KING ALFRED'S SCHOOL, WANTAGE.
A DEFINING MOMENT, 1954-1960.

By Mark Child

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NEW BEGINNINGS

At Wantage, the origin of a grammar school concept lies somewhere in the late 1500s. A Latin school was established at the end of the sixteenth century in a former Norman chapel that was situated in the parish churchyard of St Peter & St Paul, and was dedicated to St Mary. It was in this school that boys principally learnt Latin grammar, translated from it, and declaimed it. As far as it is possible to tell, its provenance at Wantage developed unbroken over the next three-and-a-half centuries. Then, in about 1830, the Latin school ceased to function.

There had been a break of about twenty years in such grammar school education in the town when, in 1849, a committee of civic luminaries was formed to re-establish a 'free grammar school'. Therein might be taught 'the rudiments of Latin and such other subjects as were required'. Its working title was 'The Alfred Free Grammar School', and the project began with the raising of finances by way of subscription, one thousand years after the supposed date of the Saxon king's birth at Wantage in 849. The rationale was 'as a permanent memorial of the labours of that enlightened monarch for the advancement of learning'. The new buildings, designed in Early English style by J.B. Clancy of Reading, incorporated in its classroom a fine Norman doorway with beakheads from the one-time chapel of St Mary. The builders were the Wantage firm of T. and F. Hunt of Mill Street, and the school was opened in 1850.

The school was initially intended to accommodate seventy scholars, of which thirty would be boarders. However, it was recorded: 'the school admits upon its foundation twelve senior and twelve junior scholars of the parish of Wantage, the former being taught free of charge, the latter paying a small fee; both are chosen by competition; private borders and scholars are also received'. The school was 'reorganized' in 1868, and additional buildings were erected, and by the late 1880s there were said to be 'about forty scholars, of whom twenty are boarders'.

More than half a century after it was built, there were still only around sixty boys at the school. The principles of learning that carried through into the new school were therefore medieval in concept; and the spirits of free education for such children as were considered by their social standing to be eligible, and education for children of the poor, were equally as old. In this instance however, it was wholly of perceived nineteenth-century beneficence. The 1850 school buildings, however, were ultimately the catalyst − albeit belatedly − for what, in a physical sense, the school has since become.

LAYOUT, BUILDINGS AND THEIR USE 1: ON THE NORTH SIDE OF PORTWAY

When it was opened in 1850, there were three connected sections to the school. These were arranged on three sides of an open courtyard, behind a dry-stone wall (which was completely taken down and rebuilt by a master craftsman in 1956). A stone gateway formed the entrance, from which a path led into the boarders' accommodation. These buildings, in the style of thirteenth-century architecture, are still in situ. Originally, they comprised a classroom to the west; the master's accommodation to the east; and, running along the north of the courtyard, the boarders' dining hall, kitchen and school office, with the boarders' dormitory above. There is still a pathway running between the gate on Portway and the original entrance. This was known as 'The Sacred Way' because it could be used only by masters and prefects. Any boy who was seen on it by a master or prefect was given a punishment drill.

The classroom still has the Norman doorway with chevron and beakhead decorative motifs, which was inserted when it was built. Today, this part of the old school is commonly known as 'the chapel', but this is a misnomer. It was built as the classroom, and was used as such until 1908, when it became the chapel for the next fourteen years. Then it reverted to a classroom, was briefly the boarders' day-room, but had, by 1960, been a classroom again for several decades. (Later, it was used as the masters' common room.)

As for the rest of the original buildings, these hardly changed in more than a century. By 1960, the master's house had been extended, and accommodated the headmaster and his family. The school office had been moved out of the central section of the block into what had previous been the master's private room. The boarders' dormitory and refectory were as planned, but the kitchen had gone. The whole site on the northern side of Portway had been extended and built upon.

To the east and north of the original site, bounded only by Priory Road, was the large quadrangle. Here, boys assembled in rows, in their classes, squashed up at one end of the area at 8.30am every morning, except Sundays. They were brought to attention by the duty master (each master held the position for a week at a time), and marched forward to fill the whole quadrangle. Then they were told to 'stand at ease', which had to be done in proper military fashion, and then to 'stand easy'. Prefects allocated to each class then passed down their appropriate rows, checking that each boy was turned out in accordance with the expected standards of dress and cleanliness. Any boy who fell short was given either one or two punishment drills (for a description of drills, see section on *Punishments*) depending upon the severity of the crime. The duty master read out any information of the day. The parade was then brought to attention, again in military fashion, with prefects keeping an eye out for boys who did not respond properly to the command − and therefore to whom further drills might be given.

If the duty master felt that the 'parade' was in any way slovenly in its responses, he would make the whole school go through the procedure again, as many times as it took for him to be satisfied. Once this was accomplished, the school was marched off the quadrangle, class by class, and into morning assembly. After 1956, when the chapel became too small to accommodate all the boys, the school hall was used for morning prayers. There, each class lined up in two straight lines, facing the stage. Prefects stood opposite the rows, ready to allocate punishments to any boys seen to be talking during assembly, praying with their eyes open, etc.

The school hall formed the northern side of the large quadrangle; it had large double doors in the centre, on either side of which were rudimentary, galley-like kitchens. It was designed by the architect William Butterfield, on whom − and on the architectural details of the building − John Betjeman discoursed at length during his Speech Day address in 1959. This building remains, and it is now the Resource Centre. The double doors were only ever opened to admit the trays of school dinners. These were brought daily on a Berkshire County Council schools' dinner service van, and kept hot and plated up in the kitchens. Boys entered the hall through a small door in the eastern wall.

The school hall is architecturally unlike any other part of the old school. At Speech Day in 1959, John Betjeman, who then lived at The Mead in Wantage, spoke of Butterfield's architectural contribution to the school, and described his building in some detail. The hall was used for assemblies, eating school dinners (boys who took sandwiches ate them in a nearby classroom), the annual school play and other school entertainments (there was a stage at the

west end), taking school examinations (GCE examinations mostly took place in the school gymnasium), and playing table tennis (a table was kept folded against one wall).

The hall was also used for class music lessons because it was the only room with wide enough access to admit the school's grand piano, and for rehearsals of the school orchestra. In 1955, Michael Waterhouse, of Yattendon, gifted a chamber organ to the school, as long as the school dismantled it, transported it, and had it cleaned. This was accepted, and the organ was set up at the east end of the hall.

A door at the east end of the hall led into a narrow, dark corridor that extended for about forty feet eastwards, and had a small doorway at the end. Immediately outside the hall, the corridor gave access, on its south side, to the great quad; the door at the opposite end gave access to the small quad. The corridor from the hall no longer exists. Halfway along this corridor, on the south side, was the open entrance to a large day-boys' cloakroom, from which another corridor ran due south towards the original entrance to the 1850 building, facing Portway. The northern entrance to the cloakroom has been built up, with doors in what is the outside wall of the extension to the original buildings.

This two-storey brick extension to the 1850 complex was built onto the rear of the boarders' original refectory and dormitory block. Beginning at the Portway end, it comprised the corridor with all rooms off its west side; these were, walking northwards: the school library, masters' common room, matron's room, and prefects' common room, after which the corridor opened out into the day-boys' cloakroom. The school library included a wall of mainly leather-bound books, mostly established classics by British and American authors and a smattering of 20th-century genre titles of note, and some comfortable chairs. It was to here that wealthy 'Old Boys' were brought on Speech Days, where they were given such hospitality as might make them amenable to the financial needs of those projects in which the school was currently involved.

The cloakroom consisted of rows of pegs above seats, with a small wire basket under the seat beneath each peg. At break-time each morning, designated milk monitors were required to bring into this room the crates of one-third-of-a-pint milk bottles that had been left on the school grounds beside the Portway footpath. Duty prefects stood by, making sure that each boy drank his allocation of milk; anyone who did not (unless they were exempt on medical grounds) was punished with a drill. Milk monitors who were late bringing in the milk were similarly punished.

