

# *Mitcham County Boys School History*

## The School Some Facts (Author Unknown)

The School was opened in September 1922, with about 70 boys under Mr. F G Hall as headmaster.

The idea of a secondary school was new to Mitcham and it took some time before the idea aroused any enthusiasm. Parents of prospective scholars were told that the building occupied by the School would shortly be replaced by something better and more suitable elsewhere. The original building, with alterations, is still being used - 27 years after.

Slow but steady progress and increased numbers continued and the first boys to pass school certificate did so in 1926. The School football and cricket teams played on the *News of the World*, "Bushes", the present Girl's County School ground and Mitcham Common ground and achieved a fair measure of success. OM's of those early days will remember with affection the School sports with the added attraction of the brass band from the Holborn Schools. Mention of the Holborn Schools recalls the swimming bath which was placed at the disposal of the School in the Summer months.

Mr. Hall left in 1929, and he recently retired after 18 years as headmaster of Ashton-in-Macklesfield Grammar School. After a term under the able guidance of Mr. Stephens, the present headmaster, Mr Doig arrived from Rutlish School, Merton Park.

One of the most important events that followed was the purchase of the present playing field at London Road in 1931. This playing field and all its misfortunes has been a feature of School life and worry ever since. It seems that it will be a long time before it is a fit condition for play.

Under Mr. Harrison and Mr. Clemas the first [plays were performed and 1931 also saw the beginning of the long run of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, starting with "Trial and Jury" and two short plays at the Masonic Hall, Merton. The present annual performances seen by ten times as many people owe much to the traditions laid down by these early performers.

The School changed from soccer to rugby football in 1932 and soon became proficient and successful under the new code.

Extra buildings were added in 1934, 1936 and 1938 and the School began to bear its present not unpleasant appearance.

In the meantime the numbers of pupils increased and the School became "Two form entry" with a corresponding increase in examination results. The first higher school success and direct university entry was in 1931.

The School scout troop was formed in 1933 by Mr. Reid and in 1939 numbered over 100 scouts.

A Parents' Committee was established and among many activities the Aesthetic Trophy and Summer term fairs may be remembered.

In such an atmosphere of expansion the war came and with it evacuation and a mixed school. The evacuation must have pleasant memories for the dwindling numbers who saw it out. The formation of the A.T.C. Barking Abbey, the Western County Schools

The return depleted the numbers but undismayed in 1942, was marred by the attention of flying bombs, but marked the introduction of harvest camps at Cheddar followed by the long list of visits to Medhurst. All activities were soon revived and with the return of war-service masters routine was again normal.

It is interesting to record that the School now numbers 400, and that a total of 1,921 pupils, including the girls at Weston, has passed into or through the School's hands since Underwood, No. 1.

The provision of public education was transformed by the Forster Act of 1870. The local School Board opened a School at Singlegate, Colliers Wood in 1874 and at sites in Mitcham in 1884 and 1897.

A great workhouse complex was established off Western Road, Mitcham which had its own schools, including the Holborn Schools in London Road famous for an excellent boys' band, much in demand to perform at summer fetes and village celebrations.

In 1906 secondary education became the responsibility of Surrey County Council and Mitcham County School for Boys was established in 1922. This picture was taken circa 1922/23 and shows Mr George Coe, father of Mick Coe, who attended the same school forty years later. The first boys to obtain a School Certificate did so in 1926.



Photograph courtesy Mick Coe Pupil 1958-1965

## Extract from the Mitchamian -1984

### MITCHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS

1922 - 1969.



In 1920 a conference was held in Mitcham under the Chairmanship of the late Alfred Mizen and it was decided to ask the County Council to establish a Secondary school for both boys and girls in Mitcham. Two years later, in 1922, the boys' school opened. The Urban District Council, having achieved one goal, pressed on and as a result of the pressures they exerted the site for the girl's school was acquired in 1926.

It may come as a surprise to many later pupils that the school was not at Commonside East but at Eastfields in the early days and it was only after some time had passed that the move took place. There is perhaps sense in the move in 1969 back to Eastfields, although I cannot see any myself!

The first Headmaster to be appointed was Dr. F.G. Hall, a taller and thinner built man who, I see from photographs that were taken in 1927 or 1928, had a moustach of similar style to Adolph Hitler and was, certainly in the pictures, going through a distinct & very noticeable approach to baldness. (This description in no way is intended to mean that his attitude was "Hitler like" and indeed I have not yet had any indication of his approach to the pupils or staff and it all happened long before my time at the school.

