

# REFURBISHMENT OF THE OLD GRAMMAR SCHOOL

by David Holmes



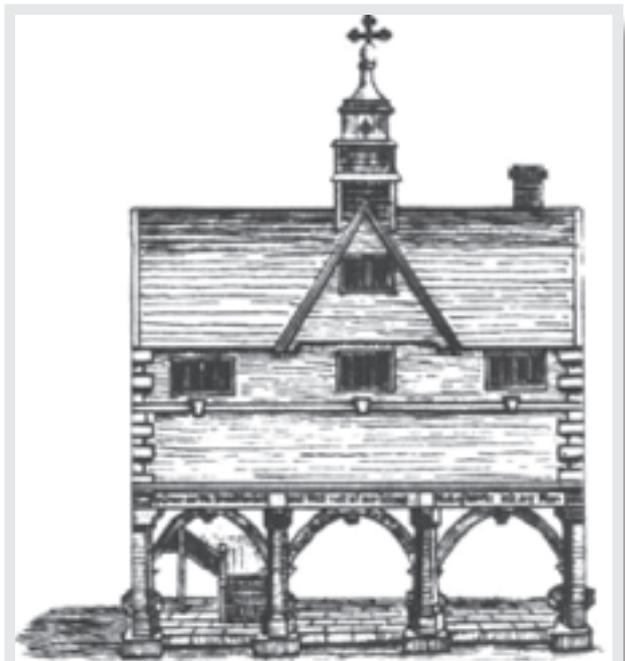
400 years until, in 1994, they agreed to pool their resources and administration and became the

Market Harborough and The Bowdens Charity and the Town Lands (Great Bowden) Charity. In 2004, this Charity amalgamated with the Market Harborough Exhibition Foundation and by so doing acquired ownership of the Old Grammar School. The Charity's name was then revised to its present title, Market Harborough and The Bowdens Charity.

For most of 2014, both residents of the town and visitors wondered what was going on behind the protective sheeting that completely covered The Old Grammar School. This article explains the background to the work and details the work that had to be completed on the most iconic building in Market Harborough.

To understand the reasons for the recent work, it is necessary to consider the origins and history of the Old Grammar School. Most of the following

The work was financed by Market Harborough and The Bowdens Charity (MHBC). How did the Charity become involved with the project? Both Charity and School have a venerable history. In 1994, three local charities, Market Harborough Town Estate and The Bates Charity, Little Bowden Town Estate and Great Bowden (Town Lands) Charity amalgamated to form the present Charity. The first of these was the largest and the earliest documentation relating to that Charity goes back to the mid-16th century, though other documents suggest the Charity obtained its first buildings as early as 1503. The Enclosure Award of 1776 consolidated all the Charity's land into four blocks, totalling 118 acres. The Little Bowden Town Estate is first mentioned in a deed of 1639, when the estate consisted of a house and garden and a nearby close. The first reference to Great Bowden Town Lands Estate was found in a document of the Lord of the Manor of Harborough and Bowden, dated 1624. The three Charities operated separately for some



*This drawing of 1789 appears to be fairly accurate, except that it doesn't show jetties to the gable ends. Note the first floor render, completely covering the timber frame, in imitation of a masonry building*



1837 drawing

historical information is taken from *The Old School of Market Harborough* (Robert Hakewill, 2008). The school was built in 1614 and financed by Robert Smyth, a local man who moved to London where he made his fortune, becoming in due course City Solicitor and Comptroller. Between 1609 and 1614 he made various bequests to his native town and in 1614 he financed construction of a new Grammar School.

It was originally intended to be both a school and a covered area for market traders. According to a note on the 1789 drawing, the bell and ventilation turret had just been added, replacing an earlier turret of around 1697.

A later drawing of 1837 shows how the building had been altered so it is largely the same as the one we see today.

An early photo of the 1860s shows the same features which suggests the earlier drawings were fairly accurate. It is recorded that the building had Collyweston stone slate roofing in the mid-19th century, which may well have been the original roof covering. Considerable restoration work was undertaken in 1868/69. This comprised major works of both repair and alteration, which gave the



1860s photograph taken just before work started.

building the general aesthetic appearance that it now has.

