

The tower, known as Perrott's Folly, is 96 feet tall, and has a spiral staircase of 139 steps, with small rooms on each floor. In the later part of the 19th century the tower became one of the world's first weather stations under the guidance of the pioneering meteorologist, A. Follett Osler. It must have been a mysterious place at night during this period with lighted windows at all hours through the evening and night as weather readings were being taken. The two towers – the waterworks chimney and Perrott's Folly - are locally believed to be Minas Morgul and Minas Tirith but Tolkien himself was very ambiguous about which pair of towers are commemorated in *The Two Towers*.

While living in Stirling Road, Ronald would most likely have walked past a Victorian public house on the corner of Monument Road and the Hagley Road as he went to and from school. The public house is called the Ivy Bush and this would reappear many years later - in Hobbiton.

In 1908 Ronald and Hilary moved from Stirling Road to into lodgings at one Mrs Faulkner's house in Duchess Road. Living there at the time was Edith Bratt, another orphan. Romance started to blossom between sixteen-year-old Ronald and Edith, then nineteen.

They most likely would have gone for walks around Edgbaston Reservoir, a short walk from Duchess Road, which in those days was like an inland seaside attraction. It had a band stand, rowing boats for hire, and even beaches.

This relationship was frowned on by Father Francis Morgan – parish priest at the Oratory as well as the boys' guardian - and he had Hilary and Ronald moved out of Duchess Road into a house in Highfield Road just over the road from the Oratory, presumably so he could keep an eye on them. This was to be Ronald's last Birmingham address. While he was living at this house, Father Francis banned Ronald from pursuing his relationship with Edith, who moved to Cheltenham.

But before she left, she and Ronald met by chance, one lunchtime, at the Prince of Wales public house in Moseley Village. The tale now moves away from the Birmingham area as Ronald went up to Oxford. As soon as he attained his majority, at the age of 21, Tolkien felt that Father Francis' strictures no longer applied, and proposed to Edith in a letter. She accepted (a complicated matter, as she was at the time engaged to someone else). Ronald finished at Oxford in the summer of 1915, by which time the Great War was raging. Ronald joined the Lancashire Fusiliers, but he and Edith were married in the spring of 1916.



Left: The bandstand and boathouse at Edgbaston Reservoir. Right: The Plough and Harrow

The couple returned to Birmingham in the June and stayed overnight at the Plough and Harrow hotel just over the road from the Oratory.

Ronald was most likely on embarkation leave as he was shortly to go the Western Front and it would be nice to think that they were returning to the places of their childhood sweetheart days. They stayed in room 116: a Blue Plaque records it.

Bob Blackham is a noted expert on Tolkien's Birmingham connections and an obsessive collector of old postcards.

Commentary: John Ronald's Schooldays

Maggie Burns

When you think about Tolkien's Birmingham you may well think of Sarehole, and of the annual weekend at Sarehole Mill - this year on 17-18 May. Two other places in Birmingham should also be remembered as they were vitally important to Tolkien's life and to his career; the Oratory Church in Edgbaston, and King Edward's School.

Tolkien was a pupil at King Edward's from 1900 to 1911 (ref. 1) with a short break in the summer of 1902 when he attended the Catholic grammar school of St. Philip's in Edgbaston. Studying at King Edward's he gained the scholarship which took him to Oxford University. University education at that time was still a rare privilege. Without a scholarship only the children of rich parents could hope for that opportunity. King Edward's gave the kind of education which meant that a number of its pupils each year gained exhibitions or scholarships enabling them to study at Oxford or Cambridge.

King Edward's was founded by Edward VI in 1552, and for centuries was Birmingham's 'free grammar school' (for boys). It stood in the lower part of New Street in the centre of Birmingham. The building Tolkien knew was designed by Sir Charles Barry and built in 1836, beautiful, as Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher in April 1944 'better than most Oxford colleges'². This was after he and other Old Edwardians had visited the new building in Edgbaston to have lunch, by invitation of the Head Master.

