

## ODDS & ENDS OF WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

Collected by Robert HG Charles



Photograph by the author

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## ODDS & ENDS OF WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

(OR MORE PROPERLY 'THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ST. PETER IN WESTMINSTER')

Many people say that the oddest thing about Westminster School is our pronunciation of the Latin used in school prayers. It is the traditional pronunciation that was in use in schools and universities at the time of the Reformation, as opposed to the Italianate pronunciation used by the clergy and monks at that time. The school and some other favoured foundations were given exemption from the 1549 and subsequent Acts of Uniformity and permitted to pray in Latin, provided that they did not use what Queen Elizabeth I described as 'that dreadful monkish pronunciation'. Westminster now seems to be the only one to have retained the traditional pronunciation at least for prayers. All the rest have given in to the modern 'Weeny, weedy, weekly' pronunciation.

The Abbey Almoner's accounts for 1454 record the cost of mending the school wall and diverse desks in the school: schoolboys were obviously no less destructive in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century than today. The accounts and other contemporary documents also give us the names of some of the School Masters and a little insight into their activities. In 1424 John Newborough and his wife Margery were occupying a house in the Sanctuary, rent free as part of his stipend. Three years later he was fined 8d 'for owning a leaking gutter draining out of his dwelling to the great annoyance of those crossing Thieving Lane.' It had that name because of the criminal activities of many of its residents, who found Sanctuary from the Law in the precincts of the Abbey. In 1494 William Baker was School Master. He was fined 3s 4d for insulting and striking a blow at one Thomas Kirkham; we know nothing more about the circumstances.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries the School House was within the Almonry to the west of the Abbey Church at the end of the grange, the home farm and by the ditch. The ditch ran along what is now Great Smith Street. There was a playground next to the Chapel of St. Anne and In the account roll for 1447-48 is an entry of 16d for constructing a gin, a trap, over the Chapel 'to stop boys with balls'.

Henry VIII's dissolution of the Monastery of Westminster in 1540 did not spell the end of this flourishing school. Instead the King issued a charter establishing a new religious and scholastic foundation. In the 'Booke of the erection of the King's new College' the names of the Dean and Prebendaries are followed immediately by the names of the 'forty scholars to be taught grammar'. The King also ordered that the costs of their schooling should come from the royal purse.

The first Head Master of Henry VIII's re-foundation was John Adams, who was succeeded by Alexander Nowell, the author of the Catechism and, more importantly, the inventor of bottled beer.

Queen Elizabeth I confirmed what her father had already created, but, characteristically, did not offer any funds. However she used to visit the School to see the boys at their lessons. It is recorded that on one such occasion 'She espies one of a fair and ingenious countenance, with which she was much pleased, comes to him and strokes him on the head, and demanded him to tell her how often he had been whipped.' The precocious child replied with the opening line of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Virgil's Aeneid 'Infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem'. The queen 'being wonderfully pleased with the witty answer, said that he should be her child if he did English it; which presently he did thus, to her great comfort and his advancement: 'Most gracious Queen, you do desire to know  
A grief unspeakable and full of woe.'

Nicholas Udall was appointed Head Master in 1555. He had been the 'flogging' head master at Eton previously and had been sacked in 1541 for a scandalous offence with one of the boys. Under the 1533 Buggery Act Udall was liable to execution by hanging. He appealed to an unnamed patron and escaped execution but spent a year in Marshalsea Prison. In 1533 Udall wrote the lyrics for a coronation song for Anne Boleyn. He translated several classical discourses and some of the works of Erasmus, but is best known for writing the first comedy in English 'Ralph Roister Doister' in about 1553.

Henry Machyn, a tradesman of the City of London, records in his diary that in 1556 a boy killed a big boy that sold books and printed papers (by) hurling of a stone and hit him under the ear in Westminster Hall: the boy, the son of a hosier, was one of the children that was (at the) school there in the Abbey. Westminster boys had long had the right to sell unwanted school books in Westminster Hall, which may have led to the conflict. The schoolboy was one of three murderers in a procession for punishment by the church authorities. His punishment is not stated but seems likely to have been no more than a whipping.

A more serious view was taken of the King's Scholars in 1679, who were charged with murder by the civil authorities. A bailiff had taken possession of a house in a backstreet behind Dean's Yard and had arrested the owner. A woman living in the house ran into the school claiming that the ancient privilege of Sanctuary in the Abbey's precincts had been violated. In fact it had long been extinct, but some of the Scholars picked up clubs, rushed to the scene and beat the bailiff to death. An identity parade for the whole school was held in the Abbey and eleven king's Scholars were picked out. A royal pardon was obtained which names all forty King's Scholars. Three however chose to stand trial at the old Bailey and were acquitted. Busby charged the parents of all forty scholars £13 1s 3d each as their proportion of charge of the pardon. When John Carleton was Master of the Queen's Scholars he obtained the original document, which was framed and hung in the College library and still hangs there.

