

# PRIOR PARK COLLEGE **NEW EDITION**

## THE PHOENIX - AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

Peter Cornwell

Prior Park College was born in the nineteenth century, the dream of a Benedictine Bishop, Peter Augustine Baines. He believed that as the Catholic Church re-emerged from years of persecution it needed educated priests and an educated laity. It was a wildly ambitious scheme, embracing not just a school but a seminary and university as well, housed in the glorious Palladian mansion built by Ralph Allen overlooking Bath. But trust in Divine Providence became a substitute for sound finance and then devastating fire swept through the building. Baines died and the enterprise was written off as a white elephant.

Revival under the gentle, scholarly, golf-loving Dr Edward Williams was not sustained, but then the Irish Christian Brothers took charge. Under their control, Prior Park produced a stream of priests, bishops, archbishops and even a cardinal, as well as international rugby players, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, musicians and servants of the theatre. In the 1980s the Brothers left Prior Park but it has risen again under lay leadership and has become a flourishing co-educational ecumenical community with firm Catholic roots.

Father Peter Cornwell, former chaplain of Prior Park College, charts the many times the Phoenix has crashed to earth in flames only to rise again. He highlights the many characters who have left an indelible mark on the school, both masters and pupils. In doing so he creates a frank but sympathetic portrait of a remarkable institution that has shaped the lives of thousands.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Peter Cornwell** was born in 1934, the son of an Anglican Archdeacon. Educated at King's School Bruton and Worcester College Oxford, he studied at Cuddesdon in preparation for Ministry in the Church of England. He returned to Cuddesdon to become Chaplain and then Vice-Principal under Robert Runcie, before serving as a parish priest in the north of England. In 1975 he became Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford. He also served on the Chadwick Commission on Church and State, was Proctor in Convocation for York and was a member of the General Synod of the Church of England.

In 1983 Peter Cornwell was received into the Catholic Church and, among other appointments, became chaplain of Prior Park College. In retirement he is now Assistant Priest at St John's church, Bath.

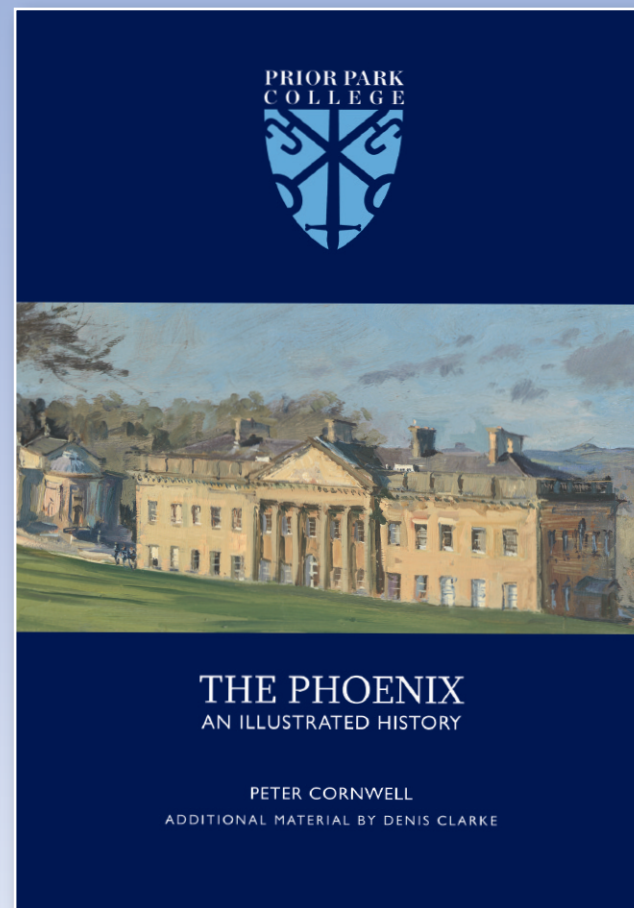
He is the author or editor of five other books, and is a regular contributor to the *Tablet*. Father Peter is married and has two children.

**Denis Clarke** is a graduate of the University of Bradford and was Deputy Headmaster at Prior Park College for 24 years, having been Head of History and a Housemaster. He joined the school in 1978 and served all four lay Headmasters of Prior Park before retiring in 2016. His daughters are alumni of the College.

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Right: The filming of *The Elusive Pimpernel* caused much interest among the boys in 1950.



Above: A view of the College from the Palladian Bridge. Plunder from Ampleforth included a herd of cows and cattle graze on the hillside to this day.

