

Llanthony Priory and Gloucester Grammar School.

'to which scholar's flock for the sake of learning'³

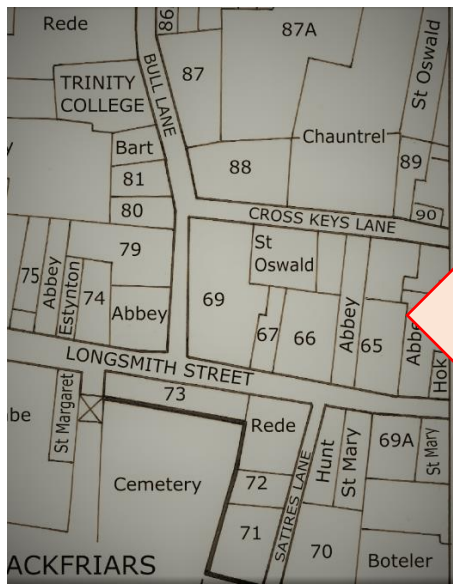
For over 350 years, not all trouble free, the Canons of Llanthony Priory were responsible for secular education in Gloucester.

Sometime around 1154 a charter of Henry II granted the Canons of Llanthony the right to provide '*unam scolam*' (one school) in the town of Gloucester. The original charter does not survive, however, reviews of the charter by Richard I in 1198 and John in 1199 confirms this original grant.



It is not known why Henry gave this charter but may be because he had close connections with Llanthony. It was not unusual for such charters to be given to religious houses, with the Augustinians being frequently entrusted with secular schooling. The wording of the charter however is unusual as it grants one school and may reflect the fact that during the reign of Henry I St Oswald's Priory in Gloucester had been given a charter to provide education in all Gloucester. Maybe it was intended that the Pories were to share education provision, however it would appear that in reality by the late twelfth century it was Llanthony's school that was the general school in the town¹. Over the centuries though, these rights would come to cause disputes between Llanthony and St Oswald's.

Little is known about the early school in Gloucester, it was almost certainly a grammar school; teaching Latin and grammar and may have taught song also. By 1396 the school house was located on Smith Street (Longsmith St, today) and successive masters drawn from the canons, priests or laymen would have been appointed by the Prior. The names of the masters are not all known; the earliest mention is of Master Roger 'rector', in 1203². Only boys attended the school and a fee would have been paid directly to the schoolmaster. This given the importance of Gloucester would have offered a good living and possibly was the reason that St Oswald's reasserted its rights to open a school in Gloucester in 1286.



Plot 65; The site of Llanthony Grammar School from 1396 -1535.²

The site was 36ft 11in wide in the front; 37 ft 3 in wide at the back by a barbers plot; 69ft 8in deep on the east by the Abbot of Gloucester tenement and 67ft 7in deep in the west by John Beres tenement.

Let for 40 years, rent 24 shillings annually payable of the usual quarter days.

The Gloucester Grammar Schools Case.

In 1286 St Oswald's set up a rival school to that of Llanthony, much to the dismay of the Prior, who promptly appealed to Bishop Gifford of Worcester to protect its charter. The Bishop supported this claim writing to the Archdeacon of Gloucester reminding him that schools in Gloucester belonged to Llanthony since ancient times; *no one was to teach except the master appointed by the Prior and any other schools should be suspended*¹. Despite the Bishop of York appealing against this on behalf of St Oswald's, it appears that, for the next century Llanthony continued to operate the only school in Gloucester.

However, in 1382 the Prior was again forced to complain about the encroachment of the rights of Llanthony. John Nelmes, clerk, was called to appear in consistory court at Worcester Cathedral to explain why he was publicly teaching grammar to the detriment of the general school. The matter was seemingly resolved by 1386 when John Nelmes and John Schefield are described as schoolmasters who have the school house by two deeds for 13shillings and 4d. Both were excused a year's rent to help repair the building which was said to be ruinous. Nelmes also agreed to maintain the ancient liberties of the school he had infringed in 1382².

The dispute between the Priories rumbled on and throughout the 1380's and 90's both Llanthony and St Oswald's sought inspections of their charters to assert their rights. However, by 1400 ***"for the sake of the scholars who had been coming uselessly to Gloucester"*** the two houses made peace. St Oswald's granted its

grammar school to Llanthony for a period of 30 years. In return Llanthony paid an annual sum of 13shillings 4d and 15 cocks at lent (a usual gift to schoolmasters following the cock fights at lent); 8 boys from St Oswald's to be taught at the school, without charge by way of alms. The arrangement was sealed by a payment of 5 pounds by each party ^{1&2}.

The final chapter in this dispute took place in 1410. Thomas More, '*that was Scolemaster atte Hereford*'³ set up a grammar school close to the authorised school, thus prompting an action of trespass by the Prior. At the Court of Common Pleas, the prior claimed on behalf of John Hamelyn Schoolmaster that whereas previously a charge of 3shillings could be made, now it was scarcely a shilling, resulting in damages assessed to be 40 pounds.

The Court considered two points firstly whether there was any wrong doing, even though there was damage. Here the court said; 'the teaching of children is 'virtuous and charitable' and as such not punishable. The second point being whether there was a free trade in schools, here the court demurred as 'teaching children is a spiritual matter', therefore not for the Kings Court to decide³. And so, the long running dispute ended without Llanthony being given firm title to being the sole provider of education in the Town.

This is known as the Gloucester Grammar school case, it is taught as an example of 'Damnum sine injuria' in law today. (*Damnum Sine Injuria* (Damage without Injury) is when a damage is suffered without breach of a legal right, but such claim of damage is not valid in court of law.)

A Grant of land.

Over the following century Llanthony continued to provide the grammar school in Gloucester. It is mentioned in the 1455 Rental compiled by Robert Cole.

By 1529, the Prior of Llanthony was relinquishing his authority over being the sole provider of education in the town. In this year a merchant called John Cooke had left monies in his will for the endowment of a '*free schole*' in Gloucester. The Prior gave support to this in a grant of part of the churchyard of St Mary De Crypt and the De Crypt school was established (Southgate Street). The fee 'forever yielding and paying yearly to said rector and his successors there one red rose at the feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist⁴.

Today the tradition continues as each year on Crypt School Founders Day service at the Cathedral the head boy presents the Rector of Mary De Crypt Church a red rose⁵.

The Llanthony school continued for only a few years, but by 1534 the school house 'lately in the holding of Sir William schoolmaster', lay vacant. It was still vacant in 1535 at the time of the dissolution of Llanthony Priory ^{1&2}.

And so the involvement of Llanthony with education in Gloucester town came to an end.

References

1 Orme N: *Education in the West of England. 1066-1548. University of Exeter 1976*

2. Rhodes J: *Terrier of Llanthony Priory's Houses and Lands in Gloucester 1443. Gloucester Record Series Volume 30. The Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society 2016.*

3. Leach A, F: *The Schools of Medieval England. London Methuen and Co.Ltd.1915*

4. Grant: D3270 Gloucester Archives.

5. Old Crypt Schoolroom. www.discoverdecrypt.org.uk