



CHESTERFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Based on a brief history by Roy Smith published in Reflections Magazine in March/April 2007

The origins of the Chesterfield Grammar School may be traced to a charter issued by Queen Elizabeth I in April 1598. In addition to renewing the town's earlier Charters, it also offered Royal confirmation of an act of private charity of four years earlier.

On his death in 1594, Godfrey Foljambe of Walton bequeathed two sums of money for the benefit of Chesterfield: the sum of £40 towards the maintenance of a preacher, and an annual amount of £13 13s 8d towards the salary of a schoolmaster for "the education and instruction of boys in Chesterfield" and thus the Chesterfield Grammar School was born.



The task of establishing and managing the school fell to the Chesterfield Corporation who chose the mediaeval chapel of St Helen, in Sheffield Road, for the site. The first recorded headmaster was one Gilbert Allsop in 1618. Another charitable act followed soon after, when in 1619, the sum of £100 was endowed by Anne, the widow of Gilbert Heathcote.

The 17th Century – The Developing School

During the 17th century little is recorded about school life other than names of some headmasters taken from charity records listing their salaries and including: Messrs. Allsop, Gibson, Bonner, Sylvester, Willy, Stone and Robert Browne.

Local antiquarian, Samuel Pegge - who was born in Kent, but educated at Chesterfield Grammar School and later became rector of Whittington - recorded that “following the appointment of the Rev. Robert Browne in 1699, the school did quite well since the school sent eight down to University.” One of these boys, Thomas Secker was to become Archbishop of Bristol and later the Archbishop of Canterbury. Secker's childhood home can still be seen at the north-east corner of New Square, Chesterfield where it is commemorated by a Civic Society plaque.

The finances that assured independence also grew at this time, with other endowments from James Lingard, Thomas Large, Leonard Gill, John Bright and Cornelius Clarke, each of whom endowed money or property to the school.

The endowment of Cornelius Clarke was particularly important. It not only gave the sum of £15 per annum to the schoolmaster, but it also funded the opening of a preparatory school known as the Petty School. Cornelius Clarke, the son of Ralph Clarke of Cutthorpe, the first Mayor of Chesterfield, lived and died at Norton Hall. He was an ardent non-conformist who also gave money to build the Elder Yard Chapel in the town, which opened in 1694.

The school bore a coat of arms that contained, along with the arms of the Foljambe family, those of the Clarke family who had settled in Ashgate during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Two of his sisters and his coheirs, married into those of Bright and Heathcote, other school benefactors.

18th Century – Prosperity, and Decline

The 18th century saw Chesterfield Grammar School become arguably the leading academic establishment in Northern England. There were regularly three or four old Cestrefeldians entering Cambridge. The nomenclature “Cestrefeldian” adopted by old boys of the school was taken from the town's name recorded at Domesday, where it was described as “a bailiwick to Newbold”.

One old Cestrefeldian was Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, one of the leading intellectuals of the time and a man with a remarkable array of interests and pursuits. Erasmus Darwin was a respected physician, a well known poet, philosopher, botanist, and naturalist.



It was towards the end of the 18th century that the fortunes of the school began to wane. During the tenure of the Rev. Joseph Shipstone the school had been neglected - most likely due to him being in poor health most of his life - although he was clearly a well respected man as the inscription on his headstone in the Parish Churchyard reads; “To the memory of the Rev. Joseph Shipstone, clerk, a true Christian, dutiful and zealous friend, and to the poor, charitable and humane. For 21 years he was headmaster of the Chesterfield School. Through many of the last he contended with illness extremely severe and painful to which he submitted with patience and resignation, and died July 18th, 1794 aged 61 years.”

The new headmaster was the Rev. Thomas Field. At the time of his appointment the number of attendees at the school had fallen to eight or nine. This did not improve during his time as head. A later Charity Commissioners report recorded that local opinion blamed Rev. Field's "lack of attention" for the decline in the school. Field had many other duties in the area including being curate of Barlow and Brimington, spent only a few hours at the school each week.

Regeneration in the 19th Century

Another difficulty facing the school at this time arose from the way that the Chesterfield charities were managed by the Corporation. From 1779 only the Foljambe charity was managed separately, the others being held in general Corporation accounts. This resulted in surpluses being used to fund other town projects - specifically in 1826 and the building of Derby Road baths. In 1829 a legal suit was filed by the Charity Commissioners against the Corporation in the Court of Chancery. A decree issued in July 1830 required the Corporation to repay £719 15s7d to the school accounts - with interest at 4% per annum backdated to 1815.

