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Education in Medieval Bristol and Gloucestershire

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Education in Medieval Bristol and Gloucestershire

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Going to school in the middle ages may seem like an oxymoron. Did anyone go? And if they went, was it to what we would recognise as a school, or merely a place where terrified children sat on the floor mumbling information by heart, while a teacher brandished a birch in their faces and periodically on their bottoms? My answer would be that there were indeed schools, that they operated in logical, imaginative, and effective ways, and that many people attended them — not only future clergy but laity too. Medieval Bristol and Gloucestershire constituted only a fortieth part of medieval England but they are admirably representative of the kingdom as a whole in the kinds of schools they had and in the history of these schools. I first published a study of them in 1976, and it is welcome to have this opportunity of looking at them afresh nearly thirty years later.¹ During this period great advances have been made in understanding the nature of school education in medieval England. The Bristol and Gloucestershire evidence can be explained and understood more fully in the light of this understanding than was possible in the 1970s.²

When did schooling begin in our county? It may have existed in Roman times in places like Cirencester and Gloucester, but it has left no record. It was certainly available in Anglo-Saxon Gloucestershire, once Christianity arrived. Education is recorded in England, before 1066, in connection with monasteries, minsters (churches staffed by groups of canons or clerks), the households of bishops and at least one king (Alfred), and (probably by the 10th century) some of the parish clergy. St. Peter's Gloucester, Westbury-on-Trym, and Winchcombe are churches likely to have provided schooling in Gloucestershire. The information about education in Anglo-Saxon England, however, is largely related to teaching within larger institutions like monasteries and minsters, for the benefit of the boys whom they maintained in order to train as monks or clerks. We do not have definite records of public education, in the sense of monastic or minster schools that were open to outsiders or free-standing schools of a similar kind, until after the Norman Conquest. The earliest record of distinct schools, in their own right, occurs in a charter of 1086–7 by which Archbishop Lanfranc gave the care of the music and grammar schools of Canterbury to the canons of St. Gregory's church in that city.³ At about the same time Robert Malet, a Norman magnate, presented the school of Dunwich (Suffolk) to the priory of Eye that he had just founded nearby.⁴

The third such charter, in date order, refers to Gloucester. Between 1096 and 1112 Samson, bishop of Worcester, appears to have given 'the school of Gloucester' to the church of St. Oswald, a small local minster staffed by canons.⁵ Along with the grants at Canterbury and Dunwich it constitutes the earliest evidence for schooling in a public sense, either through the opening of a minster school to outsiders or the provision of a separate free-standing school. The question arises

whether such schools were new initiatives following the Norman Conquest or endorsements of what had existed previously. The truth is hard to establish, but the latter looks more likely. The early-Norman references to schools almost all involve minsters — religious houses that had existed in Anglo-Saxon times. Minster clergy were linked more closely with the everyday world than were monks, and their churches were likely places to have provided education for outsiders. Lanfranc seems to have founded St. Gregory's Canterbury to take on the public responsibilities formerly handled by Canterbury Cathedral, which he was making more monastic. Samson may have been doing something similar in Gloucester, where the minster of St. Peter's was becoming a monastery under Serlo. This may have necessitated the provision of local education to be moved to St. Oswald's, which was a more 'open' foundation.⁶ Minster clergy may have acted as schoolmasters themselves in the 11th century. During the 12th century many minsters, like St. Oswald's, adopted the Rule of St. Augustine, and turned into abbeys and priories of Augustinian canons. This left their canons able to govern a local school but less suited to teach it, causing a need for professional schoolmasters to do so. As a result, at least two features of modern schools emerged in England during the late 11th and 12th centuries. There came to be self-contained schools, distinct from the internal education provided by monasteries and minsters to their members, and usually housed in separate premises accessible to the public. These schools were taught by full-time teachers who might be priests, clerks, or laymen, but were no longer monks or canons.

The sources for school education in the 12th century, and for long afterwards, are patchy and incomplete. Legally schools belonged to the sphere of the Church, but the Church authorities had little interest in supervising them. No regular arrangements were made for listing them, vetting their teachers, or inspecting their work. We hear of schools largely by accident, and we can form an impression of school provision only by making assumptions that if a school existed in one kind of place it is likely to have done so in at least some other similar places. Gloucester had a school by about 1100; we next hear about it in the time of Henry II and then intermittently down to the Reformation, so it is likely that education was usually available in the county town.⁷ The same might be expected in Bristol, but here the evidence is less satisfactory. We are told that Henry II, when a boy in the 1140s, studied letters and good manners at Bristol under a master named Matthew, but such an important boy may have been taught privately. The only evidence about a school for the public is a reference collected by the Tudor antiquary John Leland *c.* 1540 to the effect that William, earl of Gloucester, 'gave the prefecture and mastership of the school in Bristol to Keynsham [Abbey]'.⁸ William was earl from 1153 till 1183 and founded Keynsham *c.* 1166. Since it was another foundation of Augustinian canons, clergy who were given control of schools elsewhere in England during the 12th century, Leland's statement is a credible one.⁹

The evidence about grants of schools tells us not only that they existed but something about their character. Gloucester and Bristol were each put under the management of a local authority — a house of canons in both cases. At Gloucester the school was given successively to two such houses, St. Oswald's Priory and Llanthony Priory, which caused disputes in later times.¹⁰ There are many other examples of English bishops, cathedrals, monasteries, and occasionally lords of manors claiming or being granted control of local education during the 12th and 13th centuries, and this is a sign that schools were still rather frail beasts. By allowing education to be controlled, so that only one school was licensed to operate in each place, you ensured that everyone locally went to it, enabling its schoolmaster to earn a reasonable living. Schools were not yet endowed, and teachers depended on the fees that they charged. In Gloucester the right of controlling the school continued to be an issue down to the early 16th century, mainly because the two Augustinian priories disputed as to which of them owned it. In Bristol, on the other hand, we never hear of Keynsham Abbey appointing schoolmasters, and by the late 14th century there was more than one school, probably free of external control.¹¹ Bristol was one of England's biggest and

busiest towns, and it is likely that the demand for education and the distance from Keynsham led to the erosion of the latter's rights and powers.

