

A 19th-Century Village Boarding School: The Garlick School at Ewelme

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SUMMARY

Private schooling, both day and boarding, was an important part of 19th-century educational provision yet has been relatively neglected by historians. This study of a boarding school in the Oxfordshire village of Ewelme looks at the role of such a school, and at its proprietors, pupils and curriculum. The identity and background of the pupils are pursued and, with the help of family papers, something of their social status, aspirations and subsequent careers is pieced together. The Garlick school at Ewelme is then placed in context by comparison with private schools elsewhere in the county.

In the mid-19th century in the quiet south Oxfordshire village of Ewelme, over 40 young boys lived together in a single household. They were pupils attending the private boarding school run by a local family, the Garlicks. Who were these pupils? Where did they come from? Why were they sent to Ewelme? What were they taught and by whom? Whilst much has been written about schools, schooling and their extensive development in the 19th century, attention has most frequently concentrated on either the ancient foundations of grammar and public schools or on the new provision of elementary schools, first on a voluntary and denominational basis by the National and British Societies and then, after 1870, under statutory compulsion. This emphasis has applied in Ewelme, which had a medieval school, endowed by the de la Pole family in 1437 but decayed and inactive by the 18th and early 19th centuries, and where by 1833 provision for local children was made by the Anglican sponsored National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. Yet many 19th-century children went neither to ancient or public schools nor to local elementary schools. It was at establishments like the Garlick school at Ewelme that they gained their formative educational experiences. Because such schools were private enterprises, sometimes of a transitory nature, they leave little or no mark in the institutional, denominational or parliamentary records of the period yet, by use of those standard tools of the historian of the 19th century – commercial directories, census enumerators' books, tithe apportionments and parish registers – together with surviving family papers, it has been possible to piece together some account of the Garlick school. This paper presents the Ewelme evidence and discusses the role and character of such schools, particularly in 19th-century Oxfordshire.

The Garlick family are first mentioned in the Ewelme parish registers in 1776. They flourished in the village until the 1880s and are last mentioned in the registers in 1932. A parallel, but apparently unconnected Garlick dynasty of agricultural labourers is recorded in the registers between 1769 and 1901. The boarding school, known variously as the Commercial School and the Academy, was run by James Garlick (1783–1843) and

after his death by his widow Elizabeth, born at Ipsden, Oxfordshire in 1796, and who continued until she died in 1875. After this date the school disappears from records. James was a veritable patriarch, marrying three times and fathering 17 children. It was a son, Thomas Henry Garlick (1813–73) by his first wife, who ran the other family business, as publican of the Greyhound Inn at Ewelme and as a butcher. The family fortunes lay in trade, rather than farming or landholding. The Garlick school operated at the Mount in the centre of the village. The name remains, although the house has disappeared. It lay east of the present-day Chaucer's Court. In 1841¹ the property amounted to 1a–2r–24p.

The overall fortunes of the school are reflected in the enumerators' books for the 1841, 1851, 1861 and 1871 censuses. In 1841 James Garlick was the schoolmaster and lived at the Mount with his third wife, Elizabeth, and 6 offspring aged between 3 and 15. Four domestic servants were kept. Forty-eight pupils were in residence, 25 in the main house and the remainder in 'a cottage detached from the school' which they shared with Thomas Townsend, a 17-year-old 'usher', William Garlick aged 19 and a Manchester warehouseman, a 60-year-old woman servant, and a 45-year-old man of independent means. All the pupils were boys, aged between 7 and 14, and only 9 had been born in Oxfordshire. They included Peter Spokes, aged 11, Joseph Spokes, 10, and (in the cottage) George Lark, 11, none of them Oxfordshire-born, and of whom more will be heard later.

By 1851 the widowed Elizabeth Garlick (55) was in charge, living at the Mount with two children, 4 domestic servants, an assistant (Charles Robinson, 32, teacher of English and born in Margate), and a reduced number of pupils – 27. They were boys between 8 and 15, seven of whom had been born in Oxfordshire but most in central or greater London. By 1861 the school had recovered to its earlier size, with 44 resident boys between 4 and 16 but concentrated in the 8 to 13 age group. No fewer than 30 came from the London area and only 3 from Oxfordshire. Elizabeth, now 65, lived with one son, the unmarried Septimus (35), described as 'farmer and schoolmaster', an assistant master aged 45 and born in Middlesex, and two domestic servants. In 1871 Elizabeth Garlick was assisted by the same teacher as in 1861 and by an 18-year-old governess from Coomb [sic] in Oxfordshire. There were two servants and 41 pupils, all boys aged 6–14, including 29 born in the London area and 7 in Oxfordshire or nearby parts of Berkshire. In 1875 Elizabeth died and the school was not mentioned in the next census of 1881 or in subsequent commercial directories.

