

A Brief Historical Account of St. Aubyn's School By Nicholas Dixon, School Archivist

James Crump B.A., Founder



James Crump (1812-1892)

James Crump was born in Marylebone in 1812. He was educated under the care of a clergyman for 7 years before assisting another clergyman at a Preparatory School in Islington. He studied at King's College, London, from 1837 until 1839 when he was awarded a B.A. in General Literature and Science. He married Frances Maria Hunt of Islington, 18 years his junior, in the early 1850s and by 1851 was working as a private tutor. In 1854, he took up residence in Pimlico. It was in the mid-1850s that he was employed by the Duke of Sutherland at Stafford House (now Lancaster House) in London to be the tutor of the Duke's children, which included the famous artist and friend of Oscar Wilde, Lord Ronald Gower. Gower later remembered Crump as "a most amiable, painstaking little grey-headed man, with a bright, bland and childlike face". Crump and his wife had nine children between 1854 and 1872.

In about 1866, the Crump family moved to St. Aubyn's Place, Hove, where Crump is reputed to have set up a 'coaching establishment' in Sussex Square which he called 'St. Aubyn's'. By the late 1870s, the Crump family had moved back to London to Hackney, where Crump continued to work as a tutor. It was in 1883 that Crump moved to Woodford to found St. Aubyn's with the help of his eldest daughter, Frances.

Early Crump Years



The First St. Aubyn's (1884-1893)

In January 1884, James Crump B.A. opened St. Aubyn's Preparatory School, a boys' school offering day-schooling and boarding, in two adjacent houses he had purchased in Woodford Wells, opposite the present site of Bancroft's School. It was named after St. Aubyn's Place, Hove, where the Crumps had lived before, as aforementioned. There were somewhere in the region of 2 to 4 pupils at the start, but by 1886, this number had increased considerably. The year 1886 saw the first Annual Sports, the first School magazine and the first use of the School motto. It is thus no surprise that the foundation date is sometimes wrongly cited as that year.

By 1887, Crump was joined by two of his other children: Rhoda and Harry. The School was very successful even its very early years and by the early 1890s, it had many distinguished patrons, including the then Bishop of Wakefield (William Walsham How, the hymn-writer) and Baron Huntingdon of Heveringham Hall in Suffolk. Most of the guests of honour at the Annual Sports were of similar status. James Crump died of 'senile decay' on 4th August 1892 at the age of 79, and was buried on 9th August at St. John's Church, Buckhurst Hill, where his grave can still be seen today. The School then came into the possession of Crump's widow, but the headship of the actual School went to Frances Crump, whilst 'Old Mrs. Crump' undertook the domestic tasks and Rhoda and Harry provided valuable assistance for Frances in the teaching.



The trio of (L-R) Fanny, Rhoda and Harry Crump

Later Crump years



The Second St. Aubyn's (1893-1918)

In 1893, the School moved to larger premises at 13 Broomhill Road in Woodford Green. The numbers of 'Crumpets', as they were called by the locals, were on the increase, and regular Sunday trips to All Saint's Church, Woodford Green were introduced. The work of the School continued in this way thereafter and by 1906, the School was recognised by the Board of Education. 1909 saw the retirement of Harry Crump to get married and pursue a career in chicken farming which unfortunately proved unsuccessful. In 1912, Rhoda Crump had a house built in Leigh-on-Sea where she took the boarders at weekends. The house remained in the family until the death of Rhoda's niece in 1985. On the 12th March 1914, 'Old

Mrs. Crump' died and was buried alongside her late husband at St. John's, Buckhurst Hill.

11 pupils and one master from St. Aubyn's are known to have died in the Great War: there may be many more. Among these were Geoffrey Thurlow, friend of Vera Brittain, the wartime nurse and author of *A Testament of Youth*. Thurlow is the character 'Gryt' in that book.

In July 1918, the School moved to its present site at Pymont Villa, a mid-19th century house that was, at the time, still owned by Mrs. Marianne Pascoe, widow of James Rogers Pascoe who purchased the house in 1879. It was not until December 1926 that the School actually owned the estate. By 1922, the Misses Crump were getting old, and they decided to sell the School to a successor: that successor was Lieutenant-Colonel William Harold Colley.