The basic function of medieval schools was to teach the reading, writing, and speaking of Latin. One started by learning the Latin alphabet from a small tablet, not dissimilar to the later hornbook, proceeded to master basic Latin prayers like the Paternoster, went on to reading the psalter (often including how to sing it to plainsong), and finished by studying the grammar of Latin and how to read, write, and speak it.¹² Sometimes the reading and speaking of French may have been added, and by the end of the middle ages English was also taught, but only as part of the process of learning Latin. Arithmetic was not a school subject; it was learnt 'on the job' by apprentices and clerks who needed to know it. The textbooks used for teaching grammar in 12th-century Bristol and Gloucestershire would have been those used generally, and one of them originated from a local schoolmaster. His name was Osbern of Gloucester, and since he had the alternative surname of Pinnock, he probably came from that village. Osbern was a schoolmaster in an unspecified school, possibly in or near Gloucester, when he set out to compile a dictionary called *Liber Derivationum* ('book of derivations'), listing Latin words according to their stems or word families, explaining their origins, and tracing their relationships to other words. The work was stolen from him, and he had to re-compile it, by which time he had become a monk of Gloucester Abbey. It circulated on the continent and was one of the sources used by the Italian scholar Hugutio of Pisa (d. 1210) in a much more widely used dictionary, called *Derivationes Verborum*. Gloucestershire therefore has an honoured place in the history of medieval Latin lexicography.¹³

In the 13th century schools begin to appear in smaller towns and villages. Cirencester had one by 1242 and Wotton-under-Edge by 1291.¹⁴ They existed in many other similarly sized towns in England by these dates, so there is no reason why places such as Chipping Campden, Northleach, or Tewkesbury should not have had them too. Even Awre, a remote parish beside the Severn, possessed a school by 1287, suggesting that education might have been available in the countryside, though it would be hazardous to say how common that was.¹⁵ Two other tantalising references may point to schools in Stow-on-the-Wold and Cheltenham. At Stow a layman named John Scolmaister, with a servant, paid the poll tax in 1381,¹⁶ and at Cheltenham a certain [Thomas?] Scolemaistr' occurs in the manorial court rolls in 1422.¹⁷ Either place might have had a fee-earning freelance schoolmaster in the period concerned, but one has to be careful with surnames. A person called Scolemaister could be a practising teacher, an ex-teacher, or even the son of a teacher. It is less likely that schools in small places had a continuous existence. In Gloucester, and perhaps even Cirencester and Wotton, there was a monastery or a lord of the manor to ensure that, when a master left or died, another was found. This was not necessarily the case in the countryside, and there the supply of pupils was smaller and less certain. A rural teacher, even a committed one, might find it impossible to make a permanent living.

Boys could also be educated without attending free-standing schools for the public. Many of the larger monasteries, after c.1200, provided teaching in Latin for small numbers of boys known as almonry boys, who were supposed to be relatively poor. They received board, lodging, and education, in return for acting as servers in church; some of them came to be monks.¹⁸ St. Augustine's Abbey (Bristol), Gloucester Abbey, Llanthony Priory, St. Oswald's Priory, Tewkesbury Abbey, and Winchcombe Abbey all appear to have had such boys.¹⁹ Other children, wealthier in status, were taught in noble households. It is likely that the Berkeley family supported such teaching, and that some of the abbots of the biggest monasteries took in boys to their households, which were sited on the outer edge of the precinct and staffed by lay servants like those of a nobleman. Parish clergy sometimes did some teaching. The vicar of St. Augustine's, Bristol, acted as a grammar master to the novices and boys in the nearby abbey during 1491–2, and the vicar of Windrush taught his servant to read English between about 1515 and 1521.²⁰ Literate parents too may have handed on



Fig. 1. The tomb of Katherine, Lady Berkeley (d. 1385), in Berkeley church (English Heritage: National Monuments Record). She endowed the first small grammar school in England at Wotton-under-Edge.

their skills to their children. This was particularly the case with girls, who did not usually go to school. They would be taught to read at home along with other skills, or (in the case of some wealthier families) be sent to a nunnery for the purpose. In Bristol and Gloucestershire going to school in a nunnery would have involved leaving the county, as there was no significant monastery for women inside it.²¹

By the end of the 14th century there are signs that the system of education based on fees was coming under strain. This may have been a result of demographic changes during the 14th century, notably the Black Death, which reduced the population considerably. Schoolmasters teaching for money in small towns must have found it more difficult to make a living, and in 1439 an English commentator believed that seventy schools had disappeared from the eastern half of England alone, through lack of men to teach them.²² Wealthy people sought to solve this problem by endowing schools, either with property or annuities, so that the schoolmaster would receive a guaranteed salary, usually of £10 a year, in return for which he would teach without charging fees. The earliest and most famous scheme of this kind was Winchester College, founded by William of Wykeham in 1382. Although now called a public school, it was not a school for the public, as we understand it. It provided board, lodging, and education for seventy scholars who were members of the founder's family, children of the college tenants, children from counties where the college owned lands, and, only when these categories were exhausted, candidates from the rest of England.²³ Winchester College thus drew together a privileged national body of scholars, rather than catering for a local region, and it was also a large and expensive foundation that few could envisage imitating. The only person to copy it, until the middle of the 16th century, was Henry VI at his foundation of Eton College in 1440.²⁴

A project of more significance was the endowment of the grammar school at Wotton-under-Edge, carried out in 1384, two years after Winchester College: the school that still exists as Lady Katherine Berkeley's School. The foundress (Fig. 1) was the widow of a Lord Berkeley, but we know so little about her that it is hard to be sure how far the enterprise was her own idea or suggested to her by others. Katherine provided an endowment of land, and probably a new school building in Wotton, to support a schoolmaster and two scholars. The schoolmaster received a permanent salary, in return for which he had to be a priest and to pray for the Berkeley family in Wotton church as well as teach. The two scholars were boarded and lodged for nothing, and the school was open to anyone who wished to be taught, without payment. This made it, more than Winchester, a local school, and it is easy to see how such an endowment provided stability compared with schools whose masters had to collect a large class of fee-paying boys to support them. Moreover the cost of the enterprise, about £250, was not a vast sum, and it was affordable by any bishop, rich clergyman, nobleman, gentleman, or merchant who wished to do the same.²⁵