It is unclear exactly when the Garlick school began. When, in 1808, the Archbishop of Canterbury conducted a survey into local schooling Ewelme was reported to have 3 day-schools, with 12–14 pupils each.² No boarding school was mentioned. In 1815 the local curate reported 2 day, 2 Sunday and 2 boarding schools in the parish,³ whilst in 1818 the Parliamentary Committee on the Education of the Poor recorded a boarding and day school for 60 boys, 2 day schools teaching 40 children and a Sunday school in Ewelme.⁴ By 1833⁵ several dame schools for very young children, a day and Sunday National School, and a boarding school for 40 boys were operating.

It was in January 1839 that Peter Spokes, already encountered in the 1841 census, came to James Garlick's Ewelme Academy. His background and educational experi-

¹ Ewelme tithe apportionment and map, 1841 (Oxfordshire Archives, Tithe no. 159).

² Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Ox. Dioc. Pp. d 707.

³ Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Ox. Dioc. Pp. c 433, quoted in George Cannon, 'Elementary Educ. in Oxon. during the 19th century' (Oxf. Univ. Dept. for External Studies cert. dissertation, 1985).

⁴ Select Cttee. on Educ. of Poor, Digest of Paroch. Returns, 1818. PP HC 1819, vol. IX-B, p. 723.

⁵ Educ. Enq. Abstract, 1833. PP HC 1835, vol. XLII, p. 746.

ences⁶ provide valuable clues to the character of the school and its clientèle. The Spokes were a prosperous trading family, corn dealers and maltsters from Wallingford, 3 miles from Ewelme. Peter was their eldest son and began his education at the early age of 2½ at a dame school in Wallingford. At 6 he became a day boy with Thomas Wallis of Fish Street, Wallingford. His departure to board at Ewelme came at what seems a typical age of 8, but was apparently hastened by a row with Wallis who had made 'disparaging remarks' about the Church of England catechism. Peter's only brother, Joseph, a year younger, was also sent to Ewelme. Peter's recollections, written in 1904, reveal little of the education received. He remembers hearing sermons by Dr. Hampden, rector of Ewelme, presumably when the school attended church. His four years at the Academy were a prelude to Wallingford Grammar School (1843-45), whose day boys and half a dozen boarders he contrasted with Ewelme's 'rather rough element'. Spokes then began an apprenticeship, at the age of 14, to a chemist and druggist in Reading. A successful career as a chemist followed and in 1869-71 the mayoralty of Reading, crowned in 1872 by a knighthood.

From this solidly respectable position Peter Spokes remembered the most exciting event of his Ewelme years, the escape of George Lark. The school always had a strikingly high proportion of boys from London, of whom Lark was one and desperately keen to get home before the end of the half-year. Spokes, the local boy, showed him the way to the GWR railway station, then situated outside Wallingford on the Streatley road. The boys climbed the playground wall after afternoon school, George was set on the way, and Peter decided to drop in unexpectedly on his parents. His father rapidly returned him to Ewelme where, at evening roll call, Lark's absence was discovered. Peter was questioned and a messenger sent in pursuit of the missing pupil who was found, still waiting for a train. The hapless boy was returned to the school by midnight. His fate is unknown, as is the source of his unhappiness. What is clear is that the Academy continued to attract pupils from the metropolis. Indeed, with half to three quarters regularly with origins in greater London, its fortunes seem to have depended on this source of recruitment.

The Garlick school's links with a world of prosperous, middle class trading families are further illustrated in the rich family papers of the Tubbs, three of whose children were pupils at Ewelme in the 1850s. Benjamin Tubb, a maltster, became a farmer at Warborough in 1810⁷ where, 10 years later, he was joined by his brother James, who had been a substantial grocer in Chichester. There he was an active Radical campaigner, supporter and correspondent of William Cobbett and Henry Hunt. The latter, raising funds to agitate against the Peterloo massacre of 1819, asked Tubb's help in marketing Hunt's special label British Herb Tea. He also asked affectionately after 'your little treasure of a daughter', the Tubbs' only child, Maria Louisa, born in 1811. In 1820 the Tubbs arrived in Oxfordshire, an articulate family with firm and still radical views and educational aspirations. At the age of 8 Maria Louisa had started school in Chichester, writing to her cousin Mary in immaculate copperplate, 'I now go to school . . . I like going very much. I think of learning French next quarter. It is a very large school, as it contains upwards of an hundred boarders, and as many day-scholars.' From this she went to board at Miss Lee's Seminary for young ladies in Wallingford. In 1835 she married her first cousin, James, and by 1848 had produced 5 surviving children. From her diary and her and their letters⁸ we know of the education of 4 of these, James (born

⁶ This section is based on personal information and on unpublished reminiscences by Sir Peter Spokes ('Some Chronological Reflections on Entering my 75th Year', 1904) kindly supplied by his great-granddaughter Ann Spokes Symonds.

