

PERINS RESURGENT

by
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In 1926 the Hadow Report, "The Education of the Adolescent", advocated segregating children at the age of eleven into two types of school "according to their individual needs and attainments". These schools were to be grammar, providing an academic education and secondary modern, providing more general courses for the less gifted child. Even in those days many people were against selection and separate schools and advocated a multilateral system, basically the comprehensive system of today. This system of separate schools could function well in large centres of population but for rural areas it meant the end of all-age village schools and the transportation of pupils to, in those days, quite distant towns.

Perins closed as a grammar school because the lack of pupils made it too expensive to support the number of specialists required to make it viable. At this time, six years after Hadow, rural Alresford and district still had all-age schools [7-14) and there is little doubt that Hampshire County Council saw the now empty school on its attractive site as ideal for a secondary modern. Early in 1933 H.C.C. purchased the site and obtained a lease on the adjoining playing field and later in the year gave notice that it would re-open as a public elementary school to accommodate 260 pupils and would be called Perins Senior Council School. The Old Perineans immediately objected to the retention of the name of their old grammar school but the Education Committee refused to change it.



Alresford itself could not produce enough pupils so a start was made by relegating the village schools of Bishops Sutton, Tichborne and Old Alresford [all within the statutory walking distance] to junior status and transferring the seniors to Perins. So on November 5th, 1934 the school re-opened with pupils from four parishes, 143 in all, a headmaster, three full time teachers and two part-time for woodwork and cookery.

The headmaster was Mr. A.L. Raven B.A., F.R.G.S., at that time, the youngest man ever appointed by Hampshire to that post: and he remained until his retirement in 1964, by which time the school had nearly quadrupled. Perhaps some humorist had chosen the opening date. Many people in the town were still smarting at Perin's closure. Many of the grammar school governors reappeared on the board of the new school. The headmaster decided "to keep the peace" as he put it, by quietly dropping the name Perins and substituting Alresford and, in fact, he kept that title during his thirty years at the school. The name, Perins did not return until the new headmistress revived it in 1965.

There was also much resentment on the part of the pupils. In these days of easy transport and communication it is hard to realise that fifty years ago villages were quite isolated and the inhabitants of villages three or four miles apart would regard each other as foreigners. Many children resented leaving their cosy village school and walking, often long distances, to a much larger one. Boys were particularly truculent. They refused to sit next to or line up with boys of another village and feuding, usually with fist fights, was commonplace. This attitude continued right through to 1939 as new schools were added to the catchment area.

Added to all this the school had opened in an age of austerity. It needed so much to put it on a sound footing but rearmament had priority and education suffered from a money shortage.

In 1935 Cheriton and Headbourne Worthy pupils joined the school, followed by Ropley in 1938 and Beauworth and Bighton in 1939. Headbourne Worthy, north of Winchester and isolated from Alresford, was withdrawn during the war because of transport costs. At the outbreak of war the school opened with 264 on the roll and a staff of six. Evacuees from Portsmouth and London began arriving on the second day of term and numbers rose until they peaked at about 350, all within a school built in 1910 for a "population of 100". At times a shift system was necessary and classes were held in every conceivable space, back-to-back in the hall and in the staff room. Dig for victory became the order of the day. The east field was ploughed and planted with potatoes and other vegetables and whatever the other shortages, the school meals service never lacked potatoes for the duration of the war. In terms of continuity of education the war years were chaotic, to say the least. It was a four-year saga of rising and falling rolls, evacuees - and staff - constantly coming and going and no male staff after 1942. There were transport problems with worn-out buses, frequently off the road for lack of spares or petrol, with children arriving late [and often walking 4 or 5 miles home] or not arriving at all for days on end. If more than one member of staff was ill, and this happened often, all specialisation came to a stop and the pupil-teacher ratio rose to around 50 to 1. Child labour was in great demand by the farmers and although there were official fortnightly holidays in May and October for potato planting and lifting, many children obtained additional weeks at the request of a local farmer. Even the school vegetable field took precedence over lessons when the sun shone after a week's rain. The enemy also took one sly dig at the school. In August 1942 an enemy aircraft jettisoned its bombs within 200 yards, cracking ceilings and windows and strangely "all the soup and pudding plates". Luckily the school was on holiday. Even the local soldiery came under suspicion because also in 1942 all the school rabbits mysteriously disappeared one night.

School meals and sanitation also posed problems. Meals had started in 1936 as a private venture, with the caretaker as cook. Since his culinary activities alternated with less salubrious ones and all he had to cook on was a coal range, one needed, in the words of a pupil of the time, "a cast-iron stomach" to partake of school meals. A year later came a cook and a new gas stove, the system being self-supporting with the head doing the catering and paying the cook from the profits. When the war came the County Council took a hand and meal numbers rose to over 150 daily. However no dining facilities arrived until long after the war and meals were eaten off desk tops and hastily erected trestle tables in the hall, itself two classrooms and a gymnasium by turns.

