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THE MARITIME SCHOOL AT CHELSEA.

BY CAPTAIN H. T. A. BOSANQUET, R.N. (RETD.)

THE chance acquisition for a few pence of a little print, which must now be rare, of Ormond House, Paradise Row, Chelsea, is responsible for the following account of the vicissitudes of that dwelling whilst it served as a Naval Academy. Historians of old Chelsea have already delved in this same garden,¹ but the whole story has never yet been related, and as it contains some items of naval interest it may not be out of place to record it in these pages.

It would appear that in the latter part of the 18th century the facilities at the disposal of parents desiring to give their sons a sound grounding in the elements of navigation and seamanship, before they went to sea in the Royal Navy, were practically non-existent. The inauguration of the Naval Academy² at Portsmouth in 1729, which was intended to accommodate "forty young gentlemen who are volunteers for his Majesty's fleet," had been a step in the right direction, but this was a royal foundation and took the boys at a later age than was desirable from the parents' point of view. Moreover, no special advantages were, in its early days, offered by this establishment to the sons or orphans of impecunious sea officers and there was undoubtedly a want of some school which would take these at a reduced cost and at the same time give them a good nautical education. True there was Greenwich Hospital School, but this was for the sons of seamen only, whilst the Navigation Schools at Christ's Hospital and Hatton Garden School were intended only for those embarking on a career in the Merchant Service, and the number sent to sea annually was inconsiderable.³

¹Notably T. Faulkner; A. L'Estrange; A. Beaver; R. Blunt and others.

²This did not actually commence operations until 1733, becoming the Royal Naval Academy in 1773, and the Royal Naval College in 1806.

³Christ's Hospital. Children put forth apprentices and discharged out of Christ's Hospital the year last past, 102; eight whereof being instructed in the mathematics and navigation were placed forth apprentices to commanders of ships, out of the mathematical school founded by King Charles II. Ann Reg. 1760. Vol. III. p. 91.

Some sort of private effort seems to have been made in the year 1704 when Mr. Lewis Maidwell, a wealthy and philanthropic gentleman, submitted proposals to the Admiralty in which he offered to endow a public school for navigation to the extent of £500 per annum. His scheme was very warmly welcomed, as so often happens when a Government department is to benefit without being called upon to expend any public money. Their Lordships even went so far as to report to the Lord High Admiral that "the same will undoubtedly be not only of general use and advantage to the navigation of this kingdom, upon which the prosperity and welfare thereof so much depend; but also of great benefit and particular service to the royal navy of England, in its several capacities."

In spite of this high eulogium and the approval of H.R.H. the Lord High Admiral himself, the plan did not mature. Mr. Maidwell had too exalted an ideal, and as he laid down that the scholars, who were to benefit by his generosity, had to acquire no less than six foreign languages, a hitch occurred and for this, or some other reason, the whole thing came to an end.

It was not until 1777 that anything further seems to have been done, when that extraordinary genius, Mr. Jonas Hanway, applied his mind to the subject, and evolved plans for a public school peculiarly devoted to navigation in the military line."

The Marine Society, which he had instituted some twenty years previously, was then in full swing, and with the support of the stalwarts of that Society he succeeded in launching his project under the name of the "*Maritime School on the Banks of the Thames, near London*, as distinguished from the Royal Naval Academy, at Portsmouth Dock." His backers included Admiral Sir George Pocock, K.B., Sir Herbert Mackworth, Bart., Messrs. John and Samuel Thornton, Beeston Long, and Dr. Samuel Glasse, all of the Marine Society and, amongst several peers, the Duke of Bolton, formerly Lord Harry Powlett, Admiral of the White, an old friend. A strong Committee was formed, Mr. Hanway became Treasurer, with Admiral Lord Hawke as first President-elect, to be succeeded on his death, two years later, by H.R.H. the Duke of Cumberland. A subscription was then promoted, and was well responded to throughout the Kingdom, chiefly by the nobility, the City of London and Naval and Marine officers.

