

Wheatley Secondary School Record (Issue Number 1, Spring 1960)
1950- 1960

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT, by F. C. E. Anson (Headmaster)

This was the first, post-war secondary school to be erected in the County, and represented the latest ideas in educational planning. The building was commenced in 1948, and 10 years ago at this time, it was beginning to take shape.

I came to Wheatley on July 3rd 1950, and spent some weeks going round the neighbourhood meeting my colleagues in the Primary schools, and the children who would soon be transferred to the new school, the completion of which seemed a very long way away.

August came, and soon a decision had to be made either to wait until after Christmas when most of the building would probably be ready, or else to open on the appointed day, September 6th, when only the classroom block and cloakrooms would be available.

The staff had been appointed, and everything possible done with regard to the preparation and organisation of the school, and I determined to make a start. The furniture arrived on September 1st, and as the workmen finished a classroom, so Mr Beechey, our worthy Caretaker, arranged the desks.

On Monday, September 5th, the first staff meeting and tea party, complete with iced cake, was held in the Domestic Science room. Even at that late hour the gas had not been connected, and the boiling water for our tea was kindly provided by Mrs Clements our neighbour in the nearest house. Mr E. J. Dorrell, Assistant Director of Education honoured us with his presence and wished us well. We were *not* welcomed by the contracted who obviously would have preferred our room to our company.

Of that original staff, 5 of us remain, and we, with some 280 ex-pupils, whom most of the teachers met for the first time on that September morning, have some interesting memories. I think my most lasting impression is that in spite of our troubles, the school 'went' from the moment it opened - a pattern of industry was started on September 6th which has followed ever since, and will, I feel sure be continued.

Other memories are that only the side staircase was in use, and at the bottom of it was 'Piccadilly Circus', where everyone from every direction seemed to meet on every possible occasion. The drive, concrete paths and asphalt play ground, had yet to be made, and the mud, brought into the school in that wet autumn was a nightmare to the caretaking staff. There were over 50 men still working on the site. A novelty and a nuisance during the attainment examinations of the first few days, was the noisy mechanical excavator which was working, seemingly by deliberate intention, right under the classroom windows.

School meals were conveyed from Sandhills and eaten at desks in the classrooms, washing up being done in the cloakrooms. The boys had their woodwork lessons in the old hut at the Primary School, and football was played at Littleworth.

Such were our beginnings, difficult, but enjoyable in their challenge to us, and moulding the school into a community far more quickly, than would have been possible in a completed building.

As more teaching space became available, so we spread ourselves, until in the summer of 1951 the last of the sheds and builders' debris disappeared, and we were able to commence our work in the grounds. The book of photographs in the entrance hall, illustrates far better than I can

describe, this gradual development. There, can be seen the laying out of the gardens, the building of the greenhouses, lily pond, and swimming pool, and the progress of our agricultural and small livestock courses.

In school too, we did much to increase the educational facilities, in fact, during the past 10 years, more than £1,000 have been raised and spent on a variety of essentials and extras, not provided by the Education Committee. Complete stage furnishings including five extra spotlights and a dimmer board, as well as an Annual grant of £25 to the Continental holiday fund, are some of our major contributions.

In 1956, the children from Horspath, Garsington and Cuddesdon began to attend here, and in consequence, the roll rose to over 400, the new classrooms and gardening laboratory coming into use, just in time to provide the necessary accommodation.

Also in 1956, the first of two major and far reaching educational developments took place - developments which have given, and will give, far greater purpose and aim to the work of the school. In that year, we began to enter candidates for the County Certificate of Education, which is now an integral part of the curriculum. Those 'A' stream pupils who took the examination, will remember the concentrated effort required in the preparation for, and in the actual working of, the papers - concentration never before expected in this type of school. They will also, particularly those who left in 1958 and 59, have memories of the expedition from Woodstock to Kidlington by very devious routes, when footsore and weary, they waded through bogs, and traversed footpaths which only existed on the 1922 ordnance survey map!

In 1957, to my sorrow, the Headington children began to be transferred to the new school at Marston. Throughout the 7 years they had totalled about half of the pupils and the good public bus service enabled them to return home easily when they stayed after school for sporting and dramatic activities - a very important and useful factor in the 'fuller' life of the school. However, their places were ably taken by the boys and girls from the Miltons, Haseley and Tiddington, and today, with a roll of 384 we serve an entirely rural population.

September 1959 saw the second development, this school being chosen with six others in the county to offer to the 3rd and 4th year children a variety of courses of study with a bias towards the kind of work they would like to do when they leave school. These courses, 7 in all, namely Academic for boys and girls wishing to take G.C.E., Commercial for girls, Rural for boys, Technical for and Practical for boys and girls, have made an excellent start, and I am sure are providing a far greater stimulus and incentive to school work, than we have been able to offer in the past. In consequence, the school is no longer known as 'Modem,' but 'Bilateral.'

What then of prospect? I look forward to the continued expansion of the school, both in numbers, in buildings and in what it has to offer to its pupils. The facilities are here, the Governors so ably led by Brigadier R. J. Brett are with us and for us, the excellent staff are keen, capable and competent, and when I remember that nearly 300 Parents came in November to see their children's work and to discuss their progress, I feel that we have the fullest support of all concerned.

This report would not be complete without a personal tribute from me to the Staff. Mr Allen has been my esteemed colleague, friend and advisor from the beginning, and all will realise the tremendous importance and advantage to a school, where the Headmaster and his Deputy see eye to eye as we do. Miss Brock, Senior Mistress, carries her many responsibilities with enthusiasm and tact, and we three have the willing and happy support of the rest of the staff.

'Floreat Wheatley.'

F. C. E. Anson