The visit from Sarehole will be to this building, which unfortunately Tolkien did not like at all, describing it to Christopher as: 'ghastly, utterly third-rate... like a girls' council-school'². But the past sixty years have softened the rawness of the new brick, and the trees around have grown. In addition there is the school chapel, part of the old New Street building which was only reconstructed on the new site in 1952 (ref. 3), some years after Tolkien's visit.

The beauty of the chapel's stonework and windows suggests how attractive the old building in New Street had been, as there it was simply the 'Upper Corridor'.

It contains a memorial plaque listing the Old Edwardians who had died in the First World War, many of whom were known by Tolkien. Two, G.B. Smith and R.Q. Gilson were very close to him. He did not forget them. In an excerpt from the Tolkien Papers he states that the lament which Aragorn chants for Legolas and Gimli as they pass the burial mounds before Edoras: "Where now the horse and the rider?..." is not an attempt to echo the mood of loss in the Old English poem *The Wanderer*. Rather, "... it laments the ineluctable ending and passing back into oblivion of the fortunate, the full-lived, the unblemished and the beautiful."⁴. Tolkien remembered his friends. The plaque was placed in the Upper Corridor and unveiled in December 1920.



Left: The 'Upper Corridor' at KES in 1935. **Right:** KES Oxford Scholarship board

Sir John Barnsley, whose son T.K. Barnsley had died in the war, pledged that if the school moved - even then the building was too small and there were no playing fields - the plaque would be transferred³. A photo taken just before the old building was demolished in 1936 shows that every stone of the Corridor was lettered so that it could be rebuilt in Edgbaston.

Tolkien was living at Sarehole when he first took the King Edward's admission exam in November 1899. He had been taught English, French, Latin, mathematics and botany at home by his mother Mabel. His Aunt Jane, one of the first women science graduates in the country, and herself a teacher at one of the King Edward's Foundation girls' schools in Bath Row, had taught him geometry². It was Tolkien's father's old school: Arthur Tolkien was a pupil there 1870 to 1873. The *King Edward's School Lists* show that Mabel's older brother Roland and her cousin Mark Oliver were pupils in the late 1870s. Wilfred, a Tolkien uncle, had been a pupil in the mid 1880s, and his sister's husband T.E. Mitton was also an Old Edwardian. Tolkien's Aunt Jane was a pupil at the new King Edward's Girls' High School 1885 to 1892. All in all it was natural that Mabel Tolkien should wish her sons to go to King Edward's.

However King Edward's New Street was no longer a 'free' grammar school. The Board Schools had been set up in 1870, offering free elementary education to all children. From 1883 schools in the King Edward's Foundation focussed on secondary education through the two High Schools in New

Street, and grammar schools at Five Ways, Camp Hill, Bath Row, Summer Hill and Aston. Pupils at the King Edward's Foundation schools had to pay tuition fees unless they gained a scholarship. The fees were higher at the High Schools in New Street than at the grammar schools; £12.0.0 per annum in 1900 compared to £3.0.0. per annum at the grammar schools⁵. Mabel Tolkien, with her limited income, could have sent her sons to Camp Hill, a mile closer to Sarehole than New Street.

But Ronald took the admission exam for the High School. He was only seven years old and he failed. Carpenter suggests that this was because Mabel was not strict enough⁶, but more probably it was due to the fact that few pupils were admitted at such a young age. When Tolkien was successful at his next attempt in June 1900 he was one of only three eight-year-olds to gain a place. Foundation scholarships were available for one-third of the boys in the school, but Tolkien did not get one and his fees were paid by an uncle.

From Sarehole it was a four-mile journey into Birmingham each day. Tolkien had to walk about a mile from Sarehole to reach the Stratford Road. Now there is a good path alongside the River Cole; willow-trees still line the river. Old photos show that in Tolkien's time the fields were water-meadows, prone to flooding. Having reached the Stratford Road Tolkien had to walk a further mile to the steam-tram terminus, then at St. John's Church in Sparkhill, to travel into town on the tram. It was a long journey for a small boy, and Mabel decided to move to Moseley two miles to the west, directly on the Alcester Road tram-route into Birmingham.

