



A photograph dating from the 1860s showing the Town Hall (now the Masonic Hall Building) on the left and the original Town Boys' School below Holy Trinity Church on the right. The Corporation Upper School is the building with three chimneys.

THE CORPORATION UPPER SCHOOL

A Scheme of the Chancery Court dated 14th May 1825 ended thirty-seven years of litigation between the freeholders of Sutton Coldfield and the Warden and Society (the self-appointed body which acted as the Town Council or Corporation from the time of King Henry VIII's Charter of 1528 until it was replaced by an elected Borough Council in 1886). During the course of the litigation a sum of over £42,000 had been accumulated and invested by the Court in 3% Consolidated Stock, following an injunction in 1792 which effectively prevented the Corporation from managing its own financial affairs until the disputes had been resolved; the disputes related mainly to the alleged mismanagement of the Park and the unlawful granting of leases by the Corporation to its own members. The Scheme established Charity Schools in Great Sutton (the Town centre around Mill Street, Coleshill Street and the High Street), Hill and Walmley. More schools were opened in the next seventy-five years, so that by the end of the century there were thirteen schools: Boys' Schools in the Town and at Hill and Wylde Green, Girls' Schools in the Town and at Boldmere, Hill and Walmley, and Infant Schools in the Town and at Maney, Boldmere, Hill, Roughley and Walmley. The Boys' and Girls' Schools were elementary, or primary, schools for children aged from six to twelve. The only secondary school in Sutton was Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, founded in 1527 with its own board of Trustees, or Governors, independent of the Corporation, but the Scheme authorised the Corporation to set aside £50 a year to assist up to twenty-four parish boys to attend the Grammar School.

Charles Barker was the Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School from 1817 to 1842. In 1819 he put forward the proposal that some of the money that was accumulating in the hands of the Chancery Court should be used towards the establishment of elementary schools in Sutton. He had an ulterior motive for this proposal. The land in Lichfield Road on which the Grammar School had been built in 1728 belonged to the Corporation, having been bought by them for £100 specifically for that purpose, and in 1730 it was leased to the then Headmaster, Paul Lowe, for his lifetime at £5 per year, with a stipulation that if his successor paid £100 to his estate (he was appointed for life and it was assumed that he would die in post) the lease would continue for the next five hundred years in favour of future Headmasters, at the same rent, provided they each paid their predecessor £100. It was a condition of the lease that Lowe and his successors should teach writing and arithmetic, as far as the first four rules (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division), to a class of twelve parish boys under the age of fourteen, and should teach English to a similar class, without charging any fees. Lowe died in 1764, after forty years in post, and was succeeded by William Webb, who paid £100 to Mary Lowe, Paul Lowe's widow and executrix. Webb remained in post for a remarkable fifty-three years, dying in 1817, and was succeeded by Charles Barker, who duly paid £100 to Webb's daughter and executrix, Anne Webb.

Barker was not a dedicated teacher; on the contrary, he wanted to do the minimum that was required of him. The Grammar School had no constitution beyond Bishop Vesey's 'will or ordinance' dated 14th May 1527 ('will' meaning wishes, not a testamentary disposition), which referred to the School Trustees finding "a fit person to teach grammar and rhetoric in the parish of Sutton". At that date grammar meant Latin, not English, grammar and rhetoric entailed speaking in Latin; three hundred years later the legal definition of these terms had not changed, although there was by then little demand for a classical education among the middle and lower classes in Sutton. Barker stubbornly refused to widen the curriculum offered by the Grammar School to make it more popular, and he was hoping that if the Corporation established its own primary schools he would be relieved of the responsibility of teaching twenty-four parish boys reading, writing and arithmetic (the three Rs). In

fact, he did not personally teach these subjects, but he resented having to pay an usher, or assistant master, to do so, which he believed lowered the tone of the School. He had no fixed salary, but received the rents from the School's estates, which in 1818 consisted of five houses and 136 acres of land producing an annual rent of £321. Out of this sum he had to pay all the expenses relating to the School. This arrangement meant that the fewer pupils there were, the smaller was the sum paid for assistant teachers and the greater was the profit for Barker's own pocket. And the less time he spent in teaching classics to the foundation scholars, the more time he had for his other interests. According to Roger Lea, "Barker lived like a country gentleman, using the school as his stately home, managing the school lands and involving himself in local politics". He was appointed to the Sutton Corporation in 1833 and was elected as Warden in 1836 and again in 1837, a post which entailed acting as a Justice of the Peace and as the Town's Coroner. He was also an enthusiastic huntsman, and fond of writing poetry.

Contrary to Barker's hopes, the 1825 Chancery Court Scheme did not relieve him of the requirement to teach parish boys, a term which implies working class boys, as distinct from the sons of professional men who received a classical education at the Grammar School. In fact, as we have seen, the Scheme provided assistance towards school fees for twenty-four parish boys. The teaching of grammar and rhetoric was free under Bishop Vesey's will or ordinance, but modest fees were charged for other subjects taken by the foundation scholars. The reference to twenty-four parish boys in both the 1730 lease and the 1825 Scheme is somewhat confusing; on the face of it the same set of boys are referred to, and yet the lease specifically says that the boys are to be taught at the Headmaster's "own costs and charges", and the Scheme gives the boys grants towards school fees. The distinction seems to be that the boys admitted under the terms of the lease were taught only the three Rs and the boys given grants were foundation scholars receiving lessons in grammar and rhetoric (free) and also paying for lessons in the three Rs.

There is clear evidence that Barker's predecessors taught English, history, modern languages, book-keeping and religious studies; however, Barker was only interested in the classics. Zachariah Twamley, who was admitted as a pupil of the School, aged seven, in 1780, wrote a *History of Sutton Coldfield* in 1855 in which he states that Barker turned away the day pupils of the English Department except a few who also learnt the classics. As the Scheme failed to affect Barker's obligation to teach parish boys, he looked around for other ways to rid himself of this burden. Fortunately for him, an opportunity soon arose. Before the new Grammar School was built in Lichfield Road, the schoolhouse was at the top of Mill Street on land adjacent to the Holy Trinity churchyard. In 1828 it became known that the Corporation wanted to increase the size of the churchyard and the obvious way to achieve this objective was for them to buy the old Grammar School land from the School Trustees, but Barker came up with the suggestion that the Trustees should give the land to the Corporation in exchange for the freehold interest in the new School site. This exchange suited both parties as it enabled the churchyard to be doubled in size without the Corporation having to pay for it, apart from the loss of the rent of £5 per year, and it gave the Trustees absolute ownership of a substantial property, having given up land which had little commercial value. But the biggest winner was Barker himself; the 1730 lease merged in the freehold interest and ceased to have any legal effect, and as a consequence Barker no longer needed to teach twenty-four parish boys the three Rs.

Even before completion of the exchange in 1830, the Corporation were aware of Barker's reluctance to teach parish boys, and they still wanted to establish some form of secondary education in the Town for boys who were not classically minded. At a meeting on 11th July 1829 the Warden and Society resolved that the members of the Inclosure Committee should "forthwith make arrangements for

taking the English School that is being given up by Mr Barker into their own management”, and on 1st January 1830 they resolved that the Committee should “make arrangements with Mr Percy for the temporary management of the School to be carried on at the expence of the Corporation”.

