



Richard (Dick) Winsloe Patton founded St. Anthony's Eastbourne in 1893. He is pictured here with his wife Emily.

Chapter 1

The School at Eastbourne

1893–1939

St. Anthony's began in Eastbourne in 1893. Often the date for the School's foundation is given as 1898 but the earlier date was confirmed in a speech given by the founder, Richard Winsloe Patton, when he reviewed the School's progress in 1926.

Dick Patton, as he was known, established St. Anthony's as a preparatory boarding school for the sons of English and Irish Catholic gentry at a time when the Catholic Church was regaining its confidence, boosted by a growing Catholic congregation and greater acceptance in civil society after ancient legal constraints had been swept away earlier in the century.

The development of Catholic prep schools came quite late. While the Church had been the first provider of schools and universities in England, this role vanished as a result of the Reformation. Several of the oldest Catholic public schools, such as St. Edmund's, Ware, Stonyhurst and Downside, were all founded in exile, returning to England from the late eighteenth century onwards as the climate became less hostile for Catholics. Beginning with the first Relief Act of 1778, a series of measures ensured that by the time of the Emancipation Act of 1829 Catholics could once again acquire and inherit land, join the professions and take a full part in civic life. Priests were no longer prosecuted and registered Catholic places of worship were legally recognised.

Once again the Church began to take a leading role in English education, stimulated in part by the mass influx of



Whole school photo from 1953.

everything on his plate, this was one step too far. But he failed to hide what he could not eat and for this he was told to take off one of his gym shoes and was hit hard across the hand by the headmaster. Joseph Connolly also noted that ‘the food was absolutely vile and we had to eat every scrap’. He remembers the pain when he was hit across the hand with a slipper.

The School was run along traditional lines with a traditional curriculum. There was none of the relaxed informality that characterised the School in later years. Philip Pell returned home after his first day, when he was one of a small band of pupils, to lament to his parents that his teachers didn’t call him Philip any more. Boys wore uniform, including a royal blue blazer, tie, and regulation garters with grey shorts, and were expected to doff their cap politely to local residents, some of whom did not hesitate to report them if they failed to do so.

As for the curriculum, it was only after the late 1950s that prep schools began to make any significant changes. This followed a curriculum review by what was now the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS) in 1959. This placed priority on a greater understanding of the educational needs of each boy, and recommended more emphasis on cultural subjects, including art and music. It was only in the 1960s that science (which appears to have been absent from St. Anthony’s in the 1950s) won a secure place in the prep school curriculum.



Sarah Patton on her wedding day with her father, Anthony, on the grand stairs at 90 Fitzjohn’s Avenue, Hampstead.

He had an almost uncanny knowledge of the character of boys and a deep and lasting affection for his pupils.

From an obituary of Anthony Patton in *The Tablet*, 1963

Anthony Patton comes across as a fairly austere character although, as his daughter Sally recalled, he was a man of absolute integrity and widely respected. He fell ill during the summer of 1962, developing Hodgkin’s lymphoma, from which he never recovered. He was so poorly at his last public engagement, when he gave away the prizes at The Oratory Prep School in Bournemouth, that he had to remain seated throughout the event. He died in hospital at the age of 55 on 12 July 1963. ‘He was so well known in the preparatory school world’, recorded *The Tablet*, ‘that his name became a byword. He had an almost uncanny knowledge of the character of boys and a deep and lasting affection for his pupils.’ This was reciprocated by many of his pupils, from whom flowed a stream of letters of condolence to Pat. One boy wrote how his former headmaster was ‘someone who really understood me. I am sure that if he had not understood me, I would never have got where I have. I will forever be grateful to him. Ever since I left St. Anthony’s I have never felt that I belonged anywhere as much as I did there; this sense of belonging only came from the great interest he and you have always had for the pupils – we always felt like one of a large family.’

Anthony’s son, Tim, had already returned from a teaching exchange in New York to be with his father before he died. He paid an emotional tribute to his father at the prize-giving that occurred just days after Anthony’s death. ‘My father was a headmaster in the true sense of the word. We all owe him a tremendous debt for his fine example, his sound commonsense and deep understanding of the young, their fears and worries. He combined his experience with a keen eye for new methods and techniques. He always insisted we must be prepared to change and improve, keeping abreast of modern educational methods.’ As one Old Boy wrote to Pat Patton, ‘Tim made a magnificent speech on Thursday and you must have been very proud of him. He has a very good way with the boys and they like him immensely.’

Tim was just 26 years old when he took over as headmaster from his father. Over the next 30 years he would make the school in Hampstead as well known as his grandfather had made the school in Eastbourne.



If you went in when the red light was on, life was over for you!

Keith Sanford

One of Tim's commonest injunctions to a naughty boy was to ask him how he would like it if Tim had behaved in the same way at the boy's house. This reprimand was probably delivered in a strong cockney accent, one of the things Tim had picked up during his national service, and which he broke into whenever he wanted to make a particularly strong point. This was all part of Tim's performance, sincerely meant yet calculated to achieve what he wanted from boys, teachers and parents. Perhaps it also covered up an innate shyness, a social reserve, which some detected, even, as one former pupil believed, a certain melancholy.

For most boys, being called to Tim's study was enough to make them nervous as they stood outside the door waiting for the red light to go out and the green one to come on. 'If you went in when the red light was on, life was over for you!' remembered Keith Sanford. Keith and a friend were once breaking two cardinal rules: never to be inside the Senior School buildings during break and never to play indoors with rubber balls. Carried away, Keith threw the ball particularly hard, watching in alarm as it ricocheted off the oak panelling in the main classroom and toppled one of the many sports trophies on display from its plinth, leaving it lying dented on the floor. As his friend fled, Keith picked up the damaged cup, unmentionable thoughts passing through his mind, fearing the consequences. He decided to own up, taking the trophy with him to Tim's study where the green light was already on. He walked into the room clasping the cup, and stood in tears in front of Tim's desk as he explained what had happened. 'I feel quite nauseous just repeating the story', said Keith nearly half a century later. When Keith confessed to damaging the sports cup, Tim excused him from corporal punishment, giving him instead ten hours' detention and letting him know his father would be receiving a bill for the damage. 'He had his heart in the right place.'

Adam Gishen was among many who dreaded being sent to Tim's study for misbehaving – 'that was the worst'. Sam Leifer recalled how Tim could be very intimidating, with his piercing blue eyes, gesturing wildly, raising his voice, reducing boys to jelly. By the time many boys reached the top of the School, they had worked out the element of performance involved in all this, often mimicking Tim's many mannerisms.



Above
Tim in his study.

Left
Tim's study in the
Senior House today.