The boys' behaviour had clearly not improved in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In 'The Pickwick Papers, published 1836-37, Dickens describing the waiters in the Pump room at Bath observes that 'from their costumes they could be mistaken for Westminster boys, only they destroy the illusion by behaving themselves much better'.

Canons of royal foundations, such as Westminster Abbey, are allowed to wear scarlet cassocks. These are also worn by the Head Master and the Master of the Queen's Scholars. When visiting the school one hot summer afternoon, King George VI asked John Carleton, then Master of the King's Scholars, 'Do you have to wear trousers under that thing'?

College Dormitory was burnt out by an incendiary bomb in 1941, though the walls survived. When King George VI was officially opening the rebuilt Dormitory, now also housing Wren's, a loudspeaker system was installed in College Garden for the ceremony. The loudspeakers

were making strange noises. When the King approached the microphone to make his speech he asked 'Is this bloody thing working'? It was, only too well.

Five years ago the Statue of Queen Elizabeth I in Yard was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II; the Duke of Edinburgh looked at it in stony silence for a moment before commenting. The gist of his remarks was 'We are going now; you can cover it up again'. Whatever one may think of its aesthetic value, the lower half makes an excellent wicket.



Photograph by the author

### My thoughts on first seeing the statue

Her gracious majesty Elizabeth II;  
Unveiled this effigy of Gloriana.  
She asked "what is that thing around her neck?  
Is it a Cheddar cheese or a banana?"

She looked at it once more and winced,  
As though she suffered from some mental pain.  
" Now we have taken a more careful look,  
We think we'd better cover it again."

GLORIANDIAS (With apologies to Percy Byshe Shelley)



I met a tourist from a foreign land,  
 Who said," Last week I London visited  
 Where in antique corner I beheld,  
 Not far away from ancient Westminster  
 A statue underneath an aged plane.  
 The tree was noble; in its spreading shade  
 The statue stood unlovely and unloved."  
 I made reply that such a tale I'd heard  
 From a bold traveller from an antique land;  
 "Was not the statue ruined on a plinth  
 Bearing these words 'Look on my works ye mighty and despair'  
 Or words to that effect?" The stranger shook his head  
 "No words were there and what was even worse,  
 The statue was Intact and hideous".

Robert Charles November 2011

Busby was head master from 1638 till his death at the age of 95 in 1695. He was known as a flogging Head Master, but probably was no worse than others at that time. When King Charles I was about to be executed in Whitehall, Busby, who was a fervent royalist, gathered his pupils up school and prayed for the King. After praying for the King Busby locked the doors, to prevent any of his pupils from going to Whitehall to watch the unedifying spectacle being enacted there. Two scholars with drawn swords were sent to guard the entrance, giving rise to the tradition of the monitors ostii, (watchers of the gate), who now stand on the two great stones, known as the mon.os. stones, at the foot of Burlington's archway leading up school, before and after Latin prayers. Busby had great confidence in himself. For example, when King Charles II visited the school, Busby did not remove his hat on the grounds that his pupils 'must not think that there is a greater man in the land than myself'. When asked how he had survived the troubled political and religious atmosphere during the period of his Head Mastership he replied 'The fathers govern the nation; the mothers govern the fathers; but the boys govern the mothers, and I govern the boys'.

At the Great Fire of London in 1666, the Dean of Westminster, John Dolben, himself an Old Westminster, gathered the scholars and marched them to the City, where they saved St. Dunstan's Church in the East from the flames. William Taswell, one of the boys, records in his autobiography that, as he stood in Palace Yard, he took a copy of Terence from his pocket and read it by the light of the blazing Old St Paul's Cathedral about a mile away. John Carleton used to recount that one night during the German air-raids he was fire-watching on the roof of the Abbey, when he took out his diary and read it easily by the light of the fires in the City of London; he then remembered Taswell.