Richard Percy had been employed by Barker as an assistant master at the Grammar School to teach writing, accounts or book-keeping (in other words, simple arithmetic) and drawing. He is first named in the School records in 1826, but he probably started in 1818, when the previous teacher, Edward Parnell, who had been at the School for thirty-eight years, resigned when he realised that his views on elementary education clashed with those of the new Headmaster. It appears that Percy left the Grammar School in 1829 and was immediately employed by the Corporation to run a secondary school on their behalf, which was initially referred to as the Corporation Free School. The Corporation's accounts for the year ended 2nd November 1830 show that Percy was paid a salary of £10 per quarter, the first payment being made on 27th March, which suggests that he started in early January. (The Corporation's accounting year ended on 2nd November, All Souls Day, because this was the date in each year that a new Warden was elected.) At a meeting on 4th September 1830 the Corporation decided that a School House should be provided for the Corporation Free School and the Warden (Rev James Packwood, curate at Holy Trinity Church) and the Inclosure Committee were asked to ascertain whether the house belonging to Mr Nevill, where Percy lived, could be acquired or any other suitable property found. There is no further mention of the subject in the Corporation minutes during the next two years, and presumably Richard Percy continued operating from Mr Nevill's house.

It appears that either Nevill was unwilling to sell his property to the Corporation, or they decided that it was not suitable for their purposes in the long term, as at a meeting held on 10th December 1832 it was resolved “that the Cottage by the Churchyard lately occupied by Russell be put into a sufficient state under the superintendence of Mr Nicholson for the receiving Mr Percy and the Boys attending the School”. Robert Pooley Nicholson was a member of the Corporation from 1804 to 1836 and Warden in 1818 and 1819. He was a carpenter by trade, which explains why he was given the job of supervising the building work. In addition to the property they acquired from the Grammar School Trustees, the Corporation also owned other land between Mill Street and Blind Lane (Trinity Hill), on which there were some twenty or so houses, one of which had recently been vacated by the tenant Russell, giving the Corporation the opportunity to move the school to one of their own properties.

Richard Percy remained in post at £40 per year, although the Corporation were somewhat erratic in paying his salary. Their accounts show that he was paid as follows:

27/3/1830	£10
17/8/1830	£10
22/11/1830	£10
18/5/1831	£20
9/9/1831	£10
29/10/1831	£10
29/11/1832	£55
28/5/1833	£25
11/4/1834	£20
28/10/1834	£20

The work required to adapt Russell's cottage for the purposes of a schoolroom were duly carried out, but it appears that there was still dissatisfaction with this arrangement, as by 1834 the Corporation had decided that a brand-new school needed to be built. On 8th September 1834 they resolved “that

a Committee consisting of Mr Hacket [Francis Beynon Hacket of Moor Hall] the Rector [Rev William Riland Bedford] Mr Barker [the Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, in his first year as a Corporation member] Mr Oughton [John Oughton of Holland House] Mr Packwood and the Warden [George Browne of the Blade Mill, Sutton Park] be appointed for the purpose of fixing upon a scite [an obsolescent spelling of 'site'] for the erection of a room for the School now conducted by Mr Percy and that they be authorized to consult some competent person upon the subject of such erection and report to the next meeting of the Corporation and that they be empowered to treat with some one for a temporary school room the present building being unfit for the purpose".

The new Committee acted more promptly than the Inclosure Committee had and their report dated 6th October 1834 was as follows: "This Committee having taken the opinion of Mr Hill the Architect consider the situation now occupied by Collage and Grove to be the most eligible they can at present find for building an Upper Corporation School and they recommend the Corporation to proceed as soon as circumstances will allow to erect that building on that spot. The Committee report that the alterations and repairs just made in the House now occupied for the above purpose prevent the necessity of having any other School room supposing that the building of the new school will not be delayed beyond next spring." Daniel Rowlinson Hill (1809-57) was a Birmingham architect with offices in Union Passage, who later became the Birmingham borough architect and the first President of the Birmingham Architectural Society. Amongst many other public buildings, he was responsible for designing St. James's Church in Mere Green Road (1834/35) and St. John's Church in Walmley (1845). The Committee considered that provided the new building was completed within six months, there was no need to look for a third temporary building, as the work carried out at Russell's cottage was adequate in the short term. The Corporation resolved to adopt the Committee's recommendation and authorised it to carry the proposal into execution. From now onwards the school was referred to as the Corporation Upper School.

The Committee also recommended that there should be "a free class consisting of 12 boys to be elected by the Corporation and that each boy pay the sum of Three pence per week in lieu of all payments hitherto made for fire, sweeping etc. And that the school be open to all boys resident in the parish at a payment of nine pence per week and that no boy shall be considered qualified for the school who cannot read a verse in the Bible". In other words, twelve boys would receive free education but pay threepence a week for heating and cleaning the schoolroom and the other pupils would pay an extra sixpence a week for tuition. No hint was given as to the criteria for electing pupils to the twelve free places.

Progress in building a new school was slower than envisaged. The site chosen was land belonging to the Corporation on Church Hill off Mill Street, approximately where the Sons of Rest now stands. Mr Hill submitted his plan of the school to the Corporation in March 1835 and they thanked him "for gratuitously preparing and sending the same" and referred the plan to the Committee. The Committee reported to the Corporation on 14th April, mentioning the cost of the project for the first time: "The Committee having taken every means in their power to ascertain the most suitable place and the probable expences of building the Corporation upper school recommend the Corporation to allow a sum of money not exceeding £300 for that purpose and to authorize the Committee to proceed upon the plan now laid before them marked A [Mr Hill's plan] with such alterations as may be necessary to bring it within that sum." However, the Corporation declined to approve the plan as they had been advised "that certain rights of road exist across the ground proposed by the Committee to be built on" and they resolved that "another plan be adopted according to which the school shall be built lengthways from the Church yard towards Mill Street" and authorised the Committee "to have such

plan and estimate prepared and to proceed immediately with building the school on the understanding that the expence of the school room shall not exceed £300". The Corporation also suggested that "a clear space of 21 feet be left between the opposite houses and the School" as they might wish "a Master's house to be built at a future time at the back [of the new school] on the ground now occupied by Mrs Brentnall's house". Mrs S. Brentnall was a stationer and bookseller with a shop in Mill Street, leased from Emmanuel College Cambridge, known as the Stationery Depot.

As soon as the building work commenced, an objection was raised by some local residents. The minutes of a Corporation meeting held on 17th June record that "the Warden having submitted to this Meeting a memorial signed by certain Inhabitants on the subject of the School now building on the Church Hill Resolved after a most attentive review of all the circumstances that the Warden and Society do not think themselves justified in abandoning or delaying the progress of the present building". No details of the memorial are given, but it is likely that the grounds of objection were that the Corporation should not be spending public money on building a new secondary school when the Grammar School with a considerable income was available for this purpose and was by no means full to capacity. No doubt the signatories to the memorial were the same people who in 1834 had presented a petition to the Grammar School Trustees asking them to widen the curriculum ("to make the School an efficient one for a general English education in addition to Latin and Greek, and put it on such a footing as will give general satisfaction and make it as profitable to the Parish at large as the very handsome endowment imperatively calls for").

The Corporation's accounts for 1835 and 1836 show that £158.6.8d. was paid by six instalments to a Mr Satchwell for building the Upper School. Other payments were made to various workmen, namely Richard Brown, a glazier (£3.4.2d.), Thomas Whitworth (£29.7.0d.), Mr Pratt (£4.5.1d.) and Mr Watton (£2.14.2d.). The architect Mr D.R. Hill was paid £129.11.2d. by four instalments, including £20.4.10d. for "extra work". The total cost was £327.8.3d., almost ten per cent over budget.

Having built the new school, the Warden and Society somewhat belatedly resolved on 8th February 1836 "that the Committee of the upper Corporation School be requested to Report as to the best method of carrying on the business of that School". The Committee's report dated 2nd March 1836 was as follows:

"Mr Percy having signified his intention to resign upon a retiring pension of £25 per annum the Committee recommend that the same be allowed to Mr Percy to be made up by deducting £15 per annum from the stipend hitherto paid to the Master and adding £10 from the Corporation Funds.

That an advertisement for a new Master be immediately inserted in Birmingham newspapers.