The second Headmaster was Mr. A.J. Doig. A man of whom I know much more and who was a very individual and talented Headmaster. Not only did he assemble a staff of teachers that were the envy of many other schools in the area for their, undoubtedly, talents and qualifications but who, more importantly worked, as a team, with great dedication in a sincere attempt to give every pupil the chance to learn as much as possible in their years at the school.

His great love was the music and words of Gilbert and Sullivan and during his time at the school he instituted a tradition of holding at least one opera each year. In the earlier days the school had not aspired to these heights and it says a lot for his hard work, ably assisted by some other staff members, that it was possible to see "House Full" notices at the Baths Hall on almost every night that the performances were staged.

Among the team of staff that served under Mr. Doig it would be imprudent not to give a mention to Mr. Hopton (Chemistry) who took great delight in creating experiments & had a great knowledge of his subject. (He also on one memorable day caused an enormous "Stink" at a very appropriate time to the great delight of most of the school). "Gaffer" Mr. Cook whose talents on the Rugby field fell on deaf ears when at University and who, in later years, had a habit of dozing at odd times. Mr. Whiteley, known otherwise as "Weary Willy" who wrote a whole series of physics books and was a tall person who seemed at times to wear trousers a bit too short. Mr. Clemas "Dicky Bird" who taught English, left the stationery cupboard open, quite often, I am sure in the full knowledge that someone would arrange to filch a few odd sheets of paper that in the wartime days were so hard to obtain. Mr. Marsh a much loved and understanding person whose memory was almost photographic. "Cackles" Stephens whose parrots and tales of his days at school were much appreciated. Mr. Gush, who perhaps may never have realised just how much he was envied by many of the pupils when he decided to take as his wife the much admired Miss Juett who taught History. It seemed no one wanted to miss her lessons! There are always some staff who come and leave fairly soon and the war broke up the service of some who went to the forces and returned later.

Mr. Judge, Mr. Lewis, Mr. Woodiwiss, Miss Whitelegg and many more served under Mr Doig. Perhaps unique for a time was Mrs Purbrick who taught Art at the boy's school and in earlier years, as Miss Clarke, had spent a number of years teaching at the girl's school. Her Husband, Mr. Purbrick being a Master at the boy's school and one who, apart from his ordinary duties, took a great interest in the sporting side and, especially, Athletics. To try to list all the others, Mr. Bottoms, Mr. Raggett etc; etc; would fill so much space but would French ever have been the same without Msr. Monnaie?

I was quite surprised to find out that up to 1935 the school was light by "GAS LAMPS" in parts if not all of the buildings. The sub for the Old Boys Assn in 1935 was 1/- per annum. When Mitcham became a Borough in 1934 (27th August) Mr. Doig made haste to obtain permission to use the coat of arms as the school badge (As heading this ite

The death of King George V. and the later problems with King Edward the looming problems in Europe were not of great concern, except to older pupils and staff, and with the advent of cheaper motor cars of a more reliable and comfortable nature it was weekends in the country or at the coast etc that occupied most boys leisure & only in 1938 when the "Crisis" struck Britain did the state of the world hit a new note. In 1939 when war finally was declared by Mr. Chamberlain at 11-00am on September 3rd, the sirens sounded almost at once and gas masks etc were hurriedly found and tried on in many a home. Happily the first warning was a false alarm. But many afterwards left trails of horror and destruction throughout the Borough. The school shared the losses of the war. One Head boy died on active service and many others fell to the same tragic fate. One boy was killed in an Air Raid on his home on the day before he was to take his GSC Exams (J.D.Waller).

Men who marvel today at the contents of their wife's handbag would have a blue fit at the contents of handbags in those days and yet many were themselves just as bad. What went into a Gas Mask case varied from a tame white mouse to sandwiches & even the odd stink bomb! Speaking with them was difficult and they did nothing for the faces of your schoolday girlfriends.

Productions of Gilbert & Sullivan were suspended for the years 1939-1943 and in 1944 resumed with two different operas. In 1946 The Mitcham County School for Boys became Mitcham County Grammar School for Boys. The days after the war brought many changes and in particular changes in the staff. Mr. Doig left to use his talents elsewhere (Surbiton Grammar School) to be followed by Mr G.J.P. Coutney, the Dr. Bingham and the last Headmaster was Mr. Atherton.

In 1966 The great friends of all the boys (and staff) Mr & Mrs Perry retired after some thirty five years. A record! A great loss and some say the school was never the same again. Happily they enjoyed many years of leisure in retirement together before Mrs Perry died and Jim still comes to our functions and expands his great knowledge of the past years whenever I speak to him.

