

## The Victorian Headmaster

### - Biographical Research into an Emerging Profession

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#### ABSTRACT

*Headmaster* only became a viable career option in England during the nineteenth century - and this study of professional identity and professionalizing education aims to find unifying features in the life stories of four pioneering and prominent Victorian headmasters. While teachers had already established their vocation during the eighteenth century, professional headship only became a necessity when the demands of the middle classes fuelled a boom in public schooling and a subsequent increase in the schools' sizes. The popular schools had to be run efficiently and profitably by men and women of reputation, charisma and energy. Within a few years the stereotype of the omnipotent, slightly eccentric headmaster was firmly established – overall much faster than a professional code or even an agreement of the head's official role in school and community. It will be concluded here that individual careers mattered greatly at the time of schooling's anarchic growth, since the new professionals needed role models for the definition of a professional standard. The biographies show that commercially successful schools had to provide education beyond subject teaching: a clearly defined school ethos and morale proved to be as important as academic performance. The research also shows that the headmasters under investigation greatly relied on their predecessors for guidance and the establishment of privileges, duties and codes of conduct.

#### INTRODUCTION

Biographical research contributes to our wider understanding of society and its history. This is particularly true for the history of schooling, where the lack of official documentation hampers research for any period prior to the twentieth century. 'Until 1902 England had no centrally organized and financed system of state secondary schooling and British governments felt less obliged than leading European countries to provide one' (Stephens, 1998, p. 101). The lack of state intervention, with its ensuing lack of documentation leaves biographical research as one of the few viable research options for the historian of education. Within that field, the history of the teaching profession remains a neglected and under-researched area, but 'in particular the role of the head has been virtually ignored' (Bernbaum, 1976, p. 9). The literature on school effectiveness has come some way in analysing the head's position in a successful school (f.e. Tomlinson, 2004; Townsend, 2006), but the profession's historiography is still very much incomplete.

In the absence of governmental intervention or control, the ever increasing number of public schools in Victorian England was left in the hands of trustees and their appointed executive: the headmaster<sup>1</sup> – a profession that only really emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century. Up until then schools were small enough for the teaching staff, often a single clergyman, to cope with the administration on top of the teaching duties. Nonetheless, the period of class formation from the French Revolution to the Great Reform Act (Perkins, 1969, p. 177f) led to an increased demand for schooling by the emerging middle-classes and subsequently to a dramatic increase in the size of successful (predominantly boarding) schools as well as to the foundation of new schools all over the country.

In less than a hundred years those public schools transformed themselves from desolate places to nurseries for the governing classes of the British Empire (Leinster-Mackay, 1988), hotbeds for future intellectuals, and institutions inducing lifelong loyalty in its alumni. This transformation must be accredited as much to changes in English society as to the achievement of individual headmasters. After the earlier, 18<sup>th</sup> century establishment of teachers as part of an increasingly professional society, Victorian England witnessed the appearance of career headmasters. Nevertheless, *headmaster* was not a profession yet; it lacked nearly all the criteria of the accepted professions like doctors or lawyers (organisation, professional standards, answerability to peers). Practices of headmasters were not yet built on theoretical knowledge, their training for the post was not standardized, they were not answerable to a board of peers, and they were certainly not working within a well organized group of colleagues (Walford, 2006, p. 40). Headship also still carried the 18<sup>th</sup> Century stigma of belonging to ‘what might be termed sub-professions aspiring to higher status’ - namely university dons, school teachers, scribes and attorneys (O’Day, 2007, p. 413).

At the same time, the Victorian headmasters were evidently part of the rise of the English professional society, ‘made up of career hierarchies of specialized occupations, selected by merit and based on trained expertise’ (Perkin, 1989, p. 3). This study is thus part of the much-needed research into the nature of professional education and training. After all, ‘we need to have more truly parallel studies that begin with the premises that *professions* had much in common and that this common ground deserves study’ (O’Day, 2007, p. 428). This study attempts to situate the life stories of a few headmasters within the collective history of education for a period that is generously regarded as Victorian (from the Reform Act 1832 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914). Even this small sample offers some diversity, though. It mixes the famous with the unknown, the successful with those struggling, the males and female, the ones at both ends of the social class system – but there cannot be a pretension to offer a complete or detailed picture beyond snapshots within the scope of this article.

