



ETON
COLLEGE

History

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Public Schools and Private Schools

Until 1902 there were no publicly-supported secondary schools in England. Schools were either privately owned (by an individual or family) or 'endowed' – that is, deriving at least part of their income from an endowment, often in the form of land, and run by some sort of Governing Body. In both cases fees were charged. The endowed schools were known as 'public schools' to distinguish them from the 'private schools' being run for an individual's private profit. In that sense Eton has always been a public school.

By the middle of the 19th century both types of school were in decline. The Clarendon Commission of 1861 and the Taunton Commission of 1864 were established by Parliament to recommend reforms which led to the Endowed Schools Acts of 1869 and 1874 affecting the public schools. Further reforms led to the establishment of publicly-funded secondary schools in 1902. The expression 'Public School' thus pre-dates the public funding of secondary schools in England.

Today there are still a few private schools in England for children aged 8–13, and until recently boys at Eton would sometimes say "my private [school]", or "m'private" when referring to their previous school.

It has now become common to replace the word 'public' by the word 'independent', meaning a school able to determine its own curriculum, admissions, fees, etc, largely independent of government regulation. The expressions 'Public School' and 'Independent School' are thus virtually synonymous, with the former perhaps being regarded by some as slightly old-fashioned.

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The Arms and Motto



In a document dated 1st January 1449, King Henry VI assigned as arms to Eton College:

“On a field *sable* three lily-flowers *argent*, intending that Our newly-founded College, lasting for ages to come, whose perpetuity We wish to be signified by the stability of the *sable* colour, shall bring forth the brightest flowers redolent of every kind of knowledge, to which also that We may impart something of royal nobility, which may declare the work truly royal and illustrious, We have resolved that that portion of the arms, which by royal right belong to Us in the kingdoms of France and England, be placed on the chief of the shield, per pale *azure* with a flower of the French, and *gules* with a leopard passant *or*”.

The grant was attested by the Great Seal of England and is preserved in the College archives.

Eton's arms are a registered trade mark, as are the names 'Eton' and 'Eton College'.



The grant of arms to King's College Cambridge followed the Eton grant word for word, except that three roses *argent* were substituted for the three lily-flowers.

The School Motto

Eton's motto is often thought to be *Floreat Etona*, which can be translated as “May Eton Flourish” or “Let Eton Flourish”; but *Esto perpetua* (“May it last forever”) came into usage if anything a little earlier. In fact, neither phrase is officially a motto; they are unofficial creations that, over time, have stuck.

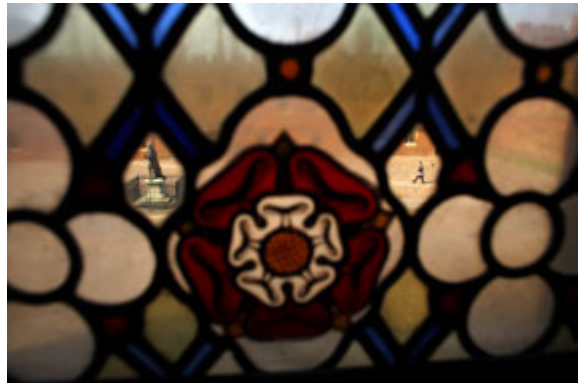
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The Founder's Prayer

The Founder's Prayer of King Henry VI was set to music by Dr Henry Ley. The text is as follows:

Domine, Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum; tu scis quæ de me facere vis; fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen.

[O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast created and redeemed me and hast foreordained me unto that which now I am; thou knowest what thou wouldst do with me; do with me according to thy will, in thy mercy. Amen.]



To listen to the Founder's Prayer being sung by the boys of Eton College Chapel Choir, click [here](#).

Henry Ley

Henry George Ley MA, DMus, FRCO, FRCM, Hon RAM was born in Chagford in Devon in 1887. He was a chorister at St George's Chapel Windsor Castle, Music Scholar at Uppingham School, Organ Scholar of Keble College Oxford (1906) where he was President of the University Musical Club in 1908, and an Exhibitioner at the Royal College of Music where he was a pupil of Sir Walter Parratt. He was organist at St Mary's Farnham Royal from 1905–1906, and at Christ Church Cathedral Oxford (1909–1926), Professor at the Royal College of Music in London from 1919, and Precentor at Eton College (that is, in charge of the music in College Chapel) from 1926 to 1945. He was an Honorary Fellow of Keble College Oxford from 1926 to 1945 and died in 1962.

