

ROBERT BOYES -

MASTER OF THE FREE SCHOOL IN NEW ALRESFORD c. 1723 - 1782

By

Raymond Elliott

The year 1982 was the two hundredth anniversary of the death of Robert Boyes, Master of the Free School in New Alresford and the first Historian of the Town. He was born in 1723 and probably educated at the Free Grammar School, and died in 1782. Robert Boyes lived a very full life and with his untiring and indefatigable energy, apart from his successful administration of the School, he laid the foundations of the known history of Alresford, and chronicled many events, all in much detail. His writings are unique and Alresford will never be able to repay its debt to this remarkable man.

His parents would be John Boyes and his wife Mary (Russell) who lived in West Street adjacent to the Swan Inn - "After the fire Robert Heath built our House on the Ground where the 3 tenements stood". Shortly after 1742 his Father "John Boyes by his Will left it in fee to his wife who in 1763 conveyed it to her daughter, Mary Boyes, who in 1775 sold and conveyed it to William Houghton and his Heirs forever".

The first recorded event concerning Robert Boyes was his marriage to Ann Bassett in the Bighton Parish Church on the 20th December 1744. Ann Bassett, born in 1718, was the third daughter of Thomas Bassett, Yeoman Fanner at Ashton, near Bishops Waltham and his wife Ann. Earlier however, in May 1744, Robert Boyes had been elected Master of the Free School in New Alresford, at the age of 21 years.

