Rector for a monitor to assist with the teaching of the Infant class. She will receive some instruction out of school hours, and her school fee will be remitted as compensation." The entry for 17 May 1883 reads: "the monitor Annie Birch I am sorry to say does not pay satisfactory attention to her duties. The lessons which I offer to give her after school hours being greatly neglected and no effort appears to be made by her mother in arranging home affairs to assist me in giving her the extra instruction." Annie was reprimanded but on 4 April 1884 "Annie Birch...has been dismissed for bad behaviour." There was a consequence to the affair - 28 April 1884 "Two infants named Birch, relatives of the late monitor, have been removed from School by their Grandmother."

There is no evidence as to how mistresses were appointed at Pickwell. At Somerby the board minutes reveal that vacancies for assistant posts and for the head teacher's position were filled after advertisements in teachers' journals and in the local press. Interviews were invariably held before an appointment was made. One case of suspected nepotism can be found. In July the daughter of one of the members of the board was appointed assistant. When the board met to interview the candidates, the father withdrew. But the salary given to his daughter was lower than was usually given to

assistants in the school, and this might suggest that she was given the post despite having inferior qualifications because the board did not want to offend her father.

The Education Department always vetted the teaching staff at any school, but the process took quite a time and the board or managers might find that they had had an unqualified teacher for six months or so. For instance, the board at Somerby held a special meeting on 18 October 1889 “to consider a letter from the Education Department respecting Miss E. Newton's engagement.” She was asked to resign, “not being duly qualified as an Assistant Mistress under Art. 50, 51, New Code.”

The Department also ensured that assistants in the schools were doing all that was demanded of them. At Somerby, after the Inspector in 1886 had warned Mrs. Pike the sewing mistress that she was not giving enough time for instruction, the board received notice in June 1887 that “HMI is unable any longer to approve of A.L. Pike under Art. 84.”

The relationship of the teacher with the managers or board obviously had a great effect on the running of the board. The absence of any managers' minutes for Pickwell means that little can be seen there of the state of these relationships. One example of a satisfactory relationship can be seen from the entry in the log for 16 June 1882. “At a meeting of the managers of Pickwell school held June 16 1882 a resolution was passed expressing the entire satisfaction of the managers with the conduct and character of Miss Edith Pitt during her term as mistress of the school; also their satisfaction at the progress made by the children during the past year, issuing in the favourable result, and Report, of the recent examination.” This resolution was obviously intended for a testimonial since Miss Pitt left within a month. The inspection referred to was her second in the school, so she had obviously been granted her parchment and was moving on to a more lucrative position.

The unusual step by the managers of writing the testimonial in the log book is a tribute to the fact that, after a series of indifferent reports, the two inspections under Miss Pitt had shown a remarkable improvement in the attainments of the school. 1881: “The children are well taught and show much improvement... ” 1882: “The children in this little school are in good order and have been carefully taught. The results of the examination were creditable throughout.” The mistress who stayed longest at Pickwell during this period was Miss Fox from March 1890 until June 1897. She was obviously on good terms with the rector of the village, who was chairman of the managers. On 11 April 1890 she recorded in the log, “Rev. E. Harman visited the school and prayed for the welfare of the school under my tuition.” It may be concluded that she was on very good terms with the Rector because as soon as he died in 1897 and a new rector arrived, she left the school. The coincidence would seem to

imply that she could not get on under the new regime.

At Somerby Mr. Pike was headmaster for nearly twenty years. Things seemed to go very smoothly for him until a mysterious incident in 1892. On 29 April the board resolved “that Mr. Pike at the next meeting of the Board explain his reason why he was absent from the school on Tuesday 12th April.” On 27 May he appeared before the board. “After Mr. Pike had explained to the board why he was absent from the school on Tuesday 12th April last, it was proposed by Mr. Plant that Mr. Pike be given three months notice to leave the school. Mr. Plant's proposition not being seconded, it was resolved that in future Mr. Pike obtain permission from the Board in case he requires to be absent during the school hours.” There is no indication of the reason for Mr. Pike's absence. However, the headmaster at Somerby in 1970 told me that Mr. Pike had the reputation of being a bit of a drinker, and he speculated that on Tuesday 12 April Mr. Pike may have been suffering from a hangover. As has already been mentioned the board was keen on the virtues of temperance - the Temperance Society regularly rented the schoolrooms in the evenings - so this may well account for their reaction to Mr. Pike's absence, which was the only time in his twenty years at Somerby that he was absent from his duties.

The clouds still remained about Mr. Pike nonetheless. On 11 September 1893 “Mr. Webster introduced the subject of the last report and the amount of grant received. After a good deal of discussion it was unanimously resolved that Mr. Pike be requested to make greater efforts to increase the efficiency of the school as the Board consider the report for the past year unsatisfactory....It was also resolved that the conversation and resolution regarding the state of the school be not published.”

This is rather a curious affair because the 1893 report was in fact quite good. The report for the previous year had been worthy of comment by the board, rather than 1893's. 1892's Report read, “There should be a more healthy moral tone; the children are much inclined to talk and to copy, even after repeated warnings. Reading and Spelling are fair. Handwriting and paper work untidy, and the Arithmetic is so weak that unless there is an improvement next year I shall be obliged to report the school as inefficient....” The grant received went down from £72.18.6. in 1891 to £65.10.6. The 1893 report reads, “The moral training and conduct are fairly good. The work both of the older children and of the Infants is fairly done...” The grant went up to £73.10.0. Mr. Webster's reasons for criticising Mr. Pike in September 1893 must remain unclear.

