

Three Hundred Years On

Old Swinford Hospital School at Stourbridge, Worcestershire was founded in 1667 by Thomas Foley, the ironmaster, to provide education for boys from Worcestershire and from certain parishes in Staffordshire and Shropshire. The original school still stands (on the left of the above picture) and is in use today, the centre of later additions. Today the premises meet the requirements of a full two-form entry secondary technical school of 330 boys.

Old Swinford Hospital School, Stourbridge

'It is my last and earnest desire that you suffer not from neglect or unfaithfulness this house or the means thereunto to be otherwise than is expressed in the settlement thereof. And that no boys be chosen into it but such as are real objects of charity and that they may be taught by such masters as may breed them up in the fear of God. And that when they shall be fit to be apprentices, care shall be taken to place them with such masters as may answer my great end, being the glory of God and their real good.'

So Thomas Foley of Worcestershire, ironmaster and seventeenth century magnate, ironmonger to the Royal Navy and acquaintance of Pepys, charged the trustees – the feoffees – of his charity, the Old Swinford Hospital School which was founded in 1667.

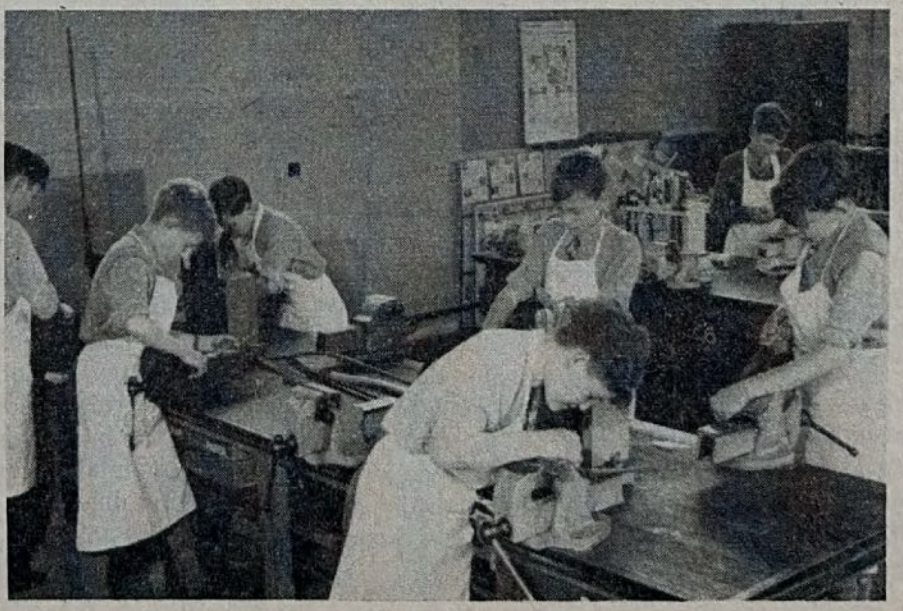
Foley was moved to found the charity by a sermon by Richard Baxter at Kidderminster. He lived and made his money in an industrial community. His concept of 'the right use of wealth' was to endow a technical school. He evidently foresaw the facility with which foundations of this kind could be diverted into schools for the well-to-do.

He endowed the foundation with land around Stourbridge in Worcestershire. The feoffees have been as good as their duty demanded. Till 1950 the school soldiered on as an independent institution. Between the wars the numbers had dropped until there were only about 80 fully-provided boarders. The record books show how each was received and discharged to an apprenticeship. (In past times the headmasters enjoyed a refreshing freedom in which to express themselves of their less responsive students). But a secondary technical school of 80 was not viable and the costs of bringing the school and the education it provided up to 1944 Act standards were prohibitive. The institution, if truth were told, had a whiff of the Poor Law about it. And, while Thomas Foley had required his trustees to choose only such boys as were real objects of charity, the times and the circumstances had changed in a way which rendered the charitable provision of free boarding education tied to apprenticeship an anachronism.

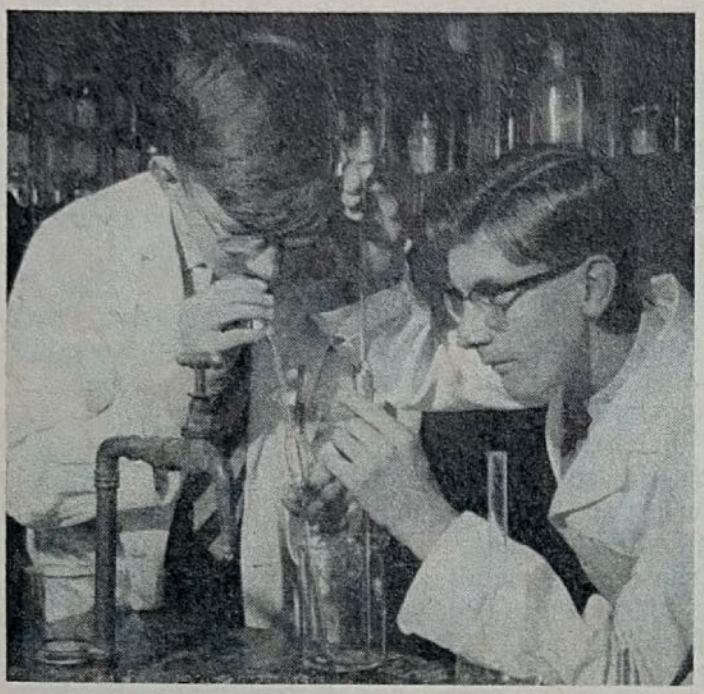
In 1950, the Old Swinford Hospital School became an Aided School. Since then the numbers have been built up and in successive building programmes it has been possible to extend and renovate the premises to meet the requirements of a full two-form entry secondary technical school. There are now 330 boys in all – 200 boarders and 130 day boys.

