

History of the Polytechnic School

Quintin Hogg announced his intentions to start a day school for boys in the *Polytechnic Magazine*, the Polytechnic's monthly publication, on 14th November 1885:

“They say nature abhors a vacuum, and I confess to having a strong dislike to seeing so many rooms at the Poly lying empty during the daytime, when there are so many useful purposes to which they may be put. I have determined therefore both with the view of promoting artisan education, and for other reasons, to start a Day School at the Poly on 1st January 1886.”

Hogg had bought 309 Regent Street in 1881 and for the first few years the building must have seemed vast compared with the previous back-street premises in Covent Garden. The Polytechnic classes and clubs were most active in the evening, when the young men and women members had finished work. At the time the state did not provide or support secondary education; only elementary education was compulsory and pupils left school aged around thirteen - so the Polytechnic Day School represented a bold experiment. When it opened on 11th January 1886 there were 130 boys, 300 by the start of the second academic year and soon over 500, aged between 8 and 17.

Hogg had clear and innovative ideas about the kind of education to be provided - all boys were to have a solid training in practical and technical as well as academic subjects and of course swimming, drill and gymnastics were part of the curriculum. School boys could use all the facilities of Regent Street, which provided an unconventional setting for a school. Many old boys remember starting the school day with an assembly in the cinema and, after 1936, with the Compton organ accompanying the hymns.

One of Hogg's motives in starting the School was a hope of generating some income from fees to support the Polytechnic, which was still privately financed. But he also provided free access, since he personally endowed a number of scholarships which enabled Board School pupils to come to the Polytechnic School. The most distinguished old boy from the early days was undoubtedly Alexander Fleming who attended the Commercial Branch of the School from 1895-97. The *Polytechnic Magazine* records the prize he won for English in 1896.

The School claims to be the pioneer of school journeys. In 1888 the first party left for a tour of Switzerland and Belgium. Legend has it that the idea for the trip came from Robert Mitchell, director of Education at the Polytechnic, who had come into a School geography lesson when the boys were learning about mountains and asked if they had ever seen any.

Whatever the truth of this, the journey marked the beginning of the Polytechnic Touring Association, later to merge into Lunn Poly. School travel continued, and many spent holidays in the Polytechnic chalets on lake Lucerne.

The name of the school is not consistently defined in this period. It is usually referred to as the Boys' Day School, but Polytechnic Middle Class School and Polytechnic Intermediate Day School are used interchangeably as well. From 1892, the school divided into two virtually separate schools – a Technical Division under Charles Mitchell (brother of Robert) and a Commercial Division under David Woodhall, with a separate Preparatory Division under Mr. T Hobart Pritchard. The school only came together for prayers and ceremonial occasions, with the rivalry between the two divisions culminating in the annual sports day each year which took place at Chiswick. The first official name was conferred in 1946 when it was re-christened The Quintin School. Interestingly many old boys objected to the name change as for sixty years they thought of themselves as "Poly boys" [and still do!].

During the interwar period the character of the school changed under the headship of P.A. Abbott. Both divisions were reunited in 1919 and the School became rigorously academic on the grammar school model, with particular strengths in science and maths. During the War the School was evacuated to Minehead in Somerset under the capable headship of Dr Bernard Worsnop. The *Polytechnic Magazine* details the school's evacuation, publishing descriptions of events by the pupils themselves:

“At about 10:30 we had the order to get ready; then a few minutes later, the order to GO. Everything went like clockwork. We marched out of that so familiar building, and the two police constables outside stopped the traffic for us to cross over Regent Street and proceed to Oxford Circus station... Here we re-assembled on the platform... The train pulled into the tunnel and we sped off on our way to Ealing Broadway. Here the job of re-assembling took place again. All along the line of boys, prefects could be heard calling the roll...everyone waited patiently and quietly for the next move. We started off again (on a Great Western train) after a long wait, still in doubt as to where we were going. It wasn't until we were about ten miles out that the guard came to tell us that our destination was Cheddar.”

The pupils were initially billeted in various villages throughout Somerset, reliant on the kindness of the locals who took them in. After a couple of chaotic weeks, Dr Worsnop succeeded in transferring everyone (around 400 boys) to Minehead where the Minehead County School became their educational base and accommodation was provided in several hostels and houses in the town, including a large house known as 'The Dene' where Mrs

Worsnop took charge, caring for some fifty boys at a time there. The County School had classes in the mornings, with the Poly School using their premises each afternoon from 1:15-5:15. The school boys thrived in their new environment, entering fully into Minehead's wartime communal life. The school's dramatic society put on plays and concerts which also raised funds for charitable and other causes related to the war effort, and frequent talks were given to local clubs and societies. School work continued as usual, with boys taking the General School and Higher School Certificate examinations throughout the war, with a pass rate of 82%.

After the War shortage of space meant that the whole school, which by this date numbered over 700 boys, never succeeded in getting back into Regent Street, and part of it was housed in the Pulteney School building in Peter Street (just off Wardour Street). Schoolboys returned to the main Regent Street building for assemblies on Monday mornings, swimming and gym, and for art, chemistry and physics classes (on the 3rd floor). The Portland Hall, in Little Titchfield Street, was used for school concerts and speech days. The problems of space, plus the coming of the 1944 Education Act, meant change was inevitable and discussions began which eventually led to the transfer of governance of the school from the Polytechnic to the London County Council. As part of the transfer, the school was renamed The Quintin School and in 1956, it relocated to St Johns Wood. In 1969, the school merged with its neighbour, Kynaston Technical School, becoming the Quintin Kynaston School.

In 2001 the school became a Specialist Technology College and in November 2011, it became an academy, changing its name to Quintin Kynaston Community Academy. Quintin Kynaston was rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted in its two most recent inspections, in 2008 and December 2011.

Relevant sources available at the University of Westminster Archive

All extant records of the Polytechnic Secondary School have been catalogued under the reference PSS and can be searched online at <http://archivesearch.westminster.ac.uk/>

There are occasional references to the school in the Polytechnic Magazine and its predecessor Home Tidings. These are available free-of-charge online at: <http://westuni.websds.net/>

There are also brief mentions of the school in the Polytechnic Board of Governors Minutes.

The University Archive also holds a copy of L C B Seaman's *The Quintin School 1886-1956 – A Brief History* (Charles Burrell, London 1957) which may be consulted in the searchroom.