

**STATEMENT
ON THE
HISTORY AND POSITION
OF THE
THE BLUE-COAT GIRLS' SCHOOL,
GREENWICH,
BY
GEORGE BIDDELL AIRY,
ASTRONOMER ROYAL.**

This is a transcription of the above document. It was published by George Biddell Airy in 1867. He was Astronomer Royal from 1835 to 1881 and, following in the tradition which went back to the first Astronomer Royal (John Flamsteed), was a trustee of the school.

The school archives hold a large body of correspondence from the 1860s and 1870s which indicated that Airy was concerned about the finances of the school and also about the manner in which they were being recorded. There were numerous exchanges between Airy and Vice-Admiral Hamilton, who was part of the Greenwich Hospital establishment as well as being treasurer to the school. Copies of many of the letters and their replies are also held in the RGO (Royal Greenwich Observatory) Archive in the Cambridge University Archives.

A copy of the original printed version of this document is held in the Blackheath Bluecoat School archives. There is also a copy with hand written corrections by Airy held in the RGO Archive.

The original spelling of this document has been preserved.

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The following account of the origin of the BLUE COAT GIRLS' SCHOOL is contained in "A letter from a gentleman at Greenwich to his friend in London," written in 1724, extracted from "An Account of several Workhouses and Charity Schools," for which I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Charles Kadwell:¹

"In the year 1700, several charitable ladies of this town (Greenwich) joined their subscriptions for setting up a School for teaching and cloathing 30 girls. Some time after, a proposal was made to the said Gentlewomen, that if they pleased to allow the charge that was usually allow'd for cloathing the children to be laid out in materials for setting them to work, the Mistress might teach the children to make their own cloathes ; which would have this advantage in it, that, tho' nothing might be saved in the charge, yet the children, by being inur'd to labour, would be better prepared for services in the families where they might afterwards be placed. A tryal of this proposal for one year was soon resolv'd on; and the success was such, that it has been continued, with some improvements, ever since.

"The Gentlewomen, who are Trustees, have a Treasurer chosen among themselves ; and the account of expenses of this School is kept in so regular a manner as to be worthy the imitation of other schools.

"In 1716, the School was in such reputation that the Trustees were enabled, by a Collection at the Church doors, to augment the children from 30 to 40, and the Collection has been yearly continued ever since for keeping up that number ; so that since the School was first set up [to 1724, the date of this letter], about 200 children have gone out to services in private families; and no sooner is there a vacancy in the School, but interest is made by poor parents to get another in; so pleased are they with the management of it, tho' at first they were much averse to it."

[The letter then describes the general discipline of the School, and enters into particulars of so much of the annual expenses as are concerned in the preparation of the children's clothes. Fool and flax were bought for spinning, and worsted for knitting ; the yarn was woven and bleached by tradesmen; the woven stuffs were employed, with the addition of other purchased materials, for making the children's clothing. It then proceeds:-]

" Thus you see the whole charge of well cloathing 40 girls' annually comes to £48. 11s. 6d., which is £1. 4s. 33d. for one girl ; in which expense, if what is saved by their labour be not considerable, yet the advantage accruing to the children by the share they have in making and mending their clothes, as it makes them good servants and good housewives, is not to be express'd."

[The letter then states that the Trustees choose rather to send the girls to service than to bind them apprentices ; that some are chosen to wash the School, wash and mend linen, scour and wash dishes, &c. And its last paragraph contains the following:-]

*" I have been the more particular in describing the management of this School, because the Ladies who have the management of it seem to have carried it to the utmost perfection, so as to enable the children to shift honestly by their own industry, if it should be their lot to be cast into any part of the kingdom where they might be friendless . . . and the employments aforesaid not at all interfering with their learning to read, and say the Church Catechism, and attending the publick prayers of the Church, every day in the year."*²

On examination of the books of the Charity, I find this account correct in every important particular. The title page of the first account-book is "The Accounts of Money's receav'd and paid for the teaching, cloathing, &c., thirty poor Girles in y^e Charity Schoole at Greenwich, from Midsummer, 1700."³ The first payment is on 1700, August 24. From that time to the present, the money accounts are complete (with one small exception, to be mentioned below). The first column of receipts is headed "Monys received from the Gentlewomen and other contributors for the teaching and cloathing of thirty poor Girls in the Charity School in London Street, in East Greenwich, from Midsummer, 1700, to Midsummer, 1701," and the first column of payments is headed "Paid by Mrs. Mapletoft out of the Monys collected for the said School, the following bills for the cloathing and schooling and other necessaries for the said children, from Midsummer, 1700, to Midsummer, 1701."

