

John Chandos, *Boys Together: English Public Schools 1800-1864*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1984. Bibliog., illust., Appendix on Eton Wall Game. pp.412. \$29.95.

Historical works on British public schools are prodigious in number and almost predictable in their approach. Most authors working in this area have begun writing a general history, or even the history of a particular school, by briefly outlining the period prior to Arnold's arrival at Rugby, and then basing the corpus of their work on the post-Arnoldian or 'reformed' public school of the mid to late nineteenth century. The attractiveness of such an approach is apparent given the burgeoning official school and governmental records of the late nineteenth century; there are much less prolific sources for earlier periods.

John Chandos has avoided the convenience of this oft-travelled path and, instead, has provided us with an erudite perspective of the daily lives of boys in the unreformed public schools of the early nineteenth century. The title, *Boys Together*, provides an evocative image of the author's central concern, namely the microcosm of pupil self-government that existed in the unreformed public schools, and its gradual erosion, encouraged by authorities, both within the schools and in the wider society. Chandos does not hide his remorse for the decline of many of the institutional practices associated with the boys' autonomy. Nor is he afraid to criticise many of the evangelical reformers (including Arnold), who, acting quite often on half-truths and misconceptions, advocated stricter

controls and surveillance in these 'nurseries of vice'.

Basing his work on anecdotes and recollections of old boys, Chandos has written a readable work. Pugilistic contests ending in the death of a combatant; eulogies written about schoolboy athletes of seemingly Olympian proportions; tacit approval of boyhood rituals on the part of masters resigned to their numerical inferiority - these are all the stuff of heroic visions and part of what Chandos calls the 'tribal mystic'. In fact, Chandos articulates all of the manifestations of self-government - fagging, periodic school rebellions, boys control over their own leisure time and choice of games, sexual activity, and punishment administered by both boys and by masters. The treatment is thematic but overlapping concerns are handled skilfully throughout the book.

Despite a great reliance on subjective primary sources, a clear picture of the prevailing conditions in the unreformed public schools is presented. Chandos has balanced the use of half-forgotten memories of old boys, which are often highly sentimental and based on happenings of up to fifty years ago, with the highly precious correspondence of some of the more notable schoolboys of that period. Chandos admits that there is a certain amount of bias inherent in his choice of primary sources, many of which reflect a tradition of loyalty engendered by 'shared experience'.

Chandos is most astute in his handling of the critical and moral assault on the public schools, leading up to the establishment of the post-Clarendon Commission 'new order'. In essence he claims that the bureaucratic attack on the public schools was just one more example of the growth of nineteenth century British governmental interference in the personal lives of men and women. This phenomenon coincided with revolutionary changes in British society, brought about by the legislative changes of 1832, as well as by the emergence of new social attitudes. Chandos is far from equitable in his comments on the social idealists/eugenicists, evangelicals, middle-class philanthropists, journalists and reformist schoolmasters who led the popular attack. The end product of reform, suggests Chandos, was a dull uniformity in place of the experiential anarchy that had once prepared boys to accept any challenge which may have arisen. To the charge that public schools were bastions of conservatism Chandos provides an equally novel argument. Because

the population of these schools changed approximately every six years, an innovation could quickly become a tradition once it had been accepted by the community of boys.

This was certainly the case in the area of games. Chandos contrasts the boys experience in class, where the classical curriculum could be likened to a 'cinderella slipper', fitting one boy in a hundred and crippling the rest, with the unsupervised autonomy of their leisure time. During this period the games played in public schools often represented substantial innovations of older games prohibited in the wider society, but thriving in the sanctuary of the public school playing fields. Allround ability was seen as commendable, but was not viewed with the same importance as the honour and privilege of participation. Punting on the river or long country rambles were not judged to be infinitely inferior pastimes. Chandos contrasts these earlier attitudes with the ethos of the 'new order'. By the 1860s 'walking' or other forms of fraternisation amongst boys was viewed with the utmost suspicion by the new class of 'surveillant' schoolmasters, while to use the river for recreational purposes would have been regarded as sacrilege.

The preoccupation with games was encouraged as a significant element of control by headmasters such as Warre at Eton. Chandos refers to this period as the ascendancy of the 'all devouring gods' - cricket, football and rowing. Recreation was out of favour as school sport became rule-bound and 'professionalised'. Chandos cites here evidence of increased expenditure on equipment and clothing, the formalisation of playing attire (as depicted by the informality of early team photographs as against the more stylised later versions), and the decline of unsanctioned sports such as boxing. He also relates the growing significance of sport to the deterioration of schoolboy literature depicting boys' leisure pursuits. In particular he points to the decline of the tradition of classical allusion and its replacement by the blatant jingoism of the genre typified by Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Discussion about games was also seen as a valuable surrogate for the adolescent pre-occupation with 'the hovering demon', sex. According to Chandos the games ethos reached its pinnacle in the 1880s, when public schools were 'divided, classified and clothed according

to the proficiency of boys at games.' (p.335).

Boys Together does have a few minor flaws. The index is not very useful. Cricket and rowing are mentioned on innumerable occasions throughout the book but have no entries in the index. Football does have an entry but only three page references are given despite a far greater number of textual mentions. There are also very few thematic entries; the majority of the index entries relate to people and places. This is unfortunate because, although the book is rich in biographical detail, it is equally impressive as a work on the history of ideas. One final criticism is that Chandos has based his work far more on Eton than on any of the other unreformed public schools. The appendix on the Eton Wall Game serves no apparent purpose and is not particularly instructive. It could be that Chandos is hoping that the time is ripe for a revival of the Etonian 'tribal mystic'.

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