In March 1896 a new board was elected, and the chairman, Rev. MacManus, was not re-elected. It seems that a new faction was now in control. Rev. MacManus may have protected Mr. Pike from too much criticism before, but now the schoolmaster, with an admirable record over twenty years at

Somerby, was under fire from the start. On 6 August 1896, “after further discussion of the general management of the school together with the reports of HMI, it was unanimously considered to be desirable to terminate the services of Mr. Pike as schoolmaster, and the Clerk was requested to give Mr. Pike three months notice that his term of service will expire on the 30th day of November next.” Recent reports had been as critical as that of 1892, so it appears that persons who Mr. Pike had fallen foul of in his twenty years at Somerby had won control of the board and were now exacting their vengeance for past slights.

Mr. Pike was understandably quite embittered at this dramatic turn of events, and the sequel over the next eighteen months sheds an unsavoury light on the way relations between Board and teacher could deteriorate. On 20 August 1896 a resolution to the effect of the meeting reported above “was put. One member of the board - Mr. Peake - dissented, and retired from the meeting, after which the resolution...was carried unanimously”. Mr. Pike evidently had one supporter remaining on the board who was appalled at the actions of the other members. Mr. Peake was so disillusioned that after this he attended the meetings of the board so infrequently that eventually his seat was declared vacant.

On 1 October Mr. Pike asked the board for a testimonial. The sourness between the two sides was evident in the resolution “that the Clerk in acknowledging the letter should say that they think the request for a testimonial somewhat premature, but if one is required for enabling Mr. Pike to obtain another appointment, the Board will endeavour to agree upon its terms.” Mr. Pike was able to get his termination of duties deferred till the end of December. On 5 November “Mr. Pike having asked to be allowed to remain in the schoolhouse until January 30 next, it was resolved that it is undesirable to sanction his remaining on the school premises after its re-opening on January 11 and that the Clerk inform Mr. Pike that the schoolhouse must be vacated not later than Saturday January 9.”

Compared to the embittered tone of what had gone before Mr. Pike's eventual testimonial from the board is remarkably glowing and makes one wonder why they had found it necessary to sack such an excellent schoolmaster. “The Somerby School Board have much pleasure in testifying that during the whole of the nearly twenty years Mr. Pike has served them, he has faithfully and conscientiously discharged his duties to them as Headmaster. The Board are pleased to be able to state - as a very satisfactory feature of Mr. Pike's management of the school - that, while maintaining discipline, he has always secured the affection of the children, as well as the esteem of their parents. Mr. Pike's educational abilities have been of much service to the school; his moral character has been without reproach; and his robust health has rendered it unnecessary for the Board to supply his place in the

school even for a single day. The loss of Mr. Pike's services to the village will be deeply regretted.”

The beginning of the tenure of the new schoolmaster did not end the affair. On 3 June 1897 it was resolved “that as the late schoolmaster has not paid the sum of £1.1.8. owing by him to the board, a County court summons for the recovery of the amount be issued forthwith.” On 5 August is recorded the receipt of £1.1.8. from “Mr. Pike per county court.” Even this was not the last the board heard of Mr. Pike. On 4 November 1897 “The Clerk reported the receipt of a claim of £2.11.0. from Mr. Pike. Resolved that the Board do not entertain the claim.”

This was the last of this unfortunate episode recorded in the minute books. However, it was not the last time the Board had to take one of its staff to court. On 19 August 1897 Mrs. Edith Knight had been appointed assistant mistress at a salary of £45 per annum. On 2 September “The Clerk reports that Mrs. Edith Knight absented herself from her duties after one weeks attendance, and without warning she had expressed in a letter to the Board her determination not to resume them. It was resolved to compel Mrs. Knight to fulfill her legal obligation to the Board.” Only one week's teaching in the school had such an effect on Mrs. Knight that despite the board's efforts she did not go back to the school. As a result on 6 January 1898 was recorded “an action in the county court against Mrs. Edith Knight for the recovery of a month's salary in lieu of notice - £3.15.0.” On 3 February was recorded “judgment for the board for £2.10.1.” So, the board elected in March 1896 had a much more troubled passage with its teaching staff than had been the case in the twenty year history of the board hitherto. Clashing personalities may have played a part. In small rural communities the system of education created by the 1870 Act was perhaps too local, and personal relationships could influence the education of the village children.

Inspections

In 1839 government inspection had been made a condition of all educational grants. This position of the inspector as the chief judge in matters of grant was reinforced by the Revised Code of 1862. The Code laid down rigid rules for the manner and content of the annual examination, and so most inspections were very routine. By the 1862 Code the ‘Three Rs’ examination, with the average attendance, became the main basis of grant, and this continued to be the state of affairs until 1890.

The beneficial effects of the system of payment by results were economies and rises in average attendance in schools, but the considerable defects of the system included the over-pressurisation of the children, the mechanical methods of teaching, and the demoralisation of teachers – arguably not too dissimilar from today! The livelihood of many teachers depended on their half-share of the grant,

and this grant depended on the inspector. Hence the importance of inspection day in the life of any school at this period.

The harshness of the 1862 Code was modified somewhat in the 1870s. As we have seen, in 1875 children were allowed to qualify for grant on the result of examination, not only in the 'Three Rs', but also in 'class subjects'. In later years the examination in the obligatory subjects - the 'Three Rs' - was required only of sample groups of not less than a third of the pupils. But mechanical teaching methods were being perpetuated by the flood of new and ignorant pupils into the schools following the 1870, 1876, and 1880 Acts.

More improvement in the situation was made in 1882. The Code of that year assessed grants on the average attendance of a school and not of the individual pupils. The total grant was to include a fixed grant and a merit grant, which was awarded on the basis of the inspector's report of 'fair', 'good', or 'excellent' in respect of the "organisation and discipline, the intelligence employed in instruction, and the general quality of the work especially in the elementary subjects." Rural schools still tended to be discriminated against by these new arrangements, because a well-supported and well-staffed school could earn high grants, whereas a poorly supported school with poor staff and irregular attendance could only qualify for low grants and was thereby penalized twice over.