Wotton is the archetype of hundreds of small endowed grammar schools, founded in England between the early 15th and the early 19th centuries. Not that its example was followed immediately. From 1384 until c.1440 very few similar schools were founded in England, even taking the country as a whole, and there is no clear evidence that any of them was inspired by Wotton. What caused the prototype to become popular and be imitated was the development of royal interest in education with the foundation of Eton College by Henry VI. Eton, like Winchester, was too large an institution to be easily copied, but the king's activities caused school education to become fashionable at court in the 1440s, the only time in English history that this has been the case. Several of the king's leading bishops, noblemen, and household officers began to endow schools, and most of them did so on the Wotton scale: providing a single priest-schoolmaster to teach grammar freely and to pray for the founders' souls. Gloucestershire is well represented in these school foundations. Chipping Campden, c.1441, was founded by John Ferriby, controller of the king's household; St. Nicholas Gloucester, 1447, by Thomas Gloucester, cofferer of the household, but never came



Fig. 2. John and Joan Cooke (d. 1528 and *c.*1545), founders of the Crypt School, Gloucester, from their brasses in St. Mary de Crypt church (Victoria & Albert Museum).

into existence; Cirencester, *c.*1457, by John Chedworth, provost of Eton College and later bishop of Lincoln; and Westbury-on-Trym, 1463, by John Carpenter, bishop of Worcester. A fifth foundation, Newland in 1446, was the work of Joan Greyndour, a widow and important landowner in the Forest of Dean and in the Avon valley. She held property near Wotton, and seems to have taken an interest in its school, some of whose features appear in the statutes she drew up for Newland. Only three more endowed schools were founded before the Reformation: Winchcombe, chiefly by

the abbot there in 1521; Gloucester (the Crypt School), by John and Joan Cooke after 1528 (see Fig. 2); and Cheltenham, by parish worthies in charge of a local chantry about the 1530s or 40s.²⁶

What else can we say about the schools of Bristol and Gloucestershire in the later middle ages, from the 1380s until the 1530s? They tended to be sited in an intermediate position in towns — neither at the very centre, like town halls and market places, nor at the far edges like hospitals or brothels. Gloucester's medieval school, run by Llanthony Priory, was in Longsmith Street off Southgate Street. It was an oblong building placed alongside the street across two burgage plots, and was very likely either purpose-built or adapted from earlier domestic premises.²⁷ Two of the Bristol schools, on the other hand, were held in rooms created for other uses: one over the city's New Gate in the 1420s, and another over its Frome Gate in the 1530s (see Fig. 3). Wotton school appears to have been on the edge of the town centre, and only Newland's was right at the focus of life next to the parish church, but Newland was only a village and a 'high status' site was more easily available. As no Bristol or Gloucestershire schoolroom older than that of the Crypt School, built in the 1530s,²⁸ survives, we have to go to other schools to understand how they might have been laid out and have functioned. One of the best such examples is Magdalen College School (Oxford), founded in 1480 and recorded in a plan and sketches in the 1820s just before the building was demolished. By that time an original two-storey building had been enlarged into three or four floors, but the schoolroom was still largely unchanged on the ground floor (Fig. 4).²⁹

Passing through the schoolroom door one entered an oblong room, measuring about 24 by 72 feet internally. This compares with the schoolrooms at Eton, known to have been 24 by 76 feet; Wainfleet (Lincolnshire) 20 by 70 feet; and Berkhamstead (Hertfordshire) 27 by 70 feet. The room at Magdalen College School had windows placed fairly high, so that they let in light but did not allow a view outwards. Benches would have been placed alongside the walls, so that the pupils looked into the room with their backs to the walls. They did not necessarily have any kind of desk in front of them. About 1625 the statutes of Bury school in Lancashire state that when the pupils 'have to write, let them use their knees for a table'.³⁰ At the inner end of the room was a large seat for the master, expressing his status and allowing him to see all the pupils unhindered. He could not have perceived them clearly at the far end, but he did not need to because that end was supervised by his assistant, the usher, whose name comes from the Latin word *ostiarius* meaning 'doorkeeper'. The usher sat in a smaller copy of the master's seat, from which he kept control of the door — intercepting boys who came in late, and controlling those who wished to go out.

The total wall length of Magdalen School was 192 feet. Taking out some space for the master's and usher's seats and the doors, and allowing two feet per boy, it would have accommodated about 90, and more if the boys were squeezed closer. Magdalen was a large town school, and it is quite possible that the schoolrooms at Newland and Wotton were smaller in size because they did not expect to attract so many pupils. Why were classrooms laid out in this way? They reflect the fact that education, then as now, was not very profitable. A fee-earning master charging 2s. a year per pupil needed enough pupils to give him £10 a year, the normal salary of schoolmasters in the later middle ages. That would require more than 100 boys, because the master might have to rent his building and pay his usher, in other words 50 or more boys per teacher — a large number to control. Having them sit round the edge of the room made this easier. You could see at once what every pupil was doing. Schools also tend to mirror the world around them. Victorian schools were like Victorian factories with rows of identical desks, pupils engaged on identical tasks, and teachers walking up and down like foremen. Modern schools try to imitate the home with a more relaxed and informal layout: children in small groups, able to move as they wish. Medieval schools resembled the great hall of a palace or manor house. The king or lord or lady presided from the middle of the inner short wall, like the schoolmaster. The household sat round the room (though they usually faced each other across tables), and there was an usher to keep control of the door.



Fig. 3. Medieval Bristol had several schools. Georgius Hoefnagel's map of 1581 (Bristol City Museum) shows New Gate (right), where Robert Londe (d. 1462) taught, and Frome Gate (top), school of Thomas Moffat.