There were two later additions to the eastern side of this corridor. One was a toilet block, adjacent to the east of the cloakroom, and the other − next to the south of the toilet block − was the boarders' cloakroom and locker room. The area on the first floor of this building was gradually taken over as boarders' dormitory accommodation. This building still exists.

Immediately north of the school hall, was a tall, narrow building that was erected at the start of the twentieth century, and demolished some time after the period under review. All that remains are some arches behind the hall that show the width of the open passage down which boys went to get to these classrooms. The furthest classroom, at ground level at the Priory Road end, was the chemistry laboratory. This was self-contained, with its own entrance, and had a walk-in storeroom that was kept locked. There was another entrance, further towards the east, with the doorway into a ground-floor classroom immediately opposite it. This room contained a large understairs cupboard in which boys were placed if, for whatever reason (perhaps having not done their homework), they did not want to attend the next lesson.

Immediately to the left of the entrance to this building, a long, steep flight of stairs led up to two further classrooms with a small storeroom between them. The one above the chemistry laboratory had a tiered wooden floor.

Adjoining this building to the east, immediately north of the passageway from the hall, was a single-storey building known as the woodwork shop. Woodwork was not taught at King Alfred's, but this is where the school's general maintenance man made and repaired things, and where those boarders who liked to create with wood were able to do so in their own time. (There was precious little 'own time', because all School House personnel had all their activities predetermined, regulated, and policed − even at weekends − and were at all times subject to the disciplines and rules of the school. It was quite common for boarders to be given punishments on Sundays.) None of these buildings still exist.

To the east of this was the small quad, on part of which masters parked their cars. The small quad was bound to the west by the old school extension, to the north by the gymnasium complex, to the east by the school's chapel, and to the south by the exit onto Portway. The topography of the site is very similar today, but no building remains from the pre-1960s period.

The gymnasium complex consisted of, from west to east, the school's tuck shop with an entrance to the south and a serving window in the west wall. The tuck shop was staffed by an elderly woman and her middle-aged daughter, both Wantage residents, who opened it during the morning break, and between 1.00pm and 2.00pm. It was not opened on Saturdays.

The Combined Cadet Force's clothing store was above the tuck shop, admitted by a ladder. Then came the gym, which could be accessed from either the west or the east; then an entrance corridor admitting into the gym changing room, with the communal shower room running off at the back of the gym. These showers were also used as punishments. It was not unheard of for boys to be beaten under cold showers if they had been particularly naughty, and it was exceptionally painful. Even after normal periods of physical activity, the PE master would enter the showers, ensuring that each boy was standing beneath a showerhead, and would then turn cold water on them. Any boy who 'escaped', or tried to, was given a drill.

East of the gymnasium complex were two single-storey classrooms with a communal entrance between them; to the west was the art room, and to the east was the geography room. Both rooms had their own walk-in store cupboards; that of the art room was at the back of the building, the geography room had its stores in the front. Opposite this building, to the south, were the school's tennis courts, regularly used by the headmaster and his family, and sometimes by sixth-form boys.

On the east side of the small quad, beside the tennis courts, was the school's chapel. Made of corrugated tin, its interior was nonetheless arranged as a small church with a nave and sanctuary. Somehow, the whole school managed to cram in here every day for morning prayers until 1955, when it was no longer possible to do so, and thereafter morning prayers took place in the hall. (Roman Catholics had to sit in one of the classrooms whilst the rest of the school had morning prayers; there were no other religious denominations to be accommodated in the school.) After 1955, the chapel was used for School House services, and to prepare boys for confirmation, which took place annually in Wantage parish church at the hand of the Bishop of Oxford. Matins was celebrated in the chapel, as was Evensong on Sundays for School House boys, when vicars from local parishes sometimes preached. King Alfred's Day, being 26 October, was observed when such boys who had been confirmed took Holy Communion; they also did so on such occasions as Ash Wednesday.

LAYOUT, BUILDINGS AND THEIR USE 2: ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF PORTWAY

On the south side of Portway, opposite the main entrance to the 1850 school complex, and situated behind a low wall, there was a run of four classrooms with a tiled, hipped roof. East to west, these comprised a classroom; a small

entrance lobby-style cloakroom; two classrooms back-to-back, separated by a floor-to-ceiling wooden concertina-type screen; another cloakroom; and the physics laboratory. The cloakrooms each had a sink with cold water laid on.

The screen was never officially pulled back in order to turn the two rooms into one for any teaching purposes, but was regularly whizzed about by boys just for the hell of it. With absolutely no regard whatsoever for health and safety, or the fabric of the building, boys held competitions to see how hard and how far they could push this screen from one side of the room to the other.

Nearby the south-west corner of this building, overshadowed by horse chestnut trees, there was an open, square urinal made of corrugated tin, which boys in the south side block could use between lessons. It contained a gulley on two sides that simply soaked away into the ground. It stank, particularly in warm weather; the floor was particularly colourful when it snowed. Being small in area, it quickly became packed out in the ten minutes between lessons (the official amount of time, but, in practice, often less). At such times, the overspill of boys relieved themselves behind the cricket pavilion.

In 1954, the cricket pavilion stood a few yards to the south of the urinal, and was also overshadowed by huge chestnut trees. It was tiny and shed-like, its green paint being long ago chipped mostly off, and there were holes in the roof. It could be rocked unsteadily by just a couple of boys, and its timbers were well rotted, particular at the bottom around the back.

In the summer of 1955, it was replaced by a new pavilion and relocated onto one of the distant playing fields. The new pavilion was a memorial to old boys of the school who were killed in the Second World War, and the cost of £820 had been paid for by funds raised through a number of appeals. The new pavilion had a pitched overhang roof on posts, and was a wooden construction of three bays with a fenced area to the front. It had two double-light windows and double glazed doors to the front, and triple light windows on each side elevation. To the south of the cricket pavilion, with its back wall adjacent to Portway, stood the school's armoury, wherein was kept all of the weaponry used by the Combined Cadet Force. This building still exists (in 2008), but the others mentioned have all gone.

Beyond these buildings were the school's upper playing fields, lined along the Portway edge and part of the west side by chestnut trees. On the east side was the wall of a dentist's house and garden. To the south, the upper playing field extended to towards a hedge which marked the line of a narrow lane that ran between Wantage town and the town's allotments. There was a small gate in the hedge that allowed boys entry onto the lane, because the school's lower playing fields were beyond the allotments.

The upper playing fields were divided in two by a bank that stretched across them from east to west, and was several feet deep. The top section contained the school's manicured 1st Eleven cricket pitch. It was said that any boy who could strike a ball with such unerring accuracy that it broke one of the windows in the dentist's house, would recieve £5 from the school funds. In season, the 1st Eleven football pitch was also marked out on this upper section.

The lower section of the upper playing field, below the bank, was marked out as a football pitch, a hockey pitch, or a cricket pitch, according to the season. All boys had to be properly kitted out for each of these sports, including full cricket whites. In the run-up to the school's annual sports day, some events such as discus throwing, putting the shot, long jumping and high jumping, also took place on the lower half of the upper playing field.

Sports afternoon was Wednesday, although that did not mean that the proscribed sport of the season was always carried out. King Alfred's School was very hot on cross country running in the 1950s, and its Wednesday afternoon eight-mile runs through country lanes, watercress beds, and across fields, and back via pathless roads − encompassing Letcombe Regis, Letcombe Bassett, and even Childrey − will always be remembered by any boy who was at the school during this period. There was even an annual cross-country inter-house tournament, as there was for each of the other sports in their seasons.

The bank that separated the two parts of the upper playing field terminated, to the west, in a large hole in the ground that was the Combined Cadet Force's firing range. It contained an open, wooden shelter at its east end, and the targets area to the west. Here, boys practised their firing accuracy each Tuesday afternoon, preparatory to gaining their Combined Cadet Force marksman's badges, in which they were also examined on the firing range.

