

Boys Together: English Public Schools, 1800-1864

by **John Chandos**

Although English public schools project an image of clean, polite, and uniformed boys living together in collective worship of God, team games, and academic standards, the early years of these schools had a reality that was far different. The early 19th Century public schools that existed before the Clarendon Commission reforms were jungles inhabited by a warlike tribe of self-governing boys, into whose social, sporting, and moral lives the masters were not admitted. Boys were chiefly educated by street fighting, poaching, and rioting, and, according to the political enemies of the schools, acquiring a taste for liquor and "a passion for female society of the most degraded kind." In this engrossing book, John Chandos examines the public schools in the last half century before their reform. Using journals, letters, and autobiographies of the time, he provides revealing anecdotes about all aspects of public school life—from academics and sports to vice, discipline, fagging, and religion. Chandos not only illuminates the harsh treatment boys experienced but also shows why parents continued to commit their sons to this system. Parents were persuaded—the fathers usually from personal experience—that the public schools gave a realistic preparation for the wicked and treacherous world that lay ahead, and that a boy who had weathered the ordeal of a public school was a confirmed survivor.