

*A Brief History of
Lord Williams's School*



To commemorate its 450th Anniversary

1559 - 2009

Lord Williams's School was founded in 1559 on the death of Lord John Williams of Thame. He was an important man in the court of Queen Elizabeth 1; he held high State positions including Keeper of Jewels and President of the Welsh Marches and was rich and influential. He owned large areas of Oxfordshire including his home at Rycote Manor. On his death in 1559, he had no male heir (his three sons had already died), so he requested that the income from his properties should be used to "erect a free school in the town of Thame for ever". Some historians think that establishing the school was some form of recompense to God for his role in the destruction of the monasteries. The building of the school house and adjacent Almshouses began in 1569 and opened on St Andrew's Day (30th November), Founder's Day, in 1570 with Edward Harris as Headmaster and approximately 50 boys.

The fine Tudor building still stands in Church Road opposite the Almshouses. There was one school room and an attic for accommodation for boarders. All new boys



The Grammar School, Church Road, Thame

were expected to be able to read and write English and were taught Latin, grammar, religion, mathematics and topics in literature, history, arts and science. School hours were 6.00am to 5.00pm and were by candlelight in the winter. During the Civil War the school was used as a hospital. Notable "old-boys" of the early period include John Hampden, a statesman killed in the Civil War in 1643 and John Fell, Bishop of Oxford, 1675.

To ensure "upright management" of the school, New College Oxford was appointed by Queen Elizabeth in 1575 as a trustee for the school "to uphold and maintain a free grammar school for the free teaching and exercise of grammar ...in Thame for all time", - "to find a schoolmaster who is an honest and learned person" and "to maintain the tomb of Lord Williams" in St Mary's Church, Thame. In exchange, the College took all rents and profits! This link with New College is sustained today with the Warden of the College participating in school affairs as a Foundation Governor - but not taking any money!



Part of the original license, document written in Latin on vellum and held by the school. It has the seal of Queen Elizabeth and New College and depicts the Queen and Lord John Williams.

After the Restoration the school ceased to be free and following a series of ineffectual headmasters the numbers dwindled to one boy in 1862. In 1874, the Governing Body was revised and the objective of the Lord Williams's Foundation established "to supply a liberal and practical education... at Thame" with "Instruction in reading and writing, arithmetic and mathematics, geography and history, natural science, English grammar and composition, Latin and at least one foreign language, drawing and vocal music" with Greek as an extra. These changes were approved by the Parliament of Queen Victoria in 1874.

To enable extension of its activities, the school moved to its present site on the Oxford Road in 1879 - "a more healthy or prettier spot could not be found in the entire neighbourhood" *Thame Gazette*, 1879.

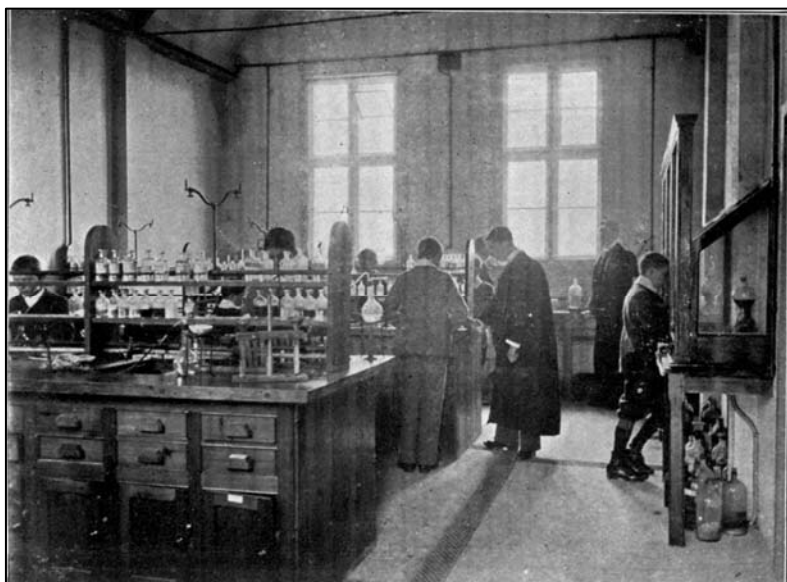


South aspect of the Headmaster's house and boarding school at Oxford Road — now the Foundation Centre

