



Portrait (left) reveals how coming manhood has altered once-chubby face of Prince Charles. At right, he imitates his father's famous hands-behind-the-back stance.

Prince Charles Grows Up

As the future king of England turns 14 on Wednesday, he has just emerged from an awkward, imperious boyhood and is now attending one of the world's toughest schools

By VERE CONNAUGHT



"THAT'S HIM," whispered the small boy nudging his neighbor as the Gordonstoun School song rose in the Scottish air. "It's Prince Charles—don't let him see you're looking at him!"

Since the heir to England's throne and his six detectives arrived at this Spartan academy in the Highlands last spring, an almost miraculous silence has fallen. Not only the boys but the entire population of Britain seems bound together in a loyal conspiracy of silence.

Even London's notoriously brash newspapers have kept their reportorial eyes averted, their camera lenses covered.

So much for the mask of silence. What of the behind-the-scenes drama at Buckingham Palace which accompanied the packing off of this small lad to what may be the most rugged school in the world? How is he facing the challenges of growing up as he nears his 14th birthday Wednesday?

Queen Elizabeth herself finally decided on Gordonstoun as the school for Charles. Rumor persists that his attempts to pass an entrance examination for Eton had failed and the choice was limited. More probably, the balance was tipped by his father's repeated entreaties to let the lad go to his own old school and, as he gruffly put it, "make a man of himself."

Whatever the cause, Elizabeth announced that when Charles left his preparatory school, Cheam, at the age of 13 he would travel 600 miles north to the barren, beautiful, but distinctly glacial school perched on the icy North Sea coast.

Gordonstoun will certainly toughen Britain's future monarch, as well as widen his eyes to frontiers outside his own island. A gaunt complex of

gray stone buildings, it was founded by an educational zealot, Dr. Kurt Hahn, in the 1930s.

From a source very close to the royal family, I learned that Charles had not shown up too well at Cheam. He was a somewhat difficult boy, inclined to be imperious and easily distressed when thwarted in getting his own way.

I hear, too, that he suffered from a distressing lack of coordination when playing field games and that he had aroused little admiration from his schoolmates in team sports. Charles' idea was to get the ball and hang on to it.

For the son of a yachtsman, polo player, and rugged outdoorsman, this is a pretty acute disadvantage. Upper-class British boys expect the sons of famous dads to show up well. Elizabeth knows this and worries. Perhaps this was another reason for sending him to Gordonstoun.

The other 400 lads at school had been well primed. They made every effort not to look agape at the future king who had landed among them. As one youngster told his mother during the vacation this summer: "It was pretty weird at first, but we soon got used to it. He's no different, really, from any other new boy."

LIKE MOST SCHOOLS, Gordonstoun has traditional ways of initiating a "newbug"—campus name for a newcomer. With Charles, they began with his being ignored for a day or two.

But every morning thereafter he rolled out of his black iron bed at 7, pulled on shorts and gym shoes and, naked above the waist, joined a file of boys from his house. They trotted a full three minutes in the crisp morning air, a distance of 400 yards. An icy shower followed.

"It is more of a breathing exercise than anything else," the school's warden, Henry Brereton,

once told me. "The boys may not run fast, but they clean out their lungs."

Gordonstoun is noted for the physical toughness of its regimen and for the rigid self-discipline expected of its students. Almost obscured is a sound curriculum: Charles is studying English, divinity, Latin, history, music, French, geography, mathematics, and seamanship.

In his second week, the boys around the Prince thawed toward him. He was asked: "What's it like to be a prince?" His answers were evasive, and the questions were soon dropped.

AT HALF-TERM, other boys had plans to meet their families. Prince Charles seemed to be at loose ends. Then a slightly older lad asked: "Anyone like to come fishing with me?"

"I would," said Charles earnestly. "I'm jolly good at fishing."

He was, too. The two boys spent an absorbing afternoon together. Nobody can remember what they caught, but the outing was a big success. Charles had made a friend.

By term's end, he was "in" at Gordonstoun and was allowed to wear the regulation day uniform of navy blue. Few boys fail this first hurdle (about four in 60, I was told), but Charles made it in July, before the school closed for vacation.

So this term, which began Sept. 24, he is no longer a "newbug." He has won his spurs in one of the hardest schools in the world.

If the school's principles work as well with Charles as they did with his father, Queen Elizabeth's worries should soon be over. Critics say the boys who leave Gordonstoun lack sophistication—that they are better at rope-handling than hand-holding with pretty girls—but this won't upset the Queen and her discipline-oriented husband.