The only other building on the upper playing field, was a tall fives court which occupied the south-east corner of the lower section. This was said to be unsafe, and boys were banned from going anywhere near it during the whole of the period under review. Boys smoked in it, and met their girlfriends in it. Because of its isolated position, anyone approaching the structure could be seen from a good distance away, so anyone who was illegally inside had plenty of time to decamp into the surrounding undergrowth without being seen.

The school's lower playing fields, to which the old cricket pavilion was banished in 1955, were quite a distance from Portway. One could approach them via the lane that still runs southwards from the former armoury, or otherwise cross the upper playing fields, go through the gate in the hedge,

continue along the lane, and walk the length of the Wantage allotments. There were three football pitches on the lower playing fields. They were used on Wednesday afternoons, and also for the annual inter-house football tournaments that took place in the lunch break. Heats in javelin took place here, and, for sports day, a running track was inscribed on the ground.

Arthur Golding looked after all of the school's grounds and he was particularly attentive to the First XI cricket pitch, the pride and joy of his work. This was rolled flat by two large cast-iron rollers, each requiring several boys to move it. Arthur, who had been appointed the school's groundsman in 1948, died, whilst still in the job, in 1960.

IN CLASS

Thus, between 1954 and 1960, the school's buildings comprised: eleven classrooms, hall, gymnasium and changing room, chapel, tuck shop, headmaster's house (including school office), boarders' accommodation (dormitories, dining room, and changing/tuck box room), three cloakrooms, toilet block and open-air urinal, four ancillary rooms, cricket pavilion, fives-court, armoury, and a roofed wooden structure associated with the rifle firing range. In the art room and the geography room, boys sat on separate chairs at individual tables, one of each per boy. The chemistry laboratory had two long tables stretching the length of the room, both of which were connected to a supply of gas and water. Boys sat on high stools, on either side of these two tables, up to six boys per side. The physics laboratory was similarly arranged, although the room being smaller, the double-sided tables were on three sides in order to accommodate the average class of about twenty-four boys.

In all other classrooms, the desks were very old, and were of the combined desk and bench type. They had an integral inkwell, a reminder of a time when the pupils wrote with ordinary nibs. Most boys used their own fountain pens (ballpoints, etc, were not allowed, and if a master detected that anything other than a fountain pen had been used on homework, a punishment drill was given). Ink was available for refilling fountain pens, or for using with ordinary nibs. All desks were arranged in rows facing the front. Boys either chose or were allocated their desk the first time they set foot in a new form room, and they expected to inhabit that desk for the next year or two. Interfering with someone else's desk was a punishable offence, as was attempting to sit in any desk other than one's own.

Each boy kept all his exercise books and the textbooks for the whole year, for every subject, in his desk in the form room. One paper-covered, lined

exercise book was allocated per boy, per subject, per term. All boys were also provided with a 'rough book' of poor-quality plain paper which was used for such as making calculations, roughing out ideas for essays, doing in-class tests, etc. The exercise books provided for physics and chemistry were of old quarto size squared paper, and were case-bound. Each boy might have about a dozen textbooks, and at least as many exercise books, in his desk at any one time. The form master would occasionally ask all boys to produce the required complement, punishing boys who were unable to do so.

As the desk was attached to the seat, it was possible, between lessons, for boys to lift the whole of the rather weighty contraption and proceed about the room in a cumbersome version of musical chairs. They had to ensure, however, that they returned to their original positions before the master arrived to take the next lesson. Desks that were not aligned correctly occasioned a punishment drill for their hapless occupants.

ON THE CUSP

In 1954, there were 205 boys at King Alfred's, of which fifty-nine were boarders. By 1960, the number had risen to 335, but the number of boarders remained about the same. The old buildings, although they had been augmented, were feeling the squeeze. At the same time, Government was beginning to put pressures on the education system for which King Alfred's was not prepared, and to make apparently benign suggestions beneath which lay scorpions of the educational system with stings in their tails.

In 1954, King Alfred's was particularly worried about the additional 700,000 secondary school places that would have to be found nationally by 1960 to accommodate the human results of the post-war rise in the birth rate. There were fears about the role that independent grammar schools such as King Alfred's might have to play in providing places for 'unsuitable' pupils, simply because Parliament had confirmed a right to secondary education for all. That 'some of those places would have to be found in this School', was strongly expressed as being a matter of considerable concern. The programme was seen as potentially 'the overcrowding and dilution that threatens grammar schools'. It was the view of King Alfred's that if this happened, 'the clever will be swamped by the stupid, the diligent by the idle, the ambitious by the indifferent'. 'It is time to stop the sacrifice of quality for the sake of erroneous notions of equality,' was its final pronouncement on the subject.

Those who know King Alfred's today, who have watched its expansion during the later twentieth century, will wonder at this attitude. However, the

unwavering mainstay of its ethical backbone had always been the maintenance of the status quo under its own terms. It considered itself to be above the intrusions of the national education system, and even flew in the face of trends. A century after its re-founding, King Alfred's was still not inclined to shed what can best be described as its 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' approach to the education and disciplining of boys.

Discipline devolved largely on prefects, who took their calling seriously. Prefects were appointed from the most senior boys in the school, usually those who had distinguished themselves, either in the school contingent of the Combined Cadet Force or in one of the sporting fields. Some boys attained the position through academic prowess; these, generally speaking, were the more pleasant personalities. Many prefects were sadists, who considered that their raison d'être was to find as many ways as they could to inflict as many punishments and humiliations as possible on the largest number of boys. The most senior prefects had the authority to beat with a cane.

In 1955, the school was outraged at the Government's call for education to 'produce more scientists', since that interfered with King Alfred's presumption that it knew best what was required, and wished to maintain its independence from political interference. Its response was: 'This school represents a certain tradition in education, and has no intention of adapting itself to making specialised components, like a factory being re-equipped for quantity production of spare parts for the newest social machine'. Years later, its line was still of 'the fallacy that persons are commodities, for the supply of which the State can place an order with the schools and universities'.

Old boys who spoke at the annual Speech Day came to the school's aid by emphasising the educational bubble in which it should be allowed to operate. 'Nothing … could be so strong an influence as a school with a character and flavour of its own, and one with a history going back beyond the products of nineteenth-century industrialism or twentieth-century glass and steel. This influence arose partly from a long association with the life of a small country town, with its intimate contact with a peaceful but highly cultivated rural society.' These days, such sentiments would appear on placards as, quite simply, 'Hands off King Alfred's'! Events over the next few years would overtake almost every ethic that the school had clung onto for a century.

Conscription was still mandatory for boys who had left education, and King Alfred's felt that, through its Combined Cadet Force − formerly the OTC, or Officer Training Corps − its former pupils might become regulars in the armed forces or the diplomatic service. The school was inclined to notice, in its official magazine, those who had distinguished themselves in these areas. The idea was to encourage its current pupils to work towards these ideals. In

other areas, the whole ethos of the school devolved on standards in all things, and on matters of discipline.

'The essence of school life is preparation, not fulfilment.' This preparation came to a halt in 1957 when large numbers of boys gradually fell ill with Asian 'flu from late summer onwards. The period of disruption was unprecedented, and eventually King Alfred's was forced to close for a week in October. In 1960, some cleverly drawn caricatures of a number of masters were displayed on a wall in the prefects' study. This incensed some of the subjects to the point where all of the existing prefects were immediately removed from office, and their places given to boys who had not expected to be so honoured.

As the 1950s drew to a close, King Alfred's School was on the verge of a watershed. For more than a century, it had operated as a small rural grammar school for boys. Its general demeanour was that of a public school, which it was not. Its whole approach to education and learning, and to ethics and standards of behaviour, was steeped in that of the nineteenth century. In 1959, bulldozers came to clear trees from an area known as 'Joe Knight's orchard', immediately adjacent to the northern perimeter of the old school complex. Pupils who left in 1960, did so with the sounds of construction work around them which heralded the first phase of a large extension to the school premises. This building programme would also see the destruction of several classrooms on the site, the gymnasium, and the chapel. It also ushered in the admittance of girls to the school, and the acceptance of King Alfred's into the mainstream of latter twentieth-century education. Schooling on Saturdays was soon to be abolished.

