

RICHARD ALPORT'S CHARITY CHILDREN



The story of the
Malpas Alport School
Part One 1745-1903

David Hayns

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FORWARD

It seems entirely appropriate that as the remodelling and refurbishment of Malpas Alport Primary School is completed, creating a wonderful, modern environment, we should pause and reflect on our past.

To this end, David Hayns has written this history of Malpas Alport, to mark the 250th anniversary of its founding in 1745. I am indebted to David for writing this book, as it places the school in its historic context within the community of Malpas. It makes fascinating reading, and I am sure you will be absorbed by the amount of information which chronicles the main events and characters which have influenced the development of the school.

Through these pages it is clear that the school has had a major influence upon the town of Malpas, and that changes in society have also affected the school during 250 years.

David Hayns' enthusiasm for local history is well known in Malpas and he has certainly brought to life the school's past in an interesting and vibrant manner. I am eagerly waiting for part two.

John Womersley
Headteacher
Malpas Alport Endowed Primary School
September 1995

All profits from the sale of this booklet will be
used for the benefit of
Malpas Alport Endowed Primary School

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All photographs are by the author except where stated otherwise.

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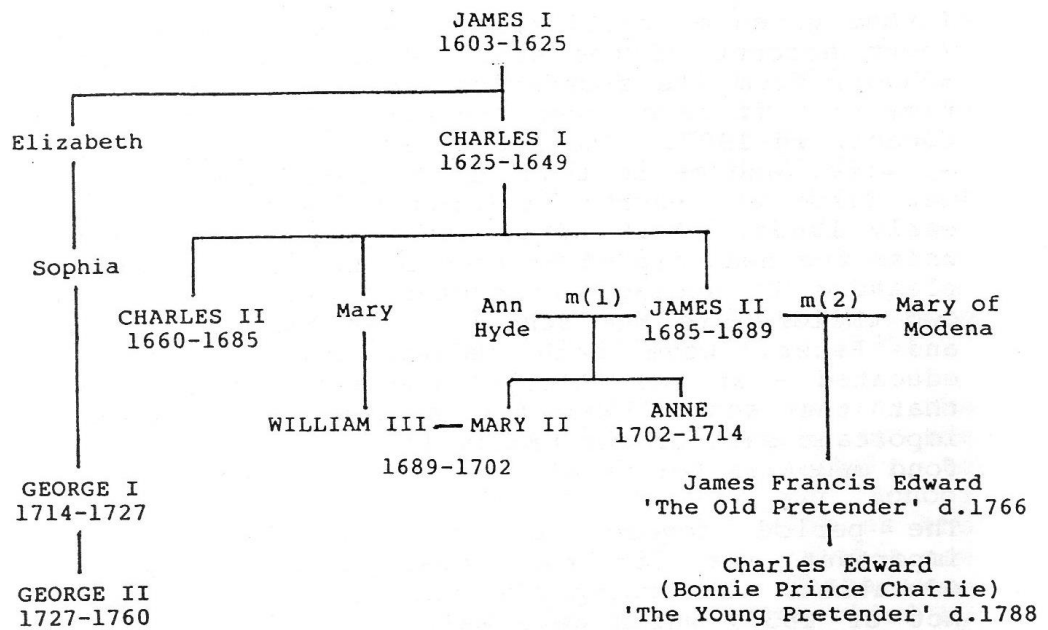
INTRODUCTION

It has given me particular pleasure to write this short account of the story of the Malpas Alport School, from its foundation in 1745 up until the time that it came under the control of the County Council in 1903. The Alport School brought Jill, my wife, and me to teach in Malpas, after we had met first at teacher training college during the early 1960s. Both of us spent three happy years under the headship of Mr Fred Blann and take great pleasure in seeing our former pupils send their own children to the school. Our two sons, John and Peter, were both Malpas born, bred and educated - at the 'Alport' and the 'Heber' - so that the school was for a long time a very important part of our family life. It still holds fond memories for us all.

The period covered by this booklet was an important one for the development of English education. It encompassed the Educational Grants Act of 1833, which gave Malpas its first infant school; the Newcastle Commission, which led to the Revised Code and 'Payment by Results' in 1862; the 1870 'Forster Act', which introduced compulsory school attendance; and the 'Balfour Act' in 1902, which signalled the end of the Alport's time as a voluntary foundation. Ideally this account would have continued to cover the story of the school up until the present day. However, once the twentieth century is reached there is such a wealth of information available in the form of reminiscences of former pupils and teachers, in old photographs and in documentary sources, that I did not have the time to do the subject justice and to publish an account during this special year. I hope that the rest of the story will be written and that many others will be involved in that task. Meanwhile I offer this booklet as a tribute to Richard Alport, whose endowment made possible the founding of the school 250 years ago, and to all those teachers, trustees, managers, governors, pupils and parents who have helped the Alport to survive and flourish to this day.

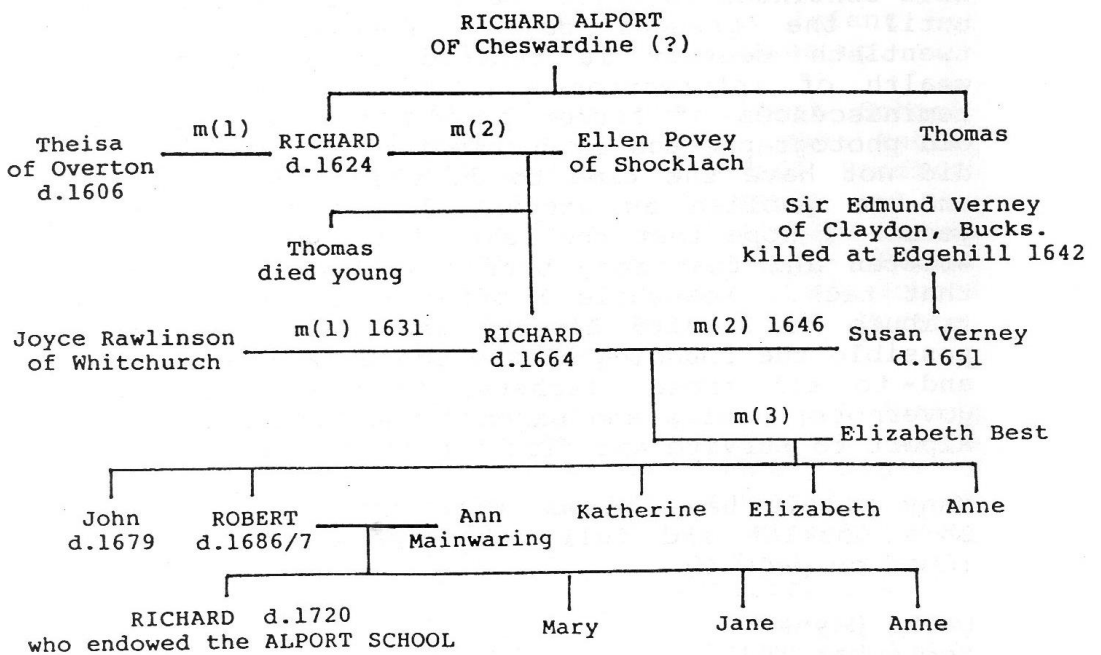
Many people have helped with the preparation of this booklet and full acknowledgements will be found on page 40.

David Hayns
September 1995



TURBULENT TIMES

THE ROYAL SUCCESSION and THE ALPORTS OF OVERTON
during the 17th & 18th Centuries



WHY 1745?

Why was the Alport School founded in 1745?

It is a year that stands out in the pages of British history. Just as 1066 is remembered for William's victory at Hastings and 1815 for Wellington's triumph at Waterloo, so is 1745 remembered for the disastrous failure of Charles Edward - 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' the Young Pretender - in his attempted march from Scotland to London to win the throne back for the exiled Stuart family and to see his father James, the Old Pretender, crowned as king. The '45, as the third Jacobite rising became known, is surrounded with romantic tales. It was followed in 1746 by the Prince's defeat at Culloden after which, disguised as a woman, he was smuggled "across the sea to Skye" by Flora MacDonald. From there he returned to exile in France, to die a disillusioned old man in 1788.

What has this to do with the Alport School?

To find out we must go back another hundred years or so, to the time when this country was in the grip of civil war; to when the Roundheads from Nantwich beat a detachment of the Royalist army at Oldcastle Heath; and to when Colonel Brereton's men were billeted in Malpas Church, after smashing up the salt works at Dirtwich (Higher and Lower Wych).