That the Committee be empowered to treat with all applicants for the situation and that the following terms be observed

The Masters Salary to be £25 per annum

That he be allowed to take boarders

That he shall instruct a free class of twelve boys, receiving from each the sum of 2s./6d. only per quarter for the expences of firing sweeping &c. and that this Class shall be elected by the Corporation

That the School shall be open to all boys residing in the parish at a payment of 10s./- per quarter and that no one shall be admitted into the School till he can read a verse of the Bible.

The Committee recommend the corporation to provide a House for the Master as soon as they are able."

The proposed charges reduced the free pupils' annual payment for heating and cleaning from thirteen to ten shillings and increased the other pupils' payment from £1.19.0d. to £2 p.a., whilst the

schoolmaster's basic salary was cut from £40 to £25 with the addition of the school fees, the total of which would vary according to the number of pupils, plus whatever profit he could make from taking in boarders. The Corporation accepted all the Committee's recommendations except that they wanted to see the applications for the vacancy and the candidates' testimonials and to choose the new master themselves, rather than leaving it to the Committee. They also approved the wording of the advertisement to be inserted in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* and *The Thursday Advertiser* until the end of March.

Despite the uncertain salary there were several applicants and at a meeting of the Warden and Society held on 11th April Mr Timothy Walton, the Master of St. Thomas's School in Birmingham, was unanimously elected. The Deputy Steward, Thomas Holbeche, was instructed to inform Walton of his appointment and to "send a circular post paid to each Candidate informing him that his Testimonials are left at Mr Woods Stationers High St. Birm.m till sent for and that Mr Whitehouse and Mr Downes be requested to send an account of their expences in coming to Sutton on the second instant". It was subsequently agreed that both Mr Whitehouse and Rev James Downes should be paid two guineas (£2.2.0d.) "for his expences in coming here when requested by the Corporation". This suggests that there was a short-list of three candidates who were selected for an interview. St. Thomas's Schools had been built in Bath Row Birmingham in 1831, consisting of separate Boys', Girls' and Infants' Departments, affording accommodation for seven hundred children.

A new Committee was appointed for the management of the Corporation Upper School consisting of the Warden (William Edmund Cradock Hartopp, later Sir William, 3rd Baronet), Francis Beynon Hacket, Rev William Riland Bedford, Charles Barker, John Oughton, Rev James Packwood, George Browne and Joseph Webster of Penns Hall. This was the same as the previous Committee with the addition of Hartopp and Webster. On 13th June 1836 the Warden and Society resolved "that permission be granted the Boys of the Secondary School to assemble in the new upper Corporation School on the Sundays under such regulations as the Committee of that School may think proper to make". This implies that a Sunday School was started at the new school, which no doubt the two clergymen on the Committee were keen to see established.

Three months later the Corporation were still discussing building work needed at the new school: "Resolved that the Corporation upper School be coloured White That a roof be put over the Coal House That spouts be made to carry off the waste water and that a Holiday be granted from Wednesday Eve till Monday morning for the purpose of putting these resolutions into execution That Mr Browne Mr Barker Mr Oughton and Mr Bedford undertake the superintendence of the works." (Minute 26th September 1836).

The Committee gave the following report to the Warden and Society on 10th October 1836: "In presenting the first report since the building was erected and the School established under the care of a new Master the Committee have to express their approbation of his method of teaching and conducting the School. Thirty boys have been admitted a number about sufficient to produce to the Master that amount of income which the Corporation led him at first to expect And it is believed that the number will increase as the Inhabitants become more aware of the benefits to be derived from the School and more accustomed to the rules which the Corporation have formed for conducting it. The Committee think it right to notice That some dissatisfaction has been stated to prevail among the parents at their being required to make the quarterly payments in advance: but the Committee are of opinion that it is advisable still to persevere in this regulation, as it appears to them to be the only mode of ensuring to the Master the proper payment of his income while it cannot occasion any real

inconvenience to the parents or form any just ground of complaint. Respecting the Fines the Committee recommend an alteration it having been found that the present fine is not sufficient to enforce the regular attendance of the boys. It is therefore proposed to add the following rule When a boy has been fined six times in the same quarter, all future fines for that boy during the same quarter shall be four pence and the Fine shall be again doubled after every six absences till the expiration of that quarter. Absence on a half holiday to be considered as an entire day's absence and fined accordingly. The Committee also recommend that a sum not exceeding Three pounds per annum be allowed to the Master for Coals and cleaning the School." All these recommendations were approved. Assuming that the thirty boys attending the school included the twelve who paid no school fees, Mr Walton's annual income would be £65 (£2 X 20 + £25).

Charles Barker was appointed as the Warden in November 1836. He may have had mixed feelings about the apparent success of the Corporation Upper School, on the one hand thinking that it positively relieved him of any responsibility to teach parish boys, but on the other seeing the number of Corporation secondary pupils increase whilst the Grammar School numbers were in a downwards spiral and the Grammar School and he as its Headmaster were becoming extremely unpopular in the Town.

There was still public disquiet not only at having to pay the school fees in advance, but also at having to pay any fees at all, especially as the Corporation's elementary schools were free. The matter was raised at a meeting of the Warden and Society held on 13th March 1837, but there were differing opinions: "It being moved by Mr Webster and seconded by Mr William Perkins [a solicitor, the son of Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins of Moat House] That the cordial thanks of this meeting be presented to the Committee of the Corporation Upper School by whose exertions the School was established and by whose able and assiduous attentions it has been brought to its present state of usefulness and that the Corporation be requested to consider whether it is not now possible to reduce altogether the Fees now paid by the Scholars for tuition Also that they be requested to consider what further advantage consistent with their revenue and the spirit of their Charter can be afforded to the School." However, the Rector and William Hartopp proposed and seconded an amendment to this proposition: "That it is the opinion of this Corporation that it would not be advantageous to the Upper School to reduce altogether the Fees paid by the Scholars for tuition but the Corporation will be happy from time to time as their revenues increase to take into consideration what further advantages can be granted to the School." There was a majority in favour of the amendment, and it appears that during a lengthy discussion Webster and Perkins came round to the more conservative majority view, as the minutes go on to say "that the Corporation having attentively reconsidered the regulations of the Upper School with a view to obviating if possible the objections which have been raised to the amount of the Fees and the manner of their payment are unanimously of opinion

1st That in order to make this school an effective place of education for the sons of the Middle Classes in the Parish it is absolutely necessary that fees should be paid by the Parents

2^{ndly} That the fees at present required are as low as they can possibly be paid with advantage to those classes for whom the School is instituted And that the payment in advance is essential to the Masters Interest as well as to the regularity of the School."

The meeting went on to discuss the basis on which boys were elected for free places, and agreed "that the Committee of the Upper School be requested in filling up the vacancies that may occur in the class of Twelve Boys to make the Election from those boys who have been in the School at least 12 months". From this it appears that it was now the Committee, not the Corporation as previously agreed, who made the election. It might seem strange that the length of time at the school was a qualification for free tuition, rather than financial need.

The Committee rewrote the school regulations in the light of the recent decisions and in July the Corporation ordered the printing of two hundred copies, but a further amendment was soon required, as there was further public objection to the system of fines for non-attendance. There was little justification for such a system, seeing that attendance was entirely voluntary, and it was particularly irksome to local farmers whose sons were in the habit of skipping school when their help was wanted with potato-picking and similar seasonal jobs on the land. The objections were so strong that on 14th August the Corporation recommended the Committee to suspend the rule respecting fines “for the present”, but four months later they confirmed the previous system of fines.

