



Vale and Downland Museum – Local History Series

Foundation of “The Alfred Free Grammar School” at Wantage

by Margaret Prentice

(This article appeared in ‘The Illustrated London News’, 3 Aug 1850)

It will be recollected that a committee was formed some months past with a view to the erection of a memorial in commemoration of the thousandth anniversary of the birth of Alfred the Great, at Wantage, Berks; described in the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS for Oct.27, 1849. The result was an appropriate proposal to revive the Wantage Grammar School by subscription, in augmentation of the limited fund appropriated to that purpose since the reign of Queen Elizabeth; the erection of a suitable building, with master’s residence, etc.; and the allotment of sufficient salary to maintain a gentleman of character and education as master. Although the whole amount required is not yet subscribed, the laudable efforts of the committee have been so far successful, that on Monday last the corner stone of “The Alfred Grammar School” was laid by B.Wroughton, Esq., of Woolley Park, Berks. Appropriate prayers were previously offered by the Lord Bishop of the diocese; the Venerable the Archdeacon Berens, the Vicar (the Rev W Butler), and most of the clergy, gentry, and inhabitants of the neighbourhood attending the interesting ceremony.

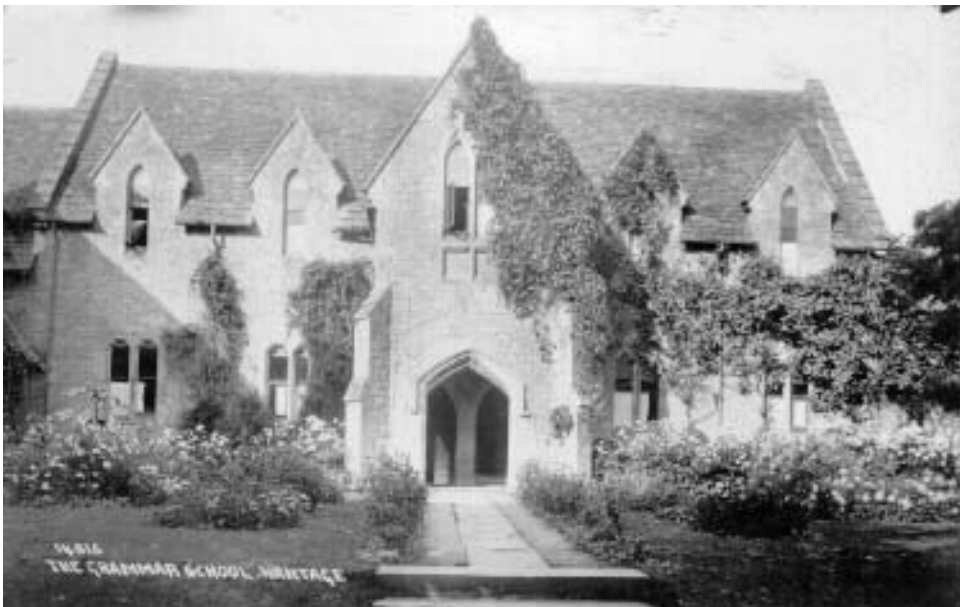
We annex a Sketch of the proposed building, which is in the style of the first period of pointed architecture prevailing in the 13th century; and is arranged round three sides of a quadrangle. The school occupies the west side; the dining-hall, kitchen-offices, and dormitory, the north; and the residence for the master, the east. The edifice is to be built of Cirencester stone, with Bath-stone quoins and dressings. The roof of the school and dining-hall will be open to the timber framing. The school will provide accommodation for seventy scholars, of which thirty will be boarded.

The design is effective, in good keeping; and possessing much variety of outline. It will be a pleasing addition to the picturesque scenery of the ancient town of Wantage. Mr J B Clancy, of Reading, is the architect; and the contract for the work has been taken by Messrs. Hunt and Kent of Wantage.