The Borough Coat of Arms consisting of a Pale Vert, which brought in the colour green for which Mitcham is famous. In the centre, Fesse wavy charged with a Barulet wavy, indicating the River or Ford - as the upper part of Mitcham was formerly called Witford or Waterford. Below a Tower, which represents the the Great Dwelling or Mitchelham - which the lower part of Mitcham was called. Above are Cross-Keys and a Sword, representing St. Peter and St. Paul, who are the patron Saints of Mitcham. On each side is a Sprig of Lavender; and the Crest is Three Sprigs of Lavender entwined by a Mural Coronet.

The Official Ceremonies to inaugurate the Borough were quite magnificent and the evening with it's massive Firework Display when some 60 or so special effects were a sight to behold. There were "Discharge of Golden Saucissions" "Silver Saucissions" and "Large Tourbillions" and, as an indication of how the times have changed, "A Dazzling Screen of Ariel Coruscations". (And how many schoolboys or schoolgirls today would have any idea of the true meaning of what these represented).

All public and elementary school scholars were given a special feast at a later date and a permanent souvenir in the form of a beaker bearing the Borough Coat of Arms. (Wonder if anyone still has one?). Mitcham had grown fast in a few years and a Brief indication of this can be gained by the fact that in 1901 the population only numbered 14,903, living in 2,584 dwellings with a Rateable Value of £76,658. By the year 1931 there were 56,856 people living in 13,187 dwellings with a Rateable Value of £322,739. (Average Rates per dwelling £24-50p).

Most Mitcham streets were still faintly illuminated by gas lamps and the few that had electric lamps were often described in great awe. The Purley Way, which had big very bright lighting before W.W.2. was visited by people from various parts of Great Britain and used a basis for many towns lighting systems. In 1935 Mr Hoare Belisha inflicted upon motorists the first "Belisha Beacons" and at least one O.M. made his mark in the History Books.:- E.B. Seeley broke the British 24 hr competition record covering a distance of 444 miles 220 yards in the time on 13th and 14th July.

The great explosion in Mitcham in 1933 was soon overshadowed by the plans for the Borough and the public looking forward to the Silver Jubilee of King George V. that took place in 1935. Mitcham Boys School having not only moved to new premises had to be expanded and a new gymnasium, art room and library were included in the extension. Plus decent civilised toilets, albeit not supposed to be used, which meant the brave did not have to sit in a smelly, open, against the wall, shed like building when the need arose.

## Contribution from Colin Chapman

The Great War of 1914-18 had taken a great toll on the men and youth of Mitcham but the population, 29000 in 1911, rapidly doubled after the war.

Between the first and second World Wars the School became well established as the foremost secondary school in the area. In a 1934 Prospectus the school offered "a liberal education for boys from 10 years until 18 years old". In addition to the school games timetable boys were encouraged to take part after school hours in Boxing, Running and Cricket Nets. It boasted a Dramatic Society and Orchestra. The 16th Mitcham scout troop consisted of boys from the school.

The original Headmaster Mr F.G.Hall left in 1929 and after a term under a temporary Head, the redoubtable Mr A.J. Doig became Head later that year and remained in office until 1952. During his long tenure his passion for Rugby was indoctrinated in the School and he actively encouraged regular performances, some legendary, of Gilbert & Sullivans Operas. They became one of the high-lights of the Mitcham Social Scene.

During the Second World War The school was evacuated, partly with the County Girls School, to Weston-super-Mare returning in 1942. On the return Mr Doig (known affectionately to many boys out of his hearing as "Doggy"), quickly re-established order and the traditions he had introduced over the years. One of these was the 'Aesthetic Trophy', an inter house competition covering a wide range of sports , arts and drama activities.

Mr Doig left the school in 1952 to become Headmaster of Surbiton Grammar School and in 1953 the reins were taken up by Mr G.J. Courtney. After so many years of one head in charge the transition was not always easy for the pupils but G.J. (Jim) Courtney prevailed.

Mr Courtney left in 1960 and after a short period when Mr Purbrick, Deputy Head was temporarily in charge, Dr C.R.Bingham( Crip or Crippen to the boys!) became Head. He was followed by B.F. Atherton ( affectionately Bernie to the boys) who remained with the school until the closure of many grammar schools in 1969 and the remaining pupils at Mitcham were transferred to Eastfields High School in that summer.

Colin Chapman Pupil 1948-1955

