

A Boy at Ewelme School, 1464–5

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SUMMARY

A list of expenses in the archives of Ewelme Hospital relates to a boy named Edward Querton, who studied at Ewelme School in the year 1464–5. This school had recently been endowed by the de la Pole family between 1458 and 1460, and the article re-examines the layout of the school building and how it might best be interpreted. The identity of Querton and his family is pursued, and an analysis is made of his expenses (including board and lodging, travel, books, candles, and other classroom materials) to elicit what they reveal about going to school in 15th-century England. The article concludes with an edition of the expenses.

During the autumn, winter and spring of the year 1464–5, a boy named Edward Querton, or Quarton, boarded in Ewelme and had lessons in the newly opened school that formed part of the hospital established there by William and Alice de la Pole, Duke and Duchess of Suffolk. A note of the expenses he incurred survives in an account book kept by or for William Marton, master of the hospital, where they were entered on a blank page between accounts relating to the years 1456 and 1457.¹ The person charged with handling Querton's expenses is likely to have been Marton himself, or if not him someone else closely involved with the hospital. Our knowledge of the expenses is indebted to Dr John Goodall, who discovered and edited them in his recent study of the hospital, *God's House at Ewelme* (2001).² My reopening of discussion about them in no way implies criticism of his excellent work. Rather it aims to explore the document further as a source for late-medieval school education, and to draw more information from it in the light of what we know about that education in general.

The accounts show that somebody sent Edward Querton to Ewelme and entrusted someone else, probably Marton, with a sum of 26s. 6d. for his expenses. Perhaps the amount was really 26s. 8d., because that was a round sum of two marks. We are not told when Querton arrived at Ewelme, only that he was there by 23 October 1464, the date from which the list of expenses begins. He seems to have boarded with a certain William Secole for a sum of 8d. a week – a typical amount for boarding a schoolboy, although we sometimes encounter sums as high as 1s. 8d., possibly for those who were older or higher in rank.³ Querton stayed at Ewelme continuously until 16 April 1465, at which point he seems to have left the village, because there is a final item in the document for 'expenses to Oxford'. He did not go home, wherever home was, during his Ewelme stay, but that was not unusual in an age of slow

¹ Bodl. MS DD Ewelme a.vi/43B, p.12.

² J.A.A. Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme: Life, Devotion and Architecture in a Fifteenth-Century Almshouse* (2001).

³ Board of 8d. a week is mentioned at Beverley in 1276 (A.F. Leach, *Early Yorkshire Schools*, 2 vols (Yorks. Arch. Soc. xxvii, xxxiii, 1899–1903), i, 80m); 10d. at Stevenage in 1312 (*VC.H. Herts.* ii, 69); 1s. at Croydon in 1394 (Edith Rickert, 'Extracts from a Fourteenth-Century Account Book', *Modern Philology*, xxiv (1926–7), 251–4); 7d. at Beccles in 1403 (A.F. Leach, *The Schools of Medieval England*, 2nd ed. (1916), 210); 1s. 8d. at Ipswich in 1416–17, for Alexander de la Pole, a nobleman's son (B.L. Egerton Roll 8776, m. 5); 1s. in Norfolk in 1522 (D. Gurney, 'Extracts from the Household and Privy Purse Accounts of the Lestranges of Hunstanton', *Archaeologia*, xxv (1834), 466); and 9d. at Nottingham in 1532 (*VC.H. Notts.* ii, 222).

transport. Alexander de la Pole, the younger brother of the founder of Ewelme Hospital, stayed at Ipswich School from September 1416 until the following July, although his family home at Wingfield was only twenty miles away.⁴