IN ACADEMIC TERMS 1954-1960

There were three terms in the school year. The first usually began on the second Friday of January, and ended on 1, 2, or 3 April at 3.00pm (an hour earlier than the normal school day). The second term began on 29 or 30 April, and continued until about 28 July, when boys had to be at school only until 10.30am. The third term began on 16, 17 or 18 September, and ended on 18, 19 or 20 December. Boarders had to be back at school on the day before recommencement, in each case. The school was discharged for half-term holidays at 12 noon on a Friday, and lessons were resumed at 2.00pm on the following Tuesday. Half-terms were effectively two-and-a-half days long, (Friday afternoon, Saturday morning, all day Monday, and Tuesday morning). Homework was always given to be carried out over half-term holidays,

however; projects were set by the school for boys to carry out during longer holidays between full terms. The usual punishments applied if they were not properly completed.

The pupils were divided into four ‘Houses’, each of which had a dedicated House Master, and was distinguished by the colour of the piping on the cap worn by its boys. The cap also bore the school’s badge in gold. School House piping was gold; Faringdon House was green; Wantage House was blue; and Didcot House was red. School House was made up of the boarders; the other Houses comprised children from the districts around the towns after which they were named. These were all day pupils, brought in on coaches supplied by Eagle Motors of Faringdon.

At the end of 1960, the school was reorganised into School House, Bailey House, Butler House, and Loyd House. Bailey was named after a former chairman of the governors, Cyril Bailey, CBE, MA, D,Litt; Butler after Joseph Butler, the philosopher bishop who was born in Wantage in 1692; and Loyd in memory of Arthur Thomas Loyd, a one-time Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire. The change from geographical House names was in order to correct the imbalance that had naturally occurred over the years as more boys built up from one area than another. Boys were re-assigned to the new houses, thus restoring numerical parity, and providing the mechanism by which this could be retained in the future.

The school’s badge was also on the breast pocket of the official blazer, which was also braided in gold. The design on the school tie was of thin, diagonal gold stripes on a black background, although a completely black tie was a permissible alternative. The school’s rationale for its uniform was this: ‘A school uniform, whether antiquated or not, is intended to be distinctive. Its wearers are meant to acquire and carry with them, as reminders to themselves and others, distinctive standards of thought and conduct. If a school cap or tie can exalt its wearer in however small a degree, then its retention is justified.’

That said, the gold braiding around the jacket became so dirty so quickly that it gave the whole jacket a scruffy appearance. By 1954, the braided jacket was worn by few boys at the school other than those in the first year. By 1960, hardly any boys, even of the first year, were wearing what had at one time been the uniform for all. The alternative was a black blazer, with the school’s badge sewn onto the breast pocket, and dark-grey trousers; or a light-grey or dark-grey suit.

During the cricket season, all boys were expected to wear cricket whites whilst playing the game. The school’s sports strip for football and hockey comprised a shirt of black and gold squares, black shorts, and black- and gold-striped football socks. Physical education and long-distance running were both

carried out in white vests, white shorts, and white gym shoes. All school uniform, including sports kit, had to be obtained from Penney's Outfitters, in Wantage market place, who had the monopoly.

First-year boys were known as 'Ticks'. The school had a fagging system, especially prevalent in School House, in all but name. Ticks were at the beck and call of all prefects and school captains, and could be required to do anything for them, run errands, settle scores, etc. Any tick who demurred could be given a punishment drill, or be required to learn a poem or a piece of prose − which would then have to be declaimed standing the next morning on the table in the prefects' study before the assembly bell was rung. Outright refusal would occasion a beating.

Classes were IIIa and IIIb (year 1 at the school); Lower IVa, Lower IVb, and Lower IVc (year 2); Upper IVa and Upper IVb (year 3); Lower Va and Lower Vb (Year 4); Upper Va and Upper Vb (year 5); Lower VI, Upper VIa, and Upper VIb. Each form was allocated a form teacher who taught them at least one of their subjects. Each class had its dedicated form room and its dedicated form master. In 1954, the whole school was accommodated on the original Portway site; in later years, this became impossible. Upper VIa went across the road into Highfield, a house that the school had recently bought; the Lower VI had to use the school's library as its form room; IIIb was moved out into Winslow Hall, and IIIc − a class that did not exist in 1959 − was domiciled in the V.C. Gallery in Wantage Market Place, where they remained as they progressed through the lower school.

In 1954, and for decades before that, the subjects taught were: Latin, English language, English literature, French, mathematics, history, geography, chemistry, physics, art, music, and physical education. School examinations took place each year in February and July. Every piece of class work, homework, and all tests carried out as a result of either, were rigorously marked, and the marks accrued by each boy entered against his name in the teacher's marks book. Absolutely nothing remained unmarked. This was done for every subject. At the end of term, each boy's marks were added up, and the total determined his position in the class for each particular subject. Marks for in-school examinations were dealt with similarly, but separately, so that each boy ended each term with two subject positions: one for class work and one for examinations. These dual subject positions were then added together to determine each boy's overall position in class for the term. The lower the resulting number, the higher one was in class.

These results were published in two ways. The class position and the in-school examinations position were both shown against the appropriate subjects on each boy's end-of-term report, together with the tutor's comments

on each subject taken. (The report, which was also posted to each boy's home during the holidays, addressed to their parents, also bore the Form Master's report, which was an overview of the individual subject tutor's comments, the House Master's report, which was almost always discipline-based, and the Headmaster's assessment of the boy's future potential.) Each boy's overall position in class determined where he appeared in the class lists in the school's record and diary (see *School Publications*, below) for the following term. King Alfred's operated a system much like the football league, whereby two or three boys at the top of 'B' and 'C' forms could be promoted to 'A' and 'B' forms respectively, and boys on the bottom of 'A' and 'B' forms could arrive back off holiday to find they had been demoted as appropriate to 'B' and 'C' forms.

All subjects were taught to GCE 'O' level standard for boys up to the Upper 5th, and GCE 'A' level in the 6th forms. For most of this period, boys could take either geography and history *or* physics and chemistry at 'O' level, but not both. The examinations, taken each year in July, were those of the Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board. Each boy's GCE examination results were sent to his home on small cards in little brown envelopes during the summer holidays. Boys who wanted to try for more than the customary handful of GCEs, simply had to stay on for another year in either Upper Va or Upper Vb (ie: joining the previous year's Lower IVa or Lower IVb as they reached the higher level). It was quite embarrassing for them, and frustrating, as they saw their classmates leave and get jobs. It also meant that the sixth form regularly had boys aged nineteen or twenty, still waiting to accumulate sufficient results to continue at university.

The bell for assembly (a small bell in the gable on the west end of the boarders' original dormitory, overhanging the large quadrangle) was rung each morning by the duty prefect at 8.30am. Morning parade took place at 8.40am on the quadrangle; assembly and morning prayers were at 8.50 in either the chapel or the hall. Morning lessons (each lesson was known as a 'period') began at 9.10am, and were each of forty minutes duration, with five minutes between them, and a break of twenty minutes at 10.35. Thus, morning lessons were timed at 9.10am to 9.50am; 9.55am to 10.35am; 10.55am to 11.35am; and 11.40am to 12.20pm. School dinners were served, and sandwiches were eaten, between 1.00pm and 1.30pm. The times of afternoon lessons were 2.00pm to 2.40pm; 2.45pm to 3.25pm; and 3.30pm to 4.10pm. Some subjects (art, physics, and chemistry) were always allocated double periods, with no five-minute break between them. The end of each period was signalled by three rings on an electric bell, one of the jobs of the school secretary.

