

## THE SCHOOLS OF WANTAGE

By Mike Haddrell

In 1983 King Alfred's School produced a commemorative mug to mark the amalgamation of Wantage's three secondary schools. It bore the legend "King Alfred's School 1434 to 1983." Education in Wantage has a long history marked by many comings and goings, changes and developments.

There are three Primary Schools in Wantage, Wantage C of E next to the recreation Ground in Manor Road and Stockham School, in Stockham Way and since 28 September 2020 GEMS Wantage Primary Academy at Kingsgrove, the new housing development in east Wantage. Grove has Millbrook in School Lane and Grove C of E in North Drive. Charlton Village Road is the location for Charlton Primary School and Challow has St Nicholas in Sarajac Avenue.

Wantage also has a Special School, Fitzwaryn School, in Denchworth Road which opened in 1970. 2008 saw substantial refurbishment including new buildings and in 2013 Fitzwaryn became part of the Propeller Academy Trust. Further building work took place in 2018. The school has been rated Outstanding in its last 4 OFSTED Inspections, most recently in March 2019.

There was once a Public School for Girls in Wantage, St Mary's, which celebrates among its former pupils the great granddaughter of King George V, Lady Helen Windsor. It was founded in 1873 and closed in 2007. The Chapel in Newbury Street now houses an NHS dentist, other buildings were converted to flats, and housing has been built across the site.

There are other ghost sites which once hosted learning. Housing now occupies the site of Wantage County Primary School, Garston Lane where Wantage's youngsters learned and played from 1929 to 1999.

In Church Street the former Cof E Infants school, now houses The Ark Pre-School and The Wantage Nursery and Pre-School. It started life as a National School, built in 1850. The architect was Henry Woodyer who lived from 1816 to 1896, a pupil of William Butterfield and a disciple of Pugin and the Ecclesiologists. He was educated at Eton and Merton College Oxford, where he became influenced by the Anglo Catholic Oxford Movement, spending most of his career designing churches in the Gothic style. The influence of the Oxford Movement is clear elsewhere in Wantage – at the parish church and in St Mary's Convent. Further up Church Street the Nonconformist tradition is represented in the form of a Gothic Stone archway which led to the now demolished Methodist school.

50 Newbury Street is divided into Alfred House and Thanet House and it seems likely that the whole property once bore the latter name as a boarding house owned by K.A.R Sugden, Headmaster of King Alfred's from 1919-1924. In 1928 (Sellers p44) Thanet House closed as a boarding house for the main school and under the new Headship of Canon Peacock became, in 1933, a prep school for younger boys, attended most famously by Lester Piggott. The 1944 Education Act had prohibited Secondary Schools from having their own prep schools and it closed in 1950 when the last pupils progressed to King Alfred's.

In Sugden's time (Sellers p38) King Alfred's had five boarding houses. School House was the property of the Governors. Sugden himself rented two as well as owning Thanet House and Highfield at the Portway end of Priory Road, where he lived on his retirement in 1924.

The locations of the rented boarding houses are uncertain but in 1907 Miss Keall's boarding house was opened (Sellers p31) in King Alfred's Hostel. (ibid. p33). In 1941 Miss Keall took in evacuees "to her house in Newbury Street" (ibid p 53).

The building of Highfield on land owned by Mr Henry Cook, Headmaster 1868-1884, had been funded by subscriptions raised by former students as a retirement home for him. Sadly he died on April 3 1885.(p

21 Sellers). In 1954 a legacy from a relative of Henry Cook's widow enabled the Governors to purchase Highfield, which was then used for boarders and as the residence of Rev. Harry Price, Captain of the OTC, having succeeded Lt Col Brittain, and school chaplain since his ordination in 1949. (Sellers p69/p65).

Another building which has sustained its educational focus is Rockwell House where in 1950 Miss Barbara Clarke founded St Andrew's School, a private primary school for boys and girls. The school closed in 2010. The building now houses Rockwell House Day Nursery or "Busy Bees."