Dr Thomas Arnold is undoubtedly the best known of the headmasters discussed here. His impact on the evolution of public schools cannot be overrated, the material by and about him (both biographical and fictional) shows Dr Arnold to be the best researched headmaster of the Victorian age. There were predictions that John Percival would be equally well remembered for his impressive achievements in education as headmaster of Clifton College and later Rugby School. History, however has been unkind to him; outside the school gates in Bristol Percival is now largely unknown. Dorothea Beale represents the growing number

of headmistresses of emerging girl's schools of that period. Due to an obscure rhyme she is remembered together with another pioneering headmistress, Frances Mary Buss, but her singular achievements as head of Ladies' College Cheltenham in establishing one of the most successful girl's schools in the country made her a natural choice for comparison with Arnold and Percival. Her inclusion also allows references towards the teaching professions' unique feature as a vocation for women acceptable to society (de Bellaigue, 2007, p. 16). Arthur Gilkes on the other hand is the antipode to those three. His professional biography symbolizes the decline of the headmasters' absolute power that Dr Arnold established; his time at Dulwich coincided with the increase of governmental influence over schools and schooling.

It is somewhat unfortunate that the biographies used here are exclusively of headmasters of public (i.e. privately run) schools, but the headmasters of the growing number of maintained grammar schools - notable exceptions like Cyril Norwood at Bristol Grammar School aside (McCulloch, 2006a; 2007) - remain largely anonymous and under-researched. With regards to literature on the topic, there is also precious little. The published histories of schools and some collective biographies of headmasters of the *great* schools (Alicia Percival's *Very Superior Men* from 1973 for example) are the obvious source material. Additionally, there are collected essays on the role of the head that include historical perspectives (Bernbaum, 1976), but overall there is a need for more in-depth research on the topic – especially since gaps in the historiography of schooling are now gradually being filled with little references to the schools' leaderships (De Bellaigue, 2007; Whyte, 2003).

## SCHOOLS AND HEADMASTERS IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

English secondary schooling at the beginning of the nineteenth century was provided mainly by a select group of public schools who prepared their pupils for entrance to Oxford and Cambridge. The break-out in elementary schooling at that time – the Sunday schools, Dame schools, charity schools and factory schools – had little impact on the secondary sector. The small, local grammar schools emerging at that time with their intake from mixed social backgrounds were deemed unsuitable for the needs of the urbanized, industrialized and socially stratified upper and upper middle classes. Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Charterhouse, Rugby, Westminster, Shrewsbury and the two schools in London, St Paul's and Merchant Taylors' were the leading educational institutions (Simon, 1975, p. 18; Stephens, 1998, p. 42ff) – schools that had often started out as locally founded grammar schools that 'had risen in prestige from one cause or another – good political patronage, lucky financial policies, or, by far the most effective; an outstanding Headmaster' (Percival, 1973, p. 3).

Furthermore, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, schools had a 'distinctly ancien-régime flavour to their ambience: masters were detached, distant figures who allowed boys considerable license to run their own affairs, often anarchically' (James, 2006, p. 330). The upper classes had various reasons for allowing anarchy to reign at their schools. Public schools were at that point still seen as a convenient place to store the less important, younger sons during their most impossible age (the oldest son would usually be privately tutored). More amazingly, though, many parents viewed the dog-eat-dog atmosphere as

good preparation for the hostile world of adults. School was supposed to be a toughening experience preparing the boys for a tough life at home or in the colonies (Bernbaum, 1976, p. 10). The curriculum reflected the lack of ambition of these schools; only Latin and Greek was taught alongside some religious instruction.

‘In these conditions the essential task of the head was to conduct a custodial institution without interfering more than necessary with the right of free born Englishmen to settle their own affairs. Instruction was confined to a narrowly defined set of grammatical rules and analytical skills, and other than an outward conformity to the established religion no attempt was made to meddle in the character of the boys’ (Bernbaum, 1976, p. 11).

