

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL AND ITS RECORDS

By J. B. WHITMORE, F.S.A.

BEFORE dealing with the records available as sources for *The Record of Old Westminsters* compiled by Messrs. G. F. R. Barker and G. H. Stenning, and others which have come to light since, it may be useful to have a very brief history of the school itself.

From quite early times the Benedictine Monastery of Westminster had a grammar school in addition to a school for novices. The names of several of the headmasters are preserved among the Abbey muniments and the names of three, or perhaps four, of the scholars are known.

On the dissolution of the Monastery in 1540 Henry VIII founded a collegiate church, as the seat of a bishopric, with, attached to it, a grammar school for 40 boys. This continued until, under Mary, the Monastery was restored, with the school. The revived Monastery was again dissolved by Elizabeth, who restored her father's foundation, but without the bishopric.

Except for a short period under the Commonwealth the school remained under the control of the Dean and Chapter until the passing of the Public Schools Act in the middle of the last century.

Under Elizabeth's foundation the school consisted of 40 Queen's Scholars, with a number of Town Boys; to these were added later four exhibitioners, known as Bishop's Boys, under the benefaction of Archbishop Williams.

The school had the right to certain scholarships at Christ Church, Oxford, and Trinity College, Cambridge; these were, until comparatively recently, open to Queen's Scholars only.

From this very short summary it is clear that the first place to look for the early records of the school was among the Westminster Abbey muniments. They contain a great deal of information, but this is confined almost entirely to the Queen's Scholars and the Bishop's Boys, the primary sources, apart from a certain number of papers relating exclusively to the school, being the Acts of Chapter and the Treasurer's accounts. The Town Boys, that is boys who were neither Queen's Scholars nor Bishop's Boys, were, apparently, a private venture of the headmaster for the time being, and the College was not concerned with them.

Unfortunately the muniments are not complete even as to the Queen's Scholars; we have complete lists of the boys elected annually to Oxford or Cambridge from 1561, but the complete lists of Queen's Scholars do not begin until 1663.

The earliest official list of scholars is contained in the Foundation Deed of 1540; in addition to the deed itself preserved among the muniments, there exist two drafts, one in the Public Record Office, and the other in the British Museum. The former agrees with the actual deed, the latter does not, and for that reason is of special interest. The list of the scholars in it differs considerably from the list in the Foundation Deed, only about half of the names appearing in both lists. In both cases the list of scholars is followed by a list of four choristers; these also differ, but two of the boys shown in the Museum drafts as choristers appear in the Foundation Deed in the list of scholars, and are marked as former choristers. Clearly then, the draft in the Museum is appreciably earlier than the draft in the Public Record Office, and the Foundation Deed. My colleague Dr. Radcliffe and I concluded, and I think the conclusion is justified, that the draft in the Museum probably gives the names of the boys in the school at or shortly after the dissolution of the Monastery in January, 1540, and that the difference between the lists represents the changes in the school due to boys leaving and new boys being admitted between that date and December, 1540, the date of the Foundation Deed.

Following close on the Foundation Deed we have for a few years quarterly lists of boys "in commons," that is, boys who, as the 40 scholars, were entitled to be fed as part of the College, and similar lists recur in varying forms under the Tudor sovereigns.

To supplement these early records we have some private accounts of Alexander Nowell, headmaster from 1542 to 1555, among the Brasenose College manuscripts, now deposited in the Bodleian Library. These refer mostly to 1542 and 1543, and record payments made for boys for clothing, books, etc., and for nursing them when sick; one entry is interesting, as a boy is charged for "half a grammar." Presumably two boys shared one grammar.

It was nearly always the financial side of the College administration which brought into being such lists as have survived, as, for example, a record of payments made when the 40 scholars

were, owing to an outbreak of plague, moved to Chiswick, the boys' names being set out, and the Treasurer's accounts in the early part of the sixteenth century contain the names of scholars for whom payments were in arrears.

The College was not interested primarily in the boys as individuals but rather as a source of expense, which had to be accounted for in the way it affected its finance. One may say that they were of greater interest, in military parlance, to "Q" than to "A."

But the "A" side had its importance too; before a boy could become a Queen's Scholar, and therefore a matter of concern to "Q," he had to be admitted. In the early days admission was undoubtedly by nomination by the members of the Chapter, and the Chapter Books have supplied the names of boys admitted on to the foundation from 1547 to 1554. At this time the boys boarded with the members of the Chapter, and examination of their wills is throwing light on the identity of the boys boarding with them.

The date when admission by nomination was changed to the later system of election and admission is not known; probably the change came with Elizabeth's refoundation; it had certainly taken place by 1580.

Election was by a body of electors representing the College, Christ Church, Oxford, and Trinity College, Cambridge, and from such documents as have survived, it seems probable that three copies of the result of each election, recording the names, ages, parentage, and county of origin of the boys elected were engrossed, one for each of the electing bodies. Unfortunately, none have survived among the muniments of either Christ Church or Trinity College, and the Abbey series does not start until 1708, although a certain number of isolated earlier lists have survived at Westminster, and a few, no doubt from Christ Church, have found their way into the Bodleian Library. The earliest, that for 1580, was noticed, for the first time, this year.

But "Election" did not necessarily mean that a boy became a Queen's Scholar; there are instances of the same boy appearing in more than one list having been "elected." Admission, no doubt as vacancies occurred, was also necessary; four short lists of such admissions have been preserved in a most unlikely place, where they were discovered by the Keeper of the Abbey Muniments, Mr. L. E. Tanner, M.V.O., F.S.A., a few years ago.

