

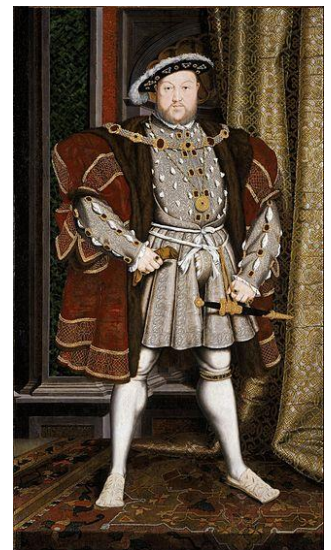
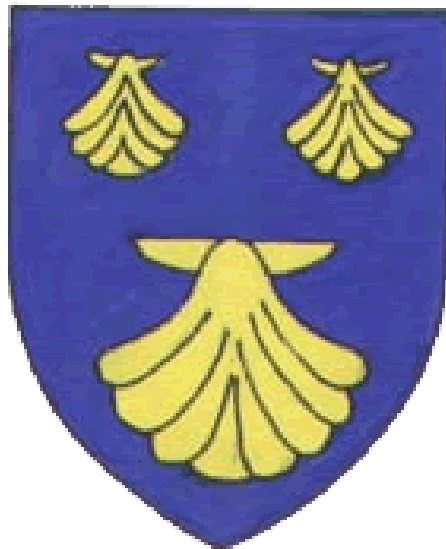
High Wych History – 52 / 53 - The Manor of Groves.

Since 1987 the Manor of Groves, in our village has included a hotel and a golf club. Without a doubt the Manor of Groves is the most imposing parcel of land within our parish. Its history goes back a very long way indeed. Just how long back we simply do not know.

In 1066 William the Conqueror defeated an English army led by King Harold Godwinson, beginning the Norman conquest of England. As in those days and perhaps still: to the winners the spoils. In the next couple of decades power came to rest with those who came over with William or who were close to the Norman invaders. This land grab was then recorded in the domesday book.

One of those was Geoffrey de Mandeville whose father William had indeed come over from Normandy. Geoffrey, usually referred to as the first Earl of Essex, came to possess large tracts of lands in East Anglia. Amongst those pieces of land was the Manor of Sayesbury of which Sawbridgeworth, Gilston and Eastwick formed part. In those days of course there was no High Wych. There wasn't even a Hertfordshire!

In 1150 Henry Fitzgerald or Fitzgeoffrey, a chamberlain of King Henry II and most probably heir to the above named first Earl of Essex, donated the Manor of Sayesbury and the Manor of Groves to the Monks of the Abbey of Reading. Those monks too had strong links with Normandy. What that actually meant for the poor Anglosaxon peasants then living round these parts you wonder. Not much I'd say. It is likely the monks had local bailiffs who collected rents on their behalf. It is doubtful there were ever any Reading monks wandering about in these parts.



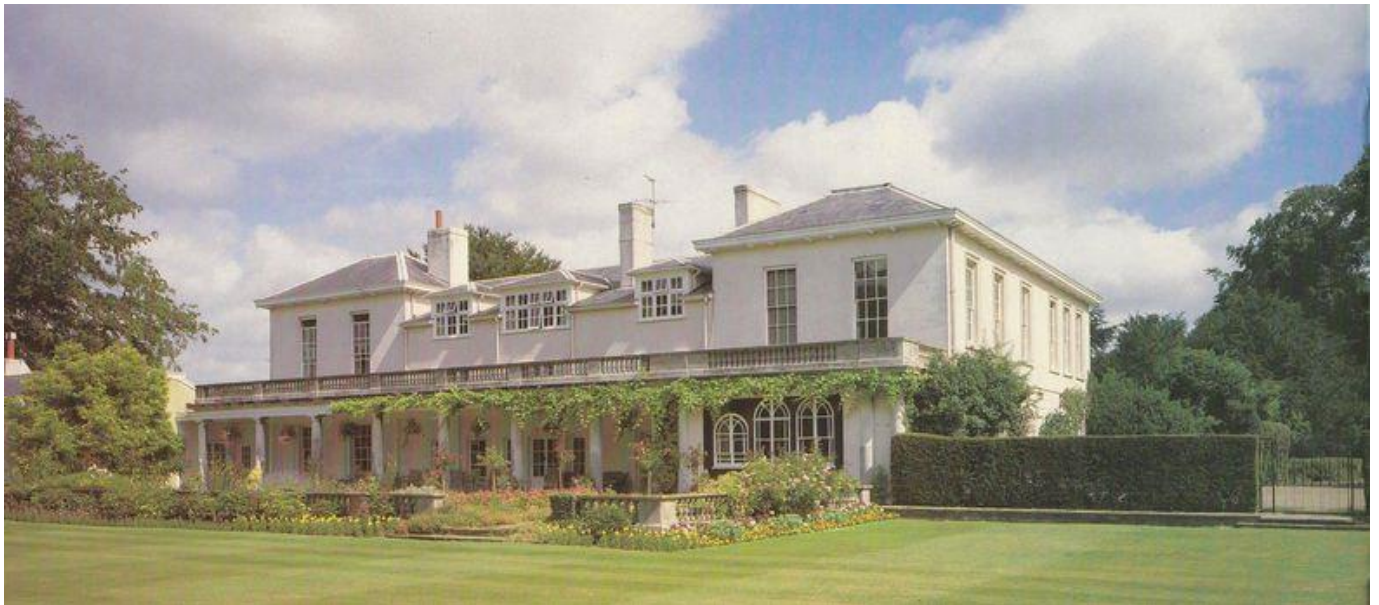
William the Conqueror – The coat of arms of the Abbey of Reading – Henry VIII

