

Bolton School 500/100

‘An extraordinary item of business’. So the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire Advertiser* described the decision to amalgamate Bolton Grammar School and the High School for Boys in December 1897. It went on to comment that ‘much will be said before it becomes – if ever – an accomplished fact’.¹ Eighteen months later the first issue of school journal, *The Boltonian*, acknowledged that the magazine came into existence at a ‘crisis point’ in the history of the institution.² Despite the furore in the local press, the histories of the several schools that came together to form Bolton School are long and illustrious and over the next school year, Bolton School will be celebrating two notable anniversaries. Not only will it see 500 years since Bolton Grammar School for Boys was recorded as ‘a going concern’ in 1516, but it also marks the centenary of Sir William Hesketh Lever’s ‘munificent endowment’, which allowed the merger of the Grammar School with Bolton High School for Girls on 1 April 1915.³

Bolton Grammar School was endowed by Robert Lever, who held the manor of Rivington, in 1613.⁴ Although much of Lancashire retained traditional religious beliefs in the wake of the Reformation, Bolton had a reputation for radicalism and during the seventeenth century, Bolton Grammar produced several prominent theologians on both sides of the divide between conformity and dissent. These included the dean of Chester, Laurence Fogg; the royalist presbyterian Oliver Heywood; and James Bradshaw, who was imprisoned briefly during the Protestant Monmouth rebellion against James II in 1685.⁵ Given Bolton’s industrial heritage, it is perhaps unsurprising that over the years many local entrepreneurs sent their sons to the school. These included the cotton manufacturer and philanthropist, Robert Heywood, and the cotton spinner Sir Thomas Bazley, who became an MP for Manchester in 1858.⁶

The late nineteenth century saw great strides taken in the education of Bolton girls, with the establishment of Bolton Girls’ Day School in 1877. It was one of the earliest public schools for girls and would soon change its name to Bolton High School for Girls before it joined with the grammar school to create Bolton School. A number of the day school’s headmistresses were distinguished by having been among the first female students accepted at Cambridge University. Strong women continued to play a role in the governance of Bolton School, as the appointment of the suffragist Sarah Reddish to the board in 1898 proved.⁷ *Hearth and Home* noted that this was ‘a particularly interesting

¹ ‘Bolton Grammar School. Extraordinary Procedure’, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Monday, December 27, 1897; pg. 3; Issue 12833.

² *The Boltonian*, Vol. i. No. i. May, 1899.

³ ‘Sir William Lever’s Munificence’, *The Times*, Tuesday, Sep 23, 1913; pg. 6; Issue 40324.

⁴ <<http://www.boltonschool.org/i-am-looking-for/school-information/history/>> accessed 13 April 2015.

⁵ John D. Ramsbottom, ‘Fogg, Laurence (c.1630–1718)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9778>, accessed 13 April 2015]; William Joseph Sheils, ‘Heywood, Oliver (bap. 1630, d. 1702)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13186>, accessed 13 April 2015]; Jonathan H. Westaway, ‘Bradshaw, James (bap. 1635, d. 1702)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3199>, accessed 13 April 2015]

⁶ A. J. Gritt, ‘Heywood, Robert (1786–1868)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57583>, accessed 13 April 2015]; A. C. Howe, ‘Bazley, Sir Thomas, first baronet (1797–1885)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1788>, accessed 13 April 2015]

⁷ Serena Kelly, ‘Reddish, Sarah (1850–1928)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50079>, accessed 13 April 2015]

election because the Board declined to co-opt her when a member resigned... solely on account of her sex: in every other respect she was a most suitable candidate. The locality, however, has shown they definitely desire a woman-member, for she received the very big total of 12,418 votes'.⁸

Following the outbreak of the First World War, *The Boltonian* turned its thoughts to 'those of the Old Boys who, in this time of national emergency, have offered themselves to serve their King and Country'.⁹ Throughout the war, it ran a Roll of Honour, but a more light-hearted approach also surfaced, as seen in an article from July 1916 which provided a French/English glossary for those receiving letters from the front. Among the humorous translations were 'Tout de suite (toot sweet).—Immediately, soon. The invariable reply to any such question as "How long is that coffee going to be?" "When are those potatoes coming?" or "When do you next go to the tranches?"'.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the Girls' Division magazine offered articles on helping the war effort by working in a Red Cross Hospital or even a bank.¹¹

Nevertheless, probably the most famous alumnus is now Sir Ian McKellen, who in his final year was school captain, chair of the Geographical Society, and a stand-in speaker for the Student Christian Movement.¹² Another notable Old Boy is the broadcaster Mark Radcliffe, who, during his school days, was a monitor and represented the school in the local UNICEF branch.¹³ The Girls' Division, of course, has been no less successful. Old Girl Ann Taylor, Baroness Taylor of Bolton, was Leader of the House of Commons then government chief whip during Tony Blair's first premiership, and went on to chair the Intelligence and Security Committee. Other noteworthy alumni include the gardener, author and broadcaster Carol Klein and the novelist Monica Ali, who played Helen of Troy in a 1984 production of Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*.¹⁴

For anyone interested in researching their family's time at Bolton School, a wealth of information is available on the school website. Particularly useful are the two school 'Archive' websites. The first of these is a section of the main school website which includes photographs and reminiscences, whereas the separate digital archive site contains copies of the schools' journals and newsletters.¹⁵

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www.earlymodernballads.wordpress.com www.boltonhistoricalassociation.wordpress.com

⁸ 'TO the Bolton School Board, Miss Sarah Reddish has been elected, being sixth on the list', *Hearth & Home: An Illustrated Weekly Journal for Gentlemen*, Thursday, May 17, 1900; pg. 94; Issue 470.

⁹ *The Boltonian*, Vol 16 No. 3. December 1914.

¹⁰ *The Bolton School* [sic], Vol 18 No. 2. July 1916.

¹¹ *Bolton School Girls' Division Magazine*, 1916

¹² *The Boltonian*, Vol. 60. April 1958.

¹³ *The Boltonian*, July 1976.

¹⁴ *Bolton School Girls' Division Magazine*, 1985.

¹⁵ <<http://www.boltonschool.org/i-am-looking-for/old-girls-and-old-boys/archive/>> accessed 13 April 2015;