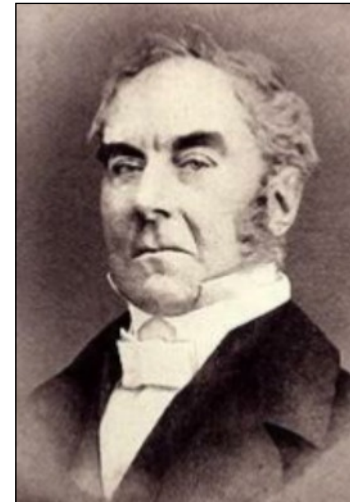


Whilst strolling around the village during the day one cannot but notice the shrill voices of our children at play at our village school. It reminds me of my own happy school days in a similar fine Victorian building on the edge of London.

The Aylburton school building is typically Victorian in character and substantially built. It was Grade II listed in March 1988. Both the school and schoolhouse were constructed in rock-faced sandstone with pale sandstone dressings. A date stone records the year the school was opened in 1869. This is an almost unspoiled building which groups with the Church of St. Mary opposite.



The building of the school was largely due to the philanthropy of William Hiley Bathurst who was an Anglican clergyman and hymnist. During the early years of his ministry he composed hymns and put to verse a large portion of the psalms. These were published in 1830 entitled *Psalms and Hymns for Public and Private Use*. Nearly all of the 150 psalms and all of the 206 hymns in the volume are his. He also translated Virgil from Latin to English in 1849. He was present at the school opening in 1869 and left ‘facilities for the conveyance and endowment of sites for schools’ in his will. He died in 1877 but Charles Bathurst (1836-1907) and his wife Mary, continued his philanthropic work in Lydney and Aylburton.



William Hiley Bathurst

Unfortunately early records have been destroyed but from the outset the school had close ties with the church with the vicar calling the daily register. Early records indicate a continuing problem of absences and sickness both amongst the pupils and teachers. These resulted from diphtheria (causing the seventh death from this in the year 1905), measles, whooping cough, influenza, chicken-pox, scarlet fever and impetigo. The head teacher at the time (who died on the premises in 1913) was paid the grand sum of £110 per annum.

The school wasn’t immune from the effects of the First World War. Collections were made for Belgian refugees and five children were taken into the school. The school coped with fuel shortages and other aspects of austerity and wounded soldiers often visited the school. Discipline was not withheld however with one pupil receiving ‘three strikes on the hand and two on the seat’!

The inter war years showed a steady improvement in the health of children with regular dental and sanitary inspections but the usual diseases still persisted.

At the onset of the Second World War the pupils were ‘enlisted’ in the war effort by gardening and gathering blackberries for example. Evacuees from London were enrolled in the school. Teachers were concerned about the impact of local air raids on the pupils but it appears they for the most part slept undisturbed. The only casualties were by ‘friendly’ action; an American army car killed an eight year old evacuee in the High Street and later, on almost exactly the same spot, two lads were killed by American army vehicles. The road was out of bounds thereafter.

Throughout all of these years a close association was evident with the Bathurst family who supported the school in so many ways.



Eric J. Rice

Note: I am obliged to Pam Bendall, the secretary, for lending me copies of the school records.