



King Alfred Lives in Advertising

by Reg Wilkinson

On 14th July 1877 the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) unveiled a statue of King Alfred in the Market Place at Wantage (fig 1). Since that day a number of local businesses have used likenesses of the statue as their trademarks.

Before the statue was erected the inhabitants did not advertise the king's connection with Wantage. The first occasion on which they are known to have acknowledged it with any enthusiasm was in 1849 when a gentleman called Martin Tupper organised a celebration to mark the 1,000th anniversary of Alfred's birth. The streets were decorated with bunting and a public holiday was announced. Medals made of a base metal and bearing the king's head were given away to the spectators. The more affluent citizens were able to purchase medals of gold, silver and bronze. In the evening a roasted ox was provided for the poor and the well-to-do dined at King Alfred's Head. The inn's sign was the only obvious indication that the king had anything to do with Wantage at that time.

Those who attended the dinner resolved to re-found the town grammar school and name it King Alfred's College. They also talked of donating a statue of Alfred to the town and Philip Pusey, the local M.P., offered £10 towards the cost. Wantage residents welcomed the idea of re-founding the school and the Governors of the Town Lands started a building fund with a donation of £100. The required amount was soon raised and in the spring of 1851 the brand new King Alfred's College opened with forty pupils under the head-mastership of the Reverend E. J. Smith.

The idea of providing the town with a statue of its most illustrious son was not so popular. It lay dormant until the 1870s, when it was revived by Colonel Robert Loyd-Lindsay (later Lord Wantage). A subscription list was opened, but as it brought little response the benevolent gentleman had to foot the bill himself.

A piece of marble from Sicily was purchased for £2,000 and the Colonel engaged the services of Count Von Gleichen to sculpt the monument, which was nine feet high when completed. It was placed in Wantage Market Place on a rough-hewn block that stood on three octagonal granite steps. On 14th July 1877, the figure was unveiled by the Prince of Wales in the company of his wife, Princess Alexandra, and watched by a great number of townsfolk whose spirits were somewhat dampened by pouring rain!

The printing works owned by the Nichols family was probably the first commercial concern to make use of the statue as a trademark (fig. 2). The business was started in 1875 with two hand presses and two years later the owners installed the first mechanical printing machines in what was then North Berkshire. The printing works served the town for well over seventy years and closed down sometime after the 1939-45 war.

The firm which owned the flour mill in Mill Street was another that quickly realised the advantage of having King Alfred as a trademark. In fact it undoubtedly had more right to the trademark than any other firm because there had been a mill on the same site since

King Alfred's day, and probably before that, as far back as Roman times. When the statue was unveiled the mill was owned by the Clark family. Although the business has changed hands since then the present owners continue to trade under the name Clarks (Wantage) Ltd., and to use King Alfred the Great as a trademark (fig. 3). Among the other businesses in Wantage which took the monarch's title were King Alfred's store, the King Alfred Travel Agency, a restaurant called King Alfred's Kitchen and the King Alfred Car Hire Firm. The travel agency and the car hire firm appear to have gone out of business, and the King Alfred's Store closed in 1975 after prospering in the Market Place for many years. The restaurant has changed its name, but the King Alfred District Scout Association and a drama group known as the Guild of King Alfred Players are still flourishing. King Alfred's School, as it is now called, and the King Alfred's Head continue to influence the life of the town and new enterprises carry on making use of Von Gleichen's statue. One of the most recent is a building firm which employs an illustration of the monument on a brochure containing specifications of dwellings on sale in Grove. Without doubt it will not be the last concern to benefit from King Alfred's connection with the area.



Fig. 1



Fig.2



Fig. 3

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