

# **The Magnetism of Edward Thring**

An edited version of the talk given to the

**Uppingham Local History Study Group**

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By

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# The Magnetism of Edward Thring

Malcolm Tozer

## Introduction

I started teaching at Uppingham 50 years ago, the World Cup summer of 1966; I left in 1989, 27 years ago. Where did all those years go?

Raise a hand if you have read Sir George Parkin's two-volume Life and Letters of Edward Thring from beginning to end. (No hands were raised.)

No surprise there; it is hardly a thrilling page-turner. In choosing Parkin as his official biographer, Thring did himself a great disservice. It was written in Canada by a Canadian; it is based on late-night diary entries, Thring's idiosyncratic publications, and terse correspondence. Parkin carried the lot home; he interviewed no-one; it took 13 years – that's twice as long as the Chilcot report; and the world had moved on by the time of its publication. It is a lifeless memorial to a life-loving headmaster.



*Edward Thring*

Parkin's Thring could never have created Uppingham. Parkin's Thring is dour, dry, grumbling, boring, gloomy, frustrated.

Where is the Thring who played charades, hosted parties, played leap-frog, built snowmen, danced all evening, played football, wrote fairy tales, acted in plays, taught tennis – and loved his boys? No-one would have been attracted by Parkin's Thring.

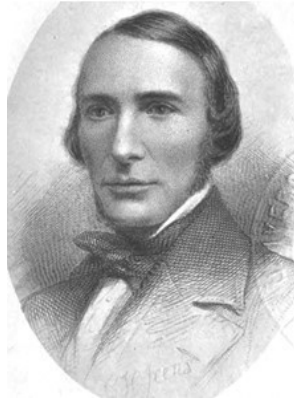
But they were. Thring had remarkable powers of persuasion. His magnetism drew influential men and women to work with him. Here's my 1st XI from the formative years. No, not this XI – this is Thring in the school's 1857 cricket XI!



*1857 Cricket XI*

Many thanks to Jerry Rudman, John Hodgkinson, Neil Waddell and Vivian Anthony for help with the photographs; and to Jim Peschek with advice on some of the text.

## 1. Daniel Macmillan



*Daniel Macmillan*

Here's my opener. I will give you a moment each time to see if you can identify the person.

Thring went up to Cambridge in 1841. The following year he was spotted by Daniel Macmillan – owner of a bookshop in Trinity Street; publisher; friend of Frederick Maurice; and a Christian Socialist. Daniel and his co-owner and brother, Alexander, were sure that Thring was destined for greatness.

Thring was a regular visitor to Trinity Street where he rubbed shoulders with many Christian Socialists. Macmillan viewed his publishing business as a means of spreading God's word to the lower classes, a cause that found a sympathetic admirer in Thring. And he was also a publisher of best-sellers – Charles Kingsley, Thomas Hughes and more.

It was through Macmillan that Thring claimed he saw the beauty and the quiet certainty of letting God plan his path. Modern critics might mock that Thring had a hotline to God – but Thring was sincere. Macmillan was his spiritual father.

When Thring informed him that he was taking the Uppingham appointment, Macmillan was delighted: 'It seems to me one of the surest ways of doing good. It has the great advantage of making no fuss.'

On Macmillan's early death in 1857, Thring continued the friendship with Alexander. Some of their correspondence has survived.

Macmillans published most of Thring's books, beginning in 1846, and the brothers recommended Uppingham to their Cambridge friends. The families visited one another, and all Daniel's and Alexander's sons came to Uppingham – one, Daniel's son Maurice, became the father of the future prime minister.

Macmillan and Thring were 'fellow sufferers' trying to improve the lot of the world. It was a spirit that was to infuse Uppingham.

## 2. Marie Koch



*Marie Koch*

Many of you will know this story.

As he slipped in to his 30s, Thring's last young-man fling was to be the English Gentleman's Grand Tour across Europe to the Holy Land.

