OLD SWINFORD HOSPITAL



A BRIEF HISTORY

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL

The school was traditionally founded in 1667, but received its first eight pupils on 20 June 1670, perhaps the date when the building known as 'Founder's was completed. The Founder was Thomas Foley of Witley Court near Kidderminster. He had made a considerable fortune in the manufacture of iron goods, so that by the time of the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, he was reputed to be earning £5000 a year. He was influenced by a sermon dedicated to him by Richard Baxter, a famous local preacher, who persuaded him that a good way to use his wealth was to found a school for poor boys. He established this in Oldswinford, paid for the buildings and attended to the running of the school until his death in 1677. Under the terms of his will, the school received the whole Manor of Pedmore, the parish adjacent to Oldswinford, and lands and property at Meriden (Warwickshire), Seighford (Staffordshire), Oldswinford and Dudley. He also left £2000 to be invested in further land, and this was bought at Rowley Regis and Stone in Staffordshire. The rent income from the lands (about £650 a year in the seventeenth century) was more than sufficient for the expenses of the school, and until the end of the second world war every boy who attended the school was educated entirely free of charge as a boarder.

Thomas Foley decided that his school should be for 60 boys from poor but honest homes, and that the age of entry should be between the ages of seven and eleven. A document in Thomas Foley's hand states that the boys were to be taught their catechism, to read, write and to cast accounts. They therefore had a very basic education, but one that was related to the work they would do when they left the school at fourteen to be apprenticed. Of the 60 boys, 46 were chosen from particular parishes nominated by Thomas Foley, viz.

Oldswinford	3
Stourbridge	4
Pedmore	1
Hagley	1
Alvechurch	1
Bromsgrove	2
Kidderminster	6
Bewdley	4
Great Witley	2
Little Witley	1
Kinver	2
Kingswinford	2
Womborne	1
Sedgley	2
Dudley	4
Rowley Regis	2
Harborne	2
Halesowen	2
Wednesbury	2
West Bromwich	2
TOTAL	46

The other fourteen boys ('Choice Boys') were nominated by the Feoffees, a self-perpetuating body of eighteen Trustees whose successors still administer the estates and income of the charity. The founding family of Foley has the right of three places amongst the Feoffees, one for each of Thomas Foley's three sons, Thomas, Paul and Philip. The remaining lands now amount to about 600 acres on the edge of Stourbridge and include Stourbridge Golf Course.

Oldswinford at m Thomas Foleys Hospitall

1 Wee the Governors and Governours of said Hospitall thinke fitt and Doe elect and approue of m John Pearkes to be Schoolemaster in the Hospitall and to teach and see to Conformity during the pleasure of all the Officers and Gouernors and to haue thirty pounds pound for his Salary and Such dyett Lodging &c Conueniencyes in the Hospitall as the Former Schoolemaster m Brodhurst haue

2 We doe Elect and approue of John Philpott to be Steward of the Hospitall and the Reuenues thereof During the pleasure of the Officers & Gouernors and to haue Eleuenty pounds p annu for his Salary and Such dyett Lodging and other Conueniencyes in the Hospitall as the Last Steward therof had

3 Whereas m Broodhurst for Seuerall yeares Serued both as Schoolemaster and Steward of the Hospitall and tooke Much paynes therin and had Cut downe forth Salary and Allowance the Charges of the Broadhurst is Funerall must paid out of the receipts of the Hospitall and whereas vpon the attempts of the Said m Broadhurst his appeares to be due vnto the Hospitall But his alledgeth he affirmed Some Short time before his Death that if his Attempts were Rightly vnder stood he was not indebted to the Hospitall about 4 or 5 pounds wee in Consideration and further Respects and doe agree that his widdow Shall be discharged of the Attempts and all debts thereupon

4 Wee elect and Nominate John Sely of Bewdley Gent to be in the place of m John Davies Lately deceased

5 Wee agree that a yeare Sermon be preached and Sticke in and the other Orders Stated at the Last meeting of the Gouernors be therby confirmed

