

### Stratton Park School at Brickendonbury

Stratton Park School was founded as a private preparatory school for about fifty boys, although precisely when it was founded is not certain. The school relocated to Brickendonbury from Great Brickhill Manor, Buckinghamshire, in 1933. It was at Great Brickhill from 1920, prior to which it was located, and indeed appears to have had its origins, at Stratton Park near Biggleswade in Bedfordshire. The house at Great Brickhill was demolished in 1937, it is said due to its poor state of repair, although Sir Philip Duncombe believed his father had it knocked down because he thought a war was coming. According to *Great Brickhill in the mid 1800s* by Michael Warth, the annual rent for Great Brickhill Manor was £485. Although it was a school for boys it is understood that one local girl was allowed to attend as she was very clever, and it was said she could also get the better of the boys at sports.



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From at least 1920 until his retirement in 1939, the headmaster and proprietor of the school was John Warren Clouston. On his retirement it is presumed that Mr Clouston sold his interest in the school and it was at about this time that it became known as Stratton-Stanmore Park School, having merged with Stanmore Park School in Middlesex a year or so earlier (see below). For a short while Mr Clouston and NJ "Nipper" Holloway were joint headmasters. It was reported at the parish council meeting on 16 March 1939 that NJ Holloway had been enrolled in National Service as a part-time warden. The school continued at Brickendonbury under its new name for a couple of years during which time Donald AR MacDonald and Cecil J Pike were the joint headmasters.

Although the precise origin of the school is uncertain, it is known that the Stratton Park estate near Biggleswade was sold in 1910 and converted into Parkfield School for boys. A helpful find was a programme for a Pastoral Play and Prize Giving at Stratton Park, Biggleswade, on 27 July 1918 which notes that two of the prizes were presented by T Harold Clouston Esq and ECT Clouston Esq, and one of the pages in the play was played by R Clouston. Thus, although JW Clouston is not mentioned, it is clear that the Clouston family was involved with – perhaps even the founder of – the original incarnation of Stratton Park School. T Harold Clouston was probably a distant cousin of JW; ECT Clouston was almost certainly JW's brother, Dr Eric Crosby Townsend Clouston (1887-1956), whose wife Olive Fisk was one of the first women doctors in Suffolk; and R Clouston was most likely Rudolph Haakon Stewart Clouston (1912-44), JW's son by his first wife Katherine Edith Amy Hughes. It is also interesting to note that before her marriage in 1910, Katherine Hughes ran a preparatory school in St John's Wood, north London, in partnership with Miss Amy Mary Hanson. The house at Stratton Park was demolished in about 1960 and the grounds are now a business park.

Some of the other teachers were Myfanwy Griffith-Jones, the music mistress, who joined the school in March 1940 and married Mr MacDonald later that year in Surrey [she died on 30 March 2006 in Wells, Somerset]; Mr Noble; Mr Thorpe; Mr Gordon; Miss Macklin and Miss Ewen, who was affectionately known as Brabbi because of her frequent references to the biblical character Barabbas. How many of the teachers transferred when the school relocated each time is not known, but certainly Eliza Ewen had been a teacher at Great Brickhill, teaching scripture and mental arithmetic. She is understood to have been an official in the Parents National Educational Union (PNEU), an organisation founded in 1887 and still surviving (in a somewhat different form) in 2007. Mr Clouston's second wife was a French woman by the name of Jeane HP Giraud, who was known as Henrietta and had a strong accent and, not surprisingly, taught the boys French. Jack Eady, a World War I veteran, lived in the lodge gate at the Hertford end of Morgans Walk and worked for the school, as gardener/caretaker. Mr Eady had obviously been with the school at Great Brickhill as his daughter Kathleen Bertha (Kay) had been born at Great Brickhill. Kay had not been expected to live and had a quick baptism with Mrs Couston as her godmother; as it was she was still living in 2010 at the age of 89. Another teacher was Dorothy Warren, possibly a cousin of JW, his mother's maiden name having been Warren. The Rev Vere Townshend Ducker, vicar of All Saints Hertford, used to cycle out to take services in the school's chapel. Some of the teachers at Great Brickhill were Gerald Meister, Mr and Mrs Miller and Mr Pillinger. Edward Robinson taught horseriding at Biggleswade and at Great Brickhill, and later taught car driving. His wife, Roseanne, and later one of his daughters were also on the staff.

In the 1938 electoral register at Brickendonbury we find JW and Henrietta Clouston, Jack and Elizabeth Eady, Eliza May Ewen, Alfred Henry and Gertrude Mary Henley, George James and Hylda Maria Kettle, Ronald MacDonald, James Alan Noble, CJ Pike, Dorothy Maud Potter, Margaret Eileen Robinson and Dorothy Alice Williams. NJ Holloway was living at 14 Morgans Road, and at 18 Morgans Road were to be found George Melson and Cecil Margaret Wingate, the parents of Walter Raymond Wingate, a pupil at the school.