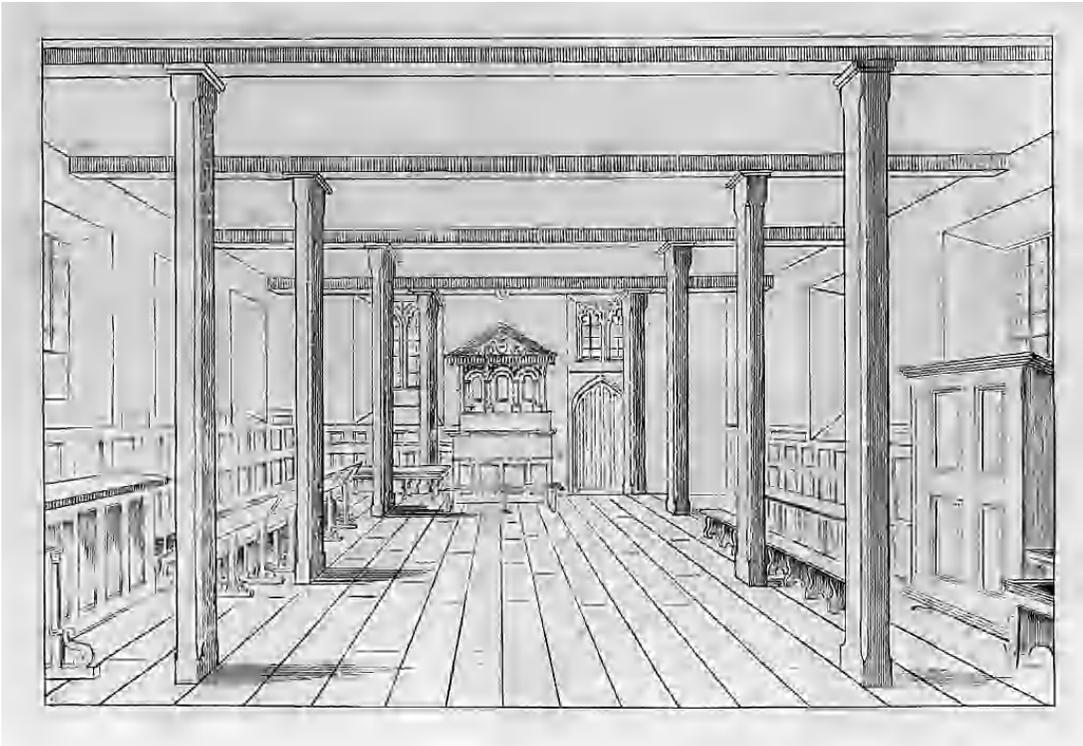


Fig. 4. The medieval schoolroom of Magdalen College School, Oxford, just before its demolition in 1828 (Magdalen College Archives). The furniture is of a later date.

Heads of households never left their seats — people came to them as they ordered. The same was true of the schoolmaster. He did not walk up and down; he stayed where he was, giving out lessons and calling up boys to examine them.

What kind of a person was the master? There are a few visual images of such people in late-medieval manuscript illuminations (largely from France) and from woodcuts in early printed books. They are stereotypes, showing a man (usually in lay dress) sitting in a grand chair and brandishing a birch. Only two monumental brasses of medieval English schoolmasters are known, and we are fortunate that one of them is that of a Bristolian, Robert Londe, who died in 1462.³¹ Unfortunately the image on the brass (Fig. 5) was even less realistic than those of the manuscript pictures and woodcuts. It represented an idealised priest with a chalice, and the inscription beneath it did not even identify Londe as a teacher. We know the names of about eighty schoolmasters in Bristol and Gloucestershire between 1100 and 1548 (see below, Appendix), but it is not easy to compile their biographies. One did not have to be a cleric to teach, and teaching probably attracted some would-be priests who failed to realise their plans by falling in love and marrying. True, most of the recorded masters were priests but this is a distortion caused by the fact that records favour the clergy. Thomas Brownyng, schoolmaster of Llantonny Priory in 1502, described as a ‘literate’, was probably a layman, and so was Thomas Moffat, a married teacher in Bristol between 1513 and 1536.



Fig. 5. Robert Londe (d. 1462), master of the New Gate School, Bristol. The brass, which lay in St. Peter's church in Bristol, has been lost.

Some masters were university graduates by the end of the middle ages and others were accorded the title 'Master', which may denote a graduate but equally may have been a polite convention like the modern 'Doctor'. There seems to have been a rise in the number of graduates in the early 16th century. Only two schools, Newland and Wotton, possess a list of schoolmasters that is virtually complete, and we cannot estimate how long or briefly their colleagues taught elsewhere. Nationally, however, certain patterns are perceptible. A lay schoolmaster was more likely to follow his calling for life, because there was no career route to a better paid or more prestigious job. A clerical schoolmaster could hope to ascend from a school to be the rector or vicar of a parish. This was often more lucrative, had lighter hours, and possessed more status. Several of the Gloucestershire priest-schoolmasters are known to have moved on to parishes in this way, but it was rare for any of them to rise higher as cathedral canons or bishops. In England as a whole there were only a few ex-schoolmaster bishops in the 12th century, two or three in the 15th, and a handful in the 16th, most notably Thomas Wolsey who taught briefly at Magdalen College School in 1499. Then as now teaching did not have the financial or social cachet of war, administration, or the law. This makes it likely that most schoolmasters were the children of yeoman farmers or peasants in the countryside, or of middling shopkeepers or craftsmen in the town. Only to men of those social levels would teaching have offered an attractive career.

We are given a detailed view of what went on in a Bristol and Gloucestershire school by a remarkable manuscript in the Bodleian Library at Oxford: MS. Lincoln College Lat.129.³² This is an anthology of school texts put together by a man named Thomas Schort in Bristol during the late 1420s, when he was in his early twenties. Two of the texts conclude with notes that they were transcribed 'over the New Gate' — the very school of which Robert Londe was probably then the master. The anthology is neatly written out, so it is not the working notebook of a schoolboy. Rather it is suggestive of a resource book for a teacher, and this is confirmed by Schort's age when he compiled it. It looks as if he intended to become a schoolmaster, and copied out for this purpose the basic texts used in the New Gate school. In the end he was ordained as a priest and became first a chantry priest in Wiltshire and later an incumbent in Wiltshire, but he may have also taught grammar at times in the course of his life. The school texts deal with various matters. There are tracts that teach Latin grammar. The most basic of these is a work in English, called the *Accidence*, a version of a popular text by John Leland of Oxford who died in 1428.³³ It explains the eight parts of speech (noun, verb, pronoun, and so on) and how they are formed in Latin. There are several other short tracts in Latin on specialised aspects of grammar: the nominative case of nouns, the gender of nouns, nouns of Greek origin, deponent verbs, names for numbers, and the terminology used in grammar. There is a Latin tract on syntax: the technique of putting words together to make sentences. There are Latin dialogues between two people about student life in Oxford. Dialogues were used to accustom pupils to reading Latin prose and to understanding how to speak Latin verbally. Verse was another classroom topic: pupils would be made to read and understand Latin poetry and eventually write it themselves. Schort's anthology contains several Latin poems of a wise or moralistic nature. Some include proverbs, 'While your purse rings, people crown you with praise' and 'he is a hostile father unless his son feels the rod'. Others comment on the shortcomings of life and the world. 'I see too many men who speak perversities.' 'If you are beautiful, great, and strong, what then?'