SQUIRE ALPORT AND THE CIVIL WARS

In those days the squire of Overton Hall, just outside Malpas, was Richard Alport. He was a sound Royalist, so loyal to the King that he had mortgaged his property to raise money to help Sir Hugh Calveley, one of Cheshire's Royalist commanders. As a result Richard became bankrupt. By the end of 1644 he had been seized by the Roundheads and taken as a debtor to London, where he was thrown into the Fleet Prison. One of his fellow prisoners was Tom Verney, from Claydon House in Buckinghamshire. Tom was the second son of the late Sir Edmund Verney, Knight Marshal and Standard Bearer to King Charles I, who had been slain at Edgehill during the very first battle of the Civil Wars.

Parole arrangements at the Fleet seem to have been fairly lenient, making it possible for Tom to introduce Richard to his sister Susan, who was living in London at that time. Richard and Susan fell in love and were married finally in 1646, spending their honeymoon back in prison! The Verney family were great letter writers and literally thousands of their letters from the seventeenth century are preserved at Claydon House, which is the home of the Verney family to this day. It is from these letters that we can reconstruct the story of Richard and Susan's romance. Among them is one that Susan wrote in June 1648 to her eldest brother, Ralph. This was soon after Richard's release from prison, when he had taken Susan home to Overton Hall for the very first time.

"My long expected happiness to see home is come at last," she wrote. "I have been in Cheshire this ten days, where I find a pitiful home for want of living in, not only so but plundered besides. I found nothing in it but bare walls" What a sorry homecoming for the twenty year old bride! What a contrast to the fine mansion where she had grown up in Buckinghamshire! Susan missed Claydon and her friends back home. Three years later she died bearing her third stillborn child, leaving Richard without an heir. He survived to marry again, and to see both his fortunes and the monarchy restored. Richard died in 1664, four years after Charles II, the 'Merry Monarch', had returned to England at the invitation of Parliament. It was an invitation which many came to regret in the years which followed.

The Civil Wars had arisen from fundamental disagreements over religion. They had led to the execution of Charles I by the Presbyterian Commonwealth party, under Oliver Cromwell, who wished to see church and country cleansed of what they regarded as "the curse of Popery". However, after the monarchy had been restored in 1660 it soon became obvious that Charles II had strong Roman Catholic sympathies and would favour a return to 'Popishness'. His turned out to be an eventful reign, much of it chronicled in the famous diaries of Samuel Pepys, covering such disasters in London as the Great Plague of 1665 and the Great Fire in the following year.



Overton Hall near Malpas, former home of the Alport family. The present facade was built in the nineteenth century. Much of the original sixteenth century timber framed building still survives. The hall is now the home of Mr. & Mrs. Richard Barnett.

THE RISE OF THE JACOBITES

When Charles II died in 1685 he was succeeded, against considerable opposition, by his brother James II. James was determined to return England to Roman Catholicism. His determination led to his downfall. During his first year as King there were rebellions in Scotland, led by the Earl of Argyll, and in the West Country, led by the Duke of Monmouth. Opposition to his policies grew rapidly, leading to the final showdown of the 1688 Revolution, which forced James to flee to France. With the country free of the Roman Catholic king, the throne was offered jointly to a staunchly Protestant Dutch couple, William of Orange (grandson of Charles I) and James' own daughter, Mary.

Although James II was the last of the Stuart kings, the Stuart cause did not die when he left the throne. Exiled in France with his supporters, who became known as Jacobites (from 'Jacobus', which is the Latin version of the name James), he plotted to reclaim the crown. He died in 1701, without realising that ambition.

By the time that George I, first of the Hanoverian kings, came to the throne in 1714 there were renewed stirrings among the Jacobite sympathisers in this country. Many of the old landowning families, the 'High Tories', were Jacobites and supported plans to crown the 'Old Pretender' (James, son of James II) as king. The first major Jacobite risings, in 1715, ended with the defeat of the Scottish rebels near Stirling and the English rebels at Preston, both on the same day. Unrest continued off and on until the year 1745, which is where I started the story. This was the year in which Charles Edward Stuart the 'Young Pretender', great grandson of Charles I and son of the Old Pretender, crossed the Channel, landed in Scotland and made the final unsuccessful attempt to reclaim the throne for the Royal House of Stuart.

PANIC IN THE NORTH-WEST

Heartened by his victory in September over Sir John Cope's English troops at Prestonpans, near Edinburgh, the Prince headed for the Border. He crossed into England on November 3rd 1745, accompanied by 5,000 foot and 500 horse soldiers, with his sights set firmly on London. The rebel army must have presented a terrifying spectacle, with all the men clad in Highland dress, as it reached Macclesfield on December 1st, causing great alarm in the east of Cheshire.

In fact, the coming of Bonnie Prince Charlie set the entire North-West into a panic. In Chester, according to a contemporary newspaper, the people were "in the utmost consternation for fear of a visit from the rebels". The City Fathers ordered the Watergate and Northgate to be bricked up, cannon were positioned on the Walls and over three thousand men were "employed throwing up Trenches and erecting Pallisades, to be able to make some stand against the Rebels should they go that Way". The Earl of Cholmondeley, as Lord Lieutenant of the County and Governor of Chester Castle, wrote in a letter to General Sir John Ligonier, commander of the English troops in the Midlands, about "the inhabitants of this place, many having retired with all their effects, which they have put aboard ships down the River where the water is Broad and Deep". He ordered the Castle defences to be strengthened and quickly raised the county militia. No doubt there were Malpas men summoned to the defence of the City and the County. Perhaps they were among those who saw later the first Scottish prisoners brought to Chester and observed that they "had no breeches, nor stockings that came up to their knees, but a short kind of petticoat about a foot deep which is all the Highlanders wear in their own country" (Chester Courant, December 18th 1745).

'MYSTERIOUS MINSHULL' AND THE CYCLE

There were many around Malpas and its Welsh borders who had waited for the coming of the Young Pretender. Jacobitism was rife among the country gentry. The Cheshire and North Wales Jacobites included Sir Watkin Williams Wynn of Wynnstay Hall, Sir Robert Grosvenor of Eaton and Thomas Puleston of Emral Hall at Worthenbury. However, at this distance in time it is hard to sort out exactly where each person's loyalty lay.

Sir Watkin Williams Wynn seems to have been the instigator of a Jacobite 'secret' society known as the Cycle of the White Rose. It was named after White Rose Day, June 10th 1710, which was the birthday of James Francis Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender. Members of the Cycle met at each other's houses in turn. On each occasion they would follow a sumptuous dinner with toasts to the 'Prince across the Water' and singing of the Cycle song, which included the words:

"Here's a Health to the Lad
With his Bonnet and Plaid
For the World cannot stain his True Blue"

Among the members of the Cycle may have been a lesser landholder, Richard Minshull of Malpas Old Hall. According to legend he was a notorious Jacobite who carried his beliefs into positive action, unlike the majority of the Jacobites in the area. The story goes that he lived a life of luxury, which could hardly have been financed from the income of his half tenancy of Lord Cholmondeley's Old Hall farm lands. After long absences Richard would return to Malpas with several bags of gold. Following his death, probably in 1813, the vaults of the Old Hall were opened and found to contain almost a cartload of golden sovereigns as well as a quantity of armour. Some thought that he was a highwayman. The notorious Dick Turpin had been hanged at York in 1739 and it was around this time that Edward Higgins, the Cheshire highwayman, began to make his presence known in the Knutsford area. Others believed Richard's own story that he was a close confidant of Charles Edward Stuart himself. He claimed to have been with the Young Pretender in France, to have fought with him at the Battle of Prestonpans, to have assisted the Jacobites at Culloden and to have accompanied Charles as he made his escape after that final disastrous battle.

It seems that no-one has ever discovered the real truth about Richard Minshull of Malpas. To his contemporaries he was known as "dreadful, dark old Minshull". In her novel 'The Long Day Closes', which is all about the Cheshire Jacobites and the 'Forty Five', the author Beatrice Tunstall called him "The Mysterious M of M", never referring to him by his full name.

JACOBITE IN WORD BUT NOT IN DEED

The Young Pretender had hoped that the many in Scotland and the north of England who claimed to be Jacobites would rise up to join him on his march to London. There seems to have been a genuine intention among the English Jacobites to support 'The Cause' and it is thought that many of the local hunts and race meetings which came into being around this time were really 'cover operations' for keeping horses and riders in training, so that they would be in peak condition when the call to action came. Could this be the origin of the Wynnstay Hunt and the reason for the numerous small race courses in this area, such as that at Threapwood just outside Malpas?

So what did the local Jacobites actually do when Charles reached Derby? Nothing, it appears. Is it true that they received the news of his arrival too late for them to be of any assistance? Or did they just get cold feet? We shall never really know. The records that could have answered such questions have either been destroyed or altered to conceal the true reasons.

