

FAMOUS SCHOOLS

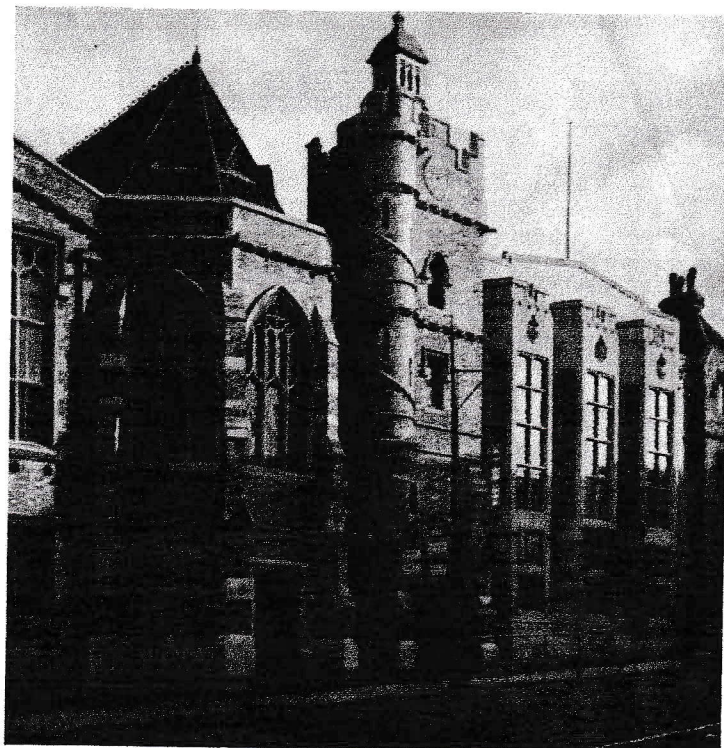
KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL, STOURBRIDGE

By R. L. CHAMBERS

IT could not unreasonably be claimed that this is the typical English grammar school in the typical English town. It stands where the main road from the north, having crossed the Staffordshire border by the undistinguished bridge over the Stour, little more than a stone's throw away down the hill, rises steeply by the broad and busy slope of Stourbridge's Lower High Street to the congested junction of roads which is the heart of the

Right : The street-front of the School, at the heart of the town of Stourbridge.

Below : The Assembly Hall, built in 1930 on the site of the original chantry and the old school-house.



Below : Rehearsal scene from the 400th Anniversary production of "Twelfth Night" on the playing field.

chantry-schools naturally went with them. But fortunately the Renaissance men who advised Edward VI realised the value of education, and in the ensuing years many new schools were founded or old ones refounded, granted charters and given fresh endowments. Still more fortunately, the townsmen of Stourbridge realised their own loss and were forward in seeking to recover their school. On 17th June, 1552, the Stourbridge school received its charter, granted "in response to the petition of the inhabitants of Stourbridge and of Old Swinford," and was endowed with various properties once belonging to the dissolved monastery of Fotheringhay in Northamptonshire.

So the Free School of King Edward the Sixth in Stourbridge started on its way, in the place where its predecessor had been, and where it has itself always since

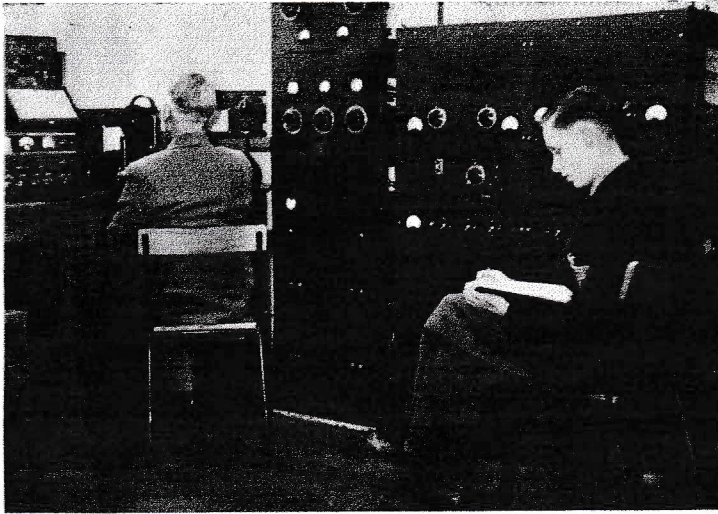
town. It stands right on the Lower High Street, just below the junction. It has always stood there, or at least for so long that "always" is a reasonable compromise with the truth ; for there can be few who pass its street-front now, whose imagination will take them back as far as five hundred and twenty-four years into "the dark backward and abysm of time."