Tolkien continued at King Edward's until April 1902, when his mother entered him in St. Philip's⁷. This was the Catholic grammar school close to the Oratory in Edgbaston. From having a long journey to school Tolkien and his younger brother Hilary now had a very short one – St. Philip's was then in Oliver Road, where the family lodged from 1902. But the lessons were too easy for him so in November 1902 he took the King Edward's admission exam again. By now he was eleven, he knew the school and would have known what to expect in the exam. As before, Mabel could have entered him for a King Edward's grammar school at Five Ways, less than a mile from Oliver Road, but again she chose to enter him for the High School. This time he was awarded a Foundation Scholarship. He stayed at King Edward's until 1911, when he left for Oxford University.

Officially King Edward's was a Church of England school, but it also reflected the diversity of religious sects in the city of Birmingham. When E.W. Badger – a former pupil and a teacher - wrote an article about King Edward's for the journal *School* in 1908 he asserted: 'Religious education in the school is entirely unsectarian; Anglican, Nonconformist, Roman Catholic, and Hebrew, all meet for scripture lessons...'⁸. This diversity was also seen in Tolkien's family, and in his friends. He was a Catholic; his Suffield grandfather was a Unitarian; the Mittons (Tolkien aunt and uncle) were Baptists; the Incedons (Suffield aunt and uncle) were Anglican; and Christopher Wiseman, his closest friend in his last year at school, was Methodist – he later wrote tunes for the Methodist hymnbook.

In the years before the First World War, King Edward's was often described as a 'public' school. It had a very high reputation in the country. There were significant differences from a traditional public school, however. Although some English public schools had originally been founded to educate poor boys, by Tolkien's time they were primarily private, fee-paying, usually boarding schools. King Edward's was a day school, with no boarders. The *Blue Book* shows that some pupils had parents or guardians living in other parts of the country, or in other parts of the Empire. In January 1911, Tolkien's last year, there were three boys with parents in India and China. The Ehrhardts' father worked in Heidelberg, others had parents living in Wales, Devon, London and Lancashire. They would live with relatives or have lodgings somewhere in Birmingham, as did the Tolkien brothers.

Secondly the boys were from families which needed to earn money, from a profession or 'in trade'. They could not hope to live off inherited wealth, though a few came from families with prosperous businesses. In his 1908 article E.W. Badger described the social background:

K.E.S. does not draw its pupils from any one stratum of society. We rather glory in the fact that the professional man's son sits beside the tradesman's son, and the boy who comes down to school in his father's motor has for comrade the foundation scholar who has been trained in a public elementary school⁸.

This social set-up is reflected in the story of Sam and Frodo, one working-class and one middle-class. Badger continues: 'Generally speaking, the K.E.S. boy is painstaking and earnest... inclined to be utilitarian... But he is intelligent, and takes a certain undemonstrative interest in what is going on around him, and he is fairly well informed'⁸. Badger also cited academic achievements; at a time when very few boys went to university, 25 Old Edwardians had gained first-class degrees in the previous six years.

The *School Lists* show that from 1905 Tolkien was generally near or at the top of his class⁹. He was awarded a King Edward's Scholarship in 1908 (ref. 1) so that as well as receiving free tuition he was given some money to buy schoolbooks. The 1911 Speech Day programme, when Tolkien was about to leave the school, gives an idea of the standards taken for granted at King Edward's. As well as Aristophanes' *Peace*, performed in classical Greek, there was an excerpt from a French play: *Le petit voyage* by Eugene Labiche. T.K. Barnsley played one of the four parts in this. There was a Latin song: *Gaudeamus igitur*. There was a brief explanation of the French and Greek plays, but none for the Latin. And the Speech Day programme ends with a verse in the Greek alphabet, again with no explanation. It was the first verse of the national anthem, *God Save The King*; translated into Greek by P.G.M. Rhodes, School Captain of King Edward's 1903-4.