Another problem came to light over the summer of 1837, as explained in the minutes of a meeting held on 11th September, at which it was resolved “that Mr Hill be informed that the work at the Upper Corporation School done under his superintendence is already in a state of dilapidation, and that the Corporation are of opinion that it is incumbent on him to see that the same be put into proper repair forthwith”. In coming to this opinion it does not appear that the Corporation investigated whether it was the architect or the builder who was at fault, or, indeed, whether competitive quotes for the building work were obtained and choosing the lowest was a false economy. Nothing further is minuted about this potential dispute, but Mr Hill was to be employed on subsequent occasions.

Timothy Walton resigned as the Upper School Master with effect from Christmas 1837, and at a meeting held on 13th December the Corporation considered a short-list of three candidates, Philip Puleston of Cannock, Samuel Phillips of Emscote Lodge Kenilworth and a Mr Trower of Atherstone. According to the minutes of the meeting, “the poll being taken the Votes were found equal in favor of Mr Puleston and Mr Phillips And a fresh election was proceeded with whereupon Mr Puleston and Mr Phillips only were proposed and the poll being taken the Majority appeared in favor of Mr Puleston and he was thereupon declared duly elected”. As in the previous election, the unsuccessful candidates were advised that their testimonials were left at Mr Woods Stationer High Street Birmingham “till sent for”, and Phillips and Trower were “paid two pounds each to cover their expences in coming to Sutton on Monday last”. Mr Puleston was to be paid the same basic salary of £6.5.0d. per quarter plus a quarterly fuel allowance of fifteen shillings. At the same meeting the Corporation resolved “that certain prizes be given to the Boys educated in the Corporation Upper School as reward for proficiency and learning, regularity in attendance and for general good conduct And that it be referred to the Committee to draw up a Scheme for that purpose”. A total of five pounds a year was fixed for these prizes. A prize for good attendance seemed a better inducement than a fine for non-attendance.

With the appointment of a new Master, the Corporation decided to take steps to provide him with a house, as had previously been recommended. As it happened, they owned a convenient and unoccupied property on the corner of Church Hill and Mill Street, the old workhouse. The workhouse had been built at a cost of £400 in 1739, following the passing of the 1723 Workhouse Test Act which required every parish to establish its own workhouse. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act brought about a radical change, in an attempt to bring some uniformity of practice across the country. Parishes were merged into groups called ‘unions’, to be run by Boards of Guardians. Sutton, Minworth, Curdworth and Wishaw were taken over by the Aston Union and in 1837 the inmates of the Sutton workhouse were transferred to the workhouse in Erdington. The Aston Union Board of Guardians, who had acquired ownership of the Sutton workhouse, put it up for sale by auction and it was bought by Sir Francis Lawley of Canwell Hall for £735. Sir Francis had no interest in owning a disused workhouse and he had agreed with the Warden and Society, who were keen to re-acquire the property,

that he would exchange the workhouse for some land in Slade Lane and Camp Road near his Canwell estate, which the Warden and Society had been allocated under the Sutton Coldfield Enclosure Award. On 12th March 1838 the Corporation resolved “that the School Committee be requested to prepare plans for the conversion of the Workhouse into a House for the School Master”, with power to consult an architect. Just a fortnight later, the minute book records that “the report of the Committee upon the plans for the conversion of the workhouse having been read and the drawings prepared by Mr Hill having been inspected it was Resolved That the Committee be authorized to proceed in making the alterations proposed, it being understood that the whole expense inside and out do not exceed three hundred pounds”. The 1837/38 accounts show that on 25th October 1838 £301.1.9d. was paid to Thomas Smith, a builder, for carrying out the alterations, a further £14.15.0d. was paid to William Hollis for part of the work, and Mr Hill was paid £10 on account, with a balance of £24.2.6d. paid in the following year. These payments totalled £349.19.3d., well over budget. It will be noted that the alterations to the workhouse cost considerably more than building the new schoolroom. While the workhouse was being adapted for Puleston’s occupation, he had to find somewhere else to live and the Corporation agreed to pay him £5 a quarter as an “allowance for rent”.

Puleston moved into his new home at Christmas 1838 and in the following April he applied to the corporation for reimbursement of the window tax and rates that he had been assessed to pay. Window tax had been introduced in 1696 and was abolished in 1851; it consisted of two parts, a variable tax based on the value of the property and a fixed rate per window for properties with more than seven windows. The church rate was set by the churchwardens in each parish and levied on land and houses to pay for the expenses of the parish church; it was abolished in 1868. The poor rate was a tax on property levied in each parish to provide poor relief, which from 1834 was collected by the Poor Law Guardians; it merged with the general rate in 1925. The Corporation’s accounts show that Mr Puleston was paid £7.14.6d. for rates and taxes in 1839/40 and £9.19.4d. in 1840/41.

Philip Puleston gave notice of his resignation in August 1841 to take effect at Christmas. The Warden and Society met on 19th November to appoint his successor and George Meaby was unanimously elected. On this occasion there was a short-list of six candidates, and Mr Potts, Mr Soden, Mr Horton, Mr Hill and Mr Dufford were paid one pound or one guinea to cover their expenses in coming to Sutton. Puleston put in a claim to be reimbursed “for fixtures and other things put up by him in the Upper School House” and he was paid five pounds. The Corporation also requested the Committee “to make the proper arrangements for Mr Meaby succeeding Mr Puleston in the possession of the house and School room and to do any repairs which may be necessary”. Messrs W. Seaton & Co. Paper Hanging Manufacturers of 40 New Street Birmingham were paid £2.19.0d. for wallpaper for the Upper School House in January 1842, and six months later Mr J.S. Holbeche was paid £30.7.2d. for repairs and decorating the house.

George Meaby was not slow in making demands of the Corporation. On Christmas Eve 1841 the Warden and Society met and resolved “that Mr Meaby have the Garden at the Blabbs lately occupied by the Widow Brooks with the Upper School House”. This garden does not appear to be near the Upper School House, as the Blabbs was an area of land on the south side of Rectory Road stretching as far as the bottom of Reddicap Hill. In May 1842 Meaby asked for a salary increase of £20 from £25 to £45, which was agreed a month later “as a temporary allowance”. The reason for this request and its ready acceptance is not given; perhaps the pupil numbers were down, thereby reducing Meaby’s income. In September of the same year Meaby requested “the enclosing a portion of the Church Hill”, which was also agreed. This, presumably, gave Meaby a piece of garden ground nearer his house than the garden at the Blabbs.

The Corporation had continued paying Richard Percy a quarterly pension, or gratuity, of £6.5.0d., but the last payment was for half a year in 1843, so it must be assumed that he died at this time. Another death, of more consequence to the future of the Upper School, was that of Charles Barker, the Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School. As a direct consequence of Barker's policy of teaching only the classics, there was only one pupil at the School in 1840, William Felton the son of the Master of the Sutton Town School. In the same year the Grammar Schools Act (jointly sponsored by Sir John Eardley Eardley Wilmot, one of the two MPs for North Warwickshire and also a Trustee of the Grammar School) was passed, which stipulated that no new headmaster was to be appointed to a grammar school unless the Chancery Court had first approved a Scheme regulating the school's curriculum. Any grammar school could apply for a new Scheme with the existing headmaster's consent, but Barker would not entertain any such idea; he had looked into the law and written a memorandum of two court cases, which reads: "Grammar Schools. Decided that when a School is instituted as a Free Grammar School without more it is a School to teach the elements of the learned languages. Atty Genl v Hartley. The Case of Leeds Grammar School [1805] -- a Petition to extend it to instruction in French German etc for benefit of trading & mercantile Young Persons refused to be complied with. Atty Genl v Whiteley." Barker had been appointed for life and at the age of forty-seven he might have continued as the Headmaster for another thirty years. It is doubtful that the School would have survived so long with Barker in charge, and it was therefore fortuitous (for the School) that two years later, on 17th October 1842, he fell off his horse and was found dead in the road. The jury at the Coroner's inquest returned a verdict of "Act of God".

