

FORTY YEARS ON
Comprehensive Education at King Edward VII
School 1969-2009



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Chapter One

How it all happened 1965-69

King Edward VII School celebrates forty years as a comprehensive school this September (2009), yet in 1969, when comprehensive education was finally introduced in all of Sheffield's LEA secondary schools, there were many critics of the decision to abolish the grammar schools of the south west of Sheffield. Nowhere had the opposition been stronger than among the staff, parents and supporters of the elite, all-scholarship boys' school known to all the city as "King Ted's", resplendent in its superb Palladian building in Broomhill.

Founded in 1905 by amalgamating the Royal Grammar School (founded 1604) with Wesley College (founded 1837), it was by common consent the highest performing LEA maintained grammar school in England. It called itself King Edward VII School (KES), not Grammar School, and judged its peers to be, not the local grammar schools, but some of the most famous day schools in the land, like St Pauls, Dulwich College, Manchester G.S. and King Edward's Birmingham. It was therefore not surprising that there was great resistance from parents and staff to the Labour City Council's plans to change all secondary schools into comprehensive schools and abolish the tripartite system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools that had been created by the 1944 Education Act.

The main purpose of that legislation had been to create secondary education for all children up to the age of 15, but, through the mechanism of a common examination, to select children at the age of 11 and send them to the type of school that was thought appropriate for their level of intelligence, aptitude and intellectual ability. Theoretically all these schools would enjoy "parity of esteem" but everyone knew that there was a pecking order and that in Sheffield KES and High Storrs were at the top of that list. KES already had an impressive academic record, but prior to 1944 three quarters of the boys had been fee payers and many of them were of average ability. Now the school would enrol each year some of the most able boys from a city of half a million people, with a university and a sophisticated steel industry. KES's critics, of which there were many, complained that the school could not fail and that its examination success in the Fifties and Sixties was because it was a "sweat shop" that drove these scholarship boys to pass as many "O" and "A" levels as they could manage. Some boys racked up 14 + O levels and most Sixth Formers had taken their "A" levels by the time they were seventeen.

The school judged itself by how many pupils were admitted to Oxbridge, and it outperformed all other LEA schools in England by a country mile in terms of scholarships and exhibitions at those two ancient universities. In the early Sixties there were over 60 Old Edwardians at Oxford alone, and among the school's admirers were the old guard of senior Labour councillors on the City Council, who boasted of the school's achievements and hoped their own sons would qualify for a scholarship to KES. However, a younger generation of grammar school and university educated councillors embraced the new enthusiasm for comprehensive education and by the early Sixties they had won the argument inside the Labour Group, thereby committing the City Council to introduce comprehensive education throughout the city by the end of the decade. When Alderman Ballard, the much respected, long-serving Chair of Education, realised he had lost the fight to keep his two most successful grammar schools out of the comprehensive plans, he is reputed to have said, "*I shall go home now and have a little weep for King Ted's and High Storrs.*"

By 1965 the plans were well advanced. Myers Grove had been established as the city's first comprehensive school in 1960, then Hinde House (1963), Chaucer (1964) and in 1965 Firth Park Grammar School got its first non-selective "comprehensive" intake who would work their way up the school until it was fully comprehensive. There was little opposition to these changes in the north and east of the city. On the contrary they were welcomed, because the great majority of parents opposed the divisiveness of the 11+ examination and saw secondary modern schools as a very poor alternative to grammar schools. Furthermore, through the mechanism of a one-off IQ test, that was now seen as technically flawed; they felt their children's life chances were being settled at a very early stage of their young lives.

We don't want you!!

When it became clear to parents and staff at KES in 1965 that the Council were about to approve plans to create comprehensive secondary schools throughout the southern half of the city, they were galvanised into bitter and well organised opposition to the proposals. Calling themselves "*the Sheffield Parents Association for Secondary Education*", but almost exclusively made up of KES parents and supporters, they were appalled at the proposal that KES should become an 11-18 comprehensive school, albeit at this stage a boys-only school. They wrote to the newly appointed Headmaster, Russell Sharrock, currently serving as the Deputy Head at an inner city comprehensive school in south east London, explaining how they objected to his appointment because it would lead to a "*dilution of standards*", because he was being brought in to introduce comprehensive education and destroy KES as they knew it. Most of the staff pledged that they would leave rather than teach in a comprehensive school, and indeed half the 44 staff did leave before 1969, including nine of the fifteen heads of departments. It is fair to assume that many others tried to leave but could not find suitable schools, because the new Labour Government was determined to force all LEA's to adopt comprehensive education. As they were mainly Labour local authorities they were now often pushing against an open door: as Tony Crosland, the new Education Secretary, was famously quoted as saying, he would "*destroy every xxxx grammar school in England*".

Nathaniel Clapton (Headmaster 1950-65), however, played no part in the campaign. He was an ill man spending considerable periods of time in hospital, but he was in despair that the Labour Council were "destroying" the high performing grammar school that he had built up. When two of his prefects, along with eleven other sixth formers, sent a letter to the Star newspaper supporting the proposed changes, he had them publicly dismissed from their prefectorial office at morning assembly; an "own goal" that brought ridicule on the school from supporters of comprehensive education.

It was into this poisoned atmosphere that Russell Sharrock arrived to take up his duties in January 1966. He was to be the last Headmaster of KES --the grammar school-- with clear instructions to prepare KES for the introduction of comprehensive education, initially within five years, later reduced to three. If he did not have a difficult enough task already, the City Council in 1967 decided that all their comprehensive schools should be co-educational. No problem for most of the other grammar schools like High Storrs and Abbeydale G.S because they had always been co-educational, but another body blow to the KES opponents of the scheme, especially among the misogynist staff members, many of whom reacted to the possibility of teaching girls as if they were creatures from a different planet, which metaphorically they were when they arrived in 1969.

To effect this proposal KES would be linked with the 350 pupils at the recently opened Crosspool secondary modern school at Darwin Lane. They had just moved into these premises from Western Road School in Crookes (now Westways) in 1965 and were expecting to become a girls-only

comprehensive to complement KES, the boys' comprehensive, in their western quarter of the city. As one can imagine the Crosspool staff were somewhat apprehensive about joining up with KES staff, but Jack North, the acting Crosspool Headteacher, encouraged them to think positively about the changes that would be beneficial to their pupils and could hold opportunities for their own professional advancement. The date for KES and the rest of south Sheffield schools to "go comprehensive" was now moved forward two years to 1969.

Then, in 1968, the unbelievable happened in Sheffield political life. The Conservatives gained control of the City Council and all the opponents of comprehensive education, including the KES parents and staff, believed that "the cavalry had arrived in the nick of time" and that the grammar schools would be saved. They were to be sadly disappointed. The Conservatives on the City Council were divided about the new proposals and their leading spokesman, Frank Adams, an Old Edwardian himself, was in favour of the comprehensive scheme going ahead. After all, even in the "Tory" heartlands of south west Sheffield the majority of children went to secondary modern schools, leaving sons and daughters cruelly divided by the 11+ examination.

Within one year Labour, against all the national trends, were back in control of the Town Hall by the narrowest of margins. Led by their new Chair of Education, Peter Horton, their most articulate and enthusiastic supporter of comprehensive education, they were now determined to get their scheme into place as soon as possible. They had to make one or two concessions to the Conservatives, including one that would be crucially important to KES in the future. The new comprehensive schools would be able to take pupils from outside their catchment areas, although it was hoped that this would be a parental option that would be very sparingly used. This was because one of the key elements of the comprehensive plan was to establish the catchment areas of the former grammar schools so that they did not just serve middle class areas. Former secondary modern schools had much tighter catchment areas just serving their neighbourhood, which could in some cases be almost exclusively middle class, while KES, Abbeydale and High Storrs were designated wedges of the city running from the suburbs to the centre of town, providing school populations that were much more socially diverse. KES's catchment area ran from Nether Green and Ranmoor in the west, to Walkley and the huge Kelvin Flats complex (now demolished) in the east. This catchment area is still largely in place and makes KES both an inner city school and one serving the leafy and affluent suburbs. Some famous grammar schools, like the Liverpool Institute (numbering Paul McCartney and George Harrison among its old boys) and Hackney Downs in London (whose alumni include Harold Pinter and Michael Caine), did not survive when they became inner city comprehensives, whilst KES has not only survived but flourished.

Chapter Two

THE FOUR (or even Five) SITE SAGA

1969-79

If Russell Sharrock thought he had weathered a bumpy ride so far, it was nothing compared to the difficulties he now faced. All over Britain headteachers were having to cope with these new comprehensive institutions, usually far larger in size than previous grammar or secondary modern schools to enable them to offer a wide range of courses to viable numbers of pupils. At the same time Heads had to smooth the concerns of parents and staff, who had known different regimes and were worried about standards and opportunities, while fusing old traditions and creating acceptable new identities. The Headmaster at KES shared all those concerns but, because of the bitterness over the changes -- often scarcely apparent at some new schools-- he had to tread particularly carefully as well as cope with the most fundamental new problem – a school on two sites.

