

*H*ISTORY OF WINCHESTER HOUSE SCHOOL



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WINCHESTER HOUSE SCHOOL, ST LEONARDS-ON-SEA

Winchester House School was started by a Classics master, G.W. Bryant, in St Leonards-on-Sea, near Hastings, in 1876. It was advertised as preparing boys for the public schools and the Royal Navy.

Bryant named it after the public school he considered the best at the time – Winchester. In 1900 Bryant moved the school to premises on the coast at Deal and in 1906 retired and handed WHS to the young Reverend E.H.W. Leachman.

Leachman was related by marriage to the Priestland family of Spondon House School, Derbyshire, a similar prep school which had been started by Rev. Thomas Gascoigne in 1854. Edward Priestland had become headmaster of Spondon House in 1885, having married one of Gascoigne's daughters. By 1912 Priestland had retired and Spondon House was under the headship of C.H.T. Hayman, who had joined the school as an Assistant Master in the 1890s. Hayman agreed with Leachman that their two schools would join forces and be based at Deal. Hayman and his wife therefore moved to the south coast in the summer term of 1912 and Winchester House School was truly born.



GEORGE W. BRYANT & REV. EDMUND H.W. LEACHMAN



WHS MAIN BUILDINGS AT DEAL



GASCOIGNE



PRIESTLAND



HAYMAN



CHEMISTRY LABORATORY AT DEAL



GYMNASIUM AT DEAL

WHS MASTERS SKIPPING AT DEAL – Cartoon by friend of the school, Will Owen. Will Owen (1869-1957) was an artist, cartoonist and lecturer. His most famous output was probably his invention of the *'Bisto Kids'* from the *'Ab Bisto'* advertising campaign. He created the Bisto kids in 1916 and following their first appearance on a poster in 1919 they remained on packs until the mid-1990s. The reason for Will Owen's connection with Winchester House School at Deal is not known, but he was clearly a friend of Leachman and made a number of cartoon contributions to the school magazine in the late 1900s and early 1910s.



The school was moved inland to Kenfield Hall near Canterbury in 1915, to escape the coastal dangers of the First World War. A pupil of the time, later to become headmaster, Stuart Meikle, recalled the drama which determined that the school should move:

‘Our first introduction to the activities of war was an enormous explosion, which disturbed our Geometry lesson: we all hastened to the Deal front to witness the sinking of H.M.S. Niger, the first British ship, so we were told, to be sunk in home waters; the Niger had been torpedoed by a German submarine.’

Kenfield Hall was only a temporary home, however, as it was also unsafe due to lying beneath the flight-path of German Zeppelins. Before the end of the war, in 1918, WHS left the south altogether and moved to Brackley – about as far inland as one can be – first to Brackley Lodge and then in 1922 to Brackley Manor. By this stage Leachman had left teaching and returned to his church ministry and Hayman was in charge – he was to remain headmaster for over forty years, until his death in 1950.

For many years a boys’ boarding prep school, WHS nevertheless seemed to follow girls. Gascoigne’s original school buildings in Derbyshire had formerly housed ‘Miss Edwards’ Academy for Young Ladies’ and from 1915-22 Brackley Manor House was St Edith’s School for Girls. The daughters of headmasters had joined in with the boys on occasions over the years – Molly Leachman features in school group photographs taken at Deal and Brackley Manor was home to Jean

Meikle, daughter of Stuart Meikle and his wife and former school matron, ‘Hosky’. But it was not until 1989 that WHS fully embraced girls and became co-educational with the opening of the girls’ boarding house at Drayton Cottage. The girls and boys attended on a boarding and daily basis, day pupils being welcomed from 1977.



STUART MEIKLE, 1946
(Courtesy of Mr and Mrs Naylor)

BRACKLEY MANOR HOUSE

Announcing to parents the move to Brackley Manor, Hayman stated with pride that ‘*no Prep School in the country has such magnificent buildings or such an ideal site as the Manor House*’ and this still rings true today. Discrete modern developments have provided up-to-date facilities while respecting the character and ‘magnificence’ of the Manor House. The main house was rebuilt from a more ancient predecessor in the 1870s, for Francis Charles Granville Egerton, 3rd Earl of Ellesmere and Viscount Brackley. The Egerton family had been Lords of the Manor of Brackley since the end of the sixteenth century and although the chief family residences of the Earls of Ellesmere (famous for the 18th century Bridgewater Canal) were elsewhere, Brackley was well-placed for the hunt. The Earl had the manor house rebuilt as a large and comfortable mansion for use during the hunting season. A faded picture in the WHS archive shows the newly-extended house with workmen and builders clustered at the top of the tower and standing at windows and on walls.





