

SECTION 2 MOVING ON (1931 – 1939)

The 1930s was an era of consolidation for the new school against a background of national austerity. It was a time for improving academic and sporting achievements, a time for developing all-round education through extra-curricular activities and a time for making a positive impression in the neighbourhood. All these elements were essential if the school was to achieve its major aims - more pupils and a new and appropriate site to house them.

Much of what took place reflected everyday matters.

The prospectus remained largely unchanged, certainly in terms of curriculum, although fees were increased slightly in 1935. Uniform was unaltered although a designated all-white PE Kit was brought in.

House events were keenly contested. Sports Day seemingly always attracted perfect weather or, as the editor of the magazine put it, 'Jupiter Pluvius relented' (!) and large numbers of parents were in attendance. House cross-country was run in March, over Epsom Downs, with different courses for juniors and seniors, a tradition that continued well into the 1980s. House plays were put on annually and were often written by the boys themselves. Abbey had more success than the other three houses and the adjudicators of the time gave an honest appraisal of what they saw.

"Carew's play was rather dull. It could have been acted better, the players could have spoken more clearly and they had a tendency to forget their lines"

If you're wondering, Carew didn't win that year!

The 'punishment book' showed a healthy number of entries, and misdemeanours which resulted in the ultimate sanction included:

- 'use of bad language to prefects'
- 'leaving school without notice'
- 'putting gum in another boy's hair'
- 'ignored instructions to go to see the Headmaster'
- 'copied homework'
- 'cheated'

Perhaps the most serious incident of the decade happened when a boy was suspended for a week for pushing a girl off a bus thus spraining her wrist. Those using the 164 bus were then split into three groups of six with the three groups getting different buses home 'pour encourager les autres'. The eldest were kept until the 4.55 bus!

Finances were tight of course and in 1935 a voluntary United Clubs' Subscription was started, with only one dissenter, to pay for taking school teams to matches, for producing Ebba's Scrip and for other extraneous expenses. UCS continued until the 1980s.

Charitable causes were not forgotten. In 1935 the proceeds of the school play, an impressive £32, were sent to help those suffering in Jarrow. Each house was encouraged to collect 'Hospital Money' and reports in the magazine often made reference to the difficulty of getting money out of Form V. No change there then! This developed in future years into a Helping Hand Fund for various causes and now manifests itself in House Charities.

There were sadnesses of course. One of the original masters WG Turner died at the tragically early age of 32 and two boys died as a result of accidents.

Academically, as numbers increased, so did achievements and more and more boys were passing their Schools Certificate often with distinction. This was partly due to some boys being admitted as scholars whose fees were waived. The Headmaster had not however encouraged 'pot-hunting', replacing prizes with certificates as early as 1932.

Inspections of the school by representatives of the University of London regularly took place although their recommendations were not always welcome. As Clark commented:

"Mr Ripman sent me his report. I have carefully considered his two suggestions but am not prepared to adopt either"

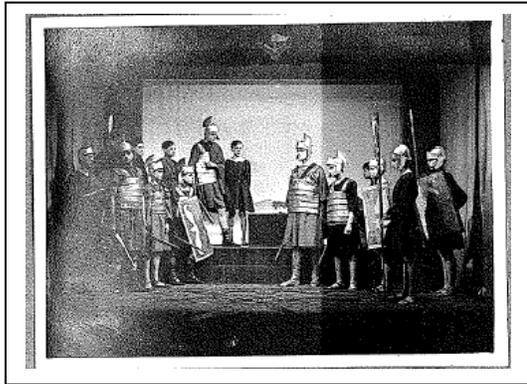
Would that OFSTED could be dealt with that easily!

As has been mentioned great strides were being made in sport. Both the major sports of football and cricket were seeing stronger opposition and improved results with the 1936 teams particularly excelling



In this particular year only 3 games out of 11 were lost in football and only 1 out of 8 in cricket. Most other games were won. In 1937, rather underplayed in Ebba's Scrip, there was an extraordinary individual performance in the first eleven cricket team from bowler John Heard. He took 6 for 9 v City Freeman's, 7 for 13 v Richmond, 5 for 11 v Wallington and 10 for 8 v Godalming! Sadly Heard was to become a victim of war.