It may be that although the English Jacobites supported the cause in principle, they disapproved of the Young Pretender's actual action in attempting to march on London without the support of French troops. What is known is that the Earl of Cholmondeley was well aware of the activities of the Cheshire and North Wales Jacobites and let it be known that he was keeping them under observation. Perhaps their choice lay between 'keeping their heads low' or running the risk of being arrested and put behind bars at Chester Castle. On November 20th 1745, as the Scottish rebels were making their way through the north of England towards Derby, Cholmondeley wrote to the Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State to King George: "... I can not imagine that any thing serious, or formidable is to be expected from that quarter (i.e. the local Jacobites), tho' I know them, but too ready in their inclinations; and as there are but few men of capacity among 'em, and that, for some time past, all His Majesty's Officers, have had directions from me to watch their motions ... I have held constant correspondence with the well-affected Gentlemen of Flintshire, Denbyshire and Montgomeryshire ... whatsoever may be their attachment and

inclinations, it is impossible any extensive scheme can subsist, and the secret kept among such numbers".

Certainly Sir Watkin Williams Wynn seems to have understood the situation. He disappeared from Wynnstay into Gloucestershire to stay at Badminton with his friend the Duke of Beaufort, until all the fuss had died down.

'THE GROWTH OF IRRELIGION AND PAUPERISM'

So much Jacobite activity in the area must have put the members of the local Anglican establishment on their guard. Having heard from their grandparents about the horrors of the Civil Wars they would want to ensure that the Church of England should never again be rocked by rebellion. A wariness of the Jacobites, with their Roman Catholic sympathies, would have been with them constantly during the thirty years between the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745. Small wonder then that, like many other Anglican churchmen and landowners across the country, the authorities in Malpas became determined that the common people should be soundly educated in the principles of the established Church of England.

During the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, thousands of 'charity schools' were founded throughout the country. The leading historian of the Charity School movement has suggested that "the political and religious unrest of the seventeenth century contributed in no small degree to the desire of the upper and middle classes to establish social discipline among the poor, who in contemporary opinion were particularly susceptible to the poison of rebellion and infidelity. An organisation which would provide for them religious and social discipline would solve two acute problems of Church and State, the growth of irreligion and of pauperism".

Many of the charity schools were assisted in their foundation by the Anglican based Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), although the nonconformist churches too were instrumental in the foundation of many schools. In fact the famous Unitarian minister Matthew Henry, who was born at Iscoyd in Malpas parish in 1662, wrote a pamphlet on 'The Reasons for promoting the Interest of Charity Schools'. Matthew was the son

of Philip Henry, who had actually witnessed the execution of King Charles I in 1649. Therefore the Henry family would have been acutely aware of the possible horrific consequences of another rebellion. I wonder if the Malpas rectors and churchwardens had seen a copy of Matthew's pamphlet? If so, could it have influenced their decision to found a charity school in Malpas?

The "growth of irreligion" so far as Malpas was concerned may have included another threat, from a religious movement that was poles apart from Roman Catholicism. John Wesley, from whose teachings sprung the Methodist Church, had been born in 1703. During his life he travelled over 250,000 miles, preaching all over the country and often in the open air. Alpraham, Peckforton and Bulkeley are three places near to Malpas where he is reputed to have preached. He passed frequently through Cheshire on his journeys to the Wirral port of Parkgate, where he took the boat for Ireland. Methodism in Cheshire took root as early as 1743 when a group of 'nonconformists' began to meet for Bible study in the vestry of Bunbury parish church, with the approval of the vicar. They would not have been recognised formally as Methodists at that stage. In fact, even the Bishop of Chester approved of them and demonstrated his support by presenting the 'Bunbury Vestry Society' in 1744 with a copy of Burkitt's 'Notes on the New Testament'. The book is still preserved in the chancel of St Boniface church. Later that year the vicar had a change of heart and the society had to move their meetings across the road to the house of Mr Evans, parish clerk and schoolmaster. Evans' Cottage still stands, a silent witness to the beginnings of Cheshire Methodism. Could it be that, by 1745, news of this possible new threat to the Established Church had travelled the ten miles from Bunbury to Malpas?

I think that there must have been some interesting discussions, and perhaps a certain amount of panic, at the Malpas Vestry Meetings during the 1730s and 1740s. The Vestry Meeting was the forerunner of the Parish Council (founded in 1894), in the days when the churchwardens had many civil duties as well as their duties connected with running the church.

A NEW SCHOOL FOR MALPAS?

Malpas was not without a school in 1745. The Malpas Grammar School had been founded over two hundred years previously, in 1528, by Sir Randle Brereton, as a school to provide instruction in classical grammar. It was for boys only who, after their first year at school, were expected to speak only Latin during their lessons. Malpas Grammar School was financed by the income from saltworks in Iscoyd and the rents from lands in Wigland. After a decline in the 16th century, due to a decline in the income from the saltworks, the school was re-founded in 1697 by Hugh, Viscount Cholmondeley. During the 18th century it appears to have flourished and a number of pupils went up to university, most of them to Oxford. During the 19th century it seems to have become primarily a fee-paying school for the sons of such people as farmers and shopkeepers, never of labourers. By 1899 the school was struggling to survive, due to low income, and soon afterwards closed down for good. Its buildings (now the premises of a hairdresser in Church Street) were finally sold off in 1906.

The full history of Malpas Grammar School remains to be written. I have included the brief account above purely to emphasise the fact that the Grammar School existed for a different purpose than the Alport School. There was no potential rivalry between them when the Alport School was founded in 1745. Contrary to common misconception, Malpas Grammar School and Malpas Alport School always were two completely separate institutions, with their pupils drawn from different social classes.

Richard Alport, son of Robert Alport and grandson of the Richard Alport who had been imprisoned during the Civil Wars, died in 1720. In his will, drawn up during the previous year, he left five hundred pounds "towards the establishing and benefit of a charity school at Malpas for poor boys or girls of the same parish". Robert, his father, had also thought about endowing a charity school - we know this from his will dated 1686 - but this was not to be. However, no moves seem to have been made towards starting a school until 1732, when Randle Brooke and Hugh Webster, the churchwardens for that year, paid three shillings and sixpence (17½p) to Edward Dod "for Copying Mr Alports Will". Perhaps they lost that copy, since

benefit of a Charity School at Malpass for poor boys or girls
 of the same parish wherein particular regard and preference be
 given to the poor of the lowest sort wherein my estate pays the
 out of the said parish I have given and bequeath the sum of
 fifty pounds for the benefit of the Charity School commonly
 called the Blewcoat School in the City of Chester the place
 of my Nativity) to be paid to the Desires of the School
 for the time being for the purpose aforesaid. In testimony whereof
 I have hereunto sett my hand and seal the ninth day of
 December one Thousand seven Hundred & nineteen

Signed Sealed published and declared by
 the said Testator Richard Alport for
 and as his last will & testament in the
 presence of us who have hereunto
 subscribed our names in the sight &
 presence of the said Testator

Richard Alport

Richard Alport's will, signed by him in December 1719. The previous page refers to the bequest of £500 for the "benefit of a charity school at Malpass". This page refers also to the bequest of £50 to the Chester 'Blewcoat' School (Cheshire County Council Archives & Local Studies Ref: W/S 1719 Richard Alport).

the churchwardens for 1738, Randle Tomlinson and John Downes, "paid to Mr Herbert for the Copey of the will of Richard Alport Esq" the sum of ten shillings (50p).

What was happening? Why the renewed interest in the will of a man who had died in 1720? Perhaps it is time to review the historical evidence.

There was still a general fear across the country that there could be some form of recurrence of the unrest which led to the Civil Wars, one hundred years previously. This fear could have been strengthened locally by the knowledge that many landowners in Cheshire and North Wales were Roman Catholics and had sympathies with the Jacobites and the exiled Royal House of Stuart. Richard Minshull of the Old Hall may have aroused fears of Jacobite activity in Malpas itself.

Francis Gastrell, Bishop of Chester, collected information around 1720 on the number of nonconformists in the Diocese. In this case, 'nonconformists' refers to all those, including Roman Catholics, who dissented openly from the Church of England. Bishop Gastrell recorded 14 Papists in Malpas parish, with 103, the highest parish total in the whole of Cheshire, for the neighbouring parish of Tattenhall. This provides further evidence that this corner of the county was a hot-bed of Catholicism in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Methodism may have been seen to provide another threat to the stability of the Church of England in Malpas. The old ecclesiastical parish of Malpas was very large, consisting of twenty-five townships. It extended to Broxton in the north, Cholmondeley in the east, Iscoyd in the south and Cuddington in the west. Parishioners living at a distance from the influence of the parish church of Saint Oswald might be tempted to take up with John Wesley's ideas. The large number of chapels that were built in the parish during the nineteenth century certainly suggests that Malpas provided a strong following for Methodism at a later date.

Charity schools had been founded elsewhere and there was no reason why Malpas should not have its own, particularly since Richard Alport had left £500 for that very purpose. A charity school could be the ideal means of ensuring that the poorer classes were educated in the principles of the Established Church.