There were also English songs at the Speech Day. One starting with an account of a rugby match 'It's a dull December day, there's five minutes more to play...' had first appeared in the *Old Edwardians Gazette* in 1909. The mood of the chorus and of the first and third verses are similar to that in Henry Newbolt's 'Play up! Play up! And play the game'. The third verse of the King Edward's song ends 'And I played the game – they taught us that at School'. It is however the second verse which tells most about the ethos of the school:

Where the blazing sun beats down on the mud-walled tropic town
Sits an Old Edwardian in the judgement place:
To the reeking city slums, priest of God, another comes,
With the word to give the sinner hope of grace;
For the sinner's laboured breath, yet a third one strives with death;
And another toils upon an office stool...

Judge, priest, doctor, clerk – these are careers for those with a sense of responsibility towards society. Many Old Edwardians followed this path, including many known to Tolkien, and information about their lives appears in the *Old Edwardians Gazette* through the years. W. H. Ehrhardt was called to the Bar in 1919; W.H. Payton was in the Indian Civil Service - he was appointed Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma in 1944. Some were churchmen; the Rev. J.N.E. Tredennick was appointed principal of Bishop Wilson College on the Isle of Man, reported in 1925. Many boys started work as clerks in the family business; Hilary Tolkien had gone to work in the Incedon firm in 1910 (ref. 4) before deciding that he would like to be a farmer.

Doctors: one name recognised by Tolkien readers may be (Leonard) Gamgee. Professor of Surgery at Birmingham University, he was later a Governor of King Edward's School. Tolkien was the Oxford representative Governor from late 1937 to 1940; signatures in the King Edward's Governors' records show that they were present at the same meetings. Tolkien gave an alternative source for the name 'Gamgee'. He did not mention Leonard Gamgee until after his death in 1956 (ref. 2). However 'Gaffer Gamgee' first appears in the 'Third Version' of the first drafts early in 1938 (ref. 10). Tolkien's signature is next to Leonard Gamgee's in the King Edward's record of the Governors' meeting of February 1938, suggesting that they were sitting next to each other. It seems probable that the meeting with Leonard Gamgee had been the reminder of the Birmingham name for cotton-wool – invented by Leonard's father.

Although entries for Tolkien in the *List* and the *Blue Book* show that he won many class prizes he did not win the yearly competitions – there were many highly intelligent boys in the school. We know that Tolkien did enter at least one competition set in 1909, and he probably entered others. The *List*⁸ for December 1909 gives details of twelve assignments for which prizes would be awarded in 1910. There were two science prizes, four for English, three for Latin and three for Greek. The tasks set were demanding: in December 1909 the prize for Latin Verse required boys to write 'about 60 hexameters' on the subject of Arctic and Antarctic Expeditions. And for the Greek Verse prize boys had to translate into Classical Greek an excerpt from Shakespeare: '*Romeo and Juliet* Act III Scene iii "Hold thy desperate" ... to ... "is coming."' The tasks had to be completed by the third week in May.

The Lightfoot Thucydides prize for 1910 required boys to take an exam on the *Fifth Book*. In 1965 Tolkien received a letter from Zillah Sherring who had purchased *The Fifth Book of Thucydides*. It had a handwritten inscription in Gothic at the back and Tolkien's name on the flyleaf. He replied that it was his² and that the meaning of the inscription was: "I read the words of these books of Greek history in the sixth month of this year: thousand, nine hundreds, ten, of our Lord in order to gain the prize given every year to the boy knowing most about Thucydides." However Tolkien was unsuccessful, in 1910 the prize was won by Sidney Barrowclough. In 1911 the *Sixth Book of Thucydides* was set, and the prize was won by W.H. Payton and F. Scopes.