It was the arrival of the new affluent middle classes that changed everything and ‘in the second half of the nineteenth century there was a huge expansion in the provision of fee-paying education’ (Whyte, 2003, p. 601). Although there were voices proclaiming the benefits of a uniquely middle class schooling system to cater for – and unite – the new professionals (McCulloch, 2006b, p. 689), their aspirations were different. Instead of creating their own schools, they demanded access to the established ones. Even though the middle classes gradually took over as arbiters of taste (Simon, 1975, p. 6) at this point they ‘remained in thrall to the aristocracy and gentry, who continued to set the tone of society and to dictate taste and fashion’ (James, 2006, p. 155). On closer inspection, though, they saw that the schools did not meet their expectations: they wanted their sons to become gentlemen, with genteel qualities, irrespective of family background. The public schools had to change - and they did; so much so that when ‘demand for secondary education increased, it was met largely by the proliferation of such private schools, which continued to dominate boy’s secondary schooling until the mid nineteenth century’ (Stephens, 1998, p. 45). However, the ambitions of the middle classes did not affect the curriculum of the schools, ‘hours spent studying dead languages was just what the middle-class parents wanted’ (James, 2006, p. 329). Their expectation of school was not to prepare children for their future trade or profession, but to ensure that they could maintain a position in society.

In the highly individualized environment of English schooling and faced with serious economical prospects and hazards, it was up to the person of the headmaster to create a reputation for his or her school. ‘Each school developed in its own way under its own headmasters, each one of whom had its own views on everything to do with the school, his own personality that, if it was a strong one, expressed itself in the place, in his choice of staff, in his effect on the boys and, in the long run, in the kind of boys who was sent there’ (Quigly, 1982, p. 22). This individualism amongst the schools and their masters continued until fear of growing state intervention led to the formation of the public school pressure group, the *Headmaster’s Conference*, in 1869. After that, ‘competition and cooperation between schools institutionalized similarities and created an ideal type’ of public school that would remain fashionable until the present day (Whyte, 2003, p. 605).

## DR THOMAS ARNOLD OF RUGBY SCHOOL

Thomas Arnold (1795-1842)<sup>2</sup> had an eventful childhood with longer stays in Germany, France and Italy. His family belonging to the intellectual milieu, he met Wordsworth as a young man, enjoyed an Oxford education and set up his own tutoring business afterwards, which he maintained for some years while writing about ancient history. By 1827, Arnold's family has grown substantially (five of his nine children were already born) and he was looking for permanent and profitable employment. Becoming headmaster was only his second choice, after failing to get elected for a professorship at the new University of London. His friends at Oxford urged him to apply at Rugby, where he was appointed without an interview – and only after the trustees of the schools made huge concessions with regards to their interference in the day-to-day running of the school. Isabel Quigly summarized Arnold's arrival and first years at Rugby:

‘So he ruled Rugby with a grand, commanding air, first asserting and winning his right to independence of the school governors, however eminent they might be, and then fiercely defending the schoolmaster's right to become involved in issues wider than those of his own patch. An impressive figure, controversial, handsome, *committed*, much criticized, he was anyone's social equal and raised the schoolmaster's position among other educated people (which of course included parents) more than anyone had done before him' (Quigly, 1982, p. 26f).

Rugby School, as many public schools in the early nineteenth century, was in dire need of reform (it failed to attract the newly emerging, more discerning parent clientele and was on the verge of bankruptcy) and Arnold did not shy away from that. His success in the transformation of the school is well documented in the hugely popular *Tom Brown's Schooldays* – that seems to be, according to contemporaries of Hughes, largely accurate. There is no need for repetition here.

Arnold swiftly became the archetype of the Victorian Public School headmaster. The reforms introduced by him at Rugby served as templates for the schools founded in the wake of his success (Bamford, 1975). Arnold's three aims for the education of the boys at Rugby were religious principles, gentlemanly behaviour and academic attainment. Unlike his predecessors, his focus was not only on the subject teaching, but also on the overall development of the students. ‘He regarded school work as primarily educative rather than, as his predecessors, largely instructive. It prepared pupils for citizenship, encouraging them to promote the well-being of society’ (McCrum, 1989, p. 53).

