The Old School

The first Malton Grammar School was founded in 1547, by the endowment of Robert Holgate, Archbishop of York and President of the King's Council of the North. The School stood in the cemetery of the Gilbertine Priory of Old Malton, where Holgate had once been a Canon, but which had been dissolved a few years previously. There had long been learning on this site, in association with the work of the Priory, and records refer to a schoolmaster as early as 1392. Old Malton today is an elongated village astride the Pickering Road, a mile or so north of Malton. Before the Normans came, however, it was the larger settlement and the foundation of the Priory in the twelfth century gave it a lead in the affairs of spirit and mind which it preserved even though New Malton, the Malton of today, soon overtook it in size, as it developed into the market town for the district.

The endowment of a grammar school was very fashionable during the sixteenth century. The Reformation and its new learning were spreading from Europe and making their first real impact in England. There was a growing awareness of the need for education; the Church, in particular, was anxious to acquire an educated clergy. Foundations such as that at Old Malton were common, either by magnates of the Church or by the landed gentry, many of them rich from the expanding commerce of Tudor England. Holgate himself endowed two other Yorkshire grammar schools, at York and at Barnsley, both of which still bear his name.

Very frequently the specific purpose of an endowment such as Holgate's was to furnish a schoolmaster's salary, enabling him to teach the local youth free of charge. In the case of Malton land was acquired at Norton, Yedingham and Ebbertson, to yield an annual income of £30, of which the master was to have £10 and the usher, or assistant master, £4, the rest being devoted to rent collection and property repairs. As elsewhere the endowment was controlled by a long list of statutes, designed to prevent any misappropriation of the funds and to ensure their use for the intended purpose. The rigidity of the statutes, however, was to be a nuisance in later years.

Elaborate arrangements were made for the appointment of the master. He was to be chosen by the Archbishop of York, but on his default by the Dean and Chapter - and yet more provision was made should they in turn default. Latin was to be taught, and Greek and Hebrew at the master's discretion, a sign, indeed, that the new learning was reaching the north of England, then something of a frontier province. School hours were the usual ones of the day - 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. in summer, and 7 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the winter. Holidays were allowed at Christmas and Easter, six weeks altogether. Each school day was to begin with prescribed prayers, and on Sundays and Holy Days the boys were to attend the services in Old Malton church, accompanied by the master.

The subsequent history of the School remains pitifully obscure. We have a list of the schoolmasters, preserved in the archives of the diocese of York. Occasionally there is information about them, for example, John Ashmore, 1622-32, had previously taught at Ripon, and John Stockdale, 1707-26, was blind. The first master was Thomas Norman, 1547-64, who may have been a former prior of the Gilbertine Priory at Mattersey. But no registers have come down to us, so that we know nothing of the boys attending the school until the very end of the nineteenth century, just before the final closure in 1904.

Most of what can be written about Malton Grammar School during its early years is little more than speculation, based on what is known of other schools at that time. The grammar schools flourished during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, provided that the master was capable and energetic. Sometimes he had the support of an usher. We know this to have been the case at Malton between 1564 and 1621, when Thomas Histler was master and Stephen Jeysom usher. Most of the boys at grammar schools were between the ages of 8 and 15, though the registers at nearby Pocklington show a range from 6 to 18. The usual requirement for admission was simply ability to read. Most of the teaching was of Latin, essential at that time for entry to the Professions. Many boys, however, left early, to be apprenticed to a trade, but others, probably a small minority in a country district such as that round Malton, stayed longer, intended for the University and a career as a clergyman, physician or lawyer. Boys who lived further than a walk or pony ride from school were forced by the long school hours to be boarders, in the master's house or in the village. But the majority of the scholars would have been the sons of the parishioners and burgesses of Old and New Malton. An account of Malton about 1690 declares it to be 'a pretty large town built of stone but poor; there is a large market place and several great houses of gentlemen round the town.' But to what extent these families supported the local school must remain an open question. We can only speculate, too, on the effect the affairs of the day would have had upon the school community, but we can be sure that even if the schoolboys took no account of the political revolutions staged in London, they would have shown eager interest in the Civil War skirmishes of their own neighbourhood.

Most grammar schools declined during the eighteenth century and what evidence we have suggests that this was also the case at Malton. There were various causes, but much of the decline was due to financial difficulties. Currency at the time was decreasing in value, but any increase in the rents due from the School's land was rigidly prohibited by the Tudor statutes. By 1762 the master was leasing land at £14 a year which his tenants were subletting for over £110. In 1769 and 1770 the Archbishop attempted to improve matters by allowing some of the school land to be alienated in exchange for a rent charge to be awarded by the enclosure commissioners, then touring the country. This did raise the yield to £92 but as the sum was fixed at that figure the same misuses occurred after a few years, as currency continued to depreciate. From 1779 to 1783 Samuel Jackson met the situation by being master only in name, drawing his salary whilst holding another position, and paying the usher, at a reduced rate, to do the actual teaching. Such plurality was hardly in the school's best interests.

