

# **Elizabethan Schooldays**

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**From the Garton Archive at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School**

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**The Cast of Elizabethan Schooldays (see Notes)**

The July 1953 edition of *The Lincolnian* magazine records that a pageant took place in the grounds of Lincoln School. It was described as 'a scenic story rather than a drama', which attempted to depict Lincoln School as it might have been in medieval times.

The entry in the magazine described a 'pageant' as a 'scene displayed on a stage' and in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was a separate scene or act in a 'Mystery Play'. In Elizabethan times it developed into a colourful drama influenced by the culture and brighter stories of the Renaissance in Italy and France.

The pageant, which brightened the grounds and the lives of staff and pupils at Lincoln School, was called 'Elizabethan Schooldays', and was written by the Revd Reginald Percy Baker MA, affectionately known as 'Bunny', who taught Latin, Greek and Religious Education at Lincoln School between 1935 and his retirement in 1971. Mr Baker had researched the history of Lincoln Grammar School from its foundation to

the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, the pageant covers only a brief episode in the long and complex the history of Lincoln School. It was written and performed in 1953 in honour of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. It is fitting that thanks were offered to a former Headmaster of the School, Mr G F Franklin, and to Professor Charles Garton himself, whose interest and generosity had supported both the research and the production of the play.

The following inscription, mounted above the cloisters of the new school buildings on Wragby Road, and unveiled in 1906, places the play in the context of the School's history:

*After serving past generations for four centuries on a site near Clasketgate, this grammar school was from the year 1567 maintained in the chapel of Greyfriars by the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral Church and the Mayor and Corporation of Lincoln. In 1906 the present buildings were erected to the end that scholars here educated in sound learning and in the fear of God may, by true service to their city and country, prove themselves from age to age worthy sons of an ancient school.*

The pageant is set during that period of time in the School's history when it moved from its Clasketgate site, with its leaks, broken windows and excessive noise, to the Greyfriars Building, where it remained for some 300 years. Greyfriars had been the House of Franciscans in Lincoln prior to the dissolution of the monasteries. When the pageant took place it was the City and County Museum, but it now awaits restoration and a new purpose in its long and historic life.

The period leading up to the move to Greyfriars had been a stormy one in the School's history, caused by a long and bitter conflict between the City and the Chapter, and the difficulties brought about by having two schoolhouses; one 'above hill' and one 'below hill'. Professor Garton has written that the move to Greyfriars, expedited by the generosity of the City's recorder Robert Monson, who made his property available for the School, led to a long period of relative peace and stability until curriculum issues once again divided the two protagonists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But that is another story.

**Scene One** of the pageant began with Elizabethan music, and the Narrator informing the audience that, at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I, there were two grammar schools in Lincoln; one in the

Cathedral Close, and the other old school near St Rumbold's in Clasketgate which was rapidly becoming derelict. The audience was invited to return in their imaginations to the 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1567, when the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors were meeting to discuss the condition of 'our ancient School'.



**A meeting is called (note Mr Hannam seated to the right of the old oak table)**

*The Lincolnian* article recorded that the pageant then began in earnest with a scene in which the City Council ('the helpful, the reminiscent and the cranky') met to discuss the sad state of the Clasketgate buildings.

The script of the pageant revealed that the Mayor appealed for 'cool heads and not hot words', and to avoid apportioning undue blame. The Master's evidence was then considered. According to his report, the floor was rotten and unsafe, the roof 'leaketh in every shower of rain', and 'every wind doth blow through the building so that the scholars can scarcely work for discomfort.'

An Alderman pointed out that the boys had 'barred out' (see Notes) the Master the previous Christmas, and had smashed every window in the School. Another, who was a former pupil at the School, reminisced, possibly with rose-coloured spectacles, about the time when there was a 'proper man' in charge. He recalled the time when that Master, Mr William Deighton, was returning home one night, 'in his cups,

perchance', when a loutish fellow insulted him, and was thrashed soundly by Master Deighton and thrown over the bridge into the River Witham!

Discussion followed about how funds could be raised to effect repairs, but it was pointed out that times were hard, Lincoln was poor, and trade was bad. Some pointed out that it was the duty of the Dean and Chapter to cough up the necessary monies, confirming the age-old dispute between the City and the 'tight-fisted' Cathedral Close.

The discussion then moved to correspondence between Aldermen and Master Robert Monson, a man of law who joined the meeting at that point, and described the state of the School as 'a poor hovel', which would cost much money to restore to a proper state of repair. He informed the meeting that he had 'of late' bought the house from which His Majesty King Henry had driven out the friars. It was a sound and strong building, which would stand for many long years. Those monks and friars, he proclaimed, 'knew how to build well and house themselves snugly.'