*Photographs from 1915 Knight, Frank and Rutley auction catalogue for the Brackley Estate.
The lower courtyard with main entrance.*

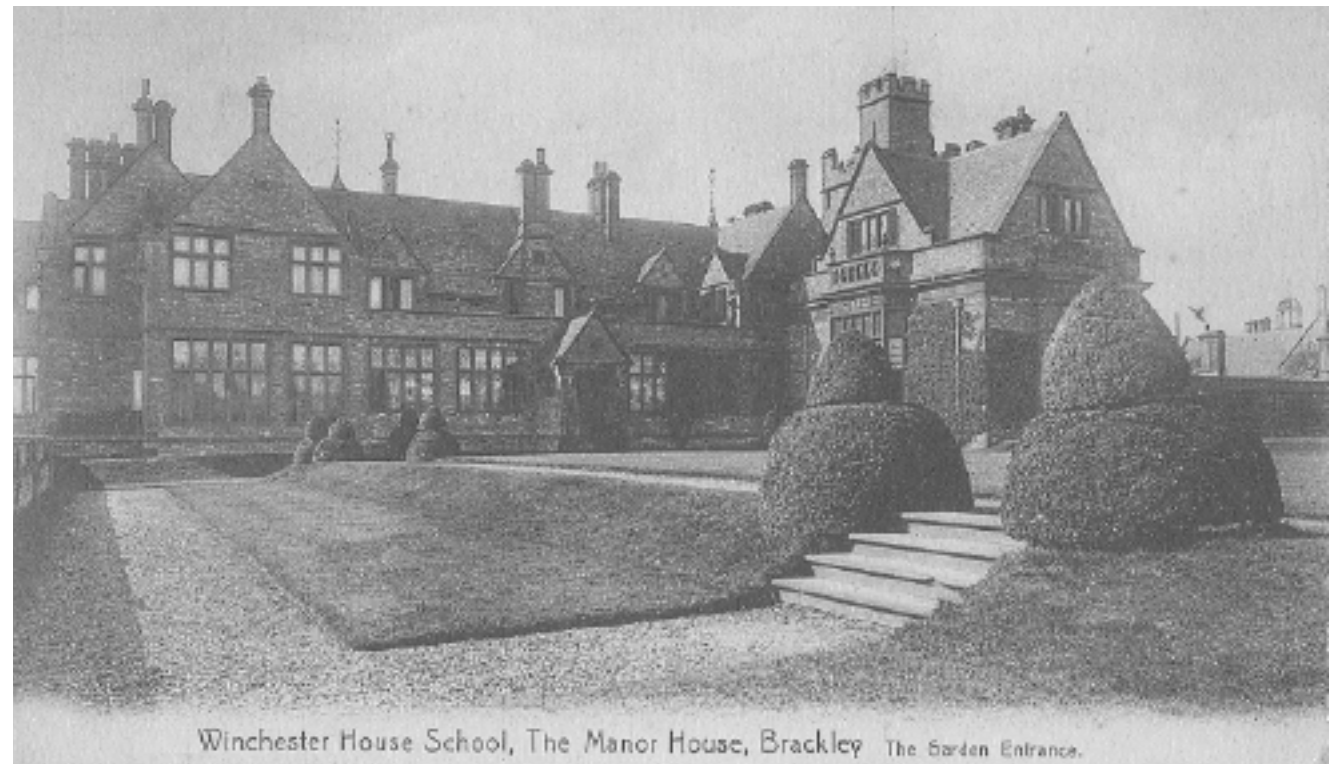


THE LODGE

THE ENTRANCE HALL



THE CORRIDOR



Winchester House School, The Manor House, Brackley The Garden Entrance.

The entrance hall and corridor, showing the wooden panelling and elaborate Victorian carving in the Tudor style which is still in existence in the Manor House today.

It was at this time that the stables and carriage houses were built in the upper quadrangle at the top of the drive, in Elizabethan style with steep tiled roof, gables and gabled dormers, and a tall entrance archway surmounted by the stable clock in its turret and cupola above – the stables clock a traditional means of staff and servants being able to know and respect the time. The clock is still in use today, the quad now providing space for impromptu cricket and other games. Since its inception as stables for the Ellesmeres, the upper quad has grown a shooting range (1930s), a school hall (1962), an art, design and technology suite, various strata of classrooms and science labs and a splendid library and IT department in what is still called The Hippodrome.

The Ellesmere estate in Brackley was sold in 1915, following the death of the Earl, and St Edith's school took over the house, making only small adaptations to accommodate their girls. When WHS moved in the manor was (to quote Hayman again): *'very well equipped internally for the purposes of a school, and stands in its own grounds, with terraced garden, tennis lawns, kitchen gardens, and playing fields. The House throughout is warmed by an efficient system of central heating, and there is an abundant supply of very excellent water from the town reservoirs, standing behind the School grounds. The drainage has been pronounced excellent by a well-known firm of London Sanitary Engineers.'* This must have been reassuring for the parents of WHS boys.



THE COURTYARD, 1915



WINCHESTER HOUSE SCHOOL, THE MANOR HOUSE IN BRACKLEY, 1920s

Over the course of 80 years on-site, WHS has expanded to accommodate growing numbers of children and staff with modern facilities, but the core of the school, the manor house, is still very much in use and provides endless sources for history hunts and artistic expression. The Reading Room, oak-panelled like many of the Victorian reception rooms in the house, is still used to welcome visitors and for various school functions and activities. The children have their meals in the Dining Room on the first floor and spill out along the long Oak Corridor, with boys' boarding accommodation and staff rooms neatly adapted from the original bedrooms surrounding the lower quad. The Chapel was created from the Ellesmere's double-length Billiard Room and adjacent is the Hayman Memorial Library, also panelled in oak and now the home of the WHS Archive and the all-important snooker table. The small arched doorway outside the Library on the main road is the last remaining element of the former manor house, which is reputed to have hosted the rebellious barons of 1215 when they drew up a list of concessions to extract from King John, resulting in the Magna Carta.