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School Life in the Early Days

The earliest records of life in the school date from the mid-16th century and they paint a picture of a strictly regimented and spartan existence for the boys. Scholars, sleeping two or three to a bed in Long Chamber, were awakened at 5 a.m., chanted prayers while they dressed, and were at work in Lower School by 6 a.m. All teaching was in Latin, the language of the church, the law, and business, and in fact it was virtually the only subject taught. Boys were marched in double file to College Hall for the two meals supplied each day; but there was no food at all on Fridays, a day of fasting. At all times boys were under the close supervision of 'praepostors' who were monitors appointed by the Head Master to perform such tasks as noting absentees, enforcing the speaking of Latin, watching for uncleanliness ('for yll kept hedys, unwashed facys, foule clothis and sich other') and supervising the single hour of play ('for fyghting, rent clothes, blew eyes, or sich like'). We may surmise that football was popular from a sentence for translation written in 1519: 'We will play with a bag full of wynde.' Lessons finished at 8 p.m., at which time they went to bed, again saying their prayers. There were only two holidays, each of three weeks in duration, one at Christmas when boys were not allowed to return home, and the other in the summer. These holidays divided the school year into two 'halves', a word that has survived despite the change to a three-term year in the 18th century.



Eton achieved a particular distinction in the early 17th century under two Provosts who succeeded in their attempt to make Eton an important centre of learning. Sir Henry Savile, an outstanding scholar, gathered round him men of conspicuous ability. He built Savile House as a printing works and here he produced his exceptional work of original scholarship on St John Chrysostom. The second renowned Provost was the diplomat Sir Henry Wotton who particularly interested himself in the education of Robert Boyle who was later said to be 'the father of chemistry'. The high reputation of the Fellows also helped to make the school popular.

This flourishing state of affairs was suddenly brought to an end by the outbreak of Civil War and the capturing of Windsor Castle in October 1642 by the Parliamentary forces. The Royalist commander, Prince Rupert, tried to retake the castle. From the grounds of the College his artillery carried out a long-range bombardment to distract the attention of the defenders from his main attack; but all his efforts were in vain.

The Civil War represents an important turning-point in the history of Eton. In medieval times the word 'college' meant a community of priests rather than a place of education. It was during the Civil War period that the priest Fellows ceased to play the important part they had for the first 200 years. They no longer took their meals in Hall and indeed, from now on, many of them were absentees for the greater part of the year, since they held posts elsewhere. For example, Provost Allestree, builder of Upper School, was Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, and Provost Godolphin, to whom the college is indebted for the Founder's statue in School Yard, was Dean of St Paul's. It was at this time, too, that what was known as the Collegiate Church took its present name College Chapel.

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The Choir School

The Foundation Charter of 1440 provided for six choristers to sing in the daily services. By 1452 this had been increased to sixteen, all boarders. One of the clerks was responsible for teaching them and they had a special claim for consideration at elections for scholarships to the College. After Henry VI's death in 1471 their numbers were cut to ten as an economy measure, and during the Commonwealth (1649–1660) they disappeared altogether.

The choir started again at the Restoration (1660), but increasingly its members also sang at St George's Chapel Windsor and the boys were educated there. Although Eton contributed to the costs, the services at St George's always took precedence and a choir of charity school children had to be paid to sing on Sunday mornings when the regular choir was busy at St George's Chapel. In 1868 the link with St George's was broken and a professional choir appointed at Eton, but they do not seem to have been very good and at first many services were sung by a voluntary choir of masters and boys.

In 1872 it was decided that the professional choir should consist of ten choristers and six lay clerks, but when new Statutes were drawn up the choir was not formally included as part of the College. The records are very incomplete but we do know that a master was appointed to teach the boys, and that by 1892 they were using the old brewhouse as a schoolroom. They were day boys; proposals for a boarding school were always abandoned because of the cost.

From 1910 the choristers were no longer paid but money was put aside to enable them to go on to further training or apprenticeships after they left the choir. The education and their meals were free.

