Introduction

Some time ago, Chris Snuggs put a welcome and interesting link on his web site for Barry Salmon’s collection of press cuttings re the closure of Woolverstone Hall.

He made one or two remarks concerning reporters’ references to ‘Cockney’s Eton’ and ‘Poor Man’s Eton’, saying strangely that he had failed to hear, whilst at WH, a cockney accent. If by Cockney Accent he meant London Accent, then the school had certainly changed out of recognition from the one I went to.

The tone of the comments accompanying the piece got me to wonder about some of the other comments, mostly eulogies, used to describe WH., such as ‘an experiment,’ or a ‘social experiment’ (re the inclusion of some better off boys, particularly those with BAOR links).

For myself, I don’t believe any of these things. I see WH as a

Continuum which began under the London Metropolitan Asylum Board in the 19th century and apart from some modest modifications in the 1930’s and1951, continued uninterrupted until its closure.

The Asylum schools (Training Ships) administered under the poor law, were peopled mainly by the illegitimate, the destitute, and boys in poverty both in and out of institutions and gave them a general education, with a Nautical flavour.

The LCC took over from the Asylum Board in1930, and the Poor Law was scrapped in the 30’s, as councils took on more responsibilities re welfare.

The LCC inherited TS Exmouth from the Asylum Board, and turned it into a state school (boarding) in 1940 under the terms of the 1921education act after the Exmouth became LNTS and shore based at Burnham on Crouch. The Navy bought the Exmouth for WW2 service at Scarpa Flow, which was then handed over as the Worcester (an officer cadet training school) at the cessation of hostilities. Meanwhile, after a few moves around the English countryside, from Burnham on Crouch, to Lydney Glouc. Then Bray (Windsor) Exmouth (now LNTS) found a home at Woolverstone, and became LNS, Grammar, then finally Comprehensive.

Throughout this time, the source of boys remained the same; mainly at the poor end of the spectrum, though not exclusively so. The abject poverty of the 19thC decreased with time, and though by the end of WW2 with full employment things were improving, there were still sufficient boys in inadequate circumstances to continue with the practice of a boys’ boarding training school.Hence LNS.

When the Navy lost most of its fleet and its requirements were decimated, the LCC had to decide on the future of WH. They decided that there was still a requirement to be fulfilled; there were some boys who had passed 11+, who would nevertheless benefit from a boarding situation, and others who had passed/ near passed, but who would not otherwise go to a Grammar school. This was not an experiment; the other LCC and Asylum boarding institutions had shown them that a mix of intake provided for an ideal chemistry.

The wide mix was underlined by inclusion of the boys from forces in Germany, who, via the MOD, helped defray the cost of funding the school. For the London boys, there was a means tested nominal contribution of costs.

With the demise of the LCC, Grammar schools; the MOD funding; the GLC and then ILEA, the writing on the wall for a highly subsidized school, the existence of which each council could individually influence at the end of the GLA, were numbered. The establishment of WH was entire due to the efforts of the London Labour Party, and always opposed vigorously by the Conservative opposition.