Opposite Rockwell House stands Alton House, 29 Wallingford Street. This street is the focus of Volume 4 of David Castle and Jack Loftin's excellent series *The People's Wantage, Past and Present*. They record that in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Misses Caroline, Annie and Florence Bailey founded a school in Alton House. The school usually had around 50 boys and girls and later moved to a site on the corner of Newbury Street and Ormond Road. In the 1920s and 1930s it used upstairs rooms at what is now Green & Co estate agents and at the VC Gallery

Our main focus here is the secondary schools of Wantage. Let us return to the dates on that commemorative mug. Was King Alfred's really founded in 1434? Without clear evidence we cannot rely on such a precise date, and one so long ago. Even the second, later, date is questionable. King Alfred's merged with Icknield and Segsbury to become Wantage School from the start of the 1984-85 academic year. Not 1983! And cap badges used by the CCF earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century bear the legend Wantage School! The Oxfordshire History Centre tells us that "The Alfred Grammar School has foundations back to 1422 and 1509 but was re-founded in 1851. In 1944 the school was renamed Wantage Grammar School."

In 1979, the year of his retirement, Mr Pickering, Headteacher of Garston Lane wrote a history of that school. On Page 27 he writes "...the decision was reached in April of 1948 to make use of a number of Army huts, erected during the war on the Springfield Road site, purchased in 1938 by the County. These huts, taken as an annex to Garston Lane, and designated The Secondary Modern Department, were brought into use as a temporary measure in September 1949." The Ministry of Education took its time to provide funding for more appropriate buildings, but we read that in 1953 "building finally began and the new school, Icknield received its first pupils on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1956". During its independent existence Icknield had three Headteachers: Mr Hurford, Mr Craggs and Mr Howells.

Springfield School was also the location of Wantage Youth Club which continued at Icknield until the school closed on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2017. Houses now occupy the site. The Youth Club was known latterly as the Sweatbox and has been relocated to Centre Site. In the 1970s The Garrison Youth Club flourished in the former Garrison Theatre which had been part of the wartime airfield at Grove. Grove also had its own Youth Club at that time.

On September 17<sup>th</sup> 1963 Wantage gained a third secondary school, on the Challow Road. Mr Trendell was the first Headteacher of Segsbury, a Secondary Modern School for boys and girls. He retired in the early 1980s and was succeeded by Mr Collier. Today known as West Site, the campus is attended by King Alfred's pupils in Years 7 and 8.

In 1948 The Community of St Mary The Virgin, Wantage Convent, published a book called "Butler of Wantage, His Inheritance and his Legacy". The first chapter is about King Alfred (The Inheritance) and the second chapter (The Heir) about The Reverend William John Butler, Vicar of Wantage from 1846 to 1881 during the period of High Anglicanism. He founded the Convent in 1848 and was extremely influential in developing education in Wantage in the mid nineteenth Century. We have already heard about St Mary's and we will return to King Alfred's but Butler was also instrumental in establishing the National School in Church Street and educational establishments at St Katherine's and St Michael's.

The National School opened in 1850 and from then on the Governors of the Town Lands were relieved of the responsibility for elementary education in Wantage. (Pupils, Potholes and Poor Relief Hazel Brown 2012 p46). In *The Story of My Life*, Augustus J Hare describes a visit to Butler's Vicarage in February 1860 and as well as praising his "energy and perseverance" he notes the "National School painted with Scripture frescoes by Pollen, Burgon etc. [and] a training school under the charge of Mrs Trevelyan."

In 1853, Mrs F A Trevelyan bought the land between Priory Road and the Letcombe Brook, the site of the Benedictine Priors Hold. She had already established an 'industrial school' in Littlemore which trained girls for domestic service. Two years later they moved into the newly built St Michael's House, designed by the architect William White. When Mrs Trevelyan left Wantage in 1861, Butler and the Community of St Mary the Virgin took over St Michael's, which now housed teacher training, established by Butler in 1850, alongside the industrial school.

A Sister Mary from the convent took over from Mrs Trevelyan, and was followed by Miss Penelope Osborne, one of Florence Nightingale's nurses, who had previously had charge of the middle school in the old Baptist Chapel in Church Street, then known as Back Street.

The teacher training at St Michaels was highly regarded. "In the early days one of the Government Inspectors had said that he had known many teachers trained at Wantage but had never come across a failure." (Butler of Wantage p26) Bishop Wilberforce: "At Wantage there was no rest day or night". Bishop Stubbs: "Butler's work is amazing." In the 20th century the Community of St Mary the Virgin organised the Guild of the Good Shepherd and the training of missionary students at St Michael's. Towards the end of the Twentieth Century St Michaels and associated buildings were converted for private housing.

