

INTRODUCTION

A report of H.M. Inspectors has recently been issued about the other Royal Naval Boys' Training Establishment, H.M.S. "Ganges". The boys coming to H.M.S. "St. Vincent" are selected in exactly the same way as those for the "Ganges" but the entry is confined to seaman boys, no communications boys being taken. H.M.S. "St. Vincent" has a normal new entry of 69 boys at each five weekly interval. At the time of the inspection there were 573 boys in the establishment. This compares with 633, 462 and 483 boys in attendance during the middle of the session in 1949, 1950 and 1951 respectively. The scope of the work in the two establishments is similar apart from the communications instruction at "Ganges".

The boys of H.M.S. "St. Vincent" are drawn mainly from London, the south coast and South Wales. The majority come from secondary modern schools, either direct or after a short period of employment, but there are quite a number from secondary grammar schools and from pre-sea schools like the training ships "Arethusa" and "Mercury".

The establishment stands at the head of Forton Creek in the centre of Gosport, Hampshire. It was originally founded, in 1713, as a hospital for sick and wounded seamen of the Royal Navy. At various periods until the end of the Napoleonic Wars it was used as a place of confinement for prisoners guilty of high treason in any of the colonies or on the high seas, or guilty of piracy, or for prisoners-of-war. At one time there were so many prisoners that several hulks were moored in Forton Creek to take the overflow. Convicts and prisoners-of-war who died during confinement were buried in the two cemeteries alongside the present open-air swimming bath.

Sometime between 1815 and 1820 the first of the present buildings were completed, comprising mainly the four large blocks now labelled Gravelines, Bartleur, Camperdown and Trafalgar. They replaced the wooden buildings of the Forton Prison, which had been burned down, and some old stone buildings. Originally they were designed as a large military hospital; then they were occupied by army units until the Royal Marine Light Infantry (Red Marines) took over in 1848. During their occupation the three smaller blocks, Texel, Quiberon and Nile were added; the middle strip of Forton Field was purchased soon after 1848 and the east and west portions in 1856; and the site of the swimming bath was reclaimed from the foreshore. Millpond was purchased from the Bishop of Winchester in 1858 and reclaimed to become Millpond Ground. The school buildings by Mill Lake were completed in 1900, apparently as elementary schools. West House was built in 1849 as subalterns' quarters, and later became the Royal Marines Warrant Officers' Mess. East House was also built in 1849 as single officers' quarters. The first of the buildings comprising the present wardroom was built in 1849, but there were big alterations and extensions in 1900.

In 1923 the Red Marines amalgamated with the Blue Marines (Royal Marine Artillery) at Eastney to become the Royal Marines and Forton Barracks were empty until June 1st, 1927, when an overflow of seamen boys from H.M.S. "Ganges" moved in and the barracks became the fifth H.M.S. "St. Vincent". During the last war the boys were evacuated to H.M.S. "St. George" in the Isle of Man, H.M.S. "St. Vincent" then being used for Fleet Air Arm training. The boys returned in February, 1946.