The Minutes in the "Order-book belonging to the Charity Schoole" commence in 1712; but, apparently, some leaves have been lost from the book.⁴

It is evident that the soul of this movement was Mrs. Margaret Flamsteed, wife of the first Astronomer Royal : a lady of ability and prudence, whose vigour and spirit, in managing the publication of her husband's astronomical works after his decease, and in vindicating his memory, are well known to the readers of the astronomical history of that age. All the accounts, from the beginning in 1700 to 1718, are in Mrs. Flamsteed's handwriting.

Mrs. Mapletoft was Treasurer to Midsummer, 1703, and Mrs. Gastrell in 1703-1704; then Mrs. Flamsteed was Treasurer to 1718. Mrs. Flamsteed was an annual subscriber from 1700 to 1722 (her husband died in 1720), and was an auditor for the last time in 1723.

The most liberal subscribers about this time were Sir Algernon May, Mrs. Mapletoft, Lady Holman, Lady Harris, and especially Mr. Justice Harrison and his family ; but the principal contributions were those of £1. and of 10s. each from ladies. The annual amount seems to have risen to about £80.

Dr. Turner, who was instituted Vicar of Greenwich in 1704, appears to have given much assistance to the Charity; and it was probably at his suggestion that a new source of income was opened, by collections after sermons in the Parish Church. The first of these appears to have been that of Dr. Kennett, Dean of Peterborough, in 1712; it was followed by those of Dr. Stanhope, Dean of Canterbury, in 1713; Mr. Burscough, 1714; Dr. Turner, 1715; &c. The collections amounted to about £23. annually.⁵

From the nature of the articles constituting the principal part of the expenses, it appears that the original scheme was closely followed out. The Committee had a 50 years' lease of a house in London Street. (Flamsteed, the Astronomer Royal, was one of the Trustees). The School was in fact a kind of day-school, with the privilege to the children of clothing, and of grants of money when they left the School. The amount of stuff produced from the yarn spun by the children amounted sometimes to 300 or 400 yards.

A piece of ground, opposite Queen Elizabeth's College, then called " Harp's Mead," divided into two parts, and producing an aggregate rental of £5. per annum on long leases of its two parts, was bequeathed by Mrs. Elizabeth Dry for the use of the School. The first receipt of the rent by the School Trustees appears to have been in the year 1742. I shall have occasion below to speak further of this estate.

About the year 1730, from causes which I am unable to trace or conjecture, the amount of subscriptions began to diminish, and by 1740 they were very small. The reliance for funds appears to have been placed solely on the collections from the annual Sermons. Some Government Stocks had been purchased with the proceeds of special grants or bequests, and these had been gradually sold out. At last, in 1745, the accounts terminate abruptly.

In 1748 appears the following remarkable document:

"We, whose names are underwritten, being desirous of reviving this Schoole, which was in a very drooping condition, and putting it upon a better footing than it has ever yet been, by taking the Girls into the House, and Boarding of them, having collected a Sume of Money by Subscription sufficient to begin to put our design in execution, and having met a great many times at the Schoole-house to form a Scheme (as on the other side) for the management of it, Agreed with the Mistress and bought in Beds and Furniture, do resolve to begin this 9th day of January, 1747/8. And do accordingly Admit ten Girls into the House, whose Names are as follows:-[the names are given, and their ages ranging from 9 to 13 years.] But as we always proposed to begin this undertaking with the New Year (tho' we could not possibly efect it now), we design it should commence from that time, and that the first of January shall always be the day, for taking-in Children and begining the new Account for the Succeeding Year.

"And we agree to meet every first Saturday in the Month (and oft'ner if occasion) to settle all Business relating to the Schoole, and besides that singly to call and Inspect into the proceedings, as often as we conveniently can.

"And to Audit the Account four times a year: viz.-on the first Saturday in April, the first Saturday in July, the first Saturday in October, and the first Saturday in January."

