



MHG NEWSLETTER

No 29

Slate Pencils

In 2018 we dug our first archaeological test pit in the garden of 28 Market Place. With professional help most of the pottery sherds were identified. The items in the photograph were largely ignored and remained unidentified. They are in fact pencils used by children in the Victorian age for writing on slate. I tested one of the pencils out on a handy piece of slate and it worked fine. These slate pencils were made of soapstone and children were supposed to bring a dampened cloth to school to clean the slate and start again but usually some spit on the sleeve sufficed. In other words they had to '*wipe the slate clean*'



A view of the school from the garden next door, No 30 Market Place,

It is not surprising that we found them, as from about 1840 until 1914 there was a school attached to the back of the house.

Jacques Academy

Lydia Jacques was the eldest daughter of Robert Pearson and Sarah Jacques and the family moved from their home next to the Anchor Inn in the north end of Mountsorrel to 28 Market Place sometime between 1841 and 1846.

In 1846, according to Whites Trade Directory, there were three schools in Mountsorrel. They were called 'academies' and one of them was run by Lydia Jacques. At that time Lydia was aged twenty one and her school was the one attached to the back of 28 Market Place.

In 1851 Lydia was still in charge of the school but later her sister Rebecca became the schoolmistress. Rebecca remained there until early 1861 when she went to France to learn French.

Rebecca Brewin, who lived next door at 30 Market Place, was then a pupil at the girls' grammar school in Loughborough. In the spring of 1861, at the age of 16, she left to replace Rebecca Jacques. Rebecca Brewin was a cousin of Lydia and Rebecca Jacques. When her widowed mother, who was the sister of Sarah Jacques, died in 1862 she went to live with her Aunt Lydia at number 28.

She left the school in the summer of 1864 to look after a sick relative in Birmingham. She died in 1873, aged 28, in East Africa, the wife of a missionary

It is not known when Rebecca Jacques returned from France but by 1870 she was back in Mountsorrel living with her sister Lydia and was once again the mistress at the school. In the following year it is recorded that she had a 15 year old assistant, Sarah Jacques, who was the daughter of her brother William.

Rebecca was still teaching at the school in 1880.

After Rebecca died in September 1881 Sarah became the schoolmistress and in 1891 was being assisted by her sister Annie Jacques. Sarah remained at the school for the next 33 years but Annie was no longer there in 1901 and got married in 1904. After her mother died in 1904 Sarah went to live with Lydia at number 28 until Lydia died in 1914 and the school closed.

Another of sister of Lydia and Rebecca Jacques, Emma started a private school in the back room of Quorn village hall in 1892.



Sarah Jacques lived with her family at the bakery, 46 Loughborough Road. In the photo you can see the name 'Jacques' over the carriage way of the bakery. It now says 'Gibsons'



Harriet and Hilda Wass



Six of William Harrington's children

The names of pupils at the school include Ball, Dennis, Harrington, Proudfoot, Scott and Wass. Many of the schoolchildren came from friends and family. The following children who probably went to the school are:

William and Herbert Dennis (the sons of Thomas and Helen Dennis. Helen was the sister of Sarah Jacques and Annie Jacques)

Harold and Winifred Proudfoot (the children of the Rev James and Harriet Proudfoot. Harriet was the sisters of Sarah and Annie Jacques).

Harriet and Hilda Wass (the daughters of Flora Pepper by a previous marriage. They lived across the road from the school at the butcher's shop).

The children of William Harrington (he was the clerk to the Granite company. He had ten children and lived next door to Sarah and Annie Jacques)

Joseph and Annie Ball who lived round the corner in Watling Street (the children of Joseph and Annie Ball. Annie was the daughter of Elijah Jacques and lived at No 28 following the early death of her mother).

Don't know about Scott, possibly the Fairfax-Scotts

This article was published in the Mountsorrel Christmas Newsletter 1983 and was written by Dorothy Jacques, Sarah Jacques niece

All that remains of the school is the rear wall, now a garden wall, and the platform. The moss and cobble stones are still there in the yard.

The building comprised one room with a platform at one end, equipped with clothes-pegs and at the other end there was a small black grate with hobs at each side. There were windows on only one side and no lighting of any sort. There were two long fixed desks with forms to sit on and Miss Jacques sat at a small table against the fire. The only water available for a drink or washing our hands was a pump in the yard, and the toilet was an earth closet higher up the yard which consisted of small granite cobble stones. The yard was our only playground as we weren't allowed to go up the garden in case we stole the fruit belonging to Great-Aunt Lydia.

I joined the school at the age of three. We got a very good grounding in the 'Three Rs' and knew all the Tables at an early age and frequently had spelling tests, dictation and composition. The fees were 6d per week for the under fives and 9d for the older ones. Our school hours differed by quarter of an hour from St Peters School as some of their scholars used to ridicule us when we went at the same time. A small cane stood in a corner by the fireplace but I have no recollection of ever seeing it used.

Each pupil had an individual reading lesson each morning and as soon as we could read we had to read the first chapter of St John's Gospel. Twice a week in an afternoon we used to go into a small sitting-room in the house for sewing and singing and we were taught all the well-known traditional airs and songs and a few Sankey hymns. Piano lessons at 6d a time were available after school hours.

