

English Schools in the Middle Ages

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For my family

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Preface

It was on a summer afternoon twelve years ago, while exploring the village of Newland in Gloucestershire, that I came among the quiet houses which border its churchyard to a cottage called 'The Old Grammar School', and was moved to begin the inquiries which have led, much later, to the completion of this book. That I have found the history of medieval schools so congenial is very likely due to my own happy experiences in four crumbling Anglican seminaries, or to the tales I heard in youth of my parents' adventures in the private and elementary schools of England sixty years ago. Yet whenever we ponder our researches we soon become aware that greater forces move us than ourselves, and it is other scholars as much as I who have conceived the usefulness of this project and have helped to carry it out. My early progress was immeasurably assisted by my tutor, the late Mr K. B. McFarlane, who showed me the standards at which an historian ought to aim, and by Dr J. R. L. Highfield who patiently supervised my work after his ever-to-be-lamented death. More recently I have been fortunate in the advice and inspiration of Dr R. W. Hunt, which I am only sorry I have not turned to better use. Most of all I owe to the kindness of Dr A. B. Emden, who has not only offered unfailing encouragement and the benefit of his unrivalled knowledge of medieval education, but presented me with the notes he had himself assembled for a book on the same subject, and scholarship knows no greater generosity. Necessary visits to the Bodleian Library over a number of years have been made possible by the thoughtful co-operation of Professor Frank Barlow and of the University of Exeter, my employers, who have been ready and uncomplaining in meeting expenses. My stays in Oxford have been made pleasant by the hospitality of Magdalen College

and more recently by the principal and students of Ripon Hall, in whose company I spent an agreeable term. I have also benefited from the advice and help of numerous other scholars who have answered my questions and communicated their discoveries, especially Brother Bonaventure, FSC, who kindly allowed me to read his thesis on 'The teaching of grammar in England in the later middle ages', Dr Antonia Gransden, Mr T. G. Hassall, Mr A. Jackson, Mr P. Lock, Mr W. Mitchell, Dr W. A. Pantin, the Reverend D. Powell, Mr I. Rowlands and Mr P. J. Wallis. To these must also be added my friends Dr J. S. Critchley and Dr M. C. E. Jones who have so kindly laboured to read and criticize my work. Faults remain, but without the advice and assistance here recorded there would have been many more.

Aylburton,
Gloucestershire
Easter 1973

List of abbreviations

Bodleian	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BM	British Museum, London
BRUC	A. B. Emden, <i>A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500</i> (Cambridge, 1963)
BRUO	A. B. Emden, <i>A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to 1500</i> , 3 vols (Oxford, 1957-9)
CCR	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i>
<i>Complete Peerage</i>	G. E. Cockayne, <i>The Complete Peerage</i> , ed. H. A. Doubleday and V. Gibbs, 14 vols in 15 (London, 1910-59)
<i>Concilia</i>	<i>Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae, 446-1717</i> , ed. D. Wilkins, 4 vols (London, 1737)
<i>Councils & Synods</i>	<i>Councils and Synods, Part II: 1205-1313</i> , ed. F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, 2 vols (Oxford, 1964)
CPR	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i>
ECD	A. F. Leach, <i>Educational Charters and Documents, 598-1909</i> (Cambridge, 1911)
EETS	Early English Text Society
ESR	A. F. Leach, <i>English Schools at the Reformation, 1546-8</i> (Westminster, 1896)
EYS	A. F. Leach, <i>Early Yorkshire Schools</i> , 2 vols (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, record series, xxvii, xxxiii, 1899-1903)
LPFD	<i>Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII</i> , ed J. S. Brewer and others, 21 vols (London, 1864-1920)

PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
PRO	Public Record Office, London
Reg.	<i>Register</i> ¹
SME	A. F. Leach, <i>The Schools of Medieval England</i> , 2nd ed. (London, 1916)
STC	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, <i>Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, 1475-1640</i> (London, 1926)
VCH	<i>The Victoria History of the Counties of England</i>

¹ For the sake of brevity, bishops' registers are noted with the name of the bishop first, then of the diocese. Thus *Reg. Chichele, Canterbury*, should be read, *The register of [Henry] Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury*.