As a Scheme of the Chancery Court had to be obtained before a new headmaster could be appointed to the Grammar School, Barker's removal from the scene opened up new possibilities for secondary education in the Town. A meeting of the parish inhabitants was convened on 4th November 1842 at which the following resolution was passed: "This meeting begs to suggest to the Corporation whether great advantage would not arise from the Corporation Upper School being placed under the same control with the Grammar School and from henceforth forming part of that Establishment under a scheme of Education to be approved by the Court of Chancery so that the boys who attend the Corporation Upper School may for the future receive their education at as small an expence as those who attend the Grammar School." At a meeting on 14th November the Corporation resolved that they were "willing to concur with the Trustees of the Free Grammar School in carrying out an extended Scheme of Education in that institution and although they are inclined to think that advantages would arise from the Corporation Upper School being placed under the same control as the Grammar School yet they fear that the Act of Parliament passed for improving the condition and extending the benefit of Grammar Schools will not enable them to effect that object".

A copy of this resolution was sent to the Grammar School Trustees who agreed to confer with a deputation from the Corporation on the subject. The Corporation appointed the Rector, William Hartopp and Thomas Holbeche as a small committee to meet the Grammar School Trustees and "to intimate to them that if an Undermaster be appointed they will be willing to assist in promoting an object they consider is desirable by providing a residence for such master". The offer to provide a second master's house was on condition that the Grammar School Trustees agreed to amalgamate with the Corporation Upper School. Holbeche (1772-1848) was an attorney who had been a member of the Corporation from 1796 to 1807, Warden in 1797 and 1798, and the Corporation's Deputy Steward from 1825 to 1836; he was reappointed as a Corporation member in November 1842. The meeting between representatives of the two bodies took place, and the Grammar School's response was somewhat tersely expressed in a letter dated 3rd December signed by C.B. Adderley, Chairman:

“The Trustees of Sutton Coldfield Grammar School beg to acknowledge the proposition sent to them by their Deputation and to say in reply that they do not feel themselves authorized to appoint a Second Master to the School”. This was an odd response, since the whole purpose of the required Chancery Court Scheme was the widening of the curriculum, which would inevitably necessitate more than one teacher. Charles Bowyer Adderley (1814-1905) of Hams Hall was a Trustee of the Grammar School for sixty-two years from 1839 to 1901; he was a Conservative MP for Staffordshire from 1841 until he was created Baron Norton and elevated to the House of Lords in 1878, having held various ministerial posts under Lord Derby and Benjamin Disraeli.

There was then another Parish Meeting, which passed a resolution “that this Meeting request that the Corporation will further communicate with the Trustees and in addition to the House will offer further aid in order to induce them to appoint a second Master”. The Corporation met on 12th December to consider this resolution and before offering any further inducement they wanted to know why the Trustees declined to appoint a second master, in particular whether it was “in consequence of their supposing that they have not the power to make such appointment or because they feel that they have not sufficient funds to enable them to make it”. When no reply to this query was forthcoming, the Corporation assumed that the Trustees were concerned about funding and threw out a hint that they were prepared to make some contribution to a second master’s salary.

While these discussions were in progress, the Grammar School Trustees were pressing ahead with drawing up new rules and regulations to form the basis of a Chancery Court Scheme and with appointing a new Headmaster, although the appointment could not be confirmed until the Scheme had been approved. Charles Adderley wrote to Richard Sadler, who had been appointed as the Trustees’ Treasurer (later called Clerk to the Governors), after a particularly unsatisfactory meeting with the Corporation representatives, to say that at first he was in favour of amalgamating the two schools under two masters, but “as the Corporation do not lay out the whole upper school income in such a project, I think bidding up – first offering the house and then throwing out expectations that £10 £20 or £25 might be added – was too auctioneering a proceeding, and it only remained for us to act independently as well as we could”.

The Trustees took counsel’s opinion on the draft Scheme to be presented to the Chancery Court. The barrister Hon Daniel Finch (1789-1868), son of Heneage Finch 4th Earl of Aylesford and High Steward of Sutton Coldfield from 1769 to 1812, advised that “it will most unquestionably be better on the whole that the Corporation should keep open their School inasmuch as it will keep a class of boys from the Grammar School who are much better away”. The Trustees concurred with this advice, in the belief that the Grammar School would not be so attractive to the professional classes if it also took pupils of a lower social class. It is relevant to note that none of the Trustees lived in Sutton, but were members of the Warwickshire or Staffordshire landed gentry, most of whom took little part and had little interest in the School’s affairs and rarely attended meetings.

By early 1843 the Corporation had more or less given up any hope of merging the two schools, passing a resolution on 13th January, which merely thanked the Trustees “for the trouble which they have taken in drawing up the rules for the Government of that Institution”, and expressed “their satisfaction that the Trustees have provided for the appointment of a Second Master”. The new rules stated that the School “shall be considered as a grammar School for the instruction of scholars in the classics and in religion, according to the principles of the Established Church, but that the scholars shall also be instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic, mathematics, algebra, geography, English composition, general literature, and ancient and modern history, sacred and profane”. French, German and other

modern languages, and the arts and sciences could be taught as extras. The School was open to boys between the ages of eight and eighteen who were able to read and write and had been instructed in the first four rules of arithmetic. School fees (for subjects other than the classics which technically remained free) were fixed at ten shillings per quarter for boys who lived in Sutton. An undermaster was to be appointed by the Headmaster at a salary of not less than £100 p.a. plus a quarter of the school fees, the Headmaster to receive the rents from the School's estates plus three quarters of the school fees, out of which he had to pay all expenses, including the undermaster's salary. The Corporation became resigned to continuing to run their Upper School.

Once these details became known, George Meaby decided to apply for the position of undermaster at the Grammar School and he asked the Corporation to provide him with a reference. On 13th March 1843 they agreed the following testimonial: "Mr Meaby having been the Master of the Corporation Upper School for upwards of twelve months the Corporation have much pleasure in stating that they have every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which the School has been conducted by him and with the progress and improvement of the Scholars in the different branches of education and especially in the study of English Grammar Arithmetic Geography and History." Mealy was unsuccessful in his application; the new Headmaster of the Grammar School, James Eccleston, appointed a Mr J. Mayland as his undermaster.

In December 1844 Meaby resigned as Master of the Corporation Upper School as he had been appointed to the Junior Department of Huddersfield College. The College, a boys' Grammar School, had opened in 1839; it was advertised as providing "a first-rate Classical, Mathematical and Commercial Education" based on the Christian Religion, and would be "under the Superintendence of Masters of eminent Learning, of superior Talent, and of unexceptionable Character". The Corporation resolved "that Mr Meaby's resignation be accepted and that the Corporation at the same time express their regret at losing Mr Meaby's services which they consider have ever been rendered by him in a way calculated to promote the Interests and well being of the pupils consigned to his care" (16th December 1844). The vacancy was to be advertised by the Deputy Stewards with a deadline of 6th January for applications and testimonials to be submitted. This seems an incredibly short time, with Christmas intervening, to allow for applications. The minutes of the next two Corporation meetings might suggest that a longer period would have been preferable: on 13th January 1845 "Resolved that as soon as the Upper School Committee are prepared with their further report a Special Meeting of the Corporation be summoned by the Deputy Stewards for the purpose of electing a Master or not as circumstances may require", and on 10th February "The report of the Upper School Committee having been read Resolved that Mr Wilson appearing the most eligible Candidate he should be forthwith appointed to the temporary Mastership of the Corporation Upper School under such regulations as may seem fit".