Monson's generous proposal was to give to the Mayor, Sheriffs and Commonality of Lincoln the site, house and grounds called the Greyfriars, to be used as a schoolhouse where scholars may be 'trained up' to serve God and the Queen.

Not surprisingly, the assembly accepted the generous offer, and the Mayor informed Monson that, as long as the Greyfriars stood, its very stones would be a memorial to his kindness.

The scene than ended in celebration as the party prepared to visit the site of the new school, and the medieval music resumed.

The Narrator introduced **Scene Two (a)** by describing the number of far-reaching changes that took place during its three centuries at Greyfriars. In Elizabethan times the number of scholars was very small, and equipment was scarce. There were only two forms, the upper one being taught by the Headmaster, and the lower one by the Usher (see Notes). In both forms the curriculum was restricted to the Classics, and hours of teaching were long.

However, there were compensations for the Elizabethan schoolboys, including the lighter side of school life, such as the 'barring-out' of Masters, and the ritual breaking of windows at Christmas and on Shrove Tuesday (see Notes). This was to be the theme of the next scene. It was

just after 7 o'clock in the Greyfriars on an early spring morning in the year 1586. The roll had been called by the Headmaster, Mr Walter Nethercoates, and the boys of the lower form, Botterill, Storr, Harewood, Yates, Rockadine, and Galland were making their way to their room for a Latin lesson with their Usher, Master Plumtree. A wandering musician passed by, and the boys rushed out to greet him.



**Master Plumtree (the legendary J A Baxter) and Latin scholar (David Sykes)**

One of the boys remarked on the 'gay' tune being played, and expressed the desire to dance to it to warm them up on that cold morning. The musician suggested that the Master might find other means of warming them up if he found them dancing!

"What, old Plumtree? Why, he's almost blind, and deaf as well," replied Botterill, "We have no fear of him, so play on and we'll all dance."

While the boys were dancing, Plumtree entered, complaining about his sight. Eventually he found the boys, ushered them into the room, and

settled them down to 'enjoy' a lesson on Vergil, while complaining that they thought more of dancing than their studies.

The passage from Vergil was one in which the poet was describing how horsemen, led by Aeneas, were galloping over rough, open country, and Plumtree was trying to explain how Vergil used onomatopoeic words to reproduce the sound of horses galloping by the sound of his words.

This led in turn to increasing 'horse-play' on the part of the boys, who believed they had been given licence to imitate horse noises in whatever way they saw fit. At the moment of peak disruption, Headmaster Nethercotes entered the room to silence, and accused the boys of taking advantage of his usher's infirmity. The result was the promise of a flogging for all those involved.

While the boys were commanded to return to their books, Nethercotes took Plumtree on one side, sympathised with his plight, and suggested that retirement might be the best outcome for him. Plumtree complained of his lack of savings, but Nethercotes was certain that past grateful pupils would offer financial support, and offered him a glass of wine to soothe his nerves.

Meanwhile, Storr reminded his fellow pupils that Nethercotes was a brute of a man, and that a flogging from him would linger long in the memory. Botterill responded by recalling that it would be Shrove Tuesday the following week, and revenge would be sweet! The old custom would mean that Nethercotes would be barred from his own school, and every window would be smashed in the time-honoured manner!

Madrigals accompanied the following *exeunt* as the scene was brought to a painful close.

**Scene Two (b)** opened with both junior and senior boys carrying missiles. One kept cave, while the others barred the door against the two masters. Nethercotes banged on the door and demanded admittance, as the boys laughed and jeered. The boys then rushed to throw stones to break the windows, and the masters disappeared.

The short scene ended with a Morris dance, and the Narrator entered to inform the audience that the incident soon became known to the City Council who, as usual, had to find the money to pay the repair bill. Meetings were held to consider what action would be taken in the case

of Master Plumtree, but the decision was left to Nethercotes to break the news.



**The Morris Dancers (possibly trained by Mrs 'Maggie' Ward?)**

**Scene Two (c)** began in the Greyfriars, with Nethercotes entering the stage reading a paper. Plumtree followed shortly afterwards, and was told that he had both good and bad news. The bad news was that the Mayor and the Common Council of the City had decided that the tradition of barring-out and window-breaking had to be stopped, and that it was the responsibility of Headmaster Nethercotes to ensure that the mischievous custom was terminated, and that any breakages in the future would have to be paid for by the Master himself. Since the boys had taken no notice of previous bans, Nethercotes was clearly nervous about this decision.

By contrast, the good news concerned Usher Plumtree. The Council had debated his health issues, and had issued a statement which Nethercotes read out to him:

*"Whereas Master Plumtree is now too old to teach, it is determined that the Council grant him a pension of £5 yearly with all the benefits of a Freeman of the City, the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral having agreed to provide in addition a pension of £3 6s 8d yearly."*

Knowing how reluctant the Council members were to give away money, Plumtree expressed doubts about their generosity, and made a reference to Greeks bearing gifts! Nethercotes, laughing, then mentioned the biggest joke in the letter. The Council had found a way to pay the annual pension at no cost to themselves. It was to be deducted from the salary of his successor!

