

Education in the Village.

Education in the village probably began in 1606 when the vicar, John Allen, was allowed to combine parochial duties with that of teaching local boys.

In the 18th Century the Goward Charity and the Evans and Kitchener Charity provided for the education of poor boys in the village but it was in the 19th Century that formalised education came about.

The Forster Act of 1870 required the newly established School Boards to set up local schools to improve on what already existed. These schools were most often run by churches or private individuals, many of whom were elderly women, (Dames Schools), and these were often no more than somewhere to leave children. They were not the 'Sunday Schools' of the Non-conformist churches which served a valuable function in the teaching of reading and writing. The new Act brought about education for both girls and boys.

Edited extracts from 'The Birth of a Country School'. Roy Silverlock.

By 1865 the two endowed schools, Goward's Free School and Evans and Kitchener's Free School were providing for 41 pupils.

Members of the new Lakenheath School Board were elected by rate-payers and had powers to establish and maintain a public elementary school with the aid of a Government grant and fees paid by pupils.

Attendance of boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 12 years could be enforced if the School Board wished but an Act of 1880 made attendance to the age of 10 compulsory! The school could decide on the fee to be paid but it could be no more than 9d. per week. (Old pence). It was possible for a grant or scholarship to be awarded which waived the fees.

The Lakenheath School Board was formed in 1875 with five members. The Chairman was the vicar, Rev. Frederick George Scrivener, with the Clerk to the Board being Frederick Evan Rolph. Charles Pearce was appointed Attendance Officer.

Ed Note. Dr. Pickworth later became a member of the Board.

There was to be an Infants School under a (Head) Mistress, and a Mixed School under a (Head) Master. The first Mistress was Miss Liddle, and the Master Mr. Ireland.

The School was built in 1876 with accommodation for around 300 children in the Infant and Mixed schools.

Lakenheath Infant School opened in 1878 with 108 pupils. In 1871 the population of the village was 1880. Lessons consisted of the 3R's which at the age of 5 or 6 was learning the alphabet and simple

letter recognition and forming, (writing), and learning numbers by chanting and singing. Lessons were given on subjects such as 'A Cow' or 'A River' and quite a bit of marching and drilling went on.

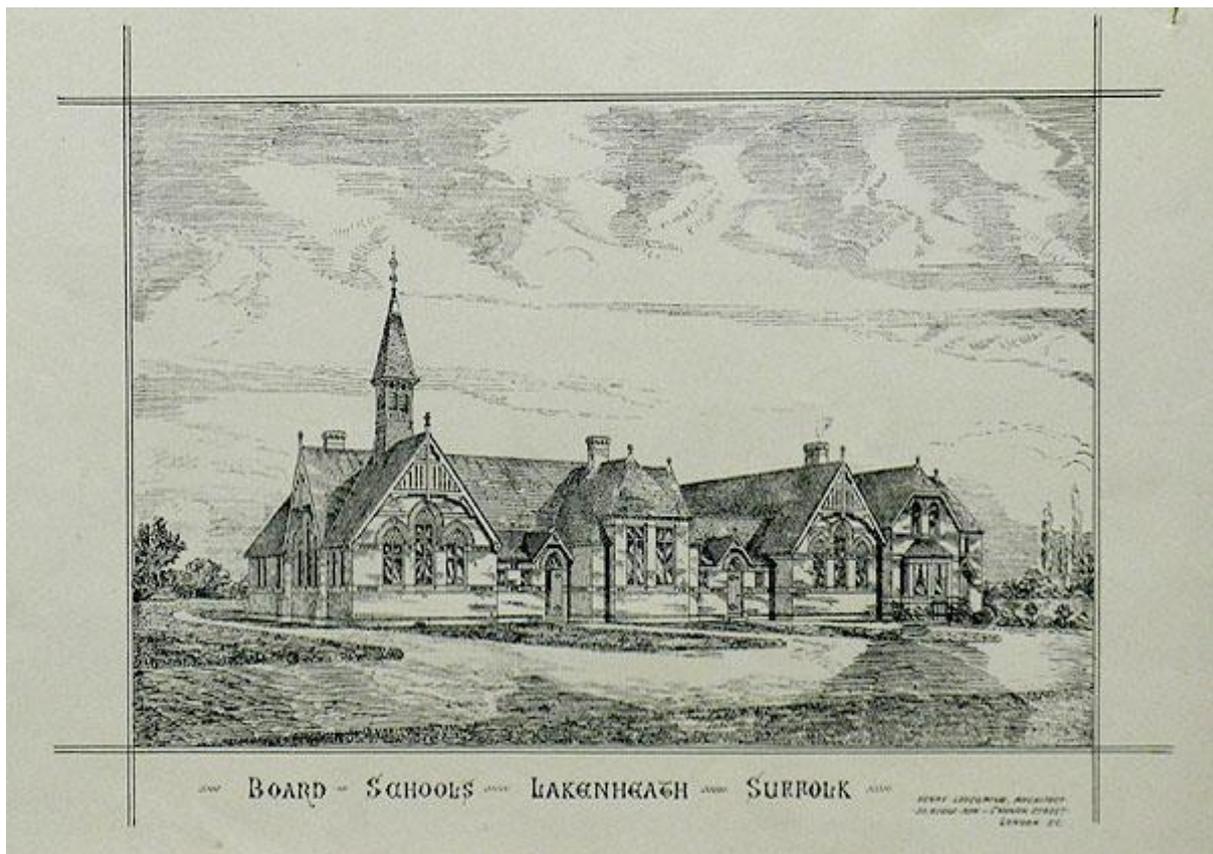
An early problem for the School Board was the shortage of appropriately educated and trained teachers and equipment such as slates and stationary were in short supply. The shortage of teachers was partly resolved by the appointment of 'pupil-teachers'.

