

CITY OF LONDON FREEMEN'S SCHOOL

Cives in loco parentis

IN a community so closely knit as the citizens of London it was natural that on the death of a Freeman parental protection of his children should be assumed by his fellow citizens. From time immemorial the guardianship of the orphans of Freeman had devolved by the custom of London on the Mayor and Aldermen. Estates were administered through a Court of Orphans under the supervision of the Common Serjeant. The property due to the Orphans, after the customary division of the estate, was safeguarded and provision made for maintenance and education while under age. Thus it is that the establishment of an Orphans' School in the 19th century was merely a modern practical manifestation of an ancient city custom.

The supreme test of the worth of a School is the quality and calibre of the young people who are its finished product.

Judged by this standard, the City of London Freeman's School should be placed in the highest category.

In peacetime, successful business and professional men have qualified here. Surgeons and doctors have taken their preliminary examinations here before leaving school. On the list of old girls are teachers, nurses and social workers. In war days many distinctions were won by old boys. The Royal Air Force especially seems for a number of years to have been the great ambition of many of the boys. Their achievements have been outstanding. Many honours were won. One sorrows over the Roll of Honour, which for a school of its size was an exceedingly long one.

On its Foundation is a special proviso, the School should have a distinctly religious background.

When the School was established at Brixton, application was made to Parliament and an Act passed in 1850—"That the Mayor and Commonalty and Citizens shall forever thereafter cause to be set apart and appropriated . . . a school for the maintenance and religious and virtuous education of Orphans of Freeman of the City of London."

Evening worship is conducted daily by the Head Master or his deputy. The children attend the Parish Church each Sunday, where he also reads Morning Prayer. All through its history the scholars, on leaving, have been presented with a copy of the Bible and the Prayer Book. One hopes that this background, treasured in after life, may have its influence in the founding of strength of character and high purpose.

Referring again to the Act of 1850 by which the School was established, it may be of interest briefly to recapitulate the circumstances which led the Corporation to seek the powers.

The provisions made for the relief of the poor during the reign of Elizabeth were amplified by Parliament in the year 1662 (13 & 14 Charles II c. 12). This Act provided for the establishment of workhouses where the idle poor might be usefully employed. In the City the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and 52 Assistants appointed by the Common Council were constituted a corporation for the government of any such workhouses as might be erected. The powers conferred by this Act were not invoked until 1698, because until then the good work of an earlier Corporation for the poor made unnecessary any further provision for setting the poor to work.

During the first years of the London Workhouse in premises in Bishopsgate, an effort was made to reform sturdy beggars and such like vagrants, as well as the unfortunate poor. However, it was soon found that the former could be better handled at Bridewell. Although the Act of 1662 made no specific reference to children, the London Workhouse soon developed mainly into an institution for the receipt of vagrant and parish children. Bequests and donations received by the Workhouse during this period bear testimony to its social value. In the words of a report of 1743, it was "a pattern of that happy mixture of industry with instruction so much to be desired in all nurseries set apart for the children of the poor."

This is the background against which the Freeman's Orphan School arose, a background far more in unison with the modern school than the term workhouse would imply. Early in the 19th century the London Workhouse became almost redundant. The labouring poor were removing to the outskirts of London, the method of treating vagrancy, bastard and deserted children was changing as a result of a more sympathetic society and the building itself was becoming ruinous.

The Governors, therefore, decided to dispose of the site and the other hereditaments belonging to them. Some of these in 1706, 1710 and 1711 had been bequeathed by various citizens and Liverymen for the benefit of the poor, and others for the apprenticing of poor children of Freeman of the City. They also decided to apply the proceeds for "the maintenance, education and apprenticing of poor children," and effect was given to this by Act of Parliament. This Act provided that the property bequeathed by John Rand, Citizen and Joiner, should be applied "for fitting out and placing the poor children of Freeman of the City in trades and employment." Further, that the proceeds of the disposal of the Workhouse and the properties bequeathed by Alderman Sir Robert Clayton and Daniel Williams, Doctor of Divinity, should be used for the maintenance, education and apprenticing of poor and destitute children.

