



THE SCHOOL—founded in 1608.

SO many old grammar schools have been swallowed up into the comprehensive system that the fate of another seems, perhaps, of little importance.

But the decisions surrounding the future—or non-future — of Cowbridge Grammar School have so infuriated the staff that it's worth paying them special attention.

# Are they playing fair with Cowbridge Grammar?

Theories

the oldest grammar school in Glamorgan, and one of the oldest in Wales. It is also one of the best.

The inevitability of educational change is accepted—albeit reluctantly in some circles—but there's a strong feeling that Cowbridge, for some reason, has come in for special adverse treatment.

Other grammar schools in Glamorgan have been used as the nucleus for the comprehensives which have replaced them. Not Cowbridge.

## 'Injustice'

The comprehensive for the area is to be based at Llantwit Major, and the buildings vacated by Cowbridge Grammar and Cowbridge High School for Girls will accommodate a new bilingual school.

This, says Mr. Iolo Davies, senior resident master at Cowbridge Grammar School, is a "conspicuous and severe injustice."

He thinks it wrong that these two grammar schools should be the only ones in the county not to become the nucleus of a comprehensive.

The headmaster, Mr. J. Idwal Rees — a one-time Welsh rugby international who has been headmaster for 32 years—agrees.

In his study overlooking the school's secluded lawns, he sat at his desk near the portrait of one of the school's founders and told me:

"If comprehensive education is to be thrust on the pupils of Glamorgan, I think it only right that the principle laid down in the authority's original document on this subject should be applied in Cowbridge — that where a grammar school exists, it should be the nucleus of a comprehensive school for the locality.

"I don't see why Cowbridge should be singled out as an exception."

"To worship tradition, I think, is wrong. But the success of our education system in Britain is that we haven't discarded the best of our old traditions.

"Here there's a danger that those traditions will be scrapped altogether. I think that's a mistake.

"I'm fed up with the way education is being messed about by politicians and psychologists. Those psychologists! They come out with a new theory every few months. We are inundated with White Papers and Green Papers and goodness knows what.

"The trouble is that these fanciful theories come from people who have never done a day's teaching in their lives."

The present set-up in Cowbridge was expected to survive into the 1980's, and the idea of a bilingual school in which Welsh will be a medium of instruction came as a complete surprise.

"It came right out of the blue," said Mr. Rees.

Herbert Williams looks at the controversy surrounding Glamorgan's oldest school



THE HEADMASTER: Mr. J. Idwal Rees.

"I read about it in the Press. In fact, I still haven't been told officially."

There are 480 boys in the school, 110 of whom are sixth formers—a high proportion. Fifty of the pupils are boarders, and Mr. Iolo Davies, who has taught classics there for 23 years, is angry with the decision to discontinue boarding when the comprehensive is set up.

"The impression was definitely given that the boarding element would be preserved, and the children taken to Llantwit by bus," he said.

## Growth

Boarding, he claims, is becoming not less important in our increasingly egalitarian society but more important, because people move around more and many of them like their children to have a settled education.

He says this is particu-

larly important in the Cowbridge area because St. Athan airmen posted elsewhere often choose to let their children remain at the school as boarders.

Mr. Idwal Rees, the head, said: "Some people think that boarding isn't compatible with comprehensive education, but this isn't so. There are comprehensive boarding schools in London and Coventry."

A number of reasons have been given for siting the comprehensive at Llantwit Major. One of them is that this is the natural "growth point" in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Mr. Iolo Davies, however, says this was based on an estimate of population trends made five years ago. Subsequent developments, such as the transfer of the Royal Mint to Llantrisant and the prospect of a new town north of Cowbridge, "may well have made this

estimate obsolete already" he said.

Anyway, he adds, by selecting Cowbridge as the site of the bilingual school the county authority "have underlined what has always been true — that Cowbridge is the natural focal point of the Vale and the place where the neighbourhood comprehensive ought to be."

## Space

When I spoke to Mr. John Brace, assistant director of education for Glamorgan, however, he didn't mention the "growth point" thesis.

"The reason we are basing the comprehensive at Llantwit Major is that there's a brand-new school there, Llanilltud Fawr Secondary," he said. "Cowbridge has very old buildings and there just isn't the space. This is going to be a large, 10-form entry school."

He made no secret of the fact that Cowbridge schools would have been left alone some years ago longer if the decision for a third bilingual secondary school for the county hadn't come up.

Mr. Brace said they needed a third school on the basis of the growth of numbers in the bilingual primary schools.

By basing the school in Cowbridge, they could then justify bringing forward their comprehensive plans for the area because obviously the "displaced" pupils from the local grammar schools have to be taught somewhere.

So this game of musical chairs means the end of an ancient school with a fine record of scholastic success. Its only crime is that it doesn't fit in with modern theories of education.

## Suspicion

Some parents, like Mr. David Beech, a Cowbridge haulage contractor, think the educationists are gambling with the children's lives.

"The scheme may not be a success," he said, "but the children don't get a

second chance. And what gets me is that these things take place without us having any say in it whatever."

He also thought the schools would be a great loss to Cowbridge as "they are very much a part of community life" — a point made by other local people.

This argument may not carry much weight in County Hall. But Coun. Ken George, a member of Cowbridge Borough Council, is pushing an alternative scheme.

He thinks the growth of population in the Vale would justify two seven-stream comprehensives in five years time, one at Llantwit Major and the other at Cowbridge.

Whatever happens, there is a strong suspicion at Cowbridge that the school has come in for adverse treatment simply because it is an old foundation steeped in tradition.

Inverted snobbery, in fact. The suspicion may be unfounded, but one thing is absolutely certain. There is an impatience with "tradition" at County Hall and an eagerness to sweep away the old order as quickly as possible. Will the new be as good as it's cracked up to be?