

UNVEILING CEREMONY OF THE FOOT & DODDS PLAQUE AT THE MANSION OTTERSHAW PARK ON TUESDAY 19th SEPTEMBER 2023

May I welcome and thank you all this afternoon for coming to this commemoration. In particular I am extremely grateful to the Ottershaw Park Estate Company and its Committee for permitting Ottershaw School Old Boys' Society to install this plaque in memory of Arthur Foot and Allan Dodds, our former headmasters.

Before I unveil this plaque, I should like to tell you a short story. It is called The Tale of Two Headmasters.

Once upon a time, in the small village of Ottershaw there was a boys' school known for its academic excellence and fierce sports rivalry. Amongst its aims, were to provide opportunities for those boys who might otherwise have struggled to fulfil their potential.

One Arthur Foot, a charismatic and well-respected headmaster, albeit at times autocratic, opened this very door to Ottershaw School on 20th September 1948 to 71 boys, 1 of whom I am very pleased to say, will be joining us tomorrow at our 75th celebratory lunch.

Often, feared by his pupils, Arthur was a man with strong values who encouraged natural aptitude above arrogance. Godliness and good learning (Arthur's words) seemed generic throughout every generation but he believed in a structured environment with a rigorous academic curriculum were key to making a pupil successful.

Having been educated at Winchester and Trinity College, Cambridge he qualified to teach science as a Master at Eton, and then in 1935 he was appointed headmaster at the Doon School in India where he honed his British principles of dedication, service and respect. During his 13 years at the Doon School, he simply kept the boys busy with similar duties the boys at Ottershaw had become familiar – serving, clearing, sweeping, general duty squads, special squads, Sunday squads, maintenance squads some 40 odd squads with different titles – all typical of his organisation. It worked perfectly for years. After all, he was a workaholic by nature!

During his time as headmaster at Ottershaw, boys earned a reputation of being well-behaved, disciplined, and excelling in their studies. Arthur Foot was highly revered by both boys and parents alike. He inculcated social responsibility, endeavour, respect for others, discouragement of personal vanity and above all, a sense of service to others. Arthur was a difficult act to follow.

On arriving at the School in 1964, Allan Dodds, faced different challenges driven by societal change.

Because of his military training and as a war veteran, he had developed the art of delegating responsibility, not only to the Masters but also the senior boys. Such a shrewd move enabled him to leave different types of leaders to carry out the day-to-day tasks associated with running a model boarding school for boys.

Allan was also a workaholic. However, the foundation of the School and its basic organisation had already been cast. Those staff members who worked under Arthur were there to see in Allan and this helped to maintain continuity. As a 43 year old Housemaster from St Peter's School, York and educated at the Royal Masonic School

and then St Catherine's College, Cambridge, Allan's approach to the management of School life was in marked contrast to that of his predecessor.

And it had to be primarily because attitudes towards boarding schools were changing. There was greater affluence in society with changing values. There was a need to 'move with the times' and initiate the School's evolutionary process whilst keeping his staff on board and enabling the School to maintain its upward progress. General standards at the School improved. There was more of everything. In sport, music and drama. More was attempted and more was achieved. The Sixth Forms were larger and more successful and it became a more 'cultured' establishment than it had been.

Both headmasters were strong leaders who recognised that an effective education provided opportunities not determined by wealth or post code, that pupils should have access to organised sport, clubs and activities, small classes to provide the best teaching environment, that there should be a broad range of curriculum, and finally but not least, the opportunity to use one's initiative through social awareness and self-discipline.

But each headmaster, though sharing common goals, had different methods which they adapted according to generational changes. The 1960's era brought new challenges and problems for both pupils and Masters. It heralded the era of teenage rebellion and the accompanying questioning of accepted dress regulations, long hair and experimentation with drugs.

Allan had a completely different approach. He believed in nurturing creativity, individuality, and holistic development. Pupils were encouraged to explore their passions, participate in extracurricular activities, and think outside the box. He was occasionally even known for his friendly demeanour and an ability to connect with boys on a personal level.

There seemed every prospect that Ottershaw would fulfil the prophecy that it would be a model for Public schools of the future. However, the School was not given the continued financial support it needed and so my tale sadly comes to an end in 1980.

This tale of our two headmasters along with the commemorative plaque which the Old Boys' Society has commissioned serves as a reminder of our indebtedness to these two men who dedicated their lives, imparted their knowledge and taught us humility.

I would like now to invite any Old Boy here this afternoon, to provide an anecdote or tale of either Arthur or Allan of their own which they wish to share with us. It needn't be long but a few words would be most welcome.

Thank you. I will now unveil the plaque which commemorates a unique period in time in our own lives as well as history – allow me to unveil the plaque. Thank you.

Andre Scruton
President

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