

NOW and THEN

Greyfriars, Christchurch Road.

Greyfriars in Christchurch Road is one of Ringwood's best known and loved buildings, described by Pevsner in his 'Buildings of England' as 'the showpiece among Ringwood houses'. Today Greyfriars is proudly recognised as an outstanding Community Centre for the town and surrounding district.

Deeds show that it was built as a private house around 1783 by a wealthy widow named Mary London as a gift for her niece Mary Field and her husband. Seven years later they sold the house to Mary Field's brother Alexander Carter and his wife Elizabeth. At that time the house was known as London House (often corrupted to Lonnens) after its generous benefactress.

In 1802 Alexander Carter took over his father-in-law's brewery and four years later moved his large family into Bridge House in West Street next to this brewery. London House was then let to his uncle William Tice, a retired widower.

Following William's death in 1824 Alexander Carter sold London House to another retired gentleman, Admiral Sampson Edwards. It was during Admiral Edward's time that the house name appears to have been changed to Greyfriars, for reasons unknown. When the admiral died in 1840 at the grand old age of 94, Greyfriars remained the home of his son, Captain Richard Edwards, for the next 36 years. Despite failing eyesight which culminated in blindness, Richard maintained a lively interest in the community of Ringwood, devoting much effort to promoting the new



1920

National School (now Ringwood Infants) and the rebuilding of the Parish Church.

This community involvement was continued by a later family of residents, the Christys. Reginald Christy purchased Greyfriars in 1920. The old photograph shows the house at this time, covered in Virginia creeper. Mr Christy was a public-spirited man who served on the District Council and was one of the shareholders involved in bringing electricity to Ringwood. He was also very keen on Greyfriars's beautiful garden, which in his day stretched right down to the Bickerley. His daughter Hilary shared his interests in the garden and the community and it is due to her generosity that the newly formed Ringwood & District Community Association was able to buy Greyfriars at a bargain price in 1959.

Over the past 57 years a huge amount of work, dedication and energy has been given by its hundreds of volunteers to ensure Greyfriars Community Centre has gone from strength to strength. Greyfriars now employs two managers and a team of caretakers, but all other work in running the Centre is done by volunteers headed by Chairman Ann Pedersen. Ann is keen to stress that Greyfriars is a registered charity committed to serving the whole community and urges anyone who has never visited the building to pop in to see what it has to offer or consult:
www.greyfriarsringwood.org.uk
N.B. A booklet 'The History of Greyfriars' by Mary Baldwin is available from Greyfriars price £1.



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