The properties comprising the endowment of the Workhouse and the other hereditaments were eventually disposed of for the total sum of £11,150 18s. 4d.

Such is the seed from which the Freeman's School commenced to grow, and the long development shows a steadfast continuity of purpose.

An appeal was made to the Court of Common Council in 1829 to add to the income that came from this capital sum, and to set aside funds for the education of sons of poor Freeman. Two years afterwards the Court was invited to set up a "School which might emphatically be termed the High School of the City of London." Those were the words used in the proposal.

The following paragraph written by Mr. R. T. D. Stoneham is now of interest in considering this period of the School's history.

"It was about this time that Warren Stormes Hale appeared on the scene—he was Chairman of City Lands in 1833, and his committee had not only to deal with the reference from the London Workhouse Governors, but also the administration of the John Carpenter Trust, and the future of what was known as Honey Lane Market. The idea of a City of London School appears to have come from the Workhouse Governors, but undoubtedly it was Hale's driving force which carried the matter forward. Clearly he whole-heartedly adopted the proposal for setting up a "City of London Corporation School" for the education of children on a more extensive scale, and on the most liberal and improved principles."

A Bill was prepared on this basis and introduced in the House of Lords in 1834. But for an objection in Committee with respect to the London Workhouse Funds, there is little doubt that one instead of two schools would have been founded. As it was, Hale jettisoned the London Workhouse portion of his proposals. The Bill was passed and the City of London School launched on the Honey Lane Market site, endowed with the John Carpenter income.

John Carpenter's bequest was to four boys born within the City "who should serve as choristers in Guildhall Chapel and generally would be children of poor but respectable parents." The responsibility of the London Workhouse Governors was "the maintenance, education and apprenticing of poor children." The reference to "orphans" was a later phrase.

The late Major Lockhart Gow, in his paper to this "Historical Association" on "City's Cash," expressed it as his opinion that could John Carpenter have been consulted, he would have considered the Freeman's School more truly represented his intentions, whilst Mr. Stoneham, in the memorandum drawn up for various Committees' consideration, expresses the opinion that "had the decision to be made in 1934 instead of 1834, there is little doubt but that one school instead of two would have been established."

In 1834 the idea of mixing what were described as "workhouse children" with those for whom the City of London School was provided would have been considered fantastic. In 1926, however, when the transfer of the school was made from Brixton to Ashted Park, the Committee felt, and their opinion was strongly backed by the Inspectors of the Board of Education, that it was a mistake to educate orphan children alone. It would be to their inestimable advantage, they considered, if such children could be educated and mixed with the children coming from more fortunate homes. Hence the beginning of accepting paying boy pupils and in 1933 also paying girl pupils, both as day pupils and boarders.

Let us, however, go back to the date of the passing of the 1834 Act. The Workhouse Governors were left with their Funds, but *no school*. They considered many proposals and one decision in particular shows the trend of their thoughts. In 1844 they decided not to amalgamate with the City of London School of Industry, because the latter "is of a class with charity and Ward Schools of which there is already a sufficiency and it would be desirable to retain their object of a school for a better class equally destitute of the means of education." They quite obviously had in mind what would later have been called a secondary school.

Hale, having satisfactorily established the City of London School, had time in 1849 to turn his attention to the long delayed schemes of the Workhouse Governors. Within a month of becoming a Governor, he moved a resolution agreeing to the proposal to promote a Bill to allow the Workhouse Funds to be used for the education of Orphans of Freemen. In 1854, largely as a result of the endeavours of Hale himself, the Freemen's Orphan School at Brixton was opened.