The school's week included Saturday mornings, until 1.00pm, when the half-hour or so remaining after the fourth lesson was given up to House meetings. At that time of day, all boys of each House, irrespective of the year or class they were in, assembled under the command of their individual House prefects, and in the presence of their House Master. Here were discussed any achievements by House teams or individuals in the previous week, expectations for the coming week, and forthcoming matters of import to the whole school. Inevitably, matters of discipline were discussed. The number of beatings and the quantity of drills or other punishments that had been handed out to boys of the House in the previous week were compared to those for other Houses. There was much talk about 'letting down the House' in this way, and of low standards of behaviour. Boys were reminded, each Saturday, that this being the weekend, they would be on their own for a day-and-a-half as ambassadors for the school in the wide world. They were told how they were to behave when not on school premises, and reminded of the punishments they might expect if caught behaving in any other way. Then the boys were sent home with the words: 'House! Dis …miss!'

There were fourteen tutors on the teaching staff, rising to eighteen by 1960; the number of prefects varied by school term. In the highest tier − School Prefects − there were between one and five; the next level − House Prefects − had two or three per House. There were also Bus Prefects: these were boys charged with keeping order on the school buses, and ensuring that no-one was ever left behind. The buses, which travelled along country routes, in many instances stopped outside the houses of boys whom they conveyed. In the event of any such boy being absent, it was the Bus Prefect's duty to obtain the reason why and convey it to the school's office upon arrival. All these prefects had the authority to issue punishment drills for offences by boys. School prefects could also beat with the cane any boys who offended. Other boys, who generally assumed the privileges of prefects, were the overall School Captain, and the individual captains of hockey, the library, the school magazine, and the Combined Cadet Force.

PUNISHMENTS

Punishments at King Alfred's in the 1950s fell into four categories: lines, detentions, drills, and beatings with various implements. Corporal punishment was considered to be admissible, and, in many cases, advisable. Punishments were given (a) for the crime per se, and (b) for being found out. This was a school that still expected many of its pupils to have military or diplomatic

careers; it was deemed important that boys learnt how to cover their tracks successfully, and not be exposed.

Lines were given by masters to boys who failed to recall a fact, or who made a simple error. They were normally issued in batches of 100, 500, or 1,000, together with the date by which they were to be completed and presented to the issuing master. Lines might be such as 'The French verb to answer is 'répondre', not respondre' or 'The Star Chamber originated in the 14th century'. There were never such lines as 'I must not talk/misbehave/shuffle my feet in class' because misdemeanours in class were dealt with by allocating drills.

Detentions were given by masters for poor class work or insufficient attention to nightly preparation. They were discharged on Wednesday afternoons − when most of the school was engaged in a sporting activity − in one of the classrooms on the south side of Portway. Detentions were in the charge of a prefect, who handed out drills to any boys who were not paying sufficient attention to the detention in hand, or any other inadmissible activites, such as talking.

Drills were at the heart of the school's punishment system. They could be given, by masters and prefects, for anything that was considered to be a misdemeanour, no matter how trivial.

Behaviour such as talking in class, not paying attention, leaving to go to the toilet during a lesson, making inappropriate remarks, laughing too heartily, might all be punishable by issuing drills. The whole class was expected to be seated and silent, and all boys in their own desks when the master entered the room at the start of each lesson. Drills were given to anyone who was not ready to begin lessons. All boys had to stand as the master came into the room at the start of a lesson and to remain standing silently until the master indicated that the class might be seated. This was also the case whenever another master entered the room during a lesson. At the end of each lesson, the whole class had again to stand silently until the master had exited the room. Any boy who remained in his seat, or was tardy in rising, was given a punishment drill.

At lunchtimes, prefects toured the classrooms to make sure that no boys were in them (in this they were particularly assiduous on days when the weather was bad). Any boy found in a classroom between 12.20pm and 2.00pm was given a drill. On dry days, boys were expected to spend their lunch breaks out of doors on the quadrangles and the playing fields; on wet days, or very cold days, they were allowed to congregate in the hall or the changing rooms and locker rooms. Any boys caught playing games with coins, such as shove ha'penny, or playing cards, were given drills.

Each drill, carried out under the command of the 'duty prefect', consisted of ten minutes of continuous physical activity. This might include star jumps, followed by press-ups, followed by running on the spot, followed by sit-ups, with no break in between. The aim was to inflict such pain and residual discomfort for the rest of the day that the miscreant would thereafter be encouraged to behave. Sadly, the drills system was so endemic that it was impossible for even the best-behaved boys to avoid during their time at the school. The duty prefect could, and often did, add extra drills to the tally of any boy who was not working hard enough in discharging any he already had.

Issuers of drills wrote down the names of miscreants and the number of drills given on pieces of paper at the time of issue, and later transferred this information into, as appropriate, the Masters' Drills Book or the Prefects' Drills Book. The duty prefect compiled the list from both of these. The list of those who had been given drills, and the number of drills given, was posted on a notice board attached to the outside eastern end of the east kitchen annexe to the hall at 10.15am each Tuesday and Thursday. Drills were discharged on those days between 12.20pm and 1.00pm. (This notice board was also used on Wednesday (sports) afternoons to list the teams and the pitch on which they were to play.)

Prefects were on hand to ensure that there was no slacking, that the boys worked up a sweat, and found the experience painful. Drills were not confined to activities on the school premises. If a master or prefect spotted a boy in the town wearing his school blazer but not his school cap, that was a drill offence. If a boy was seen wearing his school cap but not touching it when greeting a female, that was also an offence punishable by a drill. Rolling the school's grounds, using the large cast-iron rollers, was sometimes used as a punishment, instead of a drill, with fewer boys working each roller than might comfortably do so.

Any boy who accumulated four drills in a week was beaten on Friday lunchtime by the headmaster, who administered several strokes of the cane. Anyone who was issued with even a single drill by the blind music master was automatically beaten on the following Friday. At all other times, any of the masters could beat boys individually with a gym shoe. Boys were usually beaten in front of the class for answering back or for turning in particularly bad work. A whole class might be trounced with a gym shoe for not returning with sufficient speed from the sports field, and another might be soundly beaten for failing to get dressed and back to school quickly enough after swimming lessons at the town's outdoor swimming pool.

Boys who had been beaten might sometimes disclose the red welts − in some cases they might be bleeding − to their classmates, but would withhold

the evidence from their parents. This was because, by admitting they had misbehaved at school to such a degree, they ran the risk of a further beating at home.

This reaction has to be considered in the context of its time. Parents of boys in the 1950s, were themselves the children of Victorian parents who were generally very strict and controlling. My peers at King Alfred's had all been born during wartime, and, in most cases, their fathers were absent for the first few years of their lives. The fathers returned from the war, often changed men, having been subjected to years of orders that brooked no questions, and discipline that made no sense to the intelligent human being. Like professional soldiers, they were expected to have no ideas and opinions of their own, but to do what they were told, or die in the process. They frequently resented the bonds that had formed between mother and son, and considered the boys to be growing up as sissies, in want of rigorous discipline and correction.

My own father was, according to my mother, 'an amiable and easy-going chap', when he was called up in 1939. He returned seven years later to find that both businesses in which he previously worked had been bombed out of existence, and the country he had served had no interest whatsoever in helping him back to work. He found it almost impossible to find employment, and when he did, he was paid next to nothing. The war had made him stressful and intolerant; in the peaceful aftermath, he became bewildered, bitter and angry. He was one of those men who would have dealt very severely with even the hint of misbehaviour at school. We often hear of men who found it difficult to come to terms with the horrors of war; far more of the demobbed found it impossible to come to terms with the consequences of peace.

The ultimate punishment was expulsion from school (now called exclusion). This occurred only once during the period under review, following an incident when a boy took a flick knife into morning assembly. Assembly was held in the school hall at the time, when each class was arranged in two rows. Under cover of the morning hymn, the boy took out his knife to show to his neighbours in the row. Whether he misjudged the length of the blade when flicked out, or did not actually intend to extend the blade anyway, I do not know. Certainly he would not have intended to inflict injury, for the assailed youth was one of his friends. But somehow, the blade was flicked and entered the back of his classmate standing in the row in front, obviously cutting through his jacket and shirt. Fortunately, the cut was not deep, but blood was already soaking into the boy's shirt and jacket by the time the prefects got to him. The injured boy was taken to matron; his unintentional attacker was hauled off to the headmaster's office; parents were called for, and the boy was expelled.

