

## [Transcript] The Rest Is History / 368. The History Behind Hogwarts: Ancient Schools and Revolting Students

In times of old, when Iowa's new and Hogwarts barely started, the founders of our noble school thought never to be parted.

United by a common goal, they had the self-same yearning, to make the world's best magic school and pass along their learning.

Together, we will build and teach the four good friends decided, and never did they dream that they might someday be divided.

So that, Dominic, was Leslie Phillips, aka the Sorting Hat in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, written by J.K. Rowling, of course, came out in 2003.

And we continue with our look at the origins of Harry Potter, but today we're looking kind of more specifically, aren't we, at the origins of Hogwarts itself, the great school for wizards and witches up in the Scottish Highlands.

And we ended the last episode with you being very, very sneery and finicky.

Oh, I don't think sneery.

I think you were definitely being sneery.

I think Riley's skeptical, Tom.

Sneery pointing out that there were no castles in Scotland before 1200.

So therefore, Hogwarts couldn't have been built there.

Well, why did they need a castle, Tom?

I don't know.

If you're going to build a school, a castle wouldn't be the obvious.

Maybe like the medievalists of the Victorian period, they wanted to...

Or like the Earl of Cornwall in Henry III's brother, who built Tintatul Castle in Cornwall as a kind of ersatz version of what he thought King Arthur would look like, King Arthur's castle.

Yeah.

So Hogwarts is meant to have been built in the 9th or 10th century.

I think it's a bit vague.

And the four founders, Tom, do you know the four founders' names?

Slytherin, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, and whatever the other name.

Ravenclaw.

That's just...

I mean, you're just naming the houses.

So it's Ruino Ravenclaw, Salazar Slytherin, Helga Hufflepuff, and Godric Gryffindor.

Very implausible mix of names, I think.

Again, they're searching historical skepticism that you're bringing.

From the 10th century.

But now there are schools, aren't there, that claim to be that old.

So Warwick School is one of them.

I think it claims to be 10th century.

I think King's School in Canterbury is claimed to be the oldest, claims to have been founded by St Augustine himself in 597.

That's right.

But these schools have been through...

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I mean, they're making slightly spurious claims, I think, it's fair to say.

And also, they were not, you know, true, they were not regarded as real public schools for a long time.

Well, they're cathedral schools, aren't they?

Exactly, which is slightly different.

So they're schools that are set up as part of the infrastructure of cathedral.

So when I went to Rochester, which has the second oldest cathedral in England, founded in 604, I think, so a few years after Augustine founded the Founds of Canterbury, that also claimed to have a very, very old school dating back to the founding of the cathedral.

Oh, and this one in York, isn't that St Peter's?

That's right.

But none of these are kind of purpose-built public schools.

And some listeners, particularly after we utterly failed to explain this in the last episode, may be wondering, what is a public school, especially if you're overseas list is the fact that a public school is also a private school.

A lot of people find that very typically English, i.e. utterly baffling and incomprehensible.

So the point of a public school is it's public because it's usually a charitable trust and it's open to anybody as long as they will pay.

That's, you know, it's not a private tutor.

Well, except that, as we will see, I mean, the initial idea is that it be open to poor students who couldn't afford to pay.

And it's very, very much rooted in the ideal of Christian charity.

And that sense that public schools are simultaneously there to serve people who can pay enormous amounts of money to receive the benefits of the education they offer, while simultaneously lay in claim to a moral purpose, I mean, it's there now and it's there right from the very beginning.

Exactly.

That tension has been there from the beginning.

So sometimes the critics of public schools will say they've lost sight of their original charitable.

The charitable stuff is nonsense.

They've lost sight of that.

But the truth of the matter is...

It was there from the beginning.

There's always been a tension and it goes right back to the 14th century.

So you mentioned in the last podcast, Tom, an excellent book called *The Old Boys* by David Turner, which is probably the best sort of single volume history of the public schools.

And he says in that, what most historians say, the starting point is really this chap, William of Wickham.

He's born in the mid-1320s and he's a very big figure, isn't he, in 14th century England?

So he is part of the Court of Ed with the Third and we talked in the episode we did on the Hundred Years' War, how Edward the Third's reign is a crucial turning point in English history.

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And so much of what will bear fruit, I mean, even down to the use of the English language at the heart of the court, dates back to this period.

And he is very much an expression of that because he's not from an aristocratic background. His parents are kind of wealthy peasants, actually the kind of striving, upwardly mobile people who throughout the history of public schools have kind of scrimped and saved to send their sons and occasionally their daughters to these establishments.

And that's the world that he comes from.

He is a very, very academically gifted son of peasants who goes right the way up to the top.

He becomes Lord Chancellor, he becomes Bishop of Winchester.

And as you say, he comes from this village called Wickham, which is about 10 miles outside Winchester.

And anyone who is familiar with public school slang will know that the name that old boys of Winchester school give to themselves is Wickhamists.

And I assume it comes from William of Wickham.

William of Wickham, yeah.

So he himself probably went to a grammar school in Winchester.

I mean, again, to explain the terminology.

There were in the 14th century a network of grammar schools across England and they taught you to read and write, but they also taught you Latin.

And if you wanted a job as kind of a bureaucrat, you know, a clergyman, if you wanted to move up through the sort of the literate bureaucracies of England.

Or to get to Oxford and Cambridge, he makes us spend a comment that a bishop was the first graduate profession in English history.

You could only, by this point, you could only become a bishop if you've been to Oxford or Cambridge.

And you could only go to Oxford or Cambridge if you've got the necessary Latin that enabled you to do it.

Exactly.

Exactly.

So I know we'll be talking a little bit about Latin in this episode.

So right from the start, obviously, Latin is central to the projects.

And those days, it's not what we talked about last time, which is a kind of magic, a secret code just for public schoolboys.

It's more than that.

It's a crucial vocational tool.