It is by no means clear what was behind the wording "or not as circumstances may require" or why the mastership was to be temporary. Possibly, the Corporation was still contemplating closing the Upper School down in the near future, or they were not expecting there to be a suitable candidate, or in view of Wilson's age (he was twenty-one) his appointment was for a trial period. However, in July 1845 the Corporation resolved "that Mr Matthew William Wilson now enter into the Agreement as Master of the Upper School". George Meaby was paid just fifteen shillings for fixtures in the Upper School House and £8.1.0d. was paid as expenses to the unsuccessful candidates.

Matthew Wilson (1824-91) soon showed that he had the qualities of a successful schoolteacher. His salary was £45 per year, the "temporary allowance" of £20 agreed with his predecessor now being

permanent, plus £3 for fuel, supplemented by the school fees of £2 a year per pupil other than the twelve free places. The Corporation also paid his rates and taxes amounting to around £13 a year and the accounts show increased expenditure on books and prizes of about £8 a year.

Wilson thought that he could increase his income by taking in boarders, who would live with him in the old workhouse. He placed the following advertisement in the Birmingham papers: "Mr Matthew William Wilson, Master of the Corporation Upper School, Sutton Coldfield, Respectfully informs Parents and Guardians, that he is now prepared to receive into his house, a limited number of Young Gentlemen as Boarders; and begs to assure those who may favour him with their patronage, that nothing shall be wanting on his part, which may tend to the improvement and general comfort of the pupils entrusted to his charge. If required, references are kindly permitted to several Clergymen. Terms, etc. for Board and Instruction in the several Branches of a sound Education, including the Mathematics:- Pupils under Ten Years of Age, 20 Guineas [£21] per Annum, Pupils above that Age, 25 Guineas [£26.5.0d.] per Annum. Day Boarders, (not including Tuition) 2 Guineas [£2.2.0d.] per Quarter. Each Pupil will be expected to be provided with Linen, Knife and Fork, and Dessert Spoon. No Extras, except for Washing. N.B. A Quarter's Notice will be required previously to the removal of a Pupil."

The Corporation's accounts for 1847/48 show that the upkeep of the Upper School buildings required not insubstantial payments: Richard Brown was paid £16.2.0d. for painting both properties and repairing windows, John Pratt received £10.2.6d. for unspecified work at the schoolroom, and J.S. Holbeche was paid £4.15.5d. partly for work at the Upper School. Smaller payments for unspecified repairs had been made in the previous two years.

Wilson's planned expansion of the Upper School may have alarmed James Eccleston, the new Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, as he too was relying on taking in boarders to supplement his income. Unlike his predecessor, Charles Barker, Eccleston was a dedicated teacher and he did his best to increase the pupil numbers and raise the reputation and popularity of the Grammar School. However, also unlike Barker, he was hopelessly incapable of managing his finances and was constantly in debt. He borrowed £600 over five years from Richard Sadler, to be repaid out of the School rents (which Sadler as Treasurer collected) and from the boarding school fees, which were eagerly anticipated but never materialised. Eccleston was appointed to the Sutton Corporation in 1845 and was elected as Warden in November 1848, but six months later matters came to a head when the pressure of mounting debts forced Eccleston to resign as Headmaster of the Grammar School, as Warden and as a member of the Corporation. He tried to flee to avoid his creditors but was arrested in Birmingham and committed to the Debtors' Prison in Warwick, awaiting trial at the recently instituted Court for Relief of Insolvent Debtors. After establishing that he had not been dishonest, he agreed to surrender all his assets, such as they were, and was released. Somehow, he managed to secure the post of Rector of the High School at Hobart in Tasmania, but he died of a brain fever in March 1850, aged thirty-four.

The new Headmaster of the Grammar School was Josiah Wright, a much more forceful character than his feckless predecessor. He was immediately elected to the Sutton Corporation and was Warden for three years from November 1859.

In January 1851 the Warden and Society resolved to insure all their schools against damage by fire; a value of £200 was put on the Upper School. In August of that year, on the recommendation of the School Committee, the Corporation resolved "that the Chanting of the Litany in the Upper School be discontinued". The 1851 census shows that only three boys were resident at the old workhouse as Wilson's boarders.

At a meeting of the Warden and Society held on 8th December 1851 Josiah Wright proposed “that an Offer be made to the Trustees of the Grammar School, on the part of the Corporation, of an Exhibition to one of the Universities of £50 a year tenable for 3 years and open to all members of the Grammar School”. The topic was hotly disputed, five members arguing that “the Corporation cannot entertain the proposition”, but eight members voted in favour. There was no particular reason why the Corporation should support the Grammar School and it was doubtful whether it was lawful under the Chancery Court Scheme of 1825. In the Town there was a general outcry against public money being used to support a well-endowed independent school.

It appears that there was now a complete reversal of the previous situation; whereas Charles Barker had persuaded the Corporation to establish their own secondary school, the Corporation were now, with Josiah Wright’s encouragement, wanting to rid themselves of the Upper School and pass all responsibility for secondary education back to the Grammar School. On 22nd December 1851 the Warden and Society added the new Rector, Rev William Kirkpatrick Riland Bedford, Mr Wright, Richard Sadler, Clerk to the Grammar School Governors, and Dr George Bodington to the School Committee, and resolved “that the Committee report to the Corporation whether the present system of education in or management of the Schools can be improved”.

The Committee, after almost six months’ deliberation, reported on 14th June, 1852 and in view of the radical nature of their recommendations the matter was adjourned to a special meeting on 22nd June. At the adjourned meeting it was resolved “that the Corporation Upper School be abolished That the present Masters House of that School be given with about 30 pounds per Annum towards providing a second Master at the Grammar School upon such terms as shall be agreed between the Corporation and the Trustees with the approbation of the Head Master of the said School the Corporation having the power to send a certain number of Boys annually to be educated at the School free of charge, or upon payment of a mere nominal sum per head, and that the present School Committee be requested to carry out the terms of this Resolution. That the services of the present Master, after this year, be dispensed with, and that he have notice accordingly.” The Committee subsequently fixed the number of boys to be sent to the Grammar School by the Corporation at twelve. They also decided that the old workhouse would not be suitable as a house for the Grammar School second master and that £20 per annum should be paid instead.

On 13th September 1852 the Corporation confirmed a report of the School Committee “relative to the Corporation Upper School”, but unfortunately that report is not entered in the minute book. On 15th November the Corporation agreed to pay Wilson £35 “to compensate him for his outlay upon the House he occupied, and other expences he has incurred and will sustain on his quitting the School House [the School Committee had recommended £25] And that he be allowed to remain in the House until Lady Day next [25th March 1853], on his paying £5 for such privilege of occupation, it being understood that the possession must then be absolutely given up”.

On 20th December 1852 the Warden and Society resolved “that the following six Boys recommended by the School Committee be elected to the Grammar School to be clothed by the Corporation and to go free of capitation Fees

William Wilkins	10 years of age next January
Samuel Langley	13 do
Thomas Gannaway	12 “
William John Hughes	11 “

Henry Brindley	12	“
George Deeks	12	“

And that the following seven Boys recommended by the Committee as qualified to be sent to the Grammar School, without clothing but free of Capitation Fee, be elected (Mr Wright in order to avoid the necessity of rejecting any one of them having kindly offered to take the additional Boy on the understanding that the first vacancy is not to be filled up) viz

Henry Izon	aged 12
Thomas Smith	“ 11
Samuel Johnson	“ 12
John Willmore	“ 13
Charles Page	“ 12
John Ray	“ 11
Thomas Holbeche	“ 13

That the School Committee be requested to provide Clothing for the six first named Boys including a Cap at an expence not exceeding £2.2.0. each”.

To qualify to be elected these boys had to do two sums (£78496.18.8d. divided by 8 and £4862.14.2½d. less £3954.11.4¾d.*) and to copy a sentence to prove they could write. The selected sentences included “Bestow your bounty on deserving persons”, “Youth should persevere in laudable pursuits” and “Instruction is a valuable inheritance for Youth”.