The architect for that renovation was Law of Northampton and the builder was T & R Cosford, also of Northampton. The work comprised: repair of the structural framing; fitting of a new square open-sided oak-framed bell turret, with a pyramidal roof; total replacement of the first floor external render, with visible expression of the first floor timber framing, and with new pargetted panels fitted between; removal of the stair in the north corner and construction of a completely new oak-framed extension to the north east side of the middle bay, with a new staircase, a lavatory at ground level and an additional small room at first floor. The original 17th-century block was also re-roofed at this time; as noted above, it has stained softwood purlins, valley blades and common rafters which exactly match, and are continuous with those to the roof structure of the new extension. The oldest of the current Welsh slate roofing is likely to date from this period.

By 1977, the building was again in poor condition and major renovation work was carried out between 1977 and 1980. The architect this time was A. Drew Edwards of Leicester and the builder was Charles Bindley of Market Harborough. The Victorian repairs to the main posts had comprised the fitting of timber cladding around the original posts – which may have exacerbated decay of the original timber within. Eight of the ten original posts were replaced in oak below the capitals during 1977 together with their stone foundation pads. Also at this time, the first floor chimney breast and stack were removed, the roof was locally repaired, new oak floorboards were fitted to the main first floor room, the kitchen was refitted, the building was rewired and the gilt lettering to the head beams below the jetties were also renewed. The lower parts of the remaining two original posts (adjoining the Victorian extension) were replaced in green oak in 1980. From evidence on site, it appears that the bases of the two Victorian posts to the extension were also replaced in oak around this time, together with some of the front sections of the jetty sole plates to the original 17th-century block.

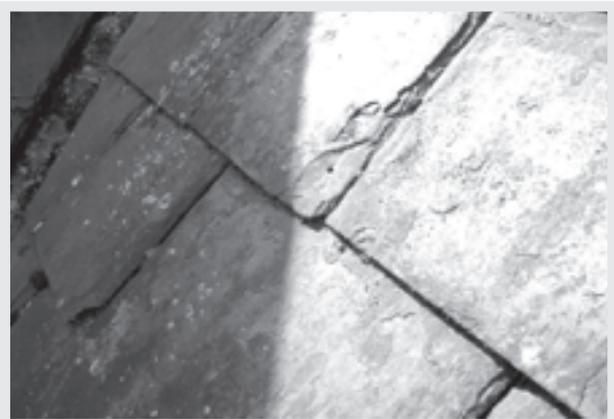
Having inherited the Old Grammar School in 2004, the feoffees (trustees) of MHBC recognised that considerable renovation of the Grade 1 listed building was again necessary. In March 2013, Bryan Martin, an architect from Byfield, Northants, produced a Statement of Heritage, Design and Access. The central aim of the report was to ensure that the building should be sympathetically restored



*Jetty Sole Plate timbers, before and after replacement*

and its appearance should not be materially altered. It detailed four main areas that required repair, the roof and bell turret, external walls including render, facing boards, jetty timbers, window frames and internal work. The feoffees accepted the recommendations and arranged to prepare plans and a specification of the work to be done. Funding was ring-fenced in the Charity's accounts. Throughout this process, the Charity worked closely with English Heritage, whose approval was required before work could begin. The Charity was anxious to ensure that the work was carried out by local contractors; consequently, the contract was awarded to W.W. Brown & Sons, whose offices are within 200 yards of the building.