THE ALPORT SCHOOL IS BORN

So it was that in 1745 the first Alport School was founded. The original school building stands to this day, as the centre section of the three part building in Tilston Road, all of it converted now into private houses. Some of the money left by Richard Alport was used later to buy a farm on Overton Common. This farm was let to a tenant farmer so that the rent could help to provide a regular income for the school. Although the Alport Trustees eventually sold the farm, in 1902, it is still known as the Alport Farm.

Little is known about the history of the school from its foundation in 1745 until the beginning of the nineteenth century. By 1800 it was being managed by Colonel Dod of Edge and, from church records, we know that the schoolmaster in 1804 was Mr J Leche, from Stretton. There is evidence that the school had strong links with the parish church and that the pupils attended services on a regular basis. In 1824 the churchwardens paid thirteen shillings (65 pence) for "Mats for the Children at the Charity School to be put for them to kneel on when in church".

Our first real glimpse of the way in which the school was run is provided by a report of the Charity Commissioners, who paid a visit to Malpas in 1836. Their report tells us that the original school building housed only fourteen boys and that in 1815 an extension was added. The boys moved into this new accommodation so that girls could be housed in the original building. The extension is the part of the surviving building that lies closest to the Chester Road. The school's annual income was just over £118, of which £85 was the rent from the Alport Farm, the rest being the interest on investments. Out of the income had to come the annual salaries of the schoolmaster (£40) and schoolmistress (£23), fuel for heating the school (just over £3 a year) and the cost of "dresses for 14 boys" (£21). The rest of the income was used to buy books, paper and other materials for the school.

The fourteen boys were the Bluecoat Boys, first mentioned in a record of 1811. Many charity schools provided some sort of free uniform, which would be prized greatly in those days by labourers with large families to feed and clothe on small incomes. At Malpas "fourteen boys, from amongst



The original school buildings in Tilston Road
Centre: First Alport School 1745 Right: Alport School Extension 1815 Left: First Infant School 1833

those who had been observed to be most punctual in their attendance and correct in their conduct throughout the year, are selected about Christmas, and provided with a suit of clothes (a sort of blue uniform) consisting of coat, waistcoat, trousers, boots, and a blue cap, out of the charity funds. The same fourteen boys, provided they remain and conduct themselves well, receive the clothes two consecutive years, and then give place to others".

Many charity schools were founded throughout the country, around this time, largely as a result of the influence and encouragement of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), although there is no evidence that the Society was involved in any way with the founding of the Alport School. It was common for charity school pupils to be dressed in some form of distinctive clothing and, although blue seems to have been the most favoured colour, there are instances of charity children wearing other colours, such as green or red. The SPCK recommended the wearing of distinctive clothing so that school trustees would recognise the children from 'their' school "and watch their conduct abroad". This is a tradition which seems to have lingered on. In the 1950s I was a pupil at a grammar school which had once been a Bluecoat charity school. Woe betide any boy who ventured into the town without wearing his distinctive black and white cap, or failed to touch its peak to any master or school governor he might chance to meet!

Perhaps the most well-known charity school in our part of Cheshire was the Bluecoat Hospital in Chester's Northgate Street, founded in 1700. Richard Alport, who was born in Chester, seems to have had some connection with the school - perhaps as a trustee - since by his will he left "fifty pounds for the benefit of the charity school commonly called the Bluecoat School, in the City of Chester (the place of my nativity)". The Chester Bluecoat building still stands, just next to the canal bridge. Over its entrance is a statue of a Bluecoat boy, which recently has been repainted in its original colours. Take a look at him if you would like to see what an 'Alport' boy might have looked like, two hundred years ago.

The thirty shillings (£1.50) spent on each Alport boy seems to have been quite generous and must have provided a suit of clothes of good quality. For comparison, the forty boys at the Nantwich



The Bluecoat Boy above the main entrance of the former Bluecoat School in Northgate Street, Chester (see page 19)



The Alport farm on the edge of Overton Common. The rents from this farm provided income for the original Alport School. It was sold by the Alport Trustees in 1902 (see pages 17 and 39).

charity school had only 11s 7d (58 pence) spent on each of their uniforms and the SPCK recommended a total annual expenditure of only thirty shillings per head to cover all costs, including uniform, for the education of charity boys.

SCHOOL PENCE AND SCHOOL TEACHERS

In his will, Richard Alport stated that a preference for admission to the school should be given to children of "the poor of the townships wherein my estate lieth". It seems that by 1836 any Malpas child was able to attend the school, upon payment of one old penny (about 0.4 pence) each week. However, this payment had been introduced only recently. Before that, the master had been allowed to take about twenty private pupils "upon his own account". The 'penny pupils' had to provide their own copy books and account books but everything else was provided, including "a library ... furnished with all books necessary for such an institution". Lessons consisted of reading, writing and accounts for the boys, with reading, writing, sewing and, sometimes, accounts for the girls.

In 1836 there were 49 infants, 87 boys and about 50 girls, although the infant school was not actually part of the Alport foundation. Children stayed in the infant school until they were about seven years old. The upper age limit for the Alport school is not known but was probably ten or eleven. By this age the boys would be ready for farm work or apprenticeships and the girls might go into domestic service. It is at this time that we first read of a complaint which is repeated often right up until the time of the second World War: "The attendance of the boys is not very regular; they are frequently absent for the purpose of being employed in labour". What made matters worse for the school's finances was the consequence that "during such absences ... the payment of the pence ceases". However, there were times when it was better for the teachers not to complain, since the employer of the truant might be one of the school trustees!

The schoolmaster and schoolmistress when the Charity Commissioners visited in 1836 were John and Elizabeth Silvester, both natives of Malpas. In addition, there were three assistant teachers, selected from among the best of the pupils and each paid half a crown (12½ pence) a week. We

have no means of knowing what standard of education was provided. This was before the days of formal teacher training, when it was difficult to obtain well qualified and experienced teachers for country schools. The more ambitious preferred the higher status and salaries attainable in town and city schools. There are many instances elsewhere where the posts of country school teachers were given to unemployed or elderly persons, simply to prevent them from becoming a burden on the parish rates! However, there is no evidence that John and Elizabeth Silvester fell into this category. The fact that they kept their posts for twenty-five years suggests that they must have proved satisfactory in their work. In 1836 John was twenty-seven and Elizabeth was thirty-six. In those days it was common for wives to be older than their husbands, often not marrying until they had completed a spell in domestic service. By 1851 the Silvesters were employing two of their nieces, Jane and Mary Shaw, as assistant teachers. It is an interesting feature of the staffing, from the time of the 1836 report right into the present century, that teaching jobs at the Alport seem to have been kept to a considerable extent 'in the family'. In 1852 there were also two boarding pupils, brothers Thomas and William Cawley from Ridley.

The Silvesters lived in a purpose built school house, possibly part of the surviving building, meeting a desire expressed in 1844 by Lord Wharnccliffe, Lord President of the Council, that the schoolmaster "ought to be provided ... with a house, by no means too large, so as to exalt him too much in the scale of society ... put into a decent residence, which would be calculated to make those persons lower than himself, inclined to show a proper feeling of respect for the schoolmaster who teaches their children".

We do not know how the Silvesters had been appointed. What we do know is that the school was managed by Mrs Dod of Edge, of whom the Charity Commissioners wrote that "she shows great zeal, and takes a great interest in its welfare". Probably the Silvesters had been her personal appointment. They had taken up their posts in 1830, as successors to George Hough and Elizabeth Golbourn, who are recorded as being "teachers at the National School". This must be incorrect, since the Alport was never a 'National' school. Had it been so it would have operated on the lines laid down by the National Society for the

Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. The National Society, which took over much of the work of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, was formed by the Church of England in 1811.

THE FIRST INFANT SCHOOL

The first infant school in Malpas had been opened in 1833, only three years before the visit of the Charity Commissioners by which time it was flourishing with 49 children on roll. It had come into existence through the initiative of local people who had taken advantage of a new Government scheme.

1833 was the year which followed the passing of the great Reform Bill, which completely re-organised the Government and rooted out many corrupt practices, such as the bribing of electors to vote for particular candidates. The first Parliament after the Reform Bill was formed in 1833 and within the next two years passed four important Acts, all of which had far-reaching effects on society. They were the Act for the Abolition of Slavery in all the British Dominions; the first Factory Act, which forbade the employment in factories of children under the age of nine; the New Poor Law Act; and the Educational Grant Act.

Under this last Act the Government, for the first time, granted money to support elementary education. The initial annual budget totalled £20,000 but in 1839 this was raised to £30,000. The money was "to be issued in aid of Private Subscriptions for the Erection of School Houses, for the Education of the Poorer Classes in Great Britain".

