

The History of Gumley House, Isleworth, London

The name Gumley is not a common one. It is thought to have originated in France, where it had a slightly different spelling, (Gommeley, or perhaps Gautchmondley) but the same pronunciation. Whatever its origins, it has, since **1700**, been associated with GUMLEY HOUSE in Isleworth, Middlesex. Although unremarkable architecturally, the house on the Twickenham Road has an interesting history, more than half of which is bound up with the school founded by Madame d'Houet, the foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.



1700

The original house was built by John Gumley, cabinet maker by appointment to George I and George II. He specialised in mirrors, one of which still hangs in Hampton Court Palace and two in Chatsworth House, Derbyshire. John Gumley had a shop in the Strand, London, but he lived in Isleworth, taking an active part in local life there, and was a church warden for many years.

1714

John's eldest daughter Anna Maria, married William Pulteney who later became Earl of Bath and played an important part in political affairs during the reigns of three monarchs. Queen Anne, George I and George II

1723

Gumley was the treasurer of the Isleworth Charity School and treasurer of the workhouse (1728). He and his wife Susan had three sons and four daughters. The eldest son George is described as 'very profligate and disobedient and not to be trusted with an ample fortune.' He was cut off with £150 a year.



1722

Through the influence of his son-in-law, John Gumley entered Parliament as member for Steyning in Sussex

1724

He was given the post of Commissary General to the Army, a position that increased his fortune. A lot of money could be made through army contracts.

Anna Maria was admired for her beauty, but not for her good character. Alexander Pope describes her as: 'Fantastic, vain and insolently fair. Grandeur intoxicates her giddy brain.' (The Looking Glass) He advises her to look into one of her father's mirrors and 'by reflection learn to mend her face.'

1721

The architect, James Gibbs was employed to make alterations and improvements to the house. He added the Colonnades in the front and made improvements in the attics.



1728

John Gumley died in December and was buried on Boxing Day at All Saints Church. In his will he left Gumley House to his second son, John. His widow continued to live at Gumley with her youngest daughter, Laetitia.

1735

When Laetitia married Lancelot Charles Lake, Anna Maria and William Pulteney came to live at Gumley. While the Pulteneys were in residence Gumley was visited by many important people, among them Alexander Pope, Dr. Johnson, Addison and the future Prime Minister William Pitt

1750

Susan Gumley died. Gumley House passed on to Laetitia Lake and her husband, then to their son General Lord Lake, who does not seem to have spent much time at Gumley. He was away fighting in the American War of Independence and the house was probably let until it was sold to Benjamin Angell in 1795



1795

The house sold to Benjamin Angell who came from Chippenham in Wiltshire. He was a chintz printer and dyer. He and his wife Sarah were Quakers and led a very simple life.

1817

Benjamin Angell died. His widow, Sarah, continued to live at Gumley until her death in 1835

1835

After Sarah's death, the house then came into the possession of Sarah's neice, Elizabeth and her husband, Charles Allen

1839

While on a business trip to France, Charles Allen became ill and died at the early age of 47. His widow found that there was not enough money for her to keep the estate going. It was put on the market and sold to Madame d'Houët in **1841**

1840 – 41

Madame d'Houët, foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, bought Gumley House and established it as Catholic educational establishment. This was the beginning of a new era in its history: for the first time it was not to be lived in as a family home. Two schools were then founded on the Gumley House property: a boarding school for the wealthy and a day school for the poor children of the parish. Extensive additions were made during the next twenty years. It was at this time too that the lake was filled in, being considered potentially dangerous for the pupils. The boarding school was particularly useful to Catholic parents who wanted to have their daughters educated in England, instead of sending them to France or Belgium, as had been the custom before the Catholic Emancipation Act of **1829**

Two of the most famous pupils of Gumley House in its early years, were the two princesses, Blanche and Marguerite. They were the daughters of Duc de Nemours, the eldest surviving son of the exiled King of France, Louis Philippe. The two young princesses were day pupils, living in Bushy Park and driving over to school each morning.

The boarding school for 'young ladies' and the 'poor school' for the local children continued to flourish. As the years passed, the need for a day school to provide secondary education for the children in the neighbourhood became obvious. In **1890** St Mary's High School was opened.

1907 a new building was erected and linked to St Mary's High School by a bridge.

In **1920** a claim for the recognition of St Mary's High School as an approved secondary school was presented to the board of education. The school was duly recognised, with the proviso that steps be taken to build a properly equipped secondary school. The construction

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In **1923** when the FCJ boarding school was opened at Poles in Hertfordshire, some of the boarders moved there from Gumley. However, during pre-war days there were always boarders at Gumley. The boarding and day schools amalgamated as far as lessons were concerned, but the girls continued to wear different uniforms. The original St Mary's was taken over by the primary school at this time.

When the war started in **1939**, the boarding school was temporarily closed. After the war, the boarders returned to Gumley but not in the same numbers and from 1968 Gumley no longer accepted boarders.

By **1959**, Gumley house had developed into a two-form entry Grammar School. In **1960** the Primary School moved across the road to new premises. In **1969** the octagonal hall was built. In **1971** a sports hall was built and A block was added. In **1974/75** the music suite, changing rooms and Howard block were added. In **1976** the first six-form entry comprehensive intake was admitted to Gumley. Comprehensive schools were now a reality in many parts of the country.

Thousands of pupils have passed through **Gumley House Convent School** since it opened in **1841**. Times have changed and certainly convents have changed. Gumley House had a new

building opened in April 1999. It was named the **d'Houët Block** after the Foundress of the FCJ Society.

The school continues to thrive in **2010**, with nearly **2000** girls on roll, between the ages of 11 and 18 years. The FCJ community continue to live in the original building, in the grounds of the school.



*Text adapted from 'Gumley House Convent FCJ - A Short History'
by Teresa White fcJ and Patricia Mabey*