



## **A Brief History of Highfield Priory**

Highfield School, later to become Highfield Priory School and Nursery, was originally created to educate the children of local businessmen and women who were looking for an excellent academic environment for the education of their children. This history of the pursuit of academic excellence, a strong work ethic and good manners continues to this day.

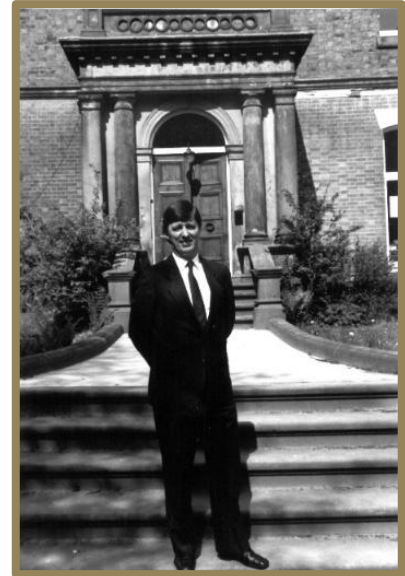
40 Higher Bank Road, Fulwood is listed in early directories of Preston and district as Holborn House, with the garden running down to Lower Bank Road, Fulwood. The 1940 directory gives the occupier as Miss H C Samman who was the proprietor of Holborn House School at 40 Higher Bank Road, Fulwood. Miss Samman did not occupy the premises in 1936 when the previous directory was published so it can be assumed that she founded the school between 1936 and 1940. It is believed that the school was founded in 1937. At this time the school catered for children aged three to eleven and was one of the earliest recorded nursery schools in Preston. Between 1940 and the publication of the next directory in 1944, Miss Samman moved to 44 Watling Street Road, Fulwood (opposite the Fulwood Police Station) and continued to run Holborn House School at this address until 1950 when Mrs Rhiannon Davies became the proprietor. In 1953 Mrs Davies moved the school to 316 Blackpool Road, Preston (formerly the vicarage of Emmanuel Church) and changed the name to Highfield School. In 1959 Mrs Davies moved the school to 19 Moor Park Avenue, Preston but after one year moved back to Blackpool Road. In November 1960, Alan Cronshaw bought Highfield School from Mrs Davies. By this time, it was then situated at 316 Blackpool Road, Preston, right from the outset, there was an obvious need for more suitable premises, especially as it also doubled as a family home. This, however, did not happen until November 1965 when The Priory on Lower Bank Road in Fulwood was acquired. It was a successful move and the school went from strength to strength with numbers increasing in conjunction with a far more suitable environment. In the Easter Term of 1966, the school was renamed Highfield Priory School.



Edward Daniel took over the school in March 1972, and hired two long-standing friends, a Mr and Mrs Paterson to act as his resident advisors in the running of the school. Shortly after in 1973, the school was established as a charitable trust and limited company. After a period of three years the parents, under the chairmanship of Mr Keith Duckett, formed a board of governors and appointed Mrs Bibby, a teacher in the school as headmistress. On the retirement of Mrs Bibby, the governors appointed Mr Turek as headmaster.

With 155 children on roll, the governors purchased 'Altadore' on Fulwood Row in 1978. The school moved into its present site in October 1979. The Altadore house had a ballroom situated to right of the main stairs which became the school hall until the new sports hall was built, a tennis court on the opposite side of the brook beyond the current forest school. There were large gardens where the infant playground and sports hall are now situated. Bedrooms, lounges, dining rooms and much more were converted into classrooms and offices. Mr and Mrs Turek lived on the premises, using the current staff room as his kitchen and living room.

When Mr Turek resigned, the governors asked Mrs K Jones, who had been at the school for some years, to act as headmistress for one year pending the appointment of Mr Barry C Duckett in 1981. Mr Duckett would go on to the head the school for 24 years and grew a strong connection with the school. At the start of his tenure Mr Duckett introduced two things both of which would go both on to be an essential part of Highfield Priory. In 1982 Mr Duckett introduced the first ever Highfeldian- an 18 page publication on A5 paper giving an insight to what life at Highfield Priory was like. The same year the house system introduced with three houses: Fylde, Pendle and Ribble (Bowland came later at the start of 90s). Mr Duckett then focused on the recently purchased site which was developed quickly with a variety of new building projects. The first of which was the new sports hall in 1985 converting what was a wasteland at the side of the playground into a facility for both sports and productions. This helped to take the pressure off the main school building. The sports hall allowed for more clubs, concerts/plays and improved the PE lessons.