In 1890 a new code abolished grants in respect of the 'Three Rs' and payment by results was retained only for class subjects and specific subjects taught to older children. In 1893 a minimum of one class subject was made compulsory, and 'varied occupations' were recommended for infants. In 1900 there was a single principal grant on average attendance, the examination grant for class subjects was abolished, and a specific grant was paid for practical subjects only. Drawing had become a compulsory subject for boys in 1891 and was separately examined and paid for by the Science and Art Department.

Rural schools faced particular problems when confronted with the examination, because the chronic absenteeism of their pupils meant not only that the average attendance would be kept down, that those who were absent too many times would not qualify for examination, and that the absentees would forget what they learned much quicker. The teacher would be under public pressures too, because until 1893 a child could leave school when he had passed Standard 4 if he was ten years old. This concern for public opinion can be seen in the desire of the Somerby School Board to keep their debate about the condition and efficiency of the school in 1893 secret. So, all in all, it is easy to understand the preoccupation of the teachers with the annual inspection.

One of the regulations insisted that the teachers should be made well aware of their deficiencies by writing the inspector's reports into the log book. From these and other entries we can see how the inspections affected the schools at Pickwell and Somerby.

Pickwell always received low grants, and the school did not seem to have much luck when it came to reports. In 1874 “the school has not been open the proportionate number of times required by Article 19 for a three months grant, viz. 100. The Grant is therefore payable for two months.” In 1879 “no grant is payable to this school as it has not been in charge of a Certificated teacher during the past year.” In 1884 “the percentage of passes is so low (56) that it is impossible to recommend a merit grant this year.” In 1885 “it is again impossible to recommend a Merit grant with such a low standard of attainments.” In 1886 “the low standards of attainments renders it impossible to recommend a Merit Grant.”

There are several entries in the log book to assure the inspector that entries made erroneously in the attendance register were genuine errors and not attempts to falsify the registers in order to obtain a higher attendance grant. After their experience in 1874, in March 1876 the “School opened on Saturday in order to make up the deficiency in 400 times necessary for obtaining the government grant for the year.” The grant was obviously needed very much.

In 1875 the school benefited attendance-wise from the temporary lack of any school at Somerby. The much increased attendance would have earned a welcome higher grant. All good things have to come to an end, however, and the managers must have been horrified to learn that the HMI's visit in 1877 was to coincide with the opening of the new school at Somerby. It seemed likely that the school would have the expense of educating the Somerby children throughout the year, only to have them not present at the examination, and so not gain any grant either for their attendance or their performance in the examination. Drastic steps had to be taken. The inspection was to be on 19 April 1877. Somerby School had opened on 16 March. On 2 April is noted in the log the ominous sign that “attendance (was) poor in the early part of the week owing to a concert in connection with the opening of Somerby School.” The solution was found in a somewhat desperate measure. 16 April: “Somerby children induced to continue coming till HMI's visit by paying no fees this week.” This had its desired effect, and the Somerby children were present for the examination on the next Monday, but the day after, “Somerby children withdrawn on Tuesday to attend the school in their own village.”

More normal events to threaten the attendance at the examination were epidemics before and during the examination. Fortunately the HMIs were considerate in such circumstances. For instance, at

Pickwell in 1883 “the children are in good order and considering that many were suffering or recovering from a recent epidemic, the results of the examination are highly creditable as regards the elementary subjects.” This shows that sick children would be paraded on examination day by the teachers for the sake of earning grant, and by their parents for the sake of getting them through another standard.

Somerby School was first examined in June 1878 when the inspector reported that “the school promises high future efficiency.” As at Pickwell, there were obviously some subjects which the staff at Somerby could not handle. For instance, year after year the school failed to gain any grant at all for singing by note, until in 1893 “the Grant for singing by note can only be recommended with hesitation.” Geography was “capable of improvement” for several years. At Pickwell one of the chief bugbears was Mental Arithmetic. Evidence that the inspector was concerned with the well-being of the schools which he inspected comes from a minute of the Board at Somerby on 4 January 1883. “Collins HMI wanted teachers and managers to meet him at Peterborough to discuss the new Code.” The board sent Mr. Pike, expenses paid. The importance attached by the board at Somerby to the annual inspection can be seen in the debates surrounding the report of 1893 and the dismissal of Mr. Pike which have already been mentioned. Also commented on was the inspector's concern with the fabric of the school. In 1893 at Somerby, “HMI reports that there is no apex ventilation.” In March of the next year with the next annual inspection rapidly coming round again, the board acted to supply apex ventilation. In 1895 “HMI reports that the steps and boundary wall need repairing. This: should receive attention at once.”

The 1870 Act had forbidden HMIs to inspect religious instruction. As has been mentioned above, a diocesan inspector visited voluntary schools, and, if invited, board schools as well. The diocesan inspection was a much less awesome occasion than the government inspection. Like the HMI, his assessment had a ‘fair’, ‘good’, ‘very good’, and ‘excellent’ range, but it tended to be very commendatory. Diocesan inspectors seemed more willing to give praise than HMIs. In voluntary schools their examination did not only cover religious instruction, but all the subjects of the school. At Somerby the diocesan inspector's request to extend his examination was turned down, as we have seen. In his first examination of Somerby school, which followed the bad report of the HMI which has been quoted already, the diocesan inspector said that “the result is satisfactory considering it is the first inspection of this school in religious knowledge.”