Lt.-Col. Colley



Lt.-Col. W.H. Colley, 1920

William Harold Colley was born in 1888 at Grove House, Helperby, Yorkshire, the son of a Yorkshire farmer. After education at St. Olave's Preparatory School and a particularly successful school career at St. Peter's School, York, he went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he graduated in theology. He was a keen rugby player, and whilst pursuing a career in teaching, he played rugby for Liverpool and Lancashire. In 1912, he became rugby coach and senior house tutor at Uppingham School, Rutland, before going into the army at the outbreak of WWI. He was first a lieutenant in the Green Howards, but later commanded the 16th Manchesters, gaining such honours as a military O.B.E. and the Belgian Order of Leopold. He remained in the army for two years after the war, mainly commanding Chinese Labour Battalions. He returned to Uppingham in 1920,

only to find that his former post of rugby coach had been taken. He then heard that the Misses Crump were selling their Preparatory School and purchased it in 1922. At that time there were 130 boys – 20 of them boarders.

The Pre-War Colley Years



The Present St. Aubyn's (1918 to date)

The new Headmaster made several changes. He introduced rugby to the School's sporting activities, introduced the house system and ensured the reintroduction of the School magazine which had not been published since 1887. On the building side, there were many new buildings erected on the School: temporary accommodation for boarders was erected in April 1923, and an entirely new wing came in 1927, following the actual purchase of the School by Colley. Lt.-Col. Colley married Miss Olive Hayton, the daughter of a Cumbrian farmer, in 1925; they had two children: Harold in 1927 and James in 1929. Both were pupils at St. Aubyn's.

Further building developments sprang up during this period: the swimming pool in 1929, the carpenter's shop and cricket pavilion in 1930 and the squash courts and tuck shop in 1934. Several internal St. Aubyn's institutions also came during this period with the library in 1924, the Natural Science Society in 1931, School museum in 1932 and the Scout Troop in 1934.

The School during this period continued to be highly regarded. As many as 23 Scholarships were gained by pupils between 1926 and 1934, and many pupils gained places at well-known public schools, also going on to the principal English universities. The sports teams of St. Aubyn's were successful also, with many a strong rugby, cricket or football teams being fielded against competent opponents, heralded by a victory on many occasions. This period of the history of St. Aubyn's came to an abrupt end in 1938, when war with Germany seemed imminent. In August 1939, the School, with 40 boarders, was evacuated to Whitehall in Cumberland, where it stayed for the duration of the war.

Evacuation



Whitehall, Cumberland: The fourth but temporary St. Aubyn's (1939-1946)

The war years were difficult, but the stay in Cumberland was a very pleasant one, although there were noticeable shortages of staff and pupils. 'Whitehall' was originally a fortified farmhouse and later had been the residence of the Victorian philanthropist, George Moore.

Whitehall made an admirable School. The big hall at once served as a dining hall, a preparation room and a chapel for the Sunday service. The timetable had to be altered, since St. Aubyn's had become almost entirely a boarding school.

Colonel Colley was, for at time, in charge of the local Home Guard battalion, but later decided he could not spare the time, so carried on as second in command.

During the difficult war years, the numbers of boys dwindled from forty to just 19 by the end of the War compared to 182 in 1934. These numbers must not have been much more than numbers during the early Crump era.

The boys played football instead of rugby, and the school found it difficult to raise a team because of the small size of the school. Nevertheless, they were able to play Rickerby House, Carlisle at cricket and football and had some victories in both.

Mrs. Colley did most of the domestic jobs. Bed making, sweeping the dormitories and classrooms and washing up were the regular tasks of boys.

Meanwhile, the School at Woodford Green was occupied by civil defence during the war. At one point, it was an Italian prisoner of war camp. The remainders of this occupation caused problems for the School when it returned at the end of the war, especially since an oil bomb dropped on the swimming pool. Eight old boys are known to have given their lives in WWII, but many more old boys served in the war.