Those famous or infamous earth closets and peat moss urinals forced upon the school in 1908 by a cost-conscious architect and designed for 100 pupils now began to make life objectionable for everyone. Every summer they became embarrassingly odorous and since they were on the east

side everyone prayed for northerly winds, the stronger the better. Unfortunately the wind did not always oblige and after much suffering and complaining relief came in 1944, with the installation of main drainage.

Out of the pressure of the war years came two other blessings for the headmaster. For nine years he had taught almost full time and been responsible for all administration and catering, so in June 1943 he was given a secretary [half time] and in September, a telephone. So the war came towards its end. The evacuees drifted back home and the school settled down to its normal routine. The interlude had been hectic but it had fostered a communal spirit in the school and the village isolationism, so much a problem in the pre-war years, had gone for good.

The "Butler" Act of 1944 laid down strict guidelines for post-war education and ordered that by April 1946, every Education Authority must have its plans cut and dried for sufficient and suitable primary and secondary schools in its area. It also ordered that the school leaving age [then 14] be raised to 15 years by April 1, 1945. Because of the impossibility of providing the necessary extra accommodation and staff at such short notice. Local Education Authorities were allowed two years grace. [It was estimated that 300,000 pupil places had been destroyed by enemy action and raising the leaving age would require another 300,000]. The Act also gave warning that the leaving age would be raised to 16 years at the earliest possible date. As it turned out that was to be a generation away.

For Perins this meant that there would be no summer leavers in 1947 and from then on the school would have to retain some eighty older- pupils, find at least three extra classrooms and recruit three teachers. Just to help matters along, Preston Candover, Wield and Ichen Stoke seniors were added to Perins roll in January 1948, and we find the school with an acute staff shortage [8 teachers for 320 children] and four half built temporary classrooms in the east field. More staff arrived in April, the rooms were "seized" from the Ministry of Works prior to completion and the school settled down again. Three hundred school lunches were still being served on the desk tops but a dining hall was to arrive in late 1949 and from then on bits and pieces, some permanent, some temporary, were added as a rising intake made them necessary.

Every year in January, usually on a freezing cold day, the school was reserved for the Common Entrance Examination, when all the juniors in the catchment area presented themselves for a series of tests to decide the style of their future education. Since there was a grammar school place for everyone who qualified, it was felt that the secondary modern school should be free of the strictures of examination syllabuses and allowed complete freedom in the education of their pupils. However, many of the "failures" who came to Perins were, by the age of twelve or thirteen, beginning to shine and were clearly capable of benefitting from an academic course. Since many teachers and parents were having second thoughts about an education without examinations, the logical outcome was for the Sec. Mods. to offer an academic course leading to "O" Level for those who were willing to stay on for an extra year. Perins was one of the first small Sec. Mods. in the county to do this and in 1957 it recorded its first "O" Level successes, earning a visit from the Chief Education Officer and an extra day's holiday.

The original dream of examination freedom had now faded and there was an increasing demand for examinations of a type suitable for the majority of the Sec. Mod. pupils and from this came the Certificate for Secondary Education. The first exams took place in 1965 and from then on large numbers of pupils stayed voluntarily until the age of sixteen in order to take part.

1965 also saw the appointment of the school's first headmistress. Mr. Raven retired in 1964 after thirty years of service. Miss Margaret Murray was appointed and one of her first acts was to bring back the name Perins into everyday use.

Since Hadow in 1926 there had been two main schools of thought in the educational world with regard to secondary education. Many opposed selection at eleven plus and favoured

comprehensive schools for all levels of ability. It seemed to many teachers that prejudice gradually took over from reason and it became more and more a political matter with, in many areas, little regard paid to the welfare of the pupils. Whatever the rights and wrongs, both sides are now deeply entrenched and the arguments still rage.

The net result was that in the late 60's Hampshire began to draw up its plans for comprehensive schooling. In this area it meant the end of three well known grammar schools, Eggar's at Alton and Peter Symonds and County High at Winchester. Perins was drawn into the Winchester Plan and one suggestion, strongly supported in areas other than Alresford, was that Perins should be made a junior school and all its seniors bussed or trained to Winchester and Alton. In the light of subsequent events, the rapid growth of the area, the loss of the railway and the ever-increasing cost of transport, it was as well for the ratepayers that the plan did not go through.

The leaving age was finally raised to 16 in 1972, some 27 years from the promise of it in the Butler Act, and in September 1973, Perins became a comprehensive school catering for eleven to sixteen year old pupils from some twenty parishes of rural Hampshire.

And there the story stops; Perins of today and tomorrow will need another recorder. Tucked away in that modern complex of plate glass and steel at the top of Pound Hill stands the 1910 school house still performing its function as a school building and giving an enviable sense of age and respectability to Perins. Nor is the generosity of the Founder forgotten. Every year the trustees of the Henry Perin Educational Foundation disburse over £500 to the benefit of the school in such materials as library books, tape recorders or musical instruments as recommended by the Headmaster, and for the assistance of ex-pupils grants are made for training in such varying fields as engineers, plumbers, hairdressers or veterinary surgeons. All of which helps to make Perins a cut above the rest which is, after all, what the Founder intended in 1697.