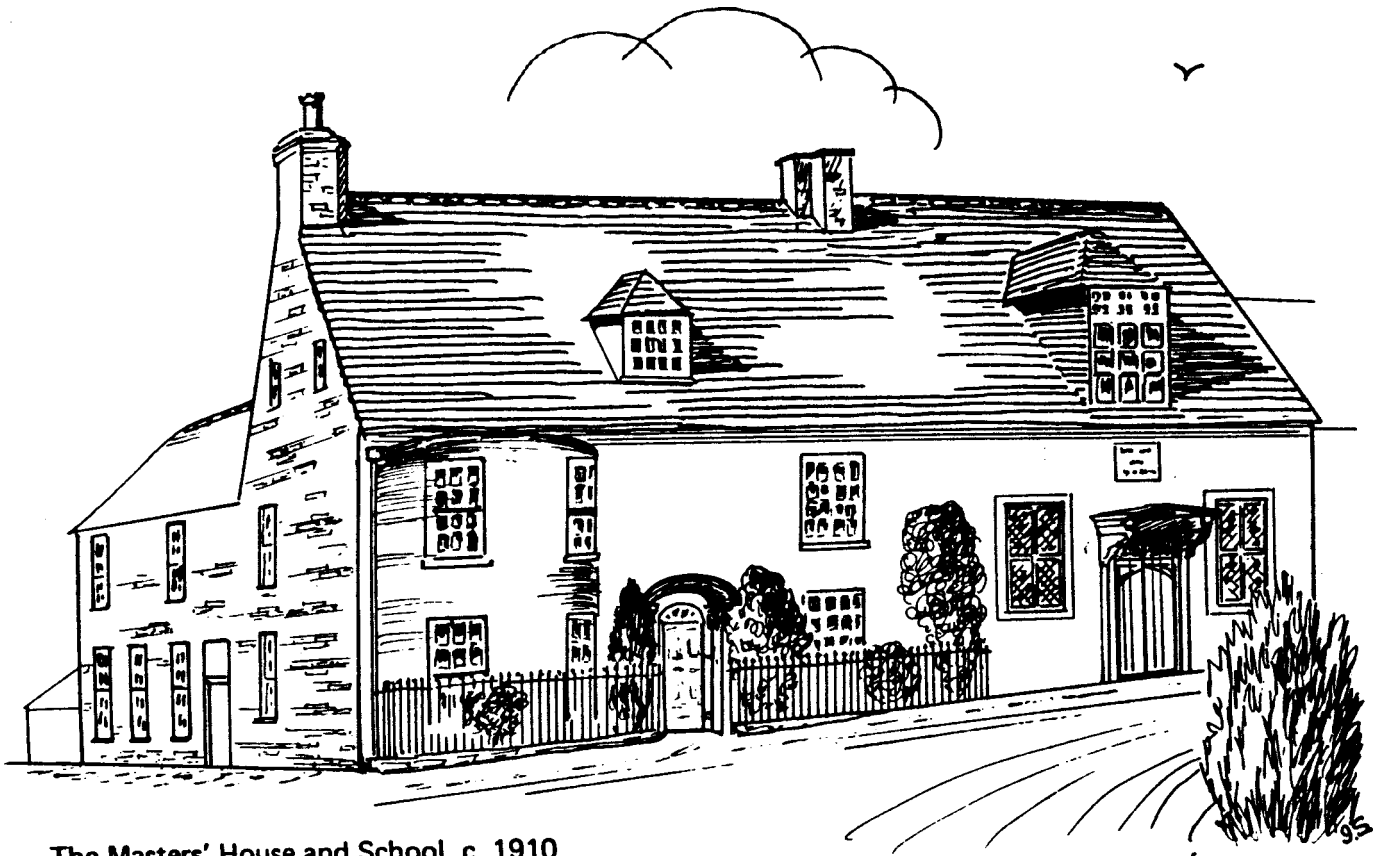
Henry Perin of the Ware House (now Weir House) in Old Alresford made provision in his Will to establish a Free School for the education of nineteen poor boys from New Alresford, Old Alresford, Tichborne and Cheriton. Forty seven acres and one yard meale of arable and pasture land lying in the south east corner of the Parish of New Alresford were purchased from Edward Miller on the 5th February 1669 and assigned to the Founders and Trustees of the School in 1697, the rents from these lands to be an endowment to provide an income for the Master of the School; also the messuage on the corner of West Street and The Dean. rebuilt after the Fire of 1689 and known as Corner Place, including three and a half acres of land in the Common Fields were conveyed to the Founders and Trustees by James Rabnet Carpenter on the 23rd March 1697, and this became the School House and residence of the Master. In this pleasant house (now known as The Old School House, 60 West Street) Robert Boyes and his wife settled and contributed greatly to the excellence and prosperity of the School and New Alresford in the eighteenth century. Their first daughter Elizabeth was born in 1745, followed by Ann Bassett in 1749 and then Martha in 1750.

