

Foreword

Canon Brendan Clover,
Provost of the Woodard Schools

Canon Edward Lowe was the first Provost of the Midland region of Woodard Schools and was in post from the founding of the first school in the region, St Chad's School, at Denstone in 1868. The Woodard educational movement was on a march north.

For the past few years I have held the same office and I took particular pleasure – when the school at Abbots Bromley was open – to recount how the Founder, Nathaniel Woodard, was a ‘utilitarian and being so could see little point in the education of the female gender, given their limited access to the corridors of power in Victorian society’. My *coup de grâce* was to tell the pupils that it was the Provost who persuaded the founder to go ahead with S. Mary and S. Anne's School in Abbots Bromley, thereby covering myself with reflected glory. Pride, after all, does come before a fall!

It has taken this wonderful book for me to realise the error of my ways and my deception of countless pupils over past years! For the author tells us that Nathaniel was never convinced that the education of the female gender was a worthwhile and godly pursuit and therefore my revered predecessor did not win the argument: it is simply (though it isn't simple, of course) that he and the Founder managed to ‘disagree well’, to respect the integrity of each other's arguments and not to allow them to destroy their friendship and mutual respect. They moved on. The rest they say is history and history is a succession of events. (Discuss?)

So already I have learnt something new from Penny Thompson and I am grateful for it. I must stop talking about matters that are not true. The devil, they say, is in the detail.

I am convinced that this book will vouchsafe to you many insights and delights – and perhaps take you to places you have not inhabited before. It is well worth the read.

When I talk to young people about Nathaniel Woodard, I ask them whether they know the name of the most significant Victorian engineer.

They tend to. And then I make the suggestion that our Founder was as significant in the educational world of Victorian England as Brunel was in civil engineering. And I believe it to be true: for the Founder's vision was about the transformation of society through the gift of Christian education. The fact that the education of women became aligned to it only accentuates the prophetic element of the Woodard movement. We might think twice about Nathaniel's attitude nowadays, but we can give thanks for the Lowe family and for all that flowed from them. Now, thanks to this book, we know a lot more about it.

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