

Early Education in St Endellion Parish

Prior to building the school

Before the late Victorian reforms, education was not a matter for the state. For the great majority, what little education was available was primarily provided by the church. Not much is recorded of the early years here, but in some 1831 correspondence to W Brown at Egloshayle about the disrepair of the Port Isaac Quaker Meeting House, J Burroughes refers to preaching and teaching 'nearly 100 children' at a Sunday school there. John Watts Trevan's 1835 map of Port Isaac shows the former Quaker chapel in Middle Street by the stream, probably what is now called 'Brook Cottage'. The oldest part of Roscarrock Chapel, built in 1836, was long used as a Sunday school. The nearby Wesleyan Chapel did not build a Sunday schoolroom until as late as August 1875. Religious buildings often had the only large rooms available so were eminently suitable for early communal education efforts throughout the week.

John Watts Trevan names two school masters here in 1835 – William Davey from St Neots, and Warwick Guy Prout from this parish. He also refers to two former teachers, the late John Arnold and a Mr Hender. What qualifications they had to undertake their profession is not recorded, but Trevan states Warwick Guy Prout had been transported for 7 years after embezzling money from the Devonport bank at which he was a clerk, and John Arnold was one of three local miscreants involved in looting valuables from the wreck of the Dutch ship *Elizabeth Joanna* which foundered off Port Isaac in 1822. Trevan also alleged Arnold was the father of Mary Ann Steer (*born c1824*), who herself later became a school teacher here. John Arnold died in 1832 and Trevan was one of the witnesses to his will (*which left everything to his mother*), so presumably he knew him.

In the 1841 census, neither Davey nor Prout are listed as living here. There are two school masters recorded, John Billing (*25 years old*) and Martyn Parnell (*15 years old*). The tithe apportionment of 1842 lists all properties here, and their uses, but does not mention any school buildings. In the 1851 census, we had just one school master, 60 year old Humphrey Craddock, who in 1841 was a stonemason at Port Quin (*'H. Craddock Engraver' in a floral script can be seen on slate headstones from this era at St. Endellion Church*). In the 1861 census the occupation 'scholar' was used for the first time, with 384 scholars recorded between the ages of 1(!) and 17. There were now six school teachers, Elizabeth Geach (*50 years old*), Mary A Ships (*46*), Rebecca Skinner (*73*), Mary Ann Steer (*37*), and William Davey (*55*) from St Neots and John Billing (*45*) were both returning to teach in the village. John Billing was recorded as living as a boarder of Betsy Olver and her son in Billings Row, which was a large 3 storey residential tenement, reputedly vermin infested. It was demolished in 1911 to make way for the Liberal Club.

In the 1871 census, our parish recorded 303 scholars between the ages of 2 and 16. John Billing, William Davey and Mary Ann Steer are still teachers here, joined by Mary Ann Bate (*71*) and Jane Blake (*60*). The 1871 census lists an unoccupied building referred to as 'Middle Street Schoolroom'. In that census, Middle Street was what we now know as Dolphin Street, and the census entry would indicate it was higher up the street than the Dolphin Inn and Trevan House. Peter Rowe remembers being told when he was a boy that in the early part of the 20th century there used to be an old navigation school opposite Temple Bar where mariners could learn the skills needed at sea. Perhaps this was the unoccupied schoolroom referred to in 1871. John Billing is now shown as the sole resident of 'Fore Street Schoolroom'. It is not possible to tell from the census where this was, but if the data were ledgered up in a logical manner, the entry would indicate it was around the same area as Billings Row. A nearby location could have been in the old Good Intent Fish Cellar opposite Billings Row. This had been disused as a fish cellar for several decades and was likely to have had the space to accommodate the children. It was owned by Anna Maria Agar at Lanhydrock, who had already donated adjacent land for the lifeboat house so would have had a favourable outlook on community projects. The cellar was demolished around 1875 when this spot was chosen as the location for the new school.