To achieve this, Arnold firstly needed autonomy from the governors. Arnold had to stand his ground on controversial issues like the expulsion of pupils, for him a necessary tool for school discipline, but traditionally opposed by the governors, as it meant a loss of revenue for the school. However, within two years at Rugby, Arnold achieved even more: he gained control over the recruitment and dismissal of the teaching staff, a traditional stronghold of governors. Arnold established the strong position of the headmaster, untouched by the interference of governors, parents or the state that prevailed at successful public schools for nearly one hundred years.

Amongst the many reform measures Arnold introduced at Rugby were regular meetings with the governors to report on progress in the school – a compensation for the diminished influence they could exercise. He personally wrote half-yearly reports for the parents of every student at Rugby. Later those reports became more frequent and included comments from the form tutors as well. Following his predecessor's example Arnold taught two lower school lessons a week in order to check up on his students as well as on his masters. In addition to the external examination of the Sixth Form by Oxford and Cambridge he introduced termly examinations for the whole school. The prefect and tutorial system he introduced at Rugby was not new, it had been used in Eton for years, but Arnold used it much more effectively to induce discipline and pride in the school (McCrum, 1989, p. 59). Arnold himself was not a great teacher. His reputation is not built on his inspirational lectures, but on his vision of the school as a community, of what a school as a whole can achieve.

Arnold was not beyond criticism, though. Much has been made of his use of corporal punishment, especially in the aftermath of the press coverage of the *March Flogging Incident* (a rare occasion of parental objection to the prevailing tradition of physical punishment in schools that was picked up by the press). What that incident showed more than anything were the limits to the headmaster's power. Following the public outrage, parents withdrew their children and with this the financial sustainability of the school. Ultimately, the power lay where the money is – and even an Über-headmaster like Arnold had to make concessions. Another area where Arnold exposed himself to criticism was the lack of innovation in the curriculum. Rugby followed the 17<sup>th</sup> Century tradition of teaching classics only, since 'that the majority of these students had no need to earn a living. They were, instead, being educated to practise the art of being a gentleman' (O'Day, 2007, p. 416). While other schools already adapted to the needs of the new middle class, Rugby fed a diet of Latin, Greek and Religious exercises. Mathematics was only taught at an elementary level, the teaching of French was insufficient and Sciences did not appear on the curriculum at all. Arnold was not willing to break away from the traditional academic diet and 'in fact the strength of his convictions was such that he did more than most nineteenth-century headmasters to reinforce an attitude towards education that, though in many respects valuable, was finally too narrow and limiting' (McCrum, 1989, p. 65).

McCrum (1989) concludes that Arnold (who died at the age of 46 while still at Rugby) influenced education in England in three ways. Firstly, he re-established Rugby's reputation as one of England's leading public schools. Secondly, Rugby's reputation had a moral strengthening effect on the other public schools and encouraged the foundation of the ones (Arnold basically established the idea of the individual boarding-school). Thirdly, he secured the position of headmasters, by establishing their autonomy and authority.

## **DOROTHEA BEALE OF LADIES' COLLEGE CHELTENHAM**

The state of girl's education in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was considerably worse than the provision in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While previously girls were at least educated in a range of domestic subjects, the focus of the education of girls from the upper and middle classes shifted towards accomplishments: random knowledge useful only for the entertainment at

home. Drawing, Music and French conversation were popular subjects for women whose household was run by servants. Only the lower classes sent their girls to day schools, families of reputation sent their daughters to expensive but in-effective finishing schools, preferably abroad (Kamm, 1958, p. 11ff; Stephens, 1998, p. 45). Some contemporaries already argued in favour of an intellectual education as a requirement for the women's expected role in domesticity, but the idea of institutions similar to the popular boys' schools was not yet fashionable. Education for girls had to happen within a familial structure (De Bellaguie, 2007, p. 16f).