Well, it's what English is today for, say, international science.

To be a scientist, you have to speak English because that's the language that is carried out in.

But most people in England obviously did not go to grammar schools.

A lot went to what were called petty schools, which are kind of, you know, amateur, informal, run by one teacher, usually one room.

They might teach you to count, to read and write, but no more than that.

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William of Wickham, obviously, is looking at something a bit bigger.

And actually, why does England have public schools?

One answer would just be the Black Death, wouldn't it, Tom?

The Black Death strikes when William of Wickham is, what, 28, 30, around about then, 1348?

And as many as half of the population of England, you know, historians disagree about this, but a vast proportion of the population is wiped out.

I mean, it does seem to have disproportionately hit England, I think, is the thinking now.

Yeah.

Basically, the number of parishes remains the same.

So you need just as many priests as you had before, but there are far fewer people to fill them.

And William of Wickham is very anxious that there aren't enough recruits coming through.

And he would be very sensitive to this, wouldn't he, being from a kind of, you know, a less wealthy background himself.

So the founding charter of Winchester, which he found, many poor scholars engaged in scholastic disciplines who suffering from deficiency, penury and indigence lack and will lack in the future, the proper means for continuing and advancing in the aforesaid art of grammar.

And this is, you know, he's not just complaining about that.

You think about the portrayal of scholars, say, in Chaucer, who's writing later in the century.

Again, there is this assumption that to be a scholar is to be poor.

And this is something that William of Wickham is trying to solve.

Exactly.

Exactly.

You know, he wants to set up an academy, basically, that will produce people for the church and presumably for the very small royal bureaucracy as well.

And he sets up two institutions.

So one of them is New College Oxford and New Oxford College, which is formally established for the study of theology, canon and civil law and the arts.

And the other is he wants to create a feeder school for New College.

And this is Winchester.

He sets it up in 1382.

It takes his first pupils in 1394.

And the sort of religious side of it is there right from the beginning.

It's very much, it's very monastic, isn't it, Tom?

It's very austere.

It's not just that they didn't have girls, but the only woman, a washer woman, it specified the constitution that she has to be old and ugly.

Yeah.

So no beastliness there.

Well, the boys have to have a decent, what's called a decent tonsure.

So they have to have a monastic haircut.

They are told they are in school.

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They are only allowed to speak in Latin.

This is Rishi Sunak's old school, by the way, for our overseas listeners.

The schoolroom is based on a church that follows an east-west axis.

They follow all the religious feasts.

And the sort of the Spartan aspect of schools, I'm using Spartan Tom before you get excited in its most debased sense.

Right, right.

But the kind of slightly Freudian slip there, because the issue of whether the asceticism of these schools, which has been a kind of enduring feature of them, right the way up really until about what, 30 or 40 years ago.

Yeah.

The question of whether they are Spartan, i.e.

whether they are emulating the example set by the ancient Greeks and Romans in their kind of days of Manly heroism, or whether they are following the monastic example is actually very, very interesting and important.

But at this stage, though, you've got to, I mean, they're completely monastic.

Yeah, completely.

It's not Spartan.

I mean, it's monastic.

Yeah, absolutely.

And indeed, the school is open for 70 poor scholars and it's 70 because Christ in one of the Gospels, that's right, specifies that 70 apostles will be sent out into the world.

But not just poor scholars.

There is no right from the start.

There is what I think David Turner calls an escape clause in the Winchester Constitution.

He says, which is written as follows, we will allow, however, the sons of noble and influential persons, special friends of the said college, up to the number of 10 to be instructed and informed and grammar within the same college.

In other words, there will be some people who are not poor.

And right from the beginning, almost every public school tries to sort of, I was going to say wrestle with, but they're not really wrestling with it.

Are they, they're gleefully exploiting this loophole because rich and powerful people want their sons to be well educated as well.

And of course, William of Wickham, because he's the Lord, he's chancellor, he knows lots of yeah, he's got favours, hasn't he?

He's got backs to scratch and exactly, exactly.

So he probably is breaking the rules, his own rules himself and allowing in churchmen, sons or noble sons or whatever it might be.

And then a generation or so later, Winchester gets a competitor that is, I think it's fair to say more glamorous.

Would you agree with that, Tom?

Because it has royal patronage.

Notorious, perhaps one might say.

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I mean, it's notorious today, but it's glamorous in yes, because it's because it's near Windsor, which of course, Edward the Third's Great Castle has been built there.

So again, this goes back to the reign of Edward.

And so this is founded by Henry VI in 1440.

It is the College of Our Lady Mary at Eaton.

So Eaton, the most famous of all British public schools.

Henry VI, useless king, would you agree, Tom?

Completely, yes.

Totally useless, spends too much time praying and thinking about God, not enough time hammering rivals or what kings should be doing.

So he sets this up in direct imitation of Winchester.

He actually poaches Winchester's headmaster, William Wayne Fleet, to come and basically set up Eaton for him.

I mean, it's such a copy, isn't it?

Because he just as Wickham had set up new college in Oxford to be the place that Winchester feeds.

So Henry VI sets up King's College in Cambridge to fulfill the same role.

And because it's the because of the royal patronage, that means the Eaton from the start has a has an extra layer of glamour and sort of prestige.

I mean, Winchester was prestigious in its own way.

But Eaton goes one step beyond that because it's the king.

And you get very aspirational kind of members of the gentry who are keen.

So a good example is the Catesby family from Northamptonshire.

People who are interested in Richard the Third will know that William Catesby was one of his kind of chief cronies.

So the Catesby's are very keen to send their boys to Eaton.

They think it's obviously a way up and a way to get the attention of the king.

And it's hyper.

I mean, it's the detail that I loved about the the forms in Eaton is that.

And I'm quoting here from David Turner's book.

Each former Deaton had an official dunce known as the Custos, an enviable title given to the weakest boy in the class.