⁷ Bodl. MS. Eng. Misc. b 347, ff 104-9.

⁸ Bodl. MS. Eng. Misc. d. 1219 and f. 794/1-5; MS. Eng. lett. c. 541.

1836), Joseph (born 1844), Mary Martha ('Polly', born 1845) and Benjamin (born 1848). During 1856 and 1857 both Joseph and Polly were boarding at the Garlick school. They attended between late January and Easter, then again until mid-June and between mid-July and the end of August. The autumn term began in early October, lasting until the week before Christmas. On 29 October 1865 Polly wrote home:

My dear Mamma,

Joseph and I are very much obliged to you for the grapes you sent us we enjoyed them exceedingly I have began a very pretty cheesecloth the pattern of which I hope you will like I am also doing the lace for the petticoat and should be very pleased if you would be so kind as to inform me how much you require.

Mr. Septimus and Mrs. Garlick desire their kind regards. Good bye

I remain

My dear Mamma

Your affectionate daughter

M. M. Tubb

Filial obedience and politeness are always apparent in the Tubb children and were clearly encouraged by the Garlicks, who knew the Tubb parents and that this letter was being written. Another example, this time from Joseph, then aged 13, was written on May 29th, 1857:

My dear Mother,

Accept my best thanks for your kind letter of the 20th Instant, which it pleased me to receive. I was truly gratified to hear of my Grandfather's recovery, and trust he will continue in good health. Our Gardens have been very productive, the seeds purchased at Mr. Gammon's proving good. The fine weather last week enabled us to have several games of Cricket, two of which we played on Ewelme Comon and enjoyed very much. I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you in three weeks time.

Polly joins me in kind love to yourself, and all at home.

I remain

Your affectionate Son

Joseph Tubb

The Garlicks had sought to diversify by extending the provision to girls, an unusual move when such schools were usually firmly for young ladies or young gentlemen, and which seems to have been unsuccessful. Polly first went to Ewelme in July 1856 but on 7 January 1858 her mother wrote in her diary that 'Mrs Garlick discontinues her school for young ladies' and within three weeks Polly was attending Miss Wells' school. Here the curriculum was so full 'that I scarcely think of anything else' as she wrote to her youngest brother Benjamin in 1859, at the end of a four-page letter packed with details of repetition in geography ('the most difficult lesson'), of half-finished Latin, French, music, botany (finding samples for both the General and Linnæan systems), heraldry and architecture, fractions and sums and Latin-English translations. That evening she was to attend a lecture on Egypt in Wallingford. Her comment - 'Miss Emma Wells is still here - she lets us have no peace' - seems heartfelt. It is a relief to know, from her mother's diary, that on 1 September 1858 'Miss Wells gave a liberal treat to her scholars in Nuneham Park. The party including visitors numbered about 20. They went in Preston's van and Goodey's sociable.'

If this was the nature of a young lady's curriculum did Polly's brothers, Joseph and Benjamin, at Ewelme enjoy a régime of gardening and cricket? Mrs Tubb records that on Ash Wednesday, 25 February 1857, 'Joseph came with the boys (about 40) to purchase garden seeds of J. Gammon', hence the productive gardens mentioned in his letter of late May. A hint of a more academic curriculum is provided by two manuscripts in the

Bodleian Library.⁹ One is the marble-backed notebook of Benjamin Tubb. It consists of 22 pages of immaculately written copperplate sentences illustrating grammar and vocabulary and also encapsulating either moral messages (for example, 'There is frequently a worm at the root of our most flourishing condition') or miscellaneous useful knowledge (for example, 'There are no fewer than thirty-two species of the lily'). The second is a large, hand-written table of the conjugation of French irregular verbs with, on the back, a geometry exercise in drawing concentric circles, radii and angles.

What were the results of the Tubb family's firm belief in boarding school education for their children? Their eldest son, James, did not go into trade or farming but turned to the newly reformed Civil Service. Despite the introduction of competitive examinations for posts it took some energetic working of the patronage system to get James nominated to enter the competition in the first place. His sponsor was Richard Malins, M.P. for Wallingford, to whom his father wrote frequently. The result, in 1858, was entry into the competition for candidates between 19 and 25 for a Clerkship in the Accountant and Comptroller-General's office of the Inland Revenue, at an annual salary of £90. James Tubb came top of 10 candidates with 942 of a possible 1,300 marks. He proved a diligent and attentive civil servant, commuting to his office from Clarendean, Roehampton and retiring in 1899 with an illuminated testimonial, a chiming clock and a pension of £600 per annum after over 40 years' service.