We are fortunate in the survival of this manuscript. Only about twenty such anthologies exist with clear links to particular schools, and no others have yet been traced to Bristol or Gloucestershire. The contents of the manuscript show that the New Gate school was teaching the same curriculum as that of other leading schools in England, both in range of material and levels of attainment. Clearly Bristol was abreast of current developments in education. During the 14th and 15th centuries Oxford, where Leland taught, was the leading centre of grammatical study and educational

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In nomine domini Amen
 contioz ac p hndi say noll lato of trestmen
 Multa lollardi sunt capta in dmsis comitatibz
 istius pnnicie p patione fiddignoz imp accipi
 he yo not deryp of f dnozt suffy dese
 Non e digno pspitate qm non p tolerajo modica ad
 usitate vñ koyz de p disciplina sto. Non d p digno
 dntoris daimne qm auaritia dno nequet qm sap
 graua mme
 Nos modern sumy in sexta cihade d'arigino mda
 p hanc d'ellid et hystad y ppo gozo d'ad ac
 mydis maw ad ffo myzoluisse hedye to
 Ego mansi byssolie isto tennio z es amplius
 quento est clapsim f'f'nd mch'adio ysp in ho
 o kan p'zo to bartho in aday d'ad / *Terma d'rom*
 ald for la zond for nado
 Ego scio comitajo bathoniay in vna die z es vlt
 illy fadye d'olllych a fonye cast h'ompo
 pat' mans morat ab hinc p tanta distanciam
 quantez d' racy lapidis
p' necesse
 Vm q' nisi pte meli' z pfectioz meo munitozi in matia m
 d' illo p'p'ite p'sp'ndere d'icq' hinc p'cedam tunc
 n' d'icoz p'betari ——— p' hinc p' noll a h'p'ch
 Istud vnu est de nouo attamnatim

Fig. 6. Sentences from Thomas Schort's notebook (Bodleian Library, MS. Lincoln College Lat.129, f. 197r.), compiled at the New Gate school, Bristol, c.1430.

writing in England. Schort's book includes two tracts by Leland, which had evidently percolated to Bristol from Oxford, as well as the Oxford dialogues. Another of Schort's tracts is replicated in a manuscript from Basingwerk in north-east Wales, and since we know that Leland's work also reached Beccles in Suffolk by the 1430s, it is clear that Oxford's influence spread all over the country.³⁴ So there was nothing provincial about going to school in Bristol and no inferiority in educational standards there. I suspect the same would have been true of going to school at Gloucester, Newland, or Wotton. Schoolmasters might vary in their cleverness or ability to teach, but the grammar-school curriculum was the same wherever you were, and it was constantly developing just as it would do today. It was capable of training good students. There were few more alert and original scholars in 15th-century England than William Worcester, the pioneer topographer, who learnt his grammar in Bristol. He mentions the New Gate school and Robert Londe in his description of the city, making it possible that he was educated in that very same school at the very same time as Schort.³⁵

A notable feature of Schort's book is a collection of sentences in English and Latin, of a kind known in the 15th century as 'latins' (*latinitates*) or 'vulgars' (*vulgaria*). Each sentence is given first in English and followed by a Latin translation. Their authorship is not wholly clear. They may have been produced by the schoolmaster and dictated to the pupils, who had to translate them from English to Latin or from Latin to English. Alternatively they may have been invented by the pupils, who were told to write an English sentence and turn it into Latin. Schort copied out 115 of them, probably as a bank of material to use when he taught in the future. The sentences are short and relate to everyday life. They taught you vocabulary — especially ordinary everyday words, and how to put together Latin words to make a sentence. Reading down the page (Fig. 6) and modernising the English, this is what it contains:

There be many Lollards taken in diverse shires of this country, as I heard say lately by reliable men.

He is not worthy of ease who cannot suffer disease [followed by a quotation from *De Disciplina Scholarium* ascribed to Boethius].

We are now in the sixth millennium from the beginning of the world.

I have dwelt at Bristol these three years, and as much more as from Michaelmas till now.

I can ride to Bath in a day, and as far beyond if I have need.

My father dwells a stone's throw from hence.

The reference to the Lollards may date this part of the manuscript to 1431. In that year there was an attempted rising of Lollard religious dissidents in Wiltshire, leading to a crackdown by the authorities on suspects in many places, almost certainly including Bristol which was a Lollard stronghold.

The topics of the sentences are varied. There are a few proverbs: 'The nearer the church, the further from God'; 'The more a shrew be spared, the more shrew he is'. One is in verse: 'Fire of spoons [chips], love of grooms, ale in a tankard, all is wayward'. There is a curse: 'The hayward hath driven my beasts to pound, and therefore Christ's curse make his cheeks fat!' There is a scrap of a lyric: 'Light leaf of the lime-tree, lay the dew a-down', and a bit of a ghost story: 'Bloodless and boneless standeth behind the door'. There is a puzzle sentence: 'I saw a naked man bear five loaves in his lap', and what might be a counting-out rhyme: 'One more than three and fewer than five, I had upon my bottom strokes full rife'. There are various references to everyday life. Men drink a pot of wine together in a tavern, it costs 4d. a day to hire a horse, the bishop of St. Davids is a great patron of poor scholars, the king is staying at Calais, and pilgrims go across the sea to St. James of Compostella (a journey often made from Bristol). These features are common in other sentence collections, and show that teachers were aware of the need to interest their pupils in the process of learning Latin. The object was achieved by introducing topics and phrases that would amuse them to write or translate.

