

# ‘A Brief History’ of Ripon Grammar School 1555 - 1910

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## The Free Grammar School

It has been suggested that schooling in Ripon could predate the Norman Conquest and documentation outside the present RGS archives shows that a precursor of the Grammar School existed by the fourteenth century. This school was then incorporated as the Free Grammar School of Queen Mary at Ripon by Royal Charter in 1555. (Figure 1)



Figure 1



## The Governors

The 1555 Charter conveyed to the school its landed endowment and named the first ten governors. The governors met regularly and a series of minute books begins in 1623, continuing through to 1924 is held in the RGS archive. The minute books (Figure 2) provide the main source for virtually every, aspect of the history of Ripon Grammar School.





**Figure 2**

Although the original governors had been given the right to appoint a Headmaster and Usher (undermaster) and to frame statutes and ordinances governing the running of the School, this latter right was apparently not exercised until the nineteenth century.

The first set of Statutes, dated 1814, were drawn up by the governors after a series of difficulties with Isaac Cook (appointed 1798) who proved unsuitable as Headmaster but before any constitutional solution could be reached, Cook resigned in 1809.

Cook's successor, William Ewbank, also had differences of opinion over the administration of the estates so these problems made it imperative for the governors to clarify their rights, particularly with regard to appointment and dismissal.

### **Free Grammar School vs. a Public School**

During the stewardship of the next headmaster, William Plues (1812-1851), Ripon Grammar School effectively became a public school, educating the sons of the gentry and making little effort to attract the boys whom the institution had been founded to teach. This was almost certainly the result of Plues's vision, which the governors did nothing to impede, their apathy registered by poor attendance at governors' meetings and the lack of governors' correspondence from this period.

By 1837, however, the tide of opinion amongst the governors had changed and a new set of Statutes introduced that year aimed to restore the School to its original purpose. The number of boarders was limited to 16 and the curriculum broadened to increase its appeal to local parents. A system of entrance and annual class examinations was introduced and regulations made regarding school hours and holidays. Town boys were thenceforth to pay no tuition fees for any of the subjects taught, only an entrance fee of one guinea. The 1837 Statutes completely transformed the character of the School.



The annual lists of town boys, which were required by the 1814 Statutes (recorded in the minute books and surviving as independent records from 1836) show that on average there were between 30 and 40 in the school each year during the second half of Plues's tenure, in contrast to the mere 17 in 1820. The number of fee-paying boarders, which had formerly numbered up to around 50, had dwindled by when Plues dies in 1851.

William Plues's successor, J.F. MacMichael, reintroduced around 14 to 15 boarders, during which time the number of day boys also increased. (Figure 3)

Grammar School.  
RIPON.

*Number of Boys at School during  
the years:*

	Foundation Boys.	Boarders.	Total Number of Boys.
1858.....	35.....	11.....	46.....
1859.....	30.....	12.....	42.....
1860.....	26.....	12.....	38.....
1861.....	40.....	14.....	54.....
1862.....	48.....	14.....	62.....
1863.....	45.....	10.....	55.....
1864.....	44.....	10.....	54.....
1865.....	37.....	7.....	44.....
1866.....	31.....	5.....	36.....
1867.....	27.....	1.....	28.....
1868.....	27.....	2.....	29.....
1869.....	25.....	3.....	28.....
1870.....	29.....	1.....	30.....
1871.....	28.....	1.....	29.....
1872.....	36.....	0.....	36.....
Total Number of Boys during 15 years	508.....	103.....	611.....
Average of Foundation Boys	34 per year.		

*Foundation Boys are required to pay, at the rate  
of Six Shillings per Quarter, for Instruction in either  
French, German or Drawing.—  
Each Boy is provided with Books for which  
he has to pay.—*

Figure 3

In MacMichael's time, the tensions over the nature of the school, whether it was to be a commercial, grammar or public institution became a matter not merely for the headmaster, governors and the citizens of Ripon but for the State. In 1864, the Schools Inquiry Commission was appointed to report on endowed elementary and grammar schools.

The recommendations of this Taunton Commission (1868) might have led to a national system of secondary education on a par with that introduced for the primary level by the Elementary Education Act of 1870 but the political will was lacking. The Endowed Schools Act of 1869 merely appointed Commissioners authorised to produce new schemes in the place of existing Charters and Statutes.