No KES Headmaster since Dr. Hichens in 1905 had faced such problems. (Hichens did not even have a school building at the start, because the old Wesley College had been gutted and was not ready until September 1906). Sharrock's problem was he had too many buildings. Not just Darwin Lane, which would morph into the Lower School within four years but, to cope with the numbers at Upper School, he had been given Melbourne House (once the home of KES headmasters, now part of the Girls' High School). Later KES would once again acquire the Lynwood site (it had been KES's boarding house from 1911-38 and is now the Aunt Sally Pub) and the adjacent Springvale building (now demolished), while their playing fields were still two miles away at Whiteley Woods.

While the 300 former Crosspool pupils were used to co-educational education, the 700 boys who had won their scholarship to the all-male KES were not. Russell Sharrock decided that the school should recruit some girls to the Sixth Form straight away. He got permission to have an establishment of twenty girls for that first term in September 1969. In the event the school only found thirteen willing volunteers who, apart from making a very large impact on the Sixth Form boys, started a tradition that has served KES very well, with so many of the school's activities now dependent on the participation of girls, while they also consistently outperform boys in GCSE exams and often outnumber the boys in the Sixth Form. By 1970 there was a Head Girl in office, although she was not allowed on the platform at Speech Day, and shortly afterwards another girl won a place at St. Hilda's at Oxford, thereby continuing another great KES tradition. A pink gingham uniform, consisting of a blouse in winter and a dress in summer, was designed by the Headmaster's wife in the colours of the Alexandra rose (named appropriately after Edward VII's Queen). Meanwhile the numbers of girls in the school continued to grow in the Seventies as the comprehensive intake made its way up the school, although, inexplicably, boys almost always outnumber girls in Years 7-11 to this day.

The critics of the new comprehensive KES expected, even wanted, to see the school fail in comparison with its grammar school predecessor. The Old Edwardians Association held a ballot to see if its members wanted to continue now that the school had changed. Many felt that KES should have been re-named and that the "Old Lady of Glossop Road" should have been quietly buried. Sharrock, on the other hand, was desperate to keep the name and even persuaded the LEA not to include the word "Comprehensive" in the title as they did in Rotherham and other towns. Keen to create a sense of continuity, the LEA, who argued that these ex-grammar schools were just as good as before but were now benefitting a wider ability range of pupils, kept the traditional names like Firth Park, High Storrs and KES and adopted their uniforms and traditions, although the Crosspool Schools

of this world were consigned to oblivion. For the record the Old Edwardians voted to continue, but only to admit boys into membership, a decision not reversed till a decade later.



The new girls at KES soon settled in. Although this young lady may have been premature in donning the boys' school uniform, as the headmaster's wife soon designed summer dresses and winter blouses for the new intake of girls

Some institutions, like the eight time-hallowed Houses, did not long survive in the new KES, especially after almost all of the housemasters resigned. To save the house system, the eight houses were then reduced to four, but there was now no enthusiasm for them and they were discontinued in 1973, although Sharrock had wanted to build the emerging pastoral system around them. The school scouts lasted till 1975, but their time may have been up even in a grammar school, and they were replaced by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, which still thrives at KES to this day. The Latin School Song and the Latin Oration at Speech Day were also discontinued. The latter was seen by some as extremely pretentious: one prefect who forgot his lines had the presence of mind to recite a recent homework he had attempted and only the Latin teachers noted his deception. The teaching of Latin would, however, survive until 1996, far

longer than at most comprehensive schools. Gowns now became optional for staff in a school where many teachers were not graduates, and the use of the word master began to disappear, although Russell Sharrock was always referred to as the "Headmaster" and was the last person to wear a gown at KES.

A new KES emerges

Although KES may have seen some changes in the early Seventies the school did not fail, it flourished, and to the relief of its political masters at the Town Hall it became a very successful comprehensive school. Sharrock made no secret that his aim was to maintain a grammar school within a comprehensive school, with all the high academic achievements and extra-curricular activities continuing. To this end, all the boys who had passed their 11+ were always taught at Upper School. They wore the same uniforms, took the same subjects, taught largely by the same staff, and were mainly unaware of their new fellow pupils at Darwin Lane. The split site could work in a number of ways and, while the Headmaster constantly pestered the LEA to build them one complete school on one site --which would inevitably have been at Crosspool, the split site allowed the transition for the former grammar school pupils and staff to pass off relatively easily. Crosspool children, on the other hand, stayed at Darwin Lane and very few came up to Upper School. Perhaps that is why, initially, few joined the Sixth Form, even though the number and quality of CSE passes increased exponentially.



The Assembly Hall at Upper School. As familiar to the boys of the Grammar School (1905-69) as is it to the students at the Comprehensive School today. Although it has the appearance of a Methodist chapel, it was not part of Wesley College but was created in 1905 when the building's interior was completely remodelled to meet the requirements of the new KES, founded in that year.

There were critics inside and outside KES who argued that this was not what comprehensive education was about. Instead the school banded and then streamed its classes rigorously, placing their faith in intensive annual assessment procedures, to move up late developers and encourage pupils who showed specific ability to take "O" level GCE in as many subjects as possible. The School's "A" Level results remained impressive, the numbers going to Oxbridge remained at a high level (averaging thirteen a year in the Seventies) and extra-curricular societies continued and evolved to accommodate new enthusiasms. Not so happy were the "ROSLA kids", the pupils who had to stay on for an extra year when the school leaving age was raised to 16 in 1972. Unsure what to do with these reluctant members of the community, they were stuck away out of sight in Melbourne House and avoided by most of the staff. This was not KES's finest achievement, although the school did put in place pastoral systems to help and advise students; something that was a major part of the comprehensive philosophy, unlike the sink or swim and pull yourself together attitude at KES from 1905 until Clapton's time.

Some areas where standards were expected to go downhill not only survived but moved to new heights. Drama and Music were strengthened by the involvement of girls and by enthusiastic new staff. While Norman Barnes (KES 1947-76), a legend in the world of KES and Sheffield music, stayed on into the comprehensive era, only retiring in 1976. He bemoaned the effect of the split site, so that "*his trebles and sopranos were at Darwin Lane, while his tenors and baritones were at Glossop Road*", and yet despite this, and the enforced splitting of his orchestra so that rehearsal of the whole orchestra was often a last minute affair, he re-established a firm foundation for KES music which has never faltered since. Outside school hours there was a vibrant alternative KES music tradition developing, as numerous pupils formed teenage rock groups. Most of these were short lived,

although some went on to international fame, like Phil Oakey, Joe Elliot and Paul Heaton, the lead singers of the Human League, Def Leopard, and the Beautiful South pop bands.

Meanwhile KES sport had never been stronger than in the Seventies. Sport often claims that it is one area of school life where students of all abilities can make an equal contribution, and that was true of KES sport in that decade. Some of the finest football teams in the school's history vied for honours with rugby union sides that were unbeaten for long periods. However, it was girls' sport that was the great revelation with 28 school teams and 14 sports on offer, producing many champions: one shot putter went on to perform at the Seoul Olympics and a gymnast became a member of the full Great Britain international team while still at the school.

Looking back now at the KES gradualist approach to comprehensive education in the Seventies, it may sometimes appear that the school's main priority was to heed the strident critics who had wanted to keep KES a grammar school, and retain as much of the old system as was possible. However, perhaps that was the wisest course to follow until it became clearer how the complex new comprehensive schools would develop. Few would have thanked Russell Sharrock if he had thrown away so much of KES's past attainments in pursuit of an ideology that was still untested, and for which there was no authoritative blueprint. Instead he would claim that he laid a solid platform of achievement that would enable new comprehensive initiatives at KES to succeed in the next three decades.

There was one final throw of the grammar school dice at Speech Day in 1974, as the last group of pupils who had taken their 11+ examination passed through the Upper Sixth. An elaborate prank was devised to drop a flour bomb, hidden in the roof of the Assembly Hall, on to the platform below, targeting the Headmaster as he spoke at the lectern. Released by its own time mechanism it was late in being activated, so instead of falling on the Headmaster, it was Arthur Jackson, the Deputy Head who had guided the fortunes of the 350 strong Sixth Form throughout the decade, who stoically took the force of the white flour powder falling from above. No-one who was there will ever forget the incident, which became part of KES folklore, while at the same time perhaps unwittingly reflecting the originality and intellectual brilliance of so much of the education at KES throughout its history.



The Staff Rugby Union Team who played the School XV in 1974. Alan Powell (second from right, front row) had started teaching at Crosspool School in 1968 and transferred to the new KES comprehensive school the following year. He served on the KES staff until his retirement in 2008. For the record, the School overwhelmed the Staff and won by 30 points to nil.

Chapter Three

Towards a more comprehensive school

1980-1988

In the Eighties, during the third phase of Russell Sharrock's time as Headmaster of KES, the school explored paths that would lead to a more complete comprehensive system of education. Now all the pupils and the large majority of the staff had only known KES as a comprehensive school and many teachers and parents were enthusiastic supporters of the new system. They believed that not only was it a fairer system, giving real equality of opportunity, rather than just an equal right to sit an examination at eleven, but they saw that KES had proved that high standards could be maintained for the academically able, who would have previously have gone to grammar schools. Students could still win places at Oxbridge, with many more (averaging a 100 a year) going to other universities than ever before in the school's history. Now was the time to concentrate more closely on the equally important duty of the school, to raise the standards, opportunities and the sheer enjoyment of learning for those who were less academically able, even hostile to education.