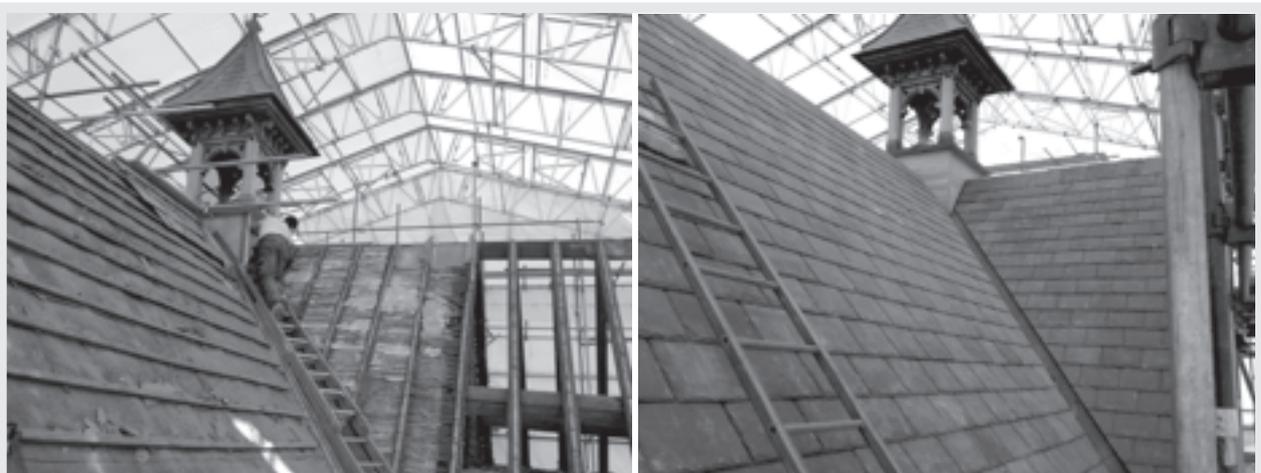
Work started in January 2014 under the supervision of Bryan Martin and the Charity's Steward, Jim Jacobs F.R.I.C.S.. The most important work was to expose and replace the Jetty Sole Plate timbers which span the posts and carry much of the weight of the upper structure. For the most part, these timbers



*Old damaged Welsh slates*

were original from 1614. This was very complex work involving lifting and supporting the structure while new oak timbers were inserted.

A thorough check of the roof coverings showed extensive damage to the Welsh slates which had been in place for some 150 years. Some repairs had been done since 1867 but it was felt that, rather than



*Roof showing partial and finished result*



*Bell Turret after refurbishment*



*Frieze after cleaning. New cladding timbers were fitted.*

attempt another repair, it would be better to completely re-roof the building with new Welsh slates.

At the same time, the Bell Turret showed considerable decay to the inner faces. It was removed and reconstructed with oak corner posts. At the same time, the bell was refurbished and rehung before the Turret was re-roofed and then protected with extensive new lead work and bird-proof mesh.

The old roof coverings were entirely removed allowing new felt to be attached and new laths to be fitted with new Welsh slates.

As part of the roofing works, the Charity involved the town's primary schools in a project that resulted in nearly 100 of the slates being inscribed by pupils so as to provide a record of their lives for future generations to discover.

All the external plasterwork was removed and most of the original Victorian cladding timbers were replaced. The ornate friezes were cleaned and retained. Plaster was reapplied in a way that will