It was on 21st May, 1430, that Philip and Joan Hareby, of whom regrettably we know nothing else, founded the Chantry of the Holy Trinity in "the market-town of Stourbridge" and endowed it with funds to maintain a "stipendiary priest" whose main duty was to say masses for the souls of the dead. Five hundred years later, in the course of the building of an assembly hall to seat 650 boys, the site of that

stipendiary priest's altar was brought to light ; and the metal plaque which records its discovery is not ten yards from the spot where the priest's successor, the present headmaster, takes his place to read morning prayers. The chantry, like many of its kind, survived until the Reformation, when it was abolished as savouring of Romish superstition. But long before then the priests, having time upon their hands, had begun to impart the rudiments of learning to the boys of the district. The last stipendiary priest here, and the only early schoolmaster of whom we know anything, was one Nycholas Rocke, who at the time of the suppression "was of the age of fifty-four years, learned, and of honest conversation."

When the chantries were suppressed, the





"Taking the log" at the School's amateur transmitting station, G6OJ, which has been operating since 1924.



A typical scene on a normal "Corps afternoon." The Corps is able to train on open land near to the School field.

remained. The typical grammar school, it has run the typical grammar school course. In 1840 there were 17 pupils; in 1890 there were 96; in 1940 there were over 600. For the greater part of its history the grammar which it taught was the grammar of Latin, the learned tongue, and the staple of its curriculum the ancient classics. They are still taught here, and classical scholars still go from Stourbridge to the ancient universities. But much has been added. In the past half-century two headmasters of great mathematical ability—the first of whom was the legendary J. E. Boyt, who guided the school through the period of its greatest expansion—sent out a stream of gifted Edwardians to add their names to the list of Cambridge Wranglers and to bring lustre to the reputation of their School. The so-called Modern Studies (a curious limitation of the term) also found their place; and as for science, it would have been strange if it had not flourished in this place on the edge of one of the workshops of England, the great Black Country where craftsmanship is hereditary king, and industry employs the hands and brains of his myriad subjects. The school's science building has been called magnificent; it could certainly not with justice be called inadequate.

This and the other buildings of the school narrate the story of its growth. Each block has been erected, as the need arose, on the perimeter of the present playground. In 1907, 1928 and 1939 new blocks of classrooms arose, and in the 1930's came the fine Assembly Hall and a considerable enlargement of the science block. The site is restricted, and each extension has been at the expense, necessarily, of ancient fabric and old amenities—gardens, walks and lawns. There was a lovely Georgian house on the site of the Library block, for generations the home of the Hickman family, who were relatives of Dr. Samuel Johnson.

But much else has survived. In 1952,



The mid-day session in a corner of the Chess Society's headquarters.

The Natural History Society's Summer camp in the Wyre Forest



Can you spot Le's Burfield?

the very year in which the 400th Anniversary of the Charter was celebrated, there came to light an astonishing collection of some two thousand documents from the school's records. They include a paper dated 1542, an Elizabethan parchment account-book whose last entry was penned when England lay under the threat of the Armada, and two folio volumes containing the Governors' minutes from 1688 to

1838. Together they present in microcosm the social history of centuries.

The personal histories are gone, since the old admission-registers have not survived, and in them rest all traces of the school's ancient alumni, famous or obscure. Probably it is fanciful to suppose that famous names are fading somewhere on those lost pages. They would be the names of worthies, not of great men; the same names that are on the form-lists, the games notices and in the detention-book today; the same names that are on the honours boards in the Assembly Hall and on the memorials to the dead of two wars. Not far from the school, also in the heart of the town, is the Stourbridge Old Edwardian Club, unusual if not unique amongst those of such institutions which spring from day-schools, in that it has

long had its own valuable and well-used premises, and is a club in fact. Here too the characteristic Stourbridge names can be read on the boards upon its walls, and the link of family affection is felt as a reality. For in this school, as in so many grammar schools, the names of Old Boys are often the names of ancestors, and local pride in the school is fed by the affection that stirs in the blood.