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Introduction

Perhaps no age has been more conscious than our own of the manifold influences which natural surroundings and human society bring to the making of man from childhood to maturity. If we set out to inquire how, in the widest sense, men were *educated* in medieval times, a whole range of possible influences will come to mind, including family life, social conditions, religious ideas and the tasks and preoccupations of adulthood. Learning will thus be seen to include the acquisition of social habits, the appreciation of nature and the mastery of trades, as well as the study of letters in school; while schooling will appear as only one of the strands of education, and one which in any case involved only a minority of people. It is a necessary preliminary to the investigation of medieval schools to remember the small scale of their impact compared with the other great forces which wrought upon mankind. Yet although few went to school, and although the schools were limited in their resources, their study has an importance and an application beyond the audience they reached. Other kinds of education have left fewer traces either of their nature or their effects, but the work of the schools is relatively well documented and, since it was more formalized, far easier to reconstruct. It also provides an operational base for the wider study of the life and education of medieval man. Schools have always attempted to prepare their pupils for the world outside, and even in medieval times their curriculum was not pursued merely for its own sake. Not only did it seek to impart the literary techniques which the clergy, and later many of the laity, needed for their adult work; it also tried to instil religion and virtue, to teach an ethic of social behaviour and to stimulate the imagination. The study of schools thus leads us insensibly to other aspects of education and provides a good deal of material for understanding them.

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Interest in schools among the wealthy and literate has never been lacking since the twelfth century, yet compared with the energy given to founding and managing them, their history has never attracted much attention, perhaps because of the tendency of educationalists always to undervalue the achievements of their predecessors. When the study of medieval history began in the seventeenth century, it fastened chiefly upon the excitements of political and constitutional history, the mysteries of the religious orders or the intricacies of genealogy and manorial history. Only a very few scholars thought to inquire into the history of medieval schools, among whom Christopher Wase and Anthony Wood are the most notable; indeed Wase deserves to be recognized as the first important historian of the subject, for he was the earliest to attempt a general inquiry into the origins and resources of the English schools and the succession of their masters.¹ His extensive collections however remained unpublished, and instead the easy fiction became current, and indeed remained so until the end of the nineteenth century, that medieval schooling had been mainly the work of the monks.² Little happened in the eighteenth century to dispel this assumption. A few local historians did bring to light instances of public, secular schools in the counties and boroughs of medieval England, but their discoveries failed to impinge upon the general notion of things.³

It was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the history of English schools was seriously reconsidered and as a subject worthy of investigation. By this period there was a growing feeling that the national facilities for education were inadequate, and this raised the question of whether the existing school endowments were being used to best advantage. Their origins and purposes began to be the subject of historical research. In 1818 Nicholas Carlisle published a private survey in which he attempted to list all the endowed grammar schools still extant and to describe their histories, in the course of which he incidentally drew attention to records of medieval schools anterior to the foundations with

¹ On Wase see P. J. Wallis, 'The Wase school collection: a neglected source in educational history', *Bodleian Library Record*, iv (1952), pp. 78-104, and Wase's own work, *Considerations Concerning Free Schools as Settled in England* (Oxford, 1678), pp. 28-41. Notes by Wood on schools appear in Bodleian, MS Wood D 11, folios 159-80v.

² e.g. John Aubrey, 'There were no free schools. The boys were educated at the monasteries.' (*Brief Lives and other Selected Writings*, ed. Anthony Powell (London, 1949), p. 6).