HOMEWORK

'Prep' was fully organised, and had to be undertaken on each and every evening, and on Sundays, for at least the allocated time. It usually took longer. In the first year, two subjects were set and allocated half an hour each. In the second year, it was three subjects at half an hour each. By the fifth year, boys were expected to spend up to three hours each evening on three subjects. At the beginning of each term, a boy in each class was nominated by the form master to be 'prep monitor'. His job was to ensure that each relevant master provided prep as appropriate (even if it meant chasing him all over the school to get it), which details he then had to write up on the left-hand side of the blackboard in his form room, no later than the end of afternoon break. Prep monitors who failed to ensure that the correct amount of prep was obtained and written up were punished with a drill for each offence. Classes that allowed this to happen, knowing that they should have prep on a certain subject, but which had not been allocated by the end of the school day, were given a whole-class drill.

EXTRA CURRICULAR

Tuesday afternoons were given up to the activities of the school's contingent of the Combined Cadet Force and the scout troop. Boys who belonged to neither were corralled together in a classroom, where they had to read suitable books of their own choice. It was not permitted to do school work of any nature, including homework, at this time, as it was considered that this would be to the disadvantage of boys in the CCF and the scouts. Wednesday afternoon was sports afternoon, except for those boys who had accrued detentions during the preceding week, when these had to be discharged under the eye of the duty prefect in one of the classrooms. The classroom chosen usually overlooked the playing fields, so boys would be aware of what they were missing by being in detention. That knowledge might act as a deterrent to future bad behaviour, and encourage them to raise their standards.

When boys attained the age of fourteen, they were expected to join the school's contingent of the Combined Cadet Force. This was deemed to be essential preparation for a career in the military. Every Tuesday afternoon, the khaki-clad CCF was drilled by a professional drill sergeant from the army base at Didcot. I could write much about him. He was predisposed to maximise the embarrassment potential of any disfigurement, hair colouring,

spot, wart or boil observed on any boy. He delighted in screaming at the top of his voice an inch from the face of his target. And he exercised a vocabulary of such foul language on the parade ground (the great quad) that it once brought him into public conflict with Mr Gregory, one of the school's history masters.

This sergeant placed much upon marksmanship on the firing range, and enjoined boys to consider the black and yellow targets at the other end of the sights on their .22 and .33 rifles as the heads of the enemy. The adjectives he used to describe the ethnicity of the said enemies − whom he considered to be anyone who was not English and white − was appalling then, and would be justifiably illegal now. But that was how it was in the 1950s for an old soldier who had been required to spend decades subjugating foreigners in their own lands. The CCF went on annual 'field days' on Milton Common, held an annual course of 'Arduous Training', and betook themselves once a year to pitch 'Annual Camp' in the grounds of some far-flung regimental barracks, where they could be ridiculed by professional regular soldiers. The school's CCF also took part in an annual Passing-Out parade, which required them to march along Portway and Priory Road whilst the salute was taken by some officer in the lychgate on the south side of the road.

If boys were already scouts, there was little pressure on them to join the CCF, as long as they joined the school's scout troop. Their activities also took place on Tuesday afternoons, and their out-of-school activities were much more civilised and enjoyable than those of the CCF. The latter marched for hours, then crawled around Milton Common in full uniform with a rifle, and several handfuls of undergrowth sticking out of each beret. The scouts attended an annual summer camp, took part in an annual Field Day, and were much involved with 'bob-a-job' week. Whilst the scouts were always much more suitably dressed for warm weather, the boy soldiers were required to operate in the same ridiculous paraphernalia that still encumbered their military elders. They sweltered, dressed in some sort of thick khaki sheep, old-fashioned gaiters, webbed and shining belts, and spit and polished boots.

There were a number of school societies: notably the Debating Society, Chess Club, Modern Music Society, Musical Appreciation Society, and Film Society. The Nathaniel Liddiard Essay Prize was awarded annually, candidates having a choice of subjects on which to write. Later Lt Col De Vine added a prize for reading aloud. Also, each year, the school was drawn together in the hall to listen to boys declaiming pieces in Latin, French and English, with as much passion and understanding as they could muster, and frequently no little drama. Selected boys were occasionally taken to the theatre to witness some production of uplifting or moral value.

There was a school orchestra, under the baton of the headmaster, and a school choir that sometimes gave concerts of religious choral music in Wantage parish church. An annual inter-House music competition also took place before the whole school, and boys who achieved sufficient orchestral or choral standards represented King Alfred's at the North Berks Music Festival. In 1957, a trip was organised for senior boys to attend a traditional jazz club in Oxford.

Every two years, in the summer, the whole school and its teaching staff were brought together on the upper playing field and photographed. The job was undertaken by a photographer from Panora of 67 Clerkenwell Road, London, using a motorised Eagle panoramic camera that panned from left to right. The result was a print eight inches high by three feet long. The picture taken in 1959 took longer than previously to achieve a satisfactory result, on account of the fact that boys realised they could sprint along the back row quicker than the camera travelled on its axis, so they could actually be photographed more than once. Several takes were needed, in 1959.

Speech Day took place annually in December. Then, the school prevailed upon visiting 'old boys' to boost the school funds, and made similar representations to those parents of current pupils who attended. Aged, fusty old academics enjoined the assembly before them to 'play the game', 'keep a straight bat in life', 'knuckle down to industrial endeavour along the chosen paths', and that 'the things that really matter are not only learning, but the training of character and a devotion to the things of the spirit'. Who would understand all that now? Prizes were given out by some academic luminary, the school song was sung, and the assembly was blessed by the reverend headmaster.

From 1956, Speech Days were held separately for the junior forms and the senior forms, due to lack of space in the hall. The Senior Speech Day of 1959 bucked the depressingly antiquated trend with the appearance of guest speaker and giver of prizes, John Betjeman, who had lost his speech, and began by apologising for his folly and for not having had his hair cut.

Other annual events included the school play, which the School Dramatic Society performed in the hall separately for the junior forms and the senior forms, followed by a public performance. The cast mostly comprised boys from School House, with some from Wantage House who lived nearby, because only these could attend after-school rehearsals. It meant that both sexes and all ages were played by boys in their teens. Some boys were particularly suited to the roles of girls, and were unfazed by wearing dresses and women's make-up. Several films were shown each term, in the evening, to the boarders. Some of these films had an 'A' certificate!

Most of the school was sent on 'eight-mile runs' around the surrounding countryside in preparation for the annual inter-House cross-country race, which was held in March and was one of the sporting highlights. The route through brooks and streams, along lanes and across ploughed fields ankle-deep in water, was waymarked by prefects. Their role was to ensure that boys did not get lost. In fact, they looked upon it more as an opportunity to hurl abuse rather than encouragement, and to mark down for punishments such boys who appeared to be slacking. Other annual inter-House sporting events included football, hockey, and cricket matches.

Swimming lessons were held in the appalling Wantage outdoor swimming pool, approached down an alley off Mill Street. Here too, was held the school's annual Swimming Gala, when pupils and tutors were packed around the pool to watch other pupils who had excelled in swimming lessons compete in the inter-House Competition. Half a century later, I can still see the ghastly place, thankfully no longer there, with its freezing stone surround, and its outdoor changing boxes. I can feel the bitter-cold water, and the slime beneath my feet, which one did not wish to investigate too closely!

SCHOOL PUBLICATIONS

The school issued two publications to its pupils. One was *The Alfredian* – King Alfred's School magazine, which first came out in 1904, and was thereafter published each year in April, July, and December. The other was the school record and diary, called *Wantage School*, published every January, April, and September. This was a complete listing of the governors, teaching staff, and ancillary staff with all of their qualifications; details of prefects and school captains; and information about all pupils. The names of the latter were arranged by forms at the time of publication, and again by house. Entries gave such details as the name of each appropriate form master, form room, allocated school number, date of birth, house, date of entry in the school and the class joined, and the number of boys in each particular form. The house lists, with the name of the appropriate housemaster at the head, recorded all boys in that house by form, and included a total of boys for that house. The record and diary also included a calendar of events for the next few months, and a calendar for that year. Boys were supposed to keep this pocket-sized publication on them at all times, and to present it if so required by a prefect. Any boys who could not do so upon demand were given a punishment drill.