This kind of Latin was a living language. Having learnt it one could employ it to converse, write letters, or keep accounts, and listen to it being talked if one went to church, to a university lecture, an ecclesiastical court, or an important meeting of clergy. The price for giving it life was to make it like English in terms of word order, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and this meant that Latin in England began to diverge from Latin in France, Spain, or Italy, where the same local influences were also at work. During the 15th century a reaction began in Italy, in which scholars rediscovered the Latin of the early Roman Empire, including the classical authors such as Cicero, Horace, Livy, and Virgil. The Latin of these authors was more consistent and stylish than late-medieval Latin, and their antiquity gave them authority in an age that thought the past to be superior over the present. So first in Italy and then elsewhere scholars and teachers began to study and teach classical or 'humanist' Latin, as it was called. This had the great advantage of re-establishing Latin as an international language, because everyone was now studying the same concise group of Roman authors. Yet this too came at a price. Latin grew more difficult to learn and more remote from English. Increasingly it turned into a language for elite purposes such as diplomacy and scholarship, and English took its place for everyday purposes like letter writing and record keeping.

The first school in England known to have taught humanist Latin was Magdalen College School in the early 1480s. There was a humanist schoolmaster in Gloucestershire by 1493 because John Stanbridge, Magdalen's second headmaster, was appointed vicar of Bledington in that year.³⁶ Bledington church lay in the gift of the monks of Winchcombe, whose abbot, Richard Kidderminster, was a learned man receptive to humanism, and it is possible that he enticed Stanbridge away from Magdalen to teach at Winchcombe Abbey.³⁷ If so the arrangement did not work because Stanbridge moved on shortly afterwards, probably to schools at Lichfield and later at Banbury.³⁸ During the next thirty years, up to about 1520, humanist Latin displaced medieval Latin from schools throughout England. The process can be reconstructed by mapping the careers of schoolmasters like Stanbridge and studying the publication dates of schoolbooks, since we have now reached the age of printing. Schoolbooks were one of the most lucrative products for printers, and it is apparent how at first, in the 1490s and early 1500s, they still issued medieval works like Leland's *Accidence*, but gradually discontinued such publications during the 1510s and replaced them with humanist ones, including a number of grammars edited by Stanbridge.

There is no doubt that the best Latin in Bristol and Gloucestershire would have been thoroughly humanist by the early 16th century. We can point to humanist scholars who were based in the county by that time, notably the Greek expert William Latimer, who was rector of Saintbury from c.1504 to 1545, and the Bible translator William Tyndale, who taught the children of Sir John Walsh at Old Sodbury c.1522–3.³⁹ Humanist Latin is well illustrated in the letters of Robert Joseph, monk of Evesham Abbey, written between 1530 and 1532: letters of which he was proud enough to copy them into a book that still survives.⁴⁰ Joseph studied at Oxford but was recalled to Evesham to act as schoolmaster to the novices. He seems to have missed the university and comforted himself by writing letters to the friends he had made there, and to others whom he knew in the area around Evesham. They included monks from Gloucester, Hailes and Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, as well as Evesham and Pershore in Worcestershire, and schoolmasters from Droitwich, Evesham, and Gloucester. Here is the gist of part of a long Latin letter from Joseph to Philip Acton, monk of Hailes Abbey, in 1530, reproaching Acton for being a poor correspondent:

What do you mean by your long silence? Take pen and ink and paper, and write; do not let the expense of ink and paper deter you. Horace says, 'He who starts a task has done half of it'. If you make mistakes, you will find me a friendly critic. Virgil says, 'We cannot all do everything', and Horace added, 'Even Homer nodded'. You will learn by experience how much readiness in composition comes from frequent letter writing. This is the only way to a purer Latin style . . . I would not sell for any price the readiness in Latin that I have derived from frequent letter writing to my friends.⁴¹

This is typically humanist in its appeals to classical writers, its wish to excel, and, one might add, its tendency to parade its author's knowledge. A century ago this kind of Latin would have been compared with that of Schort to show the superiority of humanist over medieval Latin. In truth the two were not at the same level — Schort's was that of a grammar school, Joseph's of a university, and Joseph's work needs comparing with earlier Latin of an equivalent kind. My purpose in quoting him is not to make a value judgment about humanism but to show how its culture had penetrated Gloucestershire by the 1530s. By then it was taught in all grammar schools and in the schools of the monasteries. Monks, parish clergy, and educated laymen were all touched by it; they were quoting Cicero and Virgil to one another and reading Erasmus — fully up-to-date with the humanist culture of England and western Europe.

It is ironic that the life of Joseph and his monastic correspondents was doomed to disappear within ten years. In 1534 the Reformation began, by 1540 the monasteries had vanished, and by 1548 the collegiate churches and chantries had followed them. There was much disruption to education as a result, notably through the disappearance of the religious houses and the arrangements they had made for training their monks and friars and for teaching their almonry boys and choristers. All that was salvaged from this were the two rather modest new cathedral foundations established by Henry VIII at Bristol and Gloucester. These new bodies were given free grammar schools and small numbers of choristers, but they were less favoured in their endowments and resources than the premier cathedral schools at places like Canterbury and Westminster. Moreover the dissolution of Winchcombe Abbey led to the collapse of Cirencester grammar school, which the monks had governed, while the closure of the collegiate church of Westbury-on-Trym in 1544 involved the loss of its free grammar school. The dissolution of the chantries in 1548 threatened the chantry schools at Cheltenham, Chipping Campden, Newland, St. Briavels, and Wotton-under-Edge, as well as Cirencester where local people had turned another chantry into a school to replace the one they had lost. Here the government of Edward VI was a little more merciful. St. Briavels school was not continued, apparently because it was merely a reading school, and most of the other chantry schools, which were grammar schools, had their endowments confiscated. The Crown, however, took over the payment of the schoolmasters, and paid them the salaries they had previously received.⁴²

We cannot study medieval education from a single county, because the sources are so fragmentary, but we need to investigate each county carefully in order to gather the sources for a national study. Bristol and Gloucestershire have been a rewarding field for research. Gloucester has one of the earliest recorded schools; Osbern of Gloucester was a grammarian of European importance; and Wotton was the first-ever small endowed grammar school — three bulls' eyes for Gloucestershire! Thomas Schort's manuscript shows education in Bristol to have been fully up-to-date with the education of the day, and Robert Joseph's letter book reveals how fully humanism had taken hold by the 1530s. When we try to recreate medieval Bristol and Gloucestershire, we are fully justified in taking a positive view of their achievements in education and literacy. They were places of schools, books, and learning, for these were the homelands of Osbern of Gloucester, John Trevisa, William Worcester, and William Tyndale.