In Lakenheath School two such were MELINDA GATHERCOLE, aged 12, and JULIA ROLPH, aged 14 both of limited education educated, but 'eager to learn'. Not surprisingly discipline sometimes was a problem due to the numbers in the classes and the age of the pupil teachers. In effect they were learning 'on the job'.

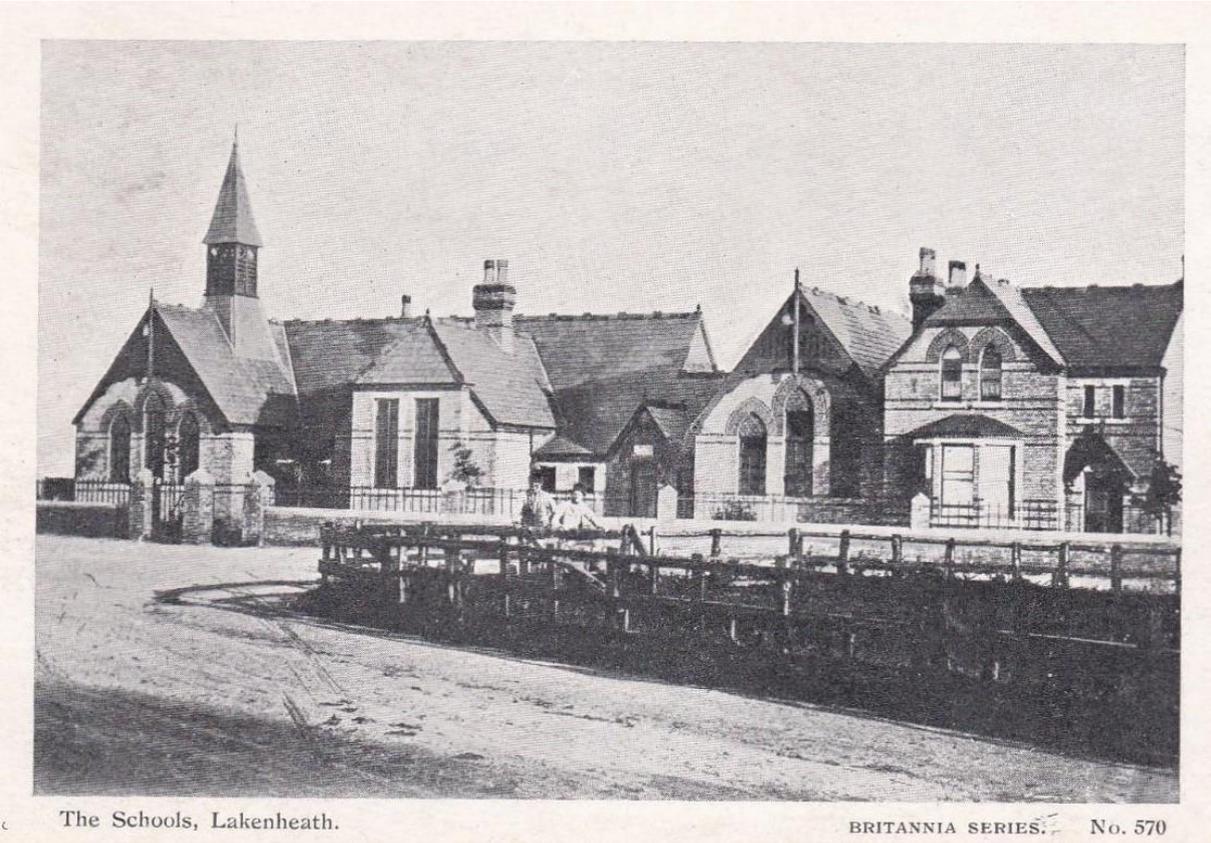
Representatives of the village paid regular visits and after a while things had improved and the children were 'good and attentive'. A higher class made up of those children who had mastered their alphabet was formed to be taught by the Mistress.

