

School History – Walton Lodge Preparatory School, Clevedon

Note: In the left margin of the first page of this document (see below) is a pencilled notation – “? Walter”. Please see the Appendix on page 4 for further information.

After working for a few years at Walton Lodge, the school was terminated in 1872. WALTON LODGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL and started a school of his own at Weston-super-Mare. CLEVEDON. The school was eventually merged with the two schools frequently met each other over a period.

Walton Lodge School had its origin at Baltonsborough near Glastonbury. Here the Rev. C. L. Cornish took a few boys and taught them in his Rectory. This was in the mid-1860s. Before moving to Walton Lodge in 1869, Mr. Cornish moved for a time to Compton Dando in the Mendips and carried on the School there.

When the Rev. C. L. Cornish died he was succeeded by his son, the Rev. Charles Cornish but he survived his father only for two or three years. He died when on a cruise in the Mediterranean and there is a memorial window ^{dedicated} to him in the Lady Chapel at St. Mary's Church, Walton.

Charles Cornish was succeeded by the Rev. Stephen Cornish, his younger brother and it was during his Headmastership that Walton Lodge became very well known, especially in the West Country as 'Cornish's'. There were only three Preparatory Schools which seem to have reached pre-eminence in those days: Walton Lodge, Willis's of Clifton and St. Peter's, Exmouth.

* In 1872, there were 42 names on the School Roll but this number increased in the 1880's to a maximum of 88 boys. Three other houses were taken over and one of these, now known as Bushbury but in those days called New House, was joined to Walton Lodge by a 'glass corridor'.

During this period, many famous names were on the School Roll, among them one Field Marshal (The Earl of Cavan), no less than 15 Generals, 5 Admirals and one Air Vice Marshal. ~~It is to be thought that the School, even with a Reverend Headmaster, was very largely a sort of military academy.~~ The Earl of Devon, Viscount Weymouth (Marquess of Bath), Viscount Elmley, Earl Beauchamp, Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, Rajah of Sarawak, Lord Coleridge, Sir Ambrose Elton and Sir Bernard Arthur Elton, Lord Thynne and the Duke of Somerset; the Earl of Limerick and John Rolls, Lord Langattock. It must be quite unique for such a small School to have produced so many distinguished and high-ranking warriors ... and with a reverend Headmaster, too!

The Rev. Stephen Cornish retired in 1894. In his last few years the school seems to have suffered a decline and at his retirement there were only 26 names on the School roll. The School was now carried on by Mr. Cornish's two cousins, Robert and John Thornton.

? Walter

After working for a few years together at Walton Lodge, the partnership was terminated in 1904 when Robert Thornton broke away and started a school of his own at Eastbourne, calling it Hill Brow. During the Second World War this School was evacuated to Brent Knoll and the two schools frequently met each other over a period of about 30 years, on the Sports field. Unfortunately Hill Brow was obliged to close down three years ago.

Under John Thornton things seem to have gone badly for Walton Lodge. It was reduced to a very small number of boys ~~indeed~~ by 1910 and indeed may have closed altogether for a year or two. In 1913 a new Headmaster, Mr. C. M. Vaughan-Parkes took over the School and ran it until 1921. In all this period, the numbers did not exceed 18 boys. When it was taken over by Mr. R. E. Gwinn in 1921 there were 14 boys in the School, 7 Boarders and 7 Day Boys. The youngest Boarder was 5 years old. On Sundays, the whole school wore Eton suits and top-hats, including the five-year Old. As regards buildings, the school now consisted of only the one house, Walton Lodge.

Slowly, the school grew under Mr. Gwinn and numbers increased to a maximum of 48 boys. In these days this was quite a reasonable size for a Preparatory School.

In 1935 a group of Old Boys meeting in the Pavilion on Sports Day, decided to found an Old Walton Lodge Society. The driving force behind this movement was the Earl of Devon, who became the first President. He was untiring in his efforts to foster the Society and went to infinite trouble and expense to produce a register of all the boys who were in the School in the Cornish's time. Dormitories in the School are named after some of these Old Boys, Somerset and Devon, Cavan and Bath, Cornish (in memory of the Founder) and Brooke a more recently Grayburn in memory of G. H. Grayburn who won a Victoria Cross at Arnhem.

