**The Old Grammar School (St John’s Hospital)**

**Guide to records**

**Coventry Archives** is located in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, CV1 5QP. Admission to both the Reading Room and Research Room is free. Documents and books can be consulted without charge, but a charge is made for photocopying or the taking of digital images. Visitors are required to make an appointment to view original documents in the Research Room. Material in the Reading Room is available without the need of an appointment.

**Opening hours:** The Coventry Archives Reading and Research Rooms are open, 10.30 am – 3.30pm, Wednesdays – Fridays; the Reading Room is open on alternate Saturdays, 10.30 am – 3.30pm. Please refer to the Coventry collections online catalogue at <http://coventrycollections.org/> or further details, or telephone on 02476 237583.

**Introduction**

The original hospital of Saint John was started in the reign of King Henry II, between 1154 and 1176. It was founded by Prior Lawence of St Mary's Benedectine Priory, and ran by the Knights Hospitallers - a monastic order who provided care for pilgrims who had travelled to Jerusalem.

The current medieval building dates from the 1300s, and is made of local sandstone. The hospital provided care not just for pilgrims, but for local people who were sick or old, giving help and free accommodation for poor travellers and a chapel and services for worship. It had 30 beds in the nave and aisles, with the chancel reserved for religious purposes.

The hospital was probably situated inside the main part of the church which was the largest building and the only part which is still standing. From an account of the hospital's expenses in 1535 we know that there were three chaplains who were paid £15 between them; also that every week, bread and ale, at a cost of twenty six shillings were given to the poor people at the hospital gates.

In March 1545 the hospital was closed by order of King Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and in 1546 it was bought by John Hales, a wealthy businessman. He paid £400 for the building and set it up as a grammar school for boys, in the King's name. Our archive holds a translation of the founding charter (originally in Latin).

This school, known as King Henry VIII School, was originally based in the Whitefriars Monastery - built in 1356 and demolished in 1572. Hales moved 49 carved oak choir stalls from Whitefriars to the school to be used as desks in 1557. Some can still be seen today, bearing the names of schoolboys over the generations. In August 1565 Queen Elizabeth visited the Grammar School as part of her only visit to Coventry, where she made a gift of money for its upkeep.

Much of the original hospital building was taken down during the reconstruction of Hales Street from 1794-1800, due to growing populations. The North aisle still remains, now cut off from the nave. The misericords were removed and placed in Holy Trinity Church.

In 1885 the Grammar School moved to newer, much larger buildings in Warwick Road. It would continue to have a notable reputation, with alumni like the poet Philip Larkin. The old school was closed and put up for sale but was bought with money raised by the people of Coventry and given to Holy Trinity Church for use as a church hall. In the Second World War it was damaged in 1940 but not destroyed, so that in 1962 extensive repair work was able to restore it to its former appearance.

**Archival Material**

BA/D/12/1 - Acquisition of St. John's Hospital, mid 16th century

CCA/3/1/6246 - File relating to presentation to the City by Mrs B Sweet-Escot, of Lyme Regis, Dorset, of an oak stall desk from the chapel at the old Free Grammar School, Coventry, 1936

CCA/3/1/7966 - File relating to Old St John's Grammar School, Hales Street: restoration after bomb damage, 1941

CCA/3/1/8911 - File relating to conservation work on the King Henry VIII School Charter of Foundation by the City Archives, as arranged with the School Headmaster, H Walker Esq: details of the Charter's physical condition and proposed treatment and repair, 1950

CCD/3/BYE/4243 - Hales Street: alterations and additions to school, 1907

PA468/5/11/3/47 - [From "Coventry Evening Telegraph"] about inclusion of Drapers' Hall, Bayley Lane and the Old Grammar School in the Ministry of Housing & Local Government list of scheduled buildings, 1957

PA972/3 - Translations of the Letters Patent of King Henry VIII to John Hales enabling him to found the Coventry Grammar School, as granted on 23rd July 1545

PA1691/2/4/2 - "History of Coventry" in subject order: 'A', Hospital of St John the Baptist [the Old Grammar School from 1545 to 1885], with presscuttings and illustration, 1155-1993

PA2290/2/1 - Trustees' Correspondence File, 17 Nov 1953 - 12 Oct 1988, includes: report (17 Nov 1953) by C[laude] F[rancis] Redgrave and L.A. Clarke [architects] on the building's condition, correspondence (1958-59) about dilapidated condition of the said Old Grammar School, list [by Francis Charles Kenderdine (solicitor and coroner)] of famous old boys [cf. PA2290/2/2], correspondence about investments (1960, 1965), correspondence about appointment of new trustees (1960), restoration appeal (1960-67), report by Eileen Gooder into Saint John's Hospital's history [cites BA/H/Q/F20/1/1] and correspondence about misericords (1965).

PA2409/2/10/11/9 - Appeal [1885.] To save the Old Grammar School, Hales Street and convey it to the vicar and churchwardens of Holy Trinity.

PA2409/2/12/12 - Explanatory note accompanying sketch by William Reader junior of coat of arms on a misericord at Old Grammar School, 1850

PA2684/2/2/6/6 - Remains of Whitefriars'; the old Grammar School

PA2886/1/8 - 1:2500 plan of city centre showing line of city wall and footprints of Priory, Whitefriars', Greyfriars', College of Saint John [Old Grammar School] and Charterhouse, 1918

**Pamphlets**

JN 373 KIN – School of King Henry The Eighth School Roll, May 1887

JN 373 KIN – King Henry VIII School Centenary, 1885-1985 (Coventry Evening Telegraph 30 April 1985)

**Reading Room Books**

JN 373 KIN E – King Henry VIII School 1545-1945 (Coventry: Parbury Bros Ltd, 1945)