

A Brief History of Time - Ripon Grammar School Clock



1889 Sketch of the New School Buildings

Ripon Grammar School Clock. What has it got to do ...

with the vandaliser of St Alban's Abbey?

with 'Big Ben'?

with Kirkby Malzeard and with Leeds?

Is it possible this harmless timepiece could ever have been controversial?

The designs for the tower and its clock were drawn up and the building constructed from 1887 to 1889, when the Governors decided on an ambitious

and very costly enlargement and modernisation of the school to the designs of Mr George Corson of Leeds. Built of expensive but very durable pressed red bricks from Leeds and stone from Rainton, the new building was intended to advance the School's rising fortunes and a clock tower was in a way a celebration of the reputation in the North of England, the Governors felt they had re-established.



George Corson 1829 -1910

However, the Charities Commission controlled the endowments from which the funds for this work (over £6,000) had to be drawn and as the buildings neared completion in 1888 the Commissioners announced that as those endowments were intended entirely for the provision of education they did not feel justified in releasing any more to pay for a purely ornamental clock and its turret, however imposing it might be.

Early in 1889 a compromise was reached, by which the Commission sanctioned money to build the turret with its expensive decorative brickwork and two groups of subscribers were found who would pay for the clock itself:

- former Grammar School pupils and also former pupils of the Bishopton Close School which had occupied the original buildings until 1874.

So it was all ready for October 10th, 1889, a Market Day, when the Marquis of Ripon, in the company of distinguished guests such as the Bishop, the Dean, the Mayor and Mayoress, Dr Crow (the Cathedral Organist), Governors, Canons, and of course the Headmaster, Mr Haslam, opened the new buildings and invited his wife, the Marchioness, to start the clock.

With few pauses, mostly caused by ice and snow, it has been telling the time ever since, surviving break-time competitions early in this century to see who could hit the hands with a thrown stone (impossible ever since the playground was asphalted, and with no reported successes).

It did break down in 1976 and again there was controversy over the expense of maintaining a mechanism which has no essentially educational purpose. Once more subscribers found the money for its repair and the event underlined the public value of this clock: many residents in the area look up to tell the time when they are gardening or on their way to work, or hear it strike during the evening and early morning and many of them contributed to the restoration fund at a time when the future of the School (it will be remembered) was in some doubt. (And it has needed some minor repairs in 1991.)

When the Marchioness started it, only the South and East dials had been installed. It has not yet been established when the West dial was added but, soon after October 1889, the North dial was added by Mr John Kearsley, a Governor and former pupil. He was present at the opening ceremony and a guest for luncheon either with the Marquis at Studley Royal Manor or among the 70 entertained by the Headmaster (indeed he died soon afterwards, aged only 45), and during that festive lunch he must have decided to make this gift.

When it was announced at the afternoon's Great Meeting in the Victoria Hall of Ripon's Market Place, it was specified that this dial would be 'of great advantage to the numerous passengers along the Kirkby Malzeard road', thus stressing once more the public nature of this clock.

To describe it as Bishopton's and Clothorholme's Big Ben is a little more than a flight of fancy, for the designer of its working parts was Sir Edmund Beckett, otherwise known as Lord Grimthorpe - well, he had the patent, the construction was by the firm of William Potts and Sons of Leeds who still carried out the maintenance work in 1991.

Lord Grimthorpe, apart from being an eminent lawyer with a special ecclesiastical practice in York, was an enthusiastic mechanic. He was a very self-opinionated and controversial designer of churches who will probably never be forgiven for what he did to the cathedral at St Alban's but as a designer of clocks he was superb, and President of the Horological Institute in recognition of his command of the subject.

He made the clocks which were displayed in the Great Exhibition of 1851 and his best-seller was a modestly titled Rudimentary Treatise on Clock and Watch-making which went into many editions.



Lord Grimthorpe 1816 -1905

Big Ben is properly the name only of the great bell in the Clock Tower of the Houses of Parliament: the machinery which controls Big Ben and works the clock there was designed by this Lord Grimthorpe in the same year (1859) that he published his Treatise.

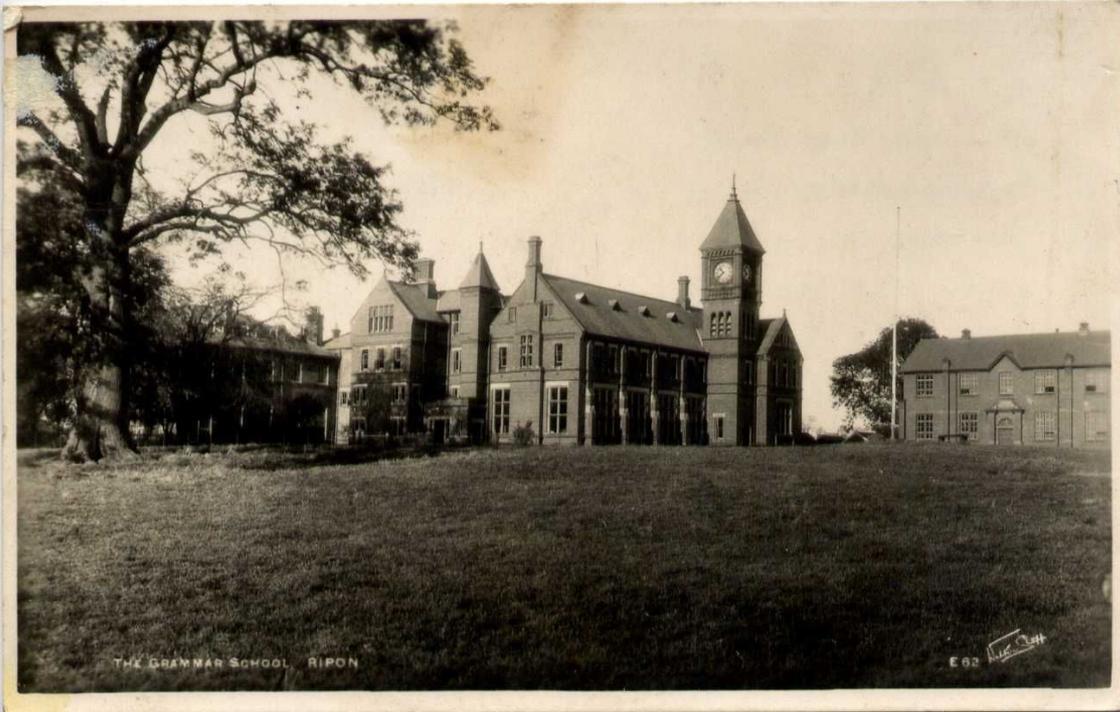
However, let us not go too far with our claims for the special interest of the mechanism within our tower; Lord Grimthorpe profited greatly from his patented designs because they were installed in many other buildings (including St Paul's Cathedral), not just in our Victorian extensions and the clock works of Leeds Parish Church are reported to be identical with ours.

Riponian article 1991, Author: Dr Bill Petchey



RIPON GRAMMAR SCHOOL, THE MODERN BUILDINGS AT BISHOPTON CLOSE.

The School Buildings 1897



The School Buildings 1949