Dorothea Beale (1831-1906)<sup>3</sup> was born into a wealthy middle class family and hence educated by a succession of governesses and a finishing school in Paris. She was an ambitious student and enrolled at newly founded Queens College where she was awarded certificates in Mathematic, English, Latin, French, German and Geography. The college, impressed with her academic achievements, offered her the post of a tutor for Mathematic and Latin, making her the first female tutor of that institution. Beale stayed at Queens College for seven years, ending her career there as the headmistress of the associated school. Eventually frustrated with the limited power of female tutors in the male-dominated college, she resigned and found a new challenge as headmistress at Casterton. Her brief spell at Clergy Daughters' School (immortalized by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* as Lowood) was dominated by the power struggle between her and the governors, a committee of six clergymen. The school aimed to offer sound secular education at smallest cost and the lack of funding had turned the school into a grim, understaffed and authoritarian place ruled by punishments. When Beale's plans for improvement were constantly opposed she provoked her own dismissal and returned to London only a bit over a year later. There she refused to return to Queen's; instead she applied for the vacancy as headmistress at Cheltenham.

The Ladies' College was only founded four years prior. It started as a well funded school in a beautiful location, but the first headmistress, Mrs. Procter, and her daughter had left the place in disarray and with most of the initial money, collected by shares, gone. Furthermore, they established a rival school close by and took some of the pupils with them. Beale accepted the challenge to get the school back on track, but demanded a high level of autonomy from the governors. The Church of England committee in charge of the Lady's College duly minimized their influence to the recruitment of teaching staff and the provision of the external exams – and left the rest of the day-to-day organization of the school (including the religious instruction) in Beale's hands.

The initial years were difficult. The school was in financial trouble and parents were openly protesting her ambitious curriculum of Mathematics and Science, demanding more Music, Drawing and French lessons for their daughters. External exams were dismissed as improper for girls. Beale's perseverance was ultimately successful, though, and under her leadership the school grew from hundred pupils to well over thousand by the time of her death. A boarding house was introduced in 1864 in addition to the boarders Beale took on in her own house.

In 1864 the provision of schooling for girls from the middle classes was officially acknowledged for the first time by a Royal Commission and in 1867 the commission's

report, while exposing the lamentable state of girl's education in England generally, raised the profile of Beale and her pioneering colleagues headmistress Frances Mary Buss of the North London Collegiate and Emily Davies, co-founder of Girton (Beaumont, 2004). Beale received a very favourable report of her work by the commission and was glad to work with them on the introduction of examinations and inspections.

The growth of the school, even though it was Beale's main goal, proved to be the biggest challenge as well. Giving power to the housemistresses to run their boarding houses profitably was a dangerous leap of faith for Beale, even though in retrospect she made very good choices when it came to staff. The running of her school was Beale's only focus. She did not marry (she referred to the college as her *husband*) and gave generously from her own fortune towards the school. Beale stayed at Cheltenham for nearly fifty years and died in 1906 while still the headmistress. A memorial service was held at St. Paul's Cathedral, one of the first held there for women, proving that 'Dorothea Beale had, as a headmistress, the same status and role in girls' education as Arnold of Rugby or Thring of Uppingham had in that of boys' (Beaumont, 2004).

## JOHN PERCIVAL OF CLIFTON COLLEGE

John Percival remains largely unknown and did not make it into the public memory as one of the great headmasters of the Victorian age.<sup>4</sup> Especially social historians should be interested in John Percival (1834-1918), though, as he is one of the few known examples of upward social mobility in class dominated Victorian England. His life story could be particularly useful, since historical studies on schooling and social change (f.e. Lowe, 2005) so far have focussed on the effect on the students, rather than on the teachers. Born illegitimately, Percival only went to the local grammar school, but his academic brilliance secured him a scholarship to Queens College, Oxford. His hard work there marked him out for a university career. While a don at his old college he was persuaded to fill in as an emergency substitute as assistant master at Rugby School in 1860, a school then at the peak of its reputation (Potter, 1998, p. 13). He remained there for two years, working under the brilliant Frederick Temple. These were formative years; at Rugby he learned that a boy's character and morals should be valued higher than his academic achievements. Percival also learned that a successful school depends on the recruitment of first class teaching staff – and ensuring their retention by providing decent salary and status. Both lessons would be put to good use at Clifton later on.

