

UNDERSTANDING ROBERT EVELYN FREETH

A STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL IDEAS AND ADMINISTRATION OF A
LEADER IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLING
1928-1950

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Introduction.

The present paper reviews the educational ideas and administration of Bishop Robert Evelyn Freeth, an Anglican clergyman who was the headmaster of Guildford Grammar School from 1928 to 1950. It is not so much for his particular impact on education in Western Australia that this study is justified, since Freeth was never a radical thinker or innovator. But he established his own school as the preeminent independent school in Western Australia during his twenty years in office, and stamped upon it a mode of operation that was closest perhaps to the traditional English public school of any Western Australian independent school of the period. Freeth also was a foundation member of the Headmasters' Conference of Australia, established in 1931.

Freeth brought to Guildford a set of traditionalist views of independent schooling that worked well until the turmoil of World War II destroyed the cultural certainties upon which they were based. Old Guildfordians from the 1930s regard their period at the school as its "golden years", a view supported by much of the historical evidence. The same could hardly be said of his later years, when the school experienced a serious decline that was not really arrested until the later 1950s. This older generation nevertheless highly respected the disciplined school associated with Freeth's administration, although his ultra conservative ideas sit uncomfortably alongside the more "progressive" thinking that became popular in the later 1930s and 1940s. Freeth was certainly out of step with the post-war generation by the time he retired, although economic circumstances during and after the war made it impossible to reassert even a respectable shadow of the system he had successfully established in the difficult depression years.

Family and Early Experience.

Robert Evelyn Freeth was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 7 April 1886, into a relatively wealthy family. His grandfather, Charles, described as a "gentleman", was a property owner in London,

The fine details of family background were provided by Robert Freeth (Synopsis of Ancestry) and gleaned also from copies of relevant birth and marriage certificates.

who sent Evelyn, Robert's father, to Eton. As the third son, however, Evelyn had to make his own way in the world as an insurance agent and later public servant with the Legacy and Succession Duty Office, which he joined in 1864. In 1870 he married Florence Thompson Oakes, daughter of a writing clerk with

the General Register Office. Evelyn moved to Dublin in 1884 as Deputy Controller, Legacy and Succession Duties for Ireland. He was promoted in 1900 to the post of Registrar of Estate Duties,

returning to London in 1902 as Registrar of the Estate Duty Office, Somerset House. On retirement in 1908, Evelyn received a knighthood.

Robert, the seventh born of eight children, belonged therefore to a family that was comfortable rather than wealthy, in which a sound education served as a necessary passport into a professional career, typically in the armed services, the law and the ministry. His eldest brother, Charles, went into the army; ano

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Ibid, p. 123.

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Waddy. L., *The King's School 1831-1981: An Account* (Parramatta, the School, 1981) Chapter 11.

See Sherington, G. *Shore: A History of Sydney Church of England Grammar School* (Sydney, the School, 1983) especially chapter 5.

Ibid, p.121.

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Purves testimonial, 16 December 1922 (GGs Archives).

Robson, 9 August 1927 (GGs Archives).

Purves, op.cit.

White, M.A., "Philip Hinckley at Guildford Grammar - an Antipodean tragedy", *History of Education Review*, Vol.22, No.1, 1993, pp.47-64.

Council, 16 April 1929, See correspondence between Freeth and the the Rev. G.E.Woods concerning fees for his son, and between the Council and Freeth on this matter.

Ibid.

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Swan, 76, May 1933, p.9.

Swan, 88, May 1937, p.7.

Swan, 76, May 1933, p.9.

Swan, 94, 19139, p.7.

Swan, 70, May 1931, p.9.

Heuston to E.McLoughlan, 31 May 1929 (GGs 1/1989-42).

Swan, 76 May 1933, p.23.

White, M.A., "William Stewart Corr - a biographical sketch" Education Research and Perspectives, Vol.18, No.2, 1992, pp.21-32.

Election confirmed 17 October 1929 (GGs File 1/1989 - 56).

Minutes of first meeting of the conference, Geelong, 21-22 December 1931 (GGs 1/1989 - 57).