He was singled out for testing in front of his peers until he improved and the ignominy passed through another boy.

So I can't imagine that would be good for his mental health to be an official form done.

No.

Do you know how long that went on for?

Is that something that's going on in Greyfriars to this day?

Because they have dunces caps, don't they?

Surely Prince Harry would have been the Custos, wouldn't he?

Oh, too royal.

No, because people would have been doing his work for him, of course.

So lots of sort of interesting people go to Eaton.

The future Earl of Essex and the Civil War.

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He went to Eaton.

Sir Francis Ferney, who became a Barbary pirate.

Yes, he did, didn't he?

Went to eat and Captain Hook, of course, goes to.

What I was about to say, piracy is a big thing for Eaton, because Captain Hook went to Eaton.

Captain Hook, so you probably do if you read the same book.

Captain Hook's last words when he's being swallowed by the crocodile in Peter Panah, Floriat Itona.

So no wonder people hate Eaton, the sense of a mighty elite going to this glamorous school founded by a king.

And there have been kind of periodic demands that the whole system be closed down and Eaton be abolished.

But again, I was amused to see that the very first person who wanted to abolish Eaton was actually Edward IV, who deposed Henry VI and became king.

And in 1463, he sent in a petition to the Pope to close it down, because of course, Eaton was a religious foundation.

And he was he was foiled by by backstairs, lobbying by old Italians.

So there really is nothing new under the sun.

Yeah, Warwick, the kingmaker's brother, George Neville, who was Archbishop of York, Eaton had been bribing him.

They'd been sending him a gift and he lobbied.

He was able to lobby for Eaton to be spared.

They would therefore did confiscate a lot of Eaton's lands.

So I think it's fair to say that the Yorkists are not highly regarded even now.

God, imagine how much richer they'd be if they kept all those lands.

I know, I know.

Those are the two most famous schools, but they're not the only schools.

So by the 16th century, there are other kind of prototypical public schools being founded.

Probably the most influential is a school called Merchant Taylor School, which is set up by a livery company, the Merchant Taylor School, one of a guild.

And the Merchant Taylor School is the first school that had the idea.

We talked about Dr. Arnold and the Victorian kind of sport and all that stuff.

In the last podcast, Merchant Taylor is the first school in Britain that has the idea of actually having a vaguely rounded education.

And that includes sport, doesn't it?

So he'd be massively in favour of Quidditch.

They would be in favour of Quidditch.

So they were copying that from a school in Italy, in Mantua, where the boys were encouraged to do exercise and to play music and so on.

This is the beginnings of, I guess, renaissance humanism, isn't it?

You know, you want to be a renaissance man.

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So teach, spread satura, you know, the art of being a dashing figure who can speak Greek, but also joust.

So the archetypal figure of that is Philip Sydney, isn't it?

Who's an old boy of Shrewsbury, which has been founded in 1560.

Kind of your neck of the woods, vaguely.

Yes. Yeah, I grew up not far from Shrewsbury.

And Shrewsbury was one of one of the great public schools of England.

But going back to Merchant Taylor, so Merchant Taylor's, they would do an awful lot of dancing, wrestling, football and drama.

Particularly big on drama.

So they did a school play for the Royal Court four times.

God, imagine that having to go and watch that.

Oh, yeah. Well, Thomas Kidd, Elizabethan kind of actor, dramatist.

He was a Merchant Taylor's old boy.

So this tradition Tom endured and maybe still endures

because do you know who else went to Merchant Taylor's?

Boris Karloff, Frankenstein, the totemic Frankenstein of the 20th century was a Merchant Taylor's old boy.

Well, it's kind of interesting, isn't it?

Because there's another school that is also a feeder for great dramatists, which is Westminster, a school founded right next to the Palace of Westminster.

And it's still there to this day.

And a boy who goes there is called Ben Johnson,

and he's the son of a builder, a manufacturer of bricks.

So again, this kind of recognizable, the upwardly mobile man who's self-made, wants to improve his son.

Ben Johnson goes to Westminster and he goes on to become Shakespeare's great peer rival companion.

So actually, when you look at the famous names of Elizabethan and 17th century literature, a lot of them have gone to public school.

So we mentioned Sir Philip Sidney, who is a famous poet.

Edmund Spenser, who wrote The Fairy Queen, Ben Johnson, we've mentioned.

Yeah. And John Milton, who went to the sixth of the public schools that existed by the 17th century, which is St. Paul's.

So that, again, had been a cathedral school that gets kind of converted into a public day school, the first school not to have boarded.

Well, six of the translators of the King James Bible went to Merchant Ailis, Tom.

So the schools, even at this stage, they're very rudimentary.

They're educating a tiny, tiny proportion of the population, but already they have an outsized influence.

So you mentioned Westminster.

Westminster is the big school of the 17th century.

So the list of alumni, extraordinary, John Dryden, Robert Hook, John Locke,



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Poser Henry Purcell, at the Blood Transfusion Pioneer, Richard Lauer, the headmaster of Westminster, Richard Busby.

He also taught Sir Christopher Wren privately.

And he's an astonishing figure, isn't he?

Because he is a kind of very much a vicar of brave figure that he moves with the changing currents of the time.

So he is appointed headmaster of Winchester in 1638, just before the convulsive decade that will see England collapse into civil war.

He remains in post throughout the civil war, throughout the Commonwealth and well into the restoration.

And he finally dies in 1695.

Yeah, incredible, incredible.

Now, one thing people may be wondering is what about girls?

You know, typical rest of the history, they haven't mentioned the girls.

The truth of the matter is we haven't really talked about girls because there weren't really many girls schools.

There were nunneries that had kind of schools attached school rooms where they would teach rich people's daughters. But there was far less emphasis on the education of girls in this point, obviously, than education of boys.

Dominic, I know you're a big fan of the Reformation, but the Reformation was terrible for girls education.

