


Willingdon College at Ven House

(photographs and some text by kind permission of Richard Duckworth)

During WW2, Ven served as a boarding school for boys evacuated from Willingdon College in Sussex. It was a boys' boarding school with accommodation for 100 pupils, one or two of whom were local boys.

Somerset

SCHOOLS—ENGLAND



WILLINGDON COLLEGE
VEN, MILBORNE PORTE, SOMERSET.

(Incorporating Cliftonville School, Margate College, and Southdown College, Eastbourne.)

WILLINGDON is a residential Boys' College providing a complete education for boys from 6 to 18 years of age.

In the Senior School pupils are prepared for the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, Cambridge School Certificate, Higher School Certificate, as well as for commercial and professional careers, under a staff of Honours Graduates.

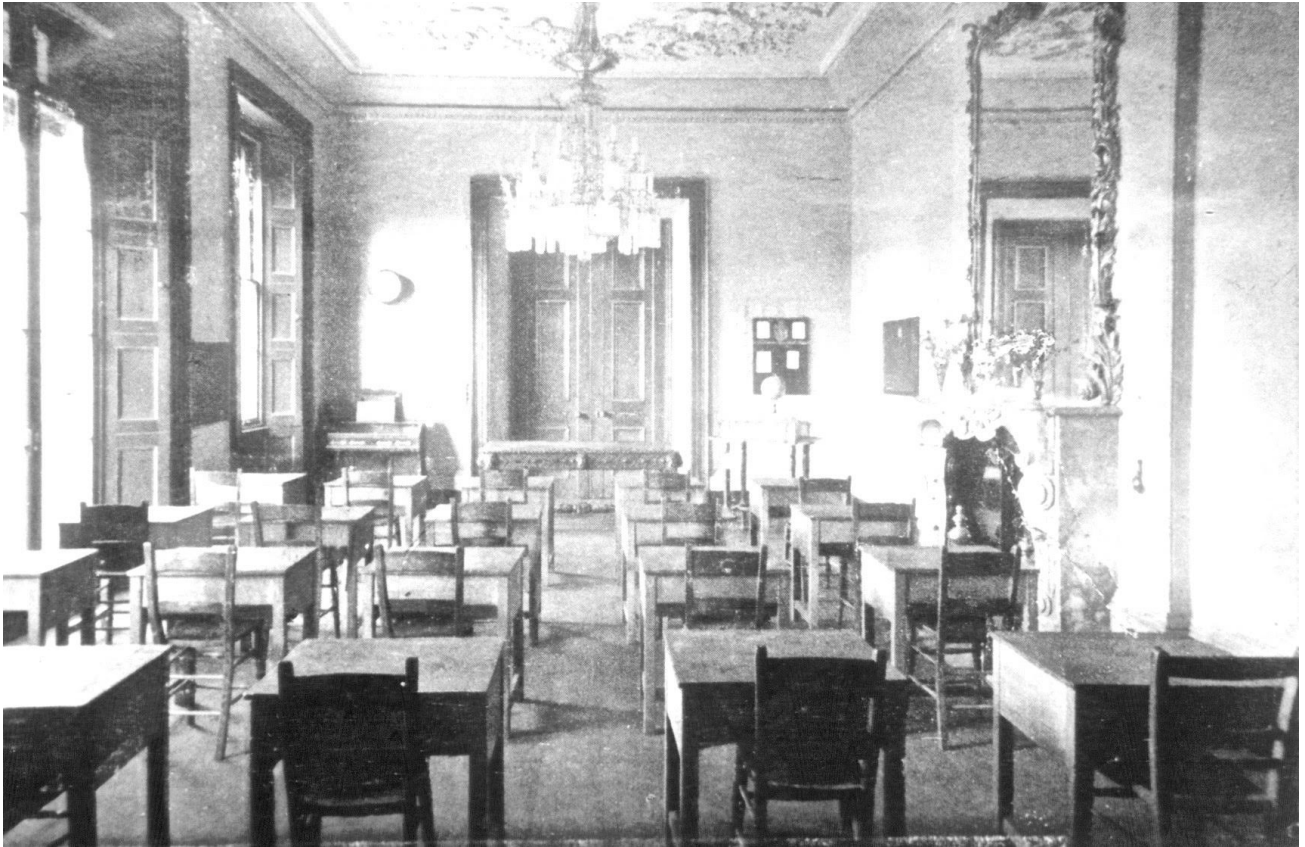
The Junior School is staffed by experienced and qualified teachers. The Kindergarten is modern and well-equipped, the little boys having their own dormitories, play rooms, gardens, and playgrounds. Hobbies include Wolf Cubs, Model Club, Meccano, Hornby, Stamp Club, etc.