This was followed by adding 4 new classrooms at the front of school going onto the junior playground. This meant the staffroom was no longer overlooking the infant playground as shown in the picture to the left. This extra space reflected the growing nature of the school. Soon



even this would not be enough as portacabins would be used to house the infants before the next development began. This would be the largest development, building a new wing consisting of 7 new classrooms and a dining room, significantly expanding the capacity of the school. The Dining Room and Infant Wing was opened in April 1990. In 1990, the school extended to cater for boys and girls from two years of age. The 'Nursery Wing' was added to the Infant Wing and opened in November 1992.

It was also sometime during the early 90s where the playing fields at the rear of the school, were first acquired meaning sports day and other sporting activities/fixtures could now happen on the school site. What followed was a period of sporting success. While the school was making its mark on the sports field, attention also turned to creating the best possible start for its youngest learners. This led to the final building development at Highfield Priory during Mr Duckett's tenure- the nursery. Before the development the nursery was housed within the school. The school bought the residential bungalow at the back of the school site. Walls were knocked through and playrooms were made as the bungalow was converted to create a home from home for our youngest children. The new nursery was opened in 1998.

Mr David Williams was appointed headmaster in September 2005. During his first year Mr Williams introduced the student council and made changes to the routine, timetable, uniform, reports, exams and improved the facilities. Specifically, the Art & DT studio, library and IT Suite which were situated on top of the Infant wing were renovated in November 2005. During the summer of 2006, the school completely refurbished the elocution room and opened a Science Laboratory in October 2006.



Mr Jeremy Duke was appointed headmaster in September 2010 after two years as deputy head. What followed was a period of academic success with twelve consecutive years in the top 30 of The Sunday Times Top 100 Preparatory Schools in England and five consecutive years in the top



ten. This unfortunately ended when the Sunday times stopped publishing this data. Our best (and final) placing was 5<sup>th</sup> in England and 1<sup>st</sup> in the North West in 2023. This level of consistency had only been achieved by three other schools in the country and the school was delighted to receive this recognition for our hard-working pupils, staff and parents. The consistency was achieved by our long-serving staff, whose dedication and commitment have shaped our school's legacy. Their passion, resilience, and support have made the school a nurturing and inspiring place to learn and thrive.

Mr Duke placed a large importance on the performing arts continuing the development of drama, dance and music within the school. Mr Duke introduced the school song Shine Out, shortly after becoming headmaster in 2010. Following the creation of the Performing Arts Studio in 2012, all year groups from Year 2 upwards performed publicly each year. 2012 also saw the opening of our Outdoor Classroom in the woodland adjacent to the school. This was then expanded when Miss Travis (Mrs Marskell) introduced Forest School to the nursery curriculum in 2020 and eventually the Infant curriculum in September 2023. In November 2015, we opened our all-weather pitch on the school site which has greatly improved our ability to play and host fixtures all year round significantly improving the sporting opportunities available to the children. At the time of completion Highfield Priory was only Independent Prep School in the area to have sole use of its own all-weather pitch.

Only a year after recovering from the covid-19 pandemic, four teenagers broke onto the school site and set fire to our nursery building on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2022. In true Highfield Priory fashion, the school and wider community sprang into action to make the best of this terrible situation. Classes moved out of their classrooms and creating new spaces within school to accommodate our nursery within the main building. Caretaker Mr Forrest worked hard to convert the classrooms into suitable nursery facilities. The nursery staff led by Mrs Elstone and made themselves a new home within the school. The PTA raised funds to provide new equipment, toys and games for our nursery children while families came to school laden with donations eager to support the school and replace some of what was lost. The new and improved Barn which was built on top of the bungalow site and designed specifically to cater for nursery and preschool children was opened in January 2025.