The narrowness of the classical curriculum was another difficulty to be met, Latin being no longer the passport to all careers. The grammar schools were now facing competition from the newly established private schools and academies, offering such subjects as English, Modern Languages, Mathematics and Accounts. Many grammar school masters met the situation by teaching these subjects to private fee-paying pupils yet fulfilling the statutes by continuing to teach the Classics free of charge to the few remaining 'free boys.' In 1747 the new master, the Rev. Joseph Kerr, advertised of the school:

'Youth are completely qualified for any Manner of Business, in Latin, Greek, etc. Also Arithmetic in all its parts, Navigation, Mensuration, Merchants Accounts, and Writing in very great perfection.'

The fees for such enlightenment were 7 guineas for board, 9 guineas for board and learning, and £12 for learning, board and clothes, *'found in a decent manner.'* This tendency to widen

the curriculum was continued over the next hundred years, particularly in country districts, and eventually many grammar schools were no more than village schools. A Government commission investigated the situation in 1818 - one of the first signs that the Government was beginning to recognise responsibility for education - and reported that at Malton there were only four boys studying to the prescribed classical curriculum, though the parish clerk was allowed by the master to teach Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, and in 1827 there had been 20 and 30 labourers' children all paying a small fee.

Another factor causing the decline of the school was local dissatisfaction with the schoolmaster. Some of the documents of these disputes are preserved in the York archives and give us a rare glimpse of the Malton schoolmasters as real personalities, albeit of often dubious character. In 1702 a petition was sent to the Archbishop complaining of the general direction of the school under George Mill, appointed in 1697. It was declared that Mill was 'irregular and immoral,' but it should perhaps be noted that the petition was instigated by the schoolmaster of Hovingham, who was eager, apparently, to secure the job at Old Malton for himself , together with its superior salary. There was a counter petition asserting that Mill was *'a person of sober life . . . well qualified to be able to discharge his office.'*

Rather more heat was generated by the petition to the Archbishop from the people of Old Malton, sent on June 20th, 1764, against the Rev. Joseph Kerr, who had been master for 17 years. This was the same Kerr who had broadened the curriculum when he first took up his office. It was asserted that Kerr had refused to teach the children of the petitioners, had not kept an usher but taken the wages for himself, and that his dialect was not suited to his position. Kerr defended himself indignantly:

'I have been extremely ill-used by a rude and illiterate people ... I have done all in my power to prevail with the parents to make their children follow the example of mine but all in vain.'

He concludes with the assertion:

The best men in the township seem satisfied with what I do

He was successful in his appeal and kept the post for another 13 years.

The mid-nineteenth century brought the school further problems and its fortunes waned still further, culminating in closure in 1904. There was competition not only from local private academies but also from the expanding public schools and from the elementary schools, at first provided by Voluntary bodies but after the 1870 Education Act obligatory throughout the land. The public schools benefited enormously from the railways, which reached Malton in 1845, making them accessible from all parts of the country, and from the expansion and growing wealth of the upper middle class in the aftermath of the industrial revolution. Quicker communications and greater prosperity were also forces in the general drive for literacy, which caused elementary schools to sprout and flourish during the first half of the century. A school was opened in Norton in 1830, part of a considerable nineteenth expansion of the town, and a similar establishment was set up in Malton in 1858. In 1873, following the 1870 Act which made attendance compulsory for at least part of childhood, the Norton school moved to new premises, which were used by the Norton Boys' School right up to 1963.

In an attempt to meet this competition the Rev. William Pounds, appointed Master of the Grammar School in 1835, moved the school to Norton. The old schoolroom was let and in

Norton the master ran what was virtually a private school, though he kept to the letter of the statutes by admitting free those Malton boys wishing to study only the classics. Nevertheless, the move was a flagrant disregard of the conditions of the foundation, as the master continued to draw his salary from the endowment income. But such disregard was by no means uncommon and was the consequence of the master's dependence on fees due to the poverty of the endowment under the financial conditions of the day.

The move did, however, engender a good deal of local opposition, and when the Rev. Harry Garratt was appointed to succeed the Rev. Pounds in 1866 the school was soon moved back to its original building. In 1868 it had 21 day boys and 1 boarder. But it was never able to attract more than a handful of pupils and in 1904, on the death of the master, the school was finally closed. However, as the endowment continued to accumulate income, which was taken over by the Governors of the new school that succeeded it seven years afterwards, it can be legitimately claimed that the old Grammar School at Old Malton is a genuine ancestor of the school that now bears the proud name of Malton Grammar School.