

WELBECK COLLEGE OPENING 1953
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598

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THE first term of Welbeck College is now in progress. This establishment is an experiment on the part of the Army Council. Its object is to provide candidates for regular commissions in the technical corps of the Army. It bears, however, no resemblance to the cadet schools which flourished in the past on the Continent. It is not under military discipline and there is no bias in favour of military education in the curriculum. Where it is, so far as I know, unique, is that it provides an education on public school lines for senior boys only. The second peculiarity is that the pupils are pledged to undertake a period of military service of at least five years. This experiment has clearly been made in order to meet a need. The Army Council would not have set up this new school had there been available sufficient candidates of the type required coming through existing channels. It hopes to extend its field of recruitment. In this regard the fact that the school has been established in the North Midlands is significant, since northern England has been providing an astonishingly small proportion of the officers of the Army.

I will speak first of the setting. It is the celebrated, almost legendary, Welbeck Abbey, the seat of the Dukes of Portland. While I was there, looking out in all directions on magnificent views—slightly artificial in that so much of the timber has been grown to make panoramas, but none the worse for that—I was casting my mind back and wondering how much impression my surroundings made upon me when I was sixteen. I believe I should have appreciated the beauty of those avenues, woodlands and gardens, and the green lawns which in this country are our best recompense for a rainy summer. Welbeck, however, is not only one of the great houses of England, but contains a number of special curiosities of its own, mostly the handiwork of an eccentric Duke in the latter part of the last century. They include the celebrated sunk garden and a number of fantastic tunnels, along one of which a carriage-and-pair used to be driven. It certainly is a place to excite the imagination.

The school has the greater part of the splendid house itself. The State apartments and two sets of family apartments are still in the hands of the family, but most of the rest has passed to Welbeck College. The buildings have fitted themselves easily enough into their new rôle. The enormous room known as "Queen Mary's bedroom" has become the largest dormitory, for twelve boys. The enormous "underground ballroom" is used as a gymnasium, some sixty family portraits still remaining on the walls. It is a curious room, about 160 ft. by 60 ft., but less odd than some descriptions make it out to be. When I first read of it in my youth I got the impression that it

A WINDOW ON THE WORLD. THE NEW ARMY SCHOOL.

By CYRIL FALLS,
Sometime Chichele Professor of the History of War, Oxford.

of £90 a year. In this respect the principles of Dartmouth have been adopted. Thus no suitable boy will be excluded for want of means on the part of his parents. After their two years' course all boys who are reported to be suitable by the Headmaster will enter the Royal Military Academy without an examination, but before entering will carry out the brief obligatory period of service in the ranks. At Sandhurst they will have opportunities of preparing



THE OPENING OF A NEW TERM, A NEW YEAR AND A NEW PROJECT: NEW BOYS OF THE ARMY'S PUBLIC SCHOOL, WELBECK COLLEGE, THREE OF THE FIRST FORTY-EIGHT PUPILS, ARRIVING FOR THE FIRST TIME AT ONE OF THE ENTRANCES OF WELBECK ABBEY.

themselves for degree courses in engineering and science. Then, after receiving their commissions in technical corps, comes the prospect of vacancies at Cambridge or the Military College of Science.

As I have already stated, the need which the College has been formed to meet is the provision of officers for the technical corps. The largest proportion will go to the R.E.M.E., which maintains so big a proportion of the Army's technical equipment. I imagine that the Royal Engineers will

years. Physical training is in the hands of a Guards instructor.

Here, then, a house which modern taxation has rendered altogether unmanageable as a family habitation has been turned into a school, without structural alteration or, I was glad to note, any of the outward sprawling evidences of "conversion" which ruin the character of such a place. So far as I can see, Welbeck

Abbey is fortunate in its tenants. I am sure that they are fortunate in it, and in this I include staff as well as pupils. Perhaps the chief problem of the former is, ironically, education—that of their children—in a district off the beaten track. The playing fields are splendid. One instance of the adaptations made, which also reveals the scale on which things were once done at Welbeck, is to be found in a range of nine class-rooms beside the great ballroom. They

have been provided by dividing three supper rooms, which existed for the special purpose of feeding hundreds of dancers, into three rooms each. Near by is the "pillar hall," which was an apartment for sitting out and is now the boys' common room. The highly imaginative might smell ghostly Havanas and hear the popping of ghostly champagne corks in such a setting, but perhaps young people of scientific bent are too matter-of-fact to do so.