TEACHING STAFF 1954-1960

W.J. Avery, FRCO. Taught music. Epithet: 'Bill'.
Bill Avery was completely blind as the result of a motor vehicle accident when he was a young man. If ever he gave a drill as a punishment, the recipient was automatically beaten by the headmaster. Bill was a kind, generous man, and much respected. He composed music for piano and organ, and had played on some of the most famous instruments in the country, including the organ of the Royal Albert Hall. Although he was quite capable of walking by himself at a rapid pace, to and from his house in Wantage, and of getting about the school unaided, boys were nonetheless expected to come to his aid if he appeared to be in any difficulties at any time. Whenever he stood in one place, slowly revolving on his axis, it was the sign that he required help. Any boys seen to be ignoring him under these circumstances were given a punishment drill.

S. Barnes, DPE (Loughborough). Housemaster – School House. Taught Physical Education and English language, occasionally mathematics. Epithet: 'Barney'.
This master was an examiner for the swimming and rescue tests of the Royal Life Saving Society, and one of its events judges. He also played rugby for Berkshire. A strict taskmaster who was unequivocal in the gymnasium, and often gave cold showers as punishments for misdemeanours. On the last day of each term, he read Stanley Holloway monologues ('Albert and the Lion', 'The Battle of Hastings', 'Three ha'pence a foot') to his English classes. He left in 1957 to marry Nancy Hodson and take up an appointment in charge of physical education at the High School for Boys, Longton, Staffordshire.

J.W. Brittain, TD, MA (Cantab.). Housemaster – Wantage House, and was 'acting headmaster' during short interregnums. Taught physics. Epithet: 'Mo'. Short, and always rumple-suited; conducted most lessons and most conversations with his eyes shut, but when he opened the lids, his eyes were revealed as startlingly blue. Mo had been the Captain in command of the Combined Cadet Force until 1938, returning after the Second World War to take charge 1948-52. He joined the teaching staff in 1922 and retired in 1960.

G.Coles, BA (Reading). Taught geography. Arrived 1955 in place of F.R. Dobson. Considered by the boys to have no sense of humour, and disliked

because he too, relied on weekly tests, in much the same way as did A.H. Gregory. He left in 1958 to become senior geography master at Kimbolton School, Huntingdonshire.

R. Colliver, BA. (Bristol). Arrived late 1959. Taught mathematics.

G.M.C. Dearling. Taught French, but left early in 1954 when appointed to the education service in what was then Southern Rhodesia. Succeeded at King Alfred's by J.N. Minnis.

F.R. Dobson. Taught Geography. Left early 1955 for Woodley Hill School, Reading.

M.J. Fairley, MA. (Dublin). Arrived in late 1958 as junior form master.

S.H. Faulkner, B.Sc (Sheffield). Taught physics. Arrived late 1960 as the replacement for J.W. Brittain.

A. Green, BA. (Liverpool). Arrived late 1959. Nothing known.

A.H. Gregory, MA (Oxon.). Taught history. Epithet: 'Greg'.
A quite humourless master to whom history was a series of facts and dates. Prep set by him consisted entirely of reading a set number of pages from the textbook (one of the Oxford History of England series), on which there was always a written test at the start of the following lesson. Each lesson then continued with boys reading aloud, in turn, such further pages as could be read in the remaining time. During this, Mr Gregory continuously interrupted with questions based on the previous lesson's class reading. Boys who correctly answered the questions were awarded an extra point each time, to be added to those gained in that day's test. All points were added up at the end of each term, by which means Mr Gregory arrived at each boy's class position in history. This procedure never changed, year in, year out. Mr Gregory would not tolerate bad language, and famously had a run-in with the dreadful professional sergeant major who was in charge of drilling the King Alfred's contingent of the CCF on the great quad. Mr Gregory, from inside the masters' common room, had heard him swear at the troops. He opened the window, leant out, and comprehensively rebuked him in front of his boy soldiers, to their great and obvious delight.

R. Harding, B.Sc, M.Ed. (Dunelm). Taught ?. Epithet: 'Gilbert' (after the television personality Gilbert Harding).
No-one was ever sure what he was supposed to be teaching because he never really got around to it. A naive, good-natured, trusting fellow who was a woolly-minded academic, completely unsuited to teaching boys. Most of his lessons were riots, during which he apologised profusely for causing them, not making himself clear and causing misunderstandings. Masters trying to teach next door, sometimes had to rescue him. He joined in mid-1958 and left in 1959, going to Hulme's Grammar School in Oldham.

T. Hore, DLC. (Loughborough). Housemaster – School House. Taught physical education. Epithet: 'Runty'.
Took over from Sid Barnes in 1957. He introduced boxing into the PE curriculum. Confident of his expertise in the art, he introduced his first session (held on the upper playing field) by asking Frank Wallis, a large boy, to don boxing gloves, and then instructed the boy to hit him. Wallis demurred, but the PE master insisted. Eventually, Wallis did as he was told. When Mr Hore came to his senses, he was lying on the playing field, being fanned by several boys, whilst another had been sent to fetch matron! Boxing lessons were soon afterwards abandoned. He left the school in 1959 to take up a post with the Youth Service of the government of Victoria, Australia.

D.B. Iles, B.Sc. (Leeds). Taught biology. Arrived late 1960 and was the first teacher of this subject at King Alfred's.

E.H. Jones, BSc (Dunelm). Housemaster – Faringdon House. Taught chemistry. Epithet: 'Bomber'.
Small, humourless, competent, and often frightening, he had a violent temper and a very loud voice when annoyed. Those boys who had suffered under his hands vouched that he gave the most painful beatings.

G.S. Keen, TD, MA (Cantab.). Deputy Headmaster from 1960, and long-time Housemaster – Didcot House. Taught mathematics. Epithet: 'Gus'.
Mr Keen was universally respected, and could quell an impending riot with the slight raise of an eyebrow. Tall, honourable and fair, he nonetheless had some strange notions. "Combs are bad for the hair; I never want to see a boy grooming his hair with a comb. You should always use a hairbrush." He was a consummate teacher, who lived for his work. He died within days of retirement.

Rev. Eric Lionel King, MA (Oxon.). Headmaster. Taught Latin, divinity, mathematics and music; directed the school orchestra. Epithet: 'The Old Man'. Teaching staff would even refer to him by this name when in conversation with pupils. The headmaster lived on site in the master's house of 1850. He was of cherubic aspect, with a pink face that always looked as if it had been freshly scrubbed. Prior to his appointment at Wantage, he taught at a school in Taunton. Perhaps more suited to the Church than teaching boys, he left King Alfred's and became Rector at Holy Trinity, Theale, Berkshire, 1963-68.

J. W. Knight, BA (Cantab.). Taught mathematics. Epithet: 'Joe'.
Generously built, elderly, bald, one tooth in his head, he had the ability to swivel on a sixpence and score a direct hit with chalk or board rubber on any boy, even at the back of the class. He was universally liked, had a commanding presence, and instilled confidence − giving praise whenever it was due, and encouraged boys to do their best. Preferred to give boys a clip around the ear rather than corporal punishment. He lived in a large, old house (now demolished) on the corner of Priory Road and Portway, with his wife, and a dog and a cat. The animals were fed every lunchtime from the leftovers of school dinners, by the same boy who was asked to do it in September 1954 and continued without a break for the next six years. Joe Knight's house had a large cellar in which the maths teacher hung a considerable amount of game (where it came from was never a question one asked!). Every so often, Joe would send the boy down there to select a pheasant, a brace of partridge, a rabbit or two, or a hare, to take home for his family's dinner "as a thank-you for daily devotion to feeding the pets".