The grant-aid was divided between the two major voluntary societies, these being the National Society referred to already and the British and Foreign Schools Society. The British and Foreign Schools Society was formed in 1810 as the 'Lancastrian Association' but changed its name in 1814. Its founder was Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, and although it was not a sectarian society it did draw its support mainly from the dissenting churches. Grants were available on a 'matching' basis whereby half of the cost of providing the school had to be met by local subscriptions and voluntary fund raising.

Fortunately for Malpas there were those locally who seized the opportunity and raised the necessary funds so that the town's first infant school, built onto the original 1745 Alport School in the form of a second 'wing', was opened in 1833. Malpas Infant School remained entirely dependent upon voluntary subscriptions and an annual Government grant, functioning as a 'National' school right up to the time of the 1902 Education Act. In that year, along with the Alport School, it passed into the control of Cheshire County Council.

Although housed in an adjoining building, the Infant School was not part of the Alport School and received no income from the Alport endowment. As a result, its finances were sometimes rather precarious. In December 1896 Mrs Rasbotham of Ebnal Grange, who was an Infant School trustee, published a letter in the Malpas Deanery Magazine, appealing for subscriptions.

She wrote: "As there is no endowment, the Infant School is dependent upon the Government Grant and yearly subscriptions. The Subscribers number Seventeen, SEVENTEEN out of this large Parish ... At present there is not £10 in hand, to pay the two coming quarters' salaries and meet the general expenses of the current School year ending March 31st 1897". The size of the annual Government grant was calculated in relation to the attendance of pupils and the results of their annual examination in the '3 Rs' - reading, writing and arithmetic - conducted by a Government Inspector. This was the notorious 'payment by results' system, introduced under the Revised Code of 1862. Local financial management of schools is not just a present day problem!

THE VICTORIAN VOLUNTARY SCHOOL

When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, John and Elizabeth Silvester were still master and mistress of the strictly segregated Boys' and Girls' departments of the Alport School. Integration of the sexes had to wait for over a century more, when the departments were combined finally in 1944. When the Silvesters retired in 1854 their places were taken by another husband and wife team, Joseph and Mary Ann Lees, with their niece Emma Bickley as an assistant teacher. Joseph came from Yorkshire but Mary Ann was a local girl, from Hanmer.

At the same time, another Malpas family of future teachers was growing up. They were the children of tailor and parish clerk Edward Tomlinson, and his wife Jane, who lived in the house known as 'Church View', where Mr & Mrs Stewart Evans live now. This building, previously the Gryphon Inn, had become Edward Tomlinson's tailor's shop. His children included Mary, Frederick and John. By 1871 Mary, aged 18, was working as a 'monitress' and Frederick, 15, as a pupil-teacher, probably both at the Alport School.

The monitorial system, under which Mary may have worked, was a scheme whereby teachers guided selected older pupils, known as monitors or monitresses. They, in turn, passed on the information to their younger fellow pupils. The idea had been developed initially in India by Dr Andrew Bell, an Anglican clergyman serving with the East India Company, and for this reason was known sometimes as the Madras system. It is still remembered locally in the modern primary school at Penley, only eight miles from Malpas, which is known as the 'Madras School', although I am sure that the school no longer uses the monitorial system! However, the monitorial system had more or less died out by the middle of the nineteenth century. It seems more likely that Mary Tomlinson was actually a pupil-teacher, like her younger brother Frederick. The post of pupil-teacher had been created in 1846 and allowed promising candidates, from the age of thirteen, to serve a five year apprenticeship with a view to progressing to a two year training at one of the new teacher training colleges.

John Tomlinson, aged 23, was teaching elsewhere, probably in Lincolnshire. Later he came to teach at Overton-on-Dee Boys' School and from there was appointed to be head of the Alport Boys' Department in 1878. John appears to have been the first of the Alport schoolmasters to have been to teacher training college. His own son John, who had been an Alport pupil, followed his father into further education when he took a Bachelor of Science course at the Victoria University (now the University of Manchester).

While John Tomlinson ran the Alport Boys' Department, the Girls' Department was in the care of a Miss Green. By 1881 the schoolmistress was Sarah Jane Edwardes, wife of the local music teacher, church organist and choir master Henry Edwardes. It may be that Mrs Edwardes was the former Miss Green.

THE INFANTS MOVE OUT

By 1874 the Infant School had outgrown its 1833 building and moved into a new purpose-built school. This 1874 building continued to house the infants until they became part of the new Alport Primary School, created in 1961. After this it became the Alport School 'annexe' - the classroom where I taught the top juniors when I first came to Malpas in 1967 - and it is now the home of the Beeches Pre-School Playgroup.

The new building was designed to be much more than just a schoolroom. It provided the first substantial meeting place for the area before the Victoria Jubilee Hall was built in 1887. As the 'Whitchurch Herald' report of its opening stated: "It was also intended for other purposes, for meetings to instruct the people, night schools, and for religious meetings". So many people wished to attend the concert organised to celebrate its opening that "the room was most inconveniently crowded, besides numbers who were unable to get a hearing save through the windows".

Shortly after the opening a new infant headmistress was appointed. This was Miss Elizabeth Danbury, from Oxfordshire, who served the school for many years, retiring in 1914. One of her former pupils is Dr George Bradbury, who lives at Malpas Old Hall. He started his education at Malpas Infant School in 1905, when Miss Danbury was assisted by Miss Amy Mercer. Dr Bradbury remembers playing with bricks and learning to write his letters in a sand tray but says that there was no formal teaching of writing or arithmetic, until he went up into the Boys' Department.

The people of Malpas made good use of the new building. One popular regular feature was a monthly concert, usually in aid of parish church funds, organised by the organist and choir master Henry Edwardes. In 1887 Mrs Rasbotham organised a concert there, to help clear the outstanding debt on the building. The 'Whitchurch Herald' reported that there was a "large and fashionable attendance" for a programme including a pianoforte duet by Mrs Jordison, the doctor's wife, and Miss Cox, the Rector's daughter, a rendering of 'The Vicar of Bray' by Mr Medlin, assistant master at Malpas Grammar School, and 'We will go hunting' sung by Mr Wolley-Dod of Edge.

NEW MANAGEMENT FOR THE ENDOWMENT

By 1874 the Alport Endowment was being looked after by Sir Richard Puleston of Emral Hall, Worthenbury, Mr John Leche of Carden Hall and Mrs Frances Parker of Edge Hall. The families at Emral, Carden and Edge had all developed links with the Alport family through marriages at various times. The three were described as administrators rather than trustees and in 1874 they wrote to the Charity Commissioners to request the legal establishment of a Board of Trustees. The Commissioners agreed to their request and in February 1875 a new Trust Deed was sealed. This named the six new Trustees as Sir Richard Puleston, Mr John Leche, the Reverend Charles Wolley-Dod of Edge, the Honourable and Reverend William Kenyon (Rector of Malpas), the Marquis of Cholmondeley and Mr Thomas Tyrwhitt-Drake of Chorlton Lodge. The Marquis and Mr Drake were the two principal landowners in Malpas at that time.

The endowment put into the care of the new Trustees consisted of "the farm situate at Overton ... comprising a Farm house and 5 acres 3 roods 17 poles (21.8 hectares) of land or thereabouts ...", the school house with garden and playground, and investments totalling £961.7s.10d (£961.39). It would appear that the administration of the endowment had been rather neglected, to the extent that there was no key available for the box containing the Trust documents and a locksmith had to be summoned to open it!

The new Trustees approached their work with enthusiasm, one of their first tasks being to set aside some of the income to repair the farm buildings, which were in a dilapidated state.

However, the Trustees' minutes indicate some misunderstanding about the school's status in relation to the Church of England. As I have mentioned previously, it was not a 'National' school, although frequently described as such. The terms of Richard Alport's will did not allow the school to be linked to any particular denomination. Despite this, the Trustees allowed Rector Kenyon - a 'high' churchman - to arrange for the Diocesan Inspector to visit the school annually to report on the religious instruction being undertaken.

One very popular move must have been the

decision of the Trustees in 1876 "that steps be taken to give the boys and girls ... a holy day in memory of the pious founder, the late Richard Alport Esq.". Whatever became of this founder's day holiday? No doubt the present day pupils would welcome its re-introduction, despite the benefit they now derive from INSET (In-Service Training) days, when they have time off while their teachers attend school. Another popular introduction was the annual 'school treat', when all of the pupils had an outing, usually to the home of one of the Trustees. In 1876 they went to Edge Park, when the Trustees subscribed to the costs of £11.3s.9d (£11.19) for erecting a tent, for 'carting' the children to the Park, for teas and for prizes for the sports. The following year they were due to go to Carden Park but instead the treat was held in school due to "the day being very wet".