Percival was not the first choice for the teaching post at Rugby and he was not the first choice for the post as headmaster at newly founded Clifton College in Bristol. His lack of pedigree did not allow for his name to be put forward, but he secured both positions all the same. In Bristol a group of businessmen, unhappy with the state of the grammar schools in the vicinity, had founded an independent school. The committee of the *Clifton College Company Ltd.* gave out shares and collected £10,000 to acquire the land, build the school and employ staff. To ensure the success of their enterprise the committee required a headmaster of reputation in order to attract parents. Their first choice, recommended by the head of Rugby School, Reverend Charles Evans defected only weeks before the opening of the school in 1862, Percival was once more the emergency substitute.



By the 1860s the role of the headmaster was already established to a degree that the committee in Clifton gave free reign to newly appointed Percival, regardless of his lack of experience, status or wife. The only thing in his favour was that he came highly recommended. Nevertheless, he received the pay package negotiated with the much more experienced Evans - his salary was a combination of a fixed annual sum and incentive based per head payments for every pupil beyond 200. Percival had to pay for lodging at the school house, but was allowed to take on boarders. With the opening of the school immanent, Percival used unorthodox and ruthless methods to get the first class teaching staff he needed, making surprise visits to candidates and pressuring them for instant decisions. His first recruits were colleagues from Rugby School and old friends at Oxford.

The ethos of Clifton College was very much in the tradition of Arnold, but Percival proved to be a greater reformer. For instance, he encouraged his staff to be friendly and accessible to the students and employed eccentrics that lingered long in the memory of Clifton alumni, while he himself remained emotionally inaccessible to the students. He widened the curriculum and adapted the school to the varying needs of those who founded it. By now visionaries within the middle classes succeeded in ‘enshrining utilitarian values and involving the ending of the dominance of the classics (...) in favour of science, technology, modern languages and the like’ (Simon, 1975, p. 6). Clifton was the first public school where natural sciences were regularly taught, by a professor recruited by Percival from university. The young headmaster also introduced Military & Engineering classes (one of the first aspects of vocational training for boys) as a preparation for the less academic students for a career in the military; Clifton College quickly became a main provider for the military academies Woolwich and Sandhurst. Later in his career he defied opposition from his governors in establishing the first Jewish boarding house in a public school, with provision for worship, observation of Shabbat and kosher meals. Especially this last achievement, against the background of the Anglican ethos of the school, showed Percival’s expert use of diplomacy and his understanding of the importance of the new middle class: the Jewish boarding house was backed by London’s Jewish merchant community.

Percival was not successful in all of his ambitious plans, though. He was very much in favor of Clifton College becoming a 1<sup>st</sup> Grade School according to the 1869 *Endowed School Act*, which meant opening the school to scholarship boys from Bristol. The committee, horrified by the idea of the mixing of social classes, defied him on that venture – Clifton College remained money exclusive. Overall though, his track record at Clifton is very impressive, especially considering that he came to the school with no experience. By the end of his seventeen years at Clifton he was a nationwide celebrity, one of the most famous headmasters alive.

His fame led to the offer of the presidency of Trinity College, Oxford, which he accepted. ‘His time at Trinity was not the happiest of his life, largely because his manner and temperament suited that of a headmaster of a school more than head of a college’ (Sadler, 2004). When he eventually was offered the most prestigious headship in the country, he took it and after twenty-five years returned to Rugby School. He stayed there for seven years. In his last years, Percival finally came into religious order and was made Bishop of Hereford. He died in 1918 in Oxford, but his memorial service was held at Clifton chapel.

Looking at Percival's biography it is difficult not to share Potter's somewhat hagiographic conclusion that 'in his work as a pioneer of educational reform Percival stood second to none in his time. Yet a prediction that his name would live in history alongside that of Thomas Arnold has proved a sad misjudgement. (...) History has embraced the one and turned its back on the other, whose talents extended over a much wider field' (Potter, 1998, p. 3). Percival's success as headmaster is all the more impressive when considering his humble origins; his defiance of the popular image of headmasters at that time as well-bred gentlemen in holy orders, brilliant scholars, Tory in politics. Percival was none of that.