Extensive grounds surround the College, providing facilities for Football, Cricket, Swimming, Gardening, Nature Study, Sketching, Photography, etc. Senior School activities include Round Table Club, Debating, Musical and Dramatic Societies, Chess, Model Aircraft, Philately, etc., and a well organised Scout Troop.

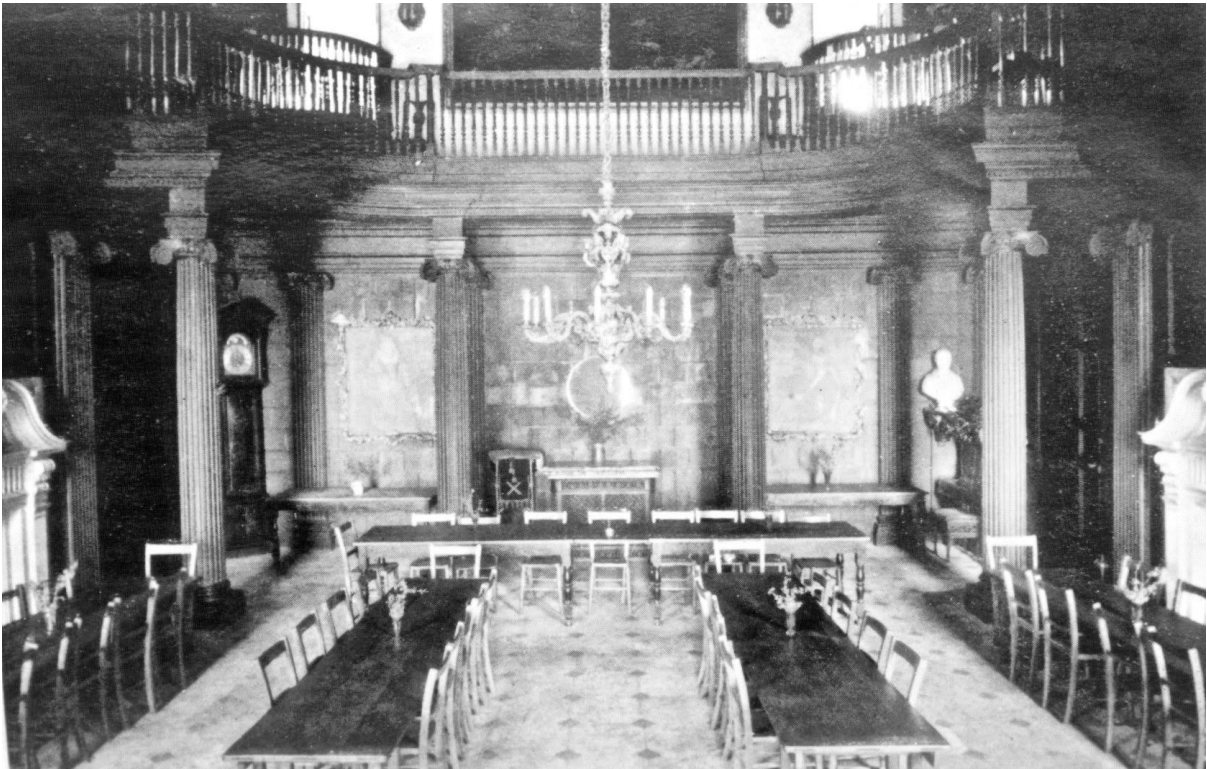
Telephone and Telegrams : Milborne Porte 255.