Other examinations which the schools underwent were drawing examinations in the 1890s by a representative of the Science and Art Department, and, later on, sewing examinations. The whole life

of the schools was geared up to the demands of the examinations upon which depended their livelihood, and it can be safely concluded that examination days were the most important day in the life of rural schools at this period.

Attendance

Sellman begins a chapter in his book on 'Devon Village Schools' with the words, "there is a common superstition encouraged by textbooks that compulsory school attendance was enforced by the Act of 1876.....The facts revealed in log books show that in most of rural Devon at least, compulsion remained a fiction throughout the rest of the century." How far do the examples of Pickwell and Somerby allow this conclusion to be extended to Leicestershire?

Before answering this question, it is advisable to get the legal situation clear. By the 1870 Act school boards were empowered to appoint an officer or officers to enforce the attendance of children between the ages of five and twelve unless satisfactory arrangements for their education had already been made. School boards were given power to compel attendance by making by-laws to that effect. By 1876 50% of the country was under compulsion, but this average was only obtained because the percentage in the boroughs was 84. Sandon's Act of 1876 set up school attendance committees in districts where there were no school boards, and it laid upon parents the duty of seeing that their child received "efficient elementary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic," and penalties for failing to do this were provided.

Exemptions to the Act, however, chiefly concerned rural schools. Any child living more than two miles from the nearest public elementary school was exempt, and children in rural areas could be excused attendance at school for a period of up to six weeks in order to help with agricultural work. The Act forbade the employment of any children under the age of ten, and of any between 10 and 14 who had not reached certain standards. Mundella's Act of 1880 compelled all school boards and school attendance committees which had not already made by-laws to enforce compulsory attendance to enact such by-laws. School attendance was made obligatory for all children between the ages of five and ten.

The Compelling Officer, or School Attendance Officer, in rural areas was only a part-time official paid a small salary. In October 1882 the salary of Mr. Victorious Towne, Attendance Officer to the Somerby board, was fixed at £5 a year. The job of such officers was to visit schools, take the names of absentees, and call upon parents and give warnings. In the last resort they had to serve summonses. This was often just a threat, since the board had to pay the legal expenses and any fine

would not cover these, and hard-pressed schools could not afford to press home their warnings.

The visits of Attendance Officers could have effects, however. It is recorded in the Pickwell log for 15 October 1877 that “seven children returned to school in consequence of the visit of the Compelling Officer.” It could work both ways. 11 November 1881 at Pickwell: “Martha and William Pick left the school this week in consequence of regularity in attendance being enforced,” and two more children were withdrawn a week later. In the Pickwell log there is record of one parent being summonsed in 1877” for not sending children to school in 1877, and “the parents of Charles Brown and Fredrica Clark” being summonsed “before the magistrates on account of the children's irregular attendance” in 1888. There is no mention of whether the summonses culminated in court cases.

The work of Mr. Towne at Somerby seems to have been far more organised than that of the Compelling Officer at Pickwell. The Somerby board resolved in April 1889 that “Mr. Towne be requested to send in writing to the Board once in each month a report of the families he visits.” Two parents were summonsed in September 1889 “for irregular attendance of their children.” In March 1890 a parent was summonsed “for employing his son”, and another for non-attendance of his children. In October of the same year James Barnett, who had been the parent summonsed for employing his son earlier in the year, was summonsed again, but it seems that Mr. Towne was neglecting his duties. On 28 November the board resolved that “Mr. Victorious Towne be requested to give an explanation in writing to the Board why he did not take action respecting James Barnett,” and on 30 January his excuse was “considered a very poor one.” This shows the problems inherent in hiring a part-time Attendance Officer. Another parent was summonsed in 1892, and in July 1898 a summons was issued against the parents of John Pick. On this occasion, however, the Board was in the wrong, because on 4 August the summons had to be rescinded because John Pick had made a sufficient number of attendances over the previous five years. “The myth of compulsory attendance” is illustrated by a step the board found it necessary to take in January 1896. “On looking at the registers it was found that many of the children were not attending regularly and it was resolved that if the attendance did not improve in certain cases summons would be taken out against the parents. Notice to this effect to be inserted in the ‘Melton Mowbray Times.’”

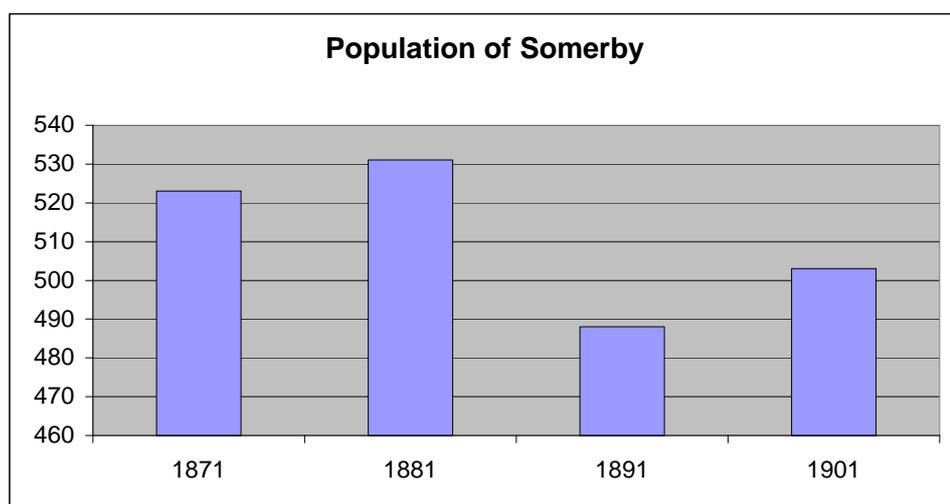
Evidence such as this seems to confirm that compulsory attendance was difficult to enforce. The lack of attendance registers for the two schools in the period make a definitive conclusion on this topic impossible. However, the question can be approached by examining the average weekly attendances which were sometimes recorded in the log books and the population figures for the two parishes.