## ARTHUR HERMAN GILKES OF DULWICH COLLEGE

By the end of the Victorian Period the omnipotent headmaster as ruler supreme over *his* or *her* school was already a thing of the past; as the biography of A. H. Gilkes, headmaster at the day school Dulwich College from 1885 to 1914, shows<sup>5</sup>. Today, Arthur Herman Gilkes (1849-1922) is best known for the semi-autobiographical school story 'Boys and Masters', but in the chronicles of Dulwich College he is venerated as the greatest headmaster that the school ever had. From looking at the facts of his headship alone this reputation does not seem to be sustainable, his time in office could best be summarized as uneventful. He inherited a healthy school (in all aspects but finances) from his predecessor J. E. C. Welldon and did not truly commit to innovation of ethos, curriculum, teaching methods or infrastructure. Even though Dulwich College already 'had its workshops as well as its laboratories' in 1885 (Bryant, 1986, p. 443) it somewhat reluctantly followed where the more adventurous public schools lead. Gilkes' passive leadership even resulted in a damning report from the 1914 Board of Education inspection which prompted his resignation. It is therefore interesting that his school still values Gilkes' legacy above those of some of the more successful headmasters. Before taking on the post at the helm of Dulwich, Gilkes was an assistant master at Shrewsbury (the school he was educated at before going to Oxford) for sixteen years. At Dulwich he worked hard, balancing a huge amount of teaching with the duties of the headship. He ran the school efficiently, employed staff according to their talents and created an impressive track record for sporting achievements and Oxbridge scholarships.

At the turn of the twentieth century public schools were 'at their most competitive, games-mad, snobbish and anti-intellectual' (Quigly, 1982, p. 38), but Gilkes refused to submit his school to that fashion or fit into the contemporary expectation of the headmaster as a peacock: a charismatic but lonely and inaccessible leader. Instead he opted for the unconventional way of treating the boys as equals and extend to them the same cordiality and good manners he expected from them. Subsequently Dulwich became a happy, if unconventional day school. His students appreciated that. It obviously helped his reputation that amongst the alumni of this period emerged such talents as the explorer Ernest Shackleton and the authors Raymond Chandler and P. G. Wodehouse.

Under Gilkes the school flourished intellectually. His passion for education and sense of friendship rubbed off on the students. During the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the school grew to a size of 700 students and Dulwich gained a bit of a reputation as the nursery for civil servants in the East Indian Civil Service. Nevertheless, Gilkes' headship was

overshadowed by the school's constant lack of money. It was impossible to modernize the buildings or improve the teacher to pupil ratio. It also led to a quick staff turnover as the most talented teachers left for better paid posts in other London schools. In 1914, the Board of Education inspection found inadequacies in the school that could only partly be explained by the lack of funding, though. There was criticism of the curriculum and the teaching methods. At a time when most public schools had (reluctantly) included the teaching of Mathematics, Science and Modern Foreign Languages, the provision of those subjects lacked behind at Dulwich. The inspectors found not one member of staff who was actually trained to teach – the relatively new subject – English. Gilkes gave his teachers autonomy in the classroom and delegated his power very effectively; the inspectors criticized the isolation in which the teachers worked and the lack of control over their teaching. Gilkes favoured the idea that the form tutor should teach as many subjects as he can to his boys; the inspectors favoured specialist teachers, especially for the new subjects. Overall, even though the inspectors conceded that 'there is a vigorous and healthy life in the School' (Hodges, 1981, p. 92) the report led to the resignation of Gilkes after nearly thirty years as Headmaster.

Looking at Gilkes' headship, one of the important things that transpire seems to be the shift of power within schools. Whereas headmasters in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century fought hard to take power away from the governors or trustees in order to independently and efficiently run the schools, the following century would be the one where the state and its inspectors accumulated more and more power. After all, their *scientific* judgment had a lasting impact on the schools funding, intake and organization – a development very much in line with the emerging 'power of the modern state (...) to control almost every aspect of life of society' (Perkin, 1989, p. 173).