To begin with there may have been popular support for the idea of a new scheme, as suggested by a letter to the governors from the mayor of 1869, Thomas Carter (himself later a governor). Carter argued that Ripon should have a first class school, with new buildings, which would be “a source of honour and profit and of increased usefulness to the City.”

The Commissioner assigned to Ripon, Mr. Fearon, let slip that fees were to be charged, amounting to between fifteen and twenty pounds per annum. In January 1871, Carter's successor as mayor, H. Kearsley, together with 140 citizens, addressed a petition to the Commissioners opposing this course. When the Scheme came out later that year, the proposed fees were found to be between six and ten pounds a year for Lower School pupils and between ten and fifteen pounds a year for those in the Upper School. To add insult to injury, the Scheme had been recommended that seven thousand pounds from the School endowment should indeed be expended on a new boarding house for the non local boys.

The Mayor and Corporation held a meeting in which they agreed to campaign for a first class school at the lowest possible cost to parents and, if viable, according to what they believed to have been the original foundation scheme of a Free Grammar School. The governors proved favourable to the more moderate approach and submitted revisions to the Scheme keeping tuition fees to a minimum of four and six pounds for the Lower and Upper Schools respectively, though the maximum fees were to remain the same. Local boys were also to be allowed to remain in the Junior department until they were fifteen years old. Needless to say, these concessions did not mollify the die-hards, a large handbill (Figure 4) proclaiming their position, which was communicated to Parliament in a motion rejecting the Scheme, tabled by Mr. Wheelhouse, M.P. for Leeds. This was opposed effectively by the Marquess of Ripon and in May 1872 the new Scheme became law.

# RIPON 'FREE' GRAMMAR SCHOOL, "Now! no longer so."

## CITIZENS,

Every legitimate means have been made use of to preserve your school "free," but the power and machinations of the Government, combined with the local influence of the Marquis of Ripon, have been too strong, and by a majority of 84 to 19 Mr. Wheelhouse's motion was defeated in the House of Commons, at Two o'clock in the morning of May the 7th, 1872 - Sir Henry Storks, your so called Representative, voting against the wishes of the great bulk of the Electors of Ripon.

Mr. Forster, on May the 8th, in answer to a question put to him by Mr. Fawcett, stated "that there were very considerable endowments in Ripon out of which the Commissioners hoped to obtain some funds for the education of Girls, and they had already suggested that such an application should be made with reference to a part of those endowments."

From the foregoing passage, quoted from Mr. Forster's speech, it is quite evident that it is the intention of the Endowed Schools' Commissioners ere long to take the "Mayor's Dole" and the funds of "Jepson's Hospital."

"Recipients of the Mayor's Dole," you who have hitherto been able to obtain a few extra comforts at the coldest and most inclement season of the year, you are now to be deprived of these little enjoyments because Lord Lyttelton and his colleagues, who are enjoying incomes of from £600 to £2,000 a year paid by the nation, lose a craze and think that charity or *elemosynary relief*, as they term it, is demoralizing.

"Poor Orphan Boys of Ripon," to whom Zacharias Jepson, of happy memory, bequeathed his wealth, you are also to be deprived of an asylum, and in future must breathe the elevating atmosphere of a workhouse, and like poor Oliver Twist be in future stigmatised as "Work'us boys."

Citizens of Ripon, your chief magistrate, eight ex-mayors, and a majority of the Town Council, representing we have been told the "wealth and intelligence" of Ripon, have sanctioned the action of the Endowed Schools' Commissioners with regard to our hitherto Free Grammar School, and as far as in them laid have paved the way for the abolition of the Mayor's Dole and Jepson's Hospital. When the Most Noble Marquis presented their petition in the House of Peers, how his breast must have heaved and what a thrill of satisfaction must have passed through his frame as he carried the precious document to the table of the House; by a little stretch of the imagination one could fancy his feelings being somewhat akin to those of a certain Roman Emperor, when he sat fiddling during the destruction of his capital.

