

# City legend recalled in school celebration

IT was the first of a series of celebrations to mark the school's 270th anniversary – when pupils remembered one of Portsmouth's most famous educators.

Children, staff and parents from St George's Beneficial CofE Primary in Portsea gathered for a special assembly which recalled the school's colourful history, and told the story of Portsmouth legend John Pounds. Each child also took home a 'bene bun' – a special bun historically associated with the school.

Parents also saw schoolbooks, registers and photos from the school's recent history. It was the first in a series of events this year to mark this significant milestone for one of the city's oldest schools.

Established in 1755 in the building that is now the Groundings Theatre, the school was originally set up by the Beneficial Society, which included local Portsmouth businessmen. It taught generations of children on that site for nearly 200 years. The Society supported the school until 1933, when it became the responsibility of the local authority. And in 1962, it transferred to a purpose-built building on Hanover Street.

Its history includes a tradition that children received these buns, perhaps because pupils originally ate leftovers from annual dinners held by the Beneficial Society. This tradition was already running by 1827, when 180 boys ate the "remains from the table". By 1952, children were given a bun and a daffodil at Easter. In 1986, they were



**Pupils from St George's with their 'bene buns' alongside volunteers from the Groundings Theatre dressed in 18th century costumes**

given buns as they processed to St George's Church for a blessing. The school revived the tradition this year.

The school's curriculum has always included learning about historic figures such as John Pounds, who is thought to be the man most responsible for creating Ragged Schools for the poor in the 18th century. He was working in the dockyard, but fell into a dry dock and ended up severely crippled. He trained as a cobbler, and used to sit mending shoes in his shop in St Mary's Street, Old Portsmouth.

As he worked, he would teach children basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills. These were poor, working-class children and he taught them free of charge. He even scoured the streets looking for children to teach, sometimes taking hot baked potatoes in his pockets to hand out. He was given chalk,

slates, Bibles and other materials by churches and others. After his death, the idea spread across Portsmouth and across the country, paving the way for universal education.

The headteacher of St George's, Izzy Lewis, realised last year that there was no children's book telling the story of John Pounds. So, over the Christmas holidays, she wrote one entitled *A Pocketful of Potatoes*, which has now been published.

At this event, Year 1 pupils re-enacted the story of John Pounds, specifically the way in which he gathered hungry children by offering them hot potatoes.

Other celebration events later in the year include a classic assembly singalong to mark John Pounds' birthday on June 17, and an anniversary party with balloons on June 20.