So among the religious institutions that were closed down in the Reformation was Barking Abbey, which really reached right the way back to the beginnings of Christianity in England and has been described by Eleanor Parker, who writes a brilliant blog called Clark of Oxford as the leading centre of female scholarship in the Middle Ages, continuous tradition of female scholarship going right the way back to the early Middle Ages, all closed down by Henry VIII.

Yeah, so from that point onwards, what girls schools there are tend to emphasise what they see as kind of wifely arts, you know, needlework, music.

If they teach of language, it's not Latin, it's French.

And obviously, French is for long for centuries, soon as an important part of kind of being a lady.

And that tradition last right through into the 20th century, actually.

So even in the mid 20th century, girls schools are generally much less academically high powered than or not even frankly, the boys public schools are not very academically high powered in the 20th century, but the girls schools make far less effort to teach what we call the traditional subjects because they're emphasising particularly music. And you talked about ladies, and of course, the counterpoint of ladies are gentlemen, but I think one of the things that I hadn't properly appreciated

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until I read David Turner's book is that actually the social class of these public schools, it's not aristocratic throughout the 16th into the 17th century.

And it's really only the kind of the star power of Westminster under Richard Busby that changes that.

But again, I guess that Westminster becomes a place where even the leading members of their aristocracy are happy to send their sons because of its proximity to the royal residence in Westminster.

Yeah, you do have some signs of public schools being a gateway to success.

So for example, when Walpole becomes prime minister at the beginning of the 18th century of his 11 man cabinet, three of them have been to Westminster, seven of them in total have been to public schools.

So Theo, our producer in the chat is saying, would aristocrats homeschool their children? And he's right.

By and large, you would, if you could, get a private tutor.

And for a lot of people in the sort of 17th, 18th, 19th century, the public schools are a bit of a failure option.

You know, if you can afford it, it'd be much better to get a private tutor.

So the things that people say about these schools are one, they are much too quick to beat the children.

The governors of the schools and whatnot are often telling off the headmasters for being far too enthusiastic with the cane or with the birch.

The second thing is that all these schools are very, very corrupt.

So they are always doing things like, so the amount that the headmaster is, the headmaster is out to make a profit.

So quite often what the headmaster will do is they will move out of their own house so they can stuff the house with boys and make a profit.

And they'll sack as many of the staff as they can, because they don't want to pay them the money.

So there's that.

And the other thing is that actually the education is quite bad.

You mentioned Milton.

Milton, he spent seven or eight years merely in scraping together so much miserable Latin and Greek as might be learned otherwise, easily and delightfully in one year.

Peeps, Samuel Peeps, he went to St. Paul's.

His education at St. Paul's was so bad, I found this a staggering fact.

The Peeps, even though he worked as a senior civil servant in the Admiralty, he didn't learn how to multiply until he was 29.

But that's true of Richard Busby as well, the headmaster of Westminster, who does, you know, he introduces mathematics into the curriculum and modern Oriental languages and all kinds of things.

But he couldn't multiply either.

So no wonder the accounts for the school were so bad.

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Yeah.

So the schools are actually, as you enter the 18th century, these schools, which are now to this day, regarded as kind of pillars of British aristocratic upper class identity, they are by words for corruption incompetence.

And one other thing, which we should get into in the second half, Tom, which I find enormously entertaining, is how unbelievably violent they are. They are.

So we will take a break now.

And when we come back, we will look at the astonishing story of the violence in these public schools.

And when I say violent, this isn't just pupil on pupil action.

It's pupil on teacher action.

And occasionally pupil on militia action.

So we will see you after the break.

Kingsley had stepped forward on the raised platform to address those who would remain behind.

We've only got half an hour until midnight.

So we need to act fast.

A battle plan has been agreed between the teachers of Hogwarts and the Order of the Phoenix.

Professors Flitwick, Sprout and McGonagall are going to take groups of fighters up to the three highest towers, Ravenclaw, Astronomy and Gryffindor, where they'll have a good overview, excellent positions from which to work spells.

Meanwhile, Remus, Arthur and I will take groups into the grounds.

We'll need somebody to organise defence of the entrances of the passageways into the school.

Sounds like a job for us, called Fred, indicating himself and George.

And Kingsley nodded his approval.

All right, leaders up here and we'll divide up the troops.

So that is from Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

by J.K. Rowling, of course, published in 2007,

and it describes the onset of the Battle of Hogwarts, Dominic.

So an account of extreme violence in a public school.

It does indeed.

And this is a bit that...

So children reading, they're certainly in my experience, with Sanbrook Junior, children reading,

Harry Potter loved the idea of a battle taking place in school and the boys and girls kind of building barricades

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and preparing their defences and the great showdown.

And they like it because of the incongruity.

You know, the idea that a school would be a battleground seems extraordinary to them.

But the truth of the matter is that in the 18th century, schools were very often battlegrounds.

And I'll give you...

Well, I'll give you an example before we kind of pull back and talk about the reasons for it.

So Winchester College, the oldest school that we talked about last time, the kind of foundational public school, which is Sunak School.

In the spring of 1793, the warden of Winchester College, who was a man called Joseph Wharton, he forbade the boys from attending a performance by the Buckinghamshire militia band in the Cathedral Close in Winchester.

He was trying to reform the school and clamp down on a discipline.

And this was a way of doing it.

And he discovered that one of the boys, a prefect no less, Tom, had ignored his this rule and had gone to hear the band play.

And as a punishment, the warden did that thing that public school headmasters love to do, that he punished everybody collectively for the misdeed of this one boy.

Now, after he did this, the boys went ballistic.

They were told that they weren't going to be allowed out at Freesta for the Easter holiday.

They went ballistic and they wrote a letter in Latin to the warden, demanding redress and saying, he must apologize to them.

The warden basically ignored their entreaties, so they launched a rebellion.