Citizens, there is a commandment which says,

## "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL,"

Will you at any future Parliamentary or Municipal Election vote for the men who have helped the Endowed Schools' Commissioners to rob you? quoting a quaint expression used by an ex-Mayor, "*I trust*" you will not. One word more, your Member, the Governors of the School, your Mayor, your ex-Mayors, and a majority of the Corporation have gone against your interests, I cannot do better than quote the following lines of Shakespeare as applicable to such men—

"Verily Justice thou art fled to brutes,"  
"And men have lost their reason."

I am, Citizens and Fellow-sufferers,

An injured Citizen.

Ripon, May 20th, 1872.

Figure 4

Under the new Scheme, the governors lost their right to make new statutes and any changes to the constitution had to be agreed with the Charity Commission. Various amendments to the basic Scheme were made, which are noted in the lengthy correspondence with the Charity Commissioners, the West Riding County Council and the Board of Education.

The most important changes came with the establishment of local county councils in 1888, which had powers to make various grants to schools, and with the creation of the Board of Education in 1899, which from 1902 carried out school inspections and also made grants. The well-documented financial difficulties experienced by Ripon Grammar School made it increasingly indebted to such outside funding and rendered it ever less an independent institution.



## Property Endowments

For most of its history, the fortunes of the school were based on its properties and their management by the governors. The earliest document possessed in the School archives is a lease of 1550 to Edmund Browne, schoolmaster, from the Duchy of Lancaster, which had taken control of the School's lands under the Act of Dissolution of Chanties (1547). Despite the Royal Charter, which conveyed these lands to the School, their title remained insecure and was contested in the Duchy of Lancaster and Exchequer Courts. The final Exchequer decision was in favour of the governors, whose rights were confirmed by Decree in 1585.

The sixteenth-century documents give the names of lands and their tenants. The descent of the various properties can be traced through the large collection of leases and through the various surveys and rentals. Some of the surveys also include very full information about the condition of the properties, land usage and the rights of the tenants

Until the nineteenth century, the School properties were held on 21-year leases, surveys of the lands in 1797 and again in 1811, revealing that between these dates their value had doubled but rents had not increased. Isaac Cook, the headmaster, suggested in 1805 that the estates were incompetently administered and his successor, William Ewbank argued that properties should be let at rents corresponding to their real value.

The records of the 1811 survey are of particular importance (eg Figure 5) The surveyor was John Humphries and he put on record for the first time the exact extent of the Grammar School lands, recording their boundaries in a splendid volume, complete with maps, which cost the School £157, a sum greater than its average annual income.



Figure 5

The Report of the Charity Commissioners of 1820 shows that the governors were unhappy with the current system of leasing lands. Mention is also made of a petition addressed to the Archbishop of York (Lord of the Manor of Ripon) by 120 Ripon citizens complaining of the precariousness of the system of leases and the unwillingness of tenants to expend their own money on repairs. Their proposed solution was for the properties in the town of Ripon to be sold and for the profits to be used to purchase larger and more convenient parcels of land. Clearly both governors and tenants were in accord as to the solution; what was in doubt was the means by which this could be effected.

To sell the Charity lands and buy new ones would have required a special Act of Parliament, which the governors could not afford to procure. The solution at Ripon came in the form of an Act of Enclosure, passed in 1826, which allowed the lands of the area to be redistributed. The Grammar School tenants were eager for such a course of action to be followed and made a petition to the Governors to this effect. Some were to exchange lands they owned for lands to the equivalent value which they had formerly leased from the Grammar School. Other lands were enfranchised (for they lay in the Manor of Ripon) and then sold to their respective tenants. The capital thus released allowed the governors to issue new leases for indefinite periods at an annual rent, a pattern revealed in the surviving advertisements, tenancy agreements and notices to quit .

Another series of land deals resulted from the construction of the Leeds to Thirsk and the Ripon to Harrogate railways, first proposed in 1844, which were to run over Grammar School lands. Disputes arose over who owned which lands and how much compensation should be paid, wrangling lasted for over a decade, generating a vast amount of correspondence.

Monies arising from the land sales were invested in Government Stock and in 1861 and 1863 the governors contemplated the purchase of estates at auction but they proved expensive and caution prevailed .