One can not prophesy about the future of Welbeck College, which might conceivably be swept away by a wave of disarmament. I see no reason, however, why it should not endure even if the state of the world permitted the reduction of the Army. It has clearly cost a great deal of money, since the work has involved, apart from the school buildings themselves, conversion of other buildings into quarters for the staff. At the same time, in terms of the cost of building a school in these days, it can not have been expensive. And the finest school ever likely to be built would be a pale shadow of this, even if it contained a few more gadgets—and a number of fads. The setting is without price. The school is particularly lucky in that from the æsthetic point of view it might be the owner of the thousands of acres of the great estate which can be surveyed from its windows. It has received every possible help from the Duke of Portland, who does not live in the Abbey, but in another house on the estate—though he uses the State apartments for entertaining—and has been appointed Vice-Patron of the College.

Alongside it the business of an estate which has been to a large extent commercialised goes on. A well-known firm of canners stores its peas in one huge building. That

State apartments and two sets of family apartments are still in the hands of the family, but most of the rest has passed to Welbeck College. The buildings have fitted themselves easily enough into their new rôle. The enormous room known as "Queen Mary's bedroom" has become the largest dormitory, for twelve boys. The enormous "underground ballroom" is used as a gymnasium, some sixty family portraits still remaining on the walls. It is a curious room, about 160 ft. by 60 ft., but less odd than some descriptions make it out to be. When I first read of it in my youth I got the impression that it was tunnelled like a station on the Bakerloo, but it is, in fact, deeply excavated, and is adequately lit and ventilated by roof windows. The vast empty library, a sad sight, will be taken over for the same purpose, but I do not suppose that the school will ever fill a fifth of its space. The modern Chapel, standing where once stood the riding school of the writing, equestrian and fighting first Cavendish Duke of Newcastle, suits the school perfectly. The Ministry of Works has used the new institution very well in the provision of modern fittings.

Because the ages of the boys come within such narrow limits, roughly sixteen to eighteen, the school has had to start gradually, and this term has begun with only forty-eight boys. Had it started at full strength, it would have been completely emptied in two years and have had to start all over again. It is to be brought up to a strength of 150. The method of entry is for parents to fill in forms of application provided by the War Office, after which the headmasters are asked to furnish confidential reports. Candidates are given a medical test and interviewed at Army headquarters. They then sit for an examination, but they are awarded marks for character and personality as well as for ability. The first forty-eight were chosen from a very large field. I enquired about their origins and was told that seven came from independent schools—public schools or those on the borderline—thirty-five from grammar schools, three from technical schools and three from Army schools in Germany. The youngest is just over sixteen.

The tuition, board, lodging, maintenance (including clothing), books, stationery, laundry, and even pocket-money, are provided by the War Office. Parents whose means suffice will be asked to contribute to maintenance according to their circumstances, so that some will pay nothing and others up to a maximum

themselves for degree courses in engineering and science. Then, after receiving their commissions in technical corps, comes the prospect of vacancies at Cambridge or the Military College of Science.

As I have already stated, the need which the College has been formed to meet is the provision of officers for the technical corps. The largest proportion will go to the R.E.M.E., which maintains so big a proportion of the Army's technical equipment. I imagine that the Royal Engineers will come second, and the R.A.O.C. third. For this reason the greatest weight is laid on mathematical and scientific subjects, and practical workshop instruction will be given. Yet other aspects of a good general education, including English, a modern language and history, will not be



THE HEADMASTER OF WELBECK COLLEGE, MR. D. A. RICKARDS, FORMERLY A HOUSEMASTER AT BLUNDILLS SCHOOL, DEVON, INTERVIEWING SOME OF THE NEW BOYS. IN HIS ARTICLE ON THIS PAGE CAPTAIN FALLS DESCRIBES THE NEW SCHOOL AND ITS OBJECTS.

