

## Other Westcott Schools before and after 1854

In 1851 out of a total Westcott population of 888 there 228 children aged 3 to 12 (inclusive). Of these just 41 were shown in the census return as Scholars. Five of these were members of the Barclay family and were privately educated at Bury Hill by their own Governess. The other 37 were presumably attended local schools but we know very little about these. All we do know comes from the June 1853 application to the National Society (for promoting the education of the poor in the principles of the established church) for a grant towards the building of a new village school:

**Amount of population at the last Census of the Parish for which the School is intended?**

**What provision already exists in the parish for educating the children of the poor in Church principles? Will this provision be superseded in whole or in part by the proposed new School?**

**What is understood to be the existing provision for education, gratuitously or at a very small charge, in schools not connected with the church?**

This house in Milton Street was built in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century and in sale particulars dated 1811 it was described as 'A brick and tile house, a barn, stable for four horses, hovel, brewhouse, pigstie etc.' In the 1830's it formed part of the Bury Hill Estate and the Barclay family converted it for use as a school by adding two school rooms, each with a separate porch. It is probable that one room was for infants and the other for older children since the 1851 census return for Milton Street includes:

Ann Peacock, aged 41 from Middlesex - school mistress

Sarah Coe, aged 24 from Dorking - infant school mistress'.

In 1854 Miss Peacock and all the pupils transferred to the new Village School, where Ann Peacock was to remain in charge of the Infant Class until her retirement in 1877.

In 1857, the Milton Street School House was converted to a laundry and was still equipped as such nearly 100 years later. The building now consists of two cottages: The Old Schoolhouse' and 'The Old Laundry'.

Apart from Milton Street, which is probably the location of the two schools referred to at (2) above, details of the other schools referred to the application to the National Society are unknown. This is not surprising since it was not uncommon in the days before the introduction of state education for anybody with a modicum of learning to set up as a 'school' to teach children to read and writ and there might well have been a 'Dame School' in Westcott. The reference to a school

*888, but since the opening of the new church the population has increased to nearly 1000.*

*There is a school for about 20 girls supported by a private individual, and also one for a limited number of infants, both of which the new school may possibly supercede.*

*There are two small schools, one kept by a Dissenter, the other by a churchwoman, where the payment is 6 pence and 3 pence weekly.*



kept by a 'dissenter' at (3) above may have referred to the Westcott Chapel, which was to have a school room attached to it sometime after its construction in 1840, especially as the established church would probably not have regarded any education provided from the Free Church as adequately meeting the National Society's criterion of 'church principles'.

Although there is no other record of its existence, Charles Rose, a Dorking man writing in 1878 about his 'Recollections of Old Dorking' claimed some Dorking scholars attended a school in Westcott: *This establishment belonged to a little old-fashioned gentleman of somewhat odd appearance and habits. I well remember the little man, dressed in a drab-coloured coat, extending almost to his heels, knee breeches, and broad-brimmed hat riding on his donkey into Dorking, and looking every inch of him like a schoolmaster of the olden time. Many and curious were the stories once afloat respecting the old master. On one occasion it is stated he remarked - it would seem by way of magnifying his office- 'I eddecated those two gentlemen going up the street.' At another time, as the story goes, he was asked by two other gentlemen to be the arbiter in a discussion on the correct spelling of the name of a third. After due consideration, the schoolmaster delivered himself thus: ' Well, gentlemen, you see there are no grammar rules for spelling proper names.' Of course from this dictum there could be no appeal. Our friend the pedagogue was a firm believer in the efficacy of corporal punishment, and it is said of him that on one occasion, after a free use of the cane, a big unruly Dorking scholar, considerably taller than himself, acting, it would seem, on the proverb that 'one good turn deserves another', snatched from the tutor's hand the instrument of correction and tried its effect upon the schoolmaster himself. Bad though this was for the poor little man, I have heard from an eye-witness that after this a sadder calamity befell him. One day, more than five-and-forty years ago, a scholar, either wilfully or innocently, offended the warm-tempered schoolmaster. The other scholars sympathised with their friend in trouble, who was now called upon to beg the master's pardon. This the pupil refused to do, whereupon the instructor's wife was called to hold the refractory boy while her husband gave him a caning. The anger of the other scholars now became ungovernable, and, seizing the master, they bound him hand and foot and carried him off to a large copper, into which immediately*

??There was also a school in the grounds of Churt House during the Second World War??

*cast him. The lid was immediately put on, and some of the boys sat upon it to keep it down. The hapless schoolmaster cried aloud for mercy but mercy there was none. Some of the boys now looked about for fuel, and, finding an old grogam gown and one or two aprons, they thrust them into the copper hole and set fire to them, thus giving to their unhappy master what they termed 'a good warming'. Of course, after such an indignity, the little moral influence which the poor schoolmaster had previously possessed was utterly gone. It need hardly be said that the effect upon the school was most disastrous. A gentleman of the neighbourhood, who had kindly paid the fees of twelve of the scholars, at once draughted them off elsewhere, while the parents of a number of pupils besides, without hesitation, transferred their sons to other establishments, where happily less severity and more discipline prevailed.*

We know far more about the Westcott Schools that existed in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. **Merton House School**, on the main road opposite Balchin's Stores (now demolished) was established by Charles Brown when he retired from his appointment as Head Master of Westcott School in 1888, and continued until his death in 1905. Miss **Lizzie Ruffell's school** at The Old Barracks in Westcott Street probably opened at about the same time as Merton House but continued until at least 1919 when the Westcott School admission register was still recording the transfer of 'Miss Ruffell's' pupils. **The Mill School** was established by the Misses Colam in 1920 in the Old Mill House at the junction of Westcott Street and Balchin Lane. It continued until 1929, with boarders accommodated at the Mill. **Belmont School** came to Westcott from Blackheath in 1920. The school survives today, but in 1953 it moved to Holmbury St Mary from its Westcott Street site although the school playing fields remain in use as the Cradhurst recreation ground.