The College kept particulars of all leases granted of its property, and between entries of these are notes of the admissions of Queen's Scholars in 1609 and 1610. The most interesting of the names is that of Humphrey Henchman, Bishop of London during the Great Plague, of whom Izaak Walton records that "no one mentioned him without some veneration for his life and excellent learning."

Influence may still have played a part in the election. In May, 1644, Dorothy Moore, afterwards the wife of John Dury, wrote to Samuel Hartlib begging for his help in getting her nephew Thomas Caulfield elected, for "there is voyces to be procured." I am indebted to Professor G. H. Turnbull for calling my attention to this letter in the possession of Lord Delamere.

About this time, too, as well as in the later years of Elizabeth, the school frequently addressed collections of verses, either of congratulation or condolence, on appropriate occasions, to persons of importance. Some of these still exist among the manuscripts in the British Museum and elsewhere, and have supplied names of scholars not known from other sources.

Under the Commonwealth the College, as an ecclesiastical body was abolished, but Parliament set up a body of Governors for the school and certain charities. Some of their accounts are in the *Cambridge University Library* and others are in the Public Record Office, among the records of the King's Remembrancer and of the Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer of the Exchequer. The latter contain some original receipts for payments made to the Bishop's Boys.

The education of the Town Boys formed no part of the financial responsibilities of the College. Payments made by them were the perquisites of the headmaster or his assistants; if the headmaster kept a record of their admission that would have been his private property, and in fact some headmasters did take their admission books away when they left. There are now at the school admission books for the years 1715 to 1752; they were found among the family papers of a former headmaster. In the same books are preserved lists of the boys in the under school, and the separate payments received from them each quarter. There seem to have been no fixed fees; perhaps the headmaster made the best bargain he could when each boy was admitted. There was no regular system of quarterly or terminal payments; some boys paid quarterly,

others twice a year, perhaps a small payment at Lady Day or Midsummer and a larger payment at Christmas, and others again would make one payment only in the year, at Christmas, but it is remarkable how consistent each boy was in the times of his payments.

The admissions are missing from 1752 to 1764, and from 1788 to 1805. It was a custom for some boys to make or get lists of their schoolfellows and some of these, preserved among the family papers of former scholars, have helped to supply names for the two gaps in the admissions, but the most important supplementary source of information is a manuscript which has only recently come to light. It is a cash book kept by John Smith, an usher at the school, covering the period from 1788 to 1802, formerly among the family papers of the Spencer-Stanhopes of Cannon Hall near Leeds, and now in the Brotherton Library, Leeds University. Its importance was recognised by Dr. Offor, the Librarian of the Library, who was for a short time a master at the school. In it Smith recorded every payment he received as usher, the person by whom it was made, the name of the boy for whom it was made, and the nature and often the actual place of the payment. Smith also added comments occasionally. In 1791 he entered a payment for a boy "all I shall get for him" and reckoned that he and another usher had been cheated of another guinea between them. In 1792 he received for Humphrey Donaldson "5 guineas gratuitous, the manner and civility of Mr. Donaldson more than doubles his present in my estimation, as he expressed himself satisfied with what I had done for his son." In later life Donaldson went out to Western Australia with the Governor, Sir James Stirling, also an Old Westminster, was appointed Sheriff of Perth, and died there shortly afterwards.

The book contains about 1,700 payments, affecting rather more than 500 boys. When the payments were analysed they provided much useful information about boys already known to have been at the school, and in addition gave us a number of new names. The surname of one of them is probably known almost all over the British Isles; Thomas Read Kemp founded and gave his name to Kemp Town, Brighton.

For those who contemplate compiling a school register it may be useful to have set out the information the editors of the 1928 edition of *The Record of Old Westminsters* aimed at giving about each boy.

They tried to give in addition to the date of birth or baptism, and death or burial, the boy's parentage in full, that is the name, address and occupation not only of the boy's father, but also of his maternal grandfather, with, of course, the name of the boy's mother; the boy's career at school, with any school prize won, or distinction in sport; his professional career in full, with, in the cases of boys entering the armed forces, a note of the major campaigns or actions in which they were engaged; the names and dates of any publications, or if these were many, the names of the more important; the date of marriage, with the name of the wife and particulars of *her* father. If the boy was mentioned in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, that was noted.

The admission books of some of the Cambridge colleges give the schools from which boys came; other records which sometimes give information as to schools are the Cadet papers and Writer's petitions of the East India Company, applications for admission to the eighteenth-century Naval College at Portsmouth, and occasionally, though very rarely, letters filed with the Commander-in-Chief's Memoranda among the War Office Records in the Public Record Office.

The foregoing pages must read rather like a library catalogue, but it is to be hoped that the very various documents referred to may provide some ideas of possible sources from which to supplement defective school records.

The first printed attempt at a record of boys who had been educated at the school appeared in 1788, when Joseph Welch, the assistant of Ginger, the School bookseller, printed *A List of the Queen's Scholars of St. Peter's College, Westminster*, giving the names of the boys elected annually to Oxford and Cambridge with the names of the King's Scholars from 1663, with very brief biographical notes. There was apparently some considerable demand for it as he had been supplying manuscript copies for some years previously. This work was re-edited and brought up to date by C. B. Phillimore in 1852 under the title of *Alumni Westmonasterienses*. In 1892 the late Mr. G. R. F. Barker and A. H. Stenning printed *The Westminster School Register*, containing the names of all known Old Westminsters who had been at school between 1764 and 1883. This was superseded in 1928 by *The Record of Old Westminsters*, by the same authors, which included all known Old Westminsters. A supplement appeared in 1938.