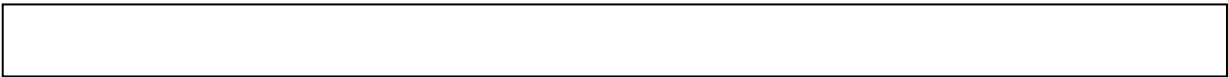
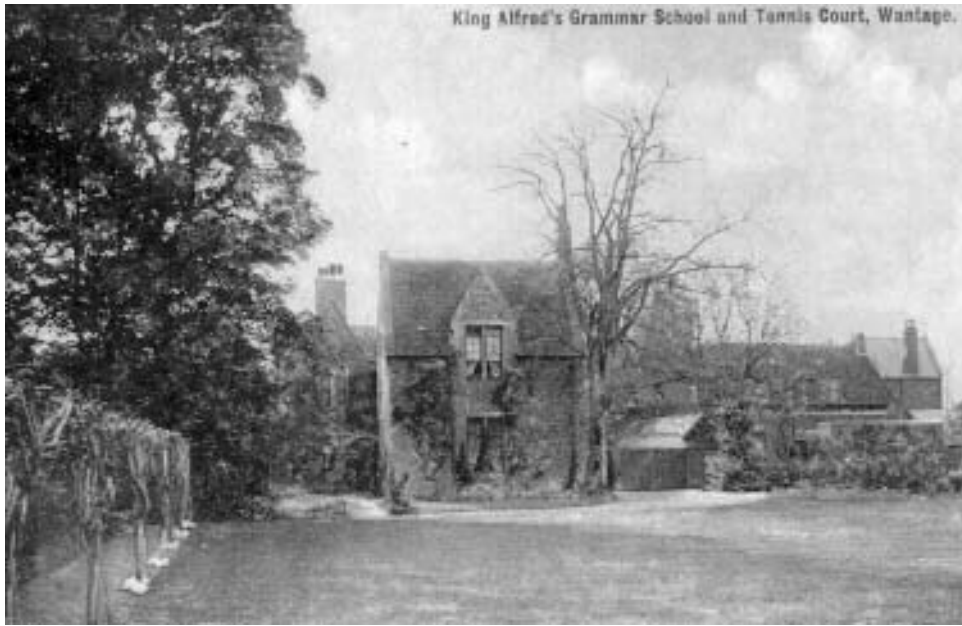
In a well-considered appeal on behalf of the funds for carrying out this desirable object, it is stated that “the Governors of the Wantage Town Lands have long been anxious to revive their Grammar School, and to provide for the middle classes of their neighbourhood a cheap and efficient course of instruction, embracing not only a rudimental acquaintance with the Latin language, but also the necessary addition of a sound modern education”.

Mr Ormond, the Wantage solicitor, had undertaken to administer the fund and subscriptions were received from many quarters. There were many local donations headed by the Governors of the Wantage Town Lands and Mr B Wroughton who each gave £100. Three local Members of Parliament gave a total of £70, and donations from the Bishops of Oxford and Salisbury and other clergymen were received. The University of Oxford supported the appeal through personal as well as college gifts. ‘The Illustrated London News’ listed individual donations totalling just under £700.

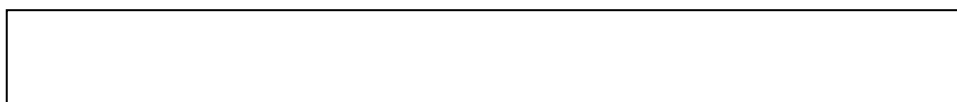
This initial sum of money was sufficient for the contracts to be awarded and for the foundation stone of ‘The Alfred Free Grammar School’ to be laid.



Wantage - King Alfred's Grammar School - front of main building. (1890's?) (sch021.jpg)



Wantage - King Alfred's Grammar School 1890s? - front of main building (sch025.jpg)



Wantage - King Alfred's Grammar School - 1960s? View from playing field (south) - chapel, school bell. (sch056.jpg)

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