

It was on the site of the Old Rectory of Wanstead parish on Redbridge Lane West that Wanstead County High School, as it was originally known, was originally established and still stands today. In 1923, Essex County Council decided that, due to an increase in housing development around Wanstead, the existing secondary school provision was no longer sufficient. There had been small secondary schools on Wellesley Road and Woodbine Place, but these were deemed too small for growing numbers of young people in the area.

The Old Rectory, built around 1830, was bought for £4,400 by the council and converted, providing the students with a laboratory, and facilities for handicrafts and domestic subjects. The main building – still the largest part of the school today – was scheduled to open in 1925. However, it took two years longer than expected, with Scotland's first female MP, the Duchess of Atholl – who later resigned her seat in protest at Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement – opening the main building on 29 June 1927.

Mr A.F. Joseph, or 'Joey' as he was nicknamed, was appointed as the school's first headmaster. Much loved and revered, he had read Classics at Oxford University and chose the school's motto 'Abeunt Studia in Mores', which still adorns the students' blazers today. The motto translated from Latin can be taken to mean that 'Education becomes the manners, or virtues, of life'. Mr Joseph would stay until 1948.

To attend Wanstead County High, students had to pass a written examination. On 23 September 1924, 92 boys and girls aged 11 were admitted. Four other teachers assisted Mr Joseph. Until the 1944 Education Act, parents were charged £21 per year fees, but this was means-tested and was waived if parents earned less than £125 annually.

The heron was used as the school's badge from the beginning and the first edition of the termly school magazine 'The Heronian' was published in 1924. A school orchestra and drama productions were started in the first year and performing arts and music have continued to thrive here. The school has also held many sporting honours, including rugby, cricket and athletics – Bancroft's School were the great local rivals!

Wanstead County High School, was one of the first co-educational schools in Britain. All academic classes were fully integrated, which made it a pioneer at the time. The school soon enjoyed a good reputation, both academically and in many sports.



Two older pupils inspecting their graduation certificate, late 1920s



11th March 1934: Players relaxing at half time during a hockey match between mixed teams of past pupils and staff from Wanstead County High School.

In 1938, there were 720 pupils at the school and the threat of war meant that the students had to be sent away from Wanstead. On the 1st September, students who lived in the Ilford area were sent to Ipswich. Two days later, pupils who lived in Wanstead and Woodford were transported out to Maldon, Essex on a fleet of red London buses. The convoy was stopped on the way and a teacher announced that war had been declared at 11am. The pupils were moved from Maldon, later deemed too vulnerable to attack, to Newent, Gloucestershire and then three months later to safety in Chippenham, Wiltshire. The school was reunited at Wanstead in 1945. They celebrated their 21st birthday, but also held a memorial service for the 83 members of the school who had not returned from the war.



Speech by Winston Churchill At Royal Wanstead School Open Air Party. 1st January 1947

The Cearns family, whose children had attended the school, donated an open-air swimming pool. It was built on the site of what is now Wanstead Leisure Centre car park. Unsurprisingly, many Old Heronians remember the pool as being extremely cold, even in summertime, due to its concrete changing cubicles that did not have a roof!

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of particular sporting success for the school, particularly in athletics. Discus thrower Gerry Carr represented Britain at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

Geoffrey Elliot also appeared in both the pole vault and decathlon events at the 1952 Olympic games in Helsinki.

Physical Education had a prominent position in the 50s school curriculum and coach Ron Pickering joined as PE teacher at the school in 1955.

In 1961, Mr Pickering became national athletics coach for Wales and also coached the British team at the Olympics in 1964 in Tokyo before becoming a BBC commentator.

Until 1965, when the London Government Act created the Borough of Redbridge, it was administered by the Essex Education Committee. In the 1960s, the school had around 800 boys and girls, with 250 in the sixth form.

The school became Wanstead High when it turned from grammar Wanstead County High School to a comprehensive in the early 1970s.

The school buildings were extended in 1964 and again in 1974 when the science and humanities block was built.



18th March 1977: Sixth formers at Wanstead High School in their common room (the library today) listening to one of their members.

### Notable former pupils

- **Geraldine Bedell**, journalist and writer
- **Nick Berry** Television actor and musician.
- **Carly Cole** (*née* Zucker), wife of footballer Joe Cole
- **Jonathan Fortune**, footballer
- **Sarah Holland**, writer
- **Gillian Merron**, Former Labour MP and Junior Minister
- **Ronnie O'Sullivan**, snooker player
- **Kayne Ramsay**, footballer
- **Frances Ruffelle**, actress
- **Richard Wisker**, star of CBBC's hit children's comedy drama Tracy Beaker Returns.
- **Bilal Zafar**, award-winning comedian

### Notable former teachers

- **Wilf Paish** (Physical Education teacher in the 60s. Coach of many athletes, including Olympic gold medal winner Tessa Sanderson)
- **Ron Pickering** (left in 1961 when he became athletics coach for Wales and the West of England)

### Wanstead County High School

- **Rt Rev Robert Atwell**, Anglican Bishop of Exeter
- **Dr. Gerry Carr**. Olympic discus thrower, (Melbourne,1956).Author, university professor (retired) (UVic, B.C., Canada)
- **Michael Coren**, journalist
- **Rupert Davies**, Film, TV, and stage actor, best known as Maigret in the 1960s TV series [*dubious*]

- **Geoff Elliott**, Olympic pole-vaulter and decathlete (Helsinki, 1952)
- **Brian Moll**, actor
- **Keith Ovenden**, writer
- **Dr Geoffrey Pardoe** OBE, aerodynamicist and rocket scientist, Director from 1993–6 of the International Academy of Science, Project Manager from 1956 to 1960 of Blue Streak, President from 1984–5 of the Royal Aeronautical Society, and advocate of the British space programme
- **David Rappaport**, musician, stage, screen and TV actor (Time Bandits, The Wizard).
- **Liz Robertson**, actress
- **Tony Robinson**, presenter of *Time Team* since 1994, and of course Baldrick in the Blackadder TV comedy
- **Maj-Gen Michael Sexton** CB OBE, Director of Military Survey from 1977 to 1980
- **Group Captain Tony Trumble**, OBE Battle of Britain pilot, Stalag Luft III POW.
- **Prof Maurice Tucker**, Professor of Geological Sciences since 1993 at Durham University and previous Master of University College, Durham
- **Angela Watkinson**, Conservative MP since 2001 for Upminster
- **Sir John Wilton** KCVO KCMG MC, Major (Royal Ulster Rifles), Ambassador to Kuwait from 1970–4, and to Saudi Arabia from 1976–9