

The Oxley Farm Diaries by Mick Henry
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Schools, School Teachers and School Friends in Warbleton and Rushlake Green

With just a few names from the Oxley Farm Diaries put together with snippets of information about school attendance, it has been possible to identify schooling which existed in the parish of Warbleton c.1800-1817, and beyond to Lewes and Beckley near Rye. Genealogical clues about Mr. Arthur RUSSELL who was schoolmaster at the Old School, Rushlake Green from 1812-1848, have been found through vital records and censuses. Information from Sussex newspapers have been cross referenced with scholarly written sources in an attempt to find some information about schools, teachers and pupils in a time of few official school records.

- Mr Arthur RUSSELL was named as the local schoolmaster in the Oxley Diaries between 1815 and 1823.
- Arthur was enumerated in the 1841 census as schoolmaster in Warbleton, resident in Rushlake Green, with Mary,¹ Emma age 20, b.1821 and Eliza age 8, b.1833.²
- Arthur was age 65 b.1776 and Mary age 62, b.1779.
- In the 1851 census Arthur was a retired schoolmaster, living in Edenbridge Kent, born Eastbourne, 1776.³
- Eliza RUSSELL age 8 in the 1841 census was the granddaughter of Arthur and Mary, the daughter of their eldest son William RUSSELL and Mary DEWEY, bp.1804, Long Clawson, Leicestershire, d.1839, Maidstone, age 35.
- In 1851, Eliza was with William, stepmother Elizabeth and half sisters in Maltravers Street, Arundel. William's sister Martha RUSSELL born in 1823, Warbleton, was a visitor. William was born in 1804, Rye. These two siblings and places of birth enumerated together in the 1851 census, confirms their parents were Arthur and Mary who married in Rye, 1803.
- In the 1861 census Eliza was unmarried and living with her father and stepmother Elizabeth née MIDDLEMAS, in Wandsworth, London, a music teacher born in 1834, Cranbrook, Kent, (non-conformist) daughter of William and Mary RUSSELL.
- Arthur and Mary had five children born in Rye between 1807 and 1812, and then five more children born in Warbleton from 1814 to 1823.
- There was an advertisement in the Sussex Express⁴ for a schoolmaster and mistress for Rushlake Green school in 1812. Arthur may have responded to this advertisement,⁵ passed his interview, and moved to Warbleton.
- Arthur died in 1856 and a short obituary in the newspaper announced that 'Mr Arthur Russell age 79, late of Warbleton, Sussex, and for 36 years schoolmaster of that place',⁶ confirming Arthur retired in 1848. Mrs Mary Russell, late of Warbleton, died age 84, in 1864.⁷
- Nicholas Oxley himself went to a boarding school in Beckley near Rye c.1804.
- The diary described how he attended the wedding of an old school mate Phillips from his 'school days at Beckley' and he had 'a piece of wedding cake'.⁸ James Parsons was the founder and headmaster, and later his son Isaac Parsons.⁹
- The Oxleys and many Warbleton families were religious dissenters who attended the Heathfield Independent Chapel, just outside Punnetts Town at Chapel Cross. It is unlikely that non-conformists with very strong beliefs would have attended the Church of England National School in Rushlake Green.
- In 1814, Nicholas wrote that 'the cart brought home Betsey from Schooll in the morning',¹⁰ and in 1816, 'Ann is at school at Mrs York's'.¹¹ ¹² Nicholas also wrote that 'Elizabeth is gone to school to Mrs and Miss Browne's Cliffe Lewes' and had travelled to Windmill Hill to 'take the cart'.¹³ Elizabeth was half-sister to Nicholas and Ann was his father's step granddaughter.

¹ RUSSELL, Arthur and Mary KENYON, *Sussex Marriages*, www.findmypast.co.uk, Rye, 5th Nov 1803, original data: ESBHRO at The Keep.

² Two boys were also enumerated, Alexander and James BARTLETT aged 10 and 7. It is likely they were two of Arthur's pupils.

³ RUSSELL, Arthur, *Sussex Baptism*, Sussex Discovery, bp.27th Sep 1776, Eastbourne, original data: The Sussex Family History Group.

⁴ *The Sussex Advertiser*, www.findmypast.co.uk, Advertisement for School Master, 18th May 1812, original data: The British Library.

⁵ Alternatively, Arthur may have been known to the Warbleton parish officers if he had a previous teaching post, possibly Beckley near Rye. Arthur must have been considered as the right candidate for the post, because the advertisement specified 'no family'.

⁶ *The Kentish Independent*, www.findmypast.co.uk, Arthur RUSSELL, Obituary, 15th March 1856, original data: The British Library

⁷ *The West Kent Journal*, www.findmypast.co.uk, Mrs Mary RUSSELL, Obituary, 1st March 1864, original data: The British Library.

⁸ Henry, M. 2024, *The Oxley Farm Diaries*, Saturday 8th Feb 1817, p.223.

⁹ Caffyn, J., 1998, *Sussex Schools in the 18th Century*, Vol.81, Sussex Record Society, Lewes. Schoolmaster PARSONS, J. p.326 and further information on p.44, Parsons' boys' boarding school, Rs (reference/register1792 and 1797).

¹⁰ Henry, M. 2024, Wednesday 21st December, p.44. Betsey arriving home in the morning, suggests she was a boarder at the girls' school in Lewes.

¹¹ Henry, M. 2024, Tuesday 20th June 1816, p.160.

