

WHITAKER'S SCHOOL AT YEW TREES ON LOWER ROAD



Yew Trees, Lower Road

In about 1700, Jeffery Whitaker started running a school in Smarts in Lower Road, which we now know as Yew Trees, when he would have been about 36 years old. Smarts was a tenanted property owned by the Longleat estate. His son, also Jeffery Whitaker, took over running the school in 1718 when he would have been just 15 years old. This was a private non-conformist boarding school for boys and had between 15 and 23 boarding pupils, who presumably didn't come from Bratton, and also 14 day pupils. All of them paid fees.

There was a dormitory on the top floor, and a schoolroom on the first floor, accessed by outside steps (which have now gone) and a balcony (which is still there). The school was said to be very popular and successful. It was advertised like this:

Later advertisements suggest a move towards classical languages including Latin and similar academic subjects. All exercise books were made by hand and some of the time was spent in decorating them. The school also made its own ink, a process which took about 2 weeks to complete.

After Whitaker died in 1775, the school continued to be run by the former teaching assistant, Thomas Morgan, then by the Baptist Minister the Rev'd John Cooper and then by Mr Thomas Williams of Trowbridge.

You can read a lot more about the school in [*Sheep Bell and Plough Share*](#).

The building was badly damaged in 1789 by the arson of a pupil. This led to some rebuilding and an 18th front to the school house. The school moved to an unknown location, possibly in Westbury, and the same pupil tried to burn this down as well. He subsequently committed suicide! The school returned to Bratton when Yew Trees had been rebuilt. But in 1820 or shortly afterwards the school

closed and Yew Trees became a private house, occupied by the Whitaker family. As we will see, 1820 is when the National School in The Oratory started, but it seems unlikely that the pupils transferred there because Whitaker's school was for non-conformists and the National School was run by the Church of England. It is more likely that in some sense the school transferred to the British School in Stradbroke, which started in 1844 or 1846 as a non-conformist school.

Yew Trees was sold by Jane Whittaker in 1947, who then moved to be with her cousin in the house next door called Whitakers, the converted milking parlour for Yew Tree Farm.