There was still much disquiet over the closure of the Corporation Upper School. At a meeting of the Warden and Society held on 16th January 1853 John Grove Todd, a farmer from New Shipton who was a member of the Corporation from 1841 until his death in 1876, said that “in consequence of the previous resolutions of the Corporation relative to abolishing the Upper Corporation School in order to give the middle class of Inhabitants of the Parish an equivalent for the loss of such School I propose that Mr Wright be called upon to take the sons of Parishioners upon the same terms as previously paid at the other School without any restrictions as to age or other Qualification”. This was an impractical proposition in view of the terms of the Chancery Court Scheme which governed the Grammar School, and Mr Sadler moved an amendment “that it be referred to the School Committee to consider if they can with propriety provide the means for the education of the children of Tradesmen and others with a view to prepare them for the Grammar School”, which was carried, with only three members (all farmers) voting against it.

Matthew Wilson had decided to set up his own private school and the School Committee came to an arrangement with him that he could use the old workhouse as a school if he accepted boys put forward by the Corporation with a view to their transferring to the Grammar School once they had acquired the necessary qualifications. On 14th March 1853 the Warden and Society resolved “that Mr Wilson be accepted Tenant of the School House in Mill Street at the rent of £10p.a. the Corporation reserving such part of the House as may be required for the Library And that he be paid by the Corporation five shillings per quarter for any boys under ten years of Age whom they may send under an order leaving Mr Wilson to charge the Parents for such Boys such further sum as may be reasonable or usual”. The Library was housed in the Town Hall at the top of Mill Street on the junction with Coleshill Street and the High Street, but this building was threatened with closure as it was in a very bad state of repair. A month later the Corporation specified that “the Room on the first Floor at the North east end of the House be reserved to the Corporation with a view to its being taken by the Committee of the Permanent Library”, but, since the former schoolroom of the Upper School was now lying vacant, they also agreed “that for the present Mr Wilson be allowed the use of the School Room on the Church Hill

on his undertaking to give it up at any time when required". This arrangement lasted for only twelve months as the Committee of the Permanent Library, also known as the Reading Room, preferred the old schoolroom to the converted workhouse as a temporary home until the Town Hall was repaired or a new one built, and on 12th December 1853 the Corporation granted them a lease of "the School Room on the Church Hill as a Reading Room at £5.10.0 p.a. the tenancy to commence at Lady Day next [25th March 1854]".

At the same meeting the School Committee "recommended that Mr Edwin Aston's two sons aged respectively 6 and 4 years be admitted to Mr Wilson's School" but the Corporation resolved "that the Elder one be admitted and that it will be a rule that no boy under 6 years of age be sent by the Corporation." It was also resolved that "Charles Smith aged 10 years son of Thomas Smith of the Parish of Sutton Coldfield Builder be admitted into the number of the 6 Boys attending the Grammar School free of expence in the room of James Johnson who has declined attendance". The only boy named Johnson on the original list was called Samuel; perhaps James was his correct name and 'Samuel' slipped in by association with the famous Doctor of that name. The admission of Charles Smith appears to ignore the previous agreement not to fill the first vacancy in order to bring the number of boys elected to the Grammar School down to twelve. In April 1854 the Corporation resolved "that Edward Langley be admitted into the Grammar School (but not clothed) in the room of Thomas Smith, who has left".

The Corporation's accounts for 1852/53 show that in addition to Wilson's last quarterly salary of £12 and the sum of £35 paid to him "on giving up the School", and Mr Wright's first half-yearly payment of £25, £7.1.6d. was paid for "books etc for the Six Boys attending the Grammar School" and £12 was paid for their clothing.

On 20th June 1854 the Warden and Society discussed the possibility of withdrawing the yearly payment of £50 to Mr Wright for a second master at the Grammar School. Mr John Grove Todd and Solomon Smith proposed "that the Deputy Stewards give notice to Mr Wright before the 24th of June to abandon the £50 allowed him from the Corporation for the education of twelve boys Which Notice will expire on the 24th June 1855". An amendment to this proposal was put forward by Robert Garnett, a wealthy businessman who lived at Moor Hall, and Samuel Kempson, a surveyor and auctioneer and the last of four generations of Samuel Kempsons who were Corporation members, "that the arrangement entered into by the Corporation with the Trustees of the Grammar School having originated with the Corporation, and having been carried out on the part of the Trustees and Head Master without complaint of any one, and as no other suitable arrangement has been proposed, Resolved That the present arrangement be continued". The amendment was put to the vote and was lost with nine members against, five members in favour (including, unsurprisingly, Wright and Sadler) and two abstentions. The original proposition was then put to the vote and carried by eight votes to five with three abstentions, Rev Gilbert William Robinson, the first vicar of St. John's Church Walmley, having changed his mind.

By 8th January 1855 the Corporation had received a letter from the Charity Commissioners which cast doubt on the legality of their paying £50 as an exhibition to a university for a Grammar School boy. The letter was read to a meeting of the Warden and Society, but they resolved "that further inquiry as to the legality of the Corporation granting an Exhibition to the Grammar School is unnecessary as it appears that the Income is barely sufficient to meet the Charges to which it is already appropriated under the Charter". Accordingly, the offer of £50 p.a. was withdrawn; Sadler felt badly let down and advised the Governors that they should hold the Corporation to their promise. He prepared a lengthy

case for the opinion of the Charity Commissioners, but they advised that the promise could not be enforced in law.

In July 1854 the old Town Hall, or Moot Hall, at the top of Mill Street was declared unsafe and was demolished. The Corporation had to find an alternative venue for their meetings until the new Town Hall, built lower down Mill Street adjoining the old workhouse (now the Masonic Hall Building) was opened in 1859, and in October they ordered “that the School House in which this meeting is now assembled shall be called the Moot Hall until a new one is built”. Although it is not entirely clear whether the reference to the ‘School House’ means the old schoolroom on Church Hill or the schoolmaster’s house in the old workhouse, the latter appears to be the case.

In 1855 a petition signed by 729 Suttonians was presented to the Privy Council requesting that Sutton became a democratically elected Borough Council under the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. A public meeting of those opposed to the petition was convened on 4th June at which Sir William Hartopp was proposed as chairman, but this proposal was shouted down and Thomas Hayward, a timber merchant who supported the petition, was elected. This led to a near riot until, according to a later account, Sir William, muttering “you’re a funny lot” led his fellow members of the Corporation “out of the Moot Hall and into the Reading Room”. This means that the Corporation members either trooped round the corner from Mill Street into Church Hill, or else (perhaps more likely) that, after 25th March 1855 when the lease of the old schoolroom to the Committee of the Permanent Library had run for twelve months, the Reading Room had relocated to the first floor room on the north-east end of the temporary Town Hall, as originally envisaged.

As a consequence of the decision to designate the old workhouse as the temporary Town Hall, Matthew Wilson moved his school to premises in Lichfield Road in the area of Sutton known as Doe Bank and it appears that the Corporation stopped sending boys to his school. The Corporation had now severed all links to the Grammar School and to Mr Wilson’s school, and having disbanded their own Upper School were back to where they were in 1830. Wilson still harboured resentment against the Corporation closing down the Upper School and against Mr Wright for his part in its closure. When the Privy Council sent Major George Warburton to Sutton in August 1855 to hold an enquiry into the petition for the grant of a new Charter (which was held in the old schoolroom), Wilson gave evidence, telling Warburton that the Corporation paid him £48 a year as Master of the Upper School to teach an unlimited number of pupils, but that when they closed the school down they paid Mr Wright £50 a year to teach twelve boys. This was a wholly misleading statement, since in addition to the sum of £48 (a basic salary of £45 plus £3 for fuel) Wilson received fees of £2 per year from all but twelve of the pupils and was provided with a rent-free house, for which the Corporation paid the church and poor rates and the window tax, as well as being responsible for all repairs and decoration of both the house and the schoolroom. The sum of £50 which the Corporation paid to Mr Wright represented £30 towards the second master’s salary and £20 for the second master’s house; all other expenses had to be found by Wright himself. When Wilson was asked “what was the average attendance of scholars at the [Upper] School?”, he replied “I have had as many as 36”, giving the maximum number, not the average. No-one took him up on these inaccuracies, but in the end Major Warburton accepted the arguments of the Warden and leading members of the Corporation that “the Warden and Society were not in need of reform”.

