



*The Reverend William Gerrish.  
Headmaster 1877 - 1923*

coats of arms and mottoes on the chimney pieces, the battle-mented panels lining lobby and schoolroom and the wrought iron hoops applied to the chimneys.<sup>95</sup> The builder was Jabez Andrews of Wainfleet, whose name is still preserved for posterity on a rolled-up lead sheet in the corner of the bell-turret, and the plumbing was the work of William Dawson. The operation was carried out in the autumn of 1856, during which time the schoolmaster resided in lodgings and the pupils were crowded for tuition into the lower sitting-room of the house. Amongst Holbrook's innovations were the introduction of pupil-teachers from 1859 and the provision of book prizes with ornamental book-plates to motivate scholarly competition. Holbrook's mastership saw the transformation of the school into an ordinary elementary school; in addition to teaching the elements of Latin to a few scholars, it had to provide a sound commercial and agricultural education for the greater number of pupils. £94 worth of books and 'philosophical apparatus' for science lessons were provided by Magdalen College in 1857 and an annual sum not exceeding £50 was approved by College to provide exhibitions and reductions of fees for promising pupils. The school lands were taken over by the College and the master was paid an annual stipend in lieu of their revenue. It is interesting to note that there was some conjecture at this point, by Dr. Bloxam, whether the change of direction of the establishment into a 'commercial' school continued to be in accordance with the precepts of the Founder. On his retirement, in November 1871, Holbrook's conscientious services were rewarded by a pension of £30 for the rest of his life.

His successor, Reverend Henry Valentine M.A. of St. John's College, Cambridge was appointed in 1872 and resigned on 22 November 1876 without making any appreciable impact on the history of the establishment. He was succeeded by Reverend William Gerrish in 1877, a man greatly respected and beloved, who was to lead the school at Wainfleet into its final phase, remaining in office for forty-six years. Trained at St. Mark's College for elementary teachers, he proceeded to ordination in 1891. In the year of Gerrish's appointment, Magdalen College sent one of its Fellows, Reverend Henry Bramley,<sup>96</sup> to visit and report on Wainfleet School. Whilst commenting quite favourably on the achievements of the pupils, Reverend Bramley suggested that increased accom-

modation for boarders (then numbering only seven) was 'the best hope of maintaining efficient teaching of the character supposed by a Middle Class School'.<sup>97</sup> This would necessitate the appointment of an Assistant Master and the day boys would be stimulated into higher attainments by boarders of greater intellectual ability. Increased accommodation could be built on land adjoining the school and with these developments there would be 'every probability of the school's answering its original purpose supplying a want in the neighbourhood of the Founder's birthplace'.<sup>98</sup> These suggestions were not acted upon; College passed a resolution whereby the school ceased to be regarded as a Classical Grammar School and actively adapted its teaching to supply the needs of the rural neighbourhood. Clearly, the question of conflict with the founding principles of Bishop Wainfleet, as raised by Dr. Bloxam, had been discussed and found invalid.

William Gerrish was paid a stipend of £150 a year, in addition to free residence in the schoolhouse and entitlement to 25% of the fees paid by his pupils. There is evidence that the College authorities had great respect for him. The President, Sir Herbert Warren, even likened Gerrish to a second William of Wainfleet, a tribute proudly recorded in the local newspaper<sup>99</sup> and a warm interest was maintained in the establishment. Mr. Gerrish was something of an educationalist and not without influence in the wider world of teaching. His system of educating boys and girls together was almost unique in the British Isles. Basing his ideas upon the system prevailing in America, he supported co-education, which he held to be suitable up to the age of sixteen years. After this age, he advised, the authorities 'must expect plenty of trouble'<sup>100</sup> from the close association of boys and girls. His aim was, at all times, to make the school a 'serviceable' institution and his letters to College about school matters were deferential but practical. The report on the school from Mr. M. C. Baines, an external examiner selected by College in 1880, reported a 'very satisfactory'<sup>101</sup> state of teaching. College, nevertheless, declined to make any enlargement to the school premises when approached about this that same year. In 1882, Mr. Gerrish wrote to the President<sup>102</sup> about the declining number of pupils due to the removal of families from the district. As an encouragement, in 1892, College offered a variety of Exhibitions, some tenable at Wainfleet and reducing the fees

payable, and others a little later, to provide leavers' exhibitions to the College School in Oxford.