All aspects of the estate and financial management of the School during the period 1850-1918 are covered in detail by the correspondence with the Charity Commissioners, who had to give their assent to any proposed deals . The finances of the school are documented in the minute books and account books (Figure 6), in a series of treasurer's accounts 1831-1850 and in the annual statements of accounts prepared for the Charity Commissioners which survive for 1853-1887 and for the Board of Education, 1913-1918. The financial records of the school are particularly complete during the period 1879-1895, when John Wood was clerk.



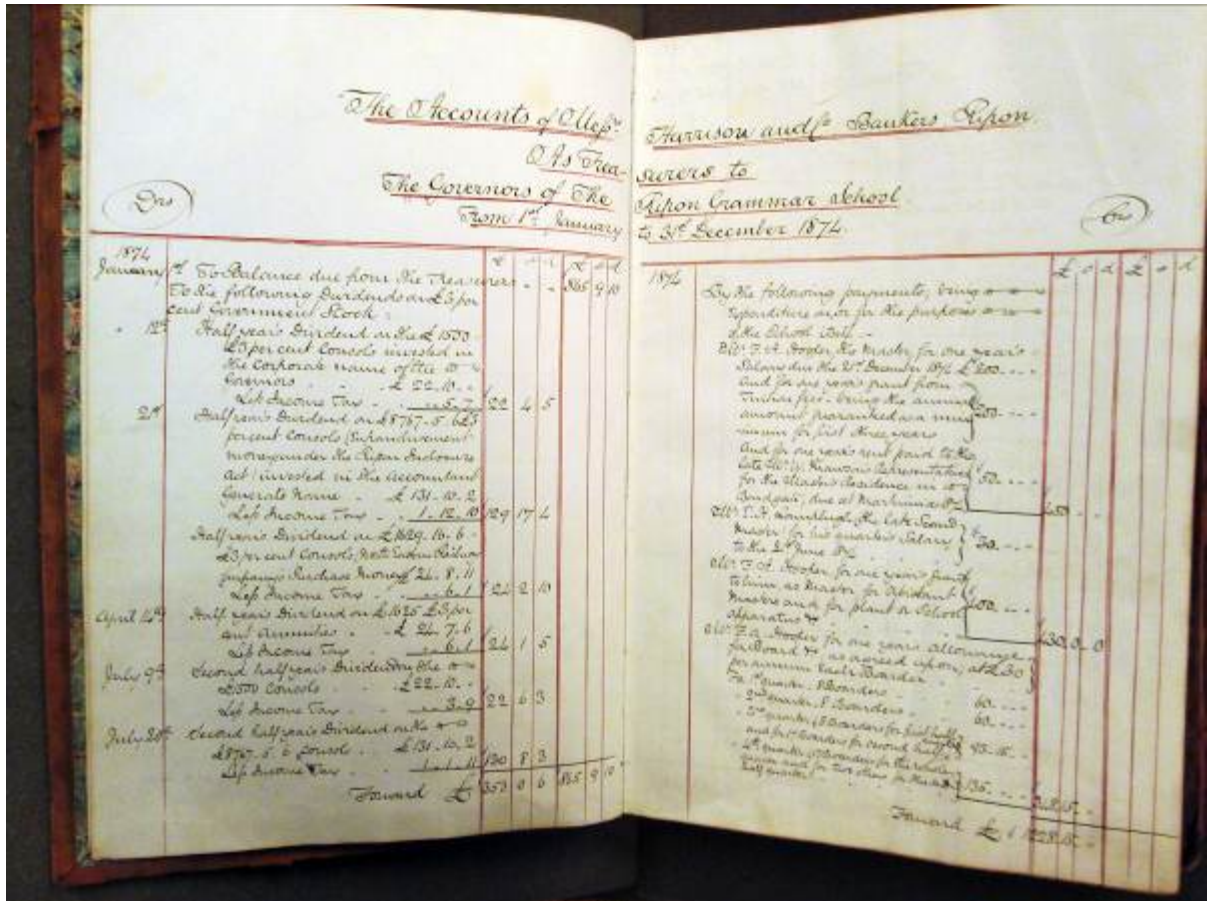


Figure 6

## Curriculum

Until the nineteenth century, information about the educational aspects of Ripon Grammar School is extremely scarce. Records of the master and usher may be found in the minute books but no regular correspondence survives until the 1830s for either post.

