THE OLD TAUNTONIANS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

October 2026

100 YEARS SPECIAL EDITION

This year marks 100 years since Taunton's School moved to new buildings in Highfield Road from New Road in Southampton. This Special Edition Newsletter commemorates this Anniversary with a short precis of material curated from contemporary articles published within the Taunton's School Journals of the day.

The Authorities felt that by September, 1926, the new building would be sufficiently ready to house the School. The ***Journal*** says very cautiously that "during the first two or three weeks of next term, the transference from New Road will take place.... enough of the new school will by then be completed to accommodate all forms." In July, as the last term at New Road moved towards it end, certain ceremonies were planned and from what we have heard and read about the occasion, the old building was given a royal farewell. The Captain of the School and other prefects had prepared a cauldron on the coping of the balcony and before the eyes of the School crowded into the playground they consigned to flames several documents symbolic of the subjects studied by them and their predecessors: exercise books, text books, a school cap were among the objects that gave fuel to the flames and cheer after cheer rose from the ranks of the boys. The Journal photograph has caught the expressions on their faces: joy, gloating, expectation, ecstasy, hope; and we can pick out some of the boys in the foreground, McMullen, Battersby, Stutchbury, being prominent. Then Trimby called for a parade round the School and soon a long file of boys was marching through every class-room in turn and along the corridors, to the accompaniment of howls, cheers and the banging of desks. This part of the ceremonies caused much alarm in New Road generally and as far away as the Clock Tower agitated citizens were asking one another the cause of the noise. Many boys crossed New Road to say goodbye to the sweetshop which had served generations of Tauntonians with tuck and of which the owner saw with dismay the departure of his best clients to Highfield. ***Ave atque vale***, New Road!

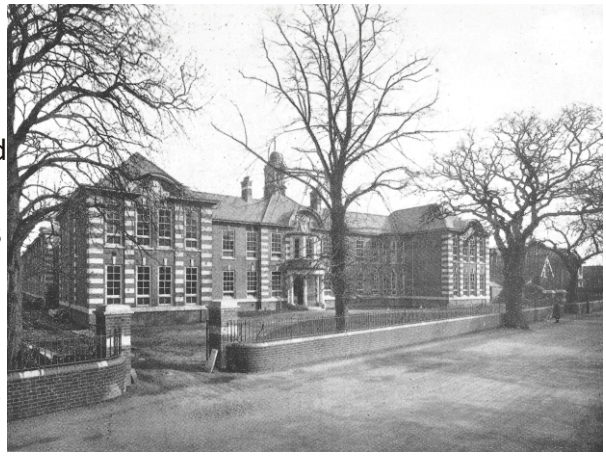


Ave Atque Vale
I salute you and goodbye
(used especially in a eulogy to a hero)

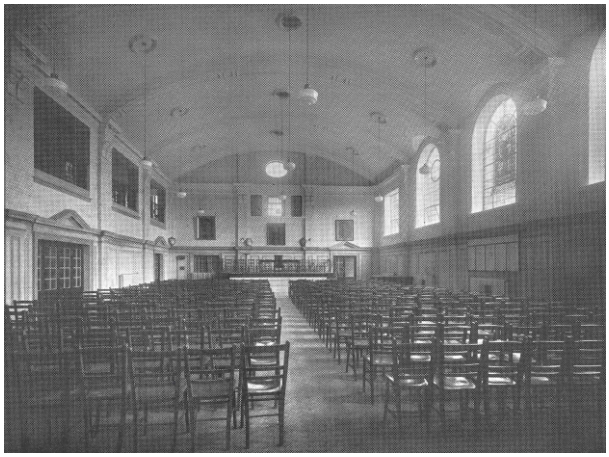


The Last of New Road
September 17th 1926
The School's Farewell

To the future generations who knew only the Highfield building a description of its plan may seem superfluous, but we give the details first to picture the joy of the 1926 boys as they looked forward to the spacious quarters awaiting them, and second to show the original layout so that the generations that followed the first at Highfield may learn what things were like before the steadily rising numbers of the 1930's led to considerable internal alteration, and so that the post-war Tauntonians may look back to 1926 before a single footstep had soiled the new floors of the building. We quote in the main from the architects' description and from our own recollections.



“The site consists of about seven acres of land and the school and its outbuilding cover rather less than half of this area. The main building is Georgian style, of two stories, surrounding a large quadrangle and built in red brick relieved with grey stone. In addition to the main entrance on the west side, there are four outer doors. The main entrance has a stone porch and vestibule and is surrounded by a bell turret. The front of the building looks on to Southampton Common, a most favourable aspect and one not likely to be changed. Above the main entrance is the Library with a large bay window and pleasant outlook, and on the other side of it the Headmasters' Room and Masters' Common Room. The principal entrance leads through a crush hall into the Assembly Hall, a very fine room, 79 feet by 45 1/2 feet and capable of seating 600. Here will be installed the War Memorial and tablets in memory of the Founder and P.G. Corbin.