Left: The Chapel, completed by 1882 to Joseph Scoles' neoclassical design, in the Roman basilican fashion of the 1840s. Fluted Corinthian pillars support a classical architrave, a frieze and a bold cornice.



Example pages

PRIOR PARK COLLEGE

Gospel values remain vital to the ethos of the school, enabling pupils to gain perspective and to seek to serve others. Charitable initiatives and an outward-looking stance play a vital role in forming attitudes based on humility and appreciation of the dignity of others. Hence, the early 1800s Jubilee Palls to raise funds to support pilgrims have given way to a stream of pupils actually participating in annual pilgrimages to Lourdes since 2009, whilst pupils routinely help on the weekly Soup Run to the homeless and in Prior Concern projects in local schools and institutions. Orleans, Nantes, Bourg St Maurice, Akoi, Malaga, Barcelona, Madrid, Cologne and Berlin have all exchanged with Prior Park pupils, whilst pupils in Bath can listen to thought-provoking Ralph Allen lectures like Brian Keenan and Alistair Hignell and be challenged in General Studies talks by speakers from Peter Tatchell to Ann Widdecombe.

Scenes from colourful Lent Term musicals.

Those doyens of Prior Park drama and music Headley Goodall and Nora Hodges would have heartily endorsed Jeremy Goulding's 1988 statement placing creative arts near the centre of our curriculum. This commitment has become a brilliant reality, fostered by successive Headmasters as essential to expression, opportunity and enjoyment in a vibrant school. Vivid, joyous annual senior musicals are an eagerly awaited highlight in a packed Lent term, with talented staff, including a Head of Science and a Housemistress as well as Music staff, coaxing wonderful performances from pupils. Curricular Theatre Studies has flourished with the Julian Slade Theatre and Mackintosh Studio, witnessing magisterial performances of drama from the challenging *The Chestnut, King Lear, The Great Gatsby*, through the catalogue of drama from Ayckbourn to Webster, with gifted English staff augmenting the work of David Langley's inspiring Theatre Studies department. Since 1981 successive Directors of Music have delighted all with the wonderful Carol Service, major choral works, numerous informal lunchtime recitals and termly concerts. In addition, since 2005 opera has featured and numerous Prior

Senior Chapel Choir at the Royal Festival Hall.

TOWARDS 200 YEARS - TAKING STOCK

Park alumni have followed careers in opera musical theatre and drama, with the May 2018 performance of Mozart's *Requiem* featuring 4 professional soloists who were all members of the Chapel Choir when at the College. Collaboration with The Pimpernel has seen the Chapel as the setting for *Night's Parade* whilst the John Wood Chapel proved a wonderful space for Isben and Stoppard plays. Band Nights and Inter-house music competitions are established highlights for pupils and give witness to a community-wide affection for performance that has typified the last 14 decades of the vibrant, co-educational community, underpinning the efforts of those talented voices who feature in a Chapel Choir that has graced national competitions from 2000 onwards, secured choral scholarships, supported European choir and band tours and sung in major cathedrals. For more than 20 years both David Sackett and Roland Robertson have made their own distinctive contributions to this wealth of music, supported by energetic young music staff and notable musical expertise in the wider community. The organ secured by Jeremy Goulding in 1996 has been a wonderful asset, enriching assemblies, religious services and concerts, but such has been the pressure on it that plans are afoot to source a necessary replacement by the time of the College bicentenary.

The Prior Park Schools' Biathlon now provides opportunity for pupils wishing to get involved in an exciting multi-discipline sport and it typifies the aim of contemporary Prior Park sport to engage with pupils, offering enjoyment and challenge. The appointment of the first Director of Sport in 2003, expansion of staff expertise and advances in facilities, notably the state of the art Bury Sports centre in 2014, illustrate this commitment to both excellence and sport for all. The original shale pitch gave way to a new astro-turf pitch to allow Alan Hall to devote 40 years to raising the quality of hockey to a respected standard at all levels. A fine schoolmaster, he offered impeccable professionalism in all that he did and was an expert, highly respected Hockey coach. It was fitting that his final year as Director of Hockey was crowned by success in the National Plate Final and a tour of South Africa. He could also be assured that a new astro-turf pitch (laid in 2017) and the leadership of Rhys Gwilliam and Irish Olympian John Jackson would secure his legacy. Meanwhile, Paul Hall arrived to give 'impossible leadership' to a rugby tradition that had seen both Oliver Robinson and James Cockle win England

2012 1st XV delight in victory at Bathampton.



The fire of 1836 from a picture at Prior Park.



Above: Going home.

Right: An aerial view of the central campus showing the setting of the Bury Sports Centre and the 1st XI Cricket Oval.