His route was through the German States, across Austria, reaching the sea at Trieste. Then a slow tour through the Italian cities: Venice, Verona, Padua, Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Siena, Arezzo, Perugia and Assisi. From there he was summoned early to Rome at his parents' bidding - his younger brother Godfrey was set to make a fool of himself by proposing marriage to Marie Koch, the daughter of a Prussian customs official, a match that his parents thought unsuitable.

Thring's diary of the trip peters out and then goes silent; he has other matters on his mind beyond art galleries. He is in love – and he rescues Godfrey by making his own proposal to Marie.

She accepts. She is swept of her feet. What can better this as evidence of the magnetism and passion of Thring?

All thoughts of the Holy Land are forgotten. Thring rushes back to England to find a job. He fails to land the headmastership of Durham School, which goes to Henry Holden. So he tries for Holden's job at Uppingham Grammar School – and gets it.

The marriage was to be most happy – 'I can only say I found my marriage the most perfect earthly blessing, (he later wrote) beyond my lover's hopes even, and worth all'.

Marie, with her sister Anna who came to live in Uppingham and served as Thring's secretary until his death, not only supported her husband but also contributed her own part.

Thring delighted in large families:

'I still think with the Psalmist (he wrote) "Blessed are those that have their quiver full."'

Two sons and three daughters arrived in quick succession.



*Anna Koch, Edward & Marie Thring*

### 3. Robert Hodgkinson



*Robert Hodgkinson*

Uppingham Grammar School's trust owned the schoolroom by the church and the headmaster's house and boys' accommodation on the other side of the London road. The trustees paid the salaries of the headmaster and his deputy. Their contribution changed little over the next thirty four years.

How was Uppingham to grow? Thring's solution was to invite men with private means to commit themselves to the venture. They would receive their income from the boarding houses that Thring would ask them to build.

Four new houses were built between 1856 and 1862; others were converted from existing buildings. Three more houses were built between 1866 and 1872, plus three more conversions. Boarding houses at other schools before the 1850s were no more than hostels; at Uppingham they were central. As an inspector noted in the 1860s, and to Thring's delight: 'at Rugby the school made the houses, at Uppingham the houses made the school.'



*Thring and his housemasters, 1864*

Robert Hodgkinson is my exemplary housemaster: two early photographs of the headmaster with his housemasters have Hodgkinson sitting at Thring's side.

Wooed from Cambridge, he arrived in 1855 – and ploughed his energies and inheritance into the school. He took over The Lodge, a conversion in School Lane, from its first housemaster, and developed it into a full-size 30-strong house. He provided funds to buy up cottages to allow others to build houses, and then in 1869 he built Springfield on the Stockerston Road, a house for the younger boys. Confusingly, it is now The Lodge. Hodgkinson, with his wife and five children, ran a popular house and supported Thring to the hilt.



*Springfield*

All housemasters were in Holy Orders, most were Cambridge men, all were married and with young children - 19 children in the seven houses of 1861 – the oldest was 6. After the coming and going of some bad early appointments, the housemasters now created a happy and sociable school community: taking walks together, hosting parties for their children, visiting each other's homes, organising concerts, and so on. The influence of the housemaster, his wife and their children was vital, for this added 'home feeling' to the boys' lives.



*The Hodgkinson family in c1871*

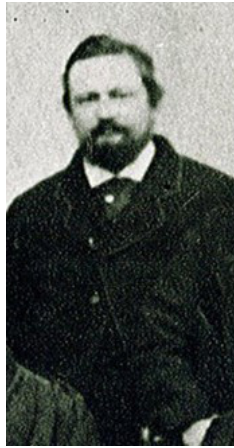
Hodgkinson and the other early housemasters launched the school, taking it to 300 boys by 1865. His obituary included this:

‘Whenever the name of Thring is honoured as the virtual founder of the new school, there also should men couple the name of Hodgkinson who willingly spent his riches of his large-hearted nature’

But it was Thring who had attracted Hodgkinson and the other early housemasters to the venture – and with no promise of success.