6 Whereas Dr Reynolds for 50 or 51 yeares hath Seised the Hospitall Landes there as Physitian and hath taken Much paynes therein Agree that in Recompence of his paynes therin and for the health Layd his hand of the Hospitall at the yeare of our Lord 1600 as Rent and Seruice and which of late the Tenants haue refused to pay vnto him Wherfore wee the Gouernors doe Order that the Bayliffe of the Hospitall doe Collect and Gather the Said Rents and Seruices and pay the Same vnto the Said Dr Reynolds his heires and Assignes

Wee the Governors and Governours of the Said Hospitall doe Elect and Nominate Richard Bayliffe to be Bayliffe of the Hospitall and to Collect and Receiue the Rents and Profitts of the Hospitall Landes and to Keepe Courtes and doe all other things Belonging to the Office of Bayliffe and Shall haue his Said Yearly Rent allowed him at Yeare

Much of the Feoffees' present income is used to help parents on low incomes pay the boarding costs, but the money is also used to provide amenities which the school cannot or should not provide from its own educational income.

The school has always looked for its pupils well beyond the local area, since each generation of Feoffees nominated 'Choice Boys' boys from all over the country, and often from London, at least until the 1830s. Then the Feoffees decided that Choice Boys should come either from Worcestershire or from a radius of ten miles from the school. Although the school is situated in Stourbridge, only a small proportion of the boys ever came from the Oldswinford area, no more than one sixth. The school retains its geographical 'mix' in the late twentieth century.

The uniform worn by the boys was the Blue Coat uniform of the apprentice, and with modification this was the uniform retained until 1928. The first alteration had come in early Victorian times (1836) when drab corduroy trousers replaced the blue cloth breeches. We can perhaps see the appearance of the seventeenth century Old Swinford boy represented in the wooden carving of Charity and child located over the Oak Room door at the end of the Library. It is known for instance from the financial accounts that boys at that time wore blue stockings and had linen 'bands' attached to their stiff collars. In the nineteenth century a boy was given two suits of clothing when he entered the school, and one suit, three shirts, four pairs of stockings, three pairs of shoes and one bonnet / cap annually. When he was apprenticed he was provided with two suits of clothes. A rather inaccurate representation of the nineteenth and twentieth century uniform can be seen in the Dining Hall. It is hardly surprising that the school was often referred to as the Blue Coat school, and still is by the older inhabitants of Oldswinford who remember the boys marching to church on Sunday mornings up to 1929.

Those connected with the school have an affection for our name 'Hospital', and the addition of 'school' is strongly deprecated. Few schools are called Hospital, and generally they are ancient foundations of charitable intent. Centuries ago the word, derived from the Latin 'hospes' a guest, was more widely used to encompass the care of several different groups of people, i.e. a place for education of poor children, a place for caring for the sick, a place for the aged poor. It was one of these last institutions that, according to Pepys' diary, Thomas Foley visited one morning, while he was staying at Oxford. This was Christ's Hospital at Abingdon, and Thomas Foley was apparently interested to find out how its income was arranged and settled; he clearly had his own Will in mind.

During the eighteenth century the financial fortunes of the Charity prospered, surplus income had been invested, and in 1820 the Feoffees increased the numbers in the school to 70, by adding 10 more 'Choice Boys'. However the school otherwise appears to have continued broadly unchanged until the early 1830s, when the Commissioners 'for inquiring concerning charities' visited the school. In particular, they compared the annual income of £816 in 1777 with that of £2400 in 1832, and not surprisingly called attention to 'the feeling which generally and not unreasonably prevails in the neighbourhood, that the benefits derived from this charity are much less than might be expected, from the ample means it possesses'. They felt the building would easily accommodate more boys.

The Commissioners noted that the boys were instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic with mensuration and surveying, which would seem to us a very basic curriculum. They felt that the facilities offered for 'air and exercise' were much too limited, the boys apparently being confined to the Courtyard in front of the building.

