

## The History of Bishops' College

The Broxbourne Council owned complex known as Bishops' College has a long and interesting history. It is made up of a number of buildings that have been added over the years.



The oldest part of Bishops' College is the Spanish Ambassador's House. It is believed that this building stands on a site originally owned by the Grade II listed Green Dragon pub. Dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century The Green Dragon was an inn said to have been used by the Stuarts for foreign ambassadors. Tradition says that the Spanish Ambassador was housed here in particular to keep him at a safe distance when the court was in residence at Theobalds Palace! The building we see today was built around 1720 as part of Churchgate House.



In February 1792 Churchgate House was purchased by the Non-conformist religious group known as the Apostolic Society. This was a college originally established in 1768 by Selina, Countess Dowager of Huntingdon in Breconshire, South Wales for training young men as evangelical ministers. The group was known as the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion until her death in 1791. The college moved to Cheshunt in 1792 when it changed its name to the Apostolic Society and remained until 1905 when it moved to Cambridge and eventually merged with Westminster College in 1968 eventually becoming the training college of the United Reform Church.



The society paid £950 for Churchgate House and its 10 acres of land. The college started with 7 young men, the aim to increase to 20 students. It opened on 24 August to commemorate Bartholomew Day – A day when thousands of Protestants were massacred during the French wars of religion in 1572. The Reverend Nicholson was employed as President and head tutor.

Discussions over the chapel for the college went on for a number of years. Initially the parlour of the house was used, while estimates were sought to build a chapel. In 1793 estimates were received for £1011 for a new building or £300 to convert the coach house and stables and use the parlour for student rooms. Work however did not proceed until 1806 when a chapel for public worship was finally built. This building is now known as the "Beaufort Suite" and stands

in front of the Spanish Ambassadors suite. It was altered in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was used as the district Council Chamber until the current offices were built. The building was also licensed for use as the local registry office.



Window tax was an issue for the college and in 1799 the bill for this and “house tax” came to £21.10. The college tried to get an exemption as they ran as a charity – this was not possible as the tax was even paid by the nearby orphan school.

The college was extended in the 1820s. The existing stable and coach house was demolished to build rooms for 20 students and a large dining hall now known as the “Huntingdon Suite”



In 1870 further work took place to build a new main college at a cost of £11,000. This enabled the college to accommodate an increased number of students. Designed by Lander and Bedells, a 100ft clock tower was also built. In 1875 the octagon room was built to house the library. This part of the



building is now used as a registry office. There is a raised inscription on the stone on the right hand side of the steps leading to what was the President’s House.

### Fun Facts

- In 1795 a neighbour built a cow shed on college against the wall of the college. His was removed and the neglected grounds improved. Part of the land was converted into an orchard, a kitchen garden was planted and a gravel path built to the college’s summer house beside the New River.
- Students were provided with two clean shirts, two cravats, one pair of stockings one handkerchief and one night cap every week.
- They were banned from smoking tobacco
- Recycling was encouraged. In November 1793 it was resolved that old sheets brought from the college in Wales were remade and used as towels by the students.
- Although they were studying religion they still participated in student antics:

- On one occasion a gun was fired into the front parlour of the college and a reward of £20 was offered for apprehending the offenders and bringing them to justice. The offender was never found.
- In 1794 a special meeting of the trustees was held in consequence of a complaint, against William Jones one of the students, “whose conduct has been very inconsistent with his character and profession” Although he had not committed “the gross act of sin” and was remorseful he was made an example and was suspended from college for 6 weeks to spend the time in prayer and studying scripture.
- In 1796 it was decided that the students were having a bit too much free time in town. It was therefore agreed decided that they would only be able to go to town with special permission of the President of the college.
- One student was locked in his room by another. The keyhole was filled with cayenne pepper and set alight. As the room filled with smoke the trapped student opened the window and put his head out for fresh air only to be soaked from a bucket of water from the room above.
- A Mr Walsh was asked to leave the college when he married in secret – only single men were allowed to train in the college!
- The students had free time and used it in a number of ways:
  - In October 1796 a request was approved for a copper to enable them to brew beer
  - They played quoits, and cricket
  - They rafted on the Pond and New River
  - They fly fished the New River

After the Apostolic College moved to Cambridge in 1906 the buildings were bought by the Reverend F Fox Lambert, Vicar of Cheshunt to establish an Anglian college. The purchase was supported by the Bishops of St Albans, London, Southwark and Chelmsford and for this reason it received its name Bishops’ College. The new college opened in 1909. In 1910 the field across the New River was also purchased and turned into a football pitch and tennis courts. Part of this land now forms the Council Staff car park.



A number of changes made to Bishops’ College include a new entrance to the dining hall in 1931. In 1936 an extension was added at the eastern end of the 1870’s building. This new room which was used as their chapel is now the Council’s print and post room.

During the Second World War the college buildings were used commandeered for use by various army regiments and the college briefly relocated.

In September 1968 the college closed and the students transferred to Queen College in Birmingham. Bishops' College was purchased by Cheshunt Urban District Council in 1972. In 1974 the Urban District Councils of Cheshunt and Hoddesdon merged. A large extension for the Council was designed to harmonize with the existing listed buildings which involved demolishing part of the Principals house. The new building was opened in 1986 by the Duke of Kent.



The park beside Bishop College is Whit Hern Park. This was formerly the grounds of Whit Hern House which stood on the site of the circular flower near the main entrance. The house was bought by the Council in 1956 for the grounds to be used as a public park.