A suitable dwelling for the establishment was next acquired, namely Ormond House in Paradise Row, Chelsea, "truly on

the banks of the Thames, on the water side, on a fair, healthy detached spot." It was an old house fitted up to take a resident governor and his family, the proper officers and servants with twenty-six scholars. The rules and regulations of the school can still be studied in a small volume⁴ drawn up by Mr. Hanway, a copy of which was presented to each scholar, bound up with a letter, of some 27 pages of print, full of moral maxims and advice, signed by the Treasurer himself. This little book in its arrangement and attention to every detail for the spiritual and practical welfare of the students is in Mr. Hanway's unique style and merits perusal.

It will be as well to give here an outline of the School, its objects and methods. The institution was governed by a Superintendent, a retired naval officer, Lieut. Edward Howarth, R.N., being the first holder, whose wife officiated as Matron. He was supported by a Mathematical and Navigational Master (Mr. John Bettsworth) and later by a French and Writing Master (Mr. Henry Fox) a Drawing Master (Mr. John T. Serres),⁵ a Secretary, with a Sergeant for small arm instruction and a Veteran Seaman to take the boys out walking, swimming, &c. These with a Surgeon (Mr., afterwards Sir William, Blizard) and an Apothecary, completed the staff.

The scholars totalled twenty-six and were composed of three classes. Thirteen were on the foundation, the sons of sea officers. Six, for whose whole education sixty guineas was paid in advance, were orphans of Naval officers or of officers with large families. Seven were the sons of noblemen, gentlemen and officers advancing £50 per annum.

The age of admission was 11 to 12. Every candidate to have had the smallpox and to be sufficiently educated in learning to be able to write legibly and to work a question in the rule of three. Course two years, though some could remain up to three years, but not after reaching 14 years of age. An uniform was provided at the expense of the institution which was probably similar to that worn by the boy shown in the frontispiece of the regulations. (See illustration.) From the number of those

⁴Reasons for opening the Maritime School proposed in 1777, &c. 1st edition, 1779 in quarto, 2nd Edition, 1781 in octavo and in demy 18mo.

⁵This was the well-known marine painter to the King and the son of Dominic Serres. Ruined by the extravagance of his wife, also a painter, he died a bankrupt in the King's Bench Prison in 1825.

who had been two years in the school the superintendent selected two to be captain and lieutenant of the school for one month. Each wore a silver medal of the King (presented by the ingenious Mr. Pinchbeck) the reverse inscribed—"Maritime School, Chelsea. The Captain (or Lieut.)" with the school motto, "We hope for glory." This little attention of Mr. Hanway to the harmless vanities of boyhood was quite characteristic and worthy of the Chief Scout of to-day.

The curriculum comprised Navigation, Mathematics, Reading, Writing, French, Drawing, Nautical Astronomy and Seamanship. The sergeant taught the scholars the use of firearms and also instructed them in artillery by the aid of a small piece of cannon. The practical instruction in seamanship was carried out by means of a "vessel of competent size for going up the shrouds, &c., formed according to art" . . . placed in their playground. Originally called the *Britannia*, she was renamed the *Cumberland* out of compliment to the second President. Thomas Faulkner, in his history of Chelsea thus refers to her: "The novelty of having a ship build on the playground of this seminary, completely rigged, with sails bent, and of capacity sufficient to admit of twenty-four of the young gentlemen going aloft at one time, attracted general notice, and formed a strong inducement for parents to send their sons hither for naval instruction. This ship moved round on swivels, which enabled her to represent the evolutions of tacking or wearing. . . . This establishment also possessed an observatory, a rope house, and a battery of two six-pounders."

From the book of rules it might be considered, with our somewhat advanced ideas of to-day, that the instruction in deportment was more likely to turn out youthful prigs than candidates for the rough and tumble life of a man-of-war's gun room, but it was evidently quite in keeping with contemporary notions. For example, there was a set speech to be delivered by one of the scholars when a person of distinction might visit the school, and on every occasion that a newcomer was admitted the scholars formed a ring round the new boy and the Captain, who read "in a manly manner" a moral discourse, commencing "My worthy schoolfellow—By our laws, it is my province to address you on this serious but pleasing occasion, of initiating you into our Society."

