

Bedstone Court

The construction of the original school building, Bedstone Court, was started in 1881 as the country 'seat' of the Ripley Family. The Ripley family made their fortune in the dyeing industry in Bradford. Henry Ripley had become a politician and in 1880 Mr Henry William Ripley became Sir Henry William Ripley of Rawdon in the West Riding of the county of Yorkshire and of Bedstone in the County of Shropshire. Sadly, Sir Henry died before the completion of Bedstone Court.

The court is one of the finest examples of a Victorian 'Calendar House' in the land. It was designed by the architect Thomas Harris who had recently built Milner Field in the Aire Valley for Titus Salt the Younger, the son of Titus Salt the elder another famous Bradford Industrialist and politician.



Bedstone Court viewed from the east entrance

Bedstone Court was designed in the popular Elizabethan/Tudor English Half-Timbered style standing on a plateau commanding extensive views of the surrounding country.

It is known as a Calendar House because it is said that it 'has a chimney for every month, a window for every day, seven entrances and fifty two rooms'. Legend has it that these facts must never be checked, as anyone who tries will be assured to fall upon hard times.

Bedstone School was founded in 1948 by Mr & Mrs R Rees. At the time, Bedstone Court was still owned by the Ripley family. Sir Henry and Lady Ripley didn't live there, instead they made their home at 'Dower House', which is now Bedstone House, (the Junior Girls' Boarding house). One of the very first pupils at Bedstone School was Martin, the son of Mr & Mrs Rees. Martin Rees made his mark in the work of Physics and in particular Astrophysics. He is a Fellow of Trinity College and Emeritus Professor of Cosmology and Astrophysics at the University of Cambridge. In 1995 he was made 'Astronomer Royal'. In 2005 Martin Rees was elevated to a life peerage and is now sits in the House of Lords as Baron Rees of Ludlow.



Bedstone Court viewed from the south terrace

The Court's most breathtaking sight is the 'Calendar Window'. The window is situated alongside the main staircase in what is now called the 'Old Hall'. It is some thirty feet wide and ten feet high and is divided by heavy mullions into thirteen sections, one for each month of the year, with a central section symbolising 'Time'.



The central section of the Calendar Window

The window takes the form of 'Father Time' surrounded by the seasons of the year. In all the allegories, the episodes are arranged in a three-tiered, frieze-like manner. In the upper sphere, the sphere of mythology, each month and its planet is paralleled by their ancient divinity in the triumphal procession. The middle layer shows the signs of the zodiac, while below are rendered the courtly events appropriate to that particular time of the year.

The window was designed and constructed by the London firm 'Campbell, Smith & Campbell'.



The Calendar Window viewed from the balcony

Bedstone School was founded as an all boys' school and all teaching and living was in Bedstone Court. As time has passed and the school has grown, purpose-built teaching accommodation has been built on the site. Recent investment includes a multi-purpose sports hall, a state-of-the-art music facility and fitness and performing arts studios. These structures are a far cry from the original classrooms that would have been occupied by Bedstone's first pupils.

Currently, the Court houses both the Senior and Junior Boys' boarding houses, the central administration hub of the school, the school library, the kitchens and the dining room.

Originally, assemblies and larger gatherings would have taken place in the Old Hall which was the main hall of the original building.



The Old Hall, (with Calendar Window to the right of the staircase)

This area is now used to host parents and visitors for match teas and other formal events.

Bedstone Court was destroyed by fire in 1996 but the rebuild was such that most of the original features were reinstated. It was a miracle that the calendar window and other stained glass windows in the Court were not destroyed.

The Fire Service, under instructions from the then Headmaster, Mr. Michael Symonds, did a remarkable job keeping them soaked with water to ensure that they would not buckle or melt from the intense heat.

Bedstone Court is a wonderful House with a wonderful history. It is fitting that Sir William Huw Ripley, (5th Baronet), lives very close to the Court and provides the current Head, and therefore the school, with a treasured link to the Ripley family who built this marvellous house all those years ago.

John Hodges a past pupil of the school, has written a book which outlines the history of this fine mansion. Looking at the 'Ripley' family and their connections with the house and the estate, which once covered over 5000 acres. It tells the story of his own time as a pupil in the 1960s when the school was a full boarding establishment and Mr Rees the founder Headmaster was still living here. The history of Bedstone Court is an interesting read. Copies can be obtained from the College itself or directly from the author Mr John Hodges, 7 Amber Reach, Spring Lane, Worcester, WR51AU. Tel: 07970770144 or e-mail: richardjhodges79@gmail.com priced at £19.99 and free p&p.