There was a sea change in the leadership team at this time, as key people who had taught in the tripartite system were replaced by new Assistant Heads from a younger generation, like Mike Denial and Kay Alcock (later Mrs.Madden), who were strong believers in the future of comprehensive schools and what they could achieve. They were the guiding hands behind changes in the curriculum and encouraged mixed-ability teaching in as many subject areas as possible. In the early Eighties English, Geography, History and even French ran mixed ability classes alongside the existing PE and RE department lessons, which had used mixed ability teaching since day one. Some subjects, including Maths and the Sciences, felt that such a radical step was impossible, while Craft, Design and Technology welcomed the chance to include more academically gifted children on their courses.

In retrospect "the jury is still out" on whether or not those mixed ability classes worked. Most felt they did not provide the great leap forward that their supporters had hoped for, but neither did they cause standards to drop. They did, however, help to create a greater sense of one community, as did the abolition in 1988 of the two examination systems, GCE and CSE, a hangover from the days of grammar schools and secondary moderns. They were fused into one common examination regime, the GCSE, with the laudable aim of providing, and celebrating, due recognition of all pupils' efforts, while at the same time challenging intellectually able students to achieve high performances comparable to those in "O" Levels.

Lower School, with its first three years of pupils situated a mile and a half away at Darwin Lane, had also entered a very happy stage under the wise leadership of Bryan Gallagher, and ensured a good start to the education of KES pupils. By the time pupils came up to Glossop Road at the age of fourteen, the precepts of good comprehensive education, namely the desire to learn and to enjoy one's education, had already been inculcated in the majority of children at Lower School. Meanwhile the Head of Middle School, Nick Jones, had been developing a more advanced pastoral care system, encouraging the individual worth of each pupil and supporting them through the angst of their early teenage years. Just as important, in helping teenagers come to terms with themselves and the world around them, were the new PSE (later PHSE – Personal, Health and Social Education) courses pioneered by Anthea Peers, which would gain national recognition for their innovation and

imagination, making KES something of a leading authority in this new curriculum departure. The early Eighties were a chaotic time in Britain with urban riots, which turned to race riots in some towns -- though Sheffield was spared both of these—and with school children constantly exposed to a wild, rebellious popular culture that seemed even more outrageous than usual to adults brought up in quieter times, or even in the swinging Sixties. At times it also appeared that the bitter industrial unrest of those years would boil over into serious political chaos, and no pupil at KES could be unaware that Sheffield was in the eye of that particular storm during the Steel Strike of 1980 and the Miners' Strike of 1984-85.

Yet despite this the school carried on its normal routine of business as it had done during comprehensive reorganisation in the Sixties. The Sixth Form, still the biggest in the city, dropped to 250 in the early Eighties, because after 1975 other Sheffield schools were allowed to offer post-16 education and Tapton and Silverdale had very soon developed viable sixth forms of their own. Prior to 1975 there was a formal arrangement that Tapton pupils joined the KES Sixth Form for their “A” level studies, although some Tapton students chose other schools, including Sebastian Coe who went to Abbeydale Grange, because their extensive playing fields offered better training facilities. KES took delivery of its first computer—an Apple word processor-- in 1980, and KESMAG, the school's tabloid magazine, noted that the new arrival was “important, but not of earth shattering significance”. They could not have been more wrong! Yet KESMAG, which had been the runner-up out of 642 entries in the 1976 Sunday Times School Magazine Competition, was a lively successor to the formal journals of record of the grammar school era, although it ran out of steam in 1983 and folded.

But there were changes that no one could ignore. In 1982 the Labour City Council quite arbitrarily abolished the use of the cane and school uniforms throughout its schools. Under pressure from angry parents they allowed schools to organise referendums on both issues, although as far as the politicians were concerned the decision had been taken. Despite this the parents at every school, including those at KES, voted to keep the cane and school uniforms, although the KES Governors sided with the Council, who abolished the cane and uniforms anyhow. In 1986 the use of the cane in British schools was outlawed under European Law, but school uniforms crept back in most Sheffield schools in the Nineties, usually in the form of a sweater bearing the school badge. KES had such a sweater, in an attractive light royal blue, but it was never made compulsory and is not worn in the classroom by KES pupils today. The freedom to wear your own choice of clothes, within reason, is one of the defining characteristics of present day KES, and some pupils choose the school for this reason, while there is still a latent opposition among some parents to the absence of formal school uniforms at KES.

Save our Sixth Forms, but not ours!

While KES was developing the benefits of comprehensive education for all of its pupils in the early Eighties, there was a time bomb ticking away underneath the school that threatened its very existence, certainly its identity. In 1981, Peter Horton had laid proposals before the City Council to abolish all the sixth forms at the existing secondary schools in Sheffield and replace them with eight tertiary colleges that would accommodate all post-16 education, both academic and vocational. The tertiary college idea had a long pedigree in the Labour Party in Sheffield. In 1942 when the City Council began the process of the rebuilding of their city after the Blitz, they also put forward plans to modernise many of their services and offer a better future for their citizens after the War. Their report included tertiary colleges offering education for all, whether School Certificate holders or adults who had only had elementary education and wanted to catch up in later life. They were disappointed that the tertiary idea was not included in the 1944 Butler Education Act, and Horton was disappointed that the City Council in 1965 had not incorporated tertiary colleges into the comprehensive re-

organisation. He was to be further disappointed when the Council in 1975 allowed all schools to run their own Sixth Forms, something that many of them were clearly incapable of managing.

In the Eighties, with falling rolls due to the imminent severe reduction of the teenage population, and the manifest imbalance between the performances of some Sheffield comprehensive schools, Horton found his proposals were now accepted by a more receptive Labour Group. While there was undoubted success of some schools' sixth forms, mainly the former grammar schools with their large numbers of post-16 students, others, mainly in the north and east of the city were struggling (Waltheof School had ten students in its Sixth Form, Herries School had nine). The Council now saw tertiary colleges as completing the comprehensive process, and many in the city found their arguments compelling as a way of raising the standards of attainment of all Sheffield secondary schoolchildren.

None more so than the left of centre KES governors, who embraced the new changes which would see KES divided, with its name and separate identity abolished. All 11-16 education would be concentrated on the Darwin Lane site and amalgamated with Tapton, whose Headteacher would become the supremo, with Russell Sharrock retiring. This new school would take a new name, or possibly be called Tapton, while Upper School would have become one of the eight tertiary colleges, probably called Broomhill College. Given its location in the west of the city it would most probably have concentrated on "A" Level work and become a high performing tertiary college. There were many who saw this as a most suitable positioning for the school, which had been for sixty years the city's elite grammar school, even if it would forfeit its proud royal name.

There was a certain amount of token resistance from the KES staff and the Headmaster never openly supported the proposals, but he would have been overruled by the Governors if he had opposed the scheme publicly, while the staff soon accepted the plans (passed in 1985) as inevitable. KES was used to these confrontations with the Labour Council: they had been the essence of their symbiotic relationship since the Labour Party first took control at the Town Hall in 1926. They came round every twenty years and this one was on cue. However, there was a difference this time. KES was not leading the opposition as usual, it was officially supporting the changes. The opposition came from Silverdale governors who found that they were going to be swallowed up by High Storrs and they were having none of it.

Led by a prominent Conservative councillor they formed a "Save our Sixth Forms" campaign and encouraged the Conservative Group on the City Council to oppose the proposals, at least for the south-west of the city. Normally their opposition would have meant nothing, for they were just perpetual sparring partners in the council chamber, but they had the ear of the Thatcher Government and specifically their combative Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker. Sorting out left-wing local councils was meat and drink to Baker, who as Environment Secretary had just signed the death warrant of Ken Livingstone's GLC and the six Labour controlled Met. County Councils, including the "Socialist Republic" of South Yorkshire. He kept Sheffield Council waiting for a year before announcing his amazing decision, in effect a political coup, which took the Conservative-held Hallam Constituency out of the tertiary system, leaving only six tertiary colleges which later, in 1992, amalgamated to form one huge Sheffield College, claimed to be the largest college in Europe.

With one bound KES, High Storrs, Tapton, Silverdale, King Ecberts and Abbeydale Grange were free to continue as 11-18 comprehensive schools and develop their sixth forms, which in almost every case they have done with outstanding success in the last two decades. The Labour Council were told by Baker that they could accept they had got three quarters of the cake or the whole thing was off. Pragmatically they reluctantly accepted this offer, defiantly announcing that when a Labour

Government was returned the six schools would be brought back into the fold. They were supported in their disappointment by the KES governors, who sent a strong resolution to Kenneth Baker saying “We are dismayed and totally at a loss to comprehend the short-sightedness of your decision. It will make for many more problems in the south-west of Sheffield than it can ever hope to solve.” Strong stuff indeed; but it is unlikely that their angry letter caused the Education Secretary many sleepless nights. As for the Council’s Plan B. Labour did not win the 1987 election, nor the one in 1992, and ironically when Labour got back into power at Westminster in 1997, the new Education Secretary was none other than Sheffield’s former Council Leader, David Blunkett. However, by then Labour at Westminster was no longer interested in large scale structural reorganisations for LEA schools. So KES has kept its Sixth Form; which in the new century passed the 500 student mark and is still the largest in the city.