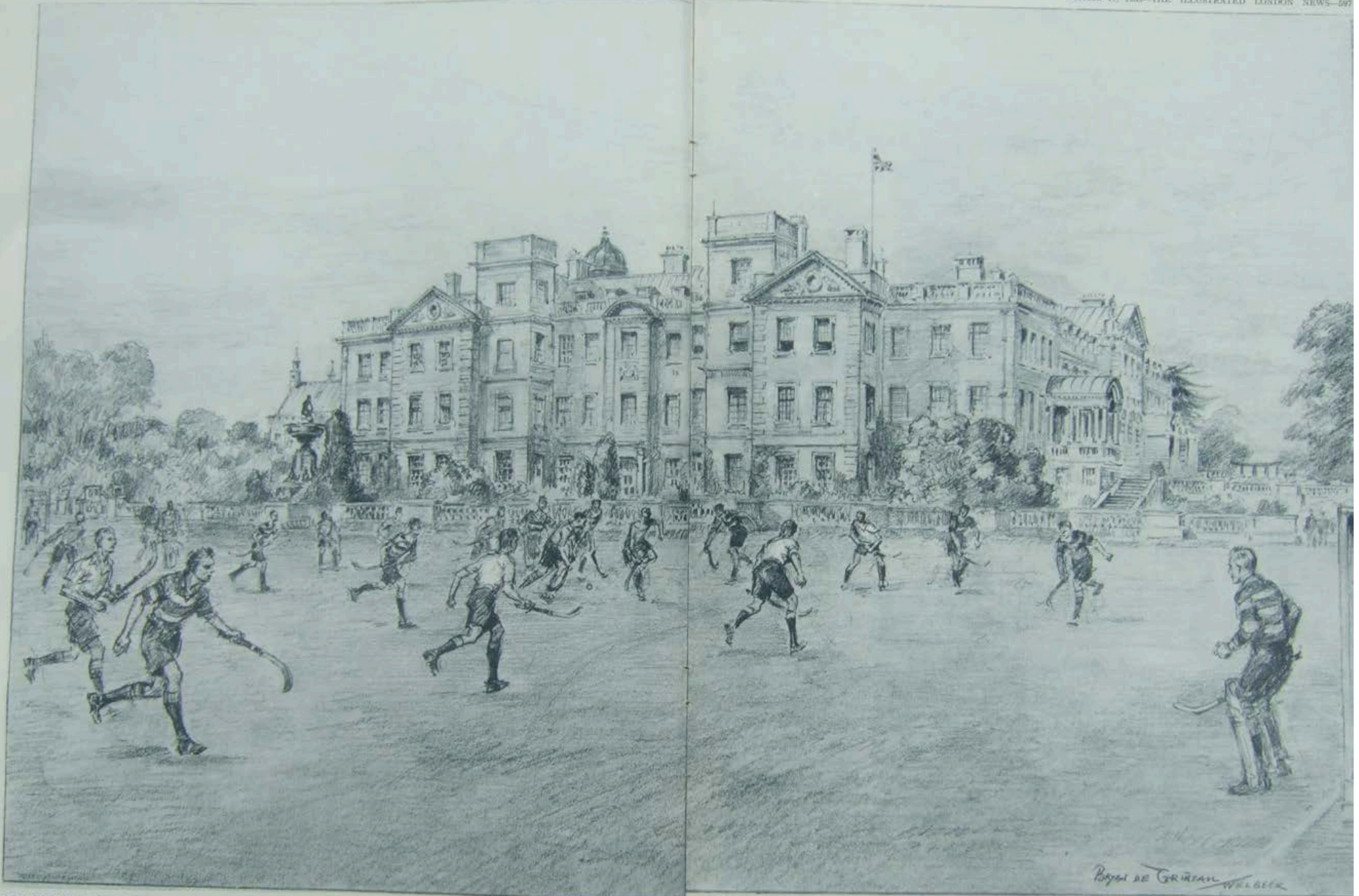
neglected. Welbeck College will, in short, follow the lines of the senior forms on the "science" or "modern" side of a public school. I may add that the competition for appointments on the staff appears to have been as strong as that for entry as pupils, so that there is every prospect of the school reaching and maintaining a high standard, if its excellent start can be taken as a promise for the future. The intention is to form a number of the societies which have become features of the life of many schools in recent