APPENDIX

A chronological list of schoolmasters in Bristol and Gloucestershire 1100–1548

This is a list of definite and possible teachers of reading, song (including instrumental music), and grammar in free-standing schools, and also in monasteries unless they were monks or friars. They are arranged in date order; uncertain masters are italicised. Unless otherwise stated, the source is N. Orme, *Education in the West of England* (Exeter, 1976).

Abbreviations: A: St. Augustine's Abbey, Bristol. BGram: bachelor of grammar. BCan&CL: bachelor of canon and civil law. C: Crypt School, Gloucester. Ci: Cirencester Abbey. L: Llanthony Priory, Gloucester. MGram: master of grammar. P: St. Peter's Abbey, Gloucester.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Teaching</i>	<i>Graduate</i>
Osbern ⁴³	Gloucester?	early 12th	clerk?	grammar	
Matthew	Bristol	1140s		grammar	
Hamo	Gloucester(P)	c.1160		grammar	Master
Roger	Gloucester	1203		grammar	Master
Awre, John of	Awre	1287		grammar	Master
Sygryth, Walter ⁴⁴	Gloucester	mid 14th		grammar	
Cleche, Edward ⁴⁵	Gloucester	mid 14th		grammar	
Schefeld, John ⁴⁶	Gloucester	late 14th		grammar	
Robert	Bristol	1379	clerk		
Hugh	Bristol	1379	priest		
<i>Scolmaister, John</i>	Stow	1381	layman		
Nelme, John	Gloucester	1382	clerk	grammar	
Stone, John	Wotton	1387–1404	priest	grammar	MA
Hamelin, John	Gloucester	1392–1410		grammar	
More, Thomas	Gloucester	1396–1410		grammar	
Hazleton, William	Wotton	1404–7	priest	grammar	
Seman, John	Wotton	1407–?	priest	grammar	
Darcy, Richard	Gloucester	1409		grammar	
James, John	Wotton	–1416	priest	grammar	
Clifton, William	Wotton	1416–?	priest	grammar	Master
<i>Scolemayster, Stephen</i>	Cirencester	1419	priest		
Londe, Robert	Bristol	1419–62	priest	grammar	Master
Wacfilde,— ⁴⁷	Bristol?	1420s?		grammar	Master
<i>Scolemaistr</i> ?, [<i>Thomas</i> ?] ⁴⁸	Cheltenham	1422			
Hogyn, William	Wotton	–1423	priest	grammar	
Joye, Thomas	Wotton	1423–7	priest	grammar	
Paradise, John	Wotton	1427–56	priest	grammar	
Breter, William	Gloucester	1430		grammar	
Goode, John ⁴⁹	Gloucester	1441		grammar	Master
Chaplain, William ⁵⁰	Gloucester	after 1441	priest	grammar	
Clifford, John	Newland	1446–9	priest	grammar	
Coburley, William	Newland	1449–57	priest	grammar	
Frocester, Walter	Wotton	1456–60	priest	grammar	Master
Deryng, Richard	Newland	1457–9	priest	grammar	

Janyns, Edward	Newland	1459-63	priest	grammar	
Haynes, Robert	Wotton	1460-1	priest	grammar	
Dale, John	Wotton	1461-2	priest	grammar	
Towen, John	Wotton	1462-5	priest	grammar	
Fabell, Roger	Westbury	1463	priest	grammar	MGram
Faukeys, John	Bristol	1463	clerk	grammar	
Phillips, William	Newland	1463-6	priest	grammar	
West, Richard	Wotton	1465-87	priest	grammar	
Eynon, Philip ap	Newland	1466-85	priest	grammar	
Bulkeley,—	Bristol	1471		grammar?	Master
Fosse, Thomas	Bristol	1480 × 1483			
Stokes, Thomas	Newland	1485-?	priest	grammar	
Molland, Simon	Cirencester	1487	priest	grammar	MA
Packer, John	Wotton	1487-93	priest	grammar	BCan&CL
Griffith, John	Bristol(A)	1491-2	priest	grammar	
Thorne, William	Bristol(A)	1491-2		song	
Chilcote, John	Wotton	1493-1511	priest	grammar	MA
Barber, Nicholas	Westbury	1498	priest	grammar	MA
Norton, Richard	Newland	1501-21	priest	grammar	
Brownynng, Thomas ⁵¹	Gloucester(L)	1502	layman	grammar	
Rulins, John	Bristol(A)	1503-4		song	
Mulder, William	Bristol(A)	1504		song	
Lentall, William	Bristol(A)	1506-7		song	
Bramston, Richard	Bristol(A)	1511-12		song	
Coldwell, Robert	Wotton	1511-53	priest	grammar	BA
More, John	Westbury	1513	priest	grammar	Master
Moffat, Thomas	Bristol	1513-c.1530s	layman	grammar	
Drury, John ⁵²	Windrush	c.1515-21	priest	reading	
Tucke, John	Gloucester(P)	1515-40		song, grammar	BA
Brode, Richard	Westbury	1521	priest	grammar	MA
Bolter, John	Newland	1521-31	priest	grammar	BA
Smith, David	Newland	1531	priest	grammar	BA
Winter, Roger	Newland	1531-8	priest	grammar	MA
Blount, John	Westbury	1532	priest	grammar	Master
Hogges, John	Gloucester(L)	1533-9		song	
William	Gloucester	pre-1534	priest	grammar	
Fletcher, Richard	Gloucester(C)	1534	priest	grammar?	
Gold, John	Westbury	1534-5	priest	grammar	Master
Horton, Humphrey	Cirencester	1535	priest	grammar	MA?
Edmunds, Henry	Cirencester(Ci)	1538-9		song, grammar	
Ford, Roger	Newland	1538-?	priest	grammar	BGram?
Simpson, Michael	Cirencester	1540	priest	grammar	
Young, Thomas	Gloucester(C)	1540	priest?	grammar	
Dodwell, James	Chipping Campden	1542	priest	grammar	MA
Fletcher, Richard	St. Briavels	1548	priest	reading?	
Grove, Edward	Cheltenham	1548	priest	grammar	
Glassman, Robert	Chipping Campden	1548	priest	grammar	
Taylor, Thomas	Cirencester	1548	priest	grammar	