The Longest Serving Head

Russell Sharrock took the opportunity to retire in 1988 when he was sixty-four years old. He remains the longest serving headteacher in the history of KES, and the fifth longest in the history of the parent schools going back all the way to 1604. His legacy was a thriving comprehensive school that had made a successful transition from an elite grammar school. Its academic standards were high; the Sixth Form had recovered its numbers and was 350 students strong, gaining an impressive 80% pass rate at “A” Level (averaging 33% AB grades), 10% above the national average, although not so impressive as the results KES was to achieve at “A” Level in the Twenty-First Century. On the day Sharrock left he told the press that he was particularly pleased that eight students had been accepted at Oxbridge, “proving that high flyers can succeed at a comprehensive school.” But during his stewardship in the Eighties much effort and thought had gone into raising the attainment levels of the less able pupils, with some success.

This was not a just a KES priority in the Eighties, but a national one as well. Starting with Jim Callaghan’s speech at Ruskin College in 1976, politicians and industrialists, as well as some educationalists, had seen a mismatch between what was taught and what was needed in a modern economy. The Education Acts of the Eighties, especially those of 1986 and 1988, were intended by the Conservatives to revitalise schools’ organisation as well as their curriculums and drive up standards. Sheffield LEA had responded in 1983 with their own Sheffield Curriculum Initiative, through which teachers were seconded to create new courses that would seem more relevant to their pupils and to their aspirations in the world of work when they left school. Education was too important to ever live outside the nation’s political process, but in the Eighties it became one of the main political battlegrounds as the Government sought to redirect the soul of the nation with its educational reforms.

Thus, KES in the Eighties was almost drowning in numerous government and council initiatives, which included giving parents a more important role in how schools were run. After 1986 the KES Governing Body had more elected parent governors and fewer LEA ones, who were in effect local political party members. Although KES was now forbidden under the Act to keep its two student governors, which Sheffield had pioneered since 1975. Furthermore, so that Governors would become more accountable to parents, they now had to produce a fairly detailed annual report and hold an annual meeting to discuss its contents, as if they were shareholders at a company’s AGM. Parent power at KES was not the populist, ill-informed monster that some feared, because many of the parent governors over the next twenty years were of a very high quality and were enthusiastic supporters of the school. Since 1987 KES has had six Chairs of Governors and all of them have been parent governors except one; and these parents have served the school with distinction.

Not everyone perceived the Thatcher Government as a beneficial supporter of “state” schools, as her party insisted on calling them, thereby conjuring up some totalitarian “bog standard” monsters where respectable folk would not dare to tread. The Eighties were a time when Government enthusiasm for cutting public expenditure, especially in areas controlled by left wing councils like Sheffield, began to bite. On rainy days the Headmaster would get to school early to lay out a series of buckets to catch the rainwater pouring through unrepaired holes in the roof, and the building’s interior and its classical exterior looked very shabby.

The main teaching unions, who felt demonised and badly remunerated by an unsympathetic government, retaliated with a guerrilla warfare of one day strikes and working to rule, which made for considerable difficulties with the school’s vaunted extra-curricular activities. This long running action (from 1984-87) had a particularly deleterious effect on school sport, and inter-school matches became difficult to organise, not so much because KES could not raise teams but because they often had no one to play. School sport recovered in the Nineties, once again disproving the popular tabloid myth that comprehensive schools did not believe in competitive team sports, but one long term casualty of these troubled times was the decline of Sixth Form sport, once the pinnacle of a school’s sporting reputation. Nevertheless the school had its sporting heroes as in any decade, with two boys representing England at Rugby Union, almost unheard of for a comprehensive school, especially one whose main sport was soccer, and a girl who went one better and was invited to join the Great Britain Women’s Judo Squad, later representing Great Britain women at Rugby League and England at Rugby Union.

In May 1988, after receiving over a hundred applications, five candidates were interviewed for the vacant post of Headteacher at KES. The successful candidate was Michael Lewis, an Oxford graduate born in Northern Ireland, who was an ardent enthusiast for comprehensive education and who, unlike all his predecessors, had never taught in a grammar or public school. He was only the seventh headteacher in the history of King Edward the Seventh School.



Russell Sharrock with his Management Team in 1988. L to R Kay Alcock (later Mrs Madden), Mike Denial, the Headmaster and Bryan Gallagher. Russell Sharrock retired that summer after 22 years service to KES.

Chapter Four

Difficult Times 1988-97

The new Headteacher took over a comprehensive school that had been “stood on its legs” by his predecessor, although like any new vigorous and capable appointee, Michael Lewis had his own ideas about the direction he wanted his new school to take. There was some trepidation among the staff who had got used to old ways that the new man might be too radical for their taste. This must have communicated itself to a number of Old Edwardians, who wrote in demanding that the new Head did not remove the iconic honours boards, that covered every available wall on the main corridor and in the Assembly Hall. He had never had any idea of doing such a thing even though they were frozen in time in the mid-Sixties when Russell Sharrock had taken over. Presumably they were not seen as appropriate in a school dedicated to celebrating the achievements of all pupils, not just Oxbridge scholarship winners. The honours boards remain to this day and are now seen as an important and very visible link to KES’s past.

Michael Lewis had much more important issues to deal with in 1988. He took over the school at the same time as a crucially significant Education Act was passed by the Thatcher Government, that established so many of the critical institutions that would shape education in the next two decades. They included; the National Curriculum, Key Stage testing at 11,14 and 16, and the Ofsted Inspectorate who would be capable of undertaking more rigorous regular school inspections, seen by the government as rooting out the weak and the unacceptable among the schools of England and Wales. They introduced the publishing of “league tables” that indicated a school’s performance in external exams which was intended to inform parental choice. This aim was clearly achieved, causing parents to “vote with their feet” and avoid local schools now perceived as less successful, while desperately trying to gain admission for their children at the “good” schools. KES might be seen as one of the beneficiaries of the “league tables”, but for the city as a whole it made attempts to create equality between schools well nigh impossible, and became a self-fulfilling initiative. Even effective schools coping extremely well with their own particular problems, can be demoralised by local newspapers publishing pecking orders that only confirm that middle class children perform better on the whole than working class children, the very core issue that comprehensive schools were set up to address and overcome.

All these “reforms” created a new culture in education, as did LMS (Local Management of Schools) which was intended to free schools from the “dead hand” of overly detailed control of school finances, staffing and organisation enjoyed by the LEA. Before LMS was introduced to KES in 1991, approval by the LEA had to be sought for the smallest item of expenditure. So, the school welcomed the freedom to have control over its own budget, then standing at £3 million, but unfortunately it was a hollow advantage because with the Government’s continued assault on public expenditure, the money available to the school was reduced in real, and in some years, actual terms. LMS was wryly referred to in some quarters as “Less Money to Spend” and this continual financial hardship was the real political battleground in the Nineties, not this time over re-organisation as in the Sixties and Eighties. The Government held one carrot out to all secondary and primary schools to enable them to escape from their LEAs, still mainly Labour controlled in populous cities and counties. They could become Grant Maintained Schools, with a more generous allocation of money, bypassing the local council and allowing “opted out” schools considerable independence of action, including some

control of admissions. It was almost a “state” school equivalent of the direct grant to independent schools that Labour had abolished in the Seventies.

Kenneth Baker, still the Education Secretary, was surprised how few schools took up this option in the Nineties. He thought comprehensives in the leafy suburbs, who had endured continual running battles with Labour Councils with seemingly permanent majorities, would jump at the chance to be free of their LEA. It did not happen, certainly not in Sheffield. Only the Catholic secondary schools and some primary schools that were about to close because of falling rolls, opted for GMS status. Not one of the Council’s comprehensives broke ranks, preferring when “push came to shove” to remain part of the LEA family of schools, although two did have a ballot of parents, something the KES governors declined to hold throughout the mid-Nineties.

The National Curriculum, introduced gradually into KES between 1989 and 1994, was perhaps the most fundamental change of all. English schools had been in charge of what they taught in the classroom, except that each subject department had to marry their syllabus to the requirements of the GCSE and “A” level external exams. Now the school were required to adopt a curriculum pattern of compulsory subjects with prescribed contents decided by government agencies, and was forced to abandon the work of the Sheffield Initiative that had explored, among new ideas, cross-curricular syllabuses.

For some in education it appeared that the government had taken away their “birthright” and reduced teachers to the role of “apparatchiks” loyally spouting the received wisdom of government servants. KES however did not find the imposition of the National Curriculum too restrictive as the three core and seven foundation subjects were not dissimilar to the entitlement that the school already offered. However, almost all teachers complained that the authors of the different syllabuses had overloaded the content and were constantly introducing revisions, thereby infuriating and exhausting teachers who had to prepare the new courses. This national outcry was addressed in the Dearing Report of 1993 and since then the National Curriculum has become accepted, even though not so many years ago such rigidity, as you had in France, would have been derided as un-English, even dangerously teetering on the edge of totalitarianism. The Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) that underpinned the National Curriculum with its culture of regular testing at 11 and 14 were never popular and in 1993 the KES staff refused, in common with other schools in the country, to administer the SATs because they were poorly constructed and putting too much pressure on pupils at a young age. They were also considered in the Dearing Report and were judged to be too complex and this led to a simplification. In 2008, after complete chaos had occurred over some of the marking by a US company, the Education Secretary, Ed Balls, abolished Key Stage 3 SAT’s (taken at the end of Year 9) virtually overnight and no one mourned their passing.