Supplementary members of staff, whose salaries were paid by the headmaster and who were first employed by Plues, have left even fewer records. News of the appointment of a new headmaster or usher brought many applications and correspondence which can be revealing with regard to the contemporary state of the school.

Pupils first begin to be recorded in the minute books after 1814, when the names of free boys are listed annually by class. Evidence about their schooling first becomes available during the headmastership of William Plues (1812-1851) and much can be learnt from the 1820 report of the Charity Commissioners. The Commissioners were preoccupied with the problem of declining numbers of town boys attending the Grammar School. Whilst Plues had undoubtedly restored pupil attendance to a healthy total after the tribulations of Cook's period, the ratio of town boys to boarders had swung markedly in favour of the latter, who paid fees and lived in the Master's house.

Some idea of their lifestyle may be gained from a school bill of 1832 (Figure 7), which mentions classes in dancing, drawing and French.

*from Mr. Plues to June 1832*  
*H. Plues Ripon School 1832*  
*Account to the 1832*

**Ripon Grammar School opens again Thursday**  
**Midsummer**  
**Master Charles Kipling's** ~~Account~~ **BILL 1832** 2 August next

	£	s.	d.
Apothecary, . . . . .		10	6
Board and Education, 1 quarter 13, 2 6			
Books, . . . . .			
Dancing . . . . .			
Drawing . . . . .			
Drill-Sergeant, . . . . .			
Entrance, . . . . .			
French, . . . . .			
Hair Dresser, <del>French</del> . . . . .	5	0	
Hatter, . . . . .			
Hosier, . . . . .	10	6	
Joiner, . . . . .			
Laundress, . . . . .			
Letters and Parcels, . . . . .	4	8	
Linen-Draper, . . . . .	13	9	
Music, . . . . .			
Physician, . . . . .			
Pocket Money, . . . . .			
Shoe-Maker, . . . . .	3	0	
Single Bed, . . . . .			
Tailor, . . . . .	6	4	
Travelling Expenses, 110, 0 4, 3 5 0			
Use of Linen, <del>115 0</del> . . . . .			
Vacation, . . . 3 weeks, . . . 4 0 0			
Ripon 18 June 1832			
Dear Sir			<b>£23 1 3</b>

*I have taken the liberty of sending this bill to you, thanking you to present it to the governors of the town of your next relative John Kipling Esq. The quarters I have charged as in all cases, when boys are absent from school during the whole half year. I should feel much obliged by being early informed whether I am to expect Master Charles again or not. I am, Dear Sir, your very faithful Servant.*

**Figure 7**

New subjects had been introduced into the curriculum prior to 1820 (geography, history and mathematics) but, like handwriting, these classes were subject to tuition fees and Plues himself remained strongly committed to the Classics. The 1820 Report to the Charity Commissioners suggests that on the whole parents were not opposed to this bias, except for the problem that the Classics textbooks were costly and Plues had disposed of the library of such works formerly used by the free boys.

The 1837 Statutes widened the curriculum by providing for teaching “in addition to the usual branches of Classical Education in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography with the use of the Globes, the Bible, English Grammar, History, Algebra and the Elements of Euclid”. The use of globes had been an additional touch by Plues, who also requested a few large maps to be suspended from the walls. These were ordered straight away and the bill from J. and G. Cary survives.

