

The 1910's



The Dodo Race 1910

The boarders of 1910 were heartbroken when Tom, the first school cat, died. Durlston was given its first bell that same year.

Sports Day 1910 included an unusual race - The Dodo Race. This event was for the under 8's only and every entrant received a crazy ball as a prize. G. T. Atkinson based the race on that in "Alice in Wonderland." The Durlstonian reported, "*They utterly disregarded the starter and behaved in a way that would have delighted the dodo.*" In 1912 the prize for Dodo Racers was a "plump-duck." Sports colours were red and orange.

The very first school production took place in 1913 when the boys performed Ali Baba.

The school magazine "The Durlstonian" can be traced back to 1908. It cost 2/6d a year (12½p) and was issued termly.

One school group deserves a significant mention. Durlston possessed one of the earliest troops of boy Scouts. The scoutmaster was Mr R.A. Ker. He taught the boys first aid, scout signs and tracking, the compass, Morse code, semaphore, signalling, how to tie knots and how to light fires without matches. The patrols were known in 1908 as Kangaroos, Otters and Curlews. So successful was the school in recruiting boys that in 1910 two more patrols were added - Peewits and Wolf. Scout meetings were held in the Dining Hall on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

In March 1910 the Union Flag was hoisted for the first time on a specially donated mast. The School scouts wore the following uniform; a regulation belt, scarf, shoulder knot, hat and ordinary school grey tweed clothes. All of the boys carried staffs. Patrol leaders carried flags.

There were developments in the life of the school before the outbreak of war in August 1914 as the following selection show. Skipping was introduced to the games curriculum in 1913 'to improve footwork'. Proper goalposts replaced 2 trees in the Old Field for Junior Boys Soccer. The first soccer XI was provided with proper football shirts in the school colours of grey and white.

Fancy dress competitions became a feature of end of term celebrations. Boys went out onto the Downs to pick blackberries. Chess and Draughts competitions were held.

The Cadet Corps were organised as army cadets. Before 1914 the Isle of Purbeck was heavily used as a training area for the newly created Territorial Army. There are many references in the school records of the masters and boys watching the "Terriers" on manoeuvres. The members of the corps wore "footer-kickers", shirts and long socks, grey tweed coats and school caps. In 1915 Cadet Corps proficiency badges were introduced. The badge was of two crossed brass rifles on a grey cloth background. It was inscribed, "Durlston Court Cadet Rifle Corps." A senior military officer inspected the Cadets annually. Two Major Generals, fathers of Durlstonians, for example attended the 1913 sports day.

Right from the very beginning Durlstonians were expected to be of service to others. There is no doubt in this author's mind, that Atkinson inspired the boys to a high sense of duty and obligation. The Scouts and Cadets provided the opportunity for the boys to acquire highly developed social skills, team sense and leadership. Leadership qualities were put to the test in the Great War of 1914-18 as many Old Durlstonians served with great distinction as Officers in the armed forces in that terrible war to end all wars.

With the coming of war, Mr Atkinson became a Special Constable for Swanage. Mr L Jenkins joined the army "to serve his country." 40 Old Durlstonians also enlisted. Atkinson wrote in December 1914, "*Considering that the school has only just had its eleventh birthday, it may well be proud of its Old Boys.*" As war clouds gathered, many soldiers arrived on the Downs for army training.

When it became apparent that the war would not be over by Christmas 1914, the school entertained soldiers to a Christmas lunch of goose, beef and plum puddings.



Armistice Day, 11th November 1918, was celebrated in a noisy manner, 'The school Union Jack (flag) was carried in procession, and all available musical instruments were commandeered, including the big School bell, other bells, gongs, bugles, a bath, mouth organs and various trays.'

The spring term of 1919 witnessed a terrible outbreak of influenza. It was a national epidemic. Nearly 50 boarders were victims. Roger Alexander became very poorly. His aunt, a trained nurse,

travelled down from London to care for him as he became seriously ill with pneumonia. Roger suffered complications with septicaemia and he passed away on March 2nd. There is a memorial to him in Swanage churchyard.

During the summer of 1919 the boys constructed camps. Each camp was given a name. They included: The Nest, The Black Cat, Foxes' Den and The Wigwam. The boys cooked over wood fires.

Several Masters were sworn in as Special Constables in October 1919. They guarded the railway bridges during a period of civil unrest and transport strikes that autumn.

On Remembrance Day, 11th November 1919, the boys stopped lessons at 11 o'clock and stood for two minutes silence.

St Aldhelm's Church choir benefited from the assistance of nine boys and two masters from the school.

There were 61 boys in school. G. T. Atkinson said, "*We could have reached three figures --- We think the school is quite large enough and that a large number would destroy the family idea.*" At the close of 1919 The Durlstonian increased its price to 1/6d (18p).

It was decided to raise funds for a school war memorial and within a term £232 was raised.