

**KEYHAM COLLEGE
AND DOCKYARD SCHOOL
DURING THE LAST 100 YEARS**

BY

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Today the familiar building known for so long as 'R.N.F.C., Keyham', will be officially reopened as the Devonport Dockyard Technical College. This, incidentally, makes the fourth time its name has changed.

Its end as the Naval Engineering College was inevitable and, as is well known, the new buildings at Manadon, H.M.S. *Thunderer*, have now assumed that role.

There is some consolation for older engineer officers that their Alma Mater will continue the good work of engineering training for dockyard apprentices' training, in fact, similar to, but more advanced than, that which it gave its first students some 80 years ago when it took over from the Dockyard School.

So it is not now a question of the old giving way to the new. Very much the reverse, in fact.

Last century, when the Navy had to give steam preference over sail, the dockyards were the only source of engineers. Excellent, practical men, but with a deplorable appreciation of naval discipline and etiquette !

Training Boys

So it became desirable to enlist boys of 15 years of age, call them Engineer Boys, and by dint of six years' training mould them, more or less, to naval ideas of what an engineer afloat should be.

Devonport was chosen as the Yard to give this training, which by modern standards was hard going. The pay was negligible. There was no accommodation for the boys, so they lodged locally, and their training was in the Yard shops only.

It soon became apparent that schooling also was needed, and so, in 1846, a small Dockyard School was opened in the South Yard.

In 1860, although the training remained much the same, the status of the boys was raised to Engineering Students, and after five years' seagoing following their Yard training, they became Assistant Engineers with one stripe.

Rugger in 1872

In 1880 it was decided to house the students under one roof, and the main building at Keyham opened as the Engineer Students' Training College. It was, however, a college with no classrooms ! So the students were marched, afternoons and evenings, still to the Dockyard School, where school went on till 8 p.m., except Saturdays, when they were free at 4 p.m.

For some time there had been a recreation ground in what is now Keyham Yard, and in 1872 the students introduced rugger, being the first people in the district to do so. But they had no opponents until the shipwright apprentices, in 1877, formed Devonport Albion, and the two clubs played against each other in Devonport Park.

As Devonport Albion in due course became Plymouth Albion, it is no wonder their matches with R.N.E. College are now in the nature of a 'local Derby'.

In 1888 some living space was converted to classrooms, which meant that some senior students lived out again. It also meant that the Dockyard School was no longer needed for engineers, but it continued to give schooling to Yard apprentices and produced some very famous names in the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors.

Renamed

A year or so later Yard extensions deprived the students of their ground, but they set to and themselves cleared a nearby field, which has developed into the fine ground in St. Levan Road today.

In 1898, the separate school block was opened and from then on all students were able to live and study under one roof.

Things moved fast now and in 1903 the title 'student' was stepped up to 'cadet', and for the first time the College became known as Royal Naval Engineering College, Keyham.

During the 1914-18 war, engineering training was suspended and special entry upper-deck cadets were transferred to the College from sea-going ships.

The College was then renamed Royal Naval College, Keyham.

After that war the College went back to engineering and changed its name again. But it did not really get going till 1922, when for the first time the students entered as Midshipmen (E).

Manadon House

During all these years the Dockyard School continued quietly and steadily producing, from the apprentices, men who have achieved success, not only under Admiralty, but in industry and the scholastic world.

In 1938 the engineering branch began to expand and the larger college at Manadon was contemplated. The 1939 war held up the plans, but the estate having been purchased in 1940, Manadon House became an officers' mess and hutments were set up in the grounds to sleep the overflow of students from Keyham. Thus began the end for the old college, at least as far as the naval engineers were concerned.

By the grace of God the college emerged from the war practically unscathed, whereas the Dockyard School had been destroyed in the Devonport blitz and had now found temporary accommodation in St. James', Keyham, Church School.

But owing to the Education Act, the number of apprentices attending school had become so big that this was quite inadequate, even though a new one-storey science block had been erected nearby.

' Moved In '

And so, when the engineers vacated the school block in 1952, the Dockyard School ' moved in ' and assumed the title of Dockyard Technical College. This accommodation was, however, in addition to St. James' School and still there was not really enough room.

The engineers still retained the main building and for seven years the Technical College carried on under very trying conditions.

But at last the main building was vacated and converted into sufficient classrooms to enable all instruction to be carried on under one roof.

So recently St. James' School was given up and at the beginning of the present term the Technical College ' moved in '.

For the time being, at least, the detached science block will continue to function.

Wide Training

The Technical College training is wide and caters for both the craft and the recently-formed student apprentice streams and many successes have been and will be achieved.

It is not only on the academic side that progress has been made for, in the past seven years, rugger and soccer sides have been built up, due to the devotion of certain members of the teaching staff, and it may be that in due course another local rugger ' Derby ' will come into being, Dockyard College v. Manadon College. Who knows ?

At any rate, the Dockyard School which, unsung and almost unnoticed a century ago, did so much to help build up the Navy's Engineering Branch seems at last to have come into its own.