¹² Caffyn, J., 1998, p.285 has an entry for Mrs Brown's school in Lewes, established 1805 or earlier. Another entry on p.185 says the school was girls' boarding which suggests that Elizabeth/Betsey may not have travelled on the cart to Lewes everyday, and was a boarder at the school.

¹³ Henry, M. 2024, Friday 6th October 1815, p.99.

The school where Arthur worked was one of the first National Schools promoted by The National Society 1811.¹⁴ The scheme was financed by the Church of England, and Arthur RUSSELL would have been fully committed to teaching CofE values.¹⁵ The Rev Richard GREEN¹⁶ of Warbleton was given £15 by the Sussex National Schools to extend the school at Rushlake Green, to accommodate 40 more children.¹⁷ The old school at Rushlake Green has now been converted into two dwellings.¹⁸ A new school was built in 1873 on a site opposite the Old School, which was later demolished to make way for private retirement dwellings, especially for the villagers.¹⁹

Before the National Schools, The Society for the Establishment and Support of Sunday Schools was established in 1785. Charity Schools were established in poor areas to help alleviate poverty, often privately supported and run by religious organisations. Workhouse schools²⁰ were initially funded after the General Workhouse Act of 1723 and the Overseers of the Poor would have appointed a governor. Apprenticeship agreements kept youngsters out of the workhouse, and a means towards settlement in a new parish, avoiding charges on a former parish.²¹ An advertisement appeared in the *Sussex Advertiser* in 1815,²² for a Governor and Governess for the Workhouse in Warbleton which was located opposite Warbleton Parish Church. The applicants had to apply to the parish officers. The Workhouse in Warbleton was not a school until at least 1836, when the New Poor Laws were introduced and Warbleton joined the new Hailsham Union.

Lewes was a busy centre for religious dissenters in Sussex in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, and it is very likely that schools established there at the time were privately run by dissenters, with religious studies at the core of the teaching. Dame Schools also grew in number in towns and villages as the among the first schools in private homes.²³ Further research is needed, but it is difficult to find extensive school records before the Education Act of 1870.²⁴

A very detailed history of Sussex Schools, by John Caffyn²⁵ is now free to download from the Sussex Record Society website, and there may be some hard copies available online. The history is divided into three sections to include a history of Sussex schooling provision, schoolmasters and schoolmistresses and the scholars/pupils of the 18th century, providing a background for schooling in the time of Nicholas OXLEY in the early 19th century. There will be a RUSSELL family tree to follow soon.

¹⁴ The National Society 1811 for Promoting Education for the Poor.

¹⁵ It is surprising that Arthur's granddaughter Eliza was given a non-conformist baptism in the Cranbrook Chapel on the Hill.

¹⁶ The Rev Richard GREEN was born in North Mundham in 1767 and married Maria Jane JOHNSON in Fishbourne 1801 by licence. Richard and Maria had six children born in Warbleton. Two sons had occupations as parish curates and others were solicitors.

The Rev Richard died 3rd Sep 1813, age 46, in Warbleton, just six months after securing the funds for the school extension to accommodate 40 more children. Maria went back to Fishbourne where she was buried in 1834.

The Oxford University Alumni 1715-1886, Vol 11 G, gives a short biog of Richard's training, dates and degrees awarded, available on Ancestry.

Rev Richard Green rector of Warbleton 16th May 1805 (started c.1801 in OUA), Ref 16290, WSRO Ep.11/10, <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk>.

¹⁷ *The Sussex Advertiser*, www.findmypast.co.uk, Sussex National Schools, 2nd Mar 1813, original data: The British Library and

The Sussex Advertiser, www.findmypast.co.uk, Sussex National Schools, 4th July 1814, original data: The British Library.

Evidence of the extension to the school is available at ESBHRO in a HER Historic Environment Record: Old School House, Rushlake: C16 Building (MON) Ref 54555, East Sussex County Council. Photographs of the Old School can be found online, for example, <https://historicengland.org.uk>

¹⁸ There are photographs available of the Old School online, for example, <https://historicengland.org.uk>

¹⁹ <https://osbornehouserushlakegreen.co.uk>. There is a photograph reference to the 1873 Victorian school building, 'Photo Rushlake Green, Warbleton, looking towards the South Downs the former school building built in 1873 (c.1900), Archive of Dr. Elizabeth Doff, ACC 8167/13, ESBHRO at The Keep.

²⁰ <https://www.workhouses.org.uk>

²¹ The Institute of Genealogical and Heraldic Studies (IHGS), Lecture 10, Schools and Education.

²² *The Sussex Advertiser*, www.findmypast.co.uk, Workhouse advertisement 15th December 1815, original data: The British Library

²³ The Institute of Genealogical and Heraldic Studies (IHGS), Lecture 10, Schools and Education.

²⁴ National School Admission Records and Log Books from 1870 are available online on the commercial websites.

²⁵ Caffyn, J., 1998, Vol.81, Sussex Record Society, Lewes.

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The School in Rushlake Green

<https://osbournehouserushlakegreen.org.uk>

The Workhouse

<https://www.workhouses.org.uk>

The Sussex Family History Group

SFHG <https://sfhg.uk> (membership access to SFHG Discovery)

SFHG Discovery <https://discovery.sfhg.uk> (access link to SFHG Membership Site)

SFHG The Sussex Marriage Index on CD (to 1837)