Who was Edward Querton, and why was he at Ewelme? Querton is a variant form of Wharton, a village in the parish of Kirkby Stephen (formerly Westmorland, now Cumbria).⁵ Cumberland and Westmorland were linked with the Queen's College, Oxford, whose statutes gave preference to entrants from both counties.⁶ Three men with the surname Wharton or Warton were connected with the college during the 15th century: John Warton served as a chaplain there in the 1390s, Christopher Warton was a poor scholar during the 1450s, and a second John Wharton held a fellowship from 1486 until his death in 1500.⁷ Both Johns came from the diocese of Carlisle, which covered parts of the two counties. The likelihood that Edward Querton too had a connection with Queen's College is strengthened by the fact that William Marton, the master of Ewelme Hospital during Querton's stay in the school, was a former chaplain and fellow of Queen's. It looks as though Edward came from the Westmorland area, possibly with a relationship to the W(h)artons, and was entrusted to the care of a Queen's man at Ewelme in preparation for entering Queen's to study, or during his studies at Queen's. Edward may even have had an adult connection with the college. A priest named Edward Querton who was a scholar of Queen's and a chaplain had died intestate by 18 July 1502, when the university granted the administration of his goods to another member of the college.⁸ The identification is feasible if the schoolboy of 1464-5 was aged about 15 and died when about 52, but if so it is odd that there appears to be no reference to him in the college records during the intervening period.⁹

It was common for youths to go to school in Oxford to perfect their Latin before they started university studies. Up to about the middle of the 15th century there were several schoolmasters in Oxford to whom they might be sent, but in the second half of the century such teaching declined, partly perhaps through the recurrent plagues by which the city was vexed and partly through the foundation of endowed grammar schools like Ewelme in various English towns and villages from the 1440s onwards. It is possible that Querton was at school in Oxford but was evacuated to Ewelme because of a plague in the city, or alternatively that he was sent there to school instead of going to Oxford because of the presence of Marton at Ewelme. The statutes of Ewelme Hospital, issued between 1448 and 1450, did not offer free education to all comers, like some endowed schools of the period, but only to pupils from the de la Poles' lordship of Ewelme and from the lands with which the hospital was endowed.¹⁰ However, although Querton's expenses included a heading 'school hire', nothing was written against it. Marton may have arranged for Querton to receive free education as a special favour.

William de la Pole had been licensed to found the hospital in 1437. The licence does not refer to a school, which is first mentioned in the statutes drawn up for the hospital between 1448, when William was made a duke, and 1450, when he was murdered during the

⁵ W.J. Sedgefield, *The Place-Names of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1915), 182.

⁶ J.R. Magrath, *The Queen's College*, 2 vols (1921), i, 33.

⁷ A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols (1957-9), iii, 1995, 2030, and for Marton, ii, 1238-9.

⁸ W.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Registrum Cancellarii 1498-1506* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. n.s. xxvii, 1980), 129.

⁹ Mr M. Riordan, archivist of the Queen's College, kindly informs me that 'scholar' should mean fellow, and that no such fellow is known in the late 15th century. I have also tried but failed to find evidence of the schoolboy's ordination in the registers of the bishops of Lincoln during the 1460s. He may have died in his youth.

¹⁰ Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme*, 226.

outbreak of political disorders that accompanied the rising of Jack Cade. Dr Goodall has produced a thorough account of the foundation, the buildings, and the life of the community, and the only point that I wish to develop relates to the schoolhouse. This still exists, in a slightly altered form, and is one of a small group of surviving school buildings from the later Middle Ages that includes examples at Eton, Wainfleet, Winchester and (extant only in plans and drawings) Magdalen College School Oxford.¹¹ The Ewelme schoolhouse is a two-storey building, orientated roughly in a north-west to a south-east direction. Each storey consists of an oblong room with fireplaces and a series of small windows, the two rooms being linked by a spiral staircase. These rooms pose a difficult question: what were they used for? One must have been a schoolroom: presumably the ground-floor room, which possessed direct access to the outdoors through an entrance porch. At Wainfleet the upper storey was used as a chapel, but this cannot have been so at Ewelme. Members of the hospital used the parish church for worship, and the school building had neither the eastern orientation nor the architectural features normal for a chapel. At Magdalen College School the schoolmaster's rooms were in the upper storey, but the statutes of Ewelme provided that its master should have his own house, and there is documentary evidence of such a house (probably the original one) from the late 17th century.¹²