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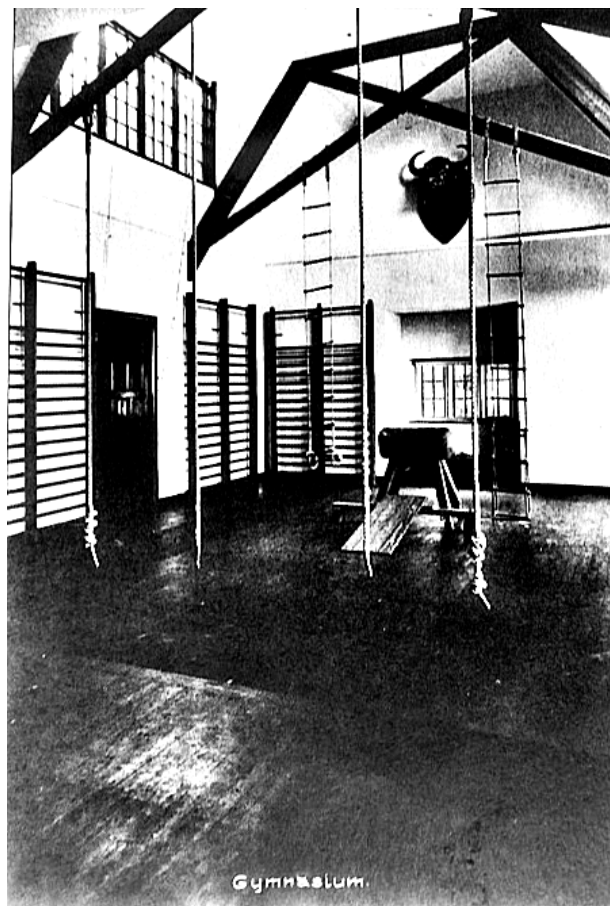
The splendid interior was turned into classrooms:



The main entrance hall was used as the dining room:



Physical education and hobbies were well catered for as this picture of the gymnasium shows (and see the trophy on the wall!):



Many popular pastimes were enjoyed, such as building model aircraft and battleships, photography, woodwork and gardening. Enough was going in to keep the boys busy and take their minds off the war...

The war-time safety of the pupils was ensured by air-raid shelters in the large underground fireproof vaults which accommodated 150 people.

Many of the fine rooms at Ven House were used as classrooms, the school being divided into junior and senior sections. The fees were 25 guineas per term for boys aged 6-9, 30 guineas for boys aged 10-13 and 35 guineas for boys over the age of 13. Private piano lessons were given by Mr Sinclair Barrows, the local church organist, at a cost of £2 12s 6d per term. It was hoped that after passing their School Certificates, the boys would go on to take the Higher School Certificate and then enter from college direct to university.' (*Pocket Images: Sherborne & Milborne Port* by Richard Brewer and Richard Duckworth)

There follow four quite different accounts from pupils who attended the college:

1)The entrance to Ven House had two phoenix on the gates; I believe we adopted the phoenix for our college badge. We were evacuated from Eastbourne during the Second World War, as a Molotov cocktail bomb burnt down the building. We were sheltering in a dug out in the school grounds. Virtually overnight a convoy of charabancs took us to Milborne Port and Ven House.

Opposite Ven House was a hill we called Babylon. We used to semaphore from the roof of Ven House to the top of the hill in our school Scout movement.

A stream ran throughout the grounds, also under the veranda leading to the gardens and lily pond where we assembled each day for roll call. There was an orangery at the end of the veranda. The grounds had a

vast collection of trees and shrubs imported by Sir Hubert Medlycott, the owner of Ven House.

Mr Cottingham was our principal, til he stepped down for a Welsh ex-army officer who took over. Rugby was introduced to replace football, which did not go down too well with us, but we accepted it.

On the Sunday march to church (having lined up for the penny we were given for the collection), we ran the gauntlet of the village boys, but the girls were much more receptive. We had turns to pump the church organ, and I believe my name was scratched on the pump woodwork.

Cross country runs were a regular thing. I remember collecting Cordite from outside an army camp. The secret panels, large oil paintings and crystal chandeliers were magnificent but not treated too well by us; I believe many of us got prisms from them.