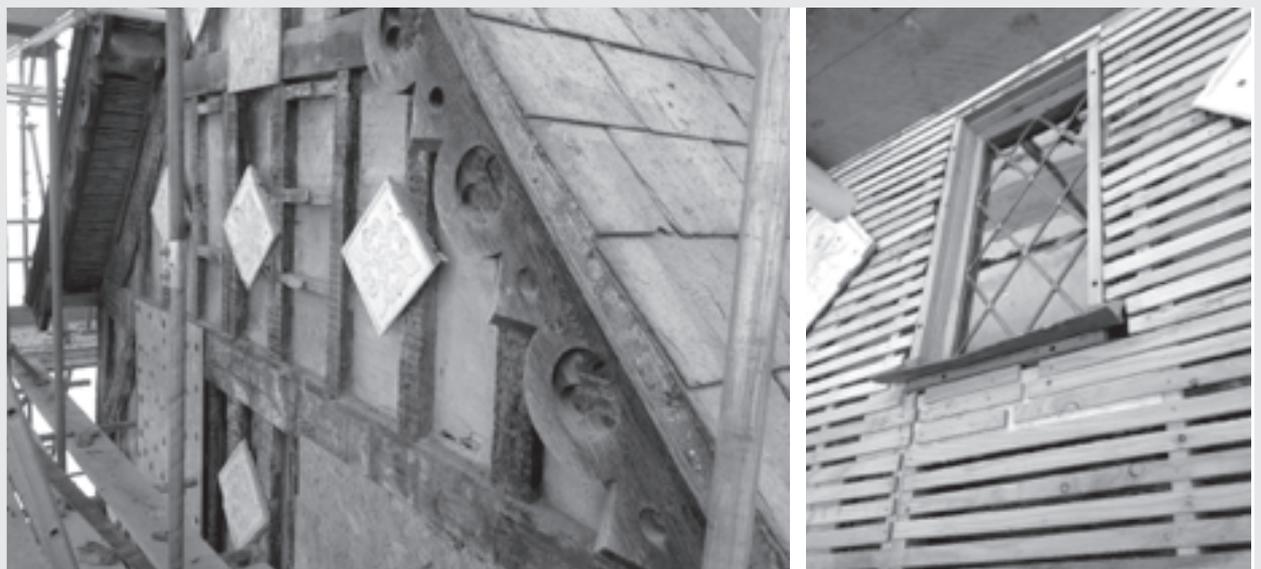
allow some movement but prevent moisture from penetrating the structure. New timbers were treated to draw out the tannic acid, and thereby minimise staining, but have otherwise been left as raw oak. Plasterwork/render was painted a light colour to blend in with the stonework of nearby buildings.



*Interior showing floor after sanding and treatment*



*Roof during and after new tiles were fitted*



*Photo showing old window frame and new leaded light glazed window*

Nearly all the window frames required much repair. Some of the windows dating from the 1868/9 restoration, had been fitted with larger panes than were originally fitted. It was decided to replace these with new leaded light glazed windows that were felt to be more in keeping with the rest of the building. All this work was done by local craftsmen. Where possible, original window fittings were reused.

Most of the main posts have been replaced at various times, so only one had to be replaced this time. New oak was spliced into the worst of the open cracks and splits in the other posts.

Internally, a new kitchen was installed. All electrical fittings were renewed and extended where necessary and provision was made for a new IT link. The whole upper floor was lifted and a new timber



*Wooden toys found under floor, after cleaning by LCC Museums Service*



*Photos showing replaced post and splice fitted into crack.*

support structure installed, original boards were sanded and treated before being relaid.

A number of items were found in the floor voids during the project, including tokens, coins, pens, pipes and musket balls; these have been sent to Harborough Museum for identification and cataloguing.

The project was completed in November 2014, ontime and within budget at a total cost of £400,000, funded entirely by Market Harborough and The Bowdens Charity. The renovated building is a credit to the Charity and the skill and professionalism of all those local craftsmen who worked on the project.

List of firms and individuals who contributed to the renovation project

- |                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Main Contractor               | W.W. Brown & Sons Ltd.   |
| ● Architect                     | Bryan Martin             |
| ● Quantity Surveyor             | Gordon Cain              |
| ● Roofing Contractor            | Paul Kilbourn            |
| ● Scaffolding                   | Aldridge Scaffolding     |
| ● Plastering Contractor         | Rob Allsop               |
| ● Glass work                    | Leicester Glass          |
| ● Metalwork                     | Barkby Forge             |
| ● Oak timbers                   | Sunningdale Timber       |
| ● Decorating                    | R&J Decorators           |
| ● Electrical work               | R.D. Jeacock & Sons Ltd. |
| ● IT supplies                   | R.D. Jeacock & Sons Ltd  |
| ● Signs and gold leaf lettering | Jim Watts                |
| ● Historian and Advisor         | Alan Walker              |

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to record my thanks to Jim Jacobs, Steward of Market Harborough & The Bowdens Charity for providing detailed information and photographs. Without his help, this article could not have been written.

*The Old Grammar School of Market Harborough* (Robert Hakewill, 2008)

My thanks to Tim Savage, Market Harborough Museums Officer, for providing photographs of items found and which are being cleaned by LCC Museums Service.