The innovative ideas of the new Headmaster, Mr George Plummer, resulted in the inclusion of science laboratories. More accommodation for boarders was provided (in what is now the Conference Room) and the extensive playing fields, which are still a major feature of the school, were used for football, cricket, gymnastics and athletics. Swimming was taught in the river. Fees were £2 per term for day boys and £13.10s per term for boarders. The first edition of the school magazine, *The Tamensian*, was published in 1900. In 1913 there were 60 boarders and 60 day boys. Hockey and rugby was introduced and the meals (served in what is now the Sixth Form library from the kitchen (now Reprographics) were considered to be very meagre. The National School Certificate examination was introduced in 1918 and all Lord Williams's candidates passed which improved the prestige of the school. This was the beginning of the Sixth Form with a small number of boys staying on to take the Higher School Certificate two years later. In 1926 the house system was introduced with distinctive colours for caps: Wykeham (yellow), Hampden (blue), Harris (green) and Williams (red); this sharpened up competitive inter-house sport. Electricity came to the school in 1927 bringing many benefits, not least that the lighting for school plays became less hazardous and the liquid ink no longer froze!



In 1931 there were 118 boys in Lord Williams's Grammar School, LWGS. Swimming was taught in the unheated and un-chlorinated swimming pool (now under concrete adjacent to the Hall) and on Sundays, boys in suits and bowler hats attended services at St Mary's Church. By 1936 there were 186 boys but during the war, a lack of teaching staff meant that some older boys had to teach the younger classes. In addition, helping lift the potatoes for local



Chemistry Laboratory circa 1900 in the era of Alfred Shaw, Headmaster — now Plummer classroom

farmers brought in some pocket money and respite from lessons. In the 1950s and '60s the school expanded in both curriculum and numbers; with the introduction of GCSE Ordinary 'O' levels in 1951, LWGS was able to demonstrate its excellence in academic as well as sporting activities, but also had high standards in art, music and drama which it still retains.

1971 was a landmark date for the school. Under the guidance of the Headmaster, Geoff Goodall, it ceased to be a selective Grammar School. The school was combined with the Wenman School on Towersey Road to form a comprehensive co-educational school funded by the Local Education Authority. Students in the first three years, now Years 7-9, were based at Towersey Road and teaching of all other years- now Years 10 and 11 and the large Sixth Form was in the now extended Upper School premises at Oxford Road. The Lower School retained its excellent reputation for technology; many homes today have a metal coal shovel and wooden stool which were compulsory projects for all students.



Wenman School, now Towersey Road site



*Peter Logan's "pencils"
Towersey Road*

Student numbers exceeded 2000 in 1977 as a result of the school's good reputation and the growth of Thame and the surrounding villages. A new Lower School - (Lower School West) - was established in 1974 on the Oxford Road site (Lestor, Quatremaims and Etherege buildings) to accommodate students from the Buckinghamshire villages and Thame. Competition between the 'Westies' and 'Easties' was fierce in all areas but especially in sport.

In 1991, falling numbers of boarders resulted in closure of the boarding houses which included The Warren, Highfield and Greenacres on the Oxford Road. In 1995, sale of a waterlogged part of the playing field and the boarding houses provided finance for an extensive programme of development of the premises at Towersey Road. This included a

new sports hall, library and classrooms to incorporate teaching of all Year 7-9 students on one site. The combined Lower School opened in 1995 and the school celebrated with a new school song composed by the acclaimed musician and "old-boy" Howard Goodall. The boarding house, the original Grammar

School Foundation buildings, were converted into administrative offices and teaching areas for the large and growing Sixth Form. The school now has more than 2000 students divided roughly equally between the two sites with specialist teaching areas for all faculties on both sites.



