



Ian Williams
on behalf of Eton College:
The Head Master's House

Project: The Head Master's House, Eton



Task: Internal redecoration of the new Head Master's House

Products used: Dulux ICI: Quick Drying Eggshell, Diamond Matt, Vinyl Matt, Satinwood

Client: Eton College

Paul Bayley, Buildings Officer for Eton: "We are extremely pleased with the work Ian Williams has completed for Eton. It is of the highest quality and was delivered ahead of schedule. The team were extremely professional and a delight to work with.

It shows Ian Williams at its best."

Background

From its humble beginnings as a charity school, built by King Henry IV to educate 70 poor boys, to its place in British history as the "chief nurse for England's statesmen", Eton College needs little introduction.

Its formidable buildings, seeped in history, were once home to 19 British Prime Ministers, including David Cameron; some of the country's best novelists and actors, like George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Percy Shelley and Hugh Laurie; and members of the Royal Family – most recently, Princes William and Harry.

Since its foundation in 1440, Eton has housed spectacular works of art, both in its architecture and the tapestries, paintings, statues and stained glass windows that adorn the school. Eton's Chapel – its founder's most revered building – has two notable wall paintings of popular medieval stories, dating back to the 1460s. The majority of the Chapel's impressive stained glass windows were destroyed in the 1940s when a bomb fell in the college's courtyard, but one of the original panes still remains.

The earliest records of school life date back to the 16th Century, where boys were required to rise at 5am to chant prayers, followed by a day of lessons from 6am to 8pm. They were taught in Latin and the school year was divided into two terms, broken up by just two holidays of three weeks each.



Shrouded in history, Eton today still follows many of the traditions established centuries ago. While boys no longer rise at 5am to chant prayers, their recognisable uniform of a black tailcoat, waistcoat, false-collar and pinstriped trousers has remained largely unchanged, despite the removal of the top hat and cropped jackets.

In keeping with tradition, Eton still places large importance on the Fourth of June celebrations. Harking back to the school's most passionate alumni, King George III, the day honours the king's birthday. The monarch spent most of his reign at nearby Windsor Castle, and hosted many occasions at the college. The day became a school-wide holiday, and is celebrated to this day – though the holiday no longer falls on the exact date. The day is marked by speeches, cricket, a procession of boats, and picnics on Agar's Plough, and remains an important occasion in the school year.

Eton is one of only four single-sex public schools in Britain that requires all of its students to board. Boys usually arrive at the school aged 13, and stay for 5 years, until they graduate aged 18. Eton has a strong record for sending its boys onto Oxford and Cambridge, and the Old Etonians network is a legacy of its own accord.

Boys who wished to attend the school were once required to be entered onto house lists at birth, but in 2002 it changed to a meritocratic entrance system. Boys now have to win their place through an interview, reasoning tests and references. Emphasis is placed on widening access, with growing numbers of students receiving substantial fee remissions.

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Service to clients

Ian Williams has been working with Eton College since 2009, undertaking a wide range of services, including internal and external repairs and decorations to a range of buildings. Many of the iconic buildings are Grade I and Grade II listed, and require specialist attention.

Most of the work Ian Williams carries out for Eton is to tight deadlines over school holidays, to ensure that all work is completed before the students return for lessons. It is not unusual for the team to be working on many different projects at once, making the best possible use of the short school holidays.

The relationship with Eton has grown from strength to strength, with many projects receiving high accolades from the college's team. Work never fails to impress, and we repeatedly meet Eton's expectations, delivering high standards of work and providing excellent customer service.

The Ian Williams' painting team has worked on many different projects around the school, including painting house master's homes, boarding houses and buildings around Eton's campus. Eton's aesthetic and the importance of its appearance throughout history remains one of Ian Williams' top considerations when beginning any painting and decorating work.

For this particular project, the new Head Master's house was to be painted, as well as the Nanny Flat next door – a humbly named three-bedroom house for the Head Master's personal assistant. As the work was being done for arguably the most important person at Eton, it was vital that it was completed to an incredibly high standard, as well as completed on time to ensure that the new Head and his family could move in immediately.

Complexity

With just 20 days to complete both the new Head Master's House, plus the adjoining Nanny Flat, the extensive decorating required careful programming. However, it became more complex when it became clear that the two buildings had to be ready for move-in at the end of the 20 days. This meant that other trades were required to work in the houses at the same time as the Ian Williams team. Contractors from M&E, flooring, cable installation and fire upgrade companies had to be taken into account when planning the works, to ensure that no one was delayed or held up unnecessarily.

The Ian Williams Site Manager and Foreman handled the complexities of multiple trades working on the same building in a number of ways. Firstly, a huge amount of time went into the pre-planning stage. A multitude of meetings were carried out with all involved contractors, and a detailed programme of works compiled. By working backwards from the deadline, the Site Manager and Foreman could identify the exact date they had to be in and working, and could then break up the works programme to cater for the other contractors.

The combination of a short timeframe, the sheer volume of work to complete, and the number of contractors engaged on the project turned the project into an increasingly complex operation.

In addition to the external complexities arising from the contractors and the deadline, was the number of Ian Williams operatives needed to be working on the project in unison. At any one point, up to 17 operatives were working on the house at once, in order to complete on time without sacrificing quality or expertise. Through detailed planning, knowledge of each other's responsibilities and careful management, the operatives



successfully worked together as a team to complete the project on time.

While many complexities arose from the logistics, the project itself also required special considerations. An intricate staircase and a grand main study had to be painted, and both scaffolding and a mobile tower had to be erected in order to carry out the work. Scaffolding was put up around the staircase, and a mobile tower was used for the study. Pieces of the scaffolding and mobile tower were lifted in through the windows in order to save time; avoiding health and safety risks to the other contractors eliminating the chance of any possible damages.



Materials used

There were a number of considerations that had to be taken into account when choosing the materials for the Head Master's house. These included the Head and his family's personal preferences; the amount of time our operatives had to complete the work; the existing condition of the house; the elements to be painted; the traditional look and feel of Eton's buildings; and the sheer amount of paint required.

Thanks to the prior removal of priceless artwork and historical artefacts, painting could begin immediately. A Dulux ICI specification was used, made up of Quick Drying Eggshell, Diamond Matt and Vinyl Matt, as well as Satinwood for the woodwork. These products meant operatives did not have to apply undercoats, and the specification's Quick Drying formula ensured work was not held up.

As is standard when Ian Williams works on the homes of house masters, a colour choice booklet designed by AkzoNobel was used, so the Head and his family were able to select colour schemes in keeping with the architectural restraints of the building.

Where required, speciality colours were matched by the Brewer and Dulux colour scanner, to ensure that the house's original features and aesthetic could be enhanced during the decorating process.

Throughout the project, over 1,000 litres of water-based paints were used, in addition to 390 litres of oil-based paints for the woodwork. Not only did the Head Master's house require such a huge volume of paint, but it had to be correctly and expertly applied, in order to meet the Head's high expectations.



Apprentices

The painting team at Eton included an apprentice Sam Saunders. In addition, a previous apprentice working on the Eton site with Ian Williams was nominated for the Painting & Decorating Association Apprentice award, emphasising how much development our apprentices are given – and how much a site like Eton helps them to grow their skills.

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