



Cranbrook School's Royal Charter

Cranbrook's history goes back to 1518 when a wealthy Yeoman bequeathed his 'chief mansion' to provide a 'frescole house' for the town's children. Some 56 years later its grammar school status was ratified in a Royal Charter awarded by HRH Queen Elizabeth 1st.

A translation of the Charter (dated 1574) is reproduced below:

Elizabeth by the grace of God Queen of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, sends greetings to all those to whom the present letter comes. Whereas Simon Lynch, the son of William Lynch late of Cranbrook in our county of Kent, with the intention that in the parish of Cranbrook aforementioned a free grammar school should be erected and should remain forever, proposed to give and bequeath lands and holdings of the annual value of six pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence as hereunder specified according to the intention of the aforesaid William Lynch his father for the perpetual support and maintenance of the same free grammar school in the parish of Cranbrook aforementioned. Know ye that, heartily desiring to promote the pious proposal aforementioned and also that the aforementioned free and perpetual grammar school within the parish of Cranbrook may be brought to perfection firmly to endure forever of our special grace and certain knowledge, we do for us, our heirs and successors will and grant that in the aforementioned parish of Cranbrook there be hereafter forever a free and perpetual grammar school and that the same school forever be called the Free and Perpetual Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth in Cranbrook.. And Richard Fletcher now vicar of the parish church of Cranbrook, Richard Baker soldier, Walter Roberts knight, Walter Hendley gentleman, Thomas Sheff, Peter Courthopp, Robert Brykinden, Francis Hartridge, John Courthopp, Thomas Ruck, Richard Ovinden, William Sheff and Laurence Sharpe now resident in the aforementioned parish and being freeholders there, we do make, create, ordain, constitute and incorporate as governors of the free grammar school aforementioned. And furthermore we wish and hereby establish for our heirs and successors, that after the death or departure of the aforementioned vicar and six other persons abovenamed, every other vicar of the aforesaid parish church and another 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7 or at least 6 freeholders resident in the parish be nominated and elected as governors of the same free school and shall be forever called Governors of the Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth in Cranbrook. And that the same governors hereafter forever are and will be a body corporate in themselves in deed and name by the name of the Governors of the Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth in Cranbrook, and that by the same name they may bring and answer cases in each and every court, and by the same name they may have the right by law to possess and obtain for themselves and their successors in contract and perpetuity not only the lands and tenements of the aforementioned Simon Lynch but also from him or any other person or persons other lands and tenements which are not held of us in Chief or by military service - provided that all the lands and tenements given or to be given to them do not amount in total to more than a clear annual value of thirty pounds. And that the governors of the said free school and their successors in perpetuity may have a common seal for the government, disposition and rule of all and each of the lands, tenements, things, causes and businesses whatsoever touching or concerning the free school aforesaid. And that the governors aforesaid and their

successors may lawfully make orders and rules for the better rule and governance of the same free grammar school as occasion requires and have authority in their decisions. And furthermore of our abundant grace and certain knowledge we grant to the said Simon Lynch the licence, power and special authority that he may be able to grant to the aforesaid governors of the free school one messuage and 140 acres of pasture and woodland with appurtenances in Horsmonden in our county of Kent, provided that they are not held of us in Chief or by military service, for the use of the said governors and their successors in perpetuity. And that the same governors and their successors may be able to receive and obtain all and singular premises specified above and other lands and tenements not amounting in all to more than a clear annual value of thirty pounds without fine or fee for the licence and without any writ ad quod dampnum or enquiry being made. It is our will that the aforesaid Simon Lynch or any other persons or aforementioned governors or their successors be not molested or aggravated in any way in relation to these premises. But that just the display of these our Letters Patent or a copy of them may acquit and exonerate each and every premise, notwithstanding the Statute of Mortmain or any other statute, ordinance, provision, cause or matter. Express mention of the true annual value or of the precise premises or other previous gifts and grants by us or our progenitors to Simon Lynch is not set out in detail. Any statute, act, ordinance, provision to the contrary notwithstanding. And further of our more abundant special grace and certain knowledge we will and grant that the aforesaid Simon Lynch and the aforesaid governors may have these our Letters Patent under our Great Seal of England in due manner made without fine or fee great or small to us in our hanaper or elsewhere being ordered, paid or made for our use. In testimony whereof we have caused these our Letters Patent to be made. Witness myself at Westminster on the eighth day of May in the sixteenth year of our reign.

Powle - by writ of Privy Seal and of the date aforesaid by authority of Parliament.

(Translation based on the probably late 19th century transcription by G.C.Dance. PRA/JB, 6/2002.)

Today – some 430 years after the Charter was granted – we remain true to that original principle of offering a free, first-class, education to those living nearby.

As a selective grammar school we challenge the brightest boys and girls in the local area (along with boarders from further afield) to fulfil their true potential in the classroom and broader walks of life. Happily, our academic results and recent Ofsted rating suggest that we are managing to meet that aim without ever betraying our ‘*frescole*’ roots. Indeed, in our view, no other school blends the traditions of the State and Independent sectors so successfully.

Many things have changed at Cranbrook over the centuries but such evolution is as much a part of our identity as the site where the schools still sits. We treasure our heritage but are very much part of the here-and-now – shaping our practices and policies to meet present-day needs and tomorrow’s uncertainties.