*Ed. Note. About this time (1878), a new pupil teacher was appointed, **EMMA (LUCY) ROLPH**. She was said at the time to be a very fair teacher. Emma Lucy Rolph later became Head of the Infant School and was known in the village as 'Governess Rolph'. She became an important figure in the life of St. Mary's Church.

* See a later foot-note.



The architect's portrayal of the schools, possibly prepared for the School Board.



The Schools, Lakenheath.

BRITANNIA SERIES. No. 570

The schools in 1878.



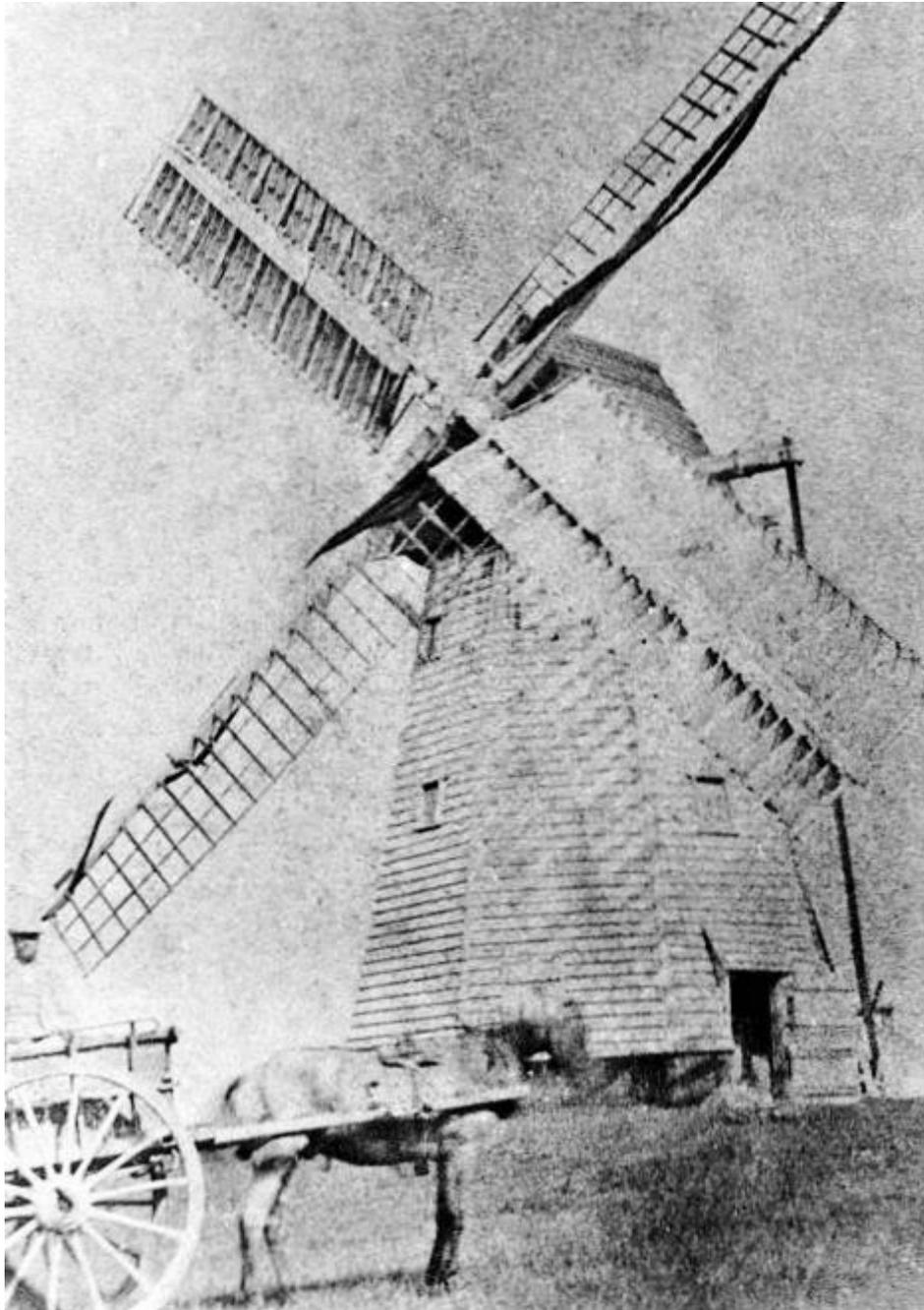
Lakenheath School, early 1900s.