A brief paragraph in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* of August 16th, 1782, gives an insight into the procedure at one of the School red-letter days.

" Thursday, the ship, lately erected in the playground of the Naval Academy, Ormond House, for the instruction of their pupils in ship manœuvre, was, in solemn form, named the *Cumberland* by way of compliment to his Royal Highness the Duke of that title, President of the Maritime School, the ceremony was as follows: The ship being completely rigged, her sails bent, and the young gentlemen drawn up in file, the senior student, upon a signal given, advanced, flung a bottle of wine at her head, pronouncing the name. The ship was then put about thrice, the scholars and company repeating "*The Cumberland*" with three cheers; after which they all returned into the house to dine. Several loyal and constitutional toasts were given, and an excellent song, written purposely for the occasion, was sung to the tune of "*Rule Britannia*." The evening was concluded with great mirth and good humour. All present expressed the highest approbation of the order, regularity, and commodiousness of the house, with the warmest wishes for the success of so national an establishment."

Though the original scheme was promoted in 1777 the school did not actually commence until March, 1779⁶ when ten scholars were admitted. The number soon rose to twenty-seven, the maximum allowed, the orphans of many deserving officers gaining admission, including the son of the " gallant, but unfortunate, Captain Macartney." Subscriptions came in steadily, rising to £800 per annum, the Government of Bombay sending over, in 1782, no less than £1,070 collected there. In fact, the institution, with an income more than equal to its expenditure, seemed to be well set, and with a long and prosperous career before it. Unfortunately, a difference of opinion amongst the governors disturbed the harmony and the subscriptions fell off, and in 1787 the school was closed.

It appears that one of the most cherished projects of Mr. Hanway was that the time served in the school should count as part time towards the six years' sea service required before a midshipman could go up for his examination for Lieutenant, as was the case at the Royal Naval Academy. In order to get this approved he stirred up the interest of one of the Governors, a peer, who approached the Admiralty in the matter. As was only to be expected things did not move very speedily, and Mr.

⁶At a General Court of Governors held at Batson's Coffee House, Cornhill, on March 11th, the Superintendent, a Master, Matron and ten scholars were elected.

Hanway, who could not brook the least delay, tackled the First Lord on his own account and naturally offended the noble lord previously referred to. The governors of the school then became split up into two parties, one condemning and the other condoning Mr. Hanway's action, with the unhappy result before mentioned.

It is probable that most of the funds were expended when the school was wound up, but in order to perpetuate the institution and to form a nucleus fund should it ever be restarted, a sum of £200—4 % stock was purchased in the names of the Trustees of the school, the income thereof to be disbursed annually at the anniversary meeting of the Marine Society. Eventually in March, 1823, as there had been no further attempt to start the school again, the surviving Trustees handed over the capital stock to the Marine Society for the benefit of poor distressed boys, and the general purposes of that corporation. Though the Maritime School thus came to an untimely end on its original foundation, after only a very short lease of life, it was destined to rise again, and in 1787 was carried on as the Naval Academy, under its late Mathematical Master, as J. Bettesworth & Co. An advertisement in the Press in that year stated—"Young Gentlemen are qualified for sea service, on a plan never before attempted by private persons. The Theoretical or Scientific branches of Naval Education, are not only taught in this Academy, by the most plain and familiar rules, but the practical parts of Seamanship likewise ; there being a rigging-house, and a ship with three masts, provided for the frequent exercise of the pupils." A pamphlet with the rules and regulations of the School was also issued, a copy still existing in the Chelsea Public Library, but this is sadly lacking in the quaintness of its predecessor of 1779, and is merely a synopsis of the School rules and fines for offenders. The fines varied from 2d. for skylarking, and small offences against discipline, to half-a-crown or five shillings, and even expulsion, for misdemeanours of a more serious nature. A jury of seven students apparently tried an offender and, if found guilty, sentenced him to the prescribed punishment.

On Mr. Bettesworth's death it was taken over by a Mr. Edward Francis who carried it on until 1830, when it was succeeded by Mrs. Elizabeth Fry's School of Discipline for girls, who moved in from a smaller house close by.