On page 25 in "Butler of Wantage" we read of a middle school for girls founded by Butler in a "quaint old Back Street room approached by steps." This establishment moved to two houses in Newbury Street and became known as St Katherine's in 1894, an offshoot of St Mary's School also under the authority of the Community of St Mary the Virgin. In 1898 it moved with 107 pupils into new buildings designed by A.N. Mowbray on the site of the FitzWaryn Manor of Wanting Brian. Despite the different spelling it took its name from St Catherine of Alexandria. In 1938 St Katharine's merged with St Helen's in Abingdon and the Wantage site no longer functioned as a school. It is now occupied, in Ormond Road, by St Katherines Care Home, but the grand 1898 buildings are no more.

The inscription on the statue of King Alfred in Wantage Market Place begins "Alfred found learning dead and he restored it. Education neglected and he revived it." King Alfred's School was named after the king, who indubitably promoted learning, literature, and monastic life in England but what is the evidence that he did so specifically in Wantage, even to the extent of founding a school?

In *Wantage Past and Present* (Gibbons and Davey 1901) we read that in the reign of King Alfred "Schools were opened in all directions and injunctions issued that every freeholder possessed of two hides of land should send his children to school." (p26) To assist in this project Alfred was obliged to recruit schoolmasters from abroad, "especially France which sent him learned men from the abbeys of St Omer and Corby." (WP&P p25). In *An Introduction to Anglo Saxon England* p351, Peter Hunter Blair references the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which suggests Alfred also recruited teachers from Ireland, describing a visit to his court by "Dubslane, Macbethu and Maelinmun. And Swifneh the best teacher among the Irish died."

*Alfred The West Saxon King of The English* by Dugald Macfadyen was also published in 1901, in the series *Saintly Lives*. On p 270 we learn from Alfred's biographer Asser that the royal budget included a "portion assigned to the school which he had studiously collected together, consisting of many of the nobility of his own nation". This was, however a "court school" attended by Alfred's own children, Edward and Aelfthryth, among the children of the nobility. Macfadyen describes it as a Palatine school like that of

Charlemagne which moved with the court and we can only fancy that it might have spent a little time in Wantage if Alfred ever did re-visit the Royal Lodge of his birth, which he gave to his daughter.

The court school is not the only evidence in Asser relevant to our inquiry. He writes that the king's youngest son Aethelward "was consigned to the schools of learning where, with the children of almost all the nobility of the country, and many who were not noble, he prospered under the diligent care of his teachers. Books in both languages, namely Latin and Saxon were read in the school. They also learned to read and write." (In Macfadyen p271). This is important evidence of schools which did more than teach the children of the nobility in Latin.

In Alfred's day all education had its roots in religious foundations and he established a monastery for women at Shaftesbury, where his daughter Aethelgifu was abbess, and one for men at Athelney where John the Old Saxon from Corbie was abbot. (p229-30 D.J.V. Fisher, *The Anglo Saxon Age*.) He also laid the foundations for New Minster at Winchester. These locations are well south and west of Wantage – a safe distance from the Guthrum's Viking Kingdom to which Wantage was just a little too close. In Alfred's reign there was no Oxford University nearby, the monastic revival was still a century away and his priorities lay in defending the heart of his Wessex Kingdom against the Danes and advancing learning among the ruling and religious classes. It seems unlikely that he managed to find time to set up a school in Wantage – even if he was born here.

Henry VI became king on December 1421. This seems to be the sole foundation for the suggestion that 1422 might mark the foundation of King Alfred's School as the school's foundation charter mentions money being left by "sundry persons" for maintaining a schoolmaster in the town "some in the time of the late King Henry the Sixth."

In his *History of Wantage School*, published in 1924, former Headteacher K.A.R. Sugden makes the extravagant inference (p11) that because the Priory of Ogbourne in Wiltshire, which had hitherto supplied the priest for Wantage, was suppressed in 1434, the town must then necessarily have made arrangements for education other than by the parish priest, and so founded Wantage School! I can find no other evidence to justify the foundation date on our commemorative mug.

John Leland was chaplain and librarian to Henry VIII and in 1533 the post of King's Antiquary was created especially for him. The following year he visited Wantage, where he noted in the Churchyard 'an ancient building now used as a school.' This, in all likelihood, was the Chapel of St Mary which stood in the churchyard where the war memorial now is. (Sugden p12)

And so to 1597 and, as Sugden writes on page 17, "We can now pass from the realms of inference and conjecture to the solid ground of history." In 1597 An Act of Parliament for the Town of Wantinge in the County of Berks was passed, establishing the Governors of The Town Lands with a responsibility for the relief of the poor, the highway and "to and for the maintaining of a Schoolmaster to teach Gramer within the said Town of Wantinge." The account books and minute books of the Governors of the Town Lands provide a continuous record of the history of Wantage School from 1597 until 1893 when a separate Governing Body was established for the school. "It is rare indeed", writes Sugden, "to find a year passing without an entry which affects the school."