Without doubt the greatest achievements outside the classroom during the 1930s centred round school plays. A new master Angus Wilson had joined the school and he produced an annual play with still a very small 'pool' of potential actors. Lest it be thought that 'simple' plays were put on it need only be mentioned that Macbeth, Julius Caesar, The Rivals and The Birds by Aristophanes were amongst the early productions - challenges indeed.



Three performances were put on each December and without appropriate facilities at the school other venues, including Church House in Church Street and the Epsom Lecture Hall in Station Road, had to be used and anyone or everyone was required to help. The Birds, as an example of 5th Century BC Athenian drama, was particularly challenging. Stage sets and scenery were made by boys and staff, props were provided by parents and local businesses, music was composed 'in house' and costumes, including the large number of beaks, were made by mums! All this resulted in a play described in the press as 'a triumph for the producer and his young artists'.

So skilled was Wilson at producing things dramatic that he was asked to be the pageant master charged with organising a pageant to celebrate in 1937 the founding of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell. All schools enacted in public an 'exciting' scene from Epsom's past but it soon became clear that there had been precious few exciting moments in Epsom's past. Whilst Stoneleigh Mixed School could no doubt make something of 'A Modern Derby' Epsom County Boys had the dubious honour of enacting the father of George III having a fight with a chimney sweep at Epsom in 1740!

A hugely significant development towards the end of this decade was the increasing influence of Old Boys of the School.

An Old Boys Football Club had been formed as early as 1933 and it quickly proved itself to be worthy of much better opposition being promoted to the first division of the Sutton league in

Other OB events organised then were dances, smoking concerts and rambles and a not wholly successful dramatic society called the Ebban players was started.

Alongside the need for a new school site the Headmaster was constantly seeking better playing fields and strong representations were made to acquire land adjoining the sewage farm off Hook road. This comprised 13.2 acres which would have been more than enough as well as being close at hand. Presumably the aroma from the sewage farm would have been worth a goal or two start in games against other schools! Unfortunately once more there was 'dragging of feet' from the authorities and eventually the land was given to the newly formed Ewell and Stoneleigh FC.

Meanwhile back at Half Mile Bush there was still the problem of the man, Mr Anscombe, who lived in the tin hut and who had now claimed 'squatter's rights. In 1934 it was decided to send in the sanitary inspectors to evict him and one would think that this would have suited Clark. Not entirely it appears since 'if he should be turned out the question of storing our sports gear and mower will have to be faced'

Dominating all thoughts of Headmaster, staff, governors and parents was exactly how long the wait would be for a new school and public occasions such as Speech days were used to fuel the debate. As early as 1932 the speaker, a member of Surrey County Council, admitted that the Epsom site was not ideal.

"it is not the worst in the county but I would not say it is not the second worst!"

A year later a decision was to be made which could have meant a vastly different future for the school.

Hookfield House, a splendid residence in West Hill, plus 1.75 acres of land was offered to Epsom Urban Council for £2500.



The Headmaster and Governors were clearly enthusiastic feeling that with relatively little conversion it could accommodate 300 boys and provide facilities 'for many years to come'. The Council refused to go beyond £2000 and as a consequence were heavily criticised by the local press for their intransigence.