The average attendance figures must be treated with caution. They are very patchy and so average monthly or yearly figures cannot be drawn from them. On some occasions they were only recorded because the figure was notable, either for being abnormally low or, more rarely, for being unusually high. The population figures are reliable, however, because they are derived from the official census returns.

At Somerby Mr. Pike only occasionally noted the attendance figures, and most of the figures quoted are of numbers actually present on a certain day rather than averages. Mr. Watts supplied more frequent figures:

In all there are 24 references to the attendance up to the end of 1898. It seems reasonable to postulate that in the first years of the school the average attendance was in the upper 70s, rising to the 80s in the 1880s, and the 90s in the last decade of the century. During this period the population of the parish of Somerby was:

Somerby	
Date	Present
On the opening of the school	45
After a HMI visit on 27 April 1877	75
26 October 1877	81
3 December 1880	Average 85.8
19 January 1894	85
6 November 1894	97
15 March 1895	96
5 November 1897 average exceeded 100 for the first time.	Average 100.1
19 November 1897	103



The population of the parish was declining slightly whilst the attendance of children at the school

was increasing at a greater rate than the population decline. It may be assumed from this that the percentage of children attending the school was higher at the end of the century, after the 1876 and 1880 Acts, than at the opening of the school. This does not mean that attendance was 100% or even near it. Also, there could be alternative explanations, such as more children from outside the parish may have attended the school as it proved to be more efficient than another school, e.g. than at Pickwell.

White's Directory for 1877 states that the population of 523 in 1871 lived in 112 houses. It could be argued from this that there were approximately 112 families in Somerby and therefore about 300 children. Not all of these would be of school age, but even if the figure is halved it can be seen that even so it does not correspond with the number attending school in the 1870s. It would be unwise to attempt any firm conclusions from such vague evidence. All in all it would seem that at the opening of the school, many children were not attending regularly or at all. From the board minute evidence already quoted, the attendance figures quoted, and the population figures, it would seem that the actual attendance rate became nearer to the legal fiction of 100% as the century wore on. By 1900 1 in 5 of the population was at school. The conclusion would seem to be that compulsory attendance at school, although backed by the law of the land from 1876 was something which took many years to become an actuality, in rural areas at any rate.

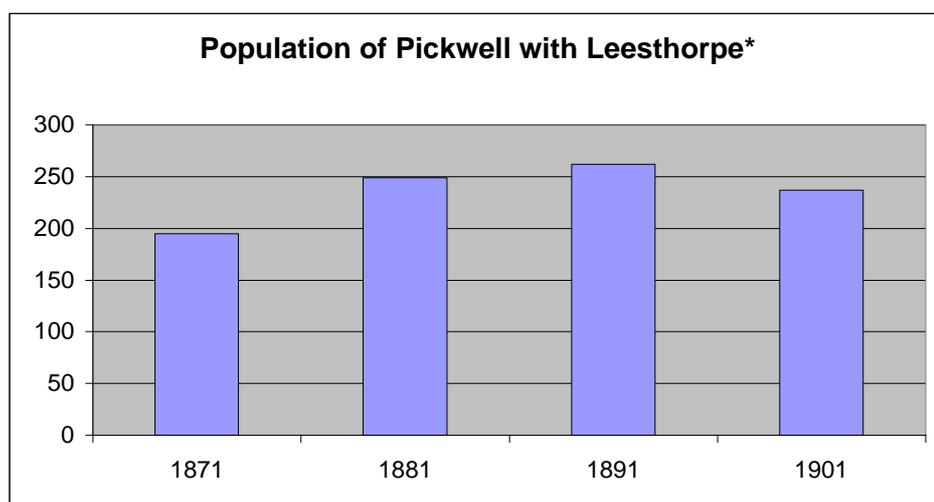
The mistresses at Pickwell entered many more average attendances into the log book of their school. As at Somerby, the years covered are patchy, and the same qualifications have to be applied to them. There are far too many figures given to quote all of them here, so I shall give the worst and the best figures given for any year, so that the school may be seen in its worst and best light attendance-wise.

Year	Worst Attendance	Best Attendance
1874	26.8 May	33.9 May
1875*	21.9 Mar	44.6 Nov
1876	39.0 Sep	49.0 Mar
1877**	14.0 Jul	35.1 Mar
1878***	17.0 Jan	
1880	6.8 Jun	19.4 Aug
1881	8.4 Apr	23.0 May
1882	30.0 Several	40.0 Nov
1883***	38.0 Oct	
1884	25.0 Jun	42.4 Nov
1890	26.0 Nov	34.9 Aug

Year	Worst Attendance	Best Attendance
1891***	31.0	
1892	17.4 Feb	40.8 Apr
1893	29.0 Dec	32.0 May
1894	21.0 Jan	34.0 Jun
1895	30.0 Nov	32.3 Mar
1897	21.6 Apr	22.9 Mar
1898	33.6 Sep	39.5 Mar
1899	35.0 Mar	39.0 Sep
1900***	33.8 Nov	
1901***	34.5 Nov	
1902	31.1 Dec	38.6 Nov
* At some time during the year the school at Somerby had closed. ** Somerby school opened in March. *** Only one figure recorded.		

From these figures it can be seen that the closing of the old school at Somerby more than doubled the number of children attending Pickwell school. When the Board School opened at Somerby there was a slump, but by the mid 1880s attendance at the school seems to have picked up again. Perhaps this was due to the 1880 Act and a rise in population. But, after reaching an average in the 30s in the 1880s, the school does not seem to have increased in size any more. There may even have been a decline.