A few years later the Trustees took action to appoint a proper school cleaner, after the schoolmistress had reported that "it had been the habit that the girl who came latest into school should remain afterwards to sweep the school. Though this rule seemed good to the Trustees, it was not liked by the parents, and it frequently happened that the last comer was a girl too small for the service". Despite considering it a good rule, the Trustees agreed that a woman could be engaged to clean the school at one shilling (five pence) a week. However, the schoolmistress would have to find the money out of her own pocket!

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

In addition to the financial support of the Alport Endowment, the school now received an annual government grant, introduced under the Revised Code of 1862 ('payment by results'), as well as a number of private subscriptions. The size of the government grant was dependent upon it being matched by locally raised income, upon the results of the annual government inspection of the school, and upon the attendance record of the pupils. Children still had to pay their weekly school pence and the Trustees ruled that any child who either failed to make the required 250 attendances, or failed to turn up on the day of the annual inspection, would have to pay an additional penny (0.4 pence) weekly during the following year.

The school's finances were becoming a matter for increasing concern when John Tomlinson was appointed as head of the Boys' Department in 1878. His annual salary started at £120, consisting of £32.10s.0d (£32.50) from the Alport Endowment, two thirds of the government grant, estimated at £52.10s.0d (£52.50) and the whole of the school pence, estimated at £35. In addition he had the school house "free of Rent and Taxes, and Coals", estimated to be worth an additional £15 annually. To meet salaries and other expenses the weekly payment for all children was to be raised from 1d (0.4 pence) to 2d (0.8 pence), except where more than one child in a family attended the school, in which case only the eldest would pay the increased amount.

By 1882 the situation had become so serious that the Trustees proposed reducing the salaries of the teachers in the Boys' Department, from £20 to £15 annually for the senior pupil-teacher and to £8 (from ?) for the 'second' teacher. Another suggestion was that permission should be sought from the Charity Commissioners to sell the Alport Farm. Neither suggestion was implemented. Mr Tomlinson found it impossible to engage suitable teachers at the reduced salaries and the Alport Farm was not sold off until 1902. Later in 1882 the ratepayers of Malpas (the 'Town Meeting') considered "ways and means of providing funds necessary to carry on the Parish School, by subscription, voluntary rate, or school board". It was arranged to seek new subscribers from all of the townships in the parish and by March 1883 a total of £55.5s.6d (£55.28) had been promised, rising to £119.13s.6d (£119.76) by April of the following year.

The pressures on the school were increased also as a result of the growing number of pupils. By 1877 there were around 100 boys and 60 girls. No doubt the Alport School had taken over the 1833 Infant School building, when the new Infant School was opened in 1874, but there would still have been a desperate shortage of space. Where were the Trustees to find the money to provide increased accommodation, when they could barely cover the everyday costs of running the school? Help was to come from an unexpected source.

JOSEPH LEWIS AND THE NEW SCHOOL

Joseph Lewis came to live in Malpas some time in the late 1870s. A farmer's son from Lee in Shropshire, he had sought a career in the drapery business in London. His was a real 'rags to riches' story. By the time that he came to Malpas he was partner in a large silk and elastic business as well as being a successful property developer. Although he lived in Malpas for barely ten years, until his death in 1889, he was a great benefactor to the town. He contributed generously towards the restoration of the parish church in the 1880s and built the twelve 'Oathills Cottages', to help counteract the shortage of working class housing in the district. For himself and his family he built 'The Beeches' in Tilston Road, completed in 1883 and now housing the Saint Joseph's Retreat and Conference Centre.

In 1887, when he learned of the difficulties being experienced by the Alport School, Joseph Lewis offered to provide the £2,000 necessary to build a new school. The Trustees were quick to accept his offer and to persuade Mr Drake to donate land for the new buildings. These 'new schools' (i.e. Boys' and Girls' Departments) still form the core of the present Alport School buildings and the tablet on the front of them preserves the name of Joseph Lewis. Unfortunately he did not live to see the project completed, dying a year before the official opening of the new buildings in September 1890. Other memorials to Joseph Lewis are the relief medallion bearing his portrait, to be found in the entrance passage of the Jubilee Hall, and a tablet and stained glass window on the north side of the parish church.

On September 1st 1890, the day of the opening, the pupils assembled in Tilston Road outside the old school buildings and marched, headed by "the Clergy, Wardens, Trustees, and Teachers, by the Road to the main entrance of the Schools". There, after prayers by the Rector and singing of 'The Church's One Foundation', the girls and boys marched into their respective departments.

Although Joseph Lewis had expressed a wish that the new buildings should be used to educate children in accordance with the teachings of the Church of England, the Charity Commissioners would not allow this. They ruled that "according to the terms of Richard Alport ... as set forth in the



The second Malpas Infant School building, opened in 1874. Later this became the Alport School Annexe and it is now the home of the Beeches Pre-School Playgroup. (see page 26).



The 1889 Alport School building. This photo appears to date from early this century and shows the boys on the playground which is now the front lawn.

(Malpas Library collection).

printed Report of the former Commissioners for Enquiry concerning Charities, dated February 4th 1837, the School was to be used as a Charity School at Malpas for poor boys or girls of the parish without reference to any particular denomination ... if the New School were placed in union with the National Society, the endowment could not properly be applied towards its maintenance and support".

However, the tablet on the buildings still records the unfulfilled wish of Joseph Lewis. It reads:

1889

ALPORT CHARITY

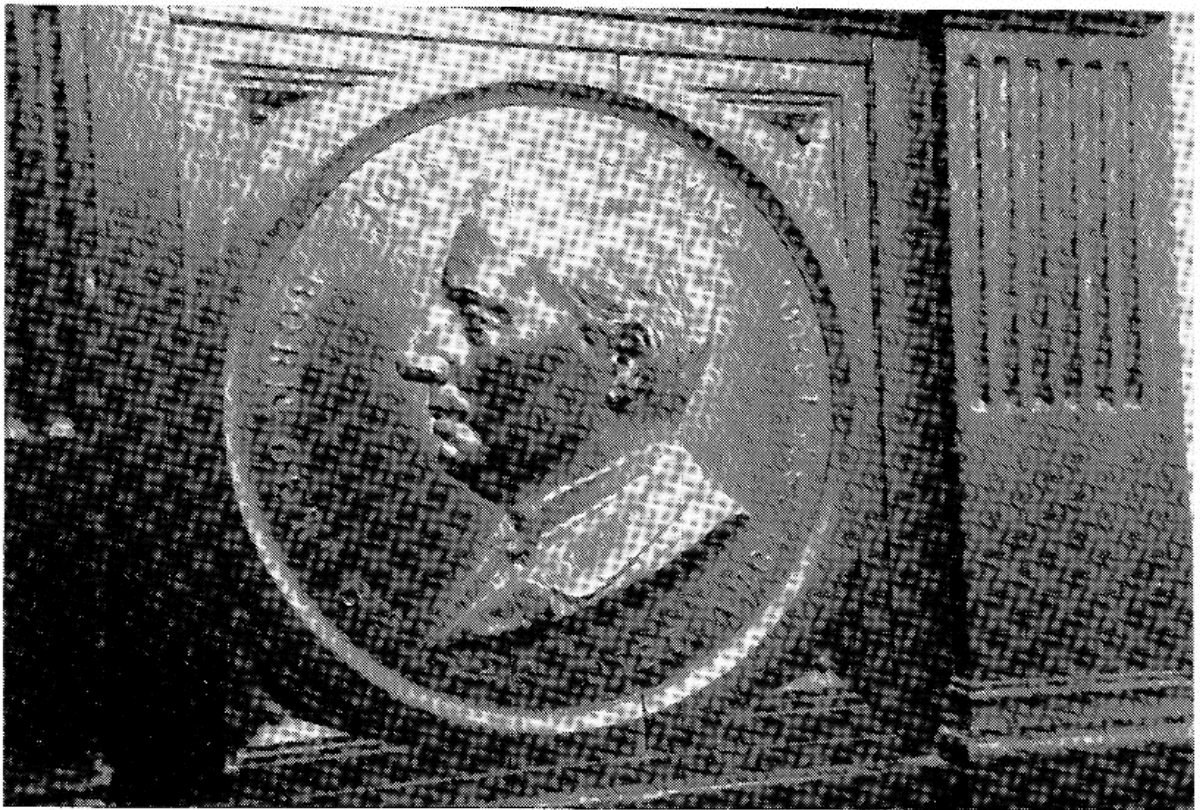
The above Charity was further endowed by the land given for the schools by T.T. DRAKE and the cost of the buildings by JOSEPH LEWIS of Malpas in the hope that the children shall be religiously educated in the Principles of the Church of England

In 1894 the Trustees sold the old Alport School buildings in Tilston Road for £480, to Doctor Jordison who lived just across the road in Prospect House. This left John Tomlinson, the headmaster, without a house. He was granted an annual allowance of £15 to rent accommodation elsewhere while the new school house, in Chester Road, was being built. It cost £300 and was completed in 1895.