The school was small, sixteen choristers and twelve probationers, but even with a second master and with help from masters in the (senior) school it became increasingly difficult to provide adequate teaching and facilities. Changes in education policy also made it harder for boys leaving the school at



13 or 14 to transfer to state schools and it was increasingly difficult to attract suitable applicants. By the 1960s the College considered that amalgamation with St George's School or conversion into a standard preparatory school, either day or boarding, mixing choristers and fee-paying boys, was the only way the school would be viable.

Amalgamation was impracticable and a new boarding school too expensive. A temporary building on Fellows' Eyot improved the accommodation, and numbers grew slightly but not enough to keep the school going.

When it was announced that it would close in summer 1969 so many boys left that closure was brought forward to 1968. Assistance with fees at other schools was given to the boys left in the school, and the Fellows set up Music Scholarships to raise the standard of music throughout the college.

The Old Choristers' Association still maintains links with the College and has its annual reunions in College Hall.

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King's Scholars, Oppidans and Private Tutors

There had always been a clear distinction between the 70 scholars provided for by the original foundation of Henry VI and other boys who were initially known as Commensals. Commensals, or 'table companions', so known because they took their meals with the King's Scholars in College Hall, were sons of the nobility who were not themselves scholars, and might be lodged with a Fellow in the Cloisters or in whatever accommodation they could secure in the town with a landlady. The precise origin of the term 'Oppidan' is obscure, with some suggesting that both Commensals and Oppidans existed side-by-side before the Commonwealth, when they almost certainly did not pay fees. Either or both had lessons in Lower School with the scholars and Commensals (but not Oppidans) took their meals in College Hall with Fellows and scholars. It was after the Civil War, when the royalist sympathies and nobility of the Commensals led to their demise, that a different system emerged.



Unlike the Commensals, 'Oppidans' (Latin '*oppidum*' meaning 'town') were not allowed to take their meals in Hall. New and more elaborate lodging arrangements were needed and what developed in the early 18th century was the 'Dame's house'. The first of these dames' houses was said to have been run by the mother of the Head Master, Dr Snape, who built Jourdelay's House in 1722 for the purpose. Gladstone, for example, boarded with Mrs Shurey in the

house now completely rebuilt at the southern end of the Long Walk; Wellington boarded with Miss Naylor at the Manor House which is adjacent to the Memorial Buildings in Common Lane. Dames' houses were in a few cases run by men known as domines who were usually teachers of non-classical subjects but they were not part of the regular staff of the school. Of 13 houses in 1766, three were run by domines. Soon after this, assistant masters began taking boarders and the dames' houses were gradually superseded. The last of the dames was the remarkable Miss Evans who had the attractive house on the left side of Keate's Lane (Evans's) and who died in office in 1906. There are now 24 oppidan houses with about 50 boys in each.

At the same time as the oppidan houses were coming into existence, the tutorial system was taking shape. Parents were able to choose from among eight or nine assistant masters a tutor to supervise their son's work. Some of the wealthier parents, however, chose to send their sons to Eton accompanied by a private tutor. One of these, Dr Barnard, was so successful (Horace Walpole called him the 'Pitt of masters') that he was appointed Head Master, a post he held with great distinction (1754–65). In the mid-19th century it was made compulsory to have a tutor chosen from among the regular staff, and the private tutor disappeared from the Eton scene.

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Eton and King George III

There has always been a close association between the College and the monarchy. This may be partly because the office of Provost is a royal appointment but no doubt also because Eton is so close to Windsor Castle, which has so often been a favoured royal residence.



No monarch other than the Founder showed more interest in the school, nor became more Etonian at heart, than George III, who spent most of his long reign (1760-1820) at Windsor. School functions were frequently enhanced by his presence and he seldom passed through Eton without stopping to talk to masters and boys, many of whom he knew by name. On numerous occasions boys were entertained at the Castle. In return, the college deeply respected and loved the King, whose birthday, the Fourth of June, was made a holiday. To this day it is celebrated as a holiday with 'Speeches', cricket, and a procession of boats on the river (although by virtue of being now celebrated always on the Wednesday following the May bank holiday, it never falls on June 4th).

Speeches are held several times a year. Senior boys wearing tailcoats, knee-breeches, and black silk stockings recite by heart passages from literature before dignitaries of the College, visitors, and a large audience, usually consisting of an entire specialist block.