#### 4. Georg Beisiegel



*Georg Beisiegel*

The housemasters taught classics, English and mathematics in their house dining halls, with boys trooping from house to house. But, right from the start, the curriculum was broader than that.

A broad curriculum was new, so new that few Englishmen could teach it. So Thring looked to Germany for masters of the 'extra' subjects. These would be 'equally superior' men, Thring's phrase, to the housemasters but they did not contribute large sums to the venture. They earned their living from the fees they would charge.

The diaries of Thring's continental travels contain no mention of schools and universities so it is likely that the initiative to look to Germany for what to teach and who to teach it came from Marie. A total of 18 foreign masters were appointed in Thring's headmastership – a quarter of the teaching staff.

Herr Schafer arrived in 1855; two more the following year; one in 1857; and then Georg Beisiegel in January 1860. Most stayed a short while but Beisiegel was still there in 1902.

I have no proof of this, but I suspect that Beisiegel had been appointed solely to teach music. But then fate took a hand.

A gymnasium had been built the previous autumn on the initiative of a housemaster, Matthias, and Benguerel, who taught 'extra' subjects, and it seems that they had lined up an ex-soldier, Sgt-Major Ellis, to teach in it.

This matches the times: the Crimean War was in recent memory and Napoleon III was rumoured to be planning an invasion of Britain.

The staff list for January 1860, however, has Ellis's printed name crossed out, and Beisiegel's penned in. Never fond of the military, once Thring discovered that Beisiegel was also a graduate of the Royal Central School of Gymnastics in Berlin, Ellis's fate was sealed. Beisiegel's combination of music and gymnastics demonstrated the school's Platonic tradition.

That 18 men came voluntarily across the English Channel to Uppingham illustrates once more the power of Thring's persuasion. Several made their home here; they formed a German colony in the town – even celebrating the Kaiser's birthday.

Thring and Marie, of course, joined the party.



*Gymnasium*



## 5. William Witts



*William Witts*

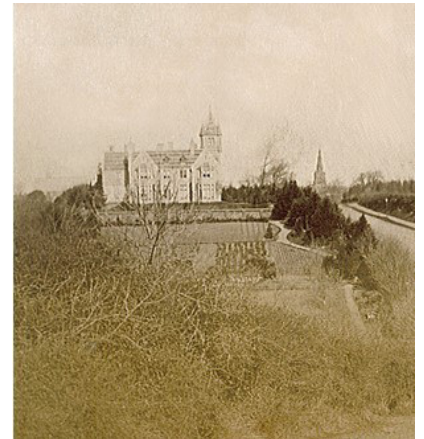
William Witts was a few years ahead of Thring at both Eton and Cambridge. When Thring was at King's, Witts was a fellow. He also served as Harvey Goodwin's curate at St Giles.

Goodwin and Witts were ardent disciples of Frederick Maurice; they joined Daniel Macmillan's Trinity Street meetings; and in 1847 they founded what was to become the Cambridge branch of the Working Men's College, run on the lines of the London original associated with Kingsley and Hughes.

In his early years at Uppingham, Thring twice asked Witts to join the staff, but without success, and then in 1861, quite out of the blue, Witts asked if he might still come. Thring was delighted and said 'yes' at once.

"How wonderfully things are brought about. (Thring wrote in his diary.) I know no more conscientious, hardworking, nice-minded fellow than Witts is, full of information and with a great connection."

The saintly and well-connected Witts did more than just build a house - Highfield on the London Road - and fill it. He served as chaplain and, more concretely, he donated £1000 to start the chapel fund.



*Highfield*

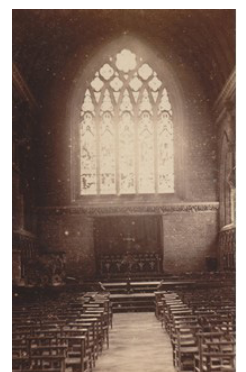
Four years later, and years before Thring's wildest dreams, the school had its own place of worship. The inaugural sermon was preached by Goodwin.