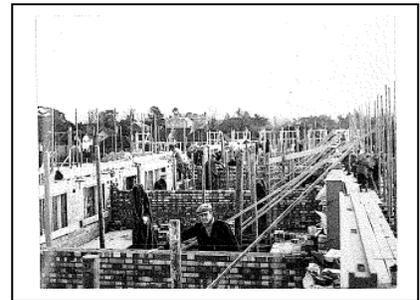
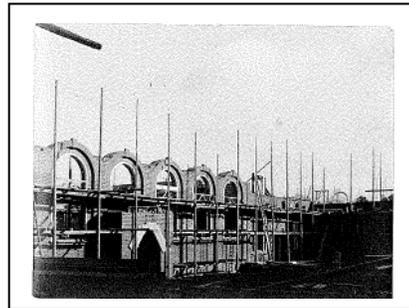
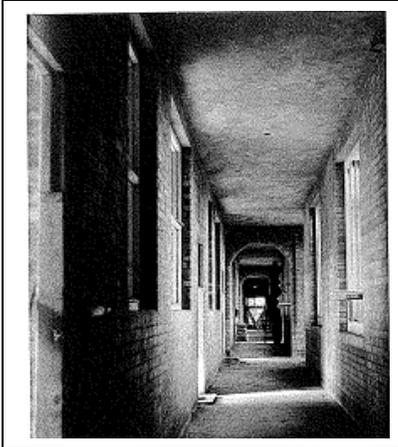
"Thus it looks as if at big cost there will be built a new school whereas 'Hookfield' could have been adapted at a considerably less cost. For the sake of £500 there are apparently to be spent thousands of pounds." How different the future would have been if this scheme had been undertaken!

There were certainly going to be thousands of pounds spent but not for a few years and all watched in frustration as funds were given to other similar ventures. In 1934 it was agreed

that a new Girls' School would be built in Sutton and a new Boys' School in Wallington, both at that time under Surrey's 'mantle' and when the opening of Raynes Park School for Boys was announced Clark's irritation boiled over into bitterness.

"I can only admire the strategic skill of the (Surrey Education) Committee in thus completing the encirclement of Epsom with new schools"

Eventually, however, it was announced in 1935 that a new school would be built on the Hessele Grove site and the 'Troglodytic' life was about to end. At a cost of approximately £40000, equivalent to about £7 million today, work began in 1936.



In May 1938, four months before boys went to the new site its luxuries, real for the time, were described thus. It was to accommodate 490 boys which would necessitate an extra three members of staff. The main form rooms were to be on the south side. There would be a gymnasium, a handicraft room and one of the largest art rooms in Surrey. There would also be a library so big that the school had insufficient books to fill it, two laboratories, a geography room and a lecture room complete with epidiascope. Because of the distance from local shops a tuck shop was to be opened and hot dinners were available.

The only major alteration to the original plan was to site the main building nearer to the Hessele Grove entrance to allow more space for games on the school field, all attempts in finding playing fields elsewhere now having failed.

Locally, thoughts turned to renaming the school since Epsom County School for Boys was clearly a misnomer for a school in Ewell! To mirror the example set by Rosebery there were press calls for it to be called Glyn County School for Boys but this idea was turned down by the Education Committee on the spurious grounds that to name an establishment after someone still alive would encourage others to seek fame in this way. Some years later the next Headmaster spoke of his frustration at the school being known in the neighbourhood as the 'Hessele Grove' School which he thought gave totally the wrong impression!

The official opening of the school took place in February 1939 and was carried out by Sir Philip Henriques (Chairman of Surrey County Council)



As with any visit of dignitaries to the school it was made clear what was expected of the boys.

'Each form room to have notices eg timetable, list of monitors, list of correction signs in English - each notice to be fastened with 4 PINS! Two days in advance desks will be inspected and paper, rubbish and superfluties are to be removed. Each house is to display its badge, motto and name at the top and to have plenty of notices.'

If a modern Head of House were to ask students to remove their superfluties they might get some strange looks!

A hugely ironic corollary to the opening of the new building was that the first Mayoral banquet was held there in Summer 1939 because it was just about the only hall in Epsom large enough for 200 people to be able to sit down to a meal!



So the school was suitably housed, was respected locally and was rapidly becoming extremely successful in both the academic and sporting spheres. If Clark and his staff were hoping to have a few years of stability, however, these hopes were to be rudely dashed by the onset of war.