In addition to academic work there was the School Club. E.W. Badger listed the activities covered by the Club as

cricket and football [rugby, not soccer], music and swimming, use of the library of 2500 books, the right to attend and speak at the school debating and literary society, membership of the natural history society... and a copy of the school *Chronicle*, which is published six times a year⁸.

Boys had to pay a small annual subscription to belong – two shillings and sixpence by 1911. Almost all boys were members of the Club.

There is nothing to show whether Ronald and Hilary Tolkien were members of the Club when they were younger (Hilary started at King Edward's in January 1905). According to the report on 'Debating Characters' for 1910-11 (ref. 11) J.R.R. Tolkien had been a member from 1909, whereas Christopher Wiseman had first spoken in 1907. Tolkien made his maiden speech in October 1909 when he was seventeen. It was reported that he made a 'good humorous speech'¹¹. Before this speech at the Debating Society in English he had previously spoken in the annual Latin debate, in March 1909. By his last year Tolkien was Secretary of the Debating Society, Secretary of the Football Club, Captain of Measures' house and in his final term the Editor of the *Chronicle*, with W.H. Payton.

At King Edward's attendance and physical exercise at the gymnasium were compulsory, other sports were voluntary as they were part of the Club. There was no space for a sports field in the centre of Birmingham; boys had to take the tram two miles along the Bristol Road to the playing-fields at Eastern Road. Tolkien became house-captain in 1910 and gained his colours in the next season, by '(legitimate) ferocity' as he wrote to his son Michael². In 1911 he combined several interests by writing a humorous epic poem about a house rugby match, *The Battle of the Eastern Field*. This first appeared in the *Chronicle*, March 1911.

There will be more about this poem and Tolkien's friends in the next *Mallorn*. And in the meantime we hope you will be able to come on the visit to King Edward's School from Sarehole, Birmingham, in May.

Maggie Burns is at Birmingham City Library.

1. *KES Blue Book* - 1901 onwards, this appeared twice yearly, January and September

2. Tolkien, J.R.R. *Letters* London: George Allen & Unwin 1981 p70

3. *Old Edwardians Gazette* – the Old Boys' magazine, 1890 onwards, at least once a year, sometimes more often.

4. Hammond, Wayne & Scull, Christina *The J.R.R. Tolkien Reader's Guide*

London: HarperCollinsPublishers 2006

5. *KES Reports* (later called Accounts) annual from 1887 onwards. Financial information about all the Foundation schools. This includes school fees, statistics about the pupils and their ages, and teachers in the various schools. The records of Governors' meetings and the KES admissions registers are manuscript and are held in the King Edward's School Archives at the Foundation Office in Edgbaston. The St. Philip's admissions register is manuscript and is held at the Oratory, Edgbaston.

6. Carpenter, Humphrey, *J.R.R. Tolkien A Biography* London: George Allen and Unwin 1977

7. MS St. Philip's Admissions Register 1902

8. Badger, E.W. *King Edward's School* 'School' 14-17. ed. R. Latimer. London: John Murray 1908

9. *KES Lists* – 1859 onwards, twice yearly (July and December): similar information to the *Blue Book* but in different formats.

10. Tolkien, Christopher, *The Return of the Shadow* London: HarperCollins 2002

11. *KES Chronicle*, 1872 onwards. In Tolkien's time there were usually two editions a term.

Commentary: (V)Arda Marred - The Evolution of the Queen of the Stars

Kristine Larsen

One of the most powerful characters, of either gender, to appear in the published form of *The Silmarillion* is undoubtedly Varda (Elbereth), Queen of the Stars. Complementary in abilities to Manwë, her spouse, she above all others is said to be feared by Melkor. She creates the first generation of stars in the early history of Eä, fills the Two Lamps with light, and hallows the Silmarils. Her creation of the second generation of stars, to illuminate the coming of the Elves, is called the "greatest of all the works of the Valar