DAILY SCHOOL LIFE AND DIVERSIONS

The new buildings were designed to provide strictly segregated accommodation for up to 140 boys and 140 girls. Plaques marked 'Boys' and 'Girls' still survive to show which half was which. The average attendance around that time was about 90 boys and 85 girls, with 85 in the Infant School.

The layout was typical of schools being built towards the end of last century. Each Department - Boys and Girls - consisted of one large classroom with a smaller classroom attached. The younger children occupied the small classroom while up to three classes were housed in the large room. The arrangement persisted into this century and some older Malpas residents can still remember



Joseph Lewis of 'The Beeches' who provided the £2,000 to build the new Alport Schools, opened in 1890. This memorial is in the entrance passage of the Malpas Victoria Jubilee Hall.



The new School House, completed in 1895. It is now the home of former Alport Headmaster, Mr. C.F.B. Blann.

anything up to 100 pupils in each large room, with nothing but curtains to divide the classes. These were the days of strict silence in class, enforced by generous doses of corporal punishment, so that there was little chance of one class disturbing another. At the time of the opening of the new building the classes were probably around twenty to twenty-five pupils each. By 1893 the school leaving age had been raised to eleven and then in 1899 was raised again, to twelve. Each increase in leaving age would have led to an increase in overall numbers, as the older pupils stayed on.

It is only in recent months, at the time of writing this, that the original internal layout of the buildings has disappeared, as a result of the major alterations that have been undertaken to adapt them to modern educational use.

Having moved into the new buildings, the Alport School was set to move into the twentieth century. For 1898 onwards it is possible to obtain a very detailed picture of the daily life of the Boys' Department, since that is the year in which the earliest surviving log book was started. For many schools it had been a legal requirement for the headteacher to keep a log book, a sort of daily diary, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. It may be that there were earlier log books for the Alport and Infant Schools but, if so, they are now lost. The earliest surviving log book for the Girls' Department starts in 1916, that for the Infant School starts in 1910.

In 1898 the Boys' Department staff was still very much a family affair, the schoolmaster being John Tomlinson with Lucy, his wife, as assistant teacher and daughter Mary as an uncertificated assistant. When later that same year Mary went to the teacher training college at Warrington her place was filled by her younger sister Dorothy. Four years later Dorothy was to follow Mary to Warrington.

There were many diversions to liven up school life. Every year Maggie Collins would bring her circus with its hobby horses to the field opposite the school where the bungalow called 'Aspasia' stands now. When I came to teach at the Alport in the 1960s, a small fair consisting of a small roundabout, swing boats and a rifle range still used to visit the 'Hobby Horse Field' each year. Other annual attractions in John Tomlinson's time were the feast days of the local friendly

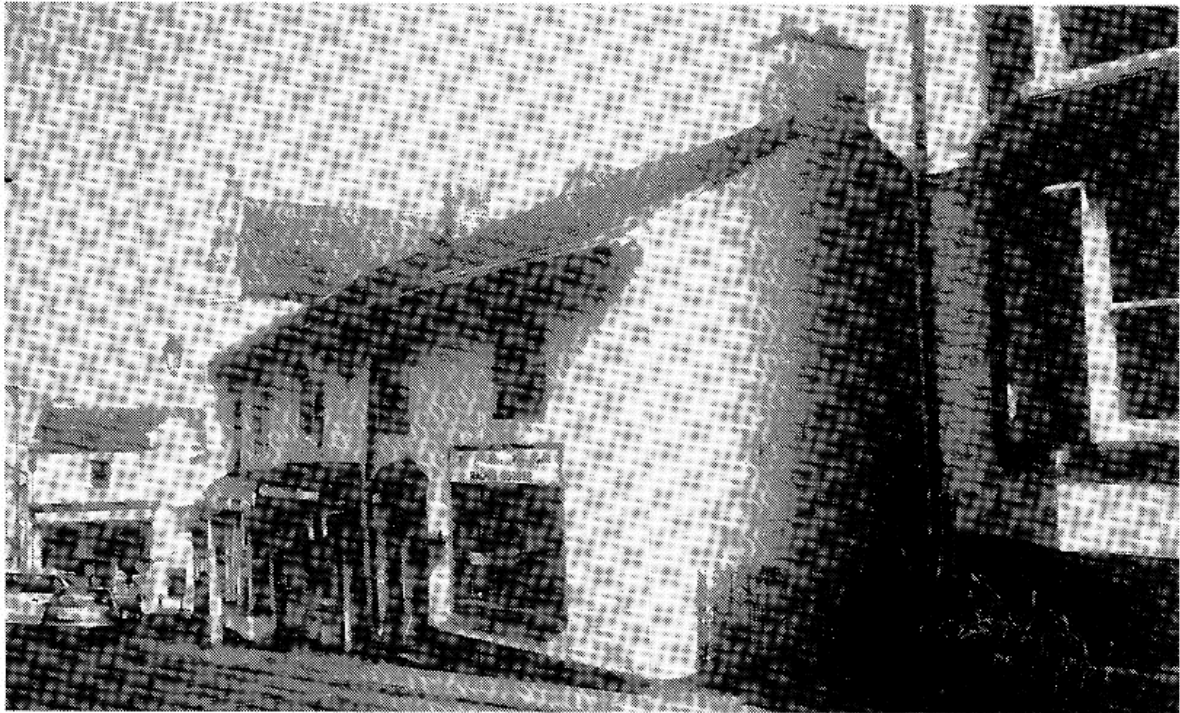
societies - the Oddfellows and the Rose Club (Malpas United Friendly Society) - when there were parades through the streets, dances on the Castle Hill and enormous teas. Church and chapels had their annual outings to such places as Beeston Castle or the seaside. So many pupils were absent on these occasions, which were usually on weekdays, that the headteachers had no alternative but to close school for the day.

In 1899 the Boer War had broken out and a number of Malpas men had enlisted to fight in South Africa. When the news of the Relief of Ladysmith reached the town in March 1900 the Alport children were marched down to the Cross, where they sang 'Soldiers of the Queen' and the National Anthem. Having 'sung for their supper', they returned to school to be "abundantly regaled with buns, cakes, pies, oranges, sweets, etc.". This spread was paid for by a collection which had been taken among the crowd gathered at the Cross. After the feast the children were given the rest of the day off, as a half holiday.

When the Relief of Mafeking was announced two months later there were more patriotic celebrations at the Cross, followed by treats for the children at the Rectory, since this time it was a Saturday. Later in the month all the pupils were presented with medals bearing the portrait of Major General Baden Powell, the hero of Mafeking, who later founded the Scout and Guide movements. No doubt the children appreciated this gift but probably they were even more delighted when each of them received a new sixpence (2.5 pence), presented by an anonymous donor in honour of the Relief of Mafeking.

There were to be further festivities in 1902 to celebrate the Coronation of King Edward VII. All schoolchildren in the parish were entertained to tea in the Jubilee Hall and presented with a commemorative Coronation mug. After tea, many of them took part in sports on the Ox Heyes. Mr Bill Coffin has a copy of the programme for those sports, which included events such as sack race, bicycle race, fireman's race and pole climbing, as well as the usual running and jumping events.

Visitors to the school were frequent and must have caused welcome breaks from the daily routine. They included Miss Wolley-Dod from Edge, who "was much interested in the boys' drawing"; Mrs Greenshields of 'The Beeches', who called to offer



The former Malpas Grammar School building in Church Street. The school closed in 1899/1900 and the buildings were sold off in 1906.



Malpas teachers about 1906

This is the earliest known photograph showing headmaster John Tomlinson (left of back row) and headmistress Sarah Jane Edwardes (far right, front row). When Mr. Tomlinson died in 1912, he was succeeded as headmaster by William ('Billy') Smith (centre back row). Far left of front row is probably Miss Elizabeth Danbury, infant headmistress.

(Malpas Library collection)

prizes of Bibles for good attendance; and a messenger from Mrs Rasbotham of Ebnal, who sent ten prayer books as prizes for Scripture work.

WIDENING EDUCATIONAL HORIZONS

Up to this time most children received their entire education through the Infant and Alport schools. They received a grounding in the '3Rs', with a basic curriculum comprising arithmetic (addition, subtraction and multiplication), mental arithmetic, English grammar and geography. Having learned to form their letters in the Infant School sand tray, they went on to write with slate and lead pencil in Standards 1 and 2 of the Alport, graduating to using a 'dip pen' in Standard 3. Many reading this will remember the days of those pens, with their ever-crossing steel nibs, the ink mixed from powder and distributed into inkwells, and the dread of 'blotting one's copybook'. Ballpoint pens have rescued children from all that, although they have done little to improve handwriting standards!