1900's. It's safe for children to be in the road.

What could they see across the way?

This is what the children could see.

Photo of the original Smock Mill which was situated directly opposite the existing school. The Mill Mound is now occupied by a 1930s bungalow.



The photograph dates from approximately 1900.

The Mixed School continued to provide pupil teachers to the Infants School, but it also seems to have also suffered from a lack of qualified teachers.

Pupil attendance was affected by other things than illness, although there was plenty of that! The arrival of the Annual Fair for instance resulted in the decision to give a two-day holiday, presumably because a low attendance was likely to be inevitable. There was also an occasion in the winter when the school was so cold due to a lack of coal that normal lessons were suspended and 'marching' substituted to keep the pupils warm. Children sometimes were 'crying with the cold' and in December the Mistress was having difficulty instructing the pupil teachers because of the poor light. Later a few oil lamps were provided.

It seems that in March 1880 an outbreak of Scarlet Fever had hit the village followed by Whooping Cough in July. By the end of the following October the Mistress was complaining of irregular attendance. Despite this an Inspector's Report recorded that the children were making creditable progress.

The weather had been so bad that some parents were unable to work and so could not afford the school fees. Poverty was common and was greatly increased by the disastrous harvest of 1881 which had followed poor harvests in the preceding years. Attendance at school was down and was explained by 'poverty, illness and fear of contagion'. It further decreased until in August only 31 pupils were attending regularly. Children were needed in the fields to help with the harvest, but also some 'just stayed away'.

In 1881 other illnesses were Scarlet Fever, Ringworm was found on some pupils' heads. Poor cleanliness of some pupils was commented upon in the school logbook.

In 1882 attendance was down to 42 due again to similar causes. Measles was present. In March two girls died who had been at school a few days earlier.

The unwitting part played by the school in the passing of infection in the village in the Diphtheria Epidemics a few years later is mentioned in **Medicine and Health**.

In order to encourage attendance the Goward and Evans Charities decided to award a prize of free boots for the 20 pupils with the best attendance record!

Despite all these difficulties the school, if not prospering, was certainly gradually improving. The Inspector's Report for 1882/3 said that "The Infant's Department is carefully conducted."

***Emma Lucy Rolph. Also known as 'Governess Rolph'.**



Emma passed her Pupil Teacher's Examination in 1878 and began a life long association with the school and village.

In 2002 Professor Ray Bonnett found Emma's music manuscript book in the kitchen attic of his mother's house. Emma was the organist at St. Mary's for many years.

She also left us her beautifully written music manuscripts gifted by Ray Bonnett.



Printed music was probably hard to come by in Lakenheath and also quite expensive, so people used to copy borrowed music scores. Emma also composed her own music.

The following is an edited extract from the introduction to the manuscript book re-bound by Ray.

"Emma Rolph was the headmistress of the Infant School at Lakenheath. She was known as 'Governess'. She ran introductory classes with two assistants (Maud Rolph, who became Mrs. Claxton, and was the aunt of my mother; and Ethel Rolph, who lived in the first of the three houses in the terrace next door to the school. Emma Rolph lived in the High Street for many years, and then in a cottage in Back Street, behind the Plough Inn. (Ed. It's still there.)

..... She did not marry, but had a companion, I believe a Miss Winifred. She was evidently a strong supporter of St. Mary's Church in Lakenheath: she gave the church organ in memory of her parents John (d 1890) and Rebecca (d 1903) and sister Sophia (d 1923), and the altar rail of the north side chapel there is dedicated to her memory. She died on April 16th 1947 aged 86 years.

..... She taught my father and mother and aunts and uncles in the period possibly between 1890-1920 or longer. (1922. Ed.) She was succeeded by Miss Priscilla Cooper (Prissy Cooper) who taught me in the same classroom during the period 1937-1939."

Ray Bonnett 2002

Sources cited by Roy Silverlock for his account in Lakenheath History Vol III, 2000 from which much information has been drawn.

Barnard, H C. *A History of English Education from 1760. (2nd Edition 1961).*

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White's Directories of Suffolk.