National Education Reform leads to our first purpose built school

In the latter half of the 19th century concerns were being expressed about the poor state of education. Industrialists feared the lack of any formal education system would affect Britain's status as the leading world economy, which needed to remain competitive by being at the forefront of manufacture and improvement. The National Education League was formed in 1867 to campaign for non-sectarian education for every child in the country, free of influence by the churches. When the Liberal government returned to power in 1868, William Edward Forster was given the task of producing an education bill. His Elementary Education Act of 1870 laid the foundations for the universal education system we have today. Viewed from modern times, there were a surprising number of objections to the concept. Some were hostile to the whole idea of 'educating the masses', which they felt might make the working classes actually 'think', leading to the prospect of revolt. Others felt state education might give rise to indoctrination. The Church had a vested interest, as it was paid by the government to educate the poor. It is hard not to conclude their objections were more concerned with loss of profits than any desire to improve the bill.

The act provided for elementary education for children between 5 and 12 inclusive, but only from 1880 was attendance made compulsory nationwide. Local administration was the responsibility of an elected school board. Capital funding for building a new school came from government loans, with running costs being met from (1) annual state grants (*affected both by levels of attendance and academic attainment*), (2) a local rate, but also, (3) contributions from parents. This weekly contribution was set by the local school board, with the board paying the fees of children who were poor. In the 1870s, 3-4,000 UK schools were created, or taken over, by these new school boards.

Royal Cornwall Gazette Reports

PORT ISAAC.

A **SCHOOL BOARD FOR ENDELLION**—At a meeting in the vestry-room, Endellion, the Rev. W. Hockin in the chair, it was proposed by Mr. F. Treran, and seconded by the Rev. J. Jones, and carried unanimously, that it is expedient that a **SCHOOL** Board be formed for this parish. Mr. Preston J. Wallis, of Bodmin, the returning officer, was present, and the resolution will be at once communicated to the Education Department. **Endellion** parish includes Port Isaac, with a population of nearly 1,000 inhabitants, which has hitherto been without an efficient **SCHOOL**.

PORT ISAAC.

The tender of Mr. John Oliver, builder, of Bodmin, of £1,860, has been accepted by the St. Endellion School Board for the erection of the **Port Isaac** schools, subject to the approval of the Education Department.

CAMELFORD.

ARCHITECT.—The St. Endellion School Board have appointed Mr. S. Trevail, of Carne, Par station, architect for the schools to be erected at **Port Isaac**.

ENDELLION.

SCHOOL BOARD.—The following gentlemen were nominated on Saturday as candidates for a **SCHOOL** Board:—James Clarke, yeoman; John George, yeoman; Jonathan George, jun., yeoman; Jonathan S. Guy, yeoman; Warwick R. Guy, merchant; Rev. William Hockin, rector; Frederick Trevan, surgeon. As there are two more nominated than can be elected, a poll will take place on Wednesday, 21st instant, unless two retire.



Warwick Richard Guy c1870

The first steps to creating a school board for St. Endellion were reported in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* for 26th September 1874, when a meeting took place in the vestry room chaired by Rev. William Hockin. Doctor Frederick Trevan proposed that it was expedient to form a school board, which was carried unanimously. On 17th October the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* reported seven nominees for the five places; James Clarke, John George, Jonathan George Jun., Warwick Richard Guy, Rev William Hockin and Dr Frederick Trevan, and an election would take place on Wednesday 21st unless two dropped out. In March 1875 the board appointed the respected Cornish architect Sylvanus Trevail to design the new school, and in August 1875 his plans were accepted. The contract was put out to tender, with John Oliver, a builder from Bodmin, winning with his £1,860 quote in October 1875. The contract was signed on 23rd December following Education Department approval. To pay for the building and equipment, the board took out a mortgage with Cornwall Council for a total of £2,400, with the first tranche of £800 on 27th March 1876. A further £800 was drawn down on 17th August and the final £800 on 12th March 1877. On 24th April 1877 Mr Warwick Richard Guy, Chairman of the School Board, formally declared Port Isaac School open and 164 children were admitted, growing to 208 in a matter of weeks (*how did they all fit in!*). At last, Port Isaac had its purpose built school.

Malcolm Lee

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