At the rear of the Hall is an open Court, 122 feet by 79 feet and round the other three sides of this area are corridors both at ground level and first floor level. Most of the class rooms are on the south side and the laboratories and art rooms are on the north side on both floors. Upstairs is a Geography Room with a balcony for observational work. On the east side of the central Court downstairs is the Gymnasium with masters' and boys' changing-rooms and above is a Dining-Room to seat one hundred, with the necessary kitchen accommodation. Special attention has been given to ensure the maximum benefit in lighting and heating throughout the building. At the rear of the main edifice is another building containing the metal-work and wood-work centres, the lavatories and a covered playshed. The rest of the site is the playing-field. Originally the architect intended to place a low wall along the front of the School between the two gates, but the idea was changed to that of a higher wall with an iron fence topping it. The back entrance to the site is from Heatherdene Road.”

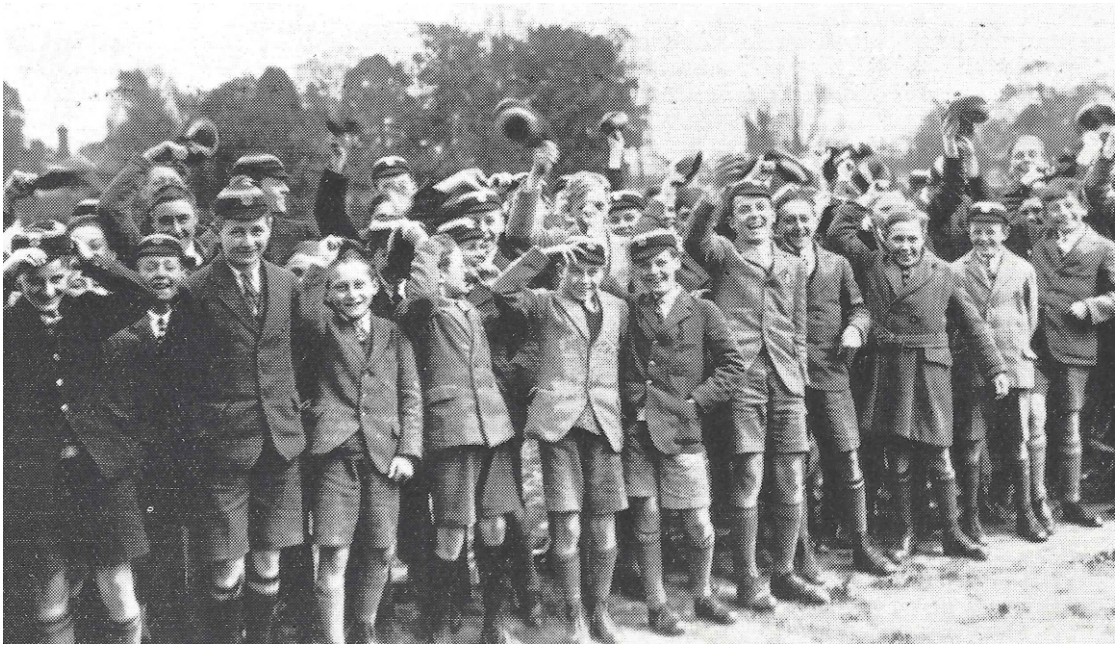
When the School took over the building in September 1926, it was, of course, not ready for occupation; the laboratories were not finished, painting went on for several months, and the Hall was still full of scaffolding. As changes were made internally soon after occupation we indicate here the principal alterations made before 1939. There were two internal cloak-rooms originally, but one (that near the bell door) was converted to a form-room. The second art room, the one on the ground floor, became a form-room for the Sixth. The Physics Lecture Theatre, the last room in the Physics corridor, soon shared its technical uses with its duties as a form-room and was later a biology laboratory. The Junior Library of the immediately pre-1939 period was originally the Gym changing-room for the boys, the Junior Library being housed in the first place in the internal rooms between the Sixth Form room (originally lower art room) and the Mechanics Laboratory. This internal room was for a time an additional room for the Sixth until in 1938 it became the English stock-room, an earlier scheme to make it an extra Master's Room having proved abortive. A new changing-room (with showers) was carved from part of the internal cloak-room near the bell door. The accommodation planned for 1927 consisted of twenty-two class-rooms (including the Geography Room), a set of rooms for Chemistry and Physics, each including two large laboratories, a lecture room and a preparation laboratory; two art rooms, a gymnasium with changing-rooms, a dining-room and kitchen, two libraries, rooms for the Head and the Masters and some store rooms. This accommodation was intended for 600 boys.