(Signed)

MARY CREED, E. MOLLOY,
MARY HOOKER, A. NEWINGTON,
S. HEYSHAM, ELIZ. DUCAREL,
ANN BRETT, LYDIA CLARKE.
ELIZ. ALLEN."⁶

[Mary Creed was Lady Creed, wife of Sir James Creed, who formerly occupied a splendid mansion near the foot of Maze Hill. E. Molloy was Lady Molloy, wife of Sir Charles Molloy, a Captain of the Royal Navy, and one of the Elder Brethren of the Trinity House, who died 1760. Lady Molloy died at Swifts, in Kent,

1765. For this information I am indebted to Mr. Charles Kadwell. Of the other ladies I have no account.]

This Resolution is accompanied with " The Scheme or Method resolv'd upon by the Comitte for the management of the School." Orphans are to be preferred, and other rules are laid down, the last resource being to lots. The girls are to be taken in " at the age of Eight Years, to have them lodged and boarded, and taught to read, sew, spin [spinning was then an important domestic service], knit, and do all sorts of household business, as Washing, Scowering, cleaning a House and household things, Dressing their own victuals, &c. To put them out to service at the age of Fourteen Years, and then to allow Money to Cloath them, not exceeding Forty Shillings, and to make the best bargain they can for them, &c." There are provisions for food and teaching; and for teaching other little girls [apparently as day scholars] ; and for an Inspecting Committee. The girls first, taken-in, seven in number, were those remaining as day scholars.

There are also "Rules to be observed by the Mistress and Children," in regard to rising and going to bed, meals, religious observances, communications with their parents, &c. Also, " to take in a little washing once a fortnight, and scowering once a month, for such as are able to do it; to wash their own things every week."

On this plan, in a new School-house, the work of the School re-commenced, in its new form ; the only departure from the plan that I can discover, being, that the interval of the Ladies' Meetings, instead of being a month, was, for some years, never greater than a week.

From this time, the School has invariably borne in the books the title of "The Blue Coat School."

All honour be to the noble-minded ladies, who could so clearly perceive and so strongly feel the importance of the cause in which they were engaged, and could so disinterestedly devote their energies to its support! And, among these, all honor to the memory of Lady Molloy, whose labours for many years are most conspicuous!

Under the vigorous superintendence of the Ladies Managers, the School speedily rose in utility, in reputation, and in pecuniary success. The yearly subscriptions for some time ranged from £ 140. to £ 160.: an amount which, if we consider that Greenwich was then a small town, is a very strong proof of the estimation in which the School was held. The collections at the annual sermons ranged from £ 60. to £ 100. Several legacies of considerable amount were bequeathed to the School. The sums not immediately required for current expenses were usually invested in Government Stocks, a resource very strongly required to meet expenses which will be mentioned.

Among the circumstances which contributed to the prosperity of the School is to be specially mentioned the high opinion of its utility entertained by the Clergy of Greenwich. Beginning with Dr. Turner, all the successive Vicars of Greenwich, Dr. Skerrett, Dr. Squire (subsequently Bishop of St. David's), Dr. Hinchcliffe (subsequently Bishop of Peterborough, and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge), Dr. Burnaby, Mr. Mathew, and Mr. Soames, have successively given their cordial assistance to the School. By their influence, the assistance of many Dignitaries of the English Church has been obtained for the advocacy, in the pulpit, of the claims of this Charity to the support of the Parishioners. I have made no special search for the names of these Dignified Churchmen, but I have incidentally remarked the names of the following Bishops (probably omitting many): Bangor, Chester, Chichester, Jamaica, Lincoln, Oxford, Rochester, and Winchester. But there is one which merits particular mention.

Mrs. Wolfe, mother of the hero of Quebec, was one of the Ladies' Committee at or soon after the revival of the School. By her husband (who was also a General in the army) the School, was brought to the notice of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Subsequently, Dr. Squire pressed it on his attention. his Grace desired that written statements on the plan and state of the School might be laid before him, and after examination of these, he consented to preach a sermon in its favour, and on 1758, June 25, the Institution had the honor and the advantage of the favourable recommendation of the School by the PRIMATE of ALL ENGLAND in the pulpit of St. Alphege Church.⁷

In 1753, the Committee built a School-house at the expense of £ 512. This appears to have been the house in Limekilns Lane (South Street), built on land for which a small ground-rent was paid to Morden College, and of which the lease expired in 1825.

In no long time it was discovered that irregularities were introduced by the clay scholars, and the admission of pupils of that class was entirely discontinued. From that time to the present, the School has been carried on, on a system sensibly uniform, with only such changes as the changes in social life have required. The spinning, for instance, has long since' terminated: other work has been executed in the School for strangers, on payment, producing annually sums ranging from £15. to £63.: but this source of income has gradually diminished.

The following are the names of the Acting Ladies Managers who have held and have quitted office since 1748 :-Lady Molloy, Miss J. Allen, Miss Vansittart (sister of Lord Bexley), Mrs. Burney, Mrs. Stow, Mrs. Browne. Lately, the following gentlemen have given their assistance in the more active duties of Treasurer:-Dr. Burney, Mr. Stow, Mr. Browne, Vice-Admiral W. A. B. Hamilton.