The Corporation struggled to repay the funds and to ensure the school was fully funded so, when in 1832 Thomas Field died, no further master was appointed and the school closed. However, the Court of Chancery had already presented a scheme under which the school was, in future, to be run. So when, in 1845, the Corporation drew up plans to replace the old school - which had fallen again into disrepair – they had a sound basis for its management.

Academically the new school was divided into two departments, each with its own principal foundation master taking one course; the first being classical and the other commercial in character.

The Grammar School reopened on 31st January 1846, with the Rev. Frederick Calder, a Cambridge graduate aged 28 as headmaster. Under his direction, attendance at the school, and its reputation, steadily improved so that within 20 years a government report was able to state that "the school has risen from insignificance under the present master." Calder remained for over 30 years until his resignation in 1876 to become Rector of Wingerworth. By this time the fortunes of the school had dramatically improved. In 1867 there were 60 scholars in the Classical School and 35 in the Commercial School.

In their 'History of the Free Grammar School' J.C.V. Kendall and M. P. Jackson record that, "It is a measure of his popularity in the town that as a retiring present he was given 400 guineas and a clock, while his wife was presented with a tea and coffee service".

Endowed Schools Act 1870

By the middle of the 19th century Chesterfield reflected the national position with regards the general failings of the education system. It was not until the passing of the Endowed Schools Act of 1870 that Parliament demonstrated their intent to deal with the problems that existed.

The principal changes for the school - which had been enlarged in 1872 with the addition of two more school rooms - took place in 1878 and involved merging the classical and commercial schools; fixing the headmaster's salary at £150 a year together with a capitation fee; tuition fees fixed at £6 to £10 a year; boarders charged £35 to £50; and all boys required to sit entry examinations, testing them in reading, writing, dictation and mathematics. This scheme was clearly a success as by 1888, Kelly's "Directory of Chesterfield" told that they were 110 boys in the school.

The fortunes of Chesterfield Grammar School had risen and fallen dramatically over the previous 300 years. However, as the school moved into the 20th century it remained staunchly independent offering the highest level of education possible and no-one could have foreseen what was to come.

The Twentieth Century

Under the Balfour act of 1902 the responsibility for primary education fell to Derbyshire County Council under the guise of the Local Education Authority. Under the act, a higher education committee was formed, of which Chesterfield Grammar School was a member, together with representation from University of Sheffield, members of the LEA and the town council. This was just the start of a series of significant education reforms during the 20th century that would shape, and finally lead to the closure of the school.

“The Cestrefeldian” a voice for the School

As education reform advanced throughout the area, a voice for the a school was created when in December 1908 the first edition of “The Cestrefeldian” magazine was produced, written and edited and published by the boys themselves. Issue one was significant for many reasons including reporting the inauguration of the debating society, which tackled many of the political and social issues of the time. It covered the parliamentary ‘by-election’ for the ‘Ancient & Learned Borough of Chesterfield Grammar School’ at which Mr Toplis was declared winner. It sadly recorded the death of Sir Alfred Arnold at the age of 73. Sir Alfred had been one of the first boys to enter the school on its reopening in 1846 - he had later become conservative MP for Halifax from 1895 until 1900.

Subsequent issues of the magazine became a highly successful medium for the promotion of the school, as well as recording historical facts, and disseminating information about Cestrefeldian old boys around the world.

The magazine also regularly used the coat of arms of the school - which itself was later to become a point of controversy. These arms differ from those above the door of the old Grammar School - which of those of the borough of Chesterfield – and are a marshalling of those of the families of Foljambe and Clarke. The motto is however the same Non Quo Sed Quomodo – ‘not wither, but in what manner’. At the time of the charter of Queen Elizabeth I the school was entitled to bear either of these arms.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the magazine began publishing letters that it had received from old boys who were “fighting for King and country”. Copies of the magazine, which can be found in Chesterfield local studies library, contain numerous accounts from all boys fighting in the various campaigns. In December 1914, the first death of an old boy in combat was reported, that of J. J. D. Wilson aged 17 who had been “submarined” whilst serving aboard HMS Hawke.





The roll of honour grew “sorrowfully, but relentlessly” until by the end of the Great War a total of 83 Cestrefeldians had perished. In July 1921 a commemorative plaque was unveiled in the memorial room of Grammar School building, honouring those who died.