By all accounts Stratton Park was a happy school. Former pupil Martin Simons describes it as a lovely, delightful school and he recalls the boys fishing in the moat but catching little more than carp which were thrown straight back. Another old boy, John Austen-Brown, remembers that some of the boys used to follow the hunt and were allowed the hunting gingerbread but not the stirrup cup. On one occasion he and his brother followed the hunt to the finish but on their way back to school they got lost and were brought back by a fine lady in a fine car, too late for supper; they never discovered who this fine lady was. On 5 November 1937 all the fireworks the boys had collected and kept under their pillows until the great day had been placed, in preparation for the celebrations, in a large pile beside the moat and the sports master assigned to guard them until dark. He was a pipe smoker and absent-mindedly knocked out the pipe against the heel of his shoe. A spark flew into the pile and set the fireworks off – much to his surprise and the boys' great disappointment!

The school uniform was grey with dark green piping. The boys' dormitories were on two floors and were named after navy and army commanders including Nelson, Collingwood, Hood, Drake and Wellington. Every Saturday morning the boys had to take a mock examination which got them well used to sitting exams. The boys were expected to write home every Sunday and had the occasional school outing; Vauxhall Motors and Whipsnade Zoo being two of the destinations. There was a billiards table and several suits and other items of armour in the entrance hall of the school. The school had a swimming pool and a rifle range where the boys learned to fire .22 rifles; the older boys played rugby, the younger boys soccer, and they all played cricket. One reminder of when the manor house was a school that still exists is a series of hooks from which ropes were hung in what is now the conference room but was then the school's gymnasium.

At the time of the Munich Crisis (September 1938) an air raid trench was dug in front of the school, and from 1940 the staff took turns at night to man a rifle in the tower of the house in case any German paratroopers should find their way into the grounds. At the beginning of the Second World War the school was suffering from falling numbers of pupils and in about 1940 Lady Pearson sold the Brickendonbury estate, including the mansion. The school, together with most of the boys, transferred to Benington House in the hamlet of Hebing End, near Stevenage. The school continued under the name Stratton-Stanmore Park School and the headmaster there was Donald MacDonald; Mr Holloway had retired to Walton-on-Thames and Mr Pike had joined the Royal Air Force. Although the 1943 edition of Kelly's Directory still lists Stratton-Stanmore Park School at Brickendonbury, it is understood that the school moved in the autumn of 1940, the school, four cottages, pumping house, outhouses, gardens and grounds having been requisitioned by the Office of Works on 12 July 1940 under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939. The rest of the Brickendonbury estate was requisitioned on 25 July.

It would appear that Stratton Park School was one of the very first places in the Hertford area to have a telephone as the 1938 edition of Kelly's Directory gives the school's phone number as Hertford 8. Whilst at Brickendonbury, the school was the feature of an article in Picture Post magazine of 24 June 1939. It is a slightly strange article about sports days and prize-givings in general which, as in the ways of the day, despite plentiful photographs of pupils, staff and parents, says nothing at all about the school itself and the photos have only impersonal, almost flippant, captions – in retrospect it is sadly a lost opportunity to record something of interest about the school.

At the play and prizegiving in July 1918, the play was Tennyson's *Harold* and the programme also shows that there were five forms in the school. The cast of the play and prizewinners (presumed to be pupils) were: G and J Alderson Smith, G Badcock, N Bagshaw, D Brown, Q Carr, C and J (and/or CJ) Carruthers, R Clouston, J Combe, J Croft, F Harmer, D and J Ireland, B, F and M Jacobs, R King, J Larner, W McElwee, E Pratten, J and M Smethurst, R Streatfeild, M Tweney, K Vignoles, Charles Walker, P Wall and W Williamson. Those presenting the prizes (presumably parents and staff) were: Mrs Alderson-Smith, Miss Barker, Miss Bult, Mrs Carruthers, ECT Clouston, T Harold Clouston, Mrs Combe, RO Fellowes, LP Jacobs, HM Lindsell, Col Owen, NF Richardson, PA Sainsbury, JW Smethurst and FA Willcox.

Stanmore Park preparatory school was transferred from Brighton to what was described as 'a large mansion with extensive grounds off Uxbridge Road, Stanmore' by Herbert Kemball Cook in the 1880s. The former Lancashire and England cricketer the Rev Vernon Royle was headmaster from 1901 until his death in 1929. Norman J Holloway, MA, was principal when the school moved 'to a park near Hertford' after Christmas 1937. The house and grounds were purchased by the Air Ministry and the mansion demolished in May 1938 to make way for RAF Stanmore Park which occupied the site until the station closed after 1 April 1997. It was developed for housing in 2002 and the streets were named after former occupiers of the house.

On leaving Stratton Park, Mr Clouston's furniture was valued at £850; it included over two dozen engravings, a number of oil paintings and a pastel, all by HW Clouston (possibly Harald, another distant cousin). His forwarding address was given as c/o Mrs Evans, Strathmashie, Kingussie, Scotland, although they clearly did not move to Scotland since JW died in Bedford in 1947, aged 62, and Henrietta died in Hitchin in 1968, aged 72. It is interesting to note that JW's father, Robert Stewart Clouston (1857-1911), was also an artist who amongst other things designed the course at Bushey Hall Golf Club.

Whilst the school was at Benington, probably in 1941, a land mine was dropped in the grounds of the school which blew out all of the windows. Luckily no one was hurt although everyone was evacuated

and only on returning was it discovered that one boy had slept through the entire episode. The following day there was no school and the headmaster offered a prize of one shilling to the boy who found the largest piece of shrapnel.