

DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS

CHESTERFIELD SCHOOL

by Derek Crust

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WITH COUNTY BOROUGH status, and as an 'excepted district' under the 1944 Education Act, Chesterfield has enjoyed a measure of freedom in the development of its schools, and has put this freedom to excellent use. It has also enjoyed, to an unusual degree, one natural benefit of a close community, in that many of its more successful sons (and daughters) have contributed by gift, deed and example to the growth and development of its schools, which have also had the advantage of a good deal of support from local industry

and commerce. The family links remain today, so that the present Chesterfield School, for example, has two grandparents of current pupils on its governing body, and there are direct family connections going back over ninety years.

An amusing contrast, then, to look back to Chesterfield's National School report of 1837, when the number of children in attendance is stated to be 'very small, compared with the expectation to which the population of the town and neighbourhood might justly

lead: and the committee lament the existence of so much indifference on the part of many parents to the religious education of their children'. That it may not have been so much indifference as interdenominational hostility at the root of the trouble might be inferred from a report of a meeting in 1871, before the election of Chesterfield's first School Board, under the provisions of the 1870 Act, when one speaker is reported as saying 'No peril attached to any religious body but one, and that was the Church of England, which did all it could to dominate over the others, and force its principles down the throats of the working class'. There is something of the ring of contemporary Ulster in the words, but I believe no bloodshed followed!

English compromise triumphed, however, and Chesterfield was able to cope competently and swiftly, as it has again in more recent times, with the problems of re-organization. **THE SCHOOL**

Chesterfield School was established in 1594, as the Free Grammar School, under the authority of Queen Elizabeth's Charter, and with an endowment under the will of one Godfrey Foljambe of an annual sum of £13.6.8d. 'towards the maintenance of a schoolmaster'. Like many other schools, it went through a lean period at the end of the eighteenth century, but rallied and gained steadily in strength and reputation from the middle of the nineteenth.

The school's most recent move was from its



*Above:
The front of the
main building
with the Science
laboratory on the
left and the
assembly hall
on the right*

*Left:
Students at work
in the
language
laboratory*

former home on Sheffield Road to the present buildings on Brookside in 1967, although for some years prior to this the Science block had been situated on the present site, with boys commuting from Sheffield Road, 'presumably causing some time-tabling problems' as Mr E. G. Price, MA(OXON), the present headmaster, neatly understates it.

To see the move to Brookside through to its completion had been the long-expressed wish of the previous headmaster, Mr W. E. Glister MA(OXON), JP, now living in retirement in Sheffield, so that Mr Price did not take over until 1968.

THE SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Planned during the period when Ewart Taylor was Director of Education in Chesterfield, the school enjoys the advantages inherent in being purpose-built, to good modern design, on a generous site in pleasant, residential surroundings. The main buildings are arranged in the form of a hollow square, with the various sections grouped into three main areas: the assembly and dining areas, science and crafts and the main classroom block. The science laboratories occupy a single-storey wing.

Opening directly from the pleasant, well-lit entrance hall is the school assembly hall, which has a fine lectern, desk and other items donated by former pupils. The school has its own kitchens, providing, each day, around seven hundred meals, which are generally acknowledged to be very good, in spite of the schoolboy tradition of critical comment. There is a well-equipped gymnasium, with one complete wall of windows, and a very fine indoor swimming-pool, where the usual activity had the added stimulus, on the day of our visit, of a drop of some degrees in the water temperature, caused by the current fuel crisis.

The centre of the hollow square was originally designed for use as an outdoor theatre, with concrete pillars forming a stage actually under one section of the building, but its use for this purpose has proved to be marginally unsatisfactory: the height of the surrounding structure always shields the proposed auditorium from the sun.

The main corridors in the front part of the building are used for exhibitions of paintings and drawings, sometimes of an individual's work, sometimes of the work of a group or form.

COURSES OF STUDY

A fully-equipped language laboratory offers good facilities for the study of French, German and Spanish, with the aid of 'assistants' from the three countries. Associated with these language studies are links with schools abroad (notably Troyes, which is 'twinned' with Chesterfield), and there are many exchanges and visits arranged. A new development this coming year will be the visit of fifteen Chesterfield School boys to Bourgen-Bresse, as part of a comprehensive linking programme between Derbyshire and the Département de l'Ain. The boys will bring their French counterparts back with them to board at Chesterfield School during part of the Summer holiday.

The school is quick to adopt the better new



ideas in educational development. It was a pilot school for the County in Nuffield Physics, and applies broadly Nuffield principles in biology and chemistry, while SMP has been adopted as the modern mathematics syllabus throughout the school. It will be one of two pilot schools in the county for a new history scheme, the Schools Council History Project, which approaches the study of history in a Nuffield 'stimulate-them-to-enquire' way. Flexibility in the sixth form permits a choice of courses leading to full A level or to a combination of O and A level subjects, the full range of options offered extending from Applied Mathematics with Engineering Drawing through to a Classical Studies course, combining the study of Latin with a general approach to classical antiquity. An Environmental Studies course in the sixth form has looked at many of our moral and social problems, with contributions from visiting speakers. Work on a project concerned with pollution problems was exhibited at Sheffield Science Fair in 1972.