The intake of boarders is about 30 a year. Very roughly these are divided as follows: 10 or so are sponsored by Worcestershire, 10 or so by other LEA's and the remainder are, as it were, 'private' boarders, paying full boarding fee but not, of course, a tuition fee. When the current extensions are completed there will be perhaps 10 more places a year, and the school hopes to be able to take a few more boarders from other LEA's. This may well be of interest to many authorities: boarding education with a technical bias is not always too easy to provide. Old Swinford Hospital School is a selective school. Worcestershire pupils have to pass the selection examination, though when the case for boarding education is strong on other grounds this may be taken into consideration in dealing with borderline candidates.

The headmaster of the school since 1951 is Mr. L. W. Sheppard who has presided over the academic



A corner of the woodwork shop. The founder specifically stated in his will that the boys 'shall be fit to be apprentices'; this is the origin of the emphasis on practical education which has influenced recent developments. When the school was granted 'voluntary aided' status in 1950 it was decided it should become a technical school for boarders and day boys.



Sixth form scientists at work in the labs.

renaissance of the school and now finds an increasing number of his pupils staying on at school beyond 15 and going on to further education. Some still leave at 15 or 16 to be apprenticed. But today, the lineal descendants of the seventeenth century craftsmen include the technicians and the technologists as well, and no one can put a finger on an 11-year-old entrant and prescribe apprenticeship and early-leaving for him, to conform with a 300 year old trust deed.

Mr. Sheppard is one of those who believes with the Master of Marlborough, that boarding education is an important factor in enabling the borderline group to do better, academically, than they might be expected to do. His 'O' and 'A' level results seem to bear this out.

The chairman of the feoffees is Sir Hugh Chance, who is also chairman of the Worcestershire Education Committee. He has been a trustee since 1937 and it has been his satisfaction to see the value of the lands which form the endowment of the school rise steadily with industrial development in the area, and for the foundation to be thus enabled to put up its share of the tens of thousands of pounds which have been required to finance the extensive new building.

What might have remained an oddity without a clearly defined function in the modern world, has been threaded skilfully into the pattern of education in Worcestershire. It remains a 'peculiar', with a strong tradition and an individualistic character. But it now serves the purposes of Thomas Foley more widely than ever before.

From the LEAs

Brighton A site is being acquired in Brighton for a residential special school for handicapped children. The school will be for 45 to 50 girls between the ages of about nine or 10 and 16 years who, by reason of home difficulties, adverse environment, or other factors, are suffering from stress, anxiety, or similar disturbances. The school will be part of the provision of special educational facilities for the region as a whole, the position being that, in view of the variety of handicaps and limited number of pupils concerned, it is not feasible for every Authority to provide schools for every type of handicap but that much of the provision must be made on a regional basis. The Ministry have approved a gross cost for building work of £105,585.

Hertfordshire A boarding school for about 50 senior maladjusted boys is to be provided. Sketch plans have already been started and should be ready for submission to the summer or autumn meetings of the education committee. The Ministry of Education has included a sum of £100,000 in the building programme.

Worcestershire The authority have been asked to submit a statement to the Minister showing the value of minor projects which they wish to start during the year 1964-65. In considering the size and composition of this programme the following developments have been taken account of: **1** the continually increasing number of births in the county, which reached new high levels with 7,519 in 1961 and 7,793 in 1962, and which is intensifying pressure on infant school accommodation in many areas; **2** the considerable housing development which is going on in the county both in towns and villages and is putting such demands on the existing schools that extension of some is essential; **3** the disparity between old and new school buildings which widens every year; **4** the need for specialist accommodation for the development of extended and varied courses in certain secondary schools; **5** the need to replace as quickly as possible several prefabricated kitchens in which conditions are poor owing to wartime building and lack of ventilation; **6** the urgent need to get rid of blocks of outside lavatories, emphasised by the hard weather of last winter, and **7** the need to maintain progress in the establishment of learner swimming baths and new clinics.

For the last three years the annual submissions under this programme have been £150,000 each