Sometimes during playtime or after school a few of us were set to grub out moss from the cobble stones in the yard with an old kitchen knife consisting of half a blade for which we were paid 4d per full bucket, after Aunt Lydia had pressed it down with her button boots.

During the latter part of the last Century and up to the time the school was closed for a short period in 1904, children of Doctors, Vicars, Granite Company Officials etc. attended the school. I am the proud possessor of a gold bangle which was presented to Aunt Sarah in 1904 by past and present pupils and which is suitably inscribed. After a few months interval the school was re-opened by Aunt Sarah and continued until the outbreak of World War I when Aunt Lydia died and the house was sold. Many of the pupils up to 1904 had no other education as at that time "Rawlins" didn't exist in Quorn and Loughborough was out of the question without a pony and trap.

Sadly the old school building collapsed and fell down a few years ago. When sometimes I used to look over the wall at the old school, it was difficult to realize that so many pupils were accommodated in it - about 30 both girls and boys.



Miss Sarah Jacques, on the left, with her sister Annie and her pupils in the garden of 28 Market Place 1897



Pupils in front of the school



The school and Great Aunt Lydia's fruit trees



The school with no roof

Money Biddles

We were recently contacted by a lady in New Zealand who is researching her family history and some of her names and places of interest were Mountsorrel and Biddles.

Joseph Biddles, later known locally as 'Money Biddles', was born in Mountsorrel in 1759 and left for London around 1784. He first worked as a shoemaker, but due to his inferior workmanship soon lost his job. So, with £400 from his wife he started selling shoes. He lost money in the first year so he sold his stock of shoes as a contract to the Government. Thus commenced his career of money getting. By extreme frugality and attention to business, when he died in 1834 his property was worth £200,000.

He spent his evenings at a pub in Bishopgate where he treated himself to a glass of gin and water, half a pint of ale and some bread and cheese. In his own shop he was seen taking his breakfast, a basin of tea and slice bread and butter tucked in the saucer, like an apprentice. At home his annual expenses barely mounted to £50.

He had a large investment in the East India Company. On one occasion when several ships docked with a cargo of nutmeg and spices, with the help of Barings, he purchased the lot and made £20,000 profit in a few days.

He left £5000 to his only surviving brother Thomas Biddles an 80 year old sheep jobber in Mountsorrel with the rest of his money going to the 15 children of his two brothers. However, for ten years, only the interest on the money was available to them.



However the lady in New Zealand could not find a link between her great grandfather Thomas Biddles Ward and Joseph Biddles.

Her great grandfather lived in the house next to the Bull and Mouth and emigrated to New Zealand in 1880.

Wildlife

Nesting seems to be well on around the village and some early fledglings of our more common species, Dunnocks, Starlings and Blue Tits etc are to be seen.

Although the public carparks at Rutland Water have re-opened the wildlife Reserves at Eggleton and Lyndon remain closed but if you want your fix of Ospreys have a look at the [live webcam](#)

Other LRWT Reserves are now open apart from Charnwood Lodge, so there are good opportunities for enjoying nature whilst being socially distant.

The excellent weather we had through May brought the life along the riverside into the fore with Damselflys abounding in the warm afternoons and a good mix of Sand Martins, House Martins, Swallows and Swifts taking insects and water. House Martin nests are to be seen on Waterside Drive although with the changes at the quarry the Sand Martin nesting bank is no longer visible.



House Martin Nest Waterside Drive 4th June



River Soar opposite Mountsorrel Marshes 28th

Peace Garden

The Peace Garden has now re-opened (at least the top gate has) and the Parish Council report that it'll now be open daily. There is some work needed to tidy up the Memorial and check over a couple of the Pyracantha bushes in the new hedge that need new supports but for the moment we'll look to doing that on a one-person basis rather than trying to organise a work party.

The Pyracantha Hedge that we planted looked stunning in full flower and is now going over hopefully to provide a major crop of berries. Similarly the three WW1 Anniversary Memorial trees are faring well.

Wildflower Meadow

The long dry period has changed the growth pattern at the Meadow and we now have almost a “tonsure” effect with some dense (mostly Cow Parsley) growth around the perimeter with much lower growth in the middle. Hopefully with change in the weather pattern in June we’ll see more lush growth in the middle. Either way there’s still a fine mix of flowers.



Wildflower Meadow 24th May 2020

Dead Trees

There are now some really apparent dead trees along Cufflins Pit Lane just near the path junction that leads up to “Albert”. The area has for many years been quite dense scrub so the die back has taken a while to be really noticeable.

Most appear to be re-growth of elms, and their death on reaching early maturity is quite common (if disappointing!) and most likely to be due to the Dutch Elm Disease that devastated our woodlands in the 1970’s and remains an ongoing problem. Despite the development of resistant cultivars in recent years we are unlikely to ever have the great elms we once had.



Cufflin’s Pit Lane 4th June 2020

Other tree losses affecting us and the local area generally are:

- Ash trees due to ash die back
- Oak trees which are being attacked by a variety of problems (Charnwood Forest being particularly badly hit).

For those wanting to learn more, Forest Research (part of the Forestry Commission) have advice on recognising problems along with data about causes and extent of the problems, see:

[dutch elm disease](#)



Cufflin’s Pit Lane 4th June 2020