The Report of the Lindsey County Council Higher Education Sub-Committee<sup>103</sup> found the school 'at a very low ebb as regards the number of pupils', when a visit was paid to Wainfleet School in 1905, in compliance with the requirements of the 1902 Education Act. There were only eighteen pupils in the school, thirteen boys and five girls, ranging in age from six to eleven years and there were no boarders by this time. The Headmaster was supported by two young female assistants. Ordinary secondary school subjects were taught; no Greek was taken, but Latin was compulsory until the age of thirteen; the only science taught was a little theoretical physiography (physical geography). The reduction in pupils was attributed to the increased provision for elementary education elsewhere in the neighbourhood, coupled with the absence of any great demand for secondary education in the two Wainfleets, whose combined population was only about 2,000. After five centuries of service, the school at Wainfleet was unable to compete with its rivals in the field. It may be conjectured whether the implementation of changes, such as those suggested by Reverend Bramley, would not have allowed the school's survival as a Grammar school, making its own specialist contribution to the neighbourhood's varied educational needs.

There were, in fact, a few last attempts at modernisation of the buildings, as shown by surviving ground and first floor plans<sup>104</sup> for improvements by J. T. Turner, a local contractor in 1907 (see illustration). These afford useful details about the overall lay-out and room usage at that date. The circular ground floor room of the bell-turret by this time housed an unusually shaped laboratory (probably in answer to criticisms of this deficiency during the 1905 visit), with a circular study occupying the floor above. The domestic arrangements of the master's house had involved building many internal partitions over the centuries, as indicated in the 1907 plan, and traces of some of these are still visible on the ground-floor ceiling at the present time. One other noteworthy architectural feature which almost certainly took place during Mr. Gerrish's mastership, although the precise date has not yet been established, was the addition of the tall, ornamental chimney stacks which crown the roof-line today. Although Tudor in style, these are

definitely not Tudor in origin.<sup>105</sup> Early engravings and drawings show the school with plain, unremarkable chimney stacks up to 1858. In 1913, the Souvenir Programme for the opening of the Coronation Hall at Wainfleet<sup>106</sup> shows the school building topped by the tall, Tudor-style stacks. These must have been added at some time between these two dates, and one possibility is the year 1885, when J. C. Hudson carried out work on the school roof, leaving his name carved on one of the lead sheets. William Gerrish died, greatly respected and much beloved, whilst still in office as Headmaster in October 1923. The excess money collected, amounting to £72, for the erection of a commemorative plaque to him in the schoolroom was subsequently utilized to found a Gerrish Prize Fund.

His successor, and the last of the long line of school masters at Wainfleet, was Mr. Kenneth Gordon Spendlove, trained at Culham College, Oxford. With a salary of £450 a year, he took over the care of the schoolhouse and its 104 day-pupils, boys and girls aged eight to seventeen years. A young and energetic man, he reorganised the syllabus to include lessons in vocal music, physical training, shorthand, book keeping and drawing. The first proposal for a new school at Skegness was made by the Lindsey Education Committee in 1924, only a year after Mr. Spendlove came to office. There was some reluctance on the part of Magdalen College to these early suggestions about closing the school, owing to its long and continuous history as an educational establishment and to the fact that it was flourishing, with an increasing number of pupils (120 by the end of 1924) under the new headmaster. Nevertheless, the old school did close with the opening of the new establishment in Skegness in 1933.

## VI Postscript

The final episodes in the history of the Wainfleet School are recent enough to be almost contemporary history. The building stood empty for a few years, during which it was considered for use as a centre for a variety of other educational purposes. Eventually, in 1939, it was offered by Magdalen College to the Youth Hostel Association as a hostel at a nominal rent. The Second World War intervened and, after being evaluated for class-room use for evacuees, the schoolroom took over an entirely new function as a military billet. From 1951, the building was re-utilised as a mixed secondary