There were new initiatives in the more routine aspects of school life. A new Tutor Group system was introduced in 1989, whereby each new pupil would be assigned to a tutor group of up to 30 classmates. They would then remain in that group as it progressed up the school until the end of their Y11 year. These groups were paired and named after Sheffield’s rivers; Loxley, Porter, Rivelin and Sheaf, so in any year a boy or girl would be in L1, L2 or P1, P2 etc. and it was hoped that from this vertical linked system might emerge a new house spirit and identity. This did not happen, but the new class structure strengthened still further the pastoral system and was a useful vehicle for inter-form games as pupils really did identify with their own form within their own year group. The naming of each year as Y7 to Y13 was now a national requirement for all schools, and any fancy names that schools had dreamt up in the past (KES had once had a Lower Sixth class called *Transitus*) were discarded.

To encourage a fuller understanding of the world of work each Y10 student would now undertake a work experience placement, no easy task to find situations for 240 students every Summer Term, but it was seen as an important element in offering a fuller education entitlement at KES. There were changes to the school's Management Team as the Heads of Middle School and the Sixth Form joined the Assistant Heads, while a series of regular meetings with the staff were instituted that focussed on curriculum, pastoral and general issues and concerns. Michael Lewis also allowed the prefects to wither away, not by any formal process of abolition, but just by not appointing any new one in 1989. They had survived longer at KES than at most comprehensives where older students "policing" younger ones, or even their peers, had proved counter-productive in recent times.

If all these changes did not cause enough headaches for a new Headteacher, Lewis also had to cope with any fall out caused by the establishment of the six remaining tertiary colleges in 1988. Firstly, there was residual political resentment from councillors and LEA officials, who regarded the six 11-18 comprehensives who had "escaped" as the illegitimate children of the 1988 re-organisation. The Leader of the Council, Clive Betts, an Old Edwardian himself and soon to be an MP, made it clear that the council's aim was to "finish the job" as soon as a Labour Government was elected and this created a background of uncertainty for KES and the other schools. Secondly, the new colleges attracted staff from the comprehensive schools and KES lost one Assistant Head and three Heads of Departments with the possibility that others might move over to one of the tertiary colleges if they proved to be the future of post-16 education. Similarly, no one knew in 1988 whether sixth forms would wither, even become unviable, if students chose the more adult atmosphere of the colleges rather than the sixth forms, which were after all still part of a traditional school.

We now know this did not happen, rather the reverse occurred and the sixth form schools became very popular for able students attempting "A" Level, with many students from the north and east of the city opting to join KES's Sixth Form. So despite the falling rolls in comprehensive schools, KES's Sixth Form increased in number throughout the decade and by 1996 broke through the 400 student limit and six years later passed 500, with students now taking 34 subjects including ones unknown to previous generations such as Psychology, Logic/Philosophy and Archaeology.

In March 1997, almost at the end of Michael Lewis's first decade, the school was much encouraged by receiving a very good Ofsted Report after a rigorous inspection by 17 Inspectors, the first such inspection since 1952. The Governors and Staff were somewhat apprehensive when they knew the inspectors were coming, because under their controversial chief, Chris Woodhead, Ofsted had acquired a reputation as "Thatcher's Rottweilers" who delighted in "naming and shaming" schools they judged to be failures. The Governors knew that KES was well above the national and local average in all aspects of school performance that could be judged numerically, including SATS, GCSE and "A" Level results, but no one could be certain if the school was guilty of complacency, even inefficiency, in some areas of school life. In the event the Report, that now went to all parents unlike the private, secretive report of 1952, was fulsome in its praise, indicating that 95% of all lessons viewed were ranked as good teaching, while 90% of parents who responded to a questionnaire indicated that their children positively liked being at KES, not a response you would necessarily get at all schools. Summing up the inspectors said;

"This is a very popular, truly comprehensive and successful school where pupils attain high standards and a very high degree of racial harmony is a strength".

No-one could have asked for much more, and the final line was particularly pleasing. Off the record the Inspectors made it clear that they could not have been more delighted to have found a school that

fulfilled almost all the criteria that the original advocates of comprehensive education had claimed would happen. Here was a school dedicated to genuine comprehensive education and raising the achievements and aspirations of the great majority of its pupils of whatever ability, while serving in almost equal proportions the children of the affluent suburbs alongside those from some of the most deprived areas in the city. Added to this was a large multi-ethnic mix (25% of students were from BME families or had dual-heritage) in a school that promoted this diversity to enhance the educational experience of all students.



In 2008 the Governors agreed to name the 'new' building, now thirteen years old, 'The Michael Lewis Building' in recognition of the retiring Headteacher's outstanding service to KES, including piloting this building through all its phases of planning and construction. He is seen here at the naming ceremony in March 2009, with the new Headteacher, Beverley Jackson.

Chapter Five

The Years of Plenty

1997-2008

The years of austerity lasted almost to the end of the decade, until a new Government in Westminster, dedicated to “Education!, Education!, Education!” began to make its presence felt with considerably more generous funding of all public sector schools. At the same time there were some key changes of senior personnel in the City Council, including a new Chief Executive in 1997 and a newly appointed Director of Education in 1996, both of whom were more sympathetic to the aspirations of the Sixth Form schools, and had no link, or truck, with past controversies. However, before that watershed date arrived, the City Council funded one major project that finally enabled Upper School to teach all of its classes on one site.

The first new building built in the Close since the new extensions of 1954 and the Swimming Pool in 1936, was finally built on the site of former temporary classrooms on the eastern side of the school grounds. Opened in 1995, and designed by the City Architect’s department, it was built in an attractive modern style, but complimentary to the main building. Its £1.26million cost had been funded by the sale of Melbourne House (in whose grounds the infamous Yorkshire Ripper had been finally apprehended) and the Lynwood site, which was bought up by a national brewing chain and turned into the Aunt Sally Pub. KES had not had classes at Lynwood for five years after the Art Department and other subject classes had had to abandon the building at twelve hours notice because it was condemned as unsafe by the Council’s buildings officer. Despite the sale of these two buildings – the Girls High School moved into Melbourne House-- the money raised could only pay for a two story building and the Art Department were now found new premises in the 1954 “New” Wing, while the Music, History, Politics, and Economics Departments and the new Language College, along with the Sixth Form common room, became the permanent residents of the new building, that after 2008 was called the Lewis Building.

In 2008 the Governors agreed to name the “new” building, now thirteen years old, “The Michael Lewis Building” in recognition of the retiring Headteacher’s outstanding service to KES, including piloting this building through all its phases of planning and construction.

PFI an Initiative in Public Finance

New initiatives and buildings now followed in quick procession after 1997, as the next decade would see a period of considerable enhancement to the facilities, functions and operations at KES. In 1998 the school achieved Language College Status, after the LEA had supported KES’s application when the original City Technology Colleges concept was expanded to promote more subject areas. Originally it had been intended to build a discrete language facility attached to Lower School, but when in 1999 Lower School was selected by the City Council for complete re-build, the money was switched to Upper School and the language labs were accommodated in the what is now the Lewis Building. The Language College did not start operating until 1999, after Eva Lamb, an Austrian born graduate of Salzburg University, was chosen to lead the new centre, and it was officially opened by the then Education Secretary, David Blunkett, in February 2000. The importance to the school of

Language College status was further emphasised by a redesigning of the school's rather magnificent coat of arms to incorporate new "armorial bearings" and the title "The International Centre for Language Learning", while at the same time maintaining all the traditional accoutrements of the 1905 device.

The necessity to learn a foreign language is, perhaps, not always appreciated these days by British school students who know the world speaks English, but the Headteacher, himself a linguist, was determined that every pupil in the school should study at least one foreign language. Initially, the DfES also required 50% of Language College students in Y10 and Y11 should study two languages and that there must be the option to study three as part of the students' entitlement. Although the two language rule at KS4 was later relaxed, KES still promotes this standard, whilst always insisting that it is a school that is clearly committed to achieving the highest standards in all of the forty subjects taught within the school. The Language College requirements include increasing the number of languages taught at the school, involving the local community and supporting language teaching in neighbouring schools. To this end KES now offers eight languages, including Japanese, Urdu and Mandarin Chinese, as part of the curriculum, provides extensive use by the public through its evening classes.

In 2004 the school decided that it would make Spanish its first foreign language rather than French, and in 2009 KES was awarded the Premio Award as the "School of the Year", presented by the Spanish Ambassador at a ceremony in the Embassy in London. Shortly after this award, a girl in the Sixth Form won the Nihongo Cup, in a competition organised by the Japanese Embassy for the best speech in Japanese by an English school student. The Language College also serves as a centre for Sheffield's ethnic communities who wish to run classes for their children in their family's first language. These include groups teaching Farsi to Iranian children, Arabic to Somalis and Spanish to Chileans. Another important role of the College is to work closely with our primary feeder schools and to support local teachers, and to this end the College is recognised as a Centre for the Professional Development of Teachers.