As we know, global conflict did not end in 1918 and during the Second World War an additional 66 Chesterfield old boys also died. A memorial to these Cestrefeldians was unveiled in April 1950 by another old boy, Air Marshal Sir Philip Wigglesworth KBE, CB, D.S.C.

The Beginning of The End?

Having maintained its independent status for almost 350 years a watershed for the school came in 1938 when the governing body of the school, which had always contained representatives from the Borough and County Councils determined that for financial reasons this independence could no longer be sustained.

Accordingly in March 1940 control of the Grammar School passed to the Derbyshire County Council. At that time Alderman W. Hawksley Edmonds explained “the reasons for change were centred on the need to move the school from its location in Sheffield Road” and “the buildings were quite beyond any further alteration, and it was impossible to build on the present site.”

As with so many things, the intervention of the WW2 affected the plans the governors and the council had for regenerating the school and its move to new premises was set back for many years.

Education Reform and the End of an Era

The state school education system was reformed again after WW2 with the introduction of primary and secondary schools. Secondary education focused onto grammar and vocational secondary modern schools, a reform that aided the Chesterfield School to once again climb to the top of the academic ladder.

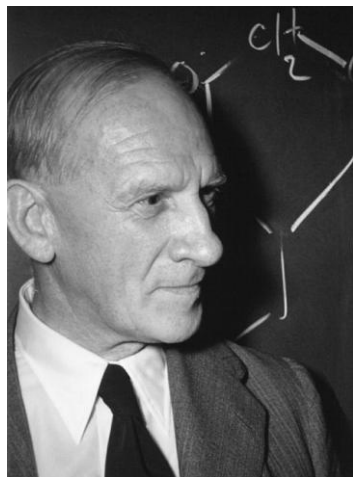
Further education reform in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in most secondary modern and grammar schools reorganised as comprehensive's. In September 1974 the era of comprehensive education began and almost 400 years of Grammar School education ended for Chesterfield. However, the school, which had moved to its new site at Brookside in 1967, continued under the name of Chesterfield School (Boys).

This is not quite the end of the story. The Education Reform Act 1988 imposed more changes onto the education system one of which was that schools could - if enough of their pupils' parents agreed - opt out of local government control and become grant maintained, receiving their funding direct from central government.

Chesterfield School (Boys), like many others endured significant turmoil. The school, for so long independent, was seen as a prime candidate for opting out. However this was not to be and after what was at times, an acrimonious debate, the Governor's proposals to opt-out of local authority control were rejected.

Given this decision and in light of other local reorganisations - subsequent to the 1988 Reform Act - Chesterfield School closed finally at midnight on Saturday 31st August, 1991. The school's last head teacher, Geoffrey Price – a 24 year incumbent of that post - said at the time, “I'm sorry, we did not win the opt-out battle, in my time 75 boys went to Oxford and Cambridge” a real success by anyone's standard..

Old Boys



Throughout the centuries, Chesterfield Grammar School has been renowned for the quality of education that it provided to those in its care. Many well-known success stories exist about Chesterfield old boys and perhaps the first of the 20th century is that of Sir Robert Robinson. Sir Robert who was born in 1886 won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1947. He was also the grandson of John Robinson founder of Robinson's Plc.

Other well-known old boys include playwright Charles Wood; pioneering dental surgeon Gerald George Pashley Holden; former ambassador in Paris Sir John Fretwell and former president of the European Investment Bank, Sir Brian Unwin.

Perhaps more widely known are some of the sporting old boys including goalkeeper Bob Wilson. Wilson not only played over 300 games for Arsenal, but also became the first Englishman to play for Scotland.

On the cricketing front, Chesterfield Grammar School can boast two well-known players, Geoff Miller and Chris Adams. A highly successful spin bowler, Miller joined Derbyshire County Cricket club in 1972 where he remained for almost two decades. Playing 34 times for England one highlight of his cricketing career was taking the catch in December 1982 to secure England's win over Australia in their 250th contest. Chris Adams has played for Derbyshire, Sussex and England, making his test debut in Johannesburg, in November 1999.

The Coat of Arms

The controversy surrounding the coat of arms began in March 1988, when the school was forced by the Labour-controlled LEA to stop using it on its letterheads and use the DCC logo and motto; Derbyshire County Council Supports Nuclear Free Zones, instead.

This debate, which raged locally and nationally, including questions asked in the House of Commons, ended with a compromise that allowed the school to retain use of its coat of arms, providing it also used the DCC's own.