

My Favourite History Place

Nuneaton's Old Grammar School – **David Paterson** describes a very conspicuous landmark at the heart of Nuneaton



Near the centre of the largest town in Warwickshire, an oasis of calm encompasses the area of Nuneaton parish church, vicarage and Old Grammar School. Of the three buildings, the Old Grammar School may be the least impressive but its history is just as eventful.

Nuneaton's Boys' Free Grammar School, founded around 1540, began with income from a chantry, prudently shut early by local inhabitants who anticipated the effects of future policy towards chantry chapels. Royal patronage from King Edward VI in 1552 ensured its survival. The location 'between the highway and the millpond' suggested a site near the parish church of St Nicolas. In 1596 growth in both capital and pupil numbers encouraged Governors to rebuild even nearer the church and a century later a further rebuilding on the same site produced the edifice which still partly survives today.

The year 1695 was a new beginning in many ways. For the previous 40 years teacher William Trevis, equally inclined to alcohol and sadistic beating of boys, had presided over the decline of a school that had earlier produced some eminent classical scholars. After Trevis's death, a new building was seen as part of a new start with new Governors (whose names still adorn the main entrance) and a new Master from faraway Chester. William Liptrott and his sons were to be in charge from 1695 to 1788.

There were a few changes in the design of the new building. Its predecessors were timber-framed and beams survive from the older building, one dated 1596. The building of 1695 was of brick with a second-storey study room for the Master since there was no separate house for him until 1715. The only substantial non-utilitarian feature was a central tower with cupola. Otherwise a new building did not mean a very different building. This reflected the lack of substantial alteration in grammar school education, from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. For boys to learn the rudiments of Latin grammar merely required a large schoolroom. The more successful pupils continued with their learning to 16 and 17, with some then matriculating at Oxford or Cambridge.

There was one Master, and sometimes an Usher as an assistant. Sitting on a raised dais, the Master would teach and control boys of all ages. With the Liptrotts' desire to keep the school socially exclusive, numbers would not have demanded a larger building in the eighteenth century. After 1800 Master Hugh Hughes taught just a few scholars on the upper floor, his moribund old age satirised in George Eliot's *Janet's Repentance*. The building became more crowded, however, as Benjamin Rayner (Usher



1802-42) developed the curriculum and took in a wider range of pupils from the rapidly growing ribbon-weaving and mining town. How much longer could the small building cope? In the 1860s a combination of uninspiring leadership and a slump in the weaving trade delayed the change. A Commissioner visiting in 1865 condemned the cramped conditions and by the 1870s the 'inefficient educational unit' could no longer manage. In 1880 renewed town growth and the greater aspirations of the generation being schooled as a result of the Education Act of 1870 meant the construction of a new grammar school on the other side of the church.

This was not the end for the Old Grammar School, however. Rapid growth in demand for science teaching meant it was kitted out as a laboratory in 1887. Science laboratories were subsequently included in the further expansion of the new school in 1904. They were constructed on vicarage glebe land purchased for a low sum with one condition: the vicar of St Nicolas would acquire the Old Grammar School for church activities. The building has remained in church hands ever

since, though in the 1920s the Grammar School hired their old building to help temporarily with classroom space.

The twentieth century did not always treat the old school kindly. In 1941 a bomb badly damaged the east wing and in 1954, with road-widening turning a quiet vicarage street into a major thoroughfare, the less damaged west wing was also demolished while the central part was partially rebuilt. In the 1980s the Old Grammar School was re-fitted to become a parish office and continues in this role.

David Paterson is the Chairman of the Nuneaton Branch of the Historical Association and among his publications is *Leeke's Legacy – A History of King Edward VI School Nuneaton* (Troubadour, 2011).

If you would like to tell us about your history favourite place in a future edition of *The Historian*, in about 700 words, please email: alf.wilkinson@history.org.uk

US Presidents in ten tweets

Its election year across the pond and whatever happens it will be an historic moment that will have international repercussions of some sort.

So here is the background and early years of the office of the US President:



Mount Rushmore National Memorial Sculptures of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln on the face of Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills in Keystone, South Dakota.



The president is not directly elected by the people, instead each state has electors that cast votes through an Electoral College.



The President of the USA is the elected head of state and head of the government of the USA and the Commander in Chief.



The president must be at least 35 years of age, has to have lived in the US for 14 yrs, and has to be a 'natural born' citizen of the US.



The first 7 US presidents were all born British citizens. Martin Van Buren was the first born in the USA.



George Washington was the first President of the USA and introduced the term 'Mr President' to avoid any regal or imperial connotations.



43 men have been sworn into office, with 44 presidencies. 4 US presidents have died in office and 4 have been assassinated.



The 9th president, William Henry Harrison, was only in office for 32 days in 1841. He contracted pneumonia and died.



12th President Zachary Taylor was a commissioned soldier who became a Major General and fought in the Mexican American war.



In the 19th century US politics included Whig politicians – Millard Fillmore was the last Whig president.



Franklin D Roosevelt was elected president 4 times, but died in office. The 22nd Amendment now limits a president to 2 terms (relief!).

Summarising an event or person using ten statements of only 140 characters (including spaces!). Compiled by Paula Kitching

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