The Language College has been an outstanding success and it has further enhanced the school's reputation for its international outlook and links. Ever since the Thirties, encouraged by its pacifist Headmaster, R.B. Graham (KES 1928-38), KES has forged international links, which were recommenced in the Fifties with the clear purpose of not only improving language skills, but also building international understanding and avoiding future wars. This had been massively expanded in the recent years, so that KES now has formal links with an amazing 14 schools in 9 countries, including schools in the Far East, with many of these partnerships arranging cross-curricular work, not just language-based exchanges. These enables pupils from KES to benefit from work experience in other countries, and in recent years, school theatre groups performed, and girls' soccer teams played, in our long term partner school in South Carolina.

A major building project is a landmark in the history of any school, and KES in 1998 was invited, quite out of the blue, to be one of the first schools in Sheffield to undertake a thorough reconstruction of one of its buildings, under the Labour Government's new flagship building scheme to restore the fabric of the nation's schools after years of appalling neglect. Unlike the other five schools involved, this initiative did not affect all the school but only applied to Lower School, where the 33 year old building was showing signs of dilapidation and was no longer really "*fit for purpose*", even if originally it had appeared to be a thoughtful, even attractive, design. This made the decision to accept this unknown form of financing initiative more acceptable to the Governors. Dependent upon a partnership between the public and private sector (the PFI) it involved the creation of a consortium of

builders, bankers, architects and facility managers who would own the building for 25 years in return for annual payments by the City Council. The jury is still out on PFI as a sound method for restoring our public infrastructure, but the Governors felt they could not turn down an opportunity to replace an inadequate building with what was promised as a “state of the art” new build. It helped their decision that they were not committing the whole school to the process, as happened at Tapton, Fir Vale and Ecclesfield, because the PFI also committed the school to a shared use of the facilities out of school hours, which had the potential to cause difficulties in extra-curricular activities, even chaos.

The fact that the new building at Darwin Lane was never formally opened, speaks volume for the problems that arose when Lower School moved in. The building work started in April 2000 and was only just ready for the new Autumn Term in 2001, although many subject departments found that while their rooms might exist, their equipment did not. There was a serious problem over catering that caused Interserve, the consortium company that managed the PFI, to sack their original partners, an internationally famous catering company, and there were leaks and acoustic problems that over the years have been addressed, usually satisfactorily. On the plus side the school now has a modern building with an appealing exterior, which to parents and pupils looks spacious and well provided with facilities, including an extensive library and ample assembly and dining halls.

At last the school had sports facilities that a modern 21st century school should enjoy. A replacement gymnasium was part of the PFI specifications, but the school also acquired a floodlit all-weather pitch of generous proportions and, after considerable wrangling, a decent sized sports hall. This had been one of the school’s priorities for many years, though because of the split site it is not very convenient for use by pupils at Upper School. The school still had the problem of totally inadequate sports fields provision for ball games. Since 1990, when the Pavilion was condemned and the Council would not replace it, KES did not have the use of their traditional sporting venue at Whiteley Woods, that had originally been developed for the Royal Grammar School in 1901. Nor did they have access anymore to the glacial playing fields at Castledyke, where it was said you could play rugby and football only if you could hammer a six inch nail into the permafrost. Those fields now belong to Birkdale School and there will be many Old Edwardians who say, “Good luck to them!”

The final “coup de grace” for the old “Crosspool” building came in the autumn of 2001 after all the pupils and staff of Lower School had moved into the new buildings. The demolition contractors moved onto the site and the buildings were demolished, with the bridge, that had housed the library and staff offices, dramatically removed in one piece before being broken up on the ground.



Any institution needs new initiatives to maintain an upward momentum and avoid atrophying on a plateau of comfort, and there have been regular changes to the organisation and work of KES that have refreshed the life of the school. The school took on new functions in 1993 when they accepted the offer of the University of Sheffield to become a centre for “Initial Teacher Training”, later working with Hallam University to train Technology and P.E. students. This enabled post-graduate students to undertake their professional training at the school. In 2000 KES became a designated as a “Training School for Teacher Training” one of only 48 schools in the country to be selected by the DfES, and among other advantages this special status ensures that the school stays in the forefront of the best teaching practice and it helps KES recruit some of the most capable new teachers.

Another fundamental change in the organisation of the school that has gathered pace over the last decade is the massive increase in the number of support staff. Schools have long been familiar with laboratory technicians, as well as office and caretaking staff, but teachers' now demanded that action needed to be taken to reduce the burden of assessment and administration duties that were being constantly piled onto them. They argued that this mounting pressure had a deleterious effect on their classroom efficiency and their right to an equitable "work-life balance", so to meet their concerns the Government made the funding available to create many new support positions. KES now has 54 Educational Support staff posts, including the significant positions of Pastoral Managers, who work closely with Year Leaders. In consequence the number of staff at KES, now numbering 220, including part timers (136 are teaching staff) is considerably higher than it has ever been in the school's history. The support staff have taken on administrative tasks such as arranging cover and supply teachers, examinations organisation and data collection that was previously thought to be work that only teachers could undertake, thereby allowing the teaching staff to devote more time to concentrate on their classroom teaching.



Three members of staff of different generations, who were also pupils at the school, pose on the front steps of the school with the Headteacher and one of the Governors at the launch of the Centenary History of the school in 2005. In the centre is Gordon Cummings (1923-31 and 1937-53), on the right is David Anderson (1948-55 and 1967-94) one of the best known teachers at KES during the comprehensive era, and Louisa Aliu (1992-97 and 2001-present).

Photo courtesy of Sheffield Newspapers

The new century also brought some deserved recognition of the school's progress. There were three consecutive "Schools Achievement Awards", a Government initiative to recognise the excellent work of a school's teaching and non-teaching staff in raising standards year on year. The DfES only gave the award for three years between 2001 and 2003 and KES won the award in all three years, while in 2002 KES and its Language College gained the "European Award for Language Teaching" one of only four given annually by the EU. There was another Ofsted Inspection in 2002, which, although it covered the whole school, gave a particular focus to the Sixth Form. Following the successful Inspection Report, the Chief Inspector gave the school a special mention in his official annual report to Parliament, commenting that KES;

"Had received an outstanding inspection report and had performed well in examinations and tests, given the circumstances of the school."

In the same period there was recognition of the excellent work achieved by the P.E. Department when KES was awarded a Government “Sportsmark” in 1999, followed by two more in 2002 and 2005. The first award was given for the excellent range of fourteen sports and activities available to both boys and girls (with 42 school teams playing 300 inter-school matches per annum) despite the school having totally inadequate indoor and outdoor facilities. By 2002 the facilities at Lower School were of a high standard, but the ancient gym at Upper School is totally inadequate and apart from the Close that can be used for training, and the tennis courts that also serve as a sub-standard all-weather pitch, there are no outdoor facilities at all.

Although they may not have received any formal awards, KES has an impressive range of extra-curricular activities. Its Music concerts and Drama productions maintain the highest standards, and among other splendid moments a KES String Octet won its category in the national “Music for Youth” competition held at the Royal Festival Hall in 2000 and another group of talented school musicians, calling themselves the “Wesley Quartette” were invited to appear at the “School Proms” held at the Royal Albert Hall. In 1990 a discrete Drama Department was established enabling drama to become a full player in the school’s curriculum, not just the performance of an annual play organised by the English Department. The Department moved into its own drama studio on the first floor the following year, when a production company, called “Blank Slate”, was created to handle all the aspects of producing a school play. They have consistently performed intellectually challenging work, like Aristophanes “Lysistrata”, Friel’s “Dancing at Lughnasa” and Kafka’s “The Trial”, with some productions in recent years performed on the thrust stage of the Crucible Main House, one of the most challenging stages anywhere in the world of English theatre.

One of the pleasing features of life at KES is that so many students derive enjoyment and satisfaction from participating in one or more of the school’s extra-curricular activities. One of the consistently well supported is the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award that in some ways superseded the activities of the school scouts in 1975. The school is a centre for the Award and every year resolute students undertake arduous treks, with not a few achieving the Gold Award. There is Youth Action assisting with community service that might include helping in primary schools, in hospitals or visiting the elderly and the infirm; In recent years there was considerable support for Young Enterprise, where KES young entrepreneurs reached the national finals four times and KES Young Engineers, who one year in the Nineties produced inventions that gained them an invitation to visit Boeing in Seattle and also mount a three day exhibition of their work in the House of Commons. Some pupils have helped to re-discover the old air raid shelters built as fortified tunnels in 1939 which lie under the Close, which could one day be established as a museum of the Second World War, while some truly intrepid explorers have climbed central Asian mountain ranges, with a group in 2007 naming a mountain in Kyrgyzstan, “Mount Keseven” -- now formally registered in the annals of the British Alpine Society.



KES students in the Tien Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan in 2007. They officially named one of the peaks they climbed Mt. Keseven.

In 2007 Carolyn Leary was selected as the new Chair of Governors, the first woman to be the Chair for sixteen years and only the third in the school's history. She was immediately handed a bombshell when the Headteacher told her of his intentions to retire at the end of the summer term in 2008. Michael Lewis served for twenty years and was the longest serving Head in any of the Sheffield secondary schools when he retired. In those twenty years he had built on his predecessors work, developing a comprehensive school that was highly respected in education and political circles in the city. More importantly KES had the confidence of parents, whether they were the middle class of the school's catchment area, a high proportion of whom were graduates, the ethnic minority communities, who had a special trust in the school's genuine enthusiasm for embracing diversity, or families from other wards in the city who believed the school's academic record and its inclusive policies would offer their children a good education. The school was usually more heavily oversubscribed than any other school in the Sheffield, although schools on the other side of the city were sometimes critical that the 11-18 schools in the south-west may be attracting the children of aspirational parents, who may well have made important contributions to the progress of their own schools.