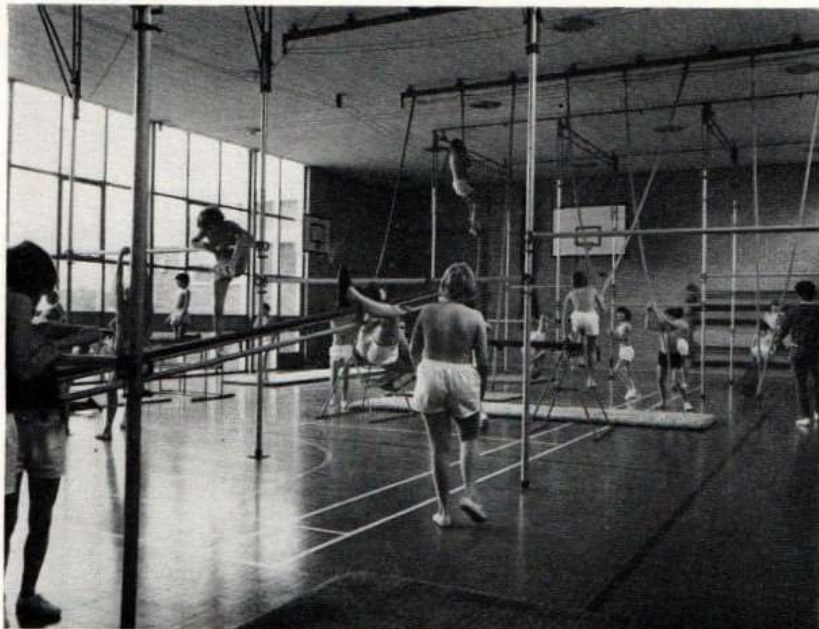
ATHLETICS AND GAMES

Chesterfield School is very strong in athletics and games, and is quite exceptionally well-endowed with sports facilities. The playing-fields were extended and laid out for the All-England Schools Athletics Championships in 1961, before the construction of the main buildings, and they retain, from this event, a 440 yard running-track, full provision for field events and courts for basket-ball, as well as both Soccer and Rugby fields. The excellent indoor swimming-pool produces some fine swimmers, one boy of 14 (D. Lowe) having full international status: but it is symptomatic of the school's philosophy that, while there is great pride in having these 'high-flyers', the emphasis is on the achievement, by every boy, of basic standards in swimming and lifesaving. The gymnasts have a good record, too, and in all these activities, as in their academic work, the boys are encouraged to use their own initiative, and to train in their spare time at their own choice of sport.

*Above:
Pupils in the
school's
swimming pool,
pausing for a
word from their
instructor*



*Right:
The assembly
hall showing the
stage platform*



*Left:
The well
equipped
gymnasium*

*Below:
A pupil at work
in the metalwork
room*

THE HEADMASTER

It has always been something of an enigma to me that a school can come, in a sense, to resemble its headmaster, when all the arguments of physical mass would seem to infer the opposite! And this in spite of all the seemingly desperate factors, the changing pupil-population, a wide variety of staff, each with the distinct and positive qualities that teaching demands. Chesterfield School is alive with good-humoured, unfussed and creative activity, in which one can see very much a projection of the headmaster's personal qualities.

'I am very fortunate in my staff', says Mr Price, 'each so competent in his own field that I can see my own role as something rather similar to that of chairman of a board of directors'. Mr Price is a former student of Halesowen Grammar School and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where he read modern languages: the well-known sporting tradition of St Edmund Hall may well underlie his present keen interest in all the sporting activities of the school. It was particularly interesting to learn that, at the beginning of the Eoka separatist troubles in Cyprus, he was in command, for more than two years, of a camp for Jewish illegal immigrants, a period which he describes as, and one can well visualize as being, a rewarding and humanizing experience. Such personal contact with 'man's inhumanity to man' must be of value in seeing around and beyond the narrow academic view. 'We do not claim to represent an academic peak', says Mr Price. 'We have good Oxford and Cambridge contacts, averaging around five entrances a year, including one or two awards, and our O level results are above the national average, but our main concern is to help every boy here to achieve his full potential, over as wide a subject-area as possible: to provide our boys with as broad-based education as a sound basis for future personal development'.

I have come across some words of Miss Violet Markham, who, as Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee during the re-organization of the '30s, was a tireless worker in the cause of education in Chesterfield . . . 'I once read that greatness consists in taking the little things in life, and walking nobly among them. Fame and success may come to the few, but every child in our schools has it within himself or herself to win greatness in this real and abiding sense'.

THE SCHOOL MAGAZINE

Special mention should be made of the school magazine, *Cestrefeldian*, which is produced and printed entirely within the school. Although it was modestly said, 'we learn as we go along', the quality is really remarkably good. It gives reports of a wide range of extra-curricular activities and school societies, from which it would be unfair to single out any one, since space will not permit a review of them all.

Mr Price is naturally pleased that the major budgetary decision, to acquire a litho machine, can be seen now as entirely justified. Programmes for the school carol services and concerts — the school has an enthusiastic fifty-piece orchestra — and a host of other jobs can be produced economically, and with a good deal of educational value in the printing work itself.

RE-ORGANIZATION

In this time of general re-organization of English schools, what of the future here at Chesterfield School? From September 1974, Chesterfield adopts a 'Doncaster' plan, with seven Junior and two Senior High Schools. Entrance to the Senior High Schools will be by 'guided parental choice', the headmaster of the Junior High advising parents whether more would be gained by moving to the, broadly, more academic Senior High, or by staying at the, broadly, more vocational Junior High to the age of sixteen CSE and

some O level papers. An opportunity for a later choice comes at sixteen, when it will be possible to join the Sixth Form here direct from the Junior High School. Some broadening of the curriculum content and options at



Sixth Form level will probably be needed to cope with these changes, and a committee is currently working on this problem. Of course, all of these plans postulate the retention of something akin to the present examination system, and may need amendment to conform with new castings from the melting-pot of examination reform. This must surely be a good time for interested parents to press their own views to the appropriate bodies.

Silence reigns in the library



The arts and crafts room