After the conditions of New Road, the Highfield building must have seemed a palace and an air of subdued excitement informed the early weeks of the Autumn term. The change for the better was of course very apparent, but the gain was particularly obvious in two ways. First, the quietness of the environment: after the constant traffic of New Road, and this included the passage of trams, Highfield was paradise. Second, the brightness of the building. Gone was the funereal gloom of the New Road class-rooms with their grime of the years and their general air of shabbiness. At Highfield windows let in light and could be opened to admit air without the accompanying roar of traffic. The improvement in conditions for the teaching and learning was immense. To add other advantages from the amenities and equipment of the new School, would be to labour the obvious; it is sufficient to record the pleasure of all, masters and boys, as they settled down in their new surroundings.



The Headmaster introducing Lord Eustace Percy to the School.

After Christmas the laboratories were available and New Road was completely abandoned. Already in the previous September the Governors had visited the School in session, had toured the buildings, talked with the boys and taken tea with the Staff; but now the official opening was being planned. The date fixed was Tuesday, 26th April and the guest of the day was the Right Honourable Lord Eustace Percy, M.P., President of the Board of Education.

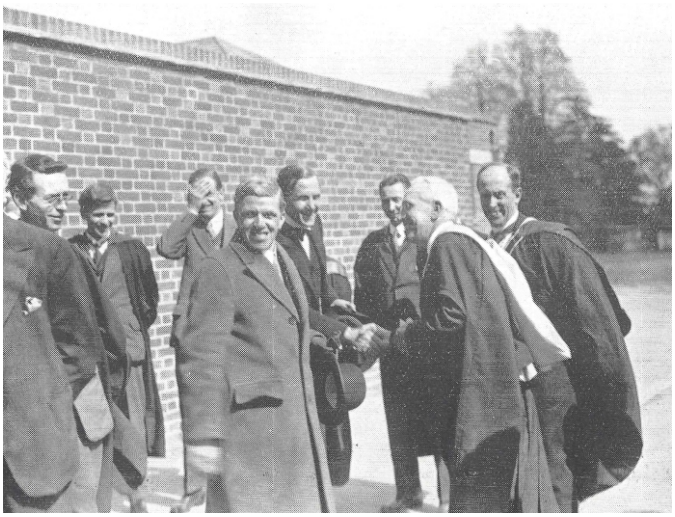


The School's welcome to Lord Eustace Percy

The first part of the proceedings took place on the edge of the School Field because the new Hall would not hold all the boys as well as all the parents, Old Boys and friends who wished to be present. Less formal but no less impressive, this gathering showed that already the new building had been outgrown on at least one occasion! After being introduced by the Headmaster, Lord Eustace Percy gave a brief but inspiring address to the boys, laying down the dictum that Taunton's must provide leaders of men in all walks of life. The School had a set of fine traditions which must not only be maintained but developed. Proposing a vote of thanks, Owen Trimby introduced the subject of the inadequacy of the playing-fields, a fact that could be proved from where they were standing, and Lord Eustace diplomatically promised to do all he could, and concluded by asking that the boys should have their holiday extended by one day since they had so loyally turned up in their holidays to honour this occasion. The request was granted and a vociferous Banga was given by the boys. The ***Journal*** photograph shows caps waving and faces smiling; the group in the foreground, mainly juniors, includes Pratt, Edwards, Jack Harrison, Perrot, Martin and Jack Stone.



Lord Eustace Percy addressing the School.



The Headmaster introducing Lord Eustace Percy to the staff.

After inspecting the new School, Lord Eustace Percy accompanied by the Mayor and Corporation, the Headmaster and distinguished guests went on to the platform in the Hall which was packed to the doors. The Mayor (Alderman P. V. Bower, J.P.) welcomed their guest and then the Headmaster gave a short account of the history of the School, stressing its growth since 1760, paying tributes to benefactors, particularly Chipperfield and Spranger, to two famous Headmasters, Corbin and Gubb and to that great servant, Stanley. The Mayor, before asking Lord Eustace Percy to declare the School officially open, called upon Mr. Stanley to take his rightful place on the platform, and although he shyly declined, the company by its applause showed its appreciation of the gesture. Lord Eustace Percy then addressed the meeting. He congratulated the town on the magnificence of the new building which reflected credit on the architects and builders.Although the country was passing a period of financial difficulty (this part of the speech sounds very familiar), few criticised wise expenditure on education, and in his opinion the provision of this building was an example of prudent economical spending. He thought that with secondary education in Southampton well catered for by Itchen and Taunton's, the Corporation might turn its attention to the elimination of defective and insanitary elementary school and to the reduction of the size of classes (that sounds familiar too). He then formally declared the School open amid great applause. Votes of thanks to Lord Eustace Percy and the Mayor were moved and seconded to bring a great occasion to its conclusion.

"I look back with pleasure to my visit to Southampton last April to open the new buildings of the Taunton's School. I hope that in the fine premises now provided, the school, while maintaining its old traditions, will go forward in the coming days with increased success, and that those who pass through it will gain that training in leadership and in the spirit of service which will enable them later to take their share in meeting the problems and the challenges of the future". *Eustace Percy 28th June 1927*