



If you read the autobiography "A Cornish Childhood" by A.L. Rowse, it tells the story of Rowse's early childhood in St. Austell. When the story reaches his secondary school age in the early 1920's, it becomes interlinked with our own school's history, because his headmaster at St. Austell County School was Mr. Arthur Godfrey Jenkinson, who in 1921 became the first Headmaster of Hemsworth Secondary School, (the Grammar School in later years). During the First World War of 1914-18, Mr. Jenkinson was away from his school in Cornwall much of the time. He had started there in 1910, and in December 1914, he joined the 24th Royal Fusiliers as a private. He later held a commission in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, from which he was discharged in March 1919 with the rank of Major. He served two years in France and fifteen months in Italy, and throughout this war, he left behind at his school an Oxford M.A. gown hanging on a peg in the corner of his room, and his mortar board, which lay in a cupboard. He was described by Rowse as having "a dark, square face, with stern, set jaw and fixed eyes staring out beneath the college mortar board in photographs of staff and prefects from before the War." Upon his return, Mr. Jenkinson, and Miss Griffiths, the Welsh senior mistress at the school, soon recognised the academic talents of the young Rowse, and set about nurturing them, and encouraging this young pupil to consider a place at Oxford University by applying for one of the two scholarships offered by the county of Cornwall at that time. From a poor, working-class family, Rowse received no encouragement or likelihood of financial support from his parents. His father was a china clay worker, and the semi-illiterate family kept a shop in the village of Tregannissey. Mr. Jenkinson introduced the young Rowse to Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, a Cornish author and man of letters who published under the pen name of Q, and who was to remain Rowse's friend and mentor throughout his life. While studying for his scholarship exams, Rowse was dismayed to learn that his respected headmaster had accepted a Headship at the new Hemsworth Secondary School, to begin in 1921. Mr. Jenkinson duly left Cornwall for Yorkshire, with Miss Griffiths following shortly afterwards. Rowse said in his book,

"If he had not kept an eye on me from Yorkshire, where he went to take on a new and soon very successful school at Hemsworth, I should have been lost. But he kept in touch faithfully, writing me letters of encouragement from his new charge, where he must have been very busy laying the foundations, suggesting the steps I should take, and handing me over as a special legacy to the new headmaster who came in his place."

(A Cornish Childhood)

Having achieved a place at Christ Church, Rowse obtained a double First in History, and was shortly afterwards elected to All Souls in 1925 where he became the first such Fellow to have a working-class background. Whilst an undergraduate, he developed a reputation for both his devotion to speaking precise English and for his open homosexuality. In 1929, he was awarded his Master of Arts degree, and in 1927 was appointed lecturer at Merton College, where he stayed until 1930. In 1931, he unsuccessfully contested the parliamentary seat of Penryn and Falmouth for the Labour Party, and then became a lecturer at the London School of Economics. Celebrity followed the publication of his autobiography and he made many lecture tours in the United States of America and elsewhere. This British historian was best known for his poetry about Cornwall and his work on Elizabethan England. Among many of the honours bestowed on Rowse were a fellowship of the Royal Historical Society, an honorary doctorate of the University of Exeter and the Benson Medal of the Royal Society of Literature. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1996. He died on 3rd. October, 1997 at Trenarren, St. Austell, and bequeathed his collection of books, manuscripts, diaries, and correspondence to the University of Exeter.

In 1934, Rowse was able to repay the kindness and friendship of Mr. Jenkinson by attending the Speech Day of Hemsworth Secondary School and giving an address to the gathered parents, pupils and staff at the Hemsworth Hippodrome. Mr. Jenkinson had just been appointed to the local magistrate's bench, and was now Headmaster of an extremely successful school of 452 pupils, with four Scholarships to Universities awarded that year, and nine Higher School Certificate successes.

In a word to parents – "poor, harassed, and often worried parents," as he described them – Rowse said the best advice he could give was to watch their children and find out what was their natural bent. It was no good trying to drive them into something not fitted for them. If the children had a talent, no pains should be spared to develop it. He stated that those who were best at examinations were not necessarily the best citizens, nor were they the worst. Winning prizes was rather a technical affair. The important thing was to turn out good, fully developed men and women, for if the country was to come out of its difficulties (these were the 'hungry thirties') it needed every scrap of ability coming through the schools. This was good advice which came from the heart, and reflected his own experiences.