They armed themselves in the first instance with marbles and they attacked an usher of the school, or marbles and clubs.

So I mustn't forget the clubs.

So marbles kind of like using slings.

Slingshot.

Yes, exactly.

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Sort of heavy.  
Not to bring down cavalry.  
Well, they would bring down cavalry, if necessary.  
They roll them.  
You either throw them or roll them.  
So they threw them at the usher,  
who is a man called Mr. Goddard.  
Often the schools would have what were called sergeants  
or ushers or some or porters who wouldn't teach,  
but would be there to enforce discipline.  
So they were hated figures.  
Mr. Goddard is one of these people.  
Then the boys rampaged to the school,  
smashing windows.  
They dragged all the desks into the courtyard  
and set them on fire.  
The warden sent them a note at this.  
Even at this point, he lived with Mr. Warden.  
I have to say, Tom, he asked for a truce  
and the boys refused.  
They occupied the second master's house  
and blockaded it with chairs and desks.  
Very battle of Hogwarts.  
The warden arrived.  
He was trying to negotiate with the boys.  
The boys seized him and imprisoned him  
and held him as a hostage.  
The next day, the high sheriff of Hampshire arrived  
and read the riot act.  
Now, if you read the riot act to a crowd,  
ordering them to disperse, if they refused to disperse,  
they're effectively guilty of treason  
and you can use the militia to fire on them.  
When the high sheriff arrived to read the riot act,  
he found that the boys had blockaded the gates of the school.  
They had armed themselves with swords,  
sticks, sticks, stones and clubs.  
Some boys now at this point had loaded pistols  
and were on the kind of ramparts.  
So he had to retreat.  
They'd also torn up the parapet of the building  
to use as stones to bombard attackers.  
So he returned the next day

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with the North Hampshire militia,  
three companies of the militia.  
And by this point, several days had gone by  
and the boys were actually running out of supplies.  
So they agreed a truce.  
But the truce only lasted a day  
because the warden broke the truce  
by demanding the return of the stolen pistols,  
which the boys regarded as absolutely outrageous.  
There was yet another confrontation  
and in the end, lots of the boys walked out of the school  
and as was so often the case,  
the governors of the school decided  
the headmaster had to go.  
It was his fault.  
Yeah. So he ended up losing.  
And the amazing thing is,  
because we know the names of the people  
who led this rebellion.  
I looked at what happened to them.  
John Colburn, he became the Governor-General of Canada.  
Sir Lionel Smith, he became the Governor of Jamaica.  
Sir James Charles Dalbiac,  
he became one of Britain's leading commanders  
in the Peninsula War.  
Thomas Silver, another of the boys,  
he became Professor of Anglo-Saxonist  
at St. John's College, Cambridge.  
And Richard Martt, the other leader of the rebels,  
he became the Bishop of Down.  
Did you come across Lieutenant-General Sir Willoughby Cotton?  
Oh, he led, was that Marlborough?  
No, he was a part of the Rugby Revolt,  
but he put down a slave uprising in Jamaica.  
And so that, I think, does kind of open up  
all kinds of interesting questions  
about the impact of these kinds of institutions  
being enrolled in these schools,  
the organized brutality,  
the sense that, so Sydney Smith,  
who was a writer, a priest,  
who had been head boy at Winchester,  
like Rishi Sunak in the 1780s,

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and he says that to be a boy at one of these schools is to be alternately tyrant and slave. And you can see these guys are going on and they are dealing with literal slaves. What is the impact of all this on the fabric of British society and the empire that is starting to merge overseas? Well, I think there obviously is a sort of, there is a low-level violence that runs through the whole sort of 18th century. These schools, these are, they are extraordinarily violent institutions, not least because they're actually abysmal institutions. Yeah, they are extraordinarily ill-funded. They have, the boys have very little to do. So Eaton, for example, you would only have four hours of lessons a day. And in what lessons there are at the schools, they're often taught in freezing cold rooms at Eaton, of Eaton, John Keaton, and we talked about them trying to make money by cutting down on staffing costs. He would teach classes of 190 boys, Tom. Yeah. Yeah, because now public schools boast about, you know, it'll be seven students for a teacher. That's the opposite extreme. But I mean, the violence, obviously, the beatings, and it's not just, you know, teachers flogging boys, it's also prefects flogging fags, you know, the boys who... The junior boys, yeah. Have to serve as kind of servants to the senior boys. Oh, my God. These stories are mind-boggling. I mean, the sense that you arrive at these schools and you get broken in very hard. So we talked about rugby and Tom Brown arriving and, you know, the process of being initiated into these schools. But the hazing rituals that you have in the 18th century at rugby are astonishing. So new boys are made to stand on a table. They have to sing. And if the singing isn't good enough,

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so this would be very worrying for me,  
you have to swallow a pail of muddy water  
that has been mixed with salt, which, unsurprisingly,  
you know, you're vomiting for days afterwards  
and everyone's having a jolly good laugh about it.  
I mean, it's kind of eye-bopping.  
You think that's bad. That is nothing. Listen to this.  
At Winchester, junior boys were forced to wear  
what people called tin gloves.  
And what that was, was that was to toughen up your hands  
for carrying the frying pans with the older boys breakfast.  
So to toughen your hands, you'd be forced to hold  
a scorching white hot branding stick  
and to hold it for as long as possible  
to give you calluses on your hands.  
Or Eaton. Eaton, Tom, if you had started eating,  
you were taken out into the countryside  
by the older boys in a big group.  
You were given a ten-yard head start  
and then pursued by prefects who took pot shots at you with pistols.  
Yeah. I mean, it's all very eye-opening stuff.  
And I think it's not surprising that these rebellions  
that you have, I mean, these are going through the 1790s,  
which is obviously in France.  
It's the age of the French Revolution.  
And there are occasional signs  
that the boys are influenced by that.  
So there's 1796, a boy from Merchant Taylor's  
flies the trickle over the Tower of London.  
And there's a rebellion in Winchester  
and they kind of, they fly the red cap.  
That's the rebellion that I was just talking about.  
In 1792, they flew the red revolutionary cap.  
But I mean, it's not really revolutionary, is it?  
Because it's about prefects wanting to uphold their power.  
It is.  
And again and again, in most of them,  
it's about boys feeling that their dignity is being infringed.  
So they, if a headmaster is brought in  
who is not of sufficient social standing,  
they'll rise in rebellion.  
If prefects feel that their dignity is being infringed  
by the teachers, again, they'll rise in rebellion.