One of the ceremonies most often attended by George III was 'Montem'. It was customary for the school to process to a small hill ('*ad montem*' in Latin means 'to the hill') on what is now the south side of Slough. (The approximate site is commemorated in the naming of the 'Montem' sports centre.) The origins of this festival are obscure but in any event it was 'customary' by 1561 and underwent various changes before it became, under George III, a major royal occasion held triennially. This colourful pageant was brought to an end after the 1844 Montem, with the reluctant consent of Queen Victoria, mainly because of the unmanageable crowds of sightseers brought to Slough by the new railway.

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The Reign of Dr Keate



The longest-serving and arguably the most remarkable Head Master in Eton's history is Dr Keate (1809–34). He has the reputation of being the greatest flogging Head Master, the symbol of unreformed Eton, and a figure of fun. He is caricatured by Kinglake as follows: 'He was little more (if more at all) than five feet in height, and was not very great in girth, but within this space was concentrated the pluck of ten battalions. You could not put him out of humour, that is, out of the ill-humour which he thought to be fitting for a Head Master. His red, shaggy eyebrows were so prominent that he habitually used them as arms

and hands for the purpose of pointing out any object towards which he wished to direct attention. He wore a fancy dress, partly resembling the costume of Napoleon, partly that of a widow woman.'

He was the last Head Master to attempt to teach all the senior boys (up to 200 but mainly around 100) in Upper School: given the lax state of discipline when he took up office and the disorderly character of the Regency period it is hardly surprising that he took severe measures. There was, of course, another side to Keate. He was a notable scholar and a gifted teacher. A fine orator himself, he taught boys to deliver speeches clearly enunciating words, and using voice and gesture to maximum effect. Two of his pupils became Prime Ministers, Derby and Gladstone, and it may well be that the training in public speaking given to boys for Speeches and Declarations had some effect on raising standards of parliamentary debate. In private, Keate was a man of geniality and kindness who much enjoyed entertaining boys to supper.

An example of the intellectual vitality of the school at this time is the foundation of the Eton Society in 1811. Initially a debating society, it met in Mrs Hatton's confectionery shop (which would have sold sweets and buns) on the site of what is now School Hall. Soon it became known as 'Pop' (derived from the Latin 'popina' meaning 'cookshop') and later became a society for athletes rather than intellectuals and debaters. In the course of time Pop became responsible for discipline in the school, a function it has retained to the present day.

Although the reputation of Eton under Keate remained high, the school was in need of radical reform and this was undertaken over the next few decades. Class sizes were much reduced, more class rooms were built (New Schools, 1861), more and abler staff were appointed, the curriculum was widened from its narrow concentration on the Classics and the conditions in which scholars lived were immeasurably improved. These had deteriorated in the 18th century and were a scandal. No longer did the Head Master and Usher occupy the rooms at either end of Long Chamber, so there was a complete lack of supervision in this huge dormitory after the scholars were locked in at 8 p.m.: no longer did the Fellows eat in Hall and the food had become insufficient, monotonous and unappetising, while breakfast and tea were not even provided. As a result the numbers and quality of the scholars fell to such an extent that in 1841 half the places were unfilled. The deficiencies were remedied in the 1840s when Long Chamber was abolished and the New Buildings were erected, providing comfortable single rooms for the scholars.

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Amicabilis Concordia

The *amicabilis concordia* (friendly agreement) between Eton College, King's College Cambridge, Winchester College and New College Oxford was signed on 1st July 1444. The relationship between Winchester and New College was the model for that between Eton and King's, and several of those involved in founding Eton College had been at Winchester.

The four colleges pledged to assist and support each other in 'actions, lawsuits and controversies' as well as in a more general way, though the agreement specifies that any costs involved were to be 'reasonable and necessary'. This was a formal document, with the four colleges' seals affixed, but it did not necessarily stop all disagreements, for example those between Eton and King's over Eton fellowships.

Today representatives of the other signatories are invited to formal functions at Eton from time to time, and if one of the colleges has a special anniversary the others present Addresses of Congratulation. Several of these addresses are in the Eton College archives. The Eton copy of the original agreement has not been found, but a copy apparently made in about 1700 does exist.

A joint service of Evensong was held in Eton College Chapel on Saturday 5th February 2005 with the choirs of Eton College, King's College Cambridge, Winchester College and New College Oxford. The previous such occasion at Eton was on Tuesday 9th July 1968.

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