

## The Founding Years



Founder G. T. Atkinson

*"Nineteen hundred nought and three,  
Edward was king O'er land and sea,  
To Durlston Hill with its bay below -  
The place where the breezes always blow  
Came the first of the Courtiers O! Courtiers O!  
Came the first of the Courtiers O!  
Three and twenty Courtiers O!"*

So wrote G. T. Atkinson, founder of Durlston Court School, in the first verse of the school song, "The Carmen Durlstonianum," in the inaugural issue of *The Durlstonian* in January 1908. Generations of Durlstonians came to know the words of the song over the years. C. W. Pearce composed the music.

Little did G. T. Atkinson realise how the sentiments penned in the eighth verse would ring true.

*"Many a minster far renowned  
Sprang from stone of Durlston ground,  
And Durlston boys as the ages go,  
Shall build up a name that will always grow."*

The founder had already spent many illustrious years as a successful headmaster of a Preparatory School in Highgate, London. In 1903 Mr Atkinson fulfilled a personal wish to open a Preparatory School for Boarding Boys set in a coastal location. His search for premises led him to Durlston Head overlooking Swanage Bay on the picturesque Isle of Purbeck.

As the school song recalls 23 boys enrolled as the first Durlstonians, including G .R. Atkinson, S.H. Gilbert and L Jenkins.

The school colours of grey and white aptly reflected the school situation, the sea and the Purbeck Hills. It was Atkinson's love of Roman History and Latin that led him to select the school's crest of an Imperial Roman Eagle and the motto 'Erectus non elatus.' Long school tradition has translated the motto as 'Proud but not boastful'

Atkinson's original intention was to own and manage a small fee paying preparatory school. The Forms were small (only ten in a group) allowing plenty of teacher attention for individual boys. The initial curriculum included Maths, English, French, Latin, Greek, History, Geography and Art. On the sports front, soccer, rugby, cricket and swimming formed a key role on the timetable. Extra curriculum activities from the outset filled spare time for the Boarders.

Durlston's tradition of wide ranging activities began from those early days. The first boarders participated in Scouts, Cadet Corps, Boxing, Carpentry, Science and Nature Study. Although the boys were kept busy, Mr Atkinson went on record that a few of the boys of that first intake were "bullies." He gained the sobriquet "Banger" for his liberal use of the cane.

Music, Art and Science were added to the academic curriculum in 1907 giving a broad and balanced timetable. Form prizes were given for English and French. It is not unsurprising that Latin was given high priority.

By 1908 the school had four forms - Upper, Shell, Remove and Lower. 41 boys attended the school in 1910. Durlston's musical tradition also dates from the first decade; the annual piano competition began in 1909.

As the numbers increased, the provision of educational facilities developed apace. In 1905 the school extended its playing field provision and, in 1910, the playground was extended. The school was reputed to possess a lovely stone terrace and front garden; Atkinson notified parents that there was from the terrace, "*a splendid outlook over the bay.*"

Being a boarding school, the Matron was kept occupied nursing boys who had contracted infectious diseases. School records reveal outbreaks of chicken pox in 1904 and 1907, and measles in 1910.

The Teaching Staff 1903-1909 Mr Atkinson, Mr Ker, Miss Ellison, Mr Gill (drawing), Mr Hillier (piano and singing), Sgt Major Denness (drill), W Bennett (carpentry) and T Bennett (Riding). In 1910 Mr Jenkins and Mr Anderson joined the staff.

Gradually prizes were extended to cover additional subjects including Drawing and German.