Notes

1. N. Orme, *Education in the West of England* (Exeter, 1976). Since writing this, Mr. J. Rhodes has kindly given me further information on the schools of Gloucester, arising from his work on the Llantony Priory registers. References to the registers in the following notes signify his assistance.
2. N. Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London, 1973) will reappear in rewritten form as *Medieval Schools* (New Haven and London, Yale Univ. Press, 2005–6).
3. *Cartulary of the Priory of St. Gregory, Canterbury*, ed. Audrey M. Woodcock (Royal Hist. Soc., Camden 3rd series **88**, 1956), pp. 1–2.
4. *Eye Priory Cartulary and Charters*, ed. Vivien Brown (Suffolk Rec. Soc., Suffolk Charters **12–13**, 1992–4), I, 14; II, 12.
5. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 57–8. This is a 14th-century copy of the text, however, and includes the suspicious phrase ‘all Gloucester’, which may be related to the contemporary disputes of St. Oswald’s with Llantony Priory over control of local schooling.
6. On St. Oswald’s, see C. Heighway and R. Bryant, *The Golden Minster* (CBA Research Rep. **117**, 1999).
7. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 57–65.
8. J. Leland, *Itinerary*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith (London, 1907–10), V, 92
9. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, p. 36.
10. When using the Llantony registers to write the account of schools in Gloucester in *ibid.* pp. 57–65, I missed one important document: The National Archives, formerly Public Record Office (PRO), C 115/73, f. 32r. (new foliation 30r.). This is a mid 15th-century terrier, describing the history of the school and the disputes with St. Oswald’s, and is the source of the information in Richard Furney’s *MS History of Gloucester* (Orme, *Education in the West of England*, p. 60 note 4).
11. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, p. 37.
12. On learning to read, see N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 237–72.
13. On Osbern, see R.W. Hunt, ‘The “Lost” Preface to the *Liber Derivationum* of Osbern of Gloucester’, *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* **4** (1958), pp. 267–82, and Tony Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1991), I, 372–8.
14. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 96, 109.
15. *Ibid.* p. 93.
16. *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381, Part 1 Bedfordshire–Leicestershire*, ed. Carolyn C. Fenwick (British Academy Rec. of Social and Economic History new series **27**, 1998), 264.
17. PRO, SC 2/175/26, m. 6. I am grateful to Mrs. Jill Barlow for this reference.
18. On almonry boys and their education, see now R. Bowers, ‘The Almonry Schools of the English Monasteries c.1265–1540’, in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain*, ed. B. Thompson (Stamford, 1999), pp. 177–222.
19. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 201–15; *A Calendar of the Registers of the Priory of Llanthony by Gloucester 1457–1466, 1501–1525*, ed. J. Rhodes (B.G.A.S., *Glos. Rec. Series* **15**, 2002), pp. 59–61, 114–15.
20. Orme, *Education in the West of England*, p. 202; J. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. J. Pratt (1877), IV, 237.
21. On girls’ education at home, see Orme, *Medieval Children*, pp. 242–6; N. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry* (London, 1984), pp. 156–63; and on education in nunneries, E. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c.1275 to 1535* (Cambridge, 1922), especially Chapter 6 and Appendix B.
22. A.H. Lloyd, *The Early History of Christ’s College Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1934), pp. 356–7.
23. Bristol and Gloucestershire figured low-down on the college’s list of priority areas, but a number of scholars came from there to Winchester: see T.F. Kirby, *Winchester Scholars* (London and Winchester, 1888), *passim*.
24. Bristol and Gloucestershire scholars at Eton are listed in *The Eton College Register 1441–1698*, ed. W. Sterry (Eton, 1943), *passim*.
25. On Wotton, see Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 190–9, now supplemented by F.W.D. Hornsby and P.K. Griffin, *Katherine, Lady Berkeley’s School* (Wotton-under-Edge, [1984]).
26. The schools above are all described in Orme, *Education in the West of England*, *passim*.

27. For references, see the Llantony registers: PRO, C 115/75, f. 43r.; C 115/78, ff. 62r., 108v., 187r.; C 115/82, f. 78r.; C 115/84, f. 48v. The site is now a municipal car park.
28. *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester* 4, 335.
29. On Magdalen College School, see N. Orme, *Education in Early Tudor England* (Oxford, repr. 2003), especially pp. 37–43.
30. M.V.J. Seaborne, *The English School, its Architecture and Organization, 1370–1970* (London, 1971), pp. 25–7.
31. Illustrated in C.E. Boucher, ‘The Lond or Loud Brass in St. Peter’s Church, Bristol’, *Trans. B.G.A. S.* 30 (1907), pp. 260–300. The brass disappeared from the church, perhaps looted, after the church was bombed in the Second World War. The other schoolmaster brass is that of Richard Burghill, a lay schoolmaster of Hereford.
32. On what follows, see N. Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London and Ronceverte, 1989), pp. 87–112, and C.R. Bland, *The Teaching of Latin in Late Medieval England: an edition, with commentary, of Oxford, Lincoln College MS Lat. 130* (East Lansing, Mich., 1991).
33. On the *Accidence*, see Bland, pp. 135–64, and on Leland’s work in general, D. Thomson, *An Edition of the Middle English Grammatical Texts* (New York and London, 1984).
34. D. Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts* (New York and London, 1979), pp. 115, 130, 170, 177.
35. W. Worcester, *The Topography of Medieval Bristol*, ed. F. Neale (Bristol Rec. Soc. 51, 2000), pp. 28–9.
36. A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (Oxford, 1957–9), III, 1754–5.
37. On Kidderminster, see W.A. Pantin, ‘Abbot Kidderminster and Monastic Studies’, *Downside Review* 47 (1929), pp. 199–211, and Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 188, 214.
38. Orme, *Education in Early Tudor England*, p. 18.
39. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, II, 1106–7; idem, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford A.D. 1501 to 1530* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 567–9; *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), sub Latimer, Tyndale.
40. *The Letter Book of Robert Joseph*, ed. H. Aveling and W.A. Pantin (Oxford Hist. Soc. new series 19, 1967).
41. *Ibid.* pp. 43–5.
42. On the Reformation and schools in Gloucestershire, see Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 26–32 and passim.
43. See above, note 13.
44. PRO, C 115/73, f. 32r.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. Bland, *The Teaching of Grammar*, pp. 165–6.
48. See above, note 17.
49. See also PRO, C 115/73, f. 32r.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Registers of Llantony*, ed. Rhodes, pp. 59–61.
52. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. Pratt, IV, 237.