From the records of the Governors of The Town Lands we discover that, over the years, they managed two schools in Wantage in addition to the Grammar School (also known as the Free School). The English School or Pettischool stood, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century at any rate, in a building in the corner of the churchyard behind the Church, and there was also a Girls' School. Neither were in continuous use from 1597, indeed the first mention of a school for girls is with the appointment in 1711 of "a schoolmistress to instruct twenty poor girls in reading and sewing" and this seems to have been an opportunity created by the temporary demise of the English School. (Pupils, Potholes and Poor Relief Hazel Brown 2012 p41).

We must shortly fast forward to the mid Nineteenth Century for the next major development but, taking Sugden's lead, we will first mention Joseph Butler who was born at The Priory in Wantage in 1692 and may lay claim to the status of most notable alumnus. His father was a wealthy draper who had first lived in the house in the Market Place known for years as Arbery's, now Costa Coffee. Butler attended Wantage Grammar School and went on to become Bishop of Durham and author of a notable work of theology, *The Analogy*.

In 1849, the millenary of King Alfred's Birth provided the impetus for Wantage's other Butler, the new and energetic Vicar, to take the lead in a project to build a new Grammar School.

In 1850 the Grammar School building in the Churchyard was pulled down. It may have been the ancient Chapel of St Mary noted by Leland or a later replacement for that building. The Parish Diary for 1850 suggests it was "not earlier than the latter of Elizabeth," which Sugden concludes is correct. Somewhere from the rubble however was a stone Norman door arch which was recovered and relocated in the new Victorian Schoolroom in Portway, the entrance in the 1970s to the inevitably smoke-filled staffroom.

On Monday July 29<sup>th</sup> 1850 the corner stone of the new Alfred Free Grammar School was laid by Barthlomew Wroughton of Woolley Park. The original buildings on Portway remain, designed by Mr John Clancy, a Reading architect who specialised in Gothic Revival, and built by Wantage builders Hunt, Kent and Haines. The first Headmaster was appointed on May 7 1851: Rev. Edmund John Smith M.A., Scholar of Worcester College Oxford. In December 1853 he resigned because "I find my present salary as Master of the Grammar School inadequate to the position." With no pay rise forthcoming he withdrew his resignation, finally leaving in 1856 whereupon there were 97 applicants for the vacancy, with Rev. C. H. Crooke being appointed.

From 1868 to 1884 King Alfred's prospered under the Headship of Henry Cook, who was married to the well-known artist Jane Robins. In 1904 Rev. Marchant Pearson B.A. began his influential tenure which ended in 1911 when he secured the Headship of Ardingly School. In the 1970s boys still competed for the Marchant Pearson Essay Prize for Boys Proceeding to University. K.A.R Sugden was Head from 1919-24 and further embedded the "Public School" ethos. Canon Peacock was Head from 1931-1949, returning to his regiment during the Second World War leaving Mr Brittain as Acting Headmaster. He was succeeded by Mr E. L. King who served until 1963 when Cedric Bower became the last Headteacher of King Alfred's Grammar School for Boys.

At this point it might be worth a diversion to trace the history of the buildings on Centre Site, where the new King Alfred's Grammar School was built in 1850. On page 53 of *Pupils, Potholes & Poor Relief* (Hazel Brown 2012) there is a very useful plan of the core buildings, all of which still stand.

In 1850 the schoolroom, incorporating the Norman doorway, was built in the southeast corner of the quadrangle on the corner of Priory Road and Portway. Opposite where the Lych gate is now, stood the new Master's House. Between them a two-storey symmetrical building at the end of the Sacred Way provided the boys' dining room and classroom with a dormitory above. This building was extended westwards in 1863, providing an infirmary and additional classrooms. In 1872 a large classroom at the northern end of the quad was funded by Governors. In the Twentieth Century this building was used as the school hall, then a library and resources centre. (See also Sellers p17)

The Governors funded two additional rooms at the Masters House in 1869, and in 1887-8, on the east end of this extension, two further sitting rooms and bedrooms. The long boarding house running north to south and thus providing the eastern boundary of the Quad Footie pitch in the 1960s and 70s, was also added in 1877, providing rooms for administration, matron, two assistant masters, a boys changing room and toilets, with sleeping accommodation above.

