



THE CHERWELL SCHOOL

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS 1963–2013

MARTIN ROBERTS

S H I R E  L I B R A R Y

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SHIRE PUBLICATIONS



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PREFACE

Jubilees are times for celebration, for reflecting on the past and looking forward to the future. Cherwell's Jubilee in 2013 will be just that. This small book is part of that celebration. It records the achievements of the school over the last fifty years and ends by looking to the future.

I hope that it may have some lasting effects. The independent school I attended recently celebrated its 450th birthday while my university college will enjoy its 750th in 2014. Over the centuries both school and college have built up archives and collections of histories which have created a tradition that gives to their present teachers and students pride in their institutions and a commitment to their futures.

Not many state schools have the longevity to celebrate in such a way. Of the state secondary schools in Oxford when the Cherwell opened in 1963, three have closed (Milham Ford, Cowley St John and Redefield) and three, wishing to shake off their pasts, have changed their names (The Oxford Academy from Peers, Oxford Spires from Oxford and St Gregory the Great from St Augustine's). Two only, Cheney and Cherwell, have evolved steadily over time, on the same sites, keeping their names and remaining proud of their histories.

So Cherwell's fifty years are worth celebrating. The school has grown from a small school hardly known outside the city to one of the largest schools in Oxfordshire. It is widely considered to be the best state school in Oxford and now enjoys a national reputation. Its roots are so entrenched in north Oxford that when another fifty years have passed, unless some unforeseeable catastrophe occurs, a famous school will be thriving here in 2063. Thousands of pupils and hundreds of teachers will come and go over this next half-century and their experiences will be enriched if they know themselves part of an institution with a proud past, a great present and a splendid future.

Martin Roberts



GETTING STARTED 1963–73

The Cherwell School opened in September 1963 with 323 pupils, twelve teachers, one full-time secretary, a part-time administrative assistant and a caretaker. Fifty years later there would be over 1,800 pupils, 139 teachers, seventy-four teacher support staff, twenty-nine administrative staff and six caretakers plus a premises manager.

The setting for the new school was quiet and rural, with open country on three sides and the Bowls Club, then as now, on the fourth, western side. The approach to the school was along a quiet cul-de-sac off the Banbury Road, lined by large private houses and ending at the school gate. A lane then ran between high hedges down to the ferry to the Victoria Arms and Marston. There was a punt with a wire by which you could pull yourself across the river. It was not until the 1970s that the Marston Ferry Road was built, which has become busier and busier with the passing years. What is now the South Site was then open fields. As part of the 1970s comprehensive reorganisation of the city two middle schools were built on some of these fields, Summertown closest to the Marston Ferry Road and behind it the Roman Catholic St Gregory's. In 1990, another

Some ex-pupils might be surprised that the main teaching block still stands after half a century. It does so only after substantial repairs and refurbishments which included the addition of a lift. (Photograph by Cameron Small)



The main teaching block (North Site) soon after completion in 1963. Hardly changed too is the Bowls Club. Otherwise the setting is transformed. In 1963, the Marston Ferry Road was a cul-de-sac which ended at the school entrance. Fifty years on cars and buses hurry along the inner ring road which links north Oxford with Marston and Headington.

The main play area for the new school in 1963. This is now occupied by the Sixth Form Centre, library and reception. Note the amount of glass in comparison with later additions, and the flat roof.

Summertown middle school, Bishop Kirk, on Middle Way, was sold to be transformed into a smart housing estate and Summertown Middle and St Gregory's merged to become Frideswide Middle School.

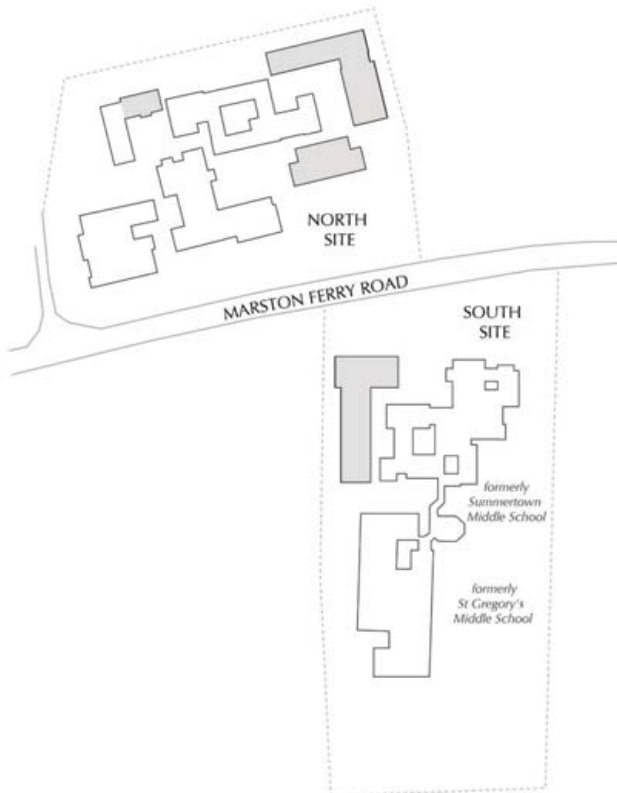
All the 1963 buildings still stand on the North Site though there have been many additions and refurbishments. The hall and adjoining offices, staff room and kitchen are all original. So too is the four-storey very 1960s teaching block, and the linked gym and changing rooms. Immediately to the north of the teaching block, beside the cycle racks, were workshops for Woodwork, Metalwork and Technical Drawing. Opposite across the courtyard were, as now, the Art and Pottery rooms. The only other original buildings are the rooms around the enclosed courtyard to the east of the Art rooms. They originally consisted of two Science labs, a Needlecraft room and a Home Economics suite. Architecturally it was very much a school of its time: with a rising young population, schools were springing up all over the country, quite spacious, flat-roofed buildings which were cheaply constructed using concrete, steel and glass.





The origins of the South Site buildings. This 1973 photo shows the almost complete Summertown Middle School. Behind it lay St Gregory's Roman Catholic Middle School. With fewer pupils in the school system, the County Council joined the two together in 1990 as Frideswide Middle School and then further adapted and extended it as the South Site of the Cherwell upon the reorganisation in 2003.

Secondary moderns like Cherwell were the result of the 1944 Education Act passed by the wartime coalition government. This Act had instituted the 11-plus examination which selected a minority of pupils for a grammar school education and left the majority to secondary moderns. As a secondary modern, the Cherwell catered for the 75 per cent of the local population who failed the 11-plus examination. Those who passed the 11-plus went to Oxford's two grammar schools, Milham Ford in Marston



Outline of the site in 2013. Buildings erected since 1990 are shaded.