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So these are very, very, I mean,  
one might almost say Tory rebellions  
rather than Jacobin rebellions.

They are absolutely.

So that these schools have a very, very Tory ethos.

I mean, Tory in the old sense.

A good way of thinking about the Toryism of the schools  
or the low level violence is how the boys entertain themselves.

So even once you've been accepted at one of these schools,  
what do you do to entertain yourself?

Mainly you murder animals.

Well, in harrow, that's the school sport,  
is killing the cats of the town.

Well, not just that.

They would have a thing called tuisling.

And tuisling meant you would equip yourself  
with a club or stick or something

and you would go out into the countryside  
and you would beat to death any wildlife that you found.

A mulbra, the boys would carry what was called a squalor,  
which was a wooden stick weighted with lead

to kill game to sort of tramp through the fields.

Which presumably shades into poaching.

Yes, exactly.

Now, what that suggests is the lack of discipline  
at these places, which is true to an extent.

So the teachers don't have any discipline.

What discipline there is enforced,  
as you said by the boys themselves.

So there's a wonderful line, isn't there?

I think it's in the David Turner book.

It was said that there are only three absolute rulers in the world.

The great mogul, the captain of a man of war  
and the prefect of Hall at Winchester.

Yeah.

And so these boys are used to almost kind of self-government.

Lord of the Flies.

It is very Lord of the Flies.

Because you said earlier in the first half  
that the head teachers are always looking to economize  
because they'll make more money that way.

And so obviously you cram as many boys in,  
but you also cut back the number of staff

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who are looking after them.  
So you mentioned that the rebellions often happen.  
They happen at the point where  
there are kind of reforming headmasters brought in  
to try and sort all this out  
because they regard this.  
They're almost kind of proto-Dr. Arnold's  
who are coming in to try and clean up the schools  
and stamp out the sort of Tory libertarian violence  
that has governed the school in the 18th century.  
So a good example is Rugby 1797.  
This is another tremendous revolt.  
So there's a new headmaster called Henry Ingalls  
and he wants to sort of clean up the school.  
He discovers that a boy called Astley  
has been firing pistols at people.  
He confiscates the pistol from Astley.  
Astley regards this as an absolutely disgraceful intrusion  
on his personal liberty.  
He reacts to this, Tom.  
As an English boy.  
Yeah, as an English boy, but also with the fervor  
of a fan of the Second Amendment in the United States,  
resisting the intrusions of the federal government.  
So Astley goes and rounds up his mates.  
They go and smash the windows of the headmaster.  
The headmaster says,  
you'll have to pay to replace these windows.  
Again, the boys regard this as a disgraceful thing  
for the headmasters.  
Any decent headmaster should pay for his own smash windows.  
So they then get gunpowder  
and blow up the headmaster's office,  
which again, they regard as a tremendous jeep.  
Interesting, you mentioned the French Revolution.  
They nailed the Declaration of the Rights of Man  
to the notice board.  
But I mean, this is the ultimate kind of Tory rebellion.  
They occupy then a place that Rugby was called the island,  
which was, please, you, Tom, a Bronze Age burial ground.  
And they fortified it.  
Once again, the riot act is red.  
And once again, soldiers had to be called in,

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the local militia, to basically surround the boys, besiege them, and eventually the boys had to give up. And this was the thing that you mentioned, Willoughby Cotton.

So Willoughby Cotton, who, I mean, he also served in the Peninsula War and in the First Anglo-Afghan War. And he's basically a real-life flashman, a sort of prototype of a flashman.

So these are really quite serious, these revolts. They're not.

I just want to throw in another thing. I know that you disagree with me on this. But I think that there is also an element in which the curriculum is influencing this.

I know you do.

These are boys who are almost exclusively studying classical texts. And they, you know, it's often said that it's mindless rote learning. To a degree, it is.

But you are studying texts that privilege the right of the strong over the weak.

And that often, most notably, you mentioned Spartan, Spartan conditions.

You can read, you'll be reading about Sparta as a kind of ideal in which boys are sent away to houses and brutalized.

And in the late 19th century, this will be very over, particularly actually in Scotland, where Hogwarts is.

So Feta's school, which Tony Blair went to, was very, very conscious in its emulation of Sparta.

It was deliberately set up to be modeled on Sparta.

And the Edinburgh Academy in the 1800s, prefects were renamed Fours after the boy herds of ancient Sparta.

I don't think, I mean, it's not as deliberate as that in the 18th century.

But I do think the experience of reading texts like Thucydides for, you know, the famous line in the million dialogue,

that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer as they must.

I think the impact of reading this in a kind of Lord of the Fly situation, it must have had an effect.

What the impact of that is then when you were going off, say, to subdue a slave revolt,

if you yourself know what it's like to be chased by people carrying pistols and shot at, if you know what it's like to be beaten with rods that are tipped with lead,

it must, I would have thought, psychologically diminish your capacity

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to feel pity, sympathy, empathy with the people in distant parts of the world that you were being sent to dominate and subdue.

Do you think or not?

Well, I agree with you about these incredibly violent institutions, so they will probably produce brutalized people who are decent.

I mean, so Pitt the Elder said,

I never knew a boy who was not broken by Eaton.