Meantime in addition to the successful administration of his School, Robert Boyes entered into the life and activity of the Town and Church. He became a Churchwarden, was elected Burgess of the Town including serving as Bailiff, appointed as Land Agent, Insurance Agent, Land Owner and was consulted in the many varied aspects of business and cultural life. But, most of all, to the future benefit of New Alresford, Robert Boyes commenced writing and recording in much detail, the histories of New Alresford, together with Cheriton and Tichborne. The 1552 Survey of New Alresford, containing details of all messuages and properties in the Town at that time and individual Owners of the furlong strips in the Common Fields, together with the Farm of Alresford, was translated into modern English almost in its entirety. Accompanying this great work, Robert Boyes attached the names of the Owners and Tenants of each individual messuage and piece of land in

the mid eighteenth century together with several of the Owners and Tenants in the intervening two hundred years. Having access to many deeds and conveyances held by his fellow Townsfolk a considerable amount of information has thus been recorded, and is available for study today. By attaching all this work to the later 1786 Terrier, Enclosure Award of 1807, Tithe Award of 1843, and the many census returns, a very real and detailed account of the life and people of New Alresford can be accurately recorded covering the past four hundred years, and all due to the tremendous energy and devotion and foresight of Robert Boyes, the Master of the Free School.

Perin Barton, a great grand nephew of Henry Perin, inherited the Old Alresford estates, also estates in Hambledon, and appointed Robert Boyes his Land Agent in 1756; and from him Robert Boyes purchased pieces of land in the Common Fields situate in Upper Witton, Jacklins Hill, Great Swetley and Hawkesbury Furlongs together with pasture land in The Dean, most of these lands being let to Tradesmen in Alresford. Perin Barton, a batchelor died in 1762 and in his Will is described as an Apothecary in Gracechurch Street, London. In his Will he bequeathed £20. a piece "to my friend W. Robert Boyce of Alresford aforesaid and his three daughters".

But unhappiness came upon Robert Boyes and his daughters in 1762, when after a long illness his wife Ann died and was buried in the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist. The grief and sorrow felt is beautifully recorded on the carved stone plaque built into the north wall of the north aisle, and it reads "Near this place lie interred the remains of Ann Boyes, the wife of Robert Boyes of this Town, who amiable conduct and steady perseverance in the uniform and faithful discharge of every religious, domestic and social duty, made her, still the more beloved the more she was known; and her death a loss most afflicting to those who had the greatest experience of her endearing virtues. Having undergone a long and tedious illness with exemplary patience and Christian fortitude and enjoyed the foretaste of approaching bliss in the contemplation of a well-spent life, she calmly resigned her soil to God April 4th 1762 aged 44. Learn Reader! Bless her memory and follow her example". Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, now 17, would have taken over the running of her Father's household and the wife of Robert Boyes of this Town, who amiable conduct and steady perseverance in the uniform and faithful discharge of every religious, domestic and social duty, made her, still the more beloved the more she was known; and her death a loss most afflicting to those who had the greatest experience of her endearing virtues. Having undergone a long and tedious illness with exemplary patience and Christian fortitude and enjoyed the foretaste of approaching bliss in the contemplation of a well-spent life, she calmly resigned her soil to God April 4th 1762 aged 44. Learn Reader! Bless her memory and follow her example". Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, now 17, would have taken over the running of her Father's household and caring for her younger sisters.



The Masters' House and School, c. 1910

In August 1764 Robert Boyes was elected a Burgess of the Town of New Airesford, a position he held until his death and included two terms as Bailiff in 1768 and 1777. Amongst other public duties he served terms as Verderer and Hayward and in 1772 was elected Constable. Also, as many other Townsfolk, he was presented at Court for encroachments in The Dean and on the Lords Waste, and the 29th September 1770 records "We present Robert Boyes for erecting Parlour windows two feet without his Front Wall into West Street" - but several Townsfolk were presented for a similar encroachment! Further lands in the Cannon Fields were bought from Thomas Cotman, all being let to local Tradesmen, and in 1767 Robert Boyes was admitted to the Copyhold of lands in Huntbourne Manor, near Hambledon, being farms let to John Newman and Charles Robey; these lands were acquired for his daughters Ann Bassett and Martha, but were not bequeathed to them in his Will.

Due no doubt to his life-long interest in books, Robert Boyes had become acquainted with Thomas Burrough, a bookseller, engraver etc., in Devizes in Wiltshire. This friendship with Thomas Burrough and his family developed quite deeply for on the 27th December 1767 Robert Boyes married Sarah, the second daughter of Thomas Burrough, in the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist in Devizes. She was twenty years of age.

The impending second marriage of her father had a great effect on Elizabeth, his daughter, for having tended her father's household for seven or eight years - remember her Mother had endured a long illness before she died in 1762 - her stepmother, Sarah, who was two years younger, would take over responsibility. Elizabeth married William Green of Havant, but it is clear from the wording in his Will later that the marriage was not successful and caused much sorrow and distress to Robert Boyes in later years; for he writes "I do hereby authorise my said Executors...in case my said daughter Green shall be distressed after my Death to apply a reasonable part of the monies.... towards her necessary relief....And I do leave it to the Equity Charity and discretion of my said Trustees to allow her what they think reasonable.... and I trust my said Daughter will use her best endeavours to be as little Burthensome as possible as her misfortunes and my own have put it out of my power to leave her a Competency without her own Industry and Endeavours and my pity and concern for her is the greater as I am satisfied her poverty was not bought on her by her own wilful misconduct. And I pray God give a blessing to her and all my Children and family".

