

After the Second World War – The Heads



Michael Hugill, Geoffrey Marlar and David Raeburn, the three Headmasters who steered Whitgift from 1946 to 1990. This photo was taken at the departure of Michael Hugill, who can smile at last.

In about 1947 most of Remove B were opting to do Woodwork as part of their School Cert but the Headmaster, Mr Marlar, thought this was not academically challenging and spoke to Mr Robinson, the Woodwork master, who deftly pointed out that Jesus Christ was a carpenter. After a moment's consideration, the Head said in that case they should also do Divinity.

In 1946 the young teachers returned from war, the old and weary retired, and new men took their places.

In the early summer of 1946 – just over a year after the end of the brutal Second World War – taking up a new teaching post at Whitgift School in South Croydon was surely a heavenly appointment for the chosen few after being engaged in so much hellish warfare overseas. These were young men who had served their country in various theatres of war and for whom tranquil Haling Park in its sylvan setting must have seemed like a suburban Shangri La – that is until they walked into their allotted classrooms to be confronted by a new breed of post-war pupil – many of whom had themselves experienced trauma with flying bombs in South London, family disruption and constant uncertainty.

By 1948 there had been a big turnover in the teaching staff: many had stayed on beyond their retirement ages to fill the gap during the war. Some younger ones had returned and quite a number were new, having served during the war and then gone on to get or finish getting university degrees. They were a different breed from the old guard and many were clearly sympathetic to the Labour Government and its aims.

Among those arrivals was a new Headmaster, who'd been educated at Brighton College and Cambridge, from where he had degrees in both History and Law. It was the perfect time to arrive, and he was the ideal Head to resuscitate the school after a war.

Marlar, EA Geoffrey, Headmaster 1946–62

Ellis was now sixty-seven, and had carried heavy responsibilities with courage and without complaint. At the end of 1946, Ellis was joined in retirement by Fisher, Kitchener and Musgrave, each well advanced towards his seventieth birthday. Percy 221.

Of all the headmasters up to his time, Marlar was perhaps the one best known to Whitgiftians, past and present, and to parents. He was not a desk man, but preferred to be out and doing, meeting others, talking to boys, finding out what interested them, understanding his staff, whether academic or domestic. He was the same to all men; at ease with the mighty, he was equally unaffected when discussing the state of the playing-fields with the groundsman. He got the best out of people because they knew he was interested in what they were doing, and they were pleased to work for him, but he would not tolerate inefficiency or slackness, and no one was ever in doubt that he was in command. Percy 238.

When Ellis retired, and the new Headmaster arrived, the old Music master George Oldroyd wrote a hymn tune for Marlar in honour of the new Head, to the hymn *Forth in thy name I go*. George retired shortly after that, and the new hymn tune was never heard again! Rumour had it that the Head ordered it never to be played again, and the manuscript to be destroyed.