The report of the Commissioners was considered by the Feoffees at a special meeting in December 1834. Reforms followed swiftly, guided by the energetic and methodical hand of Mr J Hodgetts Foley who drew up new 'Rules' for the running of the school. Numbers were immediately increased to 80 and then to 100. The barn behind the school (now known as the Barn Block) was converted and extended, with an upstairs dormitory for 50 boys and a schoolroom downstairs. Diet, school hours, uniform (this was the time when the original uniform was modified), 'play' facilities, were all considered and new regulations agreed.

For instance, there was close attention to diet:

8.00 am	Breakfast:	Bread and milk
12.30 pm	Lunch:	Meat (beef, mutton & veal only) on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday Bread and Cheese on Monday, Thursday and Saturday Puddings occasionally
6.00 pm	Supper	Bread and Milk

In 1837, the Feoffees ordered that at Dinner on Monday, Thursday and Saturday, baked Rice Pudding was to be added to the menu.

The boys got up at 6.00 am in the summer and 6.30 in the winter. They went to bed at 8.00 pm. They attended Prayers twice a day, at 9.00 am and 6.00 pm, with two visits to Oldswinford Church every Sunday. Wednesdays and Saturdays were half holidays. There were two school holidays, a month over Christmas, and five weeks in the Summer.

After the reforms of 1835 the boys were divided into four classes of 25, and because there was only a Headmaster and Under Master to instruct them, the senior boys must have been used to assist, even though two classes were engaged on the same subject at the same time.

The Curriculum was as follows:

1st and 2nd Classes:	Arithmetic	4 hrs
	Entering Sums	4 hrs
	Algebra & Geometry	2 hrs
	Grammar & Spelling	4 hrs
	Writing	4 hrs
	Copy Invoice in Book	4 hrs
	Geography & Maps	2 hrs
	History	2 hrs
	Bible reading & Catechism	2 hrs
	Scale Drawing	2 hrs
3rd and 4th Classes:	Arithmetic	8 hrs
	Reading & Tables	4 hrs
	Reading	4 hrs
	Writing	6 hrs
	Spelling	4 hrs
	Catechism	2 hrs
	Bible Reading	2 hrs

In the 1836 reforms, there remained a concentration on the three R's, though History and Geography probably made their first appearance on the curriculum of the two senior classes at this time. From 1848, some boys attended Drawing and Modelling classes at the Art School in Stourbridge. Later in Victorian times, there were some modifications, but essentially the curriculum prepared the boys for apprenticeship in industry and commerce. The Feoffees in 1846 in a testimonial on behalf of the Headmaster described the school as a 'commercial school'.

The total number of hours worked per week was therefore 30. That compares with the Old Swinford working week (excluding a games afternoon) in the 1990s. of between 26 and 27 hours. From 1836, there were exams twice a year, with a Christmas leaving Examination for those due to be apprenticed. This latter exam helped the school to decide on the type of apprenticeship most suitable for each boy. The Feoffees gave Prizes to the most successful. Many of the examination papers set have survived, printed in the Feoffees' Annual Report which was issued each year from 1836 to 1948.

In 1848, the Feoffees applied to the Court of Chancery for a review of the scheme of management of the school. At this time they were anxious to eliminate the 200 year leases which had been given in the seventeenth century and which were now not producing an economic rent for the Feoffees. They went to Court in order to achieve this. They also wished to sell some land for development to increase the capital of the Charity and the report of one of the Masters of the Court of Chancery, R T Kindersley, gave them power to do this.

Discipline in the Victorian era was apparently strict. The punishment book from 1838 to 1913 has survived and records many canings or floggings:

1842, August 3: Corporal Potter, reported by Mr Evans for using very indecent & improper language. The cane, & no longer a Corporal.

The boys were clearly involved in enforcing school discipline by being appointed as Sergeants and Corporals, a primitive Prefectorial system.