Today, 32 % of KES pupils come from BME or dual heritage families, over three times the city average, with many ethnic communities, speaking over 20 first languages, represented at the school, with as much diversity between them as there is among the rest of the school's population. Also, because the catchment area can only provide enough pupils to fill half of the 230 places on offer each year, half of the KES students in each year group joined the school from primary schools outside the catchment area; schools situated in almost all of the 28 wards across the city.

The Government policy that "Every Child Matters" has long been the watchword of KES and everyone who had any contact with Michael Lewis knew of his deep commitment to give support to the less able -- the willing and the unwilling-- and the socially deprived pupils, many of whom came from home backgrounds that were chaotic and where school was "*an oasis of calm, hope and achievement.*" The school set up a Student Inclusion Resource in 1999 to support vulnerable children

with learning or behavioural difficulties and has long given high priority to the work of the Special Needs staff. Over the years KES has earned a proud reputation for the quality of its care of SEN pupils, and time after time, parents, educational professionals and Local Authority officers turn to KES to see if a child in difficulty can be given another chance. It is important that a comprehensive school should be judged by how effectively it meets its obligation to its SEN pupils, as well as garnering impressive GCSE and A Level pass rates, and sending many Sixth Formers to university.

Lewis has described himself as *“a willing optimist, prepared to see the best in students and a belief that all have the capacity to change and achieve.”* Even so he recognised that both at KES and in the country generally, the comprehensive system of education has not as yet found the formula to close the achievement gap between middle and working class pupils. There is still much work to be done, although it is difficult to see how selection in any form could solve this issue, even if there are populist calls for a “return to grammar schools”, presumably by parents who do not think their children would be in the unlucky 80% who failed the selection process.

In recognition of his work at KES and his general contribution to comprehensive education in his adopted city, the University of Sheffield in July 2009 bestowed on Michael Lewis an honorary Doctor of Letters degree, and there were many who felt this award was most appropriate. His retirement, of course, occasioned the search for a replacement and it proved no easy task for the Governors. In 1988 there had been over a hundred applications for the position of Headteacher at KES, but in the intervening years many senior teachers have seen how stressful and demanding a Head’s post has become (KES reached 1750 students at one point) that they have decided the top job at a school is not for them. The KES Governors pitched their criteria high, requiring the candidates to have had experience of serving as headteachers already, but only received twelve applications, even after re-advertising. After a rigorous three day process, that would test anyone’s stamina, they finally made the choice of Mrs. Beverley Jackson to become the eighth Headteacher of KES and she took up her post in September 2008.

Chapter Six

The Eighth Headteacher of KES

2008- The Present

Beverley Jackson's appointment as the new Headteacher was a triple first for King Edward VII School. She is the first woman to be the Head, she is the first to have been born in Sheffield—she attended Earl Marshall School and has a Master's degree from Sheffield University—and as the holder of the NPQH (the National Professional Qualification for Headship) she is the first Head to have undergone specific training for the post. Prior to taking up the KES position she was promoted to be the Associate Headteacher at a large, split-site comprehensive school of over 2200 pupils in Doncaster, which had received a mixed Ofsted report and been given "*Notice to Improve*". She was given the task, working with the Leadership Team, to successfully turn that school around, in what was an arduous undertaking with Ofsted inspectors maintaining a constant and rigorous supervision of the school's progress. Moving to KES, where the school was in robust good health, was a most welcome new challenge, especially for someone who had grown up in the city and knew King Edwards' reputation.

The appointment of a woman to the Headteacher's position was something that KES, of course, took easily in its stride, although it was one of the last of the city's large comprehensive schools to make such an appointment. The school had long ago resolved any gender issues about staff appointments, and one of Russell Sharrock's priorities, right from the start, was to appoint women not just to assistant teaching posts, but to head of department and year tutor positions. In the early Nineties all three Deputy Heads were women and so are the majority of the current nine-strong Leadership Team of Deputy and Assistant Headteachers.

Before Mrs. Jackson took up her duties she received similar advice from several Heads. They all said that there are two things that you can count on happening." *Firstly, you will be lonely as a Head and secondly, you will get nothing from the Head who is leaving except a bunch of keys.*" Instead she found when she arrived for the Autumn Term that everyone, Leadership team, Staff and Governors, could not have been more supportive, and she reserves particular praise for Michael Lewis who gave meticulous help with information to ease her into the post. In return she formally sought out the opinions of staff, parents, students and governors for their ideas of where the school might go forward, and this produced, among other plans, a redrawing of the timing of the school day. From September 2009, KES now starts its day a little earlier and finishes at 3.05pm, allowing more time for extra-curricular activities and more focus on lessons, especially in the afternoon.



The new KES Headteacher Beverly Jackson, with her Leadership Team in July 2009. L to R: Debbie Ireland (Bursar), Sally Davies, Huw Parker, Rebecca Carpenter, Kevin Drakeley, the Headteachers, Chris Phipps, Rob Whittingham, Linda Gooden, Tracy Tunbridge and Jeremy Twyman.

Meanwhile there has been no reduction in the number of new initiatives and new building projects that help to make KES such a vibrant and interesting community. The start of the new term in September 2008 saw the first pupils undertaking two significant new courses. The AQA Baccalaureate encourages Sixth Form students to undertake not only academic subjects but requires a study of critical thinking, a hundred hours of personal development (that could be voluntary work or even paid employment) and an extended project that requires a high level of research. The emphasis in the Baccalaureate is on independent learning, which is a good preparation, not only for university but also for adult life where people are now more likely to need to change careers in the space of a lifetime.

Even more pioneering is the new Advanced Engineering Diploma, now on offer to Sixth Form students. An initial group of twelve began this new course in September 2008 and KES is one of only a dozen schools in the country who have already got the course off the ground. The diploma course provides young people with a higher level education based entirely around engineering, and is operated in conjunction with Sheffield Hallam University, where students spend a day a week studying at the University. The Diploma is worth 3.5 “A” Levels and includes project work, case studies and presentations closely linked to the modern engineering industry. At the end of their first year students are offered the chance of a placement at one of the school’s partner firms, including international giants such as Boeing and Corus Steel, while at the end of their final year they are qualified to take up a university place in engineering or go straight into the engineering industry. This Diploma exemplifies another way in which KES attempts to meet the challenges of the future, and is particularly relevant in a city whose name is a byword for engineering excellence throughout the world.

KES is not exactly becoming the “*empire on which the cement never sets*”, but after forty years without any additional construction, the last decade and half has seen a considerable increase in the number of building projects completed. Firstly there was the Lewis building in 1995, then the PFI rebuild of Lower School in 2001 and now the planning of considerable new additions at Upper School. Under the Government’s Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Programme, architects are now buzzing enthusiastically around KES, finalising plans for a large three storey wing to replace the “New” wing of 1954, in what was once, in the nineteenth century, the Masters’ Garden at the rear of

the building alongside Newbould Lane. It is planned that this extension will house the Technology and Science Departments, while the Art Department will move into the vacated laboratories on the ground floor of the existing building. The “carbuncle” of breeze block changing rooms at the other end of the school will be demolished and in its place will be constructed new accommodation for Careers and Learning Support. Finally, a long sought after priority will be realised when a new Sports Hall will be built behind the Lewis building, in an area which, in living memory, housed the fives courts and the open air swimming pool bequeathed by Wesley College. The present gym, that once incorporated a miniature rifle range, will become the IT Centre and will enable KES to meet its needs and expectations in this most important of curriculum areas.



Photograph of the school library during a recent visit of Urdu students from Moseley School, Birmingham. The Library was named the Ted Wragg Library in 2008 in memory of Prof. Ted Wragg, the Old Edwardian who was the Professor of Education at Exeter University, a leading figure in educational strategy and a well known broadcaster.

Beverley Jackson was not in post very long before a new external crisis hit the school, as the credit crunch and the international financial situation caught up with KES in 2009. The school had become accustomed to years of comparative generosity by the funding agencies -- the Government, the City Council (when both the Liberal Democrats and Labour held power) and the quango, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which had a remit for all post-16 funding. The school needs a budget of £8.8 million to run its operation and there is now a substantial hole in the available revenue. There was no way that the school would avoid the backwash of the general economic situation, so it may well be that for a period KES is back to the hard times that always existed before 1997, and certainly there will need to be some retrenchment to bring the budget back into balance in the next year or two.