When the school heard that war had ended, the school flag and the Union Jack were hoisted high above the school. There was a special thanksgiving service. After that, they took a hike and a picnic lunch, and returned in time to listen to the wireless report of the surrender. The war in the Far East ended during the summer holidays; it was announced on the wireless early in the morning, and Mrs. Colley went immediately on her way to Woodford to take possession of St. Aubyn's. St. Aubyn's was in a terrible state, but somehow Mrs. Colley managed

to live there for a term, and the school was ready when the boys came back from Cumberland in the January of 1946.

The Post-War Colley Years

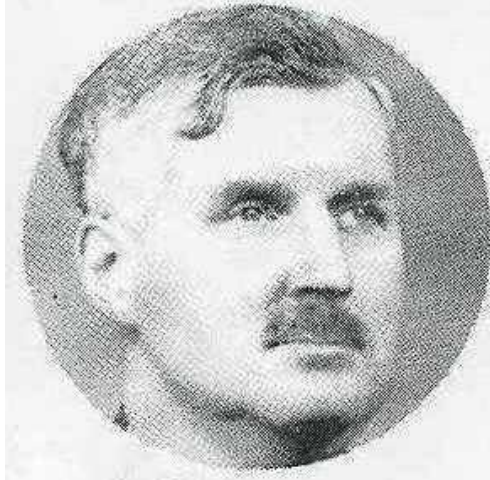


Lt.-Col. W.H. Colley

The years immediately after the War were rather difficult, arguably the most difficult in the School's history. When the School returned to Woodford, there were just under 70 boys in the School, but by 1947, that figure had increased to 160. Facilities had been put out of use because of the civil occupation during the War and things did not really return to normality until the 1950s.

After these immediate post-war years, there was a period of consolidation rather than of any great change. In 1951, Harold Hayton Colley, son of the Headmaster, joined the staff, and in 1954, he became joint-Headmaster with his father, an arrangement that continued until 1967. An extension to the Junior School was erected in 1953 along with a new hall in 1957. The School continued successfully in this manner and in 1965, Colonel Colley suddenly became very ill. Two years later, his son Harold became Headmaster.

Harold Colley's Headmastership



Harold Colley

The next period in the School's history was one of reform as the process commenced that would completely change how the School was run. By 1969, a decision was made to accept no more boarders and in July 1970, the Boarding House was officially closed, and the 12 remaining boarders departed. A new library was completed in 1969, now the Art/DT room, sited next to the front drive. More reform came in 1970 when pupils no longer had to attend school on Saturday.

Another significant change came in 1971 with the death of Colonel Colley, who had given 45 years of dedicated and loyal service to the School, and also in 1972 with the death of his wife, Mrs. Olive Colley who had also been significantly involved with the running of the School. St. Aubyn's first LP was recorded in 1973 and a new Science Laboratory was erected in 1975.

However, the largest change of the period was the formation of the St. Aubyn's School Trust in 1975. This meant that the School was no longer a proprietary, and the money gained by the School would go back into the School, thus ensuring its continued existence. This was a big step forward for a school that had been a family business, run by two different families, for 91 years. The St. Aubyn's School Society (SASS) was also formed in that year.

The next main event was the School's Centenary in 1984, before which a new block of classrooms (the Centenary Block) was erected to commemorate the occasion. Plans to introduce a nursery were announced in 1990.

Recent Times



Mr. Gordon James M.A., 2006

In 1993, Harold Colley retired giving way for Gordon James, the present Headmaster, to succeed him. Another significant development came in September 1995 when the School became co-educational after 111 years as a boys' School. There was also a new house (Hayton) added to accommodate the growing number of pupils. Recent building developments include the Sports Centre and the Symonds Performing Arts Centre. The School has been awarded Artsmark, Sportsmark and Investor in People status. So that is the School's past; for its present status, see the other parts of this website.

This is merely a small fraction of what is known about the history of the School. If you would like to find out more, I would only be too happy to assist.

Nicholas Dixon, 2006