This, in fact, follows the population curve of the parish:



In 1871, according to White's Directory for 1877, the 195 persons lived in 39 houses. On 24 November 1882 there were 46 children on the books, the log book informs us. The

* White's Directory for 1877 says that there were 36 inhabitants of Leesthorpe in 1871

highest attendance in that year was 40. On 22 June 1894 there were 38 on the books. So, over a

period when the population of the parish had risen, the number of children attending the school had declined. By 20 October 1897 the figure on the books was back up to 43. On 14 March 1902 there were 41, and on 24 April there were 50. It would therefore seem that, as at Somerby, the attendance rates rose only slowly, if at all. There must still have been a great deal of absenteeism.

The legal compulsion to send children to school may have prompted parents to get their child's name on the books, but this did not guarantee that the child would regularly attend school, as the number of summons that were issued against parents shows. The disparity between attendance and numbers on the roll may well have been a particularly rural problem. As has already been mentioned, the lures of employment often kept children in rural areas from school. It must be remembered that this period of educational history was taking place against a background of agricultural depression. The wages of agricultural labourers were very low, and often families were large. Hence the attraction of the 'present shilling' earned by the labourer's children, which, especially at harvest time, would greatly augment the family income.

There are many references in the logbooks to children being absent because they were working in the fields. For instance, on 26 July 1875 at Pickwell, "many absent haymaking". On 11 September 1876 at the opening of the school after the harvest holiday "only 17 scholars in attendance - gleaning not yet finished." On 16 October 1879 a half-holiday had to be given "owing to the children going out gleaning and only being an attendance of two." When not actually working in the fields children waited on their parents - 28 July 1882, "attendance rather low in the afternoons during the week. Parents are haymaking and keep the children away to carry tea." Other agricultural occupations affected attendance. 22 May 1889: "Several boys absent today assisting the farmers with sheep washing"; 26 April 1895: "James McArthur absent bird-scaring". Similar absences are recorded in the Somerby log books. On 24 September 1877 "an extra weeks holiday was given because of the harvest-making." On 16 July 1891, "attendance is poor this morning and this afternoon owing doubtless to haymaking, the weather being very fine".

The weather was more likely to cause absences in the countryside than in urban areas, because the children had to travel to school across difficult terrain. Snow was the chief cause of absences due to weather. For instance, from the Pickwell log book for 13 April 1876, "a very heavy snowstorm caused total absence of scholars on Thursday." Infants would often be withdrawn from school in the winter to save them from having to trudge to school through the snow and short hours of daylight. At Pickwell, on 20 November 1876, "two infant girls withdrawn for the winter on account of distance from school." In depressed agricultural areas, the exigencies of the weather could create problems

for the poor. On 22 January 1875 at Pickwell, "several children absent for want of clothes." Heavy rain could also interrupt the running of the school. At Somerby, 10 June 1896, "the whole of the boys from the country have been absent for the last day or two on account of the heavy rains." The village of Pickwell seems to have been prone to flooding, which occasionally affected the school. On 15 July 1880 "School was not opened on Wednesday and Thursday mornings on account of a flood lasting until one o' clock each day." On 4 October 1880 "The school closed today on account of the Floods, Mistress not able to cross the waters." On 24 October 1882, "The weather is so wet and stormy that only 17 children have attended school. Of these ten have been fetched by their parents before the school hours have expired, owing to a flood of water in the village street, which will shortly render it impassable for children. I am therefore compelled to cancel their attendances. Weather so very rough and stormy in the afternoon that no children came to school."

In the early days of modern medicine there were frequent epidemics and illnesses which could affect the whole of a school. Those children who were not ill would not be sent to school by their parents for fear of catching the disease. As a result the school might be closed for a period. The most common ailments were scarlet fever, mumps, measles, whooping cough, and colds. At Pickwell on 4 August 1879, "The school closed today owing to the children suffering from an infectious disease." On 2 April 1886 the Pickwell school was closed owing to an epidemic, and the entry for 19 April is in the hand of the rector and reads, "School re-opened: by the good Providence of God, there has been no spread of illness, thus far, in the village." At Somerby on 15 September 1884 the harvest holiday was extended for a fortnight on account of an epidemic, and the letter from the Medical Authority recommending the closure of the school is quoted. "Dear Sir, In reply to your question as to the advisability of re-opening the school, I beg to say that it will be much better to close it for another fortnight. There is a bad epidemic of measles and whooping cough still prevalent, and but few children would be able to attend, and fewer still whose parents would allow them to do so...."

A further cause of absence was the attraction of any church or chapel function in the neighbourhood, a fair, a hunt, or any other entertainment. These could reduce the attendance to the point where the school could not carry on. The ladies of the landowning families regularly gave treats to the children, and half-holidays were given for these. At Pickwell, however, when a treat was given to the Somerby children on 4 January 1875 "very few children were present". At Somerby there was a village feast in early July every year. The Somerby board gave a holiday while it was taking place, but at Pickwell the school tried to carry on - 5 July 1875 "attendance not nearly so good as last week owing to a 'Feast' in the neighbourhood." There are entries just like this for most years.

Other counter-attractions to the school were royal visits. On 8 March 1877 a holiday had to be given in the afternoon at Pickwell because the Prince of Wales was hunting in the neighbourhood.

Local race-meetings were a powerful lure. On 6 April 1883, "School closed this afternoon, not sufficient children to keep the school open, the inhabitants of Pickwell having gone to see the 'Grand National Steeplechase' at Dalby." The race-meetings at nearby Burton were also an attraction. I have already referred to the case of the two boys who played truant in 1897 at Somerby in order to attend Burton races; these events also affected Pickwell - 1 April 1889, "several children absent this afternoon, as they and their parents, several of them, went to Burton races."