In Retrospect

Has comprehensive education lived up to the expectations of its supporters in the Sixties, who won the political battle and introduced non-selective schools, both in Sheffield and almost everywhere in Britain? Not even the keenest enthusiast would claim that all the goals have been achieved, rather that, like democracy, it is the best system to cope with an imperfect world. The first priority for many in the Sixties was to achieve a fairer society and the tripartite system clearly did not do that. Secondly, the technical method of selection was manifestly flawed, and even if it had been faultless it was still deciding children's life's chances at a ridiculously early age. Britain is full of successful people who did not pass their 11+, while bottom stream pupils at grammar schools often underachieved because they felt themselves to be inadequate compared to their peers, whereas now they would be easily accommodated within the year group of a comprehensive school. Thirdly, the 1944 Act was designed to equip the nation with a workforce where the majority were doing manual or routine jobs, just as the 1870 Education Act had brought in universal elementary education to meet the requirements of an urban industrial society rather than a rural agricultural one. Many reformers in the Sixties, who saw beyond basic questions of equity, realised that the future would belong to those economies and societies which could mobilise the potential of all their citizens in a world of rapidly accelerating change. Harold Wilson's election in 1964, beating the implausible Etonian grandee, the 14th Earl of Home, signalled that the "Players" were taking over from the "Gentlemen", and that the nation would have to learn to live by its brains and therefore could not afford too many uneducated passengers. Finally, there were those who hoped that comprehensive education, with its large schools offering a wider range of courses and extra-curricular activities, would encourage a love of learning for its own sake. That these new schools would introduce more children to an extended spectrum of education, raise their spirits and their horizons, and enable them to live fuller lives and enjoy "*aspirations beyond the confines of the needs of the economy and their own careers*".

Comprehensive education became one of the main drivers of our society and therefore, to some extent, is responsible for the successes and ills of modern Britain. Undoubtedly today's children are better educated than those of the Sixties, when we had the tripartite system and 80% left school at 15 years of age, and only 10% went to University, many of them from independent schools. Nor were the grammar schools always the education powerhouses as they are now often portrayed (KES was something of an exception in the period between 1945 and 1969). In many grammar schools only a minority of pupils went on into the Sixth Form, with only a limited number going on to university. Now 40% of the school population continue their education at university (at KES it is 50%) and while some complain of a dilution of standards it is difficult to believe that the vast majority do not benefit immeasurably from the experience. There have been complaints about the dilution of standards from time immemorial, often by people who confuse standards with status, and if they had been listened to society would never have made any progress.

Comprehensive schools have allowed undreamed of numbers to achieve good GCSE A*-C grades (the KES figure was 67% in 2008) and three good "A" Levels (in 2008, KES had 51% passes at A-B grades) and it is difficult to believe that this could have been achieved by continuing with secondary modern schools, although we can assume that grammar schools would have improved their pass rates, judged by the performance of those that have survived. The wealthy middle classes had little faith in grammar schools and bypassed them, sending their own children to independent schools as they have continued to do in the comprehensive era, even though the 11-18 comprehensives in Sheffield must offer as good a quality of education as KES's neighbours, the local private sector in Broomhill.

To judge what comprehensive schools have achieved for society as a whole is much more subjective. The last forty years have seen the most dramatic changes in our economy as traditional 19th century industries, that often defined a town or a region, have disappeared or been seriously depleted. With them went millions of skilled and unskilled manual jobs, completely restructuring the job market and profile of the nation's economy. Yet Britain has kept abreast of these seismic changes and is still the fifth largest economy in the world, delivering a higher standard of living than few dreamed possible in 1969. Comprehensive education helped to make this possible: it was flexible enough to adjust to a service based and high-tech manufacturing economy and KES students make their careers in every corner of this new economic world order. Old Edwardians still fill the professions, university senior common rooms, board rooms and executive offices as they have always done, but there are more of them now and many make their mark in jobs that scarcely existed before 1969. Two of the most prominent are BBC TV presenters Emily Maitlis and Julia Bradbury, who were both at the school in the Eighties, while others find their career leads them into positions abroad as part of the global economy, as an earlier generation might have gone out to serve in outposts of the Empire. On the other hand a comprehensive school inevitably produces pupils who are not successful in life, including the anti-social and the criminal, and even some who are detained at *Her Majesty's Pleasure*.

Perhaps comprehensive schools' greatest contribution is to the social cohesion of our country. It is one of the imperatives of comprehensives that they promote inclusivity and welcome the diversity of race, class, gender and religion. It is a massive unsung achievement of our times that 60 million of us, with an increased sense of our own independence and self-worth, rub along with very little friction for most of the time. Our society is less deferential and less snobbish than ever before in its history. Even Old Etonian politicians want to appear like the bloke in the next semi-detached and affect support for professional football teams, because that is what now gains respect rather than attempting to promote superior attitudes based on false criteria. The Australians have a phrase for it; "*The English are still trying to prove Jack's as good as his master; in Australia Jack's as good as Jack!*" While we might not be quite there yet, there is a much stronger sense of each person's individual value and comprehensive schools have encouraged those attitudes over the last forty years. You are not in a good position to preach social cohesion or the need to fulfil your own potential if you are dividing your schoolchildren into sheep and goats at the age of eleven.

Similarly, comprehensive schools' contribution to anti-racism cannot be overvalued, along with their encouragement of an appreciation and understanding of the strengths and issues of different ethnic groups. The major transformation in the ethnic profile of this country over the last fifty years is clearly one of the greatest social and demographic changes that have ever occurred in Britain since the Normans, and schools have been in the forefront of opposing racism and welcoming diversity. Racism is not a peculiarly British vice, it is endemic in almost every part of the world, but schools like KES have faced this issue head on and celebrated the contributions of people of different cultures now resident in our city and represented at the school. For many schools in Britain outside the big cities, anti-racism and a multi-cultural approach to their teaching may well be an academic exercise, but for those in cities like Sheffield it is vital for the progress and harmony of their school. Although it is alarming that several hundred thousand voters in Britain supported a racist party in the 2009 European elections, the vast majority of the public in our country will have no truck with such attitudes, and our comprehensive schools with their mixed ethnic populations have probably had the key role in developing that empathy and tolerance.

In this way KES students are encouraged to understand the global interconnection of our society. That in the modern world successful countries will not be mono-cultural and single ethnic nations; rather the advantage will lie with those countries that can adjust to, and embrace, the positive aspects of

these inevitable changes. To recognise KES's work in this field in 2007, the school gained the Inspirational Youth Award Shield promoted by the South Yorkshire Black Police Association; an initiative that was aimed at inspiring BME students to become good role models and achieve their expectations. Then more recently the school was awarded the prestigious International School Award by the British Council. At the London ceremony in October 2008, the school was congratulated for its work in supporting international understanding, and for "*installing a global dimension into the learning experience of its young people.*" The award once again celebrated the work of the Language College and specifically the number of KES's partner schools in nine different countries, whilst also recognising the quality of the international projects the school undertakes in many other subject areas.

If the former Headmaster, Nathaniel Clapton, who retired in 1965, could possibly visit KES today, how much would he recognise in the comprehensive school whose creation he had so opposed in the middle Sixties. The Upper School building, built in 1837, would look exactly the same and he might be quite impressed with the Lewis building across the Close. Once up the steps and past those Corinthian columns he would find the interior had scarcely altered in appearance, but then he would notice that none of the students were in uniform, that the staff were wearing casual clothes not gowns and that many of them appeared to be women. He had not appointed a single woman teacher in his fifteen years as Headmaster, and would have thought it inappropriate at an all-boys school. The school he bequeathed to Russell Sharrock was occupied solely by "White British" boys; now half the population were girls and a third were BME or dual-heritage. He had died before the decision to make KES a co-educational school was taken, but he would not have approved. When told that KES's current population was twice the size of the school in his day, he would wonder where the other 700 pupils were housed. Crosspool School at Darwin Lane opened the term after he retired and, if he was aware of it at all, it was intended to be a girls-only comprehensive, not part of KES, in the forthcoming new regime.

On closer examination he would discover that there were no longer any prefects, whom he considered essential for running the school, no canes to keep discipline (in 1953 he had been desperate to replace the school's dwindling stock, and a company in Manchester, who had a few left in stock, sent him some suitably disguised). In this new world there were no morning assemblies with all the school undertaking a Christian act of worship; no grand formal Speech Days at the Victoria Hall, there were no school scout troops anymore, the school song was no longer sung and they had tampered with the school's coat of arms. The teaching of Classics had ceased, though he might well have approved that its space on the timetable was now taken by IT, because he was a mathematician who knew about the amazing new "alchemy" that Alan Turing and his successors had developed.

However, Clapton would be amazed at the size of the Sixth Form, with half of them joining KES at the age of sixteen from other schools. That, from a totally unselected entry, 97% of the middle school pupils continued in post-16 education, or that almost two hundred students went on to University each year -- with eleven going to Oxbridge this year-- and that there was a 97% pass rate at "A" Level, the examination that was introduced into English grammar and public schools in his first year as Headmaster. He would appreciate that Drama and Music were at least as strong as they had been in his day, although all the performers then were boys, and that the school now played many more sports, with a fair number of students winning international and representative honours during the last forty years. It would be made clear to him that the school curriculum was underpinned by a

sophisticated, caring, pastoral system, and that it was one of the school's highest priorities to support all pupils through the difficult teenage years. Many pupils from Clapton's time will attest to the fact that if you did not measure up, the Headmaster and the school generally had little time for you. Finally, he would have found it difficult to accept that there was now a woman occupying "his" office, where pupils, and even staff, once very visibly feared to tread.

Nathaniel Clapton had been a stern faced, hard taskmaster, highly successful by his own standards; but if he took the opportunity to delve a little deeper into the soul of the present day KES, he would find that very many of the students actively enjoyed attending the school, and were very proud to be at King Edward VII School in Sheffield.



The Class of 2009

Sixth Formers of Y13 say farewell
to KES Summer 2009