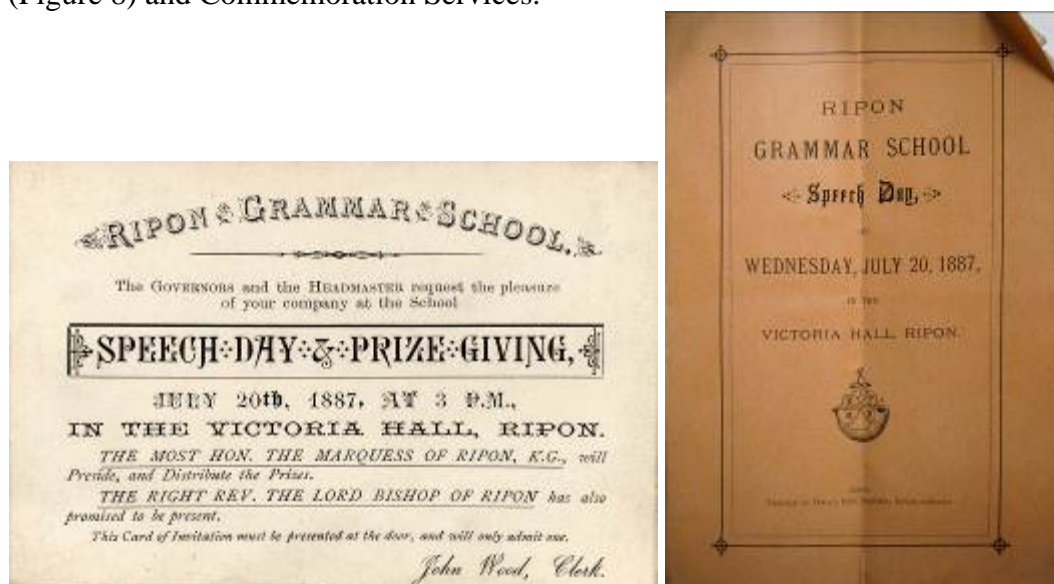
Nevertheless, the curriculum remained a source of contention. In 1848 a pair of petitions were addressed to the governors. One came from the tradesmen and inhabitants of Ripon

who argued that an education devoted 'to the imparting of knowledge of the dead Languages' was of little use to boys intending to enter trade and business and indeed set them at a disadvantage when competing with those who had benefited from a commercial education. The subjects they wanted taught were mathematics, English and at least one of the Continental languages. The other petition, which claimed to come from the local parents of pupils and former pupils, opposed these demands, which they claimed would be injurious to the best interests of local inhabitants, as "closing the only Local Channel by which the Sons of Professional Men and Tradesmen can hope to obtain a free and liberal Education, and raise themselves to Situations of Trust, Eminence, and Emolument - and by which the Sons of many humble Parents have raised themselves to the highest Stations in Church and State".

Unsurprisingly, the signatories of the first petition were in the main small tradesmen, whereas their opponents came largely from the professional class. Nothing appears to have been done in response.

The 1872 Statutes laid down the subjects to be taught at the School, of which the only addition to the curriculum was Natural Science. Teaching in this area was promoted when the School enrolled to enter students for examinations run by the Department of Science and Art, which brought grants from South Kensington .

Other evidence for the school syllabus and the standards reached by the pupils is provided by the examination and class reports. After 1872 there was a concerted effort to raise educational standards in order to attract boarders. A number of scholarships and exhibitions were founded, which are described in greater detail in the archive. The School also began to be advertised, by prospectuses, newspaper advertisements and events such as Speech Days (Figure 8) and Commemoration Services.





**Figure 8**

## **School Buildings**

The original Grammar School buildings were in St Agnesgate (Figure 9), next to Ripon Minster. Since the fourteenth century at the latest, a house had been rented from the Chapter by the schoolmaster.



**Figure 9**



It was apparently rebuilt in the seventeenth century, but the first record of building work relates to a new schoolroom constructed in 1851-2 (Figure 10).



**Figure 10**

The problems with the St Agnesgate site can be identified from a variety of sources. Writing to an applicant for the headmastership in 1851, the clerk claimed that the schoolhouse was dry, airy and in a good state of repair but was forced to admit that its situation was “somewhat low, owing to the Cathedral.” That this was an understatement is made clear by a petition of 1862 from parents and citizens who argued that the “unhealthy situation” with its “old and incommodious premises” deterred prospective parents from sending their boys to the school. The governors made inquiries about possible sites for a new school and N.A. Bourne from Thirsk put himself forward for consideration as architect but nothing came of the suggestion.

More serious were the proposals of 1872. Two possible sites were selected, one at the junction of Park Street and Firby Lane and the other further down Park Street, near Clothholme Lane. Both belonged to the Marquess of Ripon, who offered to give to the School whichever site was chosen.

The plans were shelved as a result of the death of W.F. Stephenson, Master of a private school at Bishopton Close (Figure 11 - 1861 prospectus).