The most frequent offence recorded was 'running away'. On September 21 1854 no fewer than 44 boys ran away, nearly half the school - a mass 'break-out'! The Feoffees set up a special enquiry, and harsh treatment and poor food were alleged as the causes. Perhaps not enough was done: the mood in the school was not good and on 27 April 1855, Mr Anderson, the Headmaster, reported to the Visiting Committee of the Feoffees that the school was 'in a state of rebellion'. He said that when the bell had been rung the previous night and in the morning only seventeen boys responded. Some boys had thrown stones at him from behind a wall, and one in particular, Davies, whom he had specially summoned, had refused to come to him. The two Feoffees present called the boys together, and immediately expelled Davies. They decided not to investigate further at that time, but told the Headmaster to send for them if any boy was disobedient or impertinent. As a result of all this trouble the Feoffees eventually decreed that any boy who ran away was to be well flogged by the Headmaster in the presence of the whole school; a second offence meant automatic expulsion.

Expulsion had been used as the ultimate punishment not infrequently during the school's history, though in the seventeenth century it is clear that there were 'stocks' set up in the courtyard in front of the main building, Founder's.

There had been a serious outbreak of indiscipline in the summer of 1704, when no fewer than twelve of the sixty boys were expelled for combining together to 'beat and abuse' their Master. It took several years before the school made up its numbers again to 60.

Numbers were again increased to 120, in 1862, and then to 160 after 1883 when Mr William Maybury became Headmaster (at a salary of £230 per annum). In order to accommodate them, the Boarding House, now called Maybury, was built. Earlier, in the 1870s, a Sanatorium had been built; this is now Foster House.

Towards the end of the Victorian era, the Apprenticeship system began to decline and considerable difficulties in placing boys were experienced by the end of the First World War. In addition, by the early 1920s, the Feoffees' finances were not in such a healthy position, and they decided to let the numbers fall to 125.

To some extent the school seemed unsure of its future direction, even though Mr Stone, who became Headmaster in 1928, introduced some reforms, including a radical change in uniform. It was early in his time that Rugby Football, now the leading game in the school, began to be played. Numbers were reduced further in the difficult economic times of the 1930s, and about 100 boys were in the school during the pre-war decade.

Numbers fell again during the Second World War, and in 1945 there were only 70 boys in the school, the same as in the early nineteenth century. Financial difficulties continued to occur as costs of maintaining boys rose and rent income did not match increased costs. The school began in 1946 to look for other ways to pay for the education and upkeep of the boys. In June 1946, numbers had fallen to 63 but, in September, 10 boys entered the school, paid for, because of their home circumstances and boarding 'need', by Worcestershire County Council or City. They were followed by a group from the London County Council, and other Local Authorities, especially in the Midlands, but also from further afield, e.g. Kent, began to send boys to the school. By September 1947, there were only 42 in the school paid for by the Feoffees, but 34 from Local Authorities. By the autumn of 1948, another quiet revolution had taken place. For the first time and most significantly, two parents were sending sons to the school and paying the costs themselves, the first of the full-fee payers. But numbers, gratifyingly, had risen to 98, only 27 of whom had to be paid for by the Feoffees.

The school therefore came through a very difficult few years with increased numbers, but had acquired a significant new basis of finance, mainly from a 'state' source. Once this new arrangement had been accepted, the way inevitably led to increased involvement with the 'state' system of education and ultimately, in 1949, there followed a bid for, and granting of, Voluntary Aided status. This meant that the school received sufficient finance from its Local Authority, Worcestershire, for all the educational side of the school. Each boy's boarding costs were either met by the Feoffees, or Local Authorities where boarding need was proven, or, lastly, by parents themselves who could afford to pay. More and more boys were following the original two whose parents were able and prepared to pay part or the whole boarding cost (which of course was now much cheaper than the school's Independent counterparts). No doubt, in all these changes, the Feoffees wished to preserve the 'social mix' in the school that has been its hallmark throughout the centuries. It might have been possible to establish the school successfully as a fully Independent boarding school, but then only boys from affluent backgrounds would have been able to attend, and that would have not been in the spirit of what the founder, Thomas Foley, intended.