There are some other possibilities. One is that the upper room accommodated an assistant master or 'usher'. No such person is mentioned in the statutes, but we know that an usher existed in about the 1520s, since the man concerned, William Smyth, was given a copy of Virgil's works by the schoolmaster, James Mylner – a copy that survives in the Bodleian Library.¹³ Against this one might have expected an usher to lodge with the schoolmaster and to have meals in his house; the upper storey hardly looks as if it was set up for full domestic occupation. Alternatively the upper room may have served as a second classroom. The Ewelme statutes distinguished 'petteetes' (petty scholars) and readers from those who were learning grammar, so that it is possible that the two groups occupied different rooms.¹⁴ This theory, too, is hard to establish, because the clause of the statutes that made the distinction envisaged that there might be as few as four boys learning grammar, and it would not have breached contemporary practice to teach reading and grammar at different ends of the same room. A third conjecture, perhaps the likeliest, would make the room a dormitory for schoolboys – not excluding the possibility that any usher might have slept there too as their supervisor. It was unusual, however, for small grammar schools to board their pupils in special accommodation at this time. Eton and Winchester did so, but they were much larger in scale and untypical as models. Most schoolboys who boarded away from home did so with their schoolmaster or in a private house, as Edward Querteron did in William Secole's. In the end the meaning of the two storeys remains uncertain; it is, of course, possible that they were put to different uses at different times, even in the first century of the school's existence.

Edward Querteron's expenses are valuable in recording the costs of going to school in the 15th century. As well as fees for boarding and tuition (the latter not paid at Ewelme in his case), various minor payments were called for, just as they are today. One of these is recorded

¹¹ On Magdalen College School, see N. Orme, *Education in Early Tudor England: Magdalen College and its School* (repr. 2003), and on Wainfleet, Brenda Parry-Jones and Derrick Wales, *Five Hundred Years of Magdalen College School Wainfleet 1484-1984* (1984).

¹² Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme*, 100-5.

¹³ *Opera Vergiliana*, Paris, Jean Petit, 1507 (Bodl. Antiq. c. F. 1507/1).

¹⁴ Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme*, 234.

at other schools: the requirement to bring candles for use on winter days. Schools began their work at 6.00 a.m. or so and did not finish until about 4.00 p.m., so that several hours of the day might be spent in gloom or darkness. Alexander de la Pole's school expenses included 6*d.* for candles in school during winter, and John Colet, in his statutes of 1518 for St Paul's School (London) ordered the boys to bring wax, not tallow, ones for use in the classroom.¹⁵ The early-Tudor grammarian John Holt included a picture of candles in his elementary Latin grammar, *Lac Puerorum* ('milk for children'), in the 1490s.¹⁶ The other items in Querton's list are unusual to find in a document, though they may have been common in practice. They include small sums for ink (probably supplied by the schoolmaster), wood for the fire and rushes or bracken to lay on the schoolroom floor. A candle for Candlemas may have been unique to Ewelme; the parish church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and her festival of Candlemas on 2 February must have been an important local feast day. Other schools, however, had similar celebrations, notably Shrove Tuesday with cockfighting and 6 December (St Nicholas's Day) with the ceremonies of the boy bishop – events that sometimes also involved small levies of money on boys or their parents.

Perhaps the most interesting item in the expenses is the 8*d.* spent on books. Schoolboys were beginning to have their own school texts by at least the end of the 14th century, well before the invention of printing. Edmund Stonor, at school in Oxford in the 1390s, had a copy of the basic grammar of Donatus,¹⁷ and pictures of schools in 15th-century manuscripts sometimes show boys with books in their hands.¹⁸ By about 1400 the advent of paper was making it cheaper to copy texts, and John Leland, the Oxford schoolmaster who wrote the earliest known Latin grammars in English at about that date, devised them as short tracts which could easily have been copied.¹⁹ He may have adopted this approach in response to the ready availability of paper. Querton's 'books' could well have been copies of tracts like those of Leland – the *Accidence*, or basic grammar, and the *Informacio* on syntax, written either by the schoolmaster himself (as a way of making extra money) or by another local writer such as a senior pupil. One would like more such evidence about the cost of handwritten texts, to see how typical 8*d.* would have been. Printing reduced the price considerably – by the 1520s one could buy a basic school text in Oxford for 1*d.* or 2*d.*²⁰ – but 8*d.* was not a vast sum, and supports the view that individual copies were spreading widely during the 15th century.