Sugden records that in the final years of the 1890s “the Science buildings were erected, including a laboratory and a workshop”, noting that the design, by Mr A Mardon Mowbray of Oxford, was “clearly with an eye to utility only and with little desire to be in keeping with the beauty and dignity of the rest of the school buildings.” Sellers p23 writes that “a splendid science block including a laboratory workshop and art room were erected” in 1897-9. Neither author confirms that this was rooms 1-5 known as The Gods in the 1960s and 70s.

In 1908 the 1850 schoolroom was converted to a Chapel (Sellers p32). Sugden (p91) implies that prior to this boarders had allocated seats at the Parish Church. By 1920 the Chapel was too small and reverted to its previous use as a Sixth Form Room and reference library. In 1921 a chapel was built in the tin tabernacle style with a corrugated iron roof in “a part of the Headmaster’s garden” (Sugden, then Headmaster!). This was the Language Laboratory in the 1960s and 70s.

In 1910 the Governors purchased the town Fire Station on the south side of Portway and converted it for use by the OTC as an armoury. (Sellers p32) At about the same time the school was now fully equipped as a meteorological station. (Sellers p33) On the fields south of Portway was a shooting range, middle right, a fives court in the rear left hand corner and an assault course running along the field boundary behind the fives court. I have been unable to establish the opening dates for these but they are now all gone.

In 1913 a gymnasium was erected north of the Headmasters House in the area which is now open space and car parking. It was still in use in the 1970s – including for “fights in the gym,” with seconds and a teacher referee, to settle disputes between boys. At the start of the twentieth century the swimming baths in Mill Street were being reserved for school use at certain times. Not until July 1962 did the school have its own pool which was situated on the eastern edge of the site north of Portway adjacent to what is now the Beacon Car Park.

1921 “Three new classrooms and a physics laboratory were built” (Sellers p36) “on the site of the picturesque but dilapidated cottages opposite the front quadrangle” (Sugden p75) Mr W Sergeant of Reading was the architect and Mr Howard Stroud of Wantage was the contractor. This was Rooms 6, 7 and 8 demolished to make way for the Sixth Form Centre at the end of the 1970s.

In 1922 The Lych Gate was presented to the school by the old boys in remembrance of those Old Alfredians who lost their lives fighting with the British and Colonial forces in The Great War.

In 1938 it became clear that the only way to fund much needed improvements in the building stock was for King Alfred’s to become State Maintained rather than State Aided. The proposed building programme was delayed by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. The 1944 Education Act saw the legal status of King Alfred’s as a state school cemented, as a Voluntary Controlled School with all fees abolished, Berkshire County Council having full financial responsibility. Under the terms of the Act, admission was by examination (The Eleven Plus) to either King Alfred’s Grammar School, a Secondary Modern School, or a Technical School. In an explanatory letter published in The Alfredian magazine, Spring Term 1948, Headmaster Canon Peacock concluded with a reference to the Development Plan for Berkshire according to which “we are scheduled largely to be rebuilt, although the older school buildings will be retained, in 1952-3. This date is probably rather too optimistic....” Canon Peacock moved on in 1949 to take up the post of Warden of St Augustine’s House at Reading University.

In 1949 the Second World War Memorial was set in the wall over the entrance at the end of the Sacred Way. On May 12 1955 the new War Memorial Pavilion was opened in the north west corner of the playing field on the same site as the old structure, a smaller wooden building which was moved to the New Field next to the allotments. (W. Downs Pupil at the time.) By January 1977 the pavilion was cut off from the pitch by the new Sixth Form Buildings and the Old Alfredians under the leadership of the then President Neil Doody arranged for it to be moved to the south east corner of the field. On May 30 1999,

having been moved over a rather longer distance, the pavilion was re-opened at Hanney Cricket Club. I have been unable to discover anything about the previous cricket pavilion.

In 1951 "Building was in progress on the school premises, two classrooms had been finished one to be used for Art, and the other for Geography and both to double as form rooms." (Sellers p67) It seems likely that this was the rooms known as 9 and 10 in the 1960s and 70s, situated adjacent to the gym at the middle of Centre Site on an east-west axis. At the same time the partition in the building at the north side of the Priory Road quadrangle was removed and it came to serve as the School Hall.