*Chapel and School-room*

When Witts moved to Uppingham, Goodwin - then Dean of Ely, soon Bishop of Carlisle - entered his two boys for the school and thereafter no Uppingham festival was complete without his presence.

The spirit of manly, practical Christianity shared by Goodwin, Witts and Thring ensured that 'Go and do' would be the message for Uppingham boys. The North

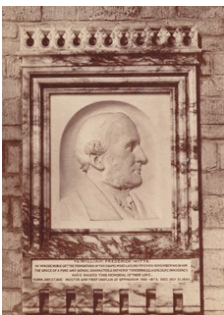


*Chapel interior*

Woolwich Mission, the first by any school, was founded by the end of the decade.

Thring and Witts, Etonians both, were keen Eton fives players. Each year they would challenge the school champions and, invariably, headmaster and chaplain would win

Thring's patience and persuasion in attracting both Witts and Goodwin brought great benefits to the school. Witts, fittingly, has a fine memorial in chapel.



*Chapel memorial*

## 6. Juliana Ewing



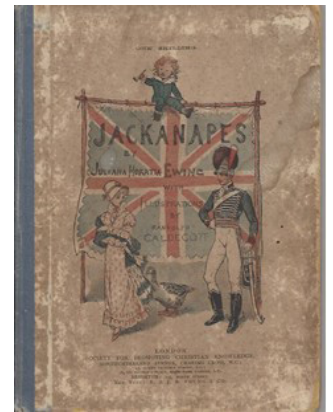
*Juliana Ewing*

In 1863 Thring's mother sent her grand-daughter Margaret a book edited by Mrs Gatty. Thring avidly read it himself and discovered 'one of those refreshing little story books which from time to time keep my feelings clear and simple and nerve me for life.'

It was probably a volume of the hugely popular *Aunt Judy's Tales*, with stories contributed by Mrs Gatty's daughter, Juliana Ewing, the wife of an army officer. Thring's daughters subsequently subscribed to the tales and he was to use a quotation from them in his 1864 book, *Education and School*.

When Margaret complained that a subsequent issue contained no story by Mrs Ewing, Thring helped her to write a letter to the author. She replied with a short story composed especially for Margaret, which in turn led to correspondence between headmaster and author that lasted over twenty years.

Mrs Ewing's best-known story, *Jackanapes*, appeared in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* (as it was now called) in 1879 – it tells how a young soldier sacrifices his own life to save a comrade. Thring knew of the story before its publication and was deeply touched by it. When it came out in book-form, Thring told the school about it, and insisted that the bookshop stocked 50 copies.



*Jackanapes*

(Today's Uppingham Bookshop took just four of mine – but has now added others – well, two!)

A later best-seller was another Thring favourite – her sales, by the way, matched those of Lewis Carroll. *Laetus Sorte Mea* told the story of a boy who knew he was to die young but who nevertheless wanted to live and die a soldier.

Thring wrote: 'I have been reading *Laetus*. I am striving to be *Laetus sorte mea*, Happy with my lot, and to have no more unsettled wishes or fear or disappointment.'



*Headmistresses, 1887*

His friendship with Mrs Ewing brought him comfort and peace amongst the struggles that dominated the middle years of his headmastership – and also led to his interest in women's education – too late, alas, for his own daughters.

You will recall that the Conference of the Headmistresses came to Uppingham in June 1887.

Thring noted: 'It is curious how Mrs Ewing's life and meaning has set me going on all this woman's work.'

## 7. William Sterndale Bennett



*William Sterndale Bennett*

I don't know when composer and headmaster first met but it was probably in Cambridge and after 1856 – William Sterndale Bennett was appointed Professor of Music that year.

He was a virtuoso pianist as a young man and, in a period when England was mocked as the 'land without music', he looked to Europe for new worlds to conquer. In 1836 he took Leipzig by storm, playing his own piano concertos, and the two foremost composers of the time – Mendelssohn and Schumann – became close friends.