*Exeunt* to the accompaniment of medieval music.

The Narrator introduced **Scene Three** by informing the audience that there was uncertainty about how successful Master Nethercotes was in preventing the breaking of windows. Certainly he failed in his attempt to bring to an end the practice of 'barring-out', because evidence showed that the Governors of the School issued edicts forbidding that 'mischievous custom' some one hundred years later.

However, in addition to the settlement of Plumtree's pension, the most important event of the history of Lincoln School was the achievement that the Dean and the Chapter had at last cooperated, and the union of the ancient School downhill, and the Cathedral Close School uphill, was accomplished.

Henceforth, there was to be one grammar school under the joint supervision of the City and the Cathedral authorities, heralding in the period of relative peace and stability referred to earlier in this article.

The final scene depicted a meeting of both interested parties, which took place in the Chapter House of the Cathedral on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1587 under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Lincoln, Thomas Cooper. Also present were the Dean, the Precentor, the Chancellor, the Mayor (Rishworth), and Aldermen.

The Bishop introduced the meeting by reminding the distinguished gentlemen that the purpose of the meeting was to bring to an end the 'ancient quarrel' between the two branches of the School, in which the chief sufferers had been the boys of the city.

He referred to the records which showed from the time of his illustrious predecessor, Remigius, that there was one grammar school in Lincoln in which were educated both the boys of the city, and also the choristers and the poor clerks of the foundation of the Cathedral (see Notes). He informed them that it was a good school, and an efficient one. The masters had all been men of sound learning, with skills to teach. Its boys were brought up in 'good learning and virtuous living'.

The Bishop then reminded the gathering that, at the beginning of the previous century, the 'wicked quarrel' had 'blazed out' between city and cathedral. The Dean and Chapter had opened a rival school in the Close. He believed that this was no time to rake up old scores, or to rekindle antagonisms that should never have existed. In his judgement, there were faults on all sides, including presumptions and negligence on the part of the Cathedral, and stubbornness on the part of the council of the city.



**The Bishop (Mr Massey?) in his finery**

As a result of that quarrel, he proclaimed that there was a state of affairs which should be deplored. In place of one good school, the city now had two inefficient ones. Neither the Council, nor the Cathedral could provide sufficient stipends to maintain able and learned masters for their schools. In both schools, the Bishop continued, the scholars failed to profit in the ways in which their parents expected, and many were withdrawn.

The Bishop then drew attention to an agreement which had been framed in order to end the quarrel and unite the two schools. Both parties had

been summoned that day in order to affirm their consent and affix their seals to a Deed of Union. At that stage, he invited the Chancellor, who had a foot in both camps, to expound the terms of the agreement.

The Chancellor gladly agreed, and rose to read out the proposals and terms upon which the two schools would be united;

- That the Mayor, Recorder and Aldermen of the city shall elect the usher of the School
- That the Dean and Chapter shall pay £20 yearly towards the stipend of the master
- That the Mayor, Sheriffs and Commonality of the city shall pay £20 yearly, of which £13. 6s. 8d shall be the stipend of the Usher, and the residue shall be towards the increase of the Master's stipend.
- That the School shall be kept in the Greyfriars.
- That the Mayor, Sheriffs and Commonality of the city shall repair the schoolhouse at their own cost as often as need shall be
- That the School shall be visited twice yearly by the Dean and three residentiaries, the Mayor, the Recorder and two Aldermen

The Chancellor concluded by stating that the agreement also dealt with the conditions in which scholars would enter the School, and the fees which were to be paid by their parents.

A disagreement followed in which Alderman Blow expressed his dislike for the agreement, because it would give the Cathedral greater control over the School without being responsible for its maintenance.

The Bishop was not impressed. He pointed out that the Alderman's fights in the Council had even reached the ears of the Queen's advisers in London. His 'brawling' on the subject of the School was widely known.

The Mayor then intervened by assuring the meeting that Master Blow's bark was worse than his bite, and that even a well-bred dog would not bark in the Chapter House of the Cathedral.

The Bishop responded by stating that he would have none of the Council's 'wranglings' in that building. If the Council were not of one mind, they should compose their differences elsewhere, and then return for further discussion.

At that point, the Mayor diffused the situation by agreeing that Master Blow and some of his friends had opposed the agreement, but the greater part of the Council, having been assured that it was the best that

could be achieved, and that it was for the advantage of their city, had empowered him to affirm and consent to the Deed of Union.



**The Bishop chairs the meeting**

“Then come forward,” proclaimed the Bishop. “Here is wax, and a light. Affix to the agreement the common seal of the city.”