Phoenix Studio for Performing Arts opened 2009

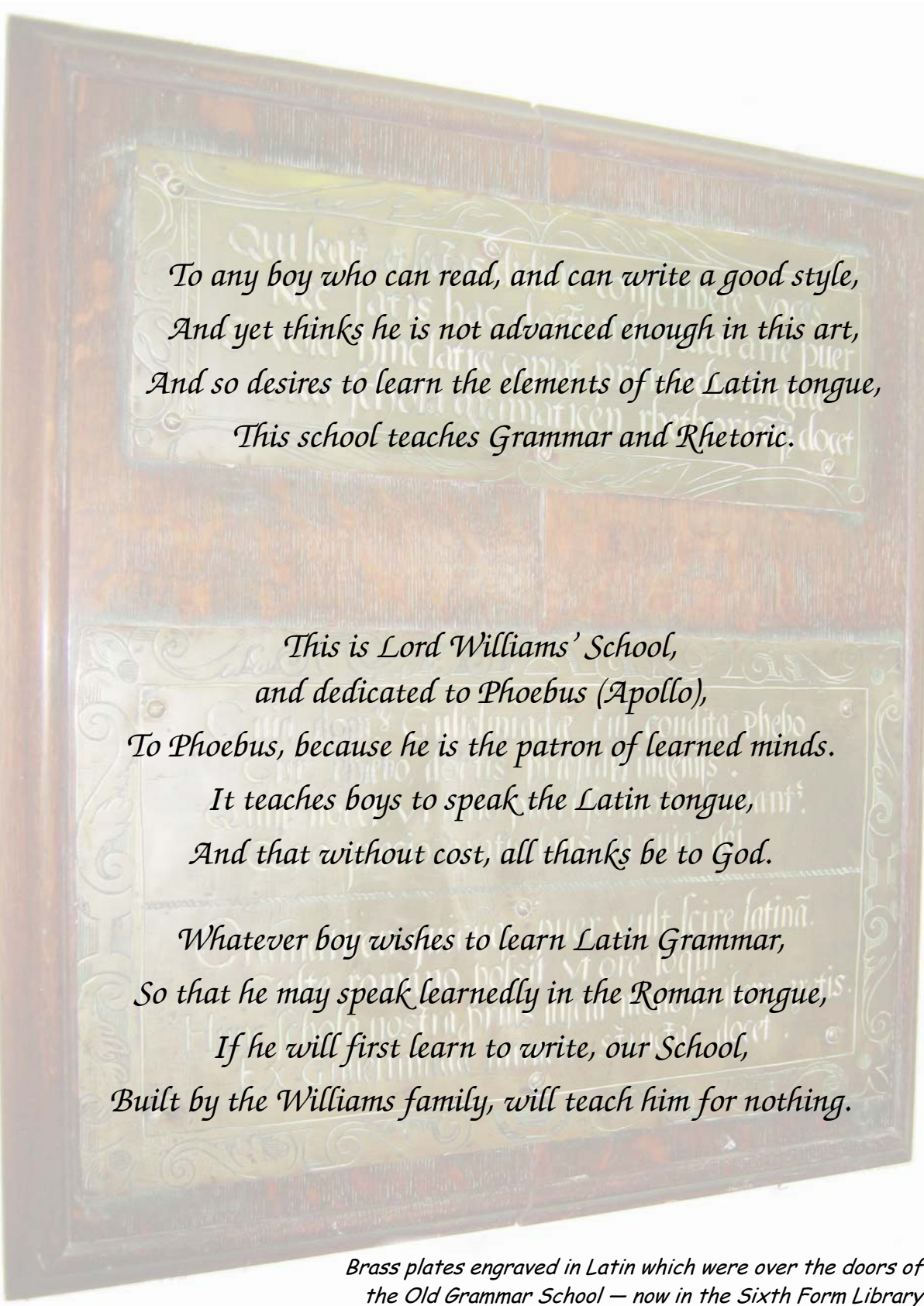
Many of the traditions and reminders of the Foundation School remain. Founder's Day is celebrated every year in the autumn term with a church service incorporating the school hymn sung in Latin and sports fixtures. Many of the buildings are named after illustrious Old Tamensians - both students and staff. The brasses from the Tudor School building are prominent in the Old Refectory, the Sixth Form Library. All subjects designated to be taught in 1864 remain in the curriculum (with the exception of Latin) and others designated by the parliament of Queen Elizabeth II are also included.

The school continues to uphold the mottoes of the Lord Williams's family -

sic iter ad astra
(thus the way to the stars)



et tous venants
(for all comers)



*To any boy who can read, and can write a good style,
And yet thinks he is not advanced enough in this art,
And so desires to learn the elements of the Latin tongue,
This school teaches Grammar and Rhetoric.*

*This is Lord Williams' School,
and dedicated to Phoebus (Apollo),
To Phoebus, because he is the patron of learned minds.
It teaches boys to speak the Latin tongue,
And that without cost, all thanks be to God.*

*Whatever boy wishes to learn Latin Grammar,
So that he may speak learnedly in the Roman tongue,
If he will first learn to write, our School,
Built by the Williams family, will teach him for nothing.*

*Brass plates engraved in Latin which were over the doors of
the Old Grammar School — now in the Sixth Form Library*

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