*Gewandhaus*

Three decades later and now Britain's foremost composer, Sterndale Bennett returned once more to Leipzig in January 1865 to conduct the first German performance of his last symphony – this was at the Gewandhaus. Thring knew in advance of this trip, for he had set the composer a task.

The early German music teachers at Uppingham had worked wonders with the boys but their frequent replacement proved frustrating. Thring asked Sterndale Bennett to find a suitable man for a permanent appointment.

Once in Leipzig, he asked his friend Ferdinand David, the principal violin teacher and leader of the Gewandhaus Orchestra for thirty years, if he could recommend anyone and David suggested his own son Paul, aged just twenty-five.

Sterndale Bennett's magic and Thring's idealism and enthusiasm brought great gifts to the school.

The composer continued to be interested in David's work and he would visit the school twice a year as an examiner; the performances by the boys, especially the instrumentalists, never ceased to amaze him.

In November 1873 Thring asked the composer 'to give us a tune, to be a memorial of his connection with us' - he promised to do so. Sadly, the composer died in 1875 before the promise was kept.

But I wonder what he made of being asked 'to give us a tune!'

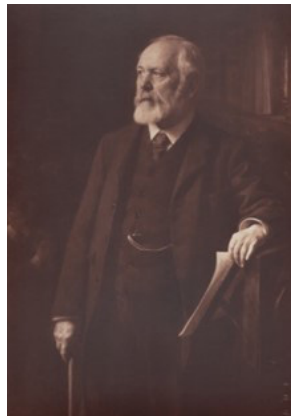
Robert Sterndale Bennett, William's grandson, was a twentieth-century director of music at the school.



*Ferdinand David*



## 8. Paul David



*Paul David*

What persuaded Paul David - the young concert-master of the Karlsruhe Orchestra, a pupil of Liszt, a member of the Mendelssohn-Schumann circle, and a friend of Brahms - to accept Thring's invitation is not known.

What is certain is that David sacrificed personal renown in his own country to give Uppingham a distinction and excellence in music above any other school in England.

Thring was obviously pleased with his catch for he declared Monday 13 March 1865 'a half holiday in honour of Herr David's arrival'.

Royds did not do that for my arrival!

Under David's direction music was soon an essential part of school life: it became a timetabled subject in the 1870s; more than a third of the school was now learning a musical instrument; and the Platonic atmosphere was such that one year the school's best violinist was also its cricket captain.

David appointed additional teachers, almost all German, to form a team of six to meet the school's expanding needs. He created an orchestral tradition, and the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven became standard fare. Chamber works were also played, and a large choral society performed a regular cycle of oratorios by Handel and Mendelssohn.

The orchestra rehearsed on Sunday evenings, with many boys dropping in to listen. David was thrilled when he heard some whistling melodies from Beethoven's 5th Symphony as they walked about the school.

Bernarr Rainbow, the historian of school music, judged that 'Paul David was indisputably the first to bring public school boys into regular contact with musical performances.'

Uppingham set the pattern for school music at its best that others would strive to follow.

Thring and David were to collaborate on many songs; a later partnership of David and John Skrine produced most distinguished hymns for the start and end of term, and for a thanksgiving service. I hope that they are still used.

David taught at the school for a total of forty-three years and served under two of Thring's successors.

On his retirement in 1908, the University of Cambridge awarded him the first honorary degree of its type - Master of Music. Indeed, Jim Peschek tells me that it was invented for him!

## 9. Josef Joachim



*Josef Joachim*

David travelled from Germany to England with another of his father's violin pupils, Josef Joachim. A few years older than David, Joachim had met great acclaim in England on his first visit as a boy in 1844.

The Illustrated London News noted: 'a little boy of thirteen, who perhaps is the first violin player, not only of his age, but of his century. ... His tone is of the purest cantabile; his execution is most marvellous; his style is chaste, but deeply impassioned; and his deportment is that of a conscious, but modest genius!'

He came again in 1847, 1849, 1852, 1858, and 1859 – and then annually from 1862. After their marriage in 1863, his wife, the contralto Amalie Weiss, generally accompanied him.