The number of scholars has ranged, I believe, from 20 to 37. In 1760, and in 1814, there were disturbances in the School which required the expulsion of many of the girls. Besides these, there were comparatively few instances of bad conduct in the School. After the irregularity of 1814, it was

proposed to give special preference, in admission, to girls of the National School; and this rule was acted on for a time; but ultimately it was found better, without any prejudice to reception of girls from that school, to revert to the general rules regulating admission.

In the autumn of 1812 occurred an event which materially changed the pecuniary position of the School.

The annual rent of £5. for the Harp's Mead Estate had been paid in a very irregular way: sometimes three years' rent at once, or (as in 1766 and 1772), five years' rent at once. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the claims on the estate went altogether out of sight. The last payment made was that of 1772.

Mr. Kimbell, in 1812, discovered the will and other documents which gave to the Blue Coat School the legal right to this estate, and communicated the discovery to the Ladies' Committee. The opinion of counsel was taken as to the validity of the bequest under the Laws of Mortmain, and other points were discussed; and finally the right of the Charity to the Estate was definitely established. A Decree of Chancery was procured, regulating the future management of the Estate; it was placed in the hands of Trustees; and the Trust has once subsequently been transferred to new Trustees. The arrears of rent were paid by the tenant. Of the two portions of the Estate, the lease of one had expired, and the Committee took possession of this part. Some years were yet to run of the lease of the other portion, and the Committee purchased the remainder of the term. Having possession of the whole, they let it on building lease at an annual gross rental of £ 212. The houses built on it are those opposite Queen Elizabeth's College. The lease expires at the end of 1874.

In 1823 it was remarked that the lease of the School-house under Morden College would expire in two years. The value of building ground in that district had so much increased, that it appeared imprudent to continue the occupation of the same building under what would be a just rent to the owners of the ground. Finally, Miss Vansittart, who had leasehold possession (under Morden College) of a piece of ground and School-house at the top of Royal hill, under the " Point," surrendered the remainder of her lease; and the ground, with some extension, was let to the Blue Coat School on a long building lease (terminating on Lady-day, 1823) at the small annual rent of £3. The additional buildings required for the School were then erected at an expense of £1132.: this sum was defrayed from the invested funds of the Charity, assisted by a Fancy Sale and Donations. The same buildings are still occupied by the School.

Before entering upon the present state of the School, I will call attention to its remarkable history. Commencing at a time when the name of the now-reigning dynasty of this Empire had scarcely been whispered, this School has been carried on through a period of ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SEVEN YEARS, administered under the laborious and gratuitous superintendence of ladies who had no personal interest in its success, and, supported entirely by the voluntary contributions and voluntary bequests of persons whose direction of their benevolence was decided only by their appreciation of the value of the Institution. There can have been few instances in the world-there are none known to me-in which such causes have operated with such uniformity, for such a length of time, and (as is believed) with such general success.

The objects of the School may be described as twofold: one is, to give to poor girls, such a practical education as may fit them for at once entering upon the duties incidental to the position which they may expect to hold in life, more especially as domestic servants; and may insure to them the power of obtaining a respectable livelihood. The other object is to educate their moral character and habits. I am assured that in both respects the School has been successful. I am told, in particular, that on occasions when girls of this School have appeared in public, the propriety of their demeanour has been very remarkable. I am told also that they are valued as house servants.

Such a School is necessarily expensive; but, for more than a century and a half, the inhabitants of Greenwich have practically expressed their opinion that the expense is repaid by the advantage.

The following particulars apply to the state of the School at the present time:-

	£. s. d.
The Annual Income of the Charity, derived from the Rent of real Estate, 1866, was - - -	212 0 0
That from Investments in the Funds - - - - -	94 0 6
The Annual Subscriptions - - - - -	72 3 6
The net amount of the contributions after Sermon - - - - -	40 9 3
<small>(This amount, in consequence of the unsettled state of parochial arrangements, is very much smaller than in the last preceding years, when it usually rose to £90. or £100.)</small>	
Sundry Donations, return of income tax, &c. - - - - -	13 19 6
Total Income - - -	£433 2 9

The present Feoffees and Trustees of the Estate are Vice-Admiral W. A. B. Hamilton, G. B. Airy. The Trustees of the Funded Stock are Vice-Admiral W. A. B. Hamilton, G. B. Airy, W. Angerstein. The number of registered subscribers is 83.

