

## TEN YEARS OF SCHOOL LIFE FROM 1948 TO 1958

The effects of the flying bomb that struck the school in June 1944 were not finally effaced until the summer of 1951, when four new classrooms, two laboratories, a spacious library and a well-equipped modern gymnasium were incorporated into the school. Except for an occasional emergency, classes in the “huts” became a thing of the past. The noise of pneumatic drills and Irish ballads died away and peace and quiet returned, the silence being disturbed only by the habitual thump of steam-hammers at work in Salusbury Road.

In 1956 the builders returned, this time to make alterations to the internal fabric of the school. The huts were converted into kitchens and dining rooms, and the space gained in the main building by their removal was used as a biology laboratory (a long felt need), a re-situated and much enlarged staff room and a prefects’ room big enough to seat almost half their number. This is not all: there is promise of things to come. It has been decided, or almost so, to construct an extra laboratory and a whole suite of two or three smaller rooms on top of the flat roof that covers the cloakrooms facing the physics labs. It is to be hoped that the quadrangle will not lose so much sunlight as to deny to senior boys its definite advantages for study on hot summers days – a pleasure which has been theirs since the garden was laid in 1954.

From permanent additions to the school to something which seems to be becoming very impermanent – the composition of the staff. Only eleven masters have remained within the portals of KGS in the last ten years. Retirements have taken their toll, but, nevertheless, changes are disquietingly numerous. To make mention of all would be to record the names of masters whose influence on the school was purely transitory. I will therefore confine myself to the most important.

In 1948 the present Headmaster, Mr D F Williams, arrived from Manchester Grammar School. At the same time came two popular masters, Mr A J W James and Mr Toley; Senior Science and Acting Headmaster, Mr Bowden, left at the end of the same school year, having been with the school since September 1910. The following year saw the departure of three more of that generation of masters who had devoted the major part of their careers to teaching at Kilburn Grammar: Mr Burton (arrived 1914), Senior Geography

Master, under whose enthusiastic leadership Keith were cock house five times; and Mr Bentley, Senior Mathematics Master, joint author with Mr E W Potts (who left in the 30s) of a celebrated test book and a keen supporter of all the school activities through all the forty-one years he spent at Kilburn.

In 1951 Messrs Mathew, Moller, McGinty and Wolheim arrived, the latter to take charge of the re-equipped manual-training room. In successive years, Mr Minchin, Mr Callaghan, Mr Beaglehole and Mr Scrase took up posts in the school. In connection with the latter, it is safe to say that the momentum that his enthusiasm gave to the study of Latin has not yet spent itself in the two and a half years since he left to take up a new post nearer to his home in Surrey. It is distressing to note that all the five new appointments in 1956 have since left the school. In the summer that has just gone by, Mr Wright, whose work on the school plays will be discussed below, left to take up the post of Senior English Master at a comprehensive school.

The retirements of Mr Gould and Mr W H Williams are still too recent for the writer to add anything more than a personal note of appreciation for the kindness and, above all, the patience with which they both regarded their efforts to grapple with the intricacies of the languages that they both taught so extremely well. The result of these changes is that, in September of this year, we welcomed no less than eight new masters.

One more matter must be dealt with before a general discussion of School life in the last ten years can begin, and that is the loss of the school field in Aylestone Avenue. Taken over for allotments up to 1952, until which time the School were guests of BKHS on their adjacent field, it was scarcely restored to us when it was taken away again to provide a site for a gleaming new secondary school. For two years, on their games days, boys used a succession of grounds in Middlesex and Surrey until, in 1955, a new field was purchased in Canons Park with, it might be added, a very inferior pavilion. The amount of time taken up for travel made it impossible to continue to play house-matches after school, and so it was decided, with much reluctance, that the number of houses should be reduced to four, in order that the games might be played on an afternoon without too much disruption to normal school work. Thus Curtis-Keith came into existence – an amalgamation instead of the disappearance of one house was insisted on by Mr Gould.

Speech Day in 1948, the first in ten years, was a rather austere affair held one afternoon. The guest speaker was Mr C B Thurston, author of those interesting geography text-books, who left KGS in 1929 after twenty-one years. The following year, due to the rebuilding, the ceremony was held in Mapesbury Hall. The Headmaster presented his first report and the speaker was Mr F R Poskitt, an Old Boy and Head of Bolton School. On subsequent occasions in Creighton Hall a number of distinguished visitors have distributed the prizes. These have included Mr Denis Richards, Principal of Morley College; Sir Graham Savage, formerly Chief Education Officer to the LCC, Mr Tyrone Guthrie, then Director of the Old Vic; Dr Eric James, High Master of Manchester Grammar School, Sir John Wolfenden, Vice-Chancellor of Reading University, who has since gained wider recognition as the Chairman of a Royal Commission; Mr Nigel Balchin, the author and scientist; Professor J W Blake, an Old Boy and Professor of History and Acting Principal of the University of North Staffordshire; Mr Bernard Miles, the actor; and Mr A Camacho, a former Head Boy and now Director of Planning of the BBC Light Programme, who was accompanied by Mr Richard Baker, who must be familiar to all those who have not yet tuned their television sets permanently to Channel 9. With few exceptions, Speech Nights have been notable for the high standard of the main speakers, with the wit and pungency of the Headmaster's report, and the efficiency and brevity of the supporting cast.

As the school gradually recovered from "its share of the Hitler nightmare", almost all of its former activities were recommenced. Every Easter, with the exception of 1948, when they went to Eire, a party of KGS boys under the care of Mr Cox and various assistants, in particular Mr McGinty and Mr Moller, has descended on the Swiss Alps, and since 1955 Mr Mathew and Mr Scrase have taken a group to France during the summer holidays.