years, who does not live in the State apartments for the estate—though he uses the State apartments for entertaining—and has been appointed Vice-Patron of the College.

Alongside it the business of an estate which has been to a large extent commercialised goes on. A well-known firm of canners stores its peas in one huge building. The biggest walled garden I have ever seen grows market produce. Close at hand is a horticultural nursery. Farming of various types is carried out on a very big scale. As for the gardens and pleasure grounds, it is remarkable how great an effort has been made, with but a small fraction of the staff of the old days, to keep them both tidy and

beautiful and to preserve what amenities it is possible to save. There are still partridges in the stubble and pheasants in the woods. A good many of the great houses, even those inhabited—generally in part only—by the original owners, have an air of decay and gloom. Some, of course, are in full decay or, as in the case of the neighbouring Clumber, have disappeared so completely that, unless you were told there had been houses on their sites, you might not guess it. Welbeck has avoided a fate of that kind.

From his frame on the wall the eccentric Duke of whom I have spoken looks down on some extraordinary changes, but they are social rather than structural. The scene from the windows is unaltered and the appearance of the Abbey virtually so. He was, by the way, an extremely handsome man and, to judge by his portrait, something of a dandy; and his almost pathological shyness can not have been so acute during his younger days, since he was a Member of the House of Commons. Whatever be the future of Welbeck, it is never likely to be the setting of a scene as odd, or, in a sense, as pathetic as the start of his journeys to London: driving to Retford Station with the carriage blinds down—sometimes, it is said, along a tunnel which emerged on a quiet road—and then having the carriage run on to a flat truck and attached to the London train, to be met by his London horses at King's Cross and borne away, without ever having left his seat. Great numbers of much more famous men are connected with Welbeck, but he gave it some of its most remarkable qualities. Now the whistle of the P.T. instructor sounds in his underground ballroom.



THE FIRST TERM OF A UNIQUE SCHOOL, IN SURROUNDINGS OF DUCAL SPLENDOUR; THE FIRST ENTRY

Welbeck College, the Army's new boarding-school at Welbeck Abbey, near Worksop, in Nottinghamshire, opened for its first term on September 26 with forty-eight boys. In the spring term a further twenty-seven will enter the school; and the strength will eventually be built up to 150. It is obvious that, since the course is one of

two years, if the school had started at full strength it would be completely emptied every two years without any opportunity to build up any continuity and tradition. The headmaster of the new school is Mr. D. A. Rickards, M.A., formerly a housemaster at Blundells School, Tiverton, Devon. There were 200 applicants for the first

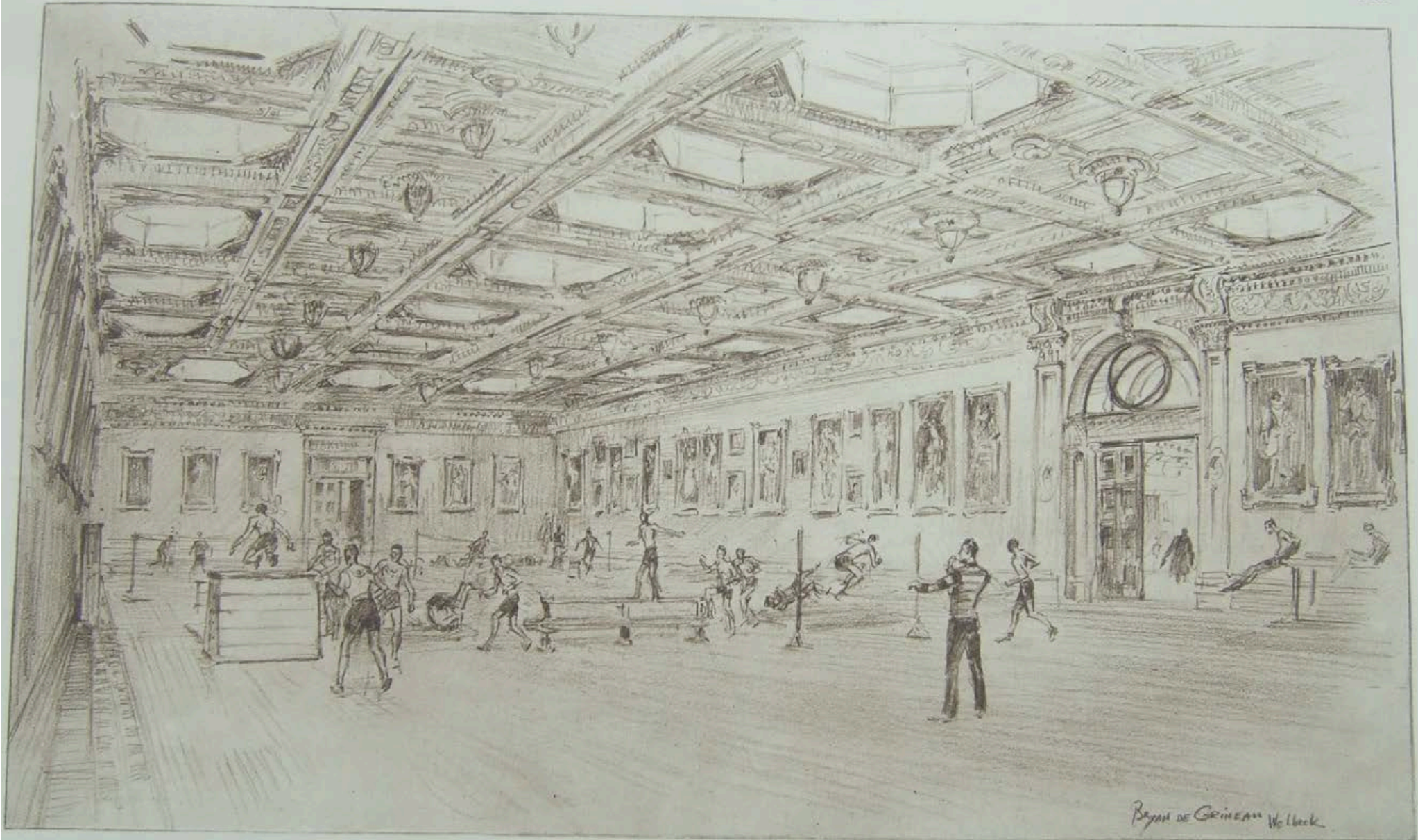
DRAWN BY OUR SPECIAL

OF WELBECK COLLEGE PLAYING HOCKEY BEFORE THE IMPRESSIVE SOUTH FRONT OF WELBECK ABBEY

46 places and 130 for the second 27. The forty-eight chosen boys for the first term are drawn as follows: seven from independent or public schools; thirty-five from grammar schools; three from technical schools; and three from Army schools in Germany. The school's crest contains crossed swords; but otherwise the life is civilian. ARTIST, BRYAN DE GRIGNAN.

The boys wear grey and are organised under prefects, and the games plan includes cricket, football and hockey. There are also facilities for sailing. Curriculum includes cadet training but only in ordinary school lines, and boys have little to remind them that their destination is Sandhurst.