The donations have come from persons of every class. I will cite one which has given me great pleasure : " Subscription by one brought up in the School, 10/6,"

The number of girls in 1866 averaged 26. In 1867, in consequence of the pressure on the School Funds, the number has been kept down to 23. The house establishment is competent to admit 30.

The expenses in 1866 were as follows:-

	£. s. d.
Meals and housekeeping - - - - -	347 3 8
(For 26 girls, with matron and teacher, the average per head is £12.8s.)	
Salaries, Coals, Gas, Water, and Washing the heavier linens - - - - -	121 19 3
Repairs of building and furniture, earthenware, brushes, &c. - - - - -	28 13 11
Parish Rates - - - - -	9 10 0
(The Parochial Board have very liberally reduced the assessment to the lowest possible amount.)	
	£507 6 10

It has been necessary, for support of this expense, to entirely exhaust the floating balance at the command of the Ladies Managers.

The Managing Committee at present consists of the following ladies :-Lady Harriet B. Hamilton, Mrs. Stow, Mrs. Airy, Miss Soames, Miss Smith, Miss Traill. They are assisted by Francis Huskisson, Esq., in the office of Treasurer.

The Ladies' Committee acknowledge with gratitude the careful and valuable medical attendance which has been given gratuitously by Frederick Moon, Esq., M.B. In reference to the points which specially fall under the notice of a physician, I am happy to be permitted to quote the following statement of that gentleman:-

"I have attended the children of the Blue Coat Girls' School for about six years, during which time the amount of illness has been wonderfully small. The children are robust and healthy in appearance, well-fed, and cheerful.

"I have enquired carefully into their dietary, and consider it fully sufficient.

(Signed) FREDERICK MOON, M.B. London."s

Greenwich, April 23, 1867.

I have myself compared the dietary with several published by Dr. Pereira, and think it ample.

The ages of the girls range from 8 to 16 years. They are taught to make beds, make fires, dust furniture, sweep rooms, scour floors, attend to ventilation, and wash linen. They are taught to cook : they can roast, boil, bake, and make hashes. They are taught plain needlework: can make shirts, gowns, &c., and mend their own clothes. (The Committee much wish that work could be placed in their hands by ladies unconnected with the School; remarking only that it is difficult to keep a strict appointment to time). The girls are taught to read in the Irish reading-books, to write, and to work ordinary arithmetic; they are accustomed to weighing goods; a little instruction is given in Geography and English History. In religious education, they are familiar with Bible Histories, and with the Church Catechism; and I understand that the Rev. I. W. North, who has repeatedly examined them, has expressed himself satisfied with their knowledge. (It is almost unnecessary to remark that, without the slightest exclusive or sectarian intention, it is absolutely necessary to adopt one system through the School.)

Care is taken to provide healthy amusement for the children.

I venture to commend this establishment to the favorable notice of the inhabitants of Greenwich, as supplying a double want which is felt almost everywhere: on the one hand, by the employers of servants, for young persons trained in moral and regular habits, and so educated as to be able at once to give assistance in all household duties; and, on the other hand, by the young persons and their guardians, for an education which, while it directs their general habits, qualifies them especially for the service by which they may expect to gain a respectable livelihood.

And I venture to invite to it the attention of the 'Ministers of Religion. In the important part which, in all ages, that body has taken in the education of the country, it has been a duty naturally connected with their sacred office, to give their care less to the commercial instruction than to the training up in regular, moral, and religious habits. The Institution of which I have treated will be found, I am confident, specially adapted to meet their wishes on these points.

Inspection of the School, especially by the ladies of the district, is particularly desired by the Managing Committee.

1867: APRIL 24.

G. B. AIRY.

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NOTES

¹ There are two letters from Charles Kadwell to George Airy in the school archives giving the information referred to in this account. Charles Kadwell appears in Pigot's Directory 1839 (p.66) as "Linen Maker & Silk Mercer, Stockwell Street, Greenwich".

² A photocopy of this article is held in the school archives and a facsimile of the book is held in a computer pdf file.

³ The first account book (1700 – 1745) is held in the school archives.

⁴ The Order Book (1712 – 1759) is held in the school archives.

⁵ An account of the money received from collections taken at charity sermons and how it was spent for the years 1712 – 1714 appears in the front of the Order Book. A list of money received from sermons from 1712 to 1774 is stored in the inside cover of the Account Book.

⁶ Order Book op. cit

⁷ Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury 1758 - 1768

⁸ The text of this statement is contained in a note from Dr Moon to George Airy 20 April 1867 and held in the Royal Observatory Greenwich (RGO) Archives at Cambridge University Archives.