

Entertaining at
The Old
Grammar
School



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The Old
Grammar
School
COVENTRY



Although it is known as the Old Grammar School, this wonderful building began life nearly one thousand years ago as the Church and Hospital of St John. Only fragments of its history remain, painting a fascinating picture of its journey through time.



In the Beginning

Founded by Prior Lawrence of St Mary's Benedictine Priory, the main religious institution in the city at the time, the original hospital on this site was built between 1154 and 1176.

The hospital was run by the Knights Hospitallers, a monastic order who provided medical care, originally to pilgrims who had made the journey to Jerusalem.

The Medieval Building

This current building dates from the 1300s, and was built using beautiful local sandstone. It had its own chapel and was maintained by gifts and endowments from local benefactors.

The hospital had around 24-30 beds for the sick and infirm of the city, as well as travellers who sought lodgings there.

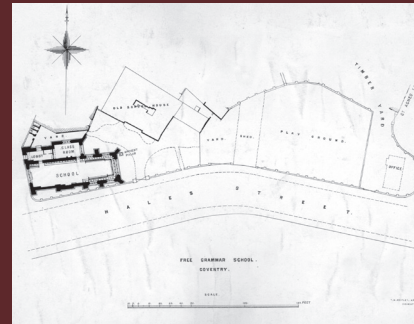
At this point England was a very

religious country, and as was usual for the time, men and women were kept strictly segregated. As the hospital provided care for the flesh, the chapel provided the equally important care for the soul.

The Grammar School

On 4th March 1545 the hospital was surrendered to King Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. A wealthy businessman named John Hales paid £400 for the building, on condition that he would found a free school bearing the King's name.

King Henry VIII School started life on 23rd July, 1545 in the nave of the Whitefriars Church, and it remained there until 1558, when it moved to the Hospital site. Freemen of the Coventry Guilds could send their sons to the school for the princely sum of 12 pence per year.



Old Grammar School, Coventry



In 1557 John Hales had 49 carved oak choir stalls moved from Whitefriars Monastery to the school, to be used as desks. Made in 1342, the stalls remain in the Old Grammar School to this day, bearing the names of generations of schoolboys, and the marble runs they carved into them.

On Saturday 17th August 1565 as part of her only visit to Coventry, Queen Elizabeth I was shown the Grammar School which was 'set up by her late father' and made a gift of money for its upkeep. In his will dated 17th December 1572, Hales left property and land to pay for 'the maintenance of one perpetual free school within the City of Coventry'.

City Improvements

In 1848 Hales Street was constructed, which resulted in major changes to the Hospital buildings, including the demolition of the Ushers' house and garden,

and the south transept. In 1852 the west front was rebuilt in a more orthodox Gothic style that remains today. In 1885 King Henry VIII Grammar School moved to new, much larger premises on a new 13 acre site on Warwick Road, leaving the beautiful medieval building behind.

The Next Chapter

Over the years the Old Grammar School has been used as a Sunday School, hosted jumble sales, and was even struck by a bomb during the Second World War. It has now been revitalised as a unique part of the city's rich heritage by Culture Coventry, and we are thrilled to be able to preserve it for future generations.