On the death of the Earl of Devon, the Duke of Somerset became President of the Old Boys Society.

The Second World War again affected Walton Lodge, as it did many other Schools very badly. The area was a relatively safe one, even though Bristol and Avonmouth were major enemy targets. During the early years when the Air Raid warnings sounded, the whole school went down to the spacious cellars, often two or three times per night. At times Prayers, lessons and even Breakfast were held there. This could not go on and after the first term of war, the Boarders slept on the ground floor and were not moved for Alerts. After Dunkirk the number of boys was suddenly reduced by almost 20, owing to a number of boys being sent abroad or to places in England considered safer than Clevedon.

s was naturally a great strain on the school and it took some time before numbers built up again.

In April 1942 a parachute mine intended for the Bristol Channel fell on the Golf Course only about 50 yards from the School. In the school over 100 windows were broken and 10 ceilings fell: the heavy front door was blown off and through into the Dining Hall. A very large number of slates were torn off. Repairs however were quickly effected and the start of the Summer Term was delayed only a few days.

Soon after the end of the war, in December 1948, Mr. Gwin retired as Headmaster and was succeeded by the present Headmaster, Mr. L.G. Holmes. At this date the number of boys in the School was 59, of whom 29 were Boarders.

In a year or two the school began to grow rapidly. Reaching its maximum number possible in the one house, 68 boys, in 1954, the School was fortunate that in that year it was able to regain possession of the neighbouring house, Bushbury which in Cornish's time was part of the School as New House.

With this extra accommodation, the school flourished as never before and for a number of years in the early 1960s, numbers exceeded 100, including 55 Boarders. Before 1900, the majority of boys leaving Walton Lodge went to Winchester, Eton, Charterhouse or Marlborough: during this period, though these Schools continued to attract many boys, a steady stream went to Public Schools in all parts of the country, with a growing tendency for parents to choose Schools closer to the area: so Clifton, Cheltenham, Monkton Combe and King's College, Taunton found themselves with a small colony of Walton Lodge boys always in residence.

Whereas the period of 10-15 years after the War was a golden age for Preparatory Schools the 1960s have presented most of these schools with increasing problems. The ending of the 'bulge', the great reduction in the numbers of British families living overseas, soaring costs and the general decline in the number of parents able to afford private education have made it impossible for the great majority of Prep. Schools to maintain their numbers. As with business concerns generally, the tendency has been for some Prep. School, those in the right situation to become very large (this applies particularly to the Prep. Departments of the Public Schools): a number of the smaller ones have been compelled to close down.

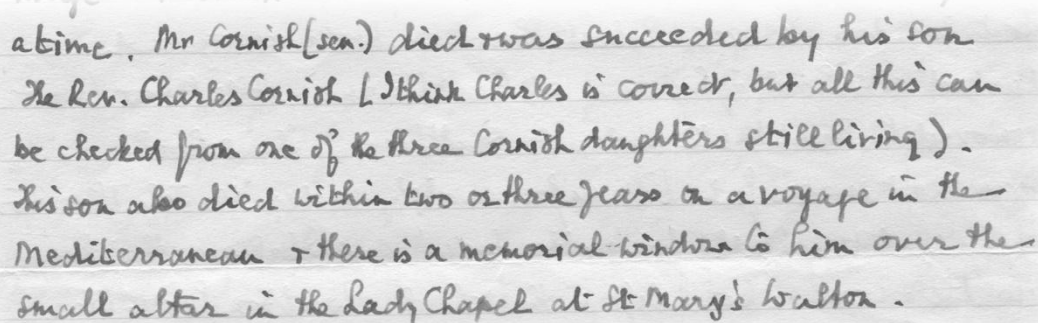
Walton Lodge throughout its history has been a small school ... as Dr. Harwood puts it ... more like a large family. It does not have the situation and grounds to become a large school and if it did have these, it would lose its traditional characteristics and ethos. The small school, if it is able to survive present-day economic difficulties, still has a great deal to offer. The state schools, with their lavish and even luxurious buildings, are no doubt improving steadily year by year but are still bedevilled by over-large classes which hamper the progress of less able pupils.