Matthew Wilson moved his school from Doe Bank to ‘The Anchorage’, a large house in Lichfield Road opposite Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School, in 1855. At the 1861 census he had fourteen boarders resident in the house and over twenty day boys in the school, which well exceeded the number of

pupils at the Grammar School. In 1871 Wilson moved upmarket to Ashfurlong Hall, set in fifty-six acres of land, and styled his school as 'Ashfurlong Hall Classical College'. He was appointed to the Sutton Corporation in 1876, resigning eight years later when he retired to Handsworth, where he died in 1891, aged sixty-seven.

The old schoolroom on Church Hill later housed the Town Infants' School, which in 1902 had over eighty pupils. The building was demolished in 1938 when the Sons of Rest was built. The Corporation's short, expensive and not very glorious foray into running a secondary school, which started in 1830 and ended twenty-three years later, was a brave attempt to provide more than an elementary education for Sutton boys who had the ambition to go on to higher education, or at least to rise above their humble origins in trade or business. It was not until 1929 that the Sutton Borough Council opened another secondary school, when the Sutton Coldfield High School (later the Sutton Coldfield Grammar School for Girls) was established in Jockey Road.

* Answers to the sums on page 15: £9812.2.4d. and £908.2.9¾d.

APPENDIX A

The Corporation Upper School Masters

Richard Percy 1830-36
Timothy Walton 1836-37
Philip Puleston 1838-41
George Meaby 1842-44
Matthew William Wilson 1845-53

APPENDIX B

The Wardens of Sutton Coldfield

Rev James Packwood 1828-31
Rev Hyla Holden 1831-33
George Browne 1833-35
William Edmund Cradock Hartopp 1835-36
Charles Barker 1836-38
Henry Grimes 1838-41
Dr Richard Horton 1841-43
Baron Dickinson Webster 1843-45
Joseph Pimlott Oates 1845-47
Solomon Smith 1847-48
James Eccleston 1848-June 1849
Rev Richard Williamson June to November 1849
Robert Garnett 1849-52
Dr George Bodington 1852-54

N.B. The Warden's period of office started and ended on 2nd November except where otherwise stated

APPENDIX C

The Headmasters of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School

Charles Barker 1817-42

James Eccleston 1843-49

Josiah Wright 1849-63

Portraits

At the end of this article are portraits of the two Headmasters of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School who played a significant role in the history of the Corporation Upper School, drawn by John Griffin in 1990: the debonaire and youthful-looking Charles Barker and the formidable and hirsute Josiah Wright.

Sources

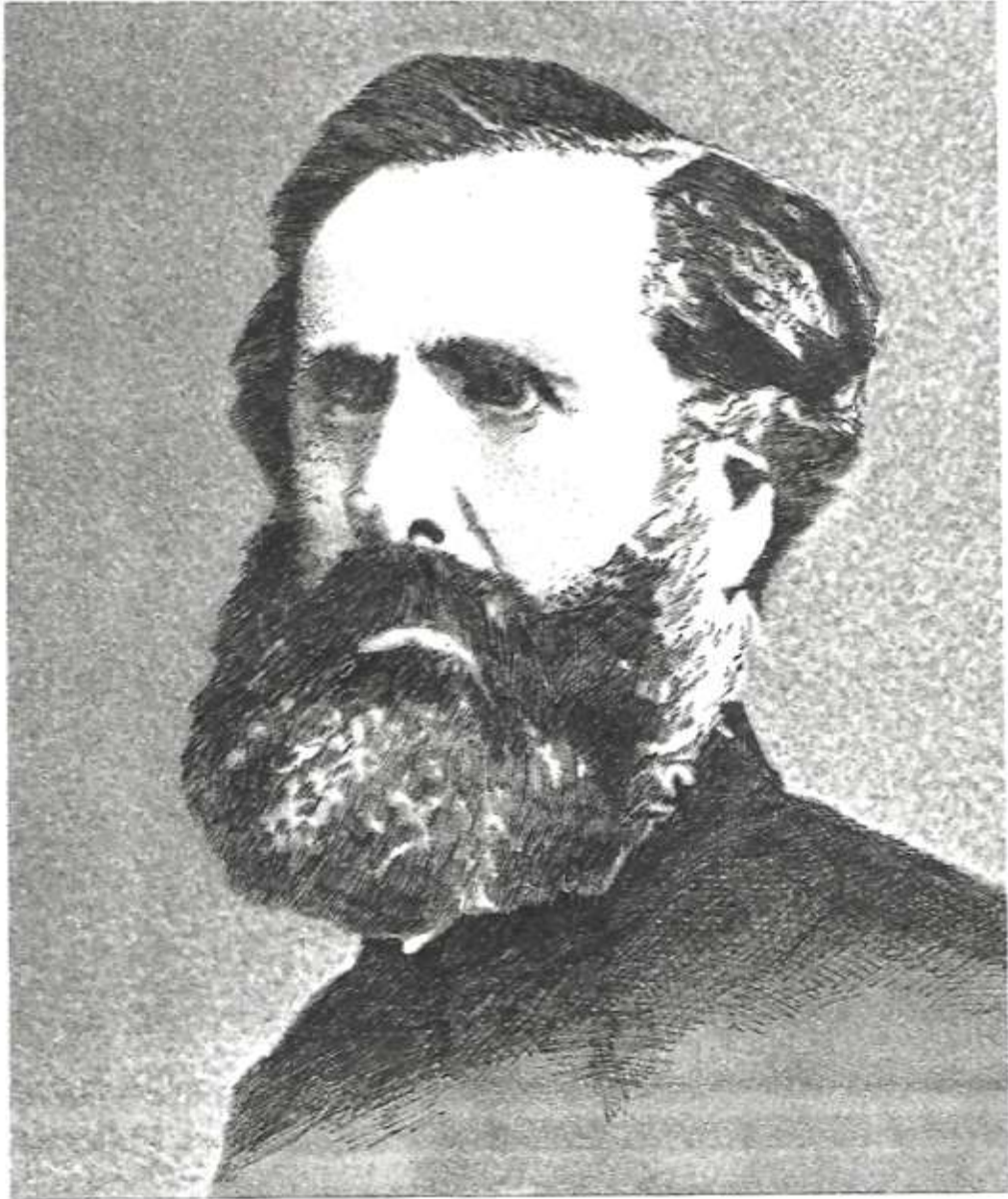
In writing this article I have mostly relied on the Minutes of meetings of the Warden and Society of Sutton Coldfield from 1829 to 1855, housed at Sutton Library, and on Roger Lea's History Spots in the Royal Sutton Coldfield Observer, particularly Nos 276, 277 and 279 dated September and October 2013[†]. I have also referred to my own *History of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School The First 375 Years* (1990), based on the Grammar School's archives, and *Sutton Coldfield Corporation Members 1723-1886* (2023)[†], and to Janet Jordan's transcription of Zachariah Twamley's *History of Sutton Coldfield* (2009)[†]. Biographical details of the architect D.R. Hill were taken from Wikipedia.

[†] These publications can be found on the Local History Research Group's website [sclhrg.org.uk]

Kerry Osbourne
January 2025



CHARLES BARKER



JOSIAH WRIGHT