## CONCLUSIONS

'A *great* headmaster (...) became almost a necessity in any school establishing itself, a man who could pull it from nothing in particular, set a pattern, impose his ideas. A kindling presence, an impressive appearance, mattered enormously' (Quigly, 1982, p. 37). This essay assembles four influential headmasters that left their mark on the schools they ran - and thus indirectly on the development of education in England. The vast differences in their personalities and biographies prevent the instant definition of the universal requirements for a *great* headmaster, but their life stories help to shed some light on the role of the Victorian headmaster.

Arnold's biography shows that commercially successful schools must provide education beyond subject teaching. A clearly defined school ethos and morale proved to be as important as academic performance; Beale, Percival and Gilkes wisely copied this concept for their schools. Other unifying aspects of these individuals are their devotion to their schools, their unification of theory and practice, and the larger-than-life personalities they needed in order to be the manager of the schools' day to day business as well as its figurehead and advertising feature.

This essay also shows that the success of one headmaster was greatly influenced by the legacy of the earlier one. Beale and Percival could negotiate autonomy with their respective governors, because Arnold had successfully introduced the headmaster's independence. Gilkes' career was greatly influenced by two inspectors' reports, but that was only possible due to the earlier co-operation of Beale and Percival with the government that contributed to the increase of the inspectorate's power.

Again, the scope of this essay and the small selection of case studies do not allow for a wide-ranging assessment of the professional role of the headmaster in Victorian England. Indeed, some important considerations like the evolution and influence of the curriculum or the importance of official acknowledgment – by the schools' inclusion in state listings and monitoring systems like the Clarendon Nine or the Taunton Commission (critiqued in: Whyte, 2003, p. 605f) - had to be left out. Also, the biographies selected for this essay only reflect a very influential minority that pushed education forward at a time when the majority of headmasters actually worked in small endowed grammar schools on the brink of financial ruin (Bernbaum, 1976, p. 14). The histories of those many men and women have so far been neglected in the History of Education. Even a preliminary survey like this might succeed, though, in highlighting the merit of future research into the comparatively new occupation of headmaster.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this essay the term *schooling* refers to secondary schooling only, as it was only those schools that grew substantially in size, necessitating professional headmasters. Please note that for reading convenience the term *headmaster* also refers to *principal* and, where appropriate, *headmistress* - as well as to the current term *head teacher*.

<sup>2</sup> Being probably the most famous headmaster that England ever had, there is no shortage of biographies on Arnold available. The first of many was published only two years after his death in 1844. The most recent one by Michael McCrum draws on all the previous material with the additional bonus of the insight of someone who has been educated at Rugby and was a public school headmaster himself - at Eton and Tonbridge (McCrums, M. (1989), *Thomas Arnold - Head Master; A Reassessment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.). This account of Arnold's life is largely based on McCrum's work.

<sup>3</sup> This account of her life relies on Josephine Kamm's combined biography of Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale Kamm, J. (1958), *How Different From Us - A Biography of Miss Buss & Miss Beale*. London: The Bodley Head. as well as an essay by Carol Dyhouse in Felicity Hunt's *Lessons for Life* Dyhouse, C. (1987), 'Miss Buss and Miss Beale: Gender and Authority in the History of Education'. In F. Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for Life - the Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950* (pp. 22-38). Oxford: Basil Blackwell..

<sup>4</sup> Only two biographies of Percival exist - the following account is based mainly on Jeremy Potter's work Potter, J. (1998), *Headmaster - The Life of John Percival, Radical Autocrat*. London: Constable..

<sup>5</sup> Gilkes' headship is the least well documented in this selection. As no current monograph documents the life of Gilkes, this essay relies on Sheila Hodges' and Jan Piggott's respective histories of Dulwich College, Dulwich's own booklet from 1938 and exhibition leaflets kindly provided by the school's archivist Hodges, S. (1981), *God's Gift - A Living History of Dulwich College*. London: Heinemann, Leake, W. R. M. (1938), *Gilkes and Dulwich, 1885-1914. A Study of a Great Headmaster*. London: Alleyn Club, Piggott, J. (2008), *Dulwich College - A History 1616 - 2008*. London: Dulwich College Enterprises.