Because Pitt the Elder, and he refused to send his son, Pitt the Younger, so he had him homeschooled because he said,

I would never put my son through that.

The poet Shelly, when he was...

Yeah, Shelly baiting.

He was, I mean, mobs of hundreds of boys would pursue him through the town, shouting, the Shelly, the Shelly, the Shelly, kicking things at him and hurling stuff at him because he was interested in science, which they regarded as illegitimate and depraved.

He loved a hot air balloon, Shelly.

He did, he did.

But your point about the classics, so people did read the classics, but they only read very selected, are often Virgil.

So the Edinburgh Review in 1830 said of Eaton's education, it said, the typical Eaton boy has not read a single book of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Livy, Polybius, or Tacitus.

He has not read a single Greek tragedy or comedy.

So actually they weren't reading some of these things, they were just being given bits of Virgil to do again and again.

I mean, it depends on the school,

but I think at Winchester definitely they are, and I think at Rugby they are.

So I cannot but believe that this is having some kind of an impact.

See, I think you're overestimating how much they're teaching.

I don't think they're doing kind of ancient history or even what we might call literary criticism.

But I think the impact of living in a kind of essentially a brutalized institution and reading texts that might provide a degree of legitimacy, might kind of clothe it in the sense that you are in a society where this is seen as raising you to be a better soldier, to be someone who can defend the patria or whatever.

I can't help but believe that that must have some impact.

Maybe. I personally think the context for this is the general violence of 18th century England, which is a very violent place, a place of mobs and of...

I'm not in any way disputing that.

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I think that the violence is the precondition,  
but I think that the classics could provide a kind of intellectual garb for it,  
that would then when you have left school,  
and you are thinking about how life is organized,  
how empires are organized,  
how the strong should behave with regard to the weak,  
that it might provide a kind of intellectual gloss for it,  
that is part of what Arnold is campaigning against.  
Maybe, Tom. I don't know.  
I think my favourite school revolt, by the way,  
is Marlborough, 1851.  
Because that's late, isn't it?  
This is the last great revolt.  
So Marlborough was only about eight years old.  
It was that classic thing where it had taken on loads and loads of pupils,  
but didn't really have many teachers.  
So the description I read, I can't remember whether it was in James Brooks Smith's book  
or David Turner's.  
It just says, basically, for the first eight years,  
Marlborough just consists of low-level guerrilla warfare.  
This is, by the way...  
Like Vietnam.  
Yeah, like Vietnam or Afghanistan or something.  
And basically, this all culminates on the 5th of November, 1851.  
The headmaster had banned fireworks, bonfire night,  
because he knew what would happen.  
But the boys got gunpowder, and according to the thing, I read munitions anyway.  
The huge explosions kind of racked the school.  
The school recruited a mob from the town to come and help them attack the teachers.  
And they destroyed the headmaster's study.  
And the culminating moment, Tom, which you would not enjoy,  
but I find very amusing, was the headmaster had literally just finished  
a long handwritten manuscript, a discussion of the plays of Sophocles.  
No, it didn't go up in smoke.  
Of course, they dragged it out and set it on fire.  
They literally set it on fire.  
And of course, what happens in all these stories,  
the governor's then sacked the headmaster.  
So he loses his essay on Sophocles, and he loses his job.  
He does indeed.  
And at this point, you know, the public schools, you would think,  
so this is a very early 19th century, that Marlborough one is very late.  
But by and large, in the early 19th century,

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you would think the public schools were going to go out of business.

So their roles had completely and utterly collapsed.

If you take Harrow as an example,

Harrow, half the school had burned down because the maths master had tried to set up his own DIY heating system, which exploded.

They were down to a few dozen boys who would presumably roaming the land, beating to death, badgers or whatever they were doing.

And that is the context, what we talked about in the last episode,

which is the emergence of Dumbledore, aka Dr. Arnold,

who comes in at rugby and says,

OK, let's ditch what happened, but a lot of what happened before.

Let's have a completely new ethos.

We are going to make these pious, you know,

these are academies for Christian gentlemen,

which, of course, if he tried to do that in the 1790s,

people would have laughed at him because the moral codes of the Regency England were so different.

Well, so should I tell you what Sheridan said in the 90s about public schools,

that nothing short of despotism can establish their government,

no principle but fear can support it.

Thus, the torturer's rod is introduced.

The torturer's rod.

Is that the Marquis de Sard episode or never again, Tom?

But as you say, I mean, that is the measure of what Arnold achieves.

And I suppose, in a sense, I mean, he's taking it back, isn't he,

to its monastic foundations.

Yeah.

The reason that the blurring between the Spartan and the monastic is easy to make when describing public schools

is that the monastic becomes Spartan,

becomes, you know, returns to its kind of Christian foundations and so on.

Obviously, public schools now are a lot less overtly Christian than they were.

I mean, I think they still have chapels, don't they?

They do, they do.

Yeah, they're still Christian, a lot of Christian foundations.

But I mean, I would say that what is happening now to public schools

is just a further reiteration of what Arnold was doing,

that they're repackaging moral values in a 21st century garb.

Tom, if you were to look at any public school prospectus

or a public school website, they will stress, of course,

the facilities, the academic results and so on.

But a key part of the appeal is building character,

which is exactly what Arnold was talking about.

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And actually, what you're always being lectured about in the Harry Potter stories, what Dumbledore is always lecturing the children, or indeed what the narrator is lecturing you about, the stories are meant to demonstrate, which is it's about being a team player, it is about a citizen who works for the greater good, all of these kinds of things.

That has been part of the ethos of the schools since the 19th century, and it certainly was not the case at all in the 18th century.

But it's interesting, isn't it, that one of the gauges of how far kind of cutting-edge public morality, elite notions of public morality, have changed is that now even Hogwarts is seen as being aggressive, that it's not diverse or inclusive enough.

J.K. Rowling's critics say, in writing it in the 1990s, she should have, and she didn't go as far as she should have done.