Having established that all were content, each signatory was empowered to add his seal in turn. The Bishop was the last to add his seal, and he rejoiced in his delight, as father to them all, that his sons’ differences had been resolved. The School would now advance to greater success and fame, and he was proud to announce that the Dean and Chapter had appointed as the first master of the united School, Master William Temple from King’s College of the University of Cambridge. He was well known to the Dean as a man of outstanding gifts, and under his care the school would achieve great things (see Notes).

At that point a bell began to ring and, with extraordinary foresight, the Bishop dreamt of a bright future for Lincoln in which, perchance far-off in the future, a second Queen Elizabeth might reign! Two things, he concluded, would remain of the city they knew; the Cathedral on its hill-top with its beauty, its challenge and its inspiration; and our School, still educating the boys of Lincoln in sound learning and what matters more – virtue and godly living.

“My sons, the bell calleth to Evensong. I do beseech you, come with me now everyone, and in our worship of God, in whose hand rest both the present and the future, let us pray that this, my dream, shall find fulfilment.”

*Exeunt* to solemn music and God Save the Queen.

Thus ended one of the most significant events in the history of Lincoln School, and heralded the period of relative calm and stability.



**A fine-looking John Thursby stealing the sartorial honours**

## **Notes**

1. A widespread custom, up to the 19th century, was the ‘barring-out’ of the schoolteacher by his pupils. On a day sanctioned by custom (but varying from place to place), the pupils contrived to bar the door with the teacher outside, often with his connivance,

and refused to let him in until he agreed to their terms, which were usually for a half-holiday, or something similar. By the 19th century the custom was relatively controlled, but in previous generations had been much rougher. On at least one occasion, in Scotland in 1595, a magistrate who was helping the teacher gain access to the school was shot dead by one of the pupils. Not surprisingly, local authorities waged a continual war against such activities and gradually succeeded in taming and, eventually, eliminating the custom (Oxford Reference).

The eminent education historian A F Leach, in his history of Lincoln Grammar School after the Union (Leach, 1906), wrote that the common council agreed that the:

*'...windowes in the Scole-house now broken and defaced shall forthwith be newlye glassed and emanded,' but 'after the repairing the Scolemaster to stand to the upholding thereof with glasse when neede require.*

2. (Head) masters, according to Leach in his seminal work on medieval schools in England (Leach, 1915), were required to be learned in Latin and Greek, of good character and pious life. They held the 'primacy' in grammar schools, and were called the head master or chief teacher.

Leach defined ushers as the second masters of schools during the medieval period, who were sometimes pupil-teachers. They were required only to be learned in Latin, and were required under the headmaster to teach the rudiments of grammar, and to be called the lower master or second teacher. There were also under-ushers who, according to Leach, were probably prefects or other senior boys,

3. Leach informed us that in Lincoln, the poor clerks, young men from eighteen to twenty, and even vicars-choral who were already deacons and priests, attended the Grammar School as pupils.

4. According to Professor Garton's list of Lincoln School (Head) Masters, (Garton, 1988) William Dighton (note different spelling)

was Headmaster from c1517 to c1548, John Plumtree from 1548 to 1556, James Maydwell from 1558 to 1560, and John Plumtree again from 1560 to 1565. William Temple was Headmaster from 1583 to 1586, followed by Walter Nethercotes from 1588 to 1595. Thus, Professor Garton's dates, based on his assiduous research into the history of Lincoln School, do not tally with those in the pageant. Further confusion is added by Leach (1906), who speculated that Plumtre (spelled with one 'e'), might have been the son of Headmaster John Plumtre(e), but records were somewhat elusive on that subject.

Thus, one can only assume 'poetic licence' on the part of the author of Elizabethan Schooldays!

## **The Cast**

I am relying on readers to help me to identify the names of those who took part, as I cannot find a programme of the pageant in the archives, and there is no mention of the cast in *The Lincolnian*.

Two members of staff are readily identifiable; 'Jab' Baxter, and history master Charles 'Buster' Hannam. I suspect that the Bishop might have been Mr Massey, our form master in 3a, but I cannot be certain.

I recognise the six young pupils as they were 'fags' in my year-group. They are, left to right, David Blatherwick, John Herrick, David Sykes, David Lister, Paul Anselm and John Smith.

Other older pupils whom I recognise are John Thursby, A P Baker (Bunny's son), John Best, Peter Pickering (although he denies any memory of the play!), and (possibly) Stuart Christie.

The location of the photographs is clearly the area alongside the hall at Lincoln School, but David Blatherwick firmly believes that the pageant was performed in the Castle grounds. David Sykes has no memory of that, so I am hoping that others might be able to solve that conundrum. The school location might have been the dress rehearsal, of course, or the 'photo-shoot'.

## **References**

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