Rugby and hockey, cricket and tennis, all except the last hampered until very recently by the loss of the old field and the preparations required to bring the new ones into full use, have been played with varying degrees of success. The school has had a number of good individual swimmers, though the general standard is regrettable low. Nevertheless, the Life-Saving Society, organised untiringly by Mr Minchin, brings in each year a commendably high crop of bronze medallions. Badminton has been revived of late years and is very popular with the sixth form. The arrival of Mr McGinty, who applied

his Scottish tenacity to training the boys, brought an immediate improvement in the standard of athletics in the school. So much so that, in 1952 and 1953, the school won the coveted Bowles Cup and entered the ranks of the best athletic schools in Middlesex. Four boys – a new record for any one school – were chosen to represent their county in the all-England championships.

The Staff versus School hockey match had not been played for several years, due, we are led to believe, to the lack of able bodied members of the staff. Nevertheless, the cricket match is a popular event and, as is to be expected, rumours of the exploits of several of the staff cricketers have reached legendary proportions.

Flourishing in 1948 were the Literary and Debating Society, and the Dramatic, the Music, the Science, the Geographical, the Historical, the Philatelic Societies and the Hobbies Club. All, though some more than others, have been through period of ups and downs since then, and, for the majority, could hardly be called consistent, but their present state is evidence of the vitality of the school. The last-named society, now known as the Arts and Crafts Club, benefitted greatly from the purchase in 1955 of a pottery wheel and kiln which are installed in the Art Room. In this room, many services have been performed for the school, from the printing of tickets for school functions and the binding of school library books, to the provision of society posters and murals to brighten up large expanses of brickwork. Mr Whitmore has also provided the décor for the school plays and the backcloths for the Prefects' annual dance. Six new societies have been started or revived since 1948 and seem to be on a firm basis: the Christian Fellowship, the Life-Saving Society, the Jazz Club, the Table Tennis Club, the Chess Club and the Aeronautical Society. The Chess Club was until recently at the top of the Willesden League table, ie. was the best team in the borough.

Two of the societies mentioned above have given quite exceptional service to the school. I refer to the Music and Dramatic Societies. Apart from the normal lunch-hour meetings, the Music Society, under the direction of Mr Merlyn Smith, has regularly provided the school with an excellent choir which has, on a number of occasions, won firsts at the Willesden Music Festival, a School Orchestra, the Christmas Carol Festival in Church, the popular Easter Soirées, and the body to the singing at the end-of-term services held first in Christ Church, Brondesbury and now in St Anne's. The high quality of many individual performances in the House Music Festivals has

been in no small part due to the opportunities for practice afforded by the Society.

This seems to be an auspicious point to inform those Old Boys who are as yet ignorant of the fact that the money they raised with such gusto in the 1930s for the purpose of building a swimming pool, proved in these inflationary days to be quite insufficient for such an amenity. The money was spent instead on a fine electric organ for Creighton Hall and, on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954, Dr O H Peasegood, CVO, and Old Boy and Organist at Westminster Abbey, gave the inaugural recital.

The other society I mentioned above, the Dramatic Society, has, under the direction of Mr P K Wright, a highly capable producer, been responsible for the school plays. All have been extremely successful; two especially excelled, *Coriolanus* in 1955 and *Hamlet* in 1956. The second play, which was the 47<sup>th</sup> annual Shakespearean production in the school's history, was taken on a tour of Northern Germany in the Easter of 1957.

The cast, accompanied by Mr Wright and Mr Callaghan, gave performances in theatres in several large towns. Last year's production, "*Love's Labour's Lost*", though perhaps not quite up to the standard of previous years, was seen, in a very small excerpt, on BBC television. The Dramatic Society will feel the loss of Mr Wright very keenly indeed, for it was due to his constant stimulus and leadership that they went so quickly and smoothly from triumph to triumph.

When the school was bombed, the section containing the library was completely destroyed and most of the books lost either by fire or by water. The meagre grant from the education authorities has not yet made it possible to restore the stock of books to its pre-war size. The loss is to some extent made good by the Willesden Loan Collection and many private presentations. The memorial to the sixty-eight Old Boys who gave their lives in the 1939-1945 war took the form of a bookcase, and reference books which the Old Boys' Association generously gave to form the nucleus of a new school library. It was dedicated on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

The actual rebuilding of the Library was completed in 1952, but it was not possible to open it to the whole school until 1954. The school is greatly in the debt of the Librarians for the amount of time and effort they have put into their jobs.

The Honours Boards in Creighton Hall bear eloquent testimony to the high academic standards attained by members of the school. No less than twenty-two University and State awards have been gained in the last ten years. Major county awards are too numerous to be counted. In the past decade, Kilburn Grammar School has reflected the dominant national trend in education, which has been to lay more emphasis on science. For many years now, the Science Sixth has been considerably larger than its Arts counterpart. The facilities provided by the new biology laboratory widened the gap, and there now seem to be no grounds for supposing that arts subjects will ever regain the former prominence over the various branches of scientific learning.

The writing of any sort of history is a matter of selection. I am conscious of the subjects I have omitted or passed over too superficially, and I apologise for them. One of them was the mock election held at the school at the time of the General Election of May 1955. But politics are too serious a matter to be taken lightly when the future of the school is determined by them.

*“Vivat Kilburnia et Floreat”* wrote my predecessors in 1948. I can only reinforce their injunction.

**Maurice Fireman [KGS 1951-1958]**

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