The school was now classified as a grammar / technical school and this affected the 'entry' to the school and brought a more academic type of boy. Voluntary Aided status was bought by the Feoffees at the price of providing for Worcestershire LEA a certain number of day boy places to local boys who of course were educated free. Over the years these day boys provided a strong numerical base especially when boarding numbers were in decline. Often too they have proved a valuable asset to the school on the academic side.

Mr Peter Sheppard became Headmaster in 1950 and early in his time the school began to encourage boys to stay on to take the new GCE 'O' Level Exam. This quickly led to the need for a small Sixth Form, concentrating initially on the more practical subjects like Woodwork, and the first boys took 'A' Level in 1953. The school developed its technical side, the academic results of the school showed steady improvement over the years, and the boarding numbers rose to a peak of about 250 in the early 1970s. The school was prospering.

The county boundary changes in the mid-1970s took Stourbridge out of Worcestershire and into Dudley Metropolitan Borough, where the secondary education system was being reorganised on 'comprehensive' lines. Old Swinford therefore took its first 'comprehensive' intake in 1976, though, academically, the school has built on its 'grammar school' tradition, and both GCSE and A Level results are far ahead of the national pass rates. Indeed, Sixth Formers have achieved pass rates well over 90% at A Level each summer since 1990.

The change to Dudley checked the flow of boarders from feeder schools in Worcestershire and quickly led to a further time of difficulty for the school. By 1978 when the present Headmaster took over, the boarding numbers had fallen to about 150, with a Sixth Form of under 50. Day boys comprised more than half the total in a school of just over 300.

In 1979 the Feoffees and Governors, with the support of Dudley and Her Majesty's Inspectors, decided on a bold policy of expansion of boarding provision, with a commitment to raise numbers from 300 to 500. This was achieved by increasing dramatically and proportionally the number of boys whose parents paid full boarding costs. Many of these boys came from primary schools at 11, and at this stage the school provided increasingly healthy and successful competition with local day Independent Schools and boarding schools all over the country. The number and quality of boys entering at 13 from independent preparatory schools also rose rapidly throughout the 1980s. In order to attract academically able boys, the Feoffees provided money for Scholarships (Lord Foley's Awards), initially for boys at 13, but more recently for 11 year olds and Sixth Formers.

During the 1980s, as four new boarding houses and other facilities were built for the extra boarders. the school became ever more successful both academically and on the sports field. As a result, more and more boys and their parents began to press for places in the school from all over the country, and applications hugely outnumbered places available. To enable the Feoffees to put up all the new buildings, the Department of Education and Science via the Local Education Authority (Dudley) made a considerable financial investment in the school, and the Feoffees, whose financial position was then as strong as it had been for some time, supported with their own resources what has been the greatest building programme at the school since it was founded. They contributed, under the terms of Voluntary Aided status, 15% of the cost of each new building. The Sixth Form grew to 180, and all boarders in the Sixth Form had their own study bedroom.

In 1989, the school Governors and Feoffees, mindful that for most of their history they had guided their own destiny with considerable success, seized the opportunity to become one of the first Grant Maintained Schools. The decision to 'go it alone' was approved in the statutory ballot by over 96% of the parents, and was not taken because of any dissatisfaction with the support from Dudley, but from a desire to use what money was available for the school from public funds to best effect, and with the object of making flexible and speedy decisions, such as do not always seem easy for any Local Education Authority.

The move has already been judged most beneficial. Applications for the school have increased still further and success both in and out of the classroom has never been higher. The school sets out to be a 'market-leader' in boarding provision for boys from all kinds of homes and backgrounds, with the clear goal of degree courses to follow on from the Sixth Form. Virtually all Sixth Formers now apply for such courses when they leave the school.

At the same time the school is still careful to follow the Founder's intent that boys from less affluent homes should find a place here, with the support of the financial resources of the Feoffees. An Old Swinford boy learns to mix easily with people from all walks of life, to eschew arrogance, not to take anyone for granted, but to respect everyone for their individual worth. Old Swinford, by its history, traditions and present arrangements is thought by many to be unique among the boarding schools of this country, and an ideal model for the boarding school of the future.

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