In the 1530s Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church, established the Church of England and started dissolving the monasteries, appropriating their income and disposing of their assets. The Abbey of Reading, being one of the most powerful, was one of the last ones to "fall". It was only in 1544 that the Manor of Groves was reassigned to William Goding. Goding then passed it on to a number of people: Thomas Goodday, Robert Hirst and his son Henry, John Duke and his son Robert who sold it to Joyce his mother in 1665. Truth be told, I found no actual documentation of all these goings on although the above information is repeated in a number of sources such as Chauncy, Salmon and Clutterbuck. I did however find an indenture documenting the sale of the Manor of Groves from Joyce Duke to Thomas Rogers in 1671. No dwelling was recorded on the site prior to this time

There were of course great changes during all that time. Most owners weren't locals. The income they derived from the Manor of Groves and other local estates initially came from felling timber (East Herts was once very wooded!) and collecting rent from local farmers. Even Edmund Godwin of Eastwick" who was High Sheriff of Essex in 1696 did not actually live at "Grove Lodge" as the main house was referred to then. The house was most probably used as a base for hunting. During the 17th and 18th century our area was also very popular for those who made their fortune in London and wanted to buy a place in the country with all the status that involved.

Documents kept at County Archives included rent rolls giving details of who paid rent to the owners of the Manor and how much they paid. In 1686 that income totalled 3 pounds, 7 shillings and 4 pence. In today's money that could be something like £15,000. A nice little earner you could say. Amongst the names on one of those rent rolls was Thomas Rivers who paid rent for "a messuage called Bonks and land late of Burtons". This could very well be the first of the three Thomas Rivers. The nursery of that name was established in 1725.

Other documents concerned appointments of staff at the Manor such as when in 1770 Jasper Reynolds appointed George Mead as gamekeeper. Given the importance of hunting, gamekeepers were of course important people.



The Manor of Groves Colonnade as it was around 1986

The next owner was Thomas Nathaniel Williams born in Shoreditch London in 1781. He bought the Manor in 1819. Starting in 1823 he made major alterations and additions to the existing house which gave the building its Georgian appearance which can still be seen today. Amongst other things this involved building the beautiful colonnade which is still much in evidence. It is said the Portland Stone Columns hail from London Bridge. This is quite possible as Williams and his family owned real estate in the area and were involved in the legal procedures to do with demolishing buildings to make way for new approach roads and a new bridge in 1831.

Thomas was a lawyer by profession and had an office in London: in 1805 he had married Catherine Jeffery. It appears that the Manor of Groves was his country house as Thomas continued to practice law in London after it was built. When he wrote his will however he gave "Grove Lodge" as his residence. Another case in point was his involvement in a court case when Daniel Cakebread and William Turner were accused of stealing twenty bushels of barley from Penny's Farm. So Thomas Nathaniel Williams was for all intents and purposes a local.

Williams died in 1841 and the house was advertised for sale in the same year. The advertisement is shown. The house was bought by John (later known as Jones) De'ath in 1844 who lived there for the next fifty years. Jones De'ath was born in Hunsdon in 1802. His father was William De'ath, a miller. Jones became a farmer and lived with his widowed father in Little Parndon until he bought the Manor of Groves. In 1852 at the age of 50 he married Mary Barnard who was the same age. He continued his farming when he moved to the house. In 1873 Mary died and Jones continued to live at the house until his death in 1891 at the age of 89. Another true local Jones Death was buried in St. James's Churchyard in plot D057 which sadly does not look very well kept. Jones De'ath left an estate of £ 6,120. The house was advertised for sale and that advertisement is shown.