I believe that during the war, large buildings such as Lord Willingdon's Ven House had the choice of either the army or a school to occupy them. I don't believe they fancied tanks ripping up their gardens and chose a school instead.

We didn't have a swimming pool at Ven House, so we undertook a project to dig one out in the grounds where the stream opened out. I do not believe we ever finished it. The stream ran throughout the village, I believe that a glove manufacturing business tipped its waste into the stream, making the water rather dark.

I believe that in 1945 we returned to Cliftonville in Margate where we originally started from. (Patrick Lee, 2012)

2)I attended Willingdon College in Milborne Port in 1944 at the age of 4 years, accompanied and protected by my elder brother. I think I was the youngest in the school. Ven House made a big impression on me, particularly the numerous old portraits hanging on the walls and the

central staircase. I seem to remember that our dining room was in a very large conservatory at the back of the building. Our dormitory was small and situated on the upper floor. I recall the lily pond and several statuettes, in need of repair, situated in the grounds. I recall being 'beaten' with a gym shoe for arriving late for breakfast.

The Headmaster at the time was a Captain Thomas. As part of a D-Day celebration, the whole school paraded into the village to join celebrations there.

I remember at half term my parents came to visit and stayed in the 'Kings Head' pub, in Milborne Port. At the age of 6 I left Willingdon College, unable to read or write but able to sing several songs in French and recite Grace in Latin and with treasured memories. (A Lynn)

3)My parents evacuated me to Ven House around 1941. I was 11 years old. My memories of the school are many. The brook that ran under Ven House entrance and the dares to go through it, the poor food, playing football on the pitch with the cow patties. I remember the dog fights of our Spitfires in the Battle of Britain. It was so long ago, but I do have fond and, sometimes, pretty rotten memories of it. (Harry Brown, 2012)

4)About 1940, at 9 years old, my private school, Willingdon College, was evacuated from Eastbourne to Ven House. It was a most magnificent building, built in the 1700s and pretty unsuitable for a boys' school. I remember fine carved doors and fireplaces, an impressive enormous entrance hall with ceiling paintings which we used as a Dining Hall, beautiful glass chandeliers, the arms of one of which I broke while fooling about, with dire consequences. During the early years many of us slept in basement dormitories which had buzzing machines supposedly to introduce ozone into the air. There was a fine terrace at the back which was weeded as a punishment. A river with a small pool which was great in the summer. There was also a path to a small entrance on to the main road where we had liaisons with the village girls; this led to violent threats from the village boys and some jeering when we marched to church on

Sundays. In 1945 the school moved back to Kent. Although I was unhappy to be away from my family during termtime, I have fond memories of Ven House as a building. (Mike Grizaard 2009)

Telephone : MILBORNE PORTE 255

Willingdon  College
FOUNDED 1874
Milborne Porte
Somerset

Principal :

L. J. COTTINGHAM, F.C.I.S., F.F.T.COM., F.C.I.

Vice-Principal :

J. RUSSELL ORR, O.B.E., M.A.,(OXON).

Assisted by a Staff of University Graduates.

Two Qualified Matrons.

Fees

Boys from 6 to 9 years	....	....	....	....	....	25 gns. per Term
Boys from 10 to 13 years	....	....	....	....	....	30 gns. per Term
Boy over 13 years	....	....	....	....	....	35 gns. per Term

A special allowance is made in the fees charged for two or more members of the same family, also for the sons of Clergymen, Officers in H.M. Forces or of Old Boys of the College.

Music

Private Lessons in Pianoforte are given by Mr. Sinclair Barrows, A.R.C.M. the fee being £2 12s. 6d. per Term.

Parents can take out an Insurance Policy against Sickness or Accident at a moderate premium, payable each term with the College fees. Further particulars may be obtained from the Principal.

Pocket Money

6d. per week is issued to each boy and entered on the termly account.
1/- per week is issued to prefects.

Any other spending money should be sent through the Principal for payment into the boy's Bank account, from which it is issued as required.

This photograph shows a visit of the younger boys to St John's Church:



These older boys were photographed in the garden to the south-west of Ven:

