

C T Major (1869 – 1938)
Headmaster – King’s College (1905 – 1926)

Two short-term Headmasters followed the premature death of the founder Mr Graham Bruce in 1901 and both inherited a school that was in dire straits. The roll was decreasing dramatically which was, quite possibly in response to an ‘inexperienced and transitory group’ of teachers. Morale was in decline and by the time Charles Thomas Major returned to the College (he had established the school with Graham Bruce in 1896 but had left to serve in the Board War) in 1905 the roll was at its lowest – 72!

Nearly every aspect of College life was in the doldrums – there was a ‘drop in keenness for sport; there was a lack of esprit de corps’ and all this must have had an overflow effect on academic life. It took a man of strong will, a devoted schoolmaster, an astute businessman to come to the rescue – Charles T Major!

He bought the College property and became proprietor, headmaster, and bursar. The College’s history, *O Floreat Semper* records qualities of a man utterly dedicated to all that the Public School system of England stood for. He insisted that ‘the school with the Chapel at the centre of its concern for boys’ spiritual and moral welfare; the boarding Houses the heart of the school and pastoral care; opportunities for leadership and the prefectorial system; emphasis on the physical as well as the academic in compulsory games; development of the esprit de corps and emphasis on public spirit and service’ was still to feature distinctive New Zealand qualities embedded in it through the pioneering spirit and so evident in its sister schools: Wanganui, Nelson, Waitaki and Christ’s College.

It was Major who decided on the move to Middlemore; he bought the Otahuhu property. The school was in much better heart by 1922 after the years of the First World War – there was a roll of 422, far too many for the overcrowded classrooms and dormitories. The fifty acres adjacent to the Auckland Golf Club was four times the size of the recently vacated Remuera property – more than adequate for the next 20 years when Selwyn and then Averill Houses were established on newly acquired property.

When he retired as Headmaster in 1926 C T Major did not disassociate himself from College life – far from it! He was a member of the governing Board, now the proprietor of the College (he was a ‘governor for life’) and was appointed ‘a committee of one’ to see to the running of the College in 1930. For that year he was Bursar, Chairman of the Board, and the ‘one-man committee’ – a financial Tsar! He had been very instrumental in the appointment of his successor as Headmaster (Canon H K Archdall) and relationships between the pair were at times far from amicable. As with another successor (G N T Greenbank) King’s was his school, his finances were heavily involved and Major was wielding such a strong hand of management that Archdall felt forced to resign (was dismissed?) in 1935.

By the time of his death in 1938 C T Major had been heavily involved in the matters financial at the College – he was liquidator of the King’s College Company, was paid off for loans he had made; reneged on further support of the Chapel building after giving considerable funds to the initial project. He served for a short time as Headmaster at King’s Prep.

Major had fulfilled his vision – King’s was well on the way to becoming an academic institution of renown, earning a reputation up and down the country, second to none.

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