Appendix

The above notes would appear to have formed some of the source material for the document "A Short History of Walton Lodge and the Old Walton Lodge Society"¹.

These notes in turn apparently took much of their content from those that accompanied a letter by Mr R F Gwinn (Headmaster 1921-1948) to Mr L G Holmes (Headmaster 1949-1971)².

In his notes, Mr Gwinn writes as follows:



at a time, Mr Cornish (sen.) died was succeeded by his son the Rev. Charles Cornish (I think Charles is correct, but all this can be checked from one of the three Cornish daughters still living). His son also died within two or three years on a voyage in the Mediterranean & there is a memorial window to him over the small altar in the Lady Chapel at St Mary's Walton.

As a consequence, the following appears in "A Short History of Walton Lodge and the Old Walton Lodge Society":

Glastonbury. Before coming to Walton Lodge, Mr. Cornish went for a time to Compton Dando in the Mendips. When Mr. Cornish died, he was succeeded by his son, the Rev. Charles Cornish, but the latter did not survive very long, and he died on a voyage in the Mediterranean. There is a memorial window to him over the small altar in the Lady Chapel at St. Mary's, Walton.

This introduces a caveat, inasmuch as it transpires that Mr Gwinn was unfortunately incorrect as to the name of the son who immediately succeeded Mr Cornish Senior (that is, the Reverend Charles Lewis Cornish, Vicar of Compton Dando).

Although Charles Lewis Cornish's eldest son was also named Charles³, the son who died at sea was his second son, Walter Cornish, who did so on 24 February 1873 whilst on his way to Egypt, a trip for his health. He was buried at sea.⁴

This would explain why someone has written the query '? Walter' in the margin alongside the paragraph mentioning the death of the son on the Mediterranean cruise shown in the typewritten notes reproduced on page 1 of this document.

¹ Published in 1952 and reproduced in PDF format available via the 'Walton Lodge and OWLS' page on <https://laurencevlatham.wordpress.com>.

² The full document is available under the title "Letter and Notes by Mr R F Gwinn re Walton Lodge Preparatory School, Clevedon", via the 'Walton Lodge and OWLS' page on the same website.

³ The eldest son of Charles Lewis Cornish was the Reverend Charles Edward Cornish, who became Bishop of Grahamstown in South Africa in 1899, having been ordained in 1870, after which he became Curate of St George's, Bristol.

⁴ A description of the memorial window referred to is available in the document "St Mary's Church, Walton, Clevedon – Memorial Window to Walter Cornish" on the above-mentioned website.

This means it was indeed Walter who briefly assumed the headship of Walton Lodge School after his father, only for the role then to be taken on by his younger brother, the Reverend Stephen Cornish.

Confirmation of this appears the following extract from the document "Doctor Basil Harwood – Recollections of Walton Lodge Preparatory School"⁵:

from Compton Dando, a little village in Somerset, of which Walter Cornish's father was Vicar, not very long before. He was dead and his second son, Walter, was now the Master. I was rather in awe of him and thought him very stern and severe; he had a terrible way of slashing our exercise books with his pencil when our Latin was faulty, which was quite nerve-racking for a small boy! It was a relief when Stephen, his younger brother (then studying at Oriel, Oxford) sometimes took charge of us during his vacations. Walter Cornish died quite young and Stephen Cornish carried on the school.

As shown in the extract given on the previous page, Mr Gwinn admits in his original notes that his suggestion that the headmaster was Charles might need checking with the surviving Cornish sisters – something that presumably did not happen. It would seem, therefore, that in giving the name of Charles Cornish instead of Walter Cornish he was inadvertently responsible for an inaccuracy that was perpetuated in any subsequent documents which used his notes as source material, and this should be borne in mind when consulting such documents.

With grateful thanks to Jane Lilly for providing the scans of the original document.

<https://laurencevlatham.wordpress.com>
August 2023 - Updated October 2023

⁵ The full document is available via the 'Walton Lodge and OWLS' page on <https://laurencevlatham.wordpress.com>.