

= St Joseph 's Convent , Taunton =

St Joseph 's Convent is a complex of 18th- and 19th @-@ century buildings in Taunton , Somerset , which were primarily used as a Roman Catholic convent , first by the Franciscans , and then Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy . The buildings were sold out of the Catholic church in 1976 , and were redeveloped as residential flats in 2005 . The main building is designated by English Heritage as a Grade II \* listed building , while the boundary walls on the west side are Grade II listed .

The main building was begun in 1772 , as a free hospital for the poor , but funding ran out two years later , and it was completed as a private residence . In the early 19th century , it was bought by a group of Franciscan nuns , who moved from an unsatisfactory site in Winchester . The nuns carried out a number of additions and extensions to the building to make it more suitable for their needs . They moved out of Taunton in 1950 and sold the convent to the Sisters of St. Joseph , who continued to run a school on the site for the next twenty @-@ six years .

= = History = =

Originally , the site was intended to be a hospital ; on the first stone , which was laid in September 1772 , the engraving describes the building as " a general hospital , for the relief of the sick poor . " That foundation stone was laid by Frederick North , Lord North , the British Prime Minister at the time . In 1774 , the building work stopped when funds ran out , and shortly after it was sold to recover the debts incurred from building it . The building was eventually completed as a personal residence , and came into the hands of James Coles . Upon his death , the house , known as Taunton Lodge , was put up for sale . This was brought to the attention of a group of Franciscan nuns . The nuns had left Bruges in Belgium , and arrived in England in 1794 to avoid persecution during the French Revolution . They initially settled in Winchester , but the buildings they utilised there were not suitable for their permanent use , and in October 1806 , they were ordered to look for somewhere else to establish themselves .

Mr Knight of Cannington alerted the nuns to the sale of Taunton Lodge , and they raised the £ 3 @,@ 150 required to purchase it . They completed the purchase in early May 1807 , after some minor quibbles with the Coles family . When the abbess visited the Lodge prior to the purchase , she had identified that it would require £ 1 @,@ 000 worth of improvements in addition to the money already spent on its acquisition . The plans included extending the existing building to gain a staircase and some dormitories for the school girls , and the addition of a new wing that would include a chapel , infirmary , four cells , and rooms for the male chaplain and servants . The new building was began in March 1808 , and by June of that year , the entire community had moved from Winchester , despite the work being ongoing . The shell of the new body was completed by the autumn of 1808 , but the work was delayed due to a lack of finances as £ 1 @,@ 908 had already been spent on altering the old building . This cost did not include the erection of the new wing , thus the constructions costs were already far surpassing the original estimate .

Within two years of being built , the roof on the new wing had to be replaced as it had started sinking ; the joists " were made of bad wood & put in the wrong way " . It was too close to winter in 1810 for the work to be completed that year , and it had to be left until the following spring . The wing was completed , with replacement roof , by January 1812 , at a total cost of just over £ 2 @,@ 230 . A storm in 1818 damaged the roof in the original building , and on inspection it was found that the whole roof should be replaced ; this was completed by September of the same year .

The convent continued to be significantly expanded over the next twenty years , and in 1858 the Franciscans purchased a plot of land adjacent to the convent for the erection of a church , rectory and school . This was gifted to the local Bishop , and St George 's Church was opened on the site two years later .

In 1950 , the Franciscans sold the convent buildings to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy . The latter had been in Taunton since the 1920s , running St George 's School , and upon purchasing the convent , set up St Joseph 's Convent School , which catered for boys and girls up to the age of 11 , and girls on to 18 . That school continued to operate until 1976 , when the property was bought by

the nearby King 's College , who used it as accommodation for their boarding students . In 2005 , the building complex was converted to " high quality " residential flats .

= = = 1809 miracle = = =

In March 1809 a miracle was reported as occurring at the convent . It is recorded that one of the nuns , Sister Mary Ann Wood , sustained a deep cut across her arm while opening a sash window . She was attended by a local surgeon , who judged that the muscles , and most of the tendons had been severed . The wound healed over after three weeks , but she continued to suffer sharp pain for four months . During all this time , she was not able to use her hand or arm , and despite attempting a variety of different methods to repair the broken tendons , the doctor eventually declared that she may regain use of her forefinger and thumb , but not the rest of her fingers . By this time , her arm and hand had withered , and Sister Mary Ann decided to make a novena ( nine prayers ) to Saint Winifred . She began her prayers on 6 August , and placed a piece of moss on her arm ; she said that she felt intense pain , and considered removing the moss , but opted not to . The following morning , she awoke , and her hand and arm were returned to full strength . The surgeon who had been tending to her was said to have " at first declared the case a miracle ; but human respect prevented him from publicly attesting it . " The Right Reverend Peter Collingridge , Vicar Apostolic of the Western District , after consulting a Catholic surgeon in London , declared " that the cure was supernatural and an evident miracle . "

= = = 1851 case of Augusta Talbot = = =

In 1851 , the House of Commons was petitioned by Craven Berkeley , who had previously sat as the member of parliament for Cheltenham . He claimed that his step @-@ daughter , Augusta Talbot , had been forced to join the Franciscan Convent in Taunton as a postulant ( the first stage to become a nun ) , rather than a pupil . Her father had died in 1839 and then her mother , after remarrying , died in 1841 , and with the subsequent death of her brother , she was due to inherit £ 80 @,@ 000 . After the death of her mother , Talbot had been placed in the care of Francis Talbot , 5th Earl of Shrewsbury , her father 's half @-@ brother . Berkeley alleged that the Shrewsburys first attempted to marry her to François VII de La Rochefoucauld , and then when she refused , placed her at the Taunton convent against her will . The allegation followed that when Talbot became a nun , her inheritance , which was due to her in June 1852 , would become property of the convent , or the greater Catholic church . Berkeley also protested that he and his daughter were not allowed to communicate with Talbot , though Thomas Wilde , 1st Baron Truro , the Lord Chancellor , noted that Berkeley had not tried to see Talbot for nine years . Lord Truro contacted Talbot , who stated that she was not a postulant , and she was amenable to his plans to remove her from the convent and place her in the care of a new guardian in London . He duly did so , and rejected Berkeley 's petition , upon the basis of his previous lack of contact with Talbot .

= = Architecture = =

The main building is a symmetrical three @-@ storey house built of red brick , with a yellow brick central range which was added later . The building has a cornice and parapet , and a bowed end which projects to the east . On the south side , there is an additional attic storey . The house retains its original sash windows , and on the first floor some of the windows have wrought @-@ iron balconettes . An addition to the building has been made in the south @-@ west , including an arcade on the ground floor , and a bell tower . Further additions were made to the main building in the 19th century , including a Gothic chapel of red brick with ashlar dressings to the north . There are later buildings on either side of the chapel : to the west is a 19th @-@ century building with a two @-@ storey entrance porch , while a Gothic cloister , comprising two walks with scissor @-@ trussed timber roofs , lies to the east . There is a further extension to the south , which is not part of the Grade II \* listing .

A summerhouse was added to the grounds , probably alongside the 19th @-@ century additions to the main building . It was constructed of red and white brick , and had a steep slate roof . The east side displayed a crucifix . The building was Grade II listed in July 1975 , but has since been demolished . The stone walls around the site are Grade II listed where they are the original " high stone rubble wall with brick capping " ; in other places they have been renovated in newer red brick .