The single page of Querton's expenses turns out to contain a handful of valuable evidence for 15th-century education. It presents us with an identifiable boy, and points to some of the probabilities of his background and career. It details the kinds of expenses involved in going to school, and thereby the kinds of activities that went on in schoolrooms. When we look at the brick walls of Ewelme School in future, we can picture more fully what was going on there: the flicker of candles at the windows on a dark day, the smoke from the schoolroom fire ascending from the chimney, and the boys at work on their benches with their pens, ink, paper and schoolbooks.

¹⁵ Egerton Roll, 8776, m.5; J.H. Lupton, *A Life of John Colet*, 2nd ed. (1909), 278.

¹⁶ N. Orme, 'John Holt (d. 1504), Tudor Schoolmaster and Grammarian', *The Library*, 6th series, xviii (1996), 294, 297.

¹⁷ C.L. Kingsford (ed.), *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483*, 2 vols (Royal Hist. Soc., Camden 3rd series, xxix–xxx, 1919), i, 22.

¹⁸ E.g. N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (2001), 240.

¹⁹ D. Thomson (ed.), *An Edition of the Middle English Grammatical Texts* (1984), pp. xii, 1–220 passim.

²⁰ F. Madan, 'The Daily Ledger of John Dorne', in *Collectanea I*, ed. C.R.L. Fletcher, (Oxf. Hist. Soc. v, 1885), 71–177, passim.

THE EXPENSES OF EDWARD QUERTON, 1464-5

(Bodleian Library, MS DD Ewelme a.vi/43B, p.12. Abbreviations are expanded in italics, and paragraphing and punctuation have been added.)

Edwarde querton expensis

- + first for a peyre shone²¹ at seynt Nicholas tyde, iiijd. solut'
- + *Item pro* [*pro erased*] pectinacione²² eorundem, ijd. solut'
- + *Item* for hys commyns fro hys commynge to cristynmas, vjs. solut'
- + *Item* for a povnde candell', jd.ob.
- + *Item* for the lavnder for the same tyme, ijd.
- Item* for Scole hyre
- + *Item* for Wrytynge of hys bokis, viijd.
- + *Item* for strawynge of the scole, ob.
- + *Item* for ynke, ob.
- + *Item* for a wex candel at candilmasse, ob.

Item payed to William Secole for the commyns of Edward querton fro crystynmasse day to the xxvjth day of februarye, that is to sey the twysday next after seynt mathye day and shrove eueyn, a[nn]o iiijto Regis Ed[wardi] iiijti, for ix wekis, vjs.

Item for the lavender for the terme of the Ann[un]c' of oure lady, ijd.

Item payed to William Secole for the comyns of Edward querton for vij wekis, that is to sey fro schrove evyn to ester tuisday that was the xvj day of aprile [*et in festo tiburtij et valeriani erased*], iiij. viijd.

+ *Item* for wod in winter, iiijd.

Item in expensis uersus oxon, iiijd.

[At the bottom left-hand corner of the page:]

querton

Recept' xxvjs. vjd.

Solut' xixs. Jd. *et re[manet]* vjs. vd.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr J. A. A. Goodall for his help in discussing the evidence and issues raised in this article, and for generously consenting to my re-edition of the accounts of Edward Querton's education. The latter are printed by kind permission of the Ewelme Almshouse Trust.

²¹ i.e. shoes.

²² Literally 'combing': perhaps dressing, decorating or cleaning the shoes.