



Public Schools and Private Education: The Clarendon Commission 1861-64 and the Public Schools Acts

Colin Shrosbree

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The great public schools are central to any discussion of English secondary education. Founded as public endowments, they are the basis of private education. Set apart from the other grammar schools by the Clarendon Commission of 1861, their influence on the state system has been enormous. Severed from the national provision of public education, they have put prestige and ancient endowments at the service of wealth and patronage.

This book, available in paperback for the first time, shows how this came to pass. How the schools' attempts at reform, reliance on fees, the defence of the Classics, public criticism of Eton, European ideas and foreign economic competition led to the Clarendon Commission. How Lord Clarendon himself, in conflict with Palmerston over foreign policy, came to lead the Commission and attempt curricular reform. How the Public Schools Acts created a separate school system for the benefit of Eton and how the Lords sought to establish that system for the upper classes. How the fee-paying, class-based principles of the Commission influenced the other grammar schools and all later English education. How the Public Schools Acts reduced the influence of local parents and how new governors were appointed nationally. How Shrewsbury School, an example of an endowed grammar school with strong local connections, came to be part of the public school system.

It is not the conflict between state education and private schools that makes so much discussion of English education bitter and controversial. It is the loss to state education of the public schools - the original political purpose of the Acts - and the impoverishment of national education by the class divisions of Victorian legislation.

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