



**King Edward VI Grammar School**

*Encouraging Excellence, Nurturing Talent*

# *“The History of Collaboration”*

**Education in Louth in the second half of the Twentieth Century**

Published with the kind permission of Dr Richard Gurnham

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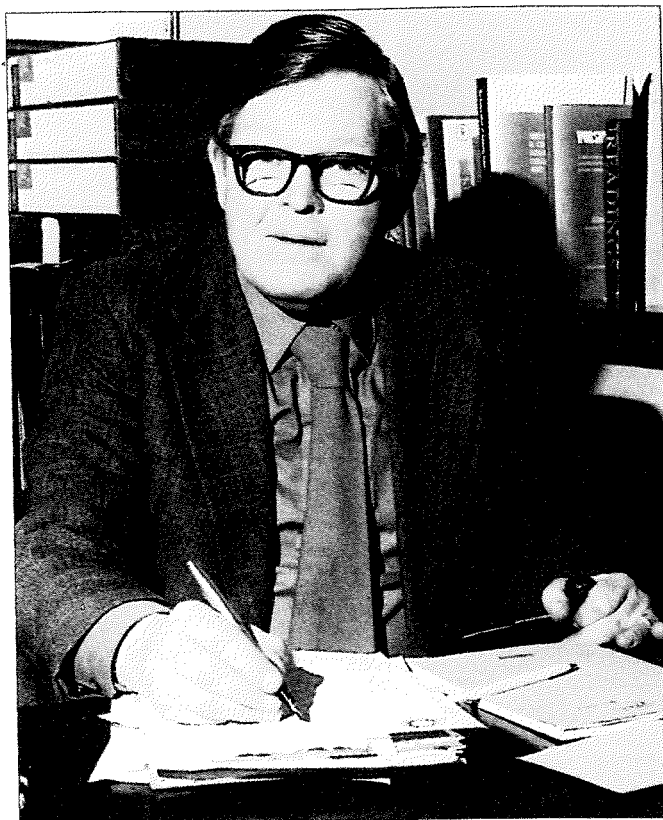
Senior School was the raising of the school leaving age, from 14 to 15 years. The school was already using extra classrooms in James Street, and the new leaving age added a further 110 pupils. The County's solution was to offer temporary HORSIA classrooms, but these did not arrive until six weeks after the autumn term had started in 1948. When the numbers on the roll reached 654, in 1953, two more temporary classrooms were erected. The problem of over-crowded classrooms was eventually overcome by opening a fourth secondary school on the north side of the town. High Holme Road Secondary Modern School, or Cordeaux School as it would be known (after Miss Phyllis Cordeaux, a leading figure in the Girl Guide movement), was opened in 1956 at a cost of over £100,000.

Following the Butler Education Act in 1944, the two grammar schools had moved into a new era, in which all entrants were selected on merit. The selective secondary education system, based on an 11-plus examination, had not been invented by the Act, for there had long been scholarship examinations, but it consolidated and tidied up the system. It also prompted further growth of both schools, although the raising of the school leaving age had relatively little impact. For the secondary modern schools the Butler Act urged 'parity of esteem' with grammar schools, and saw the new schools as a means of meeting rising pupil and parent expectations. Under a dynamic and determined head, such as Forster at Monks' Dyke, many of the extra-curricular activities, that had once been a feature only of grammar schools, had already been introduced in the early 1930s. From the 1930s there was a School Camp at the end of July when 20 girls from form IIIa spent a few days camping on the beach and swimming in the sea, while having meals in a seaside bungalow, and a Camping Club was restarted after the War. Annual excursions when pupils and staff went on a day trip were another feature of the school in the 1930s, and this was also resurrected after 1945. Plays were also put on in the open school quad and, from 1939, in the new school hall.

By the late 1950s, however, faith in the ability of secondary modern schools to achieve true 'parity of esteem' with the grammar schools was in decline, and fears grew about the social impact of the Butler 'tripartite system'. Calls for the abolition of the 11-plus and the introduction of comprehensive schools prompted Hedley Warr's successor as headmaster of the Boys' Grammar School, Donald Witney, to open discussions in 1962 with the head teachers of the Girls' Grammar School and the two local secondary modern schools about the future structure of secondary education in Louth. The 'Louth Plan', as it became known, was a novel form of reorganisation. Led by Donald Witney, a man of integrity and personal charm, the teachers and head teachers together came up with a plan, approved by the governors of all the schools, by which the two grammar schools would combine to form a single 14-18 co-educational King Edward VI School; all children would transfer at age 11 to two high schools (the existing secondary modern schools), and at age 14 parents could ask, following advice and guidance from teachers, for their children to be transferred to the King Edward VI School. When the scheme came before the Lindsey Education Committee in 1963 it was rejected, but when the plan reached the full Council in July 1963 the Committee's views were reversed, following a strong speech by Councillor Ralph Bennett (who lived at Brackenborough Hall) in favour of the scheme. The two grammar schools amalgamated in 1965 and the Louth Plan came into operation in September 1965.