Lincolnshire and Rutland newspapers report him in the area in 1870, 1871 and 1873. By this time Joachim was unchallenged as the greatest living violinist.



*Josef and Amalie Joachim*

David and Joachim maintained their friendship and the violinist probably visited the school every spring, joining the orchestra in its rehearsals and delighting in the boys' singing of the Uppingham songs.



*Josef Joachim  
by John Singer Sargent*

Joachim also attracted other eminent musicians to support David's pioneering efforts – including the trumpeter Julius Kosleck, the 'cellist Julius Klengel and the violinist Josef Ludwig.

He gave the Uppingham boys the encores that no other audience was permitted. How magnificent it must have been to hear him play with the school orchestra, perhaps the Mendelssohn concerto dedicated by the composer to Paul David's father.

An obituary for Paul David recorded:

*'The great violinist's friendship with David and his interest in David's work continued throughout his life. When he was in England he seldom failed to pay a visit to Uppingham, and the school often enjoyed the high privilege of listening to the playing of the greatest violinist in Europe. He would take his seat smilingly in the midst of the boy performers and never betray the*

*pain which he must sometimes have suffered from their imperfect efforts.'*

Lucky boys.

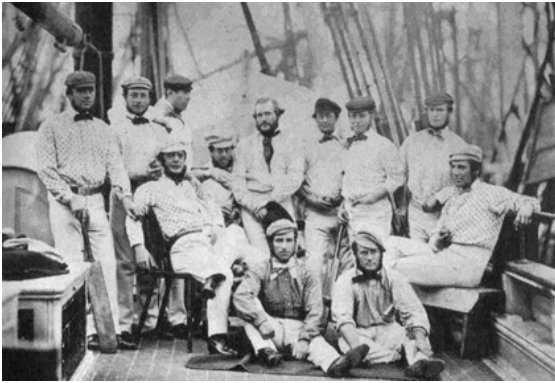
## 10. Heathfield Harman Stephenson



*HHS*

Heathfield Harman Stephenson, or HH as he was known, was one of the finest cricketers of his age. This is where I ought to hand over to Roy Stephenson – alas, he is away from home.

In 1858 HH took three wickets with three consecutive deliveries, the first recorded hat-trick; the feat was rewarded with a collection and he was presented with a hat bought with the proceeds.



*Team to USA and Canada*

He was a member of the first English team to tour abroad, in 1859 to the USA and Canada.

And in 1861 he led a party of twelve English professionals to Australia where they played matches against area teams. This was the forerunner of the modern Tests.

He became the cricket pro at Rossall School on the Lancashire coast on his return to England. That year, 1863, witnessed Uppingham's first inter-school match – away at Rossall. Uppingham won the two-day encounter and the XI received a hero's welcome, by school and town, on its return.

The Uppingham captain, Charles Green – later Chairman of the MCC – talked with H H and determined to get him as Uppingham's pro. Green was a wily and resolute advocate – but it still took him nine years to win Thring's approval – even though Green, other Old Boys, and the boys would pay his wages.

First Thring consented to a pro for a few weeks on alternate years; then it was every season; next, in 1872, Thring allowed Green to pay H H's wages for the whole of the season; and finally, in 1873, the appointment became permanent.

H H opened a sports shop, one minute's walk from the chapel, and a favourite place for boys to mingle, examine memorabilia and photographs, and talk cricket.

H H's work brought quick results. The 1873 Cricketer's Companion contained a gushing report; glamorous matches were added to the fixture list; the XI beat a strong MCC team; an invitation to play at the Oval was accepted. Uppingham cricket had arrived!

The Old Boys continued the triumphs. A succession won blues in the 'Varsity match at Lord's – two in 1875, four in 1876 and five in 1877. Many went on to play for England.