On the 2nd February 1770, Robert, the only son of Robert Boyes and his second wife Sarah was baptised in the Parish Church, to be followed in due course by their daughter Sarah in 1773 and also Jane who was baptised on the 12th January 1780. But earlier in 1769, Ann Bassett, Robert Boyes second daughter, had married John Phillips, described as a Gentleman and Hopgrower of Alton in Hampshire, and although they subsequently had no children, this union became the refuge for Robert Boyes' wife and family after his death. The study and transcriptions of the 1552 Survey by Robert Boyes was meanwhile proceeding apace and much progress made with his recording of the properties and careful examination of Indentures and Title documents, and writing continued. This great work is entitled "Survey and accounts of Titles in New Alresford, by Robert Boyes" and dated "New Alresford Hants., 19th July 1771. This historic writing, sadly not entirely completed, is today housed in the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester.

Robert Boyes fame as the Historian of Alresford was rapidly growing and in 1774 he accepted an invitation from Sir Thomas Gatehouse of Hedley Park to compile a MSS History of Alresford, to be incorporated in his own MS "Survey of the County of Southampton" and dedicated to the Duke of Chandos. Robert Boyes revised his manuscript in 1781 and then made a copy for circulation "amongst such as are anyway interested in the prosperity of the inhabitants or have any particular attachment to the place" and he considered "that it could give no pleasure to anyone whilst lying in a heap of dusty papers, but circulated might at least afford a short amusement to some", so, "Why may not the good people of Alresford be gratified...." Subsequently Alresford inhabitants, and many others, appear to have taken up the challenge in as much as further copies have continually turned up from time to time, but with the Copiers name attached in lieu of the original Author.

It was probably now due to financial pressures gathering from the difficulties in establishing agreement to increases in the School endowment revenues and ever necessary support for his eldest daughter Elizabeth Green and her family ^{that} Robert Boyes decided to raise capital by disposing of some of his lands. In 1774 Lower Stoke Close and Upper Stoke Close, each at the western end of Lower and Upper Brook Furlongs were sold to William Harris, the chief shareholder then in Ownership of Alresford New Farm. On this piece of land William Harris built an Italinete Georgian residence for his own occupation, which stands today and is known as Arlebury House. Also at about the same time the parcels of pasture and arable lands purchased from Perin Barton and Thomas Cotman were sold to the Rev. Robert Thomas, previously Curate at the Local Church, and then of Overton, one of his many friends and colleagues.

During these past years one of the Trustees of the Free School was Henry Bradley, maltster in Broad Street, who was also the Tenant of the Free School lands in the Parish. A proposal to increase the rent had been fully discussed and in due course passed by the Trustees, but Bradley refused to pay the extra sum demanded or surrender his Lease. And so began a long and difficult time for Robert Boyes in his efforts to persuade Bradley to comply with the decision of his fellow Trustees. Attempts at local arbitration having also failed, eventually in 1779 Mr. Henry Sealy, a local Attorney was briefed in the Dispute and Bill in Chancery filed. Then followed a further long drawn out case involving many meetings, discussions and letters which lasted some two years before final judgment was made on the 29th December 1781. In the meantime Henry Bradley had died and his defence was carried on by his sole Executor, Anne Bradley, his wife. Briefly, Robert Boyes had successfully won the Case and gained the increased rental for his School and the Trustees. The judgment decided that Bradley was to pay the withheld portion of the rents between 1774 and 1778, to pay part of Robert Boyes costs (approximately half) and to pay the increased rental of £50. a year. The dispute was legally settled and signed by Robert Boyes and Anne Bradley on the 21st January 1782 and they exchanged general Deeds of Release with each other.