Hunts were another attraction - 6 December 1895 at Pickwell, "Corrected three boys for playing truant to follow the hounds." So, with the only gradual growth of compulsory attendance, and the many reasons for absence, the efforts of rural schools to keep their attendance up can be seen to have been a continuous one.

The children were also absent from school, naturally enough, on holidays. Both Pickwell and Somerby schools had the usual holidays at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, and Harvest. These holidays were, however, supplemented by others given on special occasions. Pickwell school regularly had a half holiday so that the children might attend the church service on Ash Wednesday. Holidays were given for other church Services. At Pickwell on 15 August 1888 the school was closed at 11.20 "as Miss Wright a Sunday School teacher was married and the children went to church to witness the ceremony."

Sadder occasions were also marked. At Pickwell on 29 January 1897, "Friday afternoon school closed for the half day as the parents wished their children to attend the Rev E Harman's funeral," and at Somerby on 22 August 1899, "Half a day's holiday was given today on account of Mrs.. Barnard's funeral."

Half-holidays were also given after the annual inspections, and at Somerby on the occasion of the yearly audit of the board accounts as well. Other occasions were when the mistress at Pickwell had to be away, and having no assistants there was no one to carry on. On 5 February 1875, "Holiday on account of mistress having to go from home."

Every August in Somerby there was a Flower Show and both schools had holidays on this occasion. For instance at Pickwell on 27 August 1882 "Half-holiday given by permission of the Rector on the occasion of Somerby Flower Show," and on 22 August 1883 at Somerby, "The school was closed this afternoon on account of the Flower Show."

Parish, county council, school board, and parliamentary elections were held in the schoolrooms, also necessitating the granting of a holiday. At Pickwell on 1 December 1885, "School closed all day on account of the General Election, the school room being required as a polling station", and at Somerby on 23 March 1881, "The school was closed today for the triennial election of the school board."

National festivities also caused holidays. On 21 June 1887 at Pickwell, "Jubilee Day, the children met in the morning and marched to church, after the service, the remainder of the day was spent in feasting and amusements, ending at night with a display of fireworks." Not surprisingly the next day's entry reads, "Children too tired with yesterday's festivities to attend school," and even on the day after that, "only three children came this morning so I did not open school." On 25 June 1902 Pickwell School was "closed for two days on account of the coronation holiday." At Somerby on 11 June 1897, "two days holiday voted by the board to commemorate the 60th year of Her Majesty's reign."

Other occasions for holidays were Choir Festivals, village cricket matches, school treats, and occasions when the school room was being prepared for concerts. These frequent breaks in the day-to-day running of the school must have made the fight to keep attendance up even harder.

Finance

The final aspect of rural schools to be considered is their finance. Money came from government grant, fees, voluntary subscriptions, and any miscellaneous sources of income the school might have. Board schools also were assisted from the rates. The conditions by which government grants were made have already been discussed.

Fees or school pence were not entirely abolished by Mundella's Act of 1880 despite school attendance for children between the ages of five and ten being made obligatory. Fees were never easy to collect - especially so after 1880. In 1891 a special fee-grant of 10s. a head was introduced, and most schools gratefully accepted this. It provided them with perhaps more income than they had been able to collect from fees, and saved the troublesome chore of collection.

The rate of government grant was improved by the various Codes. Voluntary schools were further assisted in the 1890s by New Grant Aid, and board schools were helped by the Agricultural Rates Act of 1896.

At Pickwell fees were raised in May 1881 to 3d and 2d a week. As in many other rural schools, it was not always easy to collect fees. At Pickwell, for instance, on 30 May 1890 the mistress "sent

John Woods, Frederick Johnson, Ellen Wallace, Mary Kilbourn and Eleanor Wade to ask their parents if they could send arrears of school pence. The two former stayed at home the whole of the day. Ellen Wallace brought an impudent note and a penny and said she would only pay that as she had not been present all the week.”

School boards were empowered to pay the fees of poor children, and Somerby board regularly paid the fees of five or six. The gesture was not always appreciated. On 27 May 1881, “Alice, Emma, and Elizabeth Snowden attend school very irregularly although the Board has paid their fees for the greater part of the year. The Board has now declined to admit free on account of their irregularity.” The Board was very careful in ensuring its liberality in giving free fees was not misplaced. On 26 October 1888 a letter was read to the board “from James Davies asking the Board to admit one of his children free. The Board decided unanimously “not to grant Jas. Davies’ request, as a reason, he sending only two children to school.”. Compassion was evident, however, in the resolution of 25 January 1889 “that John and Edwin Newton children of Thomas Newton be admitted free during their Father's illness." The Board had evidently experienced difficulty in collecting fees for on 11 October 1889 they resolved “that £20 be cancelled from the arrears of school fees as per book.” It is therefore not surprising to read on 21 August 1891 the resolution “that the 10s fee grant be accepted from 1st September 1891.”

The pros and cons of the government grants have already been discussed.