*Australia*



The Rhyming Rover was in good form at the dinner after the 1876 victory:

*Who taught them this excellent cricket? Was the question of many that day,  
Who taught them to keep up their wicket, And to hit just as well as they play?  
Oh, who did these cricketers nourish? Who trained their eyes, nerves, and thews?  
'Twas STEPHENSON! Long may he flourish! The coach of the Uppingham Blues!*



HHS

Sadly, H H was never invited to attend these Old Boys' dinners; nor was he ever mentioned in the Uppingham School Roll.

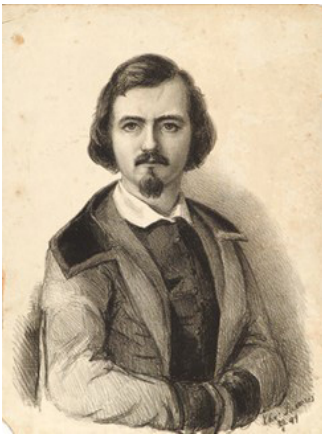
Players and gentlemen, of course.

## 11. Charles Rossiter



*Charles Rossiter*

My tail-ender is the only member of Thring's staff to join him in that select publication, the Dictionary of National Biography – Charles Rossiter. And his wife, Frances, is there too.



*Christian Reimers – self-portrait*

Christian Reimers, a German, was appointed as the first art-master in 1856 – he also taught music. Reimers was part of the Leipzig circle.

He stayed just one year.

As with music, Thring yearned for a permanent appointment. He got one in Vaughan Cooke who taught until 1872 – once more, Uppingham was well ahead of current public-school practice – but I know little about him.

Then came Rossiter, a leading painter of the day. His works were exhibited widely, including thirty-nine at the Royal Academy.



*Ferdinand David leading the Gewandhaus String Orchestra, 1850 - drawn by Reimers*

His best-known painting is in Birmingham - *To Brighton and Back for Three and Sixpence* – much in the style of Ford Madox Brown. He also contributed the design for the mosaic portrait of Bernardino Luini for the South Court of the Kensington Museum – today's V&A.



*To Brighton and Back for Three and Sixpence*

Thring determined that every boy in the upper classes had to learn some drawing; several of Rossiter's pupils went further, later exhibiting their own work at the Royal Academy.

To see Rossiter at his best, go to the Old School-room. All the murals are his; all the stained-glass is his. All, thanks to Jerry Rudman, are in sparkling condition.

My favourites are the stained-glass panels that reflect his enthusiasm for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

This tondo was discovered by Jerry Rudman in the 1980s – in pieces in the loft above the Master's Common Room. It is now back in place, high on the south wall. It commemorates the founding of the North Woolwich Mission that I mentioned earlier.

*The Sower* was Thring's favourite. Placed in the centre of the north window, in front of the boys studying below, it served to press the biblical message.



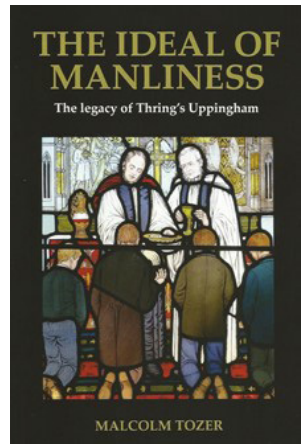
*Charity window*



*The Sower window*

Note the rising sun behind Uppingham's parish church: the sower stands on the site of the School-room. Alas it is no longer in place! It was removed in about 2005. Goodness knows why!

And, finally, there is the front cover of *The Ideal of Manliness: the legacy of Thring's Uppingham*. If you have not already got a copy, I can solve that problem!



*Thring and his chaplain offering communion*

## **Conclusion**

Thring did not build Uppingham alone. His magnetism drew men and women of talent, determination, connection and wealth to join his team.

It is this young, charismatic, playful, friendly, joyful, mischievous, enthusiastic, bold, adventurous, joking, loving, young man who created Uppingham – not the sad old man portrayed by Parkin.

What was Thring's nickname at Eton? – oh yes, 'Little Die First'! What did an early Old-Boy master call him – oh yes, 'King of Boys'! Enough said.

Malcolm Tozer 1/15/22 June 2016

Modified for ULHSG Archives 9 July 2016