His brother Joseph emigrated to America in 1872, where he married and had a family. By 1883 when a letter from Iowa City survives, the careful English of his Garlick school letters is interlaced with Americanisms; the weather is 'kind of cool' and his pet is 'just as cute as a dog can be'.¹⁰

Benjamin, the youngest child, is the only Tubb whose later schooling we know. After the Garlick school he attended an Anglican public school, St. John's College, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex. There he entered into the competitive ethos with gusto, writing home to his mother and sister Polly with immodest enthusiasm about his successes – first in his report, two prizes, drilling with a carbine in the 1st Company of cadets, performing Shakespeare before Bishop Wilberforce, and playing cricket. Here doubts about competition may have occurred to Maria Louisa as she was regaled with full and gory details (complete with diagrams) of an accident in which her son's schoolfellow, the son of a Hazlemere surgeon, was knocked over and crushed to death in a race between two cricket rollers. Benjamin's studies included Latin, divinity, English literature, history, geography, declamation, writing, arithmetic, French, spelling, English composition and book-keeping. Benjamin eventually returned to Warborough to become a leading village figure, first chairman of Warborough Parish Council and a manager of the local school.

It seems that the Garlick school at Ewelme was seen by parents as a way of fitting their offspring for life, either in preparation for grander schools or for trade and commerce. They could hold their own with their peers in public service and business, although university does not seem to have been thought of. In the case of the Tubbs their choice of school was probably reinforced by personal acquaintance. The families were on calling terms. James senior handled the payment of legacies from Elizabeth Garlick's will, and in 1879 Septimus Garlick, 'farmer and schoolmaster', but now travelling in wine and spirits for an Oxford firm, was still visiting the Tubbs at Warborough.

How typical was the Garlick school? It was certainly not an isolated phenomenon in Oxfordshire. Gardner's Directory of Oxfordshire for 1852 lists no fewer than 104 academies and private schools. Although the greatest concentration, 41, was in Oxford,

⁹ Bodl. MS. Eng. Misc. d 1221.

¹⁰ Bodl. MS. Eng. Misc. c 541, ff 74–6.

most were in market towns and villages, including Ewelme. Forty-two were described as boarding schools. Sixty had female proprietors. Using census enumerators' books for 1851 comparisons can be made with the Ewelme Academy. For example, another south Oxfordshire village, Clifton Hampden, had a 'commercial school'. It housed 28 boys between the ages of 9 and 15. The proprietor and schoolmaster was Jesse Creak, 41, born at Kingston (Blount?), Oxfordshire, the son of a carpenter. The father lived with his schoolmaster son, daughter-in-law, their 4 children and a young niece at the school house. The schoolmaster was supported by a 28-year-old assistant who taught 'grammar, etc', and an 18-year-old teacher of general subjects, giving a staff:student ratio of just over 1:9, rather better than at Ewelme. There were also 3 domestic servants. Thirteen of the boys had been born in Oxfordshire, 8 in London, 2 in Welwyn, Herts., and 5 elsewhere. As with the Spokes and Tubbs at Ewelme it seems to have been usual for families to put their young sons to board from the age of around 9, even if they lived very locally. However a significant, if lesser proportion of pupils than at Ewelme, had London origins. Oxfordshire boarding schools seem to have specialised in either boys' or girls' education. At Stadhampton Miss Kate Richmond, 45, born at Drayton, Oxfordshire superintended 15 young ladies aged 8 to 15. In the all-female household were two young teachers (20 and 23), one specialising in music, and two servants. The girls were predominantly local - 12 had been born in Oxfordshire and 3 in London. Similar establishments occurred elsewhere in the county. For example, at Bloxham in north Oxfordshire the widowed Hannah Trevithick educated 20 girls, aged 10 to 16, with the help of 3 grandly named 'professors'. Their specialisms indicate the polite curriculum for young ladies. Hannah's unmarried daughter, Sarah, 49, taught French, Elizabeth Perkins, 42, English, and Annette Lane, 27, music. As at Stadhampton the pupils were chiefly local, with 15 Oxfordshire birthplaces, one from London, and 4 from elsewhere.