It is interesting to see the detailed breakdown of the grant awarded to Pickwell in 1891 as recorded in the log book. Somerby school was, of course, aided by the rates, payment being made by precepts from the Overseers of the

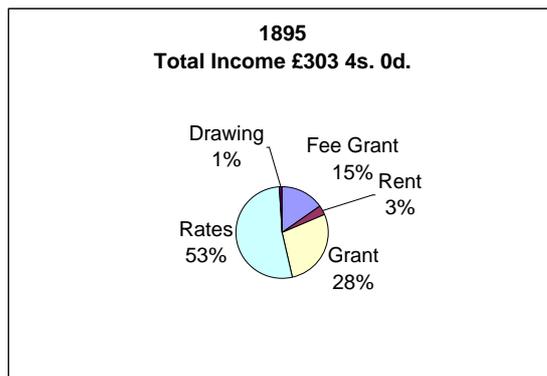
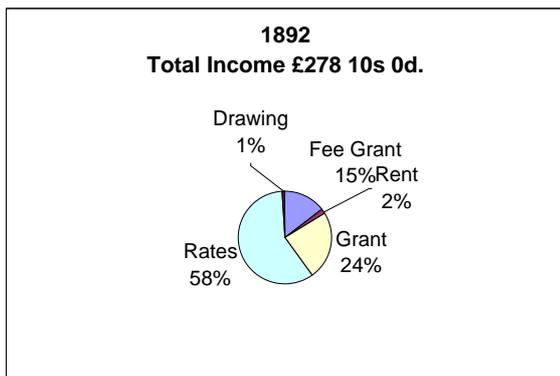
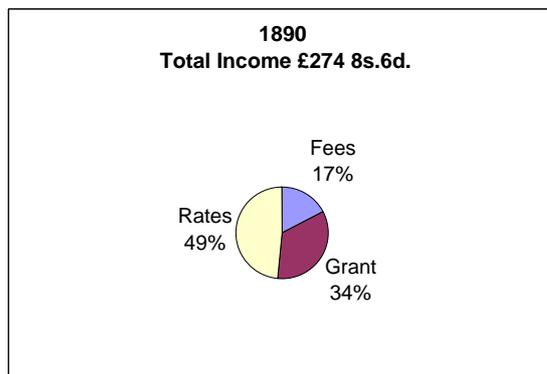
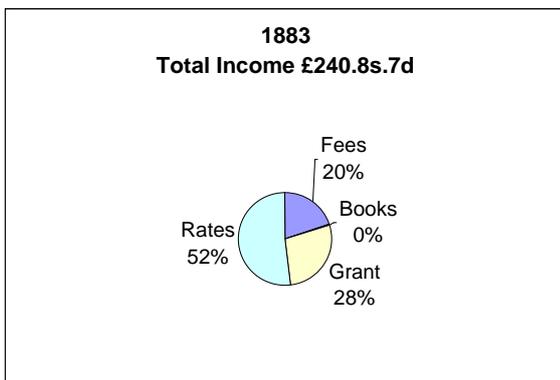
	£:s:d
Principal grant	0:12:6
Discipline and organisation	0:1:6
Class subject: English	0:1:0
Singing by ear	0:0:6
Total	0:15:6
x average attendance of 31	24:0:6
Grant for needlework at 1s on average girls attendance	0:17:0
Fee grant	10:0:0
Total	34:17:6

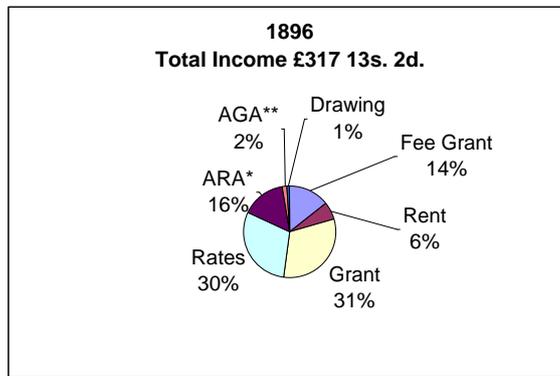
Poor. Some rural boards had difficulty in getting their precepts honoured by hard-pressed overseers. There is only one such case recorded at Somerby. At the Board meeting on 29 August 1893, “The Treasurer having stated that the amount of Precept No. 61 which should have been paid on the 21st inst had not yet been received, the Clerk was directed to write to the Overseers of the Poor asking

that the amount should be paid on or before Monday 11th September 1893 as otherwise legal proceedings would have to be taken.” The Overseers promptly paid up.

The school also benefited from the Agricultural Rates Act. On 11 April 1897 “The Clerk reported the receipt of Certificate under the Agricultural Rates Act that the amount payable out of the Local Taxation a/c for the Somerby School Board is £49.10.8.” The board also derived a minor flow of income from renting the school room for meetings in the evenings.

It is interesting to see the exact proportions of the income derived from the various sources by the school board at various stages in the life of the school. From the following table, it can be seen that the percentage of rate aid remained more or less the same throughout the board school period.





* Agricultural Rates Act ** additional grant-in-aid

The figures for 1898 show that the amount of money coming from the government covered almost 70% of the cost of running the school compared with only 48% in 1883. Until the late 1890s the school had been an increasingly heavy burden on the ratepayers of Somerby.

The County Picture

I shall conclude this study of rural schools in the late nineteenth century by extending the local approach a little to the rest of Leicestershire. In 1870 there had been 115 schools in the rural areas (i.e. not including the borough of Leicester), of which 75 were National schools, and 20 others other church schools. The formation of school boards was slow because the provision of education by the existing schools was fairly adequate. By 1874 there were just ten school boards in Leicestershire, and only two of them had passed by-laws requiring attendance at school. The Anglican church did not let the fight to control education go by default after the passing of the 1870 Act, and they continued to maintain existing church schools such as that at Pickwell, and they also tried to gain a footing on the school boards, as at Somerby where the rector was chairman of the first board.

By the end of the century there were 36 board schools and 223 other schools in Leicestershire, of which 198 were Anglican. These figures illuminate the fact that the school board system was really a system which could only work at its best in an urban situation. In the countryside the parish was too small a unit to control education sufficiently. As we have seen, too often local personalities and problems had an overbearing an effect on the life of the village school. The establishment of Local Education Authorities by the 1902 Act, which ended the period of voluntary and board schools existing side by side, was a welcome step forward.

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