On his retirement in 1960 Mr Brittain remarked that in 1922 he was asked to advise on the equipment for the new physics laboratory (probably Room 8) and that his most recent service to the school had been to advise again on the latest laboratories shortly to be opened. Autumn Term 1960 saw the first stage of the school building project almost completed to the north of the original 1850 structures. (Sellers p74). New Houses named Bailey, Butler and Loyd under Mr Osteritter, Rev Price and 'Todd' Middlebrook celebrated the new House Block for day boys. (Bailey was named after Dr Cyril Bailey, Butler after the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Bishop rather than the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Vicar and Loyd after Mr. A. Thomas Loyd.) The second building was a two storey science block with a library and art room on the ground floor.

In 1966 the Governors of King Alfred's Icknield and Segsbury collectively agreed to back the Department of Education's Circular 10/65 to reorganise state education on comprehensive lines.

In 1970, with an expected increase of 150 on the school roll, a new building programme was announced at King Alfred's. (Sellers p 90). Phase One of the building programme began in 1972 including the Four Storey Block and a ten lab science block.

On 19<sup>th</sup> December 1973 the last lessons were taught in The Gods (rooms 1-4), Rooms 6-8 on the field side of Portway and Rooms 9-10 next to the Gym. Room 5, the Lower Sixth Common Room had been the first of the old rooms to be demolished in earlier in the year. The Alfredian magazine of Trinity Term 1974 features English Master Tony Hogg's poem "Ichabod The Glory Has Departed", marking the final fall of The Gods. 1974 saw the start of the Sports Hall on the bottom field and a new school hall and Art and Technical Wing north of Portway, all opening the following year.

September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1974 saw the first intake of girls to the first year and Lower Sixth at King Alfred's, the first generation to be spared Saturday morning school, and the first comprehensive intake who started Secondary School without having taken the Eleven Plus.

On March 28 1979 the new Sixth Form Centre for all three Wantage Schools opened on the south side of Portway where Rooms 6,7 and 8 had been.

Links between the three Secondary Schools had been forged from around 1972 and at the start of the 1984/5 academic year they merged to become Wantage School (Segsbury, Icknield, and King Alfred's Halls). In 1987 Wantage School was renamed King Alfred's School. In 1999 King Alfred's became a Specialist Sports College and was known as King Alfred's Community and Sports College.

In 2006 King Alfred's gained Foundation Status which gave the Governing Body much greater control over the whole school and its property. This prepared the way for designation as an Academy in 2011, morphing into the Vale Academy Trust in 2013, and the sale of Icknield for a housing development to fund the future growth of the school on the two other sites.

In 2012 new buildings at Icknield included a classroom, science lab, music rooms and a fitness suite. After the closure of Icknield in 2017 these buildings were moved to West Site as the Humanities Department. In March 2019 a brand new Sports Hall was opened on West Site.

After a refurbishment and redevelopment of the School Hall and Technical and Arts Block built at King Alfred's (Centre Site) in the 1970s, Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex and his wife Sophie, Countess of Wessex opened the Christopher Loyd Creative Arts building on 25 April 2014. It was the Prince's birthday! The same development phase saw the replacement of the Bailey, Butler, Loyd House Rooms with a three storey building, providing 13 classrooms and a canteen.

In December 2017 MP Ed Vaizey MP opened the new two storey Science block providing high spec laboratories and classrooms in place of the buildings which went up at the start of the 1960s.

In September 2019 the Sixth Form Centre on the south side of Portway re-opened after major refurbishment. With a common room, new catering and IT facilities a new reception and a large flexible space for private study, assemblies and lectures.

The Vale Academy Trust has been given provisional approval by the Department for Education to open an all-through (primary and secondary) school as the first phase of new school delivery on Grove Airfield. The current target date for opening the primary phase is 2023, and for the secondary phase, 2024. Longer-term, another new primary school will be needed on the Airfield site.

Richard Evans is currently the Chief Executive of The Vale Academy Trust which manages King Alfred's Academy, Wantage C of E Primary School, Charlton Primary School Millbrook Primary School, St James C of E Primary School, St Nicholas C of E Primary School, Thameside Primary School and Larkmead School. In a strange irony the offices of the Trust in Denchworth Road are based at St Mary's Convent which was so influential in developing schools in Wantage in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. King Alfred, The Governors of the Town Lands, The Community of St Mary the Virgin and the Reverend William John Butler have a successor.

**Mike Haddrell October 2021**

**St Nicholas Abingdon 1963-1968, Garston Lane 1968-69, King Alfred's School 1969-76.**

## **SOURCES**

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