Faulkner in 1829 says : " Whilst it was conducted by the late Mr. Bettesworth it enjoyed a most distinguished reputa-

tion as the best institution for a maritime education. . . . The Academy is now successfully conducted by Mr. Francis."

It will not be out of place to give a short account of the history of Ormond House. It was erected in 1691 by Thomas Hill, mason, of Chelsea, and in a conveyance of 1736 it is described as "a piece of land 120ft. from east to west, and 287ft. from north to south., and the messuage or tenement, coach house, stables, with house or brew house erected thereon." The name arose from the tenancy from 1720-1733 of Mary, Duchess of Ormond, daughter of the Duke of Beaufort. The Rev. A. G. L'Estrange, writing in 1880,⁷ stated "Ormond House is still remembered by old people in Chelsea. It stood opposite the west gate of the Hospital, and the name Ormond Row given to a line of small dwellings in the vicinity, has only lately been changed into the more plebeian appellation of Smith Street. One of these houses is still called the 'Ormond Dairy.' The Mansion formed part of Paradise Row, and stood on the site of the shops now between the 'Chelsea Pensioner' and the School of Discipline. It had eight windows on the first floor; in front was a little garden, as there was to the adjoining houses, and at the back an old-fashioned gallery, that is a sort of wooden balcony along the upper floor, which led by a flight of stairs into the back pleasure ground." This definitely fixes the site of the house, and its present-day position would be partly on the site of No. 27, Ormonde Gate, in Royal Hospital Road, and between that and No. 1, which is now on the site of the "Chelsea Pensioner." The garden at the back of the old house still remains an open space, and now forms the garden behind the houses Nos. 1 to 12 in Ormonde Gate.

The story would not be complete without brief reference to subsequent efforts in the direction of the establishment of a school exclusively for the sons or orphans of officers of the Navy or Army. At the time when the Nautical School at Chelsea under Mr. Francis was practically moribund, the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth had so altered its original constitution that it was nearly, but not quite, meeting the demand which Mr. Hanway had realised some fifty years earlier. In 1828 one-half the candidates for the R.N.C. had to be the sons of commissioned officers of the two services; the payments varying from £20, where the father had died in the service, up to £80 for sons of Flag Officers; the civilian fathers having to pay £125

⁷The Village of Palaces, by the Rev. A. G. L'Estrange, 2 Vols. 1880.

for their young hopefuls. However, the College does not appear to have completely filled the Bill, and as a result of several magazine articles between 1828 and 1831 the attention of naval officers generally was aroused, culminating on April 29th of the latter year in a meeting at the Thatched House Tavern, St. James Street. It was then decided by a number of distinguished naval officers to carry into effect proposals by Commr. Dickson, R.N., for the foundation of a special school for educating the sons of Naval and Marine officers, not holding lower than Ward Room rank. Boys to be accepted from 10 years upwards for £25 per annum, and the school to be an intermediate or preparatory school, and not so expensive as the R.N. College.

It is extremely curious that in all the accounts now obtainable of the early meetings in connection with this establishment, which afterwards became the Royal Naval School, first at Camberwell in 1833, then New Cross ten years later, and finally at Eltham in 1889, no mention seems to have been made of the Maritime School, the existence of which had been completely forgotten. The basis of the new school was similar to that of the R.N.C., and the rules of the establishment were drawn up by the Head Master of the College, whose report and suggestions at some length may be found in the *United Service Journal*.

The R.N. College closed down as such in 1837, and the Royal Naval School, in its turn, after a long and useful career, joined the majority in 1910. Modern ideas no longer favour a special school confined to boys belonging to one particular class of Society, and the R.N. School is now represented by the R.N. Scholarship Fund.

The illustrations to this article show the front of Ormond House in 1803, when it flourished as the Naval Academy under Mr. Bettesworth, and the frontispiece to the smaller edition, 1781, of the Rules and Regulations of the Maritime School. There are two water colours in the Chelsea Public Library, one of which gives the back of the house about 1800, and the other is a front view, very similar to the first of the above mentioned, but taken when it was Mr. Francis' school for young gentlemen.