**Figure 11**

In October 1872, the minute book records that Stephenson had suggested giving up his lease on the property to the governors if they wanted the site for their new school, but at the time it was rejected as being too distant from Ripon. A year and a half later, only the Marquess of Ripon appears to have retained a preference for the city site. Bishopton Close was acquired and bills and correspondence show the buildings being made ready over the summer (Figure 12) . In late 1874 the School advertising its opening in its new situation (Figure 13) . The old St Agnesgate premises were eventually sold back to the Dean and Chapter of Ripon, to be used once more as a school.



BISHOPTON CLOSE IN THE 1870's.

The room with a figure at the window is now the boarding-staff dining room.

**Figure 12**



DECEMBER 12, 1874.

**EDUCATION.**

**RIPON GRAMMAR SCHOOL.**

FOUNDED A.D., 1555.

**CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNORS:**  
**THE MOST HONOURABLE THE MARQUESS**  
**OF RIPON, K.G.**

**HEAD MASTER:**

**F. A. HOOPEE, ESQ., M.A.**

(Late fellow of Trinity College, Oxford.)

**T**HIS SCHOOL which was founded and endowed, by Royal Charter, as the Free Grammar School of Queen Mary in Ripon, in the year 1555 has lately been reorganised under a Scheme of the Endowed Schools Commissioners, and has now been re-opened in the spacious and commodious buildings heretofore known as "Bishopton Close School," formerly occupied by the Rev. James Charnock, and afterwards by the late W. F. Stephenson, Esq.

It is a Boarding and Day School and prepares pupils for the Universities, the Civil and Military Services and for general Business:

**FEEES.**

Entrance.....	£1
For Tuition in Upper Department....	£8 per annum
"    "    in Lower Department....	£4 " "
For Boarding.....	£40 " "
For Daily Boarders.....	£10 or £8 " "

Any further information required may be obtained on application to THE HEAD MASTER, or to R. W. NICHOLSON, Esq., Ripon, Clerk to the Governors.

GRAVE HOUSE LEYBURN.—Mrs.

**Figure 13**

An architect, George Corson from Leeds was chosen to design and erect the ambitious expansion to the School of 1887-9, which created a school hall, more classrooms, a master's study and increased provision for boarders, including a large dormitory (Figure 14 -15). A large amount of correspondence with Corson survives.





RIPON GRAMMAR SCHOOL, THE MODERN BUILDINGS AT BISHOPTON CLOSE.

**Figure 14**



East Wing and Science Laboratories

**Figure 15**

Other than the papers regarding the new cricket pitch , little survives relating to work done after 1889, apart from a plan for the Sanatorium (Figure 16) , which was opened in 1907 and an account book for work on that and the new laboratories of the same date .



**Figure 16**

Records of building work represent quite a strong survival within the Grammar School archive, particularly with regard to their financial aspect with bills for repairs and alterations existing from 1816.

## **Information Sources**

*Dr Bill Petchey ( RGS History Master from 1960 -1994)*

This ‘history’ is based substantially on the summary written by the late Dr Bill Petchey on the transfer of the School’s Document Archive to York University Library (Borthwick Institute) in June 1995. Some editing to include photos & allow the transfer of the document to a web format was carried out by DLC & GH in February 2013.

The RGS Archive is substantial and forms an important resource, especially for historians of education and for those interested in the lands which formed part of the Grammar School endowment. During 2012-13, a substantial amount of the archive, together with some documents from the National Archives has been photographed and transferred to form a digital archive for use within the school.

***P.W. Rogers, A History of Ripon Grammar School, (Ripon, 1954)***

Ripon Grammar School also benefits from an excellent history, written by P.W. Rogers in 1954, who made extensive use of the archives. This summary makes no attempt to supplant P.W. Rogers's work, to which it is indeed indebted..

***N. Carlisle, A Concise Description of the Endowed Grammar Schools of England and Wales, 2 vols., (London, 1818. Reprinted by the Richmond Publishing Co. Ltd., 1972)***

***A.F. Leach, Early Yorkshire Schools, I, (Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, XXVII, 1899)***

***J. Murphy, Church, State and Schools in Britain, 1800-1970, (London, 1971)***

***F. Smith, A History of English Elementary Education 1760-1902 (London, 1931)***