

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S HOUSE

St. John's House is a Grade I listed building owned by the St. John's Winchester Charity. Its roots are believed to be in the **10th Century** when the site on which St. John's House now stands was thought to have been used as a hospital.

Its more recent history is more verifiable and there are clear references to St. John's Hospital from the early **13th Century**. The chapel next door dates from this period and the "sick and lame soldiers, poor pilgrims and wayfaring men" the hospital is said to have served must originally have been accommodated within its knave. By **1332** a second chapel dedicated to St. Mary, was built and part of the Western Wall of this chapel with original windows and doorway, still survive in the Undercroft.

The main structure of St. John's House was added on to the western side of St. John's Hospital in the **14th Century**. A right of way was incorporated which ran back from the Broadway, past the front of the 2 chapels. The rest of the ground floor consisted of twin infirmaries separated by a spinal wall, with one connecting door near the West End.

During building renovation in **1981**, details of the infirmaries were revealed and recorded by the Archaeology section of Winchester Museums Service. A series of large rectangular recesses probably used as cupboards for personal belongings, were identified. These suggest the hospital would have accommodated about 20 inmates in the late medieval period. The original floor was found to have been about 20" below the modern surface; it had been raised in the **19th**

Century, probably because of dampness.

The first floor hall was where the burghmote or town assembly met, where civic meetings and feasts were held, and where deeds and other city muniments were kept, including the "City Seal".

In the late **18th Century** the first floor of St. John's House was dramatically altered when the roof was raised by about 7 feet, and the interior completely refurbished to provide an elegant Assembly Room where the wealthy citizens of the day attended balls, dinners and concerts by prominent musicians including **Niccolo Paganini** and **Franz Liszt**. Much of the original 18th Century stucco plasterwork still remains and is a fine example of Regency craftsmanship.

At the end of the 18th Century St. John's House was used as the city's law courts with prison cells. It was at that time that the back stairs were built to enable the prisoners to be moved from the court in the Assembly Room to the cells in the Undercroft for safekeeping!

In the **19th Century** the first floor accommodated a temporary museum of stuffed birds (!) which was open to the public free of charge. The Assembly Room was also still used at that time for occasional lectures and public meetings.

From **1910-14** the St. John's House Assembly Room became 'The Palace Picture House' (the projection holes are still a feature in the East wall). All the latest pictures in those days were shown on the bioscope.

From **1922-1973** the Undercroft area was leased by the King Alfred Motor Services and was used as passenger waiting rooms, a cafe and staff rest rooms; prior to that the Hants & Dorset Bus

Company also used the Undercroft for similar purposes. This was, of course, before the "new" bus depot was built nearby.

In the **1970's** the Assembly Room was again utilised as a magistrates court whilst the new law courts were being built next to the Great Hall, after which the Attic Theatre Group made their home here temporarily.

In **1981** St. John's House was leased for use as a bar and restaurant until shortly before Leading Leisure took over the building in order to create the multi-media Crusades Experience which ceased trading in 1990 when Leading Leisure went bankrupt.

The entire building was left vacant until **1993** when Immanuel Church leased it from St. John's Winchester Charity. During this period St. John's House was restored to its former splendour and as well as being a thriving church centre, was available for hire to the community and was regularly used for conferences, receptions, concerts, exhibitions, training courses etc. Immanuel Church ceased using the building in March **2008**.

The building was then left vacant until February **2009** when the Winchester YMCA took on the lease and turned the building into a youth venue.

Some of the rooms have been named after local dignitaries to commemorate their connection with St. John's House.

The **DE WINTON** Room was named after Sir Simon of Winchester or Simon De Winton who was Mayor of Winchester in 1268. He was a city draper, and a prominent and wealthy merchant. He also supported a "brother" of St. John's and

supplied straw to the poor!

The **BEVERO** Room was named after Peter Bevero who was a life "Master" of St. John's from 1397-1441.

The **BRYDGES** Room was named after George Brydges who bequeathed a legacy to St. John's House which resulted in the "raising of the roof" to form the St. John's Assembly Room in the late 18th Century.

In all the work and projects of Winchester YMCA, including where acting in partnership with other organisations Winchester YMCA will aim to 'Empower young people to fulfil their God-given potential'.

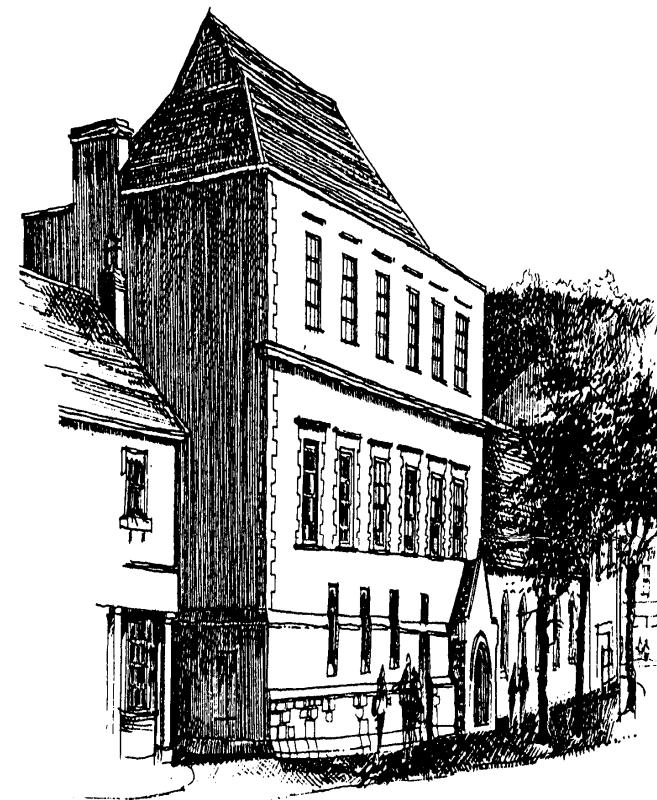
CHRISTIAN FAITH WORKING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The YMCA is a Christian Charity committed to helping young people, particularly at times of need, regardless of gender, race, ability or faith.

Winchester YMCA was established in 1847

Registered charity no. 1101028

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St. John's House

A Brief History

(Revised April 2009)