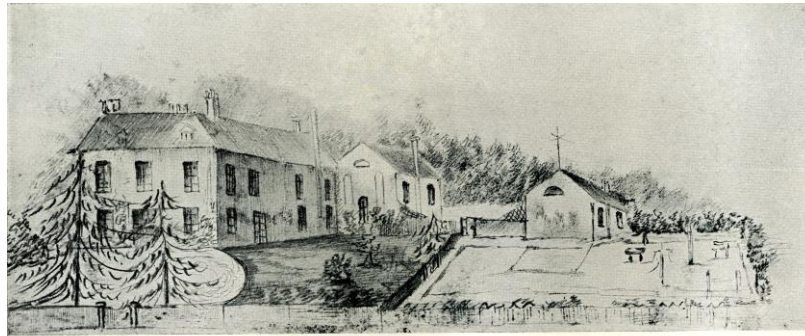




Twyford School – The Early Years



From an old Sketch made about 1830.

Whilst much of Twyford School's history is well-documented, the early years leading up to the headship of Revd. James Bedford (1815-1833) have always been somewhat shrouded in the mists of time.

In 'Shades of the Prison-House' (1986) the Revd. Bob Wickham, Headmaster of Twyford from 1937 to 1963, speculated about the possible events connecting an old Roman Catholic school with the establishment of our Twyford School.

The Roman Catholic school was established at Silkstead, near Hursley, sometime before 1688. Indeed, it may have dated from as early as 1662. At some point a second school was started in Segar's Buildings in Queen Street, Twyford. This was, again, a Catholic establishment and probably acted as a junior department for the older establishment in Silkstead.

It was at this 'Twyford School' in Segar's that Alexander Pope, arguably the greatest poet of the early eighteenth century, was educated from about 1698 until he was expelled for caricaturing a master in verse.

According to Bob Wickham, the school in Segar's was forced to close by 1745, in part due to the anti-papist passions roused during the Jacobite Rebellions. The school in Silkstead was forced underground and eventually emerged at a house called Standon Lordship in Hertfordshire. It later moved to Old Hall, Ware, where it still exists as St. Edmund's College.

It has always been assumed that the Twyford School of 2020 can be linked to the Catholic establishment in Segar's. Bob Wickham writes that Segar's was sold in 1793 to a Mr. Meader who let it to Mr. Hannington (sic) 'for a school for the sons of Middle Class Persons', after possibly having been left equipped as a school.

However, it is at this point that recent research has discovered errors in the established history of Twyford School. Bob Wickham says that Mr. Hanington died 'towards the end of the century' and that his widow tried to keep the school in existence until it was finally sold to the Revd. L. M. Stretch, the Vicar of Twyford. However, Mr. Hanington didn't die until December 1813, three months after Revd. Stretch and several years after our school probably moved to its present site.

George Hanington was born in about 1771 and did, indeed, run an establishment in Segar's, the 'Twyford Grammar, Mathematical and Commercial School'. This certainly existed before 1797 and may well have been in Segar's from 1793. However, its syllabus, which included book-keeping, land surveying, navigation, building and 'measuring and valuing timber' as well as mathematics, Latin, French, drawing and dancing, would seem to indicate older pupils that we would expect. In 1801, an advertisement placed by Mr. Hanington in the 'Salisbury and Winchester Journal' sought a job for one of his pupils, a 'young man of about 18 years of age' who is 'a complete master of accounts'.

It may be worth noting that several schools existed in Twyford during the last years of the 18th century. Apart from Hanington's 'Grammar, Mathematical and Commercial School' (sometimes referred to as 'Twyford School' in contemporary advertisements), I have also found information about William Scardefield's School (c.1772-1800) and Mr. W. Foote's School (1796-c.1800). All appear to have been boarding establishments.

George Hanington's wife continued to run the school following his death and didn't sell the business until 1830. She let the property for some years until finally selling it in 1844. The advertisements for the sale of Segar's in 1844 state that the buildings were 'formally erected for a Roman Catholic College, in which the celebrated poet, Alexander Pope, received part of his education, and lately occupied as a Classical and Commercial Academy, on a large scale, under the management of the late Mr. Hanington.'

So, what about the Revd. Stretch who was supposed to have purchased the School from Mrs. Hanington?

The first we hear of Liscombe (or Lyscombe) Stretch was as a 'pastor' at the Chipping Campden Chapel between 1757 and 1761. In 1758 he married Mary Grove, a widow, in Willersley, not far from Chipping Campden. In 1761, the Revd. Stretch was ordained as Deacon in the Church of England. He was 'priested' the following year and, after a short curacy in Evesham, Worcestershire, was appointed as non-resident Vicar in Leysdown, Kent (1762). These 'livings' were often a valuable source of income to those who held them. From 1763 to 1766, Stretch also served as curate of Warlingham and Chipstead, Surrey. During this period he was involved in the publication of a Family Bible, published in monthly parts.

In 1770, Stretch published a book on education: 'The beauties of history or, pictures of virtue and vice, drawn from real life, designed for the instruction and entertainment of youth'. This book was very popular and went through many editions.

Stretch served as non-resident vicar of Bethersden, Kent from 1762 to 1786. Between 1774 and 1776 he served another curacy at Merstham, Surrey. From about 1777 he kept a small private school known as 'The Academy' in Twickenham, Middlesex. This school was based in Bath House on the London Road, adjacent to where the Cabbage Patch public house stands today.

In 1787, Stretch was appointed as Vicar of Twyford and appears to have continued running a school from the Vicarage. Concurrently, he was admitted to Emmanuel College, Cambridge as a non-resident; Emmanuel held the 'advowson', the right to appoint the vicar, in the Parish of Twyford and may, possibly, have insisted Stretch becoming a member of the college as a condition of his appointment. An advertisement in the Hampshire Chronicle in 1790 says that

Stretch takes a 'few Young Gentlemen to board and educate in a genteel and liberal manner'. He also boasts that, 'the number of youths who have passed from under his care to almost all the public schools, to both the Universities of this kingdom, and to the most distinguished in foreign countries, leaves no room to question his ability for this undertaking'.

In 1808, the Revd. Stretch was joined in Twyford by his nephew, the Revd. Liscombe Clarke. Liscombe Clarke was educated at Winchester College and New College, Oxford, and held the curacy in Twyford. However, it is evident that, after his uncle obtained the lease on what is now the front part of the present school, Mr. Clarke moved in and, at some stage, moved the School from the vicarage to this house. It is generally accepted that this happened in 1809 but may not have been until Mr. Stretch's death in 1813.

Liscombe Clarke remained Headmaster of Twyford School until July 1815, when he passed on the headship to the Revd. James Bedford, whose portrait still hangs in the School. Like Clarke, Bedford was a Scholar of Winchester College and Fellow of New College. Liscombe Clarke later served as Archdeacon of Salisbury and Canon Residentiary of Salisbury Cathedral. He died in 1841 in Alderbury, Wiltshire, having resigned as Archdeacon in 1836.

So, Twyford School – our Twyford School – started in Twyford no sooner than 1787; we might claim continuation from the earlier establishment in Twickenham but we certainly cannot claim any link to the earlier Catholic schools, Alexander Pope or Segar's Buildings in Twyford village.

Andrew Keeling

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