BRYAN DE GRIGNAN WELBECK



Byron de Grimean Welbeck

"NOW THE WHISTLE OF THE P.T. INSTRUCTOR SOUNDS" IN THE DUKE'S UNDERGROUND BALLROOM: THE UNIQUE GYMNASIUM OF THE ARMY'S NEW PUBLIC SCHOOL, WELBECK COLLEGE, IN WHAT IS PROBABLY THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST PRIVATE BALLROOM AND SURROUNDED BY FAMILY PORTRAITS.



"QUEEN MARY'S BEDROOM"—NOW THE LARGEST DORMITORY (WITH TWELVE BEDS) OF WELBECK COLLEGE, THE NEW SENIOR PUBLIC SCHOOL STARTED BY THE WAR OFFICE IN WELBECK ABBEY, THE FAMOUS SEAT OF THE DUKES OF PORTLAND.



ON THE SITE OF THE FAMOUS RIDING SCHOOL BUILT BY THE FIRST CAVENDISH DUKE OF NEWCASTLE IN STUART TIMES: THE CHAPEL OF WELBECK ABBEY NOW USED AS A SCHOOL CHAPEL BY THE FIRST PUPILS OF THE NEW WAR OFFICE PUBLIC SCHOOL.

THE NOBLE SETTING OF THE WAR OFFICE'S NEW PUBLIC SCHOOL: A NEW LIFE FOR THE SPLENDOURS OF WELBECK ABBEY.

The great majority of Welbeck Abbey, the famous palace of the Dukes of Portland in the Dukeries—in Nottinghamshire—has been leased by the War Office; and as Captain Falls writes in his article on page 598, "its object is to provide candidates for regular commissions in the technical corps of the Army." It is not, however, a military establishment but in practice resembles the senior part of the modern side of an ordinary public school. Boys enter it at the age of sixteen and after two years and a brief obligatory service in

the ranks, pass without examination into the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. The general tendency of their education 'at Welbeck College (as the new school is called) is scientific, but the other aspects of a good general education are not neglected. The boys are drawn from many sources and "the tuition, board, lodging, maintenance (including clothing), books, stationery, laundry, and even pocket-money, are provided by the War Office"; although parents whose means suffice are asked to contribute.

DRAWN BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST, BRYAN DE GRINEAU.



"CHAPEL COURT"—ONE OF THE ENTRANCES TO WELBECK ABBEY: ON THE LEFT, THE STABLES, NOW CANTEN AND KITCHENS; ON THE RIGHT, THE CHAPEL, ON THE SITE OF THE OLD RIDING SCHOOL.

WHERE SCENES HISTORIC, ROYAL AND DUCAL SERVE A NEW

Welbeck Abbey, in which the War Office's new public school, Welbeck College, is situated, is a huge and impressive mansion and palace, set in a landscape of great natural and contrived beauty. Originally a house of Premonstratensian Canons, it passed at the Reformation to the Whalley family, and then, via the redoubtable Bess of Hardwick, to the Cavendish Dukes of Newcastle, becoming finally the seat of the Dukes of Portland. The best-known among its owners are that William Cavendish whom Charles I. created Duke of Newcastle, and

DRAWN BY OUR SPECIAL



THE SEMI-CIRCULAR PRINT CORRIDOR OF THE ABBEY, FORMERLY CLOSELY HUNG WITH PRINTS, IS NOW USED BY WELBECK COLLEGE FOR INFORMAL LECTURES AND CONCERTS, AS HERE.

SCHOLASTIC PURPOSE FOR THE BOYS OF WELBECK COLLEGE.

who was the author of a famous book on horsemanship and husband of one of the most remarkable women of the seventeenth century; and the fifth Duke of Portland, who was a great builder and was responsible for the huge underground constructions and tunnels which are such a feature of Welbeck Abbey. Both of these Dukes built riding schools; but that of the first was superseded by the present chapel, while the later one was one of the most famous of the large Victorian constructions in glass and cast-iron.

ARTIST, BRYAN DE GRINEAU.