The Louth Plan would survive for just over thirty years. In 1973 it was enlarged to include the new John Birkbeck High School at North Somercotes, and close co-operation

**108** *Donald Witney.*  
*Headmaster of Louth*  
*Grammar School, 1958-81,*  
*and chief architect of the*  
*'Louth Plan'.*



between the schools was guaranteed by establishing a single governing body for all four schools, and regular department-based meetings of the four staffs. Both developments helped ensure mutual understanding of problems, encouraged sharing and discussion of professional experience and the development of good personal relations between the staffs of the schools. Such a system could not, however, hope to survive long in the highly competitive educational environment of the 1980s and 1990s.

The first change to cause some undermining of the Louth Plan came in 1973, when the school leaving age was raised to 16 years. At first almost all pupils at the high schools were entered for the Certificate of Secondary Education examinations, but soon some were also taking the same 'O' level examinations as the King Edward VI students. In 1966 only the pupils who had transferred to King Edward VI School undertook a course of academic 'O' level subjects. Those who had stayed at the high schools had either taken no examination at all before they left school at 15, or had stayed on to take the CSE examinations, but not 'O' level. Now the case for a possible change of school for pupils at 14 seemed less apparent.

Moreover, in 1974 the new Labour government of Harold Wilson renewed its assault on selective education. The principle of guided parental choice was found to be unacceptable within a general framework of comprehensive secondary education. This was then changed, in 1977, to the allocation of fourth-year places by a committee of the four head teachers, but with parents having a right to appeal against the head teachers' decisions.

Changes in personnel also eroded confidence in the system. As the head teachers who had agreed and first implemented the plan retired, so also did some of the feeling

of joint commitment to making it work begin to erode. Then, in 1985, the Louth Plan suffered a double blow. A County 'Taskforce' investigation into the structure of secondary education – prompted principally by fears of the effects of a falling birth rate on school rolls – revealed bitter and angry opposition to the continuation of selection, albeit at 14 rather than 11, particularly from teachers at the three high schools. Although the 'Taskforce' recommended no change in the system, confidence in its long-term future had been dented, and shortly after a second blow came when new legislation obliged the schools to abandon their joint governing body and revert to separate governing bodies. Then, two years later, the introduction of a common GCSE examination for all 16-year-old pupils, replacing the 'O' level and CSE examinations, seemed further to undermine the case for a transfer of some pupils to a new school at 14 years.

The final blow did not come for another ten years, when, in the mid-1990s, the King Edward VI School head teacher, James Wheeldon, and the staff and governors became seriously alarmed by the fall in the number of pupils applying at 14, and by the decision of both Louth high schools to apply for permission to develop their own sixth-forms. Up to that time it had been agreed that King Edward VI School would be the only sixth form centre for the town; the school's sixth form had grown considerably in the 1970s, and by the early 1980s could claim to have one of the largest sixth forms in the county, offering a wide range of subjects at Advanced, Advanced Ordinary and Certificate of Extended Education level. The threat to the school's intake at both 14 and 16 raised fears about its ability to survive for long in that form. The school governors therefore took the highly controversial decision to apply to the Department for Education and Skills for permission to revert to admitting pupils at 11; that is, to become a grammar school again. Public meetings to debate the issue saw the town deeply divided, with the case for and against selection fluently and passionately discussed. Those leading the opposition to the change formed a campaigning group, the Campaign Against Selective Education, or CASE. At first it seemed as if CASE had won, when in May 1996 the DfES turned down King Edward VI School's application for a change in status, fearing that it would damage the future prospects of the high schools. However, Cordeaux School had gained permission to have a sixth form the year before, and Monks' Dyke School's application to do the same was also accepted. The town had not been so divided on a matter of education for more than 150 years.

In September 1996 the King Edward VI School governors made a second, slightly amended application, fearing that it might well be their last chance to save the school. A general election had to be called in the next few months and opinion polls suggested that John Major's Conservative government was very likely to lose heavily to New Labour, led by Tony Blair, and apparently committed to ending selective education. On 19 March 1997, two days after John Major had announced that a general election would be held in May, the school learnt that its application had been successful. After an absence of more than thirty years the 11-plus returned to Louth, and in September 1997 the first cohort of 11-year-olds entered King Edward VI School.