Right, so Dumbledore retrospectively has become gay.

Yeah, in the most recent film, I believe, Fantastic Beasts.

And obviously, there is a sense that J.K. Rowling's position on trans issues has disappointed many people who read Harry Potter as a child.

Theo is writing in the chat.

Murky Waters.

Murky Waters.

I mean, it's not to make a comment of whether it's right or wrong, but it's to say that if public schools are to stay on the cutting edge of morality, even Hogwarts now has been left behind.

And so you have, I think it's at St. Paul's, the girl school at St. Paul's, that they've abolished the post of head girl because it's too binary.

Well, the interesting thing is that the schools, which are often perceived, for example, by their critics as being somehow outside, as being escapist kind of redoubts, actually through all their history, they've changed it enormously, because they're always mirroring society.

No, but more than that, establishing the moral parameters for society.

I mean, that's what Thomas Arnold is doing.

He is ahead of the game.

He is making England more Christian.

And it does seem now when you read, so Eaton College, the most exclusive of all public schools, decolonizing its curriculum and emphasizing equity, I don't really see how a school that is as exclusive as Eaton, where you have to pay an absolute fortune to get in there.

I mean, to a degree, trumpeting its commitment to equity, there's a measure of hypocrisy to that.

And I'm sure they believe it, but the headmaster of Eaton,

sees it as his role to raise students who will be morally better.

And because they will go on to become the elites, not just in Britain, but around the world, because it's an international school now,

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he sees Eaton's mission rather in the sense that Henry VI did when he founded it as improving society, despite the fact that as it was back in the 15th century when Eaton was founded, it's absolutely interlocked with hypocrisy and ambivalence, that these are schools that are committed to the kind of virtues of poverty and equality and whatever, but simultaneously, it's all about the prestige and the money and the status.

Well, I'm sure if the head of Eaton were here, he'd say it's not all about the prestige and the money and the status, and I think-  
Kind of is, though.

You could also say, of course, that tension has run right through from the days of William Awickham, Tom. But actually, that tension is the tension between idealism and worldliness, lies at the heart of any institution, not just at the church, at the Catholic Church, at the Church of England, of all these kind of things, which they have great sweeping, soaring ideals, but also, they live in a real world that is governed by more prosaic mercenary concerns.

Yes, but I think that just as when William Awickham found Winchester and it's couched in he's modeling it on the disciples who were sent out by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

I mean, that's a very, very high aspiration, but at the same time, he's taking bungs from supporters. He's putting in wealthy pupils. I mean, that's a deliberate attempt to kind of go behind the show of moral behavior, and I would say that Eaton today is no different.

I don't think that you can separate out claims to support equity while also trousering however many tens of thousands the fees cost, thereby making it impossible for most people to go to that school without there being a massive tension at the heart of it. Well, I think what you just do is you dish all the equity stuff, Tom, that's what I do.

Well, I know.

I would just, you know what I would do? I'd just go full reactionary.

Sandbrook towers.

What about Harry Potter?

So we have done Sherlock Holmes, James Bond, we must have done other cultural things. We did The Christie, we did The Beatles, sort of avatars of Britishness by and large.

So I suppose the question about Harry Potter is how long I would not have expected Harry Potter to have endured as successfully as it has. And I marvel at the extraordinary power those stories have over children's imaginations.

I think it's a brilliant synthesis of all kinds of traditions that have a global resonance, British traditions. And in that sense, it is absolutely a legacy from the age of British imperialism, when the British Empire expanded a familiarity with concepts like King Arthur, public school stories, all that kind of stuff. And, you know, they're brilliant blendings of that to create something new.

Yeah. So I was always very skeptical. As you know, I've dissed them a little bit in my book, The Great British Steam Factory. And then when the sun and air started reading them, I just was staggered. You know, by that point, they were what, 20 years old or something?

I mean, I think it works as powerfully as it does, because the theme of the novels is magic. And I think there is a kind of magic about what Jacob Rowling does in the Harry Potter stories. But it wouldn't work if it wasn't a school story. As you said in the last episode,



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the beauty of a school story is it gives you an institution, a closed environment, a set of rules, a set of, you know, an unchanging cast, all of those things, which are true of children's own lives.

Of course. Of course. But also, as you said, I mean, you listed all the other, the kind of precursors of Hogwarts, Worst Witch and Enlightened Whatever. But none of those have had

the global resonance that Harry Potter has. And so I think that that's what I mean by the kind of the magic of it. There's a kind of indefinable quality that has made it unbelievably globally successful and which enables it to retain its popularity in an age when often there are lots of people who are quite ideologically opposed to it. I mean, it doesn't seem to have had any impact on its sales or popularity at all. Well, I saw this clip on YouTube or Twitter or something a couple of days ago. So at the beginning of September every year, people assemble at Kings Cross Station. Do you know this? And Kings Cross Station do an announcement that the Hogwarts Express will be leaving from Platform 93 quarters, the beginning of the school year, Tom. And the Kings Cross was rammed. There were hundreds of people.

Were they all dressed in their school uniforms and brimsticks?

I think some people were probably dressed. They were all filming the train, the information boards, recording the announcement, hundreds and hundreds of people for whom clearly this is, dare I say, Tom, a sacral moment.

But that must have been a day when there was a strike, I think.

So it really was magic if a train was leaving Kings Cross.

Surely there are never strikes. There are never strikes on the Hogwarts Express.

Right. Let's talk about what we have coming up next week. We are doing something very different.

Two very different subjects. So you, Tom, will be talking about gladiators.

Yes, the Coliseum. So actually rather public school. People fighting each other and inflicting violence. And in a very different episode this time next week, we will be talking about the coup in Chile in 1973 that saw the end of the Allende government and the rise of General Pinochet. And on that bombshell, Tom. Thank you very much to everybody for listening.

Bye-bye.