Swan, 63, May 1928, p.56.

Council, Special Meeting, 2 August 1929.

Swan, 70, May 1931.

Swan, 69, May 1930, p.50.

Swan, 70, May 1931, pp.62-63.

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chapter 7.

See correspondence in GGS file 1/1989 - 43.

Meeting with headmasters, 10 April 1930.

Swan, 70, August 1930, pp.6-7.

Freeth to Major S.F.Rowell, 25 February 1930 (GGS 1/1989-43).

Swan, 88 May 1937, p.9.

Swan, 91 May 1938, p.9.

Swan, 88 May 1937, p.9.

Swan 94 May 1939, p.6.

Swan, 94 May 1939, p.11.

Swan, 99 May 1940, p.8.

Council, 10 December 1929.

The event is well documented in Adams, F.D., *The Schools of the Public Schools' Association of Western Australia 1829-1929* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Australia, 1979) chapter 6, and in Wickham, op.cit.

White, M.A., "The Council for Church of England Schools in

Western Australia, 1917-1950", Collected
Papers of Australian New Zealand History of Education Society
Conference, Perth, September 1994.
pp.457-488.

Council, 25 March 1931.

Council, 22 March 1934.

Council, 7 June 1934.

Council, 4 December 1934.

Council, 16 July 1935.

Council, 7 December 1933.

Council, 5 December 1935.

Swan, 77 August 1933, pp.5-6.

Swan, 86 May 1937, p.8.

Headmaster's Report, 14 July 1936.

Alexander, F. (ed), Four Bishops and their See - Perth,
Western Australia 1857-1957 (Perth, University
of Western Australia Press,1957, pp.167-183.

Council, 5 April 1933.

Council 17 May 1937.

Council, 2 August 1937.

Council, Special Committee Meeting, 6 December 1937.

Council, 13 July 1937.

Swan, 76, May 1933, p.10.

Headmaster's report on the conference, Sydney 1933 (GGS
Archives 1/1989 - 570).

Swan, 88, May 1937, p.10.

Correspondence in file 1/1989 - 47 (GGS Archives).

Vice Chancellor H.Whitfeld to Freeth, 20 August 1936 (GGS
Archives 1/1989 - 47).

Swan, 97, May 1940, p.10.

Swan, 94, May 1939, p.10.

Swan, 97, May 1940, pp.24-25.

Council, 4 May 1937.

Guildford School Committee, 21 September 1937.

Swan, 90, December 1937, pp22-23.

Swan, 91, May 1938, pp.11-12.

Ibid.

Freeth to Archbishop, 13 April 1940, in File: Archbishop of
Perth 1928-1950 - Correspondence to and from Freeth.

Council, 22 May 1940.

Council, 23 September 1942.

Minutes of Guildford School Committee, 21 June 1940.

Council, 19 November 1941, 20 December 1941.

Council, 13 October 1941. See comments of Freeth in Guildford
Grammar School Committee, 17 March 1942.

Council, Special Meeting, 4 April 1943; Guildford School
Committee, 16 November 1943.

Council, 4 May 1945.

Council, Annual Meeting, 4 May 1945 - Report by Freeth.

Council, 13 December 1944.

Swan, 115, May 1946, pp.38-39.

Council, 4 April 1944.

Council, Annual Meeting, 4 May 1945 - Report of Headmaster.

Council, 7 December 1945.

Swan, 69 May 1930, p.51.

Council, Special Meetings 12 September, 2 October, 3 November
1947.

Council, 28 April 1949.

Swan, 115 May 1946, p.11.

Guildford School Committee, 17 February 1948.

Guildford School Committee, 20 September 1949. At the time,
the school obtained a written apology from the Sunday Tribune
(Malaya), but the paper made no public retraction.

Guildford School Committee, 19 February 1946.

Swan, 112 May 1945, pp.12-13.

Guildford School Committee, 16 September 1947.

Swan, 115 May 1946, p.17.

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Freeth to C.H.Deague (Old Wesley Collegians), 18 September

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6 May 1947 (all three schools).

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