

Why are we 'Windlesham'?

The name Windlesham was chosen for the school because the first Malden head's wife came from Windlesham in Surrey. It was in the village church there in 1828 that she, Fanny, daughter of the village curate William Cole, Domestic Chaplain to HRH the Duke of Gloucester, married Lieut Charles R Malden RN. He became head of the school when, after completing his service in the Royal Navy, he took over the running of it from Rev Dr Worsley. Though the school began at Field Place, Newport on the Isle of Wight (c.1826), it was not until 1846 after the school's move into purpose-built premises on Norfolk Terrace in Brighton that its new name was adopted. Thereafter it rapidly became one of the "Famous Five" prep schools in Victorian England.

Interestingly, in 1888 Charles' son, Henry Malden, from 1855 the second headmaster, retired and moved to Crowborough to live in a cottage called "Batheaston", which he subsequently renamed "Little Windlesham". After Henry's further move to Godalming in 1898, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle fell in love with it and quickly bought the property with his second wife. It was soon turned into quite a large family house, many extensions being made and so they decided to drop the "Little" from the title. That Windlesham House is located on the edge of Crowborough Beacon Golf Course and when they died Sir Arthur, who had been captain in 1910, and his wife were both buried in the grounds near to the Clubhouse. After his death in 1930 the house was occupied by Doyle's heirs and - as Windlesham Manor - it became a residential nursing home in the 1950s, which it still is today. Strangely, a cousin of the last Malden heads has lived very close to the property for many years.

The school itself had by 1913 become surrounded by housing as Brighton and Hove grew, so a move was made to a countryside location near Portslade, which the school renamed Southern Cross after the local pub! This site too succumbed to urbanisation so that the decision was taken in 1934 to move yet again, this time to its present location in the magnificent Queen Anne 'Highden House' in the heart of the South Downs near Washington. WWII evacuation took the school temporarily to Somerset and then the Lake District, but the Windlesham community has prospered at its ever-developing Highden home since 1945.

So in fact the school has left behind much evidence of its migrations around Sussex, for not only does the name survive at Crowborough, but there is also now another Windlesham School and a Windlesham Club in Hove as well as a Road, Avenue, Gardens and Close all named after their association with our school! Also, it is worth noting that Mr & Mrs Butlin's 'Beech House,' originally built for Mr & Mrs Chris Malden on their retirement in 1954, was called 'Little Windlesham' until the pre-prep department adopted the name in 1997!