

WINDSOR BOYS' SCHOOL

The First Fifty Years

The present Windsor Boys' School is the successor to what for many years was known first as the Windsor County Boys' School and then as Windsor Grammar School. In 1977 it became 'comprehensive' and has since been known as Windsor Boys' School. This was a revolutionary change and gave a broader base, but continuity with the past has been maintained and many of the traditions associated with the old secondary school have been carried through to the new school. The narrative that follows covers the story from its foundation in 1908 to its Jubilee in 1958.

Windsor, unlike many towns of similar antiquity and importance, has no ancient grammar school. More's the pity for the historian! He cannot garnish his narrative with those tales of colourful custom and picturesque tradition that give to the past so much of its fascination.

If the Windsor Boys' School is young, it is because Eton College is old. When the college was founded in the fifteenth century, it was ordained that it should be called 'the mirror and mistress of all other grammar schools, and no other grammar school should be founded in Windsor or elsewhere within ten miles'. Such a provision could not long have been binding, but the college was there and, so long as it retained its plebeian as well as its patrician side, the tradesmen of Eton and Windsor continued to send their sons to the famous school which lay at their doors. The existence of a school at St. George's and the foundation of the Royal Free School in the eighteenth century may also have had their influence.

So it was not until the beginning of the present century when the Education Act of 1902 placed upon the councils the duty of setting up county schools that the Windsor County Boys' School came to be founded in 1908.

The house which formed the basis of the school had for years been known as Church House. It was situated in the shadow of Trinity Church, where East Berkshire College at Windsor was later built. The school began with a mere 46 boys. You can see them in some old photographs, the younger boys with their Eton collars - excellent targets for flying ink.

The early days appear to have been somewhat chaotic - the new block consisting of two laboratories and an assembly hall was not ready and bricks, piles of timber and cement made the surroundings more like a builder's yard. The inside of the old house was nearly as bad, as the red concrete was being laid

on the floors. On top of all this there was no furniture on the opening day, or for some time after - not a chair or a desk or a table.

Nevertheless, once the school had settled in, the surroundings were pleasant enough. There was no hard asphalted playground. Instead there was a garden, with a hedge of yews and evergreens. In the middle of the garden was a circular lawn with some very fine old trees, including two specimens of the 'Chinese Tree of Heaven'. Behind the building were lawns and rose-beds. The field - alongside the present Claremont Road - was fringed with chestnuts and limes. Its great feature, however, was a walnut tree, remembered by those at school in the early days as the frequent scene of illegal depredations.

Despite all the limitations of the early buildings, the school quickly became a community with a tradition and a life of its own. That this was so was largely due to the personality of the first headmaster. Mr George Wade had been at Balliol College Oxford, under the great Jowett, and had formerly been headmaster of Wallingford Grammar School. He presided over the school for the first eleven years of its life and during that time left an abiding impression. That he could inspire awe in his pupils many stories testify, but it was with affection as well as with respect that the OWs of the early days remembered him. I can still recall the part that he took in the Remembrance Services of the 1930s and the dignity of his contributions.

In 1914 came the war. Most of those who had been at the school in the early years came to be involved before it ended in 1918. Sixteen gave their lives, including L.C.J. Burnett, J.R. Lambdin, J.A. Ottrey and L.F. Woodland, whose names were chosen when the new house system was established after the war. The four houses remained the basis of much of the life and activity of the school until, with increasing numbers, it was deemed expedient to increase the number of houses to eight - Allen, Burgess, Ford and Warwick were selected from the OWs who had died in the Second War.

Despite the turmoil of war the school grew in numbers and importance. Nevertheless so long as the war lasted, life was bound to be abnormal. Frequent and unsettling changes took place in the school staff. Men who fondly imagined that their days of teaching were over were brought back to fill the gaps - often to the delight of merciless schoolboys. There was one temporary member of staff, for example, who was so deaf that a massed comb-and-tissue paper band could perform with impunity in his classes . . .

At the time the school's growth seemed very slow. There was one occasion indeed when a worthy alderman on the town council suggested that it 'should become mixed in order that numbers might be increased'! It was 1917 before the hundred was passed, but after the war secondary education throughout the country expanded rapidly and school numbers rose term by term until a high-water mark was reached in 1922 when 219 boys were on the register. Many were