Some communities contained several boarding schools. The small town of Bampton in west Oxfordshire (1851 population 2,780) had no fewer than four. Three of these follow the pattern suggested by Ewelme, Clifton Hampden, Stadhampton and Bloxham. The proprietor's family was resident and members of it, particularly unmarried daughters or sisters, frequently undertook teaching. The pupils were in the age range 8 to 14 or 15, many of them from very local families. In neighbouring households in Bampton High Street were Elizabeth Steede's Ladies School for 9 pupils and Thomas Leforestier's establishment for 17 boys. Miss Steede's extended household included her mother, sister (who taught), a niece and a cousin, as well as a governess and a servant. Mr Leforestier coped with his 17 pupils without resident teaching staff and with two servants. Apart from 4 brothers born in India and 3 from London, his pupils were mostly local and (although exact relationships are not known) their names suggest the support of important middle-class trading families, including two Earlys from Witney and a Druce from Eynsham, blanketmakers and leading farmers respectively. At West Weald in Bampton John Beechey ran yet another boys' school for 19 young gentlemen.¹¹ This was housed in Weald Manor, and was succeeded by 'St. Mary's College', which similarly aimed to emulate public school education economically, but ran out of funds.

The fourth Bampton school illustrates another, less grand, type of boarding establishment. Harriet Hickman, a widowed 'retired farmer' of 48, headed a household in which her daughter Agnes, 23, was a 'teacher of youth' assisted by her sister Matilda, 20. Their resident pupils amounted to two local sisters aged 11 and 9 and a 6-year-old girl.

¹¹ For prospectus for Beechey's school see *Oxford Journal*, 8 January 1831. I owe this reference to Dr. Simon Townley.

There is a strong sense of setting up a school to make ends meet in an acceptably respectable way at a time of difficult family circumstances. This situation applied also in Norfolk in the 1890s, a difficult time for agriculture, where schools for middle-class girls were frequently run by the daughters of farmers. A Royal Commission report referred to the women's 'praiseworthy desire to help their parents. And as tuition is the most respectable way of making a living, and at the same time the only trade for which training seems a positive disability, they take to the business'.¹² Other 'emergency' schooling enterprises in Oxfordshire in 1851 may have included the small establishment at Clanfield run by John and Elizabeth Bryant, whose home was shared by their 2-year-old son, two local brothers and another boy, aged 9 or 10. In north Oxfordshire, at Hook Norton, Sophia Blakeman and her 20-year-old John set up as schoolmistress and master. Their scholars were a 9-year-old from Cripplegate, London, and a young boy from Banbury. Their enterprise does not appear the following year in the 1852 county directory. Like the Bryants of Clanfield, but unlike the school proprietors of Ewelme, Clifton Hampden, Bloxham and Stadhampton, their birthplaces suggest an itinerant family seeking a way to support themselves. Teaching was a task readily grafted onto others, and to which family members were often expected to turn a hand. The supplementary character of the activity is vividly illustrated by William Kibble of Neat Enstone. In the 1851 census he is described as postmaster, grocer and Wesleyan Minister. By 1852 the postmaster was also 'grocer and boarding school keeper etc'. Given the respectable and practical stations in life to which the parents of these pupils seem to have aspired for their children, perhaps such determined versatility on the part of their teachers was not considered out of place.

For many middle-class Oxfordshire children in the 19th century, private boarding schools like the Ewelme Academy provided their formative educational experiences. As Pamela Horn has commented, there was an acute dearth of post-elementary schooling opportunities in Oxfordshire as late as the 1920s.¹³ The county's private schools met a demand both from local children and outsiders, particularly those from the London area. In 1883, 72 private schools are mentioned in Kelly's Oxfordshire Directory. Fifty-one were outside Oxford, including the substantial boarding schools at Bloxham (Anglican) and Sibford (Quaker). There were 21 other boarding establishments, 9 of them for ladies. Oxford had 21 private schools, two of which adopted the title 'Middle-Class', as did others in Littlemore and Thame. By 1915 the number of private schools listed in Kelly's had fallen to 32 for the whole of Oxfordshire, only 17 of which were outside Oxford. Apart from the boarders at Bloxham, Sibford, Thame Grammar School, and in Oxford at Summerfields and Milham Ford, just 4 boarding schools were identified. Gradually alternative opportunities, changing parental attitudes, and outside regulation and standardisation had begun to overtake this relatively unknown sector of educational and local life.

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¹² Royal Commission on Secondary Education, vol. VI, Reports of Assistant Commissioners, PP 1895, vol. XLVIII, 'Report by Mr. & Mrs. Lee Warner of Norfolk', quoted in P. Horn, *Victorian Countrywomen* (1991), p. 196.

¹³ See P. Horn (ed.), *Village Education in 19th-century Oxfordshire* (Oxfordshire Record Society, li, 1979), Introduction.