For some pupils there arose the possibility for continuing their education beyond normal school leaving age, as scholarships became more widely available to make it possible financially for them to move on to other educational establishments. For instance, in 1898 James Baker was awarded a scholarship worth £30 a year to enable him to attend the Agricultural and Horticultural School at Holmes Chapel, forerunner of the present Cheshire College of Agriculture at Reaseheath. At one time the occasional pupil from the Alport may have transferred to Malpas Grammar School. However, this school entered a period of decline following the retirement in 1893 of Matthew Henry Danily as headmaster. For its final few years it was run as a school offering commercial subjects, such as book-keeping, accountancy and shorthand, by Mr Aubrey Shuttlewood, the local pharmacist. It closed finally in 1899 or 1900. When it closed, six of its former pupils transferred to the Alport school but Mr Tomlinson recorded that he had to place them in lower standards than would be normal for their ages, due to their rather low levels of attainment. A scheme was proposed to re-establish the Grammar School as a Secondary School, using money from the Alport Endowment to enable children from the Alport School to attend, but this came to nothing.

AN END AND A NEW BEGINNING

In 1902 Arthur Balfour succeeded Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister. That year the Government passed an Education Act, which had been delayed by the crisis of the Boer War. This was to bring significant changes to the educational system throughout the country. The 'Balfour Act', as it was known, brought "administrative order where there had been chaos and set up an organised system of elementary, secondary and technical education". It brought also an end to the voluntary status of the Alport School, under which it had functioned since its foundation in 1745.

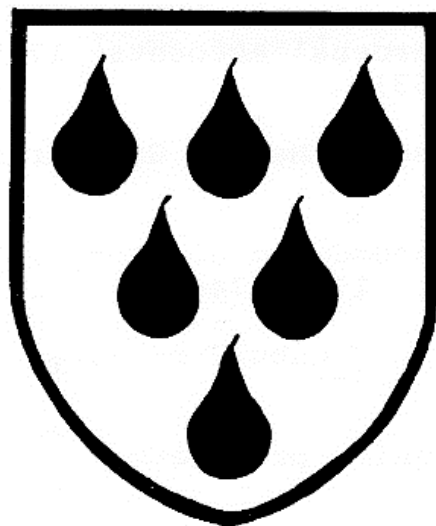
The Balfour Act opened a new chapter in the history of English education by setting up the first Local Education Authorities (LEAs), to replace the former School Boards and School Attendance Committees. For schools such as the Alport and Malpas Infant Schools it created a new category of 'non-provided' schools. These were schools where the buildings were not provided by the LEA. In Cheshire the County Council became the LEA, as it is still today. Under the new authority, non-provided schools had six managers, four of them known as 'foundation managers', appointed under the terms of the trust deed, and two nominated by the County Council. Mrs Rasbotham did suggest that there should be just one body of managers for both the Infant and Alport Schools but her idea was not taken up.

The foundation managers for the Alport School, appointed in January 1903, were the Rector (Reverend Lawrence Armitstead), Mr Samuel Sandbach of Cherry Hill, Mr Matthew Henry Danily and Mrs Rasbotham. The County Council nominated County Councillor George Morgan and Malpas Parish Councillor Mr Joseph Huxley. The Infant School foundation managers were the Rector, the Curate, Mrs Rasbotham and Mrs Barnston.

So came to an end the period of 158 years during which the Alport School had survived as a voluntary school, supported by Richard Alport's endowment. Now it became a County Council school, as it has been ever since. There have been many more changes during the present century, particularly following the developments in secondary education which led to the opening of the Malpas County Secondary School, merged later into the Bishop Heber County High School.

In 1902 the Trustees sold the Alport Farm by auction, raising £2,750 which they invested on the stock market so that it would continue to support the Alport Endowment. The Endowment is still looked after by a Board of Trustees and the Malpas Alport Primary School benefits from the interest earned by their investments. However, no longer do they have to pay the salaries of the teachers, provide fuel for heating the school and the school house, or meet the cost of "dresses for 14 boys". Nowadays the Endowment is more likely to assist the purchase of computers, books and other equipment to support work required by the National Curriculum.

Whatever the true reasons for its foundation - whether reaction to the ravages of the Civil Wars, fear of Roman Catholicism or just a philanthropic desire on the part of Richard Alport to provide education for the poor children of Malpas parish - we can be grateful that the Alport School has survived to become the excellent primary school that it is today.



THE ALPORT SCHOOL BADGE - BASED ON THE ARMS ADOPTED BY THE ALPORT FAMILY WHEN THEY FIRST CAME TO OVERTON HALL

The emblems on arms frequently result from a play on words. In this case the six red pears on a gold background could be a play on the French words 'or' (gold) and 'poire' (pear) giving 'or-poire' (Alport)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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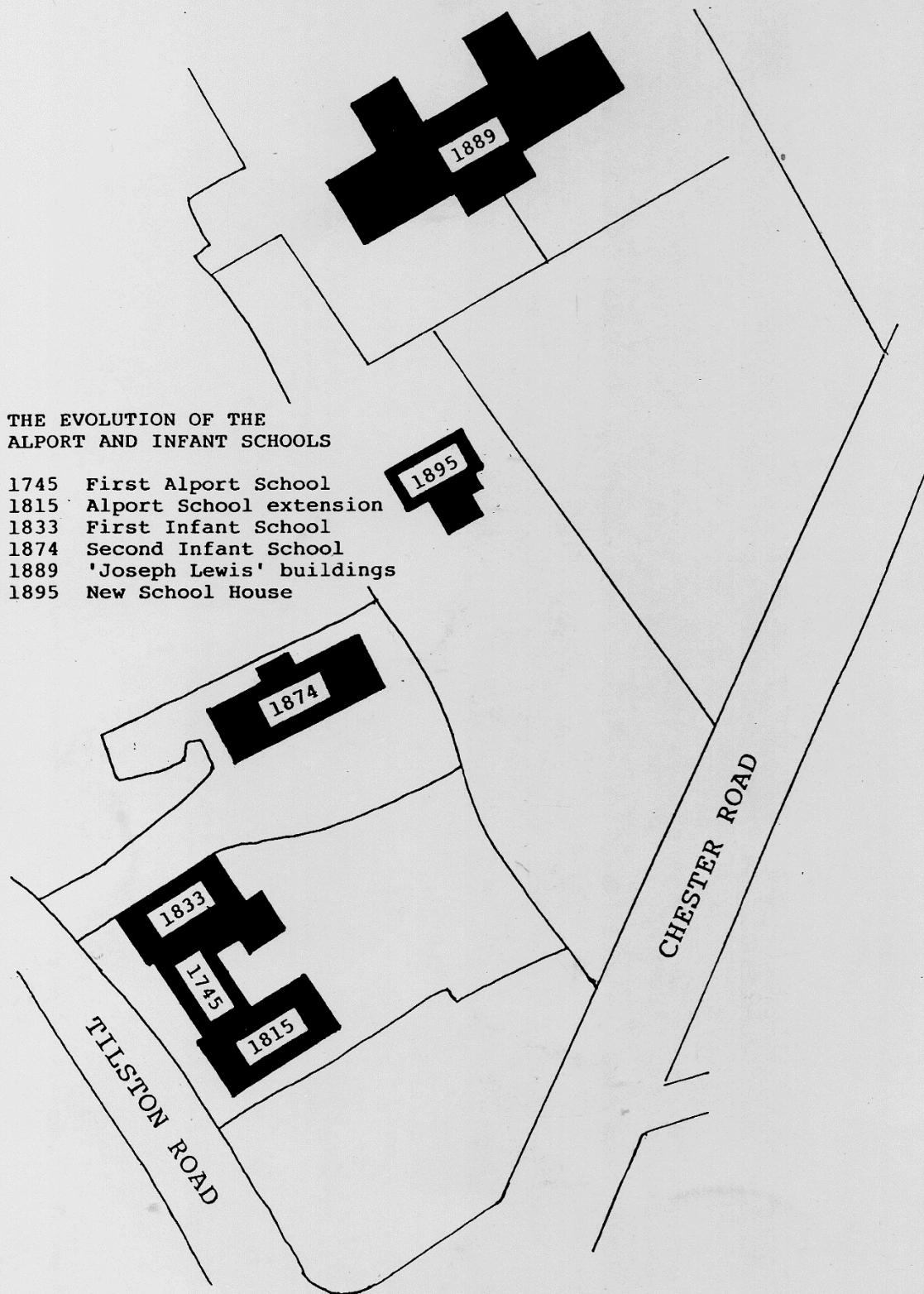
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- 1833 First Infant School
- 1874 Second Infant School
- 1889 'Joseph Lewis' buildings
- 1895 New School House



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