

# The Boarding Life

Boarding was an option from the moment the College opened its doors on the 1st August 1833. Conditions were terrible, with water running off the inside of the walls of the South –West front. Some brave souls were 'in-boarders' and the masters accommodated 'out-boarders' in their homes as private pupils. In 1844, 40 to 50 'in-boarders' narrowly avoided being burned by fire. Despite this boarding survived and when the building was reconstructed they added attic dormitories with a washroom at the base of the tower. In the tower 12 studies were built. In the photograph opposite you should be able to make out the brick chimney on the left hand side, all that remains of these studies today...



Spencer Beesly recalled that in 1847 breakfast was no more than buttered bread and dinner was one small portion of meat with boiled rice instead of bread. Pudding was served on Sundays. Hungry boys supplemented their meagre fare by poaching and theft; on Langness they found birds, eggs and fish to cook secretly over oil-lamps in their studies.

By 1858 the boarders had as much food as they wanted and one even kept a boat in Derbyhaven. In 1866 gas was introduced throughout the College and by 1870 water was supplied by the Castletown Water Works. Life was definitely improving!

In 1875 William Bragg was able to report that the place was a very healthy one and that he was happy enough. Boarding accommodation was added as the roll doubled. In 1884 Pleignier built a new boarding house (Junior House) for 30 boys. In 1888 the east wing of the College was completed and became the Principal's House. Space for another 40 boys was added in 1894.

In the afternoons boarders played cricket and rugby or went on nature walks. To add value to life there was a boathouse below Hango and a diving raft moored in Castletown Bay. The addition of a swimming bath in 1888 with sea water pumped from the sea and heated by steam from the laundry boiler made College one of the first public schools to invest in such a facility. The boarders must have felt very special indeed!

Boarding continued to grow at the College and in 1919, Nos. 9 and 10 The Promenade, were purchased and opened as Raglan House. In 1919 the 3 hostel houses were given the permanent names of Colbourne, Dickson and Walters Houses and the sometimes confusing practice of naming houses after their housemasters stopped. Four more houses on the promenade were purchased. In 1925, Nos. 1, 2 and 3 The Promenade opened as Hangoside with accommodation for 30 boys.



'Siberia'? Definitely not. No known photographs exist of this dorm. The Barrovian of October 1937 recalls that Siberia was built above the old chapel, which was divided into two floors, the top floor containing class rooms, a dormitory and the library. This floor became the Barrovian Hall in 1937. Today the dorm featured in the adjacent photograph is the New Common Room.



Junior House was home to the juniors where they were looked after by the Rev and Mrs Stenning for 28 years. Scouts and swimming were the main activities but many boys were enthusiastic supporters of Tourist Trophy racing and senior race day was a holiday, with a special train laid on to take boarders to Douglas. In 1929 School House was fitted with hot and cold running water and wash basins but College had to wait until 1934 before electricity was installed. In 1930 Hangoside was closed as recession hit hard, followed by Raglan, the first of the promenade houses during the post war boom. Promenade houses Nos. 8, 9 and 10 were sold. The College was dependent upon off-island boarders and therefore vulnerable to economic change. Only the intervention of Old Boys and Tynwald saved the school, providing loans and grants for building, scholarships and so on. Peter Farrant recalled his time in Junior House, " The food was awful, and the big caged stove in the middle of the houserom did little to keep out the winter cold, but a quick game of off-ground tag warmed us up: we ran along the tops of the shelves, along the washbasins, then jumped onto the top of the stove and up into the rafters..." By 1938 an electric service lift and central heating made life more than bearable for the boarders in Colbourne, Dickson, School and Walters.



A boarder enjoying the view from the College roof before health and safety!



The fire blackened remains of the old attic west of the Tower after the fire of 1954. Note the chair in the background.



A happy group looking out of the window of their dormitory. This window now looks out of the Principal's new study.

Owing to the outbreak of War boarders were allowed to return to College on the 5th September 1939. During the war sea bathing was common and everyone in Junior House learned how to swim, including some found "the sea very cold and very wet!" Received wisdom holds that the boys of Colbourne amused themselves by lifting their Housemaster, J.L.Ryder's, Morris 8 Tourer over the wall of a fives court. By 1942 there were 144 boarders but College was still dependent upon government help. Many staff had left to take up war service (10 out of 15) and the boys had to adapt to wartime conditions. Many boarders joined the JTC (Junior Training Corps), the ATC (Air Training Corps) and the ARP fire service.

In the autumn of 1947 boarding stood at 139 and College reverted to Independent status. On 23rd January, 1949, a fire occurred in a clothes closet on the first floor of the Hostel above the entrance Hall. The closet was completely burnt out and considerable damage was done to the adjacent dormitory walls by fire and water. At 9 p.m. on the 11th May 1954, fire struck again, this time in the roof of the Hostel Block West of the Tower. The College Fire Brigade assisted by the Castletown Brigade tackled the fire from both sides of the building and after about an hour the fire was brought under control. An attic store full of trunks belonging to boarders was destroyed and had to be rebuilt. Today it is used as accommodation for the Director of Studies.

During the 1950s boarding continued to grow with dormitories being added to the main building between the science block and the master's block and off the Tower staircase. In 1959 School House was given another dormitory with the conversion of a large bathroom. The same pattern followed in the 1960s, with continual conversion of large rooms into boarding accommodation. There was a close call on the 7th February 1969 masonry fell through the ceiling of the Barrovian Hall after lightning had struck the Tower ten minutes before breakfast. Fortunately no one was injured.



By 1970 the College was bursting out of its buildings as numbers reached 492. Boarders from the USA, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, Peru, the Pacific Islands, Africa, the Middle East and Europe attended the College. Not to be outdone by the boys of 1940 the boarders struck again in 1976, this time lifting a mini belonging to one of the resident tutor's over the wall of one of the five courts. In 1981 a new Colbourne house was opened, the first new boarding house since 1888. However by 1983 (150th) numbers had fallen and boarding had collapsed. In 1986 School House closed in its 98th year as a boy's house, but re-opened as a boarding/day house for girls the following year. Boarding numbers continued to decline and in July 1989, a hundred years after Frank Wilson established the first Hostel Houses, Dickson and Walters merged to form Wilson.

By 1996 boarding numbers had declined to such an extent that Wilson House was closed leaving just Colbourne and School Houses for boarders. Colbourne and Wilson amalgamated and a steady increase in numbers followed. Today, the introduction of the international baccalaureate has once again strengthened the appeal of the College and boarders from Hong Kong, China, Germany the Ukraine, Russia, Moldova and even Canada attend the school. A third of the 94 boarders are from the Island. Both Colbourne and School Houses are filled to capacity and a happy, purposeful atmosphere pervades. The top floor of the old Walters House is now the Colbourne Annexe, where 11 boarders reside.



Colbourne House Dorm 1 in the 1990s. These were difficult times for boarding. Once Wilson was closed, Colbourne re-emerged as the sole boys' boarding house. School House closed in 1987 as a boys' house, and re-opened as a girls' boarding house after extensive re-fitting. Today it is home for 32 girls from all over the world.

Colbourne House Room 23 in 2008. Two Lower Sixth boarders share this room. One from Hong Kong and the other from the Isle of Man. Colbourne has modern facilities, flat screen televisions and Ipod docking stations as well as access to the internet in all rooms. The boarders can choose from 5 different meals at supper and Spenser Beesly would be amazed at what is on offer for breakfast.