H.F. Middlebrook, BSc. (London). Taught mathematics. Arrived early 1960. Became the housemaster of Loyd House when the day-boy Houses were reorganised in late 1960.

J.N. Minnis, MA (Oxon.). Appointed in 1954. Taught French, and was assistant scout master of the King Alfred's School Scout Troop. Epithet: 'Min'.
Long-featured and generally lugubrious, he will be remembered by most boys for enjoining them ever to remember that: "The girls of Toulong are Toulouse, and the girls of Toulouse are Toulong" should they ever encounter either in later life. He left in 1959 to become lecturer at a training college in Hertfordshire.

R.B. Lloyd Morgan, BA. (Oxford). (Temporary Housemaster – School House). Taught geography, having replaced G. Coles. Stern and unliked by many boys, he had been captain of the Oxford University cross-country team. Temporarily took over physical education and School House at the beginning of 1960, before handing over to M.A. Winter.

A.J. Osterritter, ACP, RDS. Taught art and the history of art, directed the annual school plays, and was an officer in the school's Combined Cadet Force. Epithet: 'Crap'.
This master was disabled from the waist downwards, drove a bubble car that had been customised to suit his disability, and got about the school in a wheelchair. Occasionally laughed uproariously, disclosing particularly large, brown-stained teeth at odd angles. One boy in each class was designated to fetch him from the masters' common room at the start of each lesson, and return him there at the end of it. When in class, he always transferred from the wheelchair into a seat, moving his legs with considerable difficulty and obvious pain, with his hands. Any boy who saw him trying to get about unaided in his wheelchair was required to assist him immediately; any boy seen by a master or a prefect to be ignoring him was automatically punished with a drill. He became the housemaster of Bailey House when the day-boy Houses were reorganised in late 1960.

R.H. Ponting, BA. Taught English language, and was on the staff 1954-56, whilst J.W. Pulley was absent in Brunswick. Upon Pulley's return, Mr Ponting took up a position of assistant master at Aylesbury Grammar School.

Rev. Harry Price, BA (Lampeter). Taught Latin and mathematics, refereed sports matches, and was a Captain in the school's Combined Cadet Force, 1952-54, and 1955-56. Epithet: 'Taffy'.
A Welshman with a wry sense of humour and a twisted arm. Had a bad temper if crossed, but rarely had to show it because he was liked by most boys. All of the other masters always called the boys by their surnames; Harry Price was the only one who habitually used either their forenames or their nicknames. Became the housemaster of Butler House when the day-boy Houses were reorganised in late 1960.

J.W. Pulley, BA (Oxon). Taught English language. Epithet 'Fred'.
Was really a soldier at heart and Captain in command of the school's Combined Cadet Force, 1953-54, and 1956-60. He left in 1954 to take up an appointment in the Cultural relations Department of the Foreign Office, and

was seconded to Brunswick for a two-year tour of duty. Returned to the school in 1956.

E.E. Swan, MA (Cantab.). Taught English literature. Epithet: 'Dom'.
Ted Swan was a superb teacher under whom boys blossomed. His great line, when boys encountered Shakespeare for the first time, was: "I don't expect you to understand very much of the words yet, but just close your eyes and listen to the music they make." I have carried that line in my head ever since, and it is absolutely spot on. He owned a dog with a promiscuous nature, and brought the resulting mongrel puppies to school, from where they went to live with the families of boys in his classes.

J. Tasker, BA. (Manchester). Arrived late 1959. Taught English.
Was instantly disliked for his approach to discipline. He appointed boys in his class to inform him when others were doing something wrong, to name names, and give full details of the crimes. Of course, they did not, because the school had always taught that you did not sneak on your fellows. Mr Tasker accordingly wrote enigmatic details in the hapless students' end of term reports: 'He has not behaved satisfactorily in matters of standards', 'He has been appointed an arbiter of taste, but standards in the class are low', and other similarly arcane comments. Parents wrote enquiring what it meant. What it meant was that the designated moles had not snitched on their mates. (On my report, he wrote: 'I do not feel he has played the very positive part he could play in levelling-up the standards of discipline in the form, upon which every other standard depends.' My parents responded angrily that he was there to teach and I was there to learn, not to be some sort of policeman on his behalf!) When this approach failed, he simply turned to punishing the whole class whenever someone in it did anything wrong, on the misplaced assumption that this would make the class self-regulating. It didn't. Outraged parents wrote to complain that their children were being punished for crimes they had not committed.

Mrs M. Terry, who was much liked, taught geography for one term in 1955 between the departure of F.R. Dobson and the arrival of G. Coles.

S. Wilkinson, BA. (Birmingham). German (the first teacher of the language at King Alfred's) and French. Arrived late 1960.

J.W. Wilson, BA (Reading). Taught history, refereed sports matches, and was Scoutmaster of the school's Senior Scout Troop. Much younger than Mr

Gregory, he had a completely different approach to history teaching. To him, it was all about people, places, feelings, and reasons for doing things. He brought history to life, and actually explained what was being read in the history books. Often, boys who failed miserably under Mr Gregory's tuition suddenly blossomed in the years when they had J.W. Wilson, and ascended from the lower reaches of the class to the very top.

M.A. Winter (Carnegie College of PE). Appointed mid-1960 as successor to T. Hore.

Others on the staff 1954-60:

D. Hall from Culham College joined the staff briefly in 1954 to gain experience in teaching French and music. **J.S. Welch, BA** (Oxon.), was seconded to the school for one term in 1957 as part of his teaching practice element for his Diploma Course of the Oxford University department of Education. **P.T. Sandry**, BA (Oxon.); **M.R. Clayton**; **J.W. Hill**, each of Culham College, came for one term in 1958. In 1959, those gaining teaching experience at King Alfred's were **N. Brooks** and a Mr **McDermot**, also of Culham College. In 1960, the chance went to **A.E. Back**, BA of Balliol College. **D. Davies** also came for teaching practice in 1960, and alone amongst all those who did, was singled out thus: 'He was a student of mature years and wide experience in teaching abroad, who brought a refreshing touch of the *esprit gaulois* to classrooms and staffroom.'

Miss Cooke was the school matron from 1942 until 1957; she was then succeeded by **Nurse M. Knott** SRN, and in 1959 by **Mrs B.G. Brown**.

T. Ridsdill Smith, MA, MB, B.Ch. The school doctor.

Mrs E.L. King, LRAM. Played the violin, and taught music by private tuition, typically wearing her gown and football socks.

Miss Luard. Taught music by private tuition.

Mrs K. Meredith was Laboratory Assistant until 1956, when she was replaced by **Mrs E. E. Farrington**.

Miss J.M. Gibbs. Jessie Gibbs was the school secretary. She had a ghost in her house whom she was anxious not to leave when she moved after retirement; it is thought it went with her.

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The writer of this article:

I lived in a village near Swindon, in Wiltshire, joined King Alfred's School, Wantage, in September 1954 and left in July 1960. In order to get to the school, I got up at 5.30am each day, Monday to Saturday, and started out on my bicycle each morning at 6.20am. After two miles, I walked for a mile and then caught the 7.20am service bus to Shrivenham. Here, after another short walk, the school bus from Faringdon picked me up at about 7.50am, arriving at school just before 8.30am, which was when the bell rang for morning assembly. School finished at 4.10pm; the return journey took rather longer because the service bus from Shrivenham was less convenient, and I arrived home at about 6.45pm. There was just time to eat and do homework before going to bed. No social life was possible.

Half-term holidays (see above) were of little benefit to me, since service buses ran very infrequently during the day between Shrivenham and Swindon. It meant only that I arrived home about an hour earlier than usual on the Friday, did not have to get up at 5.30am on the Saturday and Monday, and could stay in bed until 6.45am on the returning Tuesday! A.J. Osterritter fired my enthusiasm for church architecture, and E.E. Swan told me to make a career by writing. I have since been a reference and research librarian, historical researcher, and writer and ghost-writer of non-fiction books and magazine articles, mainly on architectural history, topography, and church architecture.

Mark Child
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