³ See for example Richard Furney's MS 'History of Gloucester' (Bodleian, MS Top. Glouc. c. 4-5); Francis Blomefield's description of Norfolk; and Nicolson's and Burn's account of Westmorland and Cumberland.

which he was concerned.¹ In the same year Lord Brougham conducted a campaign for the reform of endowed schools, and this led soon afterwards to the establishment of a parliamentary commission to investigate schools and other endowed charities and to report upon their histories and activities. From this time onwards there was a steady growth of interest, both public and private, in the history of schools. Successive Charity Commissions published thirty-two reports between 1819 and 1840, and in 1853 the commission was put on a permanent footing. In 1864 the Endowed School Commission conducted even more searching inquiries, and its evidence, which ran to twenty-one volumes, contained a good deal of valuable historical material. At a local level the popular concern for education, and the reforms which this eventually produced, stimulated the production of a good many school histories, of varying quality, but testifying nevertheless to the strong sense of tradition that has been such a valuable influence on the modern English educational system.

The work of the Charity Commission was also responsible for inspiring the first research of an academic nature into medieval schools by A. F. Leach (1851-1915), the principal investigator of the subject. Leach's own education had been passed in medieval surroundings at Winchester and Oxford, where he distinguished himself by gaining a first class degree in *Literae Humaniores* and a prize fellowship at All Souls,² but it was not until 1884, when he was appointed an assistant charity commissioner and charged with investigating the history of the Prebendal School, Chichester, and the Grammar School, Southwell, that he suddenly became aware of the medieval origins of such schools and was fired to discover all that he could about them. The vague notions which he had hitherto entertained about medieval education being largely in the hands of the monks changed into a passionate desire to demonstrate, by contrast, the existence and importance of a large number of public, secular schools, run by secular priests and laymen, the ancestors of the schools of modern times. For the rest of his life he pursued this task with industry and enthusiasm.

Leach was not, in fairness to his contemporaries, the only historian who realized the potentialities of such research. As early as 1868 F. J. Furnivall had written a sketch of medieval English education as the foreword to an edition of poems on manners and meals for the Early English Text

¹ N. Carlisle, *A Concise Description of the Endowed Grammar Schools in England and Wales*, 2 vols (London, 1818).

² For Leach's career see Foster Watson's article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* 1912-1921 (1927), pp. 327-8.

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Society, and Leach acknowledged the generous help which Furnivall gave him in later years.¹ In 1894, the date of Leach's first important book on pre-Reformation schools, short accounts of the subject also appeared in two other works: J. H. Wylie's *History of England under Henry IV* and Mrs Green's *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*.² But Leach alone applied the whole of his energies to the task and succeeded in publishing a large collection of materials for its study. His achievement in doing so remains impressive. During the twenty-one years between 1894 and 1915 he published nine volumes on the history of education alone, including general studies, collections of documents and local histories, as well as contributing more than fifteen lengthy articles on particular areas to the Victoria County History. In the course of this work he examined and brought to notice an enormous range of material, not only from printed sources but from charters and manuscripts in the British Museum, the Public Record Office and dozens of local archives and muniment rooms. He was therefore well qualified to write the histories of some 200 medieval schools which constitute his main achievement. He created the modern study of the subject and his writings remain indispensable for its pursuit.³

Leach's best work undoubtedly lies in his editions of local records, *Early Yorkshire Schools* and *Early Education in Worcester*, together with his detailed studies of Warwick School, Winchester College and St Paul's. Here were small, manageable subjects which he researched thoroughly and described on the whole judiciously, so that in general they are works which can still be used without fear. Much the same is true of his large collection of original records, *Educational Charters and Documents, 598-1909*, so long as allowance is made for the more accurate dates and texts which have been established since he wrote. The articles he composed for the Victoria County History are more variable. They seem frequently to have suffered from shortage of time, space and opportunities for research, which left them in some cases hasty and incomplete. This is particularly true of Yorkshire, where the short space allotted to Leach proved quite insufficient for the number of schools he had to describe. Worcestershire, where he had some good local assistance,⁴ is far superior as a survey to Gloucestershire, the treatment of which is often sketchy and unreliable. The contributors to the VCH do not always seem to have pooled their

¹ *Manners and Meals in Olden Time*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (EETS, original series xxxii, part 2, 1868).

² These works are both listed below in the bibliography.

³ There is no complete bibliography of Leach's writings, except for the list of those on medieval schools in *SME*, pp. vii-ix.

⁴ *VCH Worcs.*, iv, 475 n 1.