SCHOOL. This room was part of the Monk's Dormitory and originally included what is now the Abbey Library and Muniment Room, separated by the north wall since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. A recess in the north wall forms the Shell, which gave its name to the form taught in front of it. The lower parts of the walls, some of the windows and the vaults beneath date from the late 11<sup>th</sup> Century. The building was damaged in 1298 by a fire, which had spread from the Palace. The Abbey Church was unharmed, but the residential buildings of the monastery were extensively damaged as were the archives. The 16<sup>th</sup> Century oak hammer-beam roof was destroyed by an incendiary bomb in 1945. The roof of the Muniment Room was spared and gives some idea of the original school roof. The room was given to the school in 1599. All the classes were taught there until 1884. The bar across the middle of School, the Pancake Bar, originally supported a curtain separating the Upper School presided over by the Head Master and the Under School presided over by the Under Master. Its only use now is as a target over which the chef must throw the pancake for the Greaze, struggle, on Shrove Tuesday. The whole school used to join in the greaze, but now it is restricted to one representative from each form. The winner, who has managed to hold on to the largest bit or bits of pancake, is rewarded with a golden guinea, which is quickly taken back and replaced with £1.5p. The origin of the greaze is unknown. The first clear reference is by Jeremy Bentham, Old Westminster, in 1755, but it was clearly well established by then.

Dr Henry George Liddell

He was Head Master 1846-55. Dean of Christchurch College 1855-91. Vice-Chancellor of Oxford 1870-74. Shortly before going to Westminster, Liddell wrote a Greek Lexicon with Robert Scott, Master of Balliol College. A story was told that when taking the 6<sup>th</sup> Form at Westminster Liddell often objected to the use of some Greek word to be met with the retort, 'Please Sir, I found it used thus in your lexicon' to which Liddell would reply 'Scott wrote that part'. This gave rise to the Westminster epigram:-

'Two men wrote a Lexicon, Liddell and Scott;

Some parts were clever, while some parts were not.

Hear, all ye learned, and read me this riddle,

How

the wrong parts wrote Scott and the right parts wrote Liddell'

Liddell was the father of Alice Pleasance Liddell, Lewis Carroll's Alice. She was born in 19 Dean's Yard, which at that time was the Head Master's house.

School Motto .

The

original school motto is said to have been 'Memores fecere merendo'. This is probably a corruption of Virgil's Aeniad vi, 664 'Sui memores alios fecere merendo' (They shall be remembered for their merits). It was also adopted as his motto by Lord Jellicoe. The current motto 'Dat Deus incrementum' 1 Corinthians, 3,6, (God gives growth) has not been traced earlier than 1732. ): It appears with the coat of arms on the stairway leading up School, where John Carleton once translated it for a passing tourist, as 'Marks & Spencer'.

## VIVATS

The official report of Lancaster Herald of the coronation of James II (23<sup>rd</sup> April 1685) records 'And it is to be noted that when the QUEEN entered the choir, the King's Scholars of Westminster School, in Number Forty, all in Surplices, being placed in a gallery adjoining to the Great Organ-Loft, Entertained Her Majesty with this short Prayer or Salutation, VIVAT REGINA MARIA; which they continued to Sing until HIS MAJESTY entered the Choir, whom they entertained in this like manner with this Prayer or Salutation, VIVAT JACOBUS REX, which they continued to sing until His Majesty ascended the Theatre.' Since then the scholars have sung the 'Vivats' at every coronation.

After the Jubilee Service in June 2013 Her Majesty lunched in College Hall, where we shall be dining this evening. She remarked to the Head Master 'The Vivat sent a shiver down my spine, suddenly taking me back sixty years.'

Unlike Eton the Westminster Scholar's change their title with the sex of the monarch. When King George VI died we instantly changed from being King's Scholars to Queen's Scholars.

Westminster is the only school to spell Head Master as two separate words. St. Paul's uses the term High Master.

John Dudley Carleton was up Home-boarders 1922-1927 and then went up Merton College, Oxford. He was an Assistant Master at Westminster from 1932-1941 and 1945-49. 1941-1945 he was attached to the War Office and Special Forces. He was Under Master and Master of the King's/Queen's Scholars 1949-1957. Head Master 1957-1970. He was devoted to the school and an expert on its history. He is buried in the Abbey. He admitted that he spent most of his time at Oxford in the Bodleian Library studying material relevant to Westminster Abbey rather than texts required for History Schools. As a result he left with a 4th class honours degree, the only Head Master at Westminster, or any other of the great public schools, not to have had a 1st class honours degree. He was full of anecdotes about the school. He was showing a group of Chinese educationalists round the school; they were very interested in introducing elite schools in their country. Over lunch John told them of the importance of maintaining school traditions and proceeded to let his imagination run riot, with the help of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'. Long afterwards he woke up at night wondering if he had condemned Chinese schoolboys to being flogged, roasted or tossed in a blanket.

Once in the 1950s John Carleton was giving lunch in College Hall to an Australian sheep farmer, who was shocked to discover that meat was still rationed in England. On his return to Australia he donated a shipment of two hundred carcasses of frozen lamb to the school. A generous gesture, but we did get tired of lamb in some form or another on every day except Friday.