While debates over the future structure of secondary education in the town had raged fitfully over the years, there was a quiet revolution in the provision of education at the other end of the age range. In 1966, just as the Louth Plan was coming into operation, Miss Welton, assisted by her mother and her younger sister, set up the privately operated Bridge House Kindergarten on Newmarket, for children aged two to five. At the time that was the only pre-school educational provision on offer

in the town. Demand quickly outstripped supply and over the following forty years the number of play-groups and pre-school nursery schools grew steadily; now there are seven, some taking children as young as six months, all privately operated and Ofsted inspected.

The town's infant and primary schools are all direct descendants of their Victorian ancestors. The oldest, Kidgate Primary School, although since extended, still occupies the building erected in 1840 as the British School, established to meet the needs of children not catered for by the Anglican National Schools in Westgate and Engingate. Until the Monks' Dyke Senior School opened in 1929 it catered for children up to the school leaving age of 14, and it was partly to relieve chronic overcrowding at Kidgate School and the town's other elementary schools that the new 'Senior' school had been built.

One of those other elementary schools had been the Holy Trinity Parochial School, built on the corner of Riverhead Road and Eastfield Road in 1865 by the National Society to meet the needs of families living in the Riverhead area. As with Kidgate School, it was to lose its older pupils in 1929 to the new Monks' Dyke Senior School, but younger children continued to be taught in the old school until 1979. In the 1960s Lacey Gardens Junior School was opened for seven- to 11- year-olds, partly to meet the demand from the newly built St Bernard's Avenue housing estate, and the children of that age group transferred to the new school. In 1979 a new Eastfield Infants School, popularly known from its shape as the 'Thrupney Bit', opened next to the Lacey Gardens Junior School, and the remaining children transferred to the vastly improved facilities of the new school. After extensions and refurbishment the old school was transformed in the 1980s into an outpost of Lincoln Technology College and served its new purpose for a further 20 years before demolition in 2007. A proposal in 2006 by the Lincolnshire Education Authority to merge the Eastfields Infants School with Lacey Gardens School was withdrawn after insistent protests by parents.

The town's other Victorian elementary school, St Michael's School on Church Street, also survived in its original buildings until the 1970s. A new St Michael's, in a new building, was opened in 1974 next to Monks' Dyke High School, and the old building was demolished five years later to make way for new housing.

New school buildings with greatly improved facilities have been one of the more obvious but not always fully appreciated developments in education in the post-war era. Another has been the steadily increasing professionalism of teachers, as they had to cope with ever-increasing parental expectations, constantly changing government-inspired initiatives, new technology, Ofsted inspections with 'goal posts' regularly changing, and deteriorating pupil behaviour.

Ironically, and happily, the ending of the Louth Plan and re-introduction of the 11-plus was not followed by a deterioration in relations between the schools but rather by greater co-operation. All three schools would achieve specialist school status, Monks' Dyke first, achieving Technology College status, Cordeaux School Specialist Science with Engineering status and King Edward VI Grammar School Specialist Science status. In consequence relations improved as their new status required closer co-operation. Cordeaux School and King Edward VI Grammar School became partner schools as part of the latter's responsibilities as a centre for science education initiatives, providing special workshops, training, expert lectures and displays for pupils, and developing new resources and teaching packs. A new initiative, beginning in 2006, to allow sixth-form students to benefit from



109 *Making a bid, Louth Cornmarket, 1995.*

the specialist resources of the three local secondary schools, and pursue courses in more than one school, brought even closer co-operation. The excellent media studies facilities, for instance, available at Monks' Dyke Technology College, could be used by sixth formers at King Edward VI Grammar School and Cordeaux School.

Cooperation was also much in evidence in relations between the different religious denominations in the second half of the century. The national movement towards ecumenism was reflected in Louth in the formation of the Louth Council of Churches in 1963, now Churches Together in Louth and District. Cooperation between the Anglican and Methodist churches has proved particularly productive, and today Methodist and Anglican clergy preach regularly in each others' churches.

The development of the St Bernard's Avenue estate in the 1950s prompted the opening of a new Methodist chapel, The Link Chapel, in 1960, but falling membership and problems in providing sufficient ministers led to its closure in 1977, together with the Riverhead (Commercial Road) and Newmarket (Church Street) Chapels. The four Methodist Societies became one, consolidated at the completely refurbished



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