This long drawn dispute appears to have been too burdensome for Robert Boyes and within two months of completion he was dead. His burial in the New Alresford Parish Church, at the age of 59 years, took place on the 4th April 1782, this day being the twentieth anniversary of the death of his first wife, Ann. In his last Will and Testament he named his Executors, brother John Boyes of Alton, Rev. Robert Thomas of Overton, John Earle of Woodmancott and his son-in-law John Phillips of Alton. Ample provision was made for his wife Sarah and for all of his Children, but the copyhold lands in Soberton were bequeathed to daughters Sarah and Jane. To his son Robert (12 years of age) he also bequeathed his "watch, chain, seals etc., also manuscripts relating to the lands and Estates of New Alresford and the Bishoprick of Winchester when they shall think him of proper age to take care of them". The Executors also to hold "All my printed books (a catalogue whereon in writing I have made out) Goods, Chattels, Monies, Securities and personal Estate whatsoever". Probate was granted to John Boyes and John Phillips at Winchester on 30th December 1782. Sarah Boyes and her family left the School House and moved to Alton under the care of John and Ann Phillips and brother John Boyes. By the 15th April a statement in the Hampshire Chronicle requested that all bills and claims to be sent and debts to be paid to John Phillips at Alton, and on the 6th May appeared a notice that "The Books, Plate, Linen, Household Furniture and Wines, of the late Mr. Boyes, are to be sold by Auction on the premises on Monday the 20th day of May inst., and the three following days, the Auctioneer being Mr. John Boyes of Alton". The Trustees of the Free School met in the Swan Inn on the 17th April to make their own arrangements, again on the 15th May to consider applications and in the Hampshire Chronicle dated 20th May stated "On Thursday the Rev, Mr. Richard Webb was elected Master of the Free School at Alresford in the room of the late Mr. Boyes".

Research now turns to the movements of Robert Boyes' family and the "Manuscripts relating to the lands and Estates of New Alresford etc". On the 3rd September 1782 his daughter Martha married Mr. George Hillier, Woollen Draper of Devizes at the Parish Church in Alton, and interestingly George Hillier was a friend (and Executor) of Thomas Burrough, the father of Robert Boyes' second wife, Sarah. Elizabeth Green and her four children settled in Alton under the care of John Phillips where she lived until her death in July 1803. Also under the care of her son-in-law Sarah Boyes took up residence in Alton but alas little is known except that by the mid-summer of 1788 she had died.

With regard to the whereabouts of Robert Boyes writings no record appears for fifty years. Sir Frederic Madden (1801-1873) antiquary and palaeographer, who was head of the Manuscript Department at the British Museum, and indefatigable in amassing manuscript material, had purchased during 1830-1833, for his collection relative to the county of Hampshire, many unedited manuscripts including Robert Boyes writings with a view towards a future History of Hampshire; but this however never materialised. Subsequently parts of Maddens Collection were bought by the Bodleian Library and others including Robert Boyes and Alresford were acquired by Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872) who was the most prolific collector of rare manuscripts and books etc., eventually totalling some sixty thousand items. Each item was catalogued and numbered - Robert Boyes writings being anoted "Phillipps MSS 19288-296" and housed in his new library at Thurlstone House, Cheltenham, where scholars and students were always welcome. It is interesting to note that item "Phillipps MSS 19293" has a cutting from a catalogue pasted inside the front cover, it reads "Hampshire. Some account of the Liberty of Alresford compiled by Sir Frederick Madden, autograph MS. Original papers and autograph letters relating to a Case in Chancery, Boyes -v- Bradley, touching lands of the Free School in New Alresford 1779-81, interesting and valuable original manuscript on 64 leaves, folio, boards, £6.6.0." Two years of Robert Boyes life being offered for sale. Since the death of Sir Thomas Phillipps most of his collections have been dispersed in a long series of auctions right up to the present day and in this process some of Robert Boyes writings have returned to Alresford, by whom and when is not known, but perhaps during the nineteen twenties. However, the great historical value of the writings was readily appreciated by the late Rev. A.J. Robertson and so formed the basis of his "History of Alresford, first published privately in 1936. The writings were then securely housed in the Parish Vestry until quite recently when they were, together with many Parish Records, deposited with the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester.

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