For more than sixty years it carried on. It cost City's Cash annually for its last ten years at Brixton an average of £7,185 per annum. Its average annual cost to City's Cash at Ashted for the last ten years has been £4,851.

At Brixton, for its last ten years, there were on the roll an average of 73 Boy Foundationers, and 65 Girls. A total of 138.

At Ashted, for the last ten years, the average number of pupils has been 190, of whom 145 paid school fees and 45 were Foundationers.

As the fees for paying pupils have now been considerably increased, the additional expense to City's Cash has not been so pronounced, in spite of the great advance in the cost of education.

Foundation Scholars who are admitted between the ages of 7 to 10 years are educated and fully maintained by the Corporation until the age of sixteen; although sympathetic consideration is always given to any application for a child's education to be continued beyond that age.

There is an Apprenticeship Fund from which grants may be made to children leaving the School, and a leaving allowance is made for the purchase of clothing.

During holidays a maintenance allowance is made to the parent or guardian. Medical and Dental attention are also provided.

Within the last few years several leaving Scholarships for the Universities have been presented by generous members of the Corporation and one or two Livery Companies, and although, so far, none have been subscribed by the Corporation, it is hoped this may soon be remedied.

The results of the School Certificate examination in recent years have been amazingly good.

Whether at Brixton or at Ashted, the educational standard striven after has been continuously very high. For this reason in 1919, when standards were improving and the School was inspected by the Board of Education with a view to its recognition as an efficient Secondary School, and this was not immediately forthcoming, the Corporation gave long and anxious consideration as to the future of the children placed in its care. Many proposals were considered, such as closing the school and making grants to the mother or guardian. Another was for boarding out the children in other schools. Finally, it was decided to move the School out of London. A site was purchased at Ashted in Surrey. Some ten acres were granted by City Lands for use of the School. The transfer took place in June, 1926.

The site, which is described as one of the finest for a school in England, is situated in charming surroundings. Its bracing air and wealth of sunshine justify the praise bestowed upon it by medical authorities.

The School buildings include the large and beautiful mansion in which pupils reside. Dayrooms and dormitories are large, well ventilated and sunny.

Class Rooms, Laboratory, Workshops and Gymnasium were converted from the former stables and coach houses.

The lovely gardens and park provide excellent playing fields on which cricket, tennis, football (both Rugby and Association), hockey and netball are played.

Best of all, after its last inspection in 1938, the School was recognized as an efficient Secondary School by the Board of Education. All the reports made were, in the main, favourable and every effort has been made by the School Committee to meet all suggestions made by the Board's Inspectors. There is no doubt that the School is now firmly established and playing an important part, not only as a co-educational school for the orphans of Freemen of the City, but for the educational life of a wide area. The demand for admission to the School increases yearly, and there is a long waiting list. Recently a heavy increase was made in the fees in order to bring the cost to parents nearer the actual cost to the Corporation. The School lost no pupils as a result of this increase, and its waiting list is longer than ever.

With the passing of the Education Act, 1944, new problems will doubtless face the School. It may well be said, however,

that the Corporation, by the establishment of a co-educational Boarding Secondary School, has *by many years anticipated* the provisions of the Education Act, 1944.

It has long been the policy of the School Committee that no child admitted to the School as a Foundation Scholar shall suffer from any sense of inferiority compared with more fortunate children.

To achieve this end, the word "orphan" was deleted from the title of the School.

The dress of both Paying Pupils and Foundationers was to be uniform. Only war conditions have caused this rule to be temporarily relaxed.

No historical survey of the School would be complete without an acknowledgment to the loyalty of the Staff and also those who have occupied the position of Minuting Clerk. They have shown such interest and devotion that their work has been rather a social labour. Perhaps this may almost be said of the Committee too. It is not merely the Governing body of an Educational establishment. Its members, rather, are "in loco parentis."

How better can this great City expend its treasure than on its Schools—its great Schools of which this one-time Cinderella of the quartette has now attained a worthy place.