At the Westminster Ball five years ago, pre-prandial drinks were being served in College Garden. Suddenly everyone was startled by a shattering explosion. A tray of empty glasses had been left in the sun; they were then filled with ice-cold wine and a moment later they all burst.

John (Mad Jack) Mytton

Born in 1796 to an old and often eccentric line of Shropshire Squires. Admitted to Westminster School in 1807; expelled in 1811 for fighting with the masters. Went to Harrow, expelled after 3 Days. Then educated by a series of tutors on whom he played numerous practical jokes including the introduction of a horse into the tutor's bedroom while he was asleep. He went up to Cambridge, taking with him 2,000 bottles of port to sustain him in his studies. He embarked on the Grand Tour and aged 16 was commissioned in his local militia yeomanry regiment. Later he joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars and spent a year in France with the army of occupation after the defeat of Napoleon. He spent his time drinking and gambling. At the age of 21 he received his full inheritance, which he proceeded to spend prodigally.

He devoted himself to sporting activities, especially fox hunting and shooting. He often went out naked whatever the weather. He was fond of and would drink up to six bottles of port at a sitting washed down with brandy. He killed a horse by making it drink a bottle of port. Once, when drunk, he cured the hiccups by setting light to his nightshirt with a candle.

He was several times arrested for debt and died of alcoholism aged 38 in the King's Bench Prison.

PINK

By 1830 light blue was well established as Eton's athletic colour. In 1831 Eton rowed in 'a blue check and the Westminsters had only their white shirts'. In 1836 both teams rowed in blue and white check shirts. The school tradition is that at the next race the crews rowed for choice of colour and having won, Westminster chose pink. The Eton tradition is that they won and chose light blue. Regrettably there seems to be no foundation for this tradition, though the school colour does date from that race. The Town Boy Water Ledger for 1837 records 'As last year our colours and the Etonians' were nearly the same, it was thought well to change them, and instead of the original blue and white, pink and white was (sic) chosen. Our dress was white rowing shirts cut off at the arms, and trimmed round with pink;....The boat was also painted pink. House colours were adopted in 1878, but the colours seem to have been chosen without any significance.

Robert Southey was admitted to the school in 1788. In 1792 he produced a journal called 'Flagellant'. The 5<sup>th</sup> number contained an article criticising corporal punishment which Southey described as the invention of the devil. He was expelled.



Judge George Jeffreys

Shrewsbury School 1652-59, St. Paul's School 1659-61 , Westminster School 1661-62,.  
Notorious for the Bloody Assizes following the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685 He had a vindictive manner in court, believed to have been suffering severe pain from kidney disease. 160-170 rebels (popularly 700) convicted of treason and executed. However Jeffreys had no choice but to pass death sentence, which was then compulsory for treason. The King had the option of commuting the sentences under the prerogative of mercy, which he refused to exercise.

Ben Jonson

Born 1572. His father, a clergyman in Annandale, died two months before Ben was born. Two years later his mother married a master bricklayer and the family moved to London. Ben went to a school in St. Martin's Lane. A friend of the family paid for him to go to Westminster School. At Westminster his talents were recognised by William Camden , then an assistant master. He wanted to go to Cambridge , but his stepfather insisted that he be apprenticed to him as a bricklayer. He built a garden wall in Lincoln's Inn.

Ben Jonson volunteered to serve with the English regiments of Francis Vere in Flanders, where he killed an enemy soldier in single combat. On his return to England in about 1586 Jonson abandoned bricklaying and became a playwright and an actor. By 1597 he was an established playwright with Philip Henslowe's company, the Admiral's Men. Apparently he was not a very good actor. In 1616 he received a yearly royal pension of 100 marks, but he fell into disfavour at court. After two strokes he died in 1637. An admirer of his work bought a grave site in Westminster Abbey on the north aisle of the nave, in a vertical grave covered by a stone 18 inches square marked 'O RARE BEN JONSON'. His benefactor could only afford that small area of floor space.

Henry Paget Lord Uxbridge 1827 Marquis of Anglesey. Westminster 1777-84. Nothing eventful recorded at school. 1810 Ran off with and eventually married Lady Charlotte Wellesley, the wife of Wellington's younger brother Henry. When he was appointed to command of Wellington's cavalry before Waterloo, the Duke commented 'Well I shall make sure that he doesn't run off with me.' Lost a leg by almost the final cannon shot at Waterloo. Wellington who was nearby commented laconically 'By God Sir, you've lost your leg'., to which Paget replied equally laconically, 'By God Sir so I have'. He survived to become Field Marshal in 1846.

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