



Blanchelande College

PRESS RELEASE

BLANCHELANDE COLLEGE PURCHASES ITS LES VAUXBELETS HOME

Blanchelande College has acquired the Vauxbelets site, home of the College since 1999, for a purchase price of £1.4m.

The Vauxbelets estate is estimated to cover 40 acres and includes the original 18th century house Vauxbelets de Haut, Vauxbelets de Bas farm buildings, large early 20th century school buildings, extensive playing fields, additional outbuildings and agricultural land. The estate was formerly owned by the French province of the De La Salle Brothers, with whom the Trustees of Blanchelande College have been in negotiations to acquire ownership.

Since the College moved to Les Vauxbelets in 1999, the De La Salle Brothers have rented the property to Blanchelande on condition of it being run as a Catholic school, and the Trustees have confirmed that this understanding applies to the running of the College in the future.

In a letter to parents the Trustees state that the purchase of the Vauxbelets means that the development of the College can continue on the most sure footing possible. *‘Outwardly, for parents and students, the position remains as before with the site continuing to be used for the provision of education with a Catholic ethos by the College, except for those parts of the site used by commercial businesses. The provision of Catholic education, which plays so positive a part in the diversity of choice within Guernsey’s educational system, is at the very heart of the vision of both the Brothers and of The Blanchelande College Trust.’*

In their letter, the Trustees reassure parents that the purchase is intended to facilitate future fundraising for investment. *‘The purchase brings the strong benefits of permanence and of course will be a more sound basis for effective fundraising for the further improvement of our educational facilities. Parents, former students and other supporters of Blanchelande regularly make generous donations to enable improvements to the physical development of the estate, and they will now do so knowing that the College has the security of ownership.’*

The Trustees have also emphasized the affordability of the repayment schedule. *‘Financially, the agreement has been carefully considered on both sides. The Brothers have agreed to receive payment over a ten-year period. We would like to acknowledge the commitment of the Brothers to securing the future of Blanchelande and to Catholic education on Guernsey.’*

The estate has been purchased by The Blanchelande College Trust.

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Appendix: A History of Blanchelande College and Les Vauxbelets

From www.blanchelande.co.uk

The earliest records of Blanchelande College date back to twelfth century, when the Canons Regular of Prémontré (known as the Premonstratensians or Norbertines) had a priory (now the parish church of St Martin) on Guernsey, attached to which was a school, 'near the mill'. Both school and priory were closed by Henry VIII in the 1530s. Three centuries would pass before the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (fleeing repressive laws passed by the French government) arrived in Guernsey and resumed the task of education once more under the name Blanchelande, having purchased in 1902 the 'fief de Blanchelande', the feudal estate of the former priory and school. The school opened in 1904 and welcomed local girls and boarders from France.

The Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary left Guernsey in 1956, after which Reverend Mother Ethelburga of the Sisters of Mercy, who had already from their convent in Abingdon established a house in Alderney, agreed to take over the running of the school. The Sisters of Mercy ran the College until their departure in 1992.

Parents and the local community responded with determination at the news of the Sisters' departure and the consequent closure of the College, and a group of parents and teachers, strongly supported by Deputy Valerie Renouf and the States of Guernsey, resolved to establish a new Blanchelande. At Easter 1992, a few months prior to the old school closing, a new College (with 41 pupils) opened at the site of the former Girls' Grammar School in Rosaire Avenue. Some teachers even taught simultaneously at both old and new Blanchelande until the Sisters departed in July.

The next chapter in this story tells how Blanchelande arrived at Les Vauxbelets ('beautiful valleys'). To understand this it is necessary to introduce the story of another exiled French order that came to Guernsey at the beginning of the 20th century, the De La Salle Brothers who built the Little Chapel.

The De La Salle Brothers arrived in Guernsey in 1904 and opened two houses – one at Vimeira (now St Pierre Park Hotel), and the other at Les Vauxbelets. At Les Vauxbelets there was a primary school (now Bob Froome & Sons), a secondary day school for local boys, and an agricultural college for French boarders. The school flourished until the Occupation, when most of the Brothers and boys evacuated to Cheshire, south of Manchester, where they founded St Ambrose College (still a leading school in the region). In 1958, Brother Christianian, who had been educated at Les Vauxbelets, was sent back to formally close the school. It had been shut since 1953 due to falling numbers, and since then the buildings had fallen into disrepair and moves were afoot to sell off the estate. Brother Christianian and four other Brothers thought otherwise and set about repairing and cleaning the school again, reopening it in 1962. In the first year there were five pupils; in the second, forty. The school continued to grow. Over the following years the school housed the Dayton School (for pupils with learning difficulties) and subsequently the Brothers opened the Centre de Rencontres Scolaires International, which welcomed around 2,000 foreign students yearly to learn English.



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However, by the late 1990s Les Vauxbelets was once again struggling to maintain its student numbers, and the decision to close was made in the spring of 1996. At this time, Brother Christianian read in the Evening Press that the recently re-founded Blanchelande College was seeking new premises. Brother Christianian stated, 'I thought to myself this cannot be a good situation for Blanchelande and I decided that I must act.' His superiors accepted the case he made for Les Vauxbelets to be leased in perpetuity to Blanchelande College. Brother Christianian explained: 'I often say to people that it is like killing three birds with one stone. Firstly, it saves Blanchelande. Next, it keeps the estate together. Finally, it brings education back to our house, which is the aim of our order.'

The new Blanchelande Girls' College would move into Les Vauxbelets in 1999. In 2015, when boys first entered the senior school, 'Girls' was dropped from the name and the school became once again simply 'Blanchelande College'.