HERTS.—Sawbridgeworth and Much Hadham.—Freehold Estates.—Grove Lodge and Grounds, Manor, Farms, Plantations, &c., the whole nearly Six Hundred Acres, about One Mile and a Half from the intended Railway Station at Harlow.—By Messrs. FAREBROTHER and CO., at Garraway's, on Friday, October 22, in Lots, by Order of the Trustees under the Will of J. N. Williams, Esq. deceased, and with the consent of the Mortgagees.

VERY Valuable FREEHOLD ESTATES, in the parishes of Sawbridgeworth and Much Hadham, in the county of Herts, about 30 miles from London; consisting of the Manor of Grove, with quit rents, &c.

Also Grove Lodge, a most desirable residence, with offices, gardens, lands, and woods, about 62 acres, of which possession may be had.

Mablett's, Allen's Green, Warren's, Little Penny, and Beadle's Ground Farms, and other Lands, a part of which is very eligible for building upon, the whole being about 540 acres, with capital buildings, and now in the occupation of Messrs. Wybrew, Housden, Speller, Avis, and Nottage, at rents amounting to 9000. per annum.

Also Six Cottages and a Blacksmith's Shop, at High Wych, let at 34l. 8s. per annum.

The land-tax chiefly redeemed, and the estates are situate in a fine sporting part of the county of Herts, about one hour's ride from London by Railway conveyance.

Descriptive particulars and plans are preparing, and will be delivered 21 days prior to the sale at Grove Lodge; the White Lion, Sawbridgeworth; Green Man, Harlow; of Messrs. Rickards and Son, solicitors, Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square; of Messrs. Morland and Godfrey, Abingdon, Berks; at Garraway's; and at Messrs. Farebrother and Co.'s offices, 9, Lancaster Place, Strand.

By order of the Executors of the late Jones De'ath, Esq.

SAWBRIDGEWORTH, HERTS,

About Two Miles from Sawbridgeworth and Harlow Stations, Four Miles from Bishop Stortford, and close to the picturesque village and church of High Wych.

AN Attractive FREEHOLD PROPERTY, comprising a RESIDENCE, known as "Grove Lodge," with pleasure grounds, walled-in kitchen garden, stabling for eight horses, outbuildings and cottage, well-timbered park, with ornamental plantations. The house, well placed on high ground, is approached by a carriage drive with lodge at entrance, and contains three reception-rooms, eight bed and dressing rooms, good domestic offices and cellars.

Also a Compact FARM, known as BAKER'S FARM, with farm buildings, labourers' cottages, &c.

The whole extending to an area of about 143a. 3r. 18p.

Sales ad for the Manor in 1841

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Similar for the sale in 1892

The house was then bought by Edmund Broughton Barnard who was a nephew of Mary and a son of William Barnard, a wealthy miller and brewer who lived in Fair Green House in Sawbridgeworth. Edmund was educated at Brighton School and the University of Cambridge where he was reputed to be an excellent polo player. In 1887 he married Alice Maud Richardson, the daughter of Charles Richardson, of Torwood. Their wedding was extensively reported in the newspapers. Barnard owned the first motor car in High Wych. He later became a liberal Member of Parliament but disagreed with Lloyd George. In 1903 Edmund sold the Manor of Groves and moved to Fair Green House his old childhood home. Barnard died suddenly in 1930. He suffered a heart attack whilst chairing a meeting of Hertfordshire County Council.

Frederic Silva (1841-1926) bought the property from Edmund and moved there with his wife, one son and two daughters. Frederic was born in 1841 in London. He was the son of John Joseph Silva, a wealthy merchant. In 1875 he married Anna Wheen daughter of Richard Wheen. Frederic Silva became a starch manufacturer. The family lived at the Manor of Groves for about ten years and in about 1915 moved to Coram Tower in Lyme Regis.

In 1915 the Manor of Groves was then bought by Henry Fowell Buxton (1876 – 1949). The Buxtons were a well known family. Henry's great grandfather was Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786 – 1845) MP, antislavery campaigner, co-founder of the RSPCA and brewer. The family's involvement with Truman, Hanbury, Buxton & Co was indeed the source of their wealth. At the end of the 19th century the Black Eagle Brewery in Brick Lane, Spitalfields was supposed to be the biggest in the world. Remarkably, the Manor of Groves was not the Buxton family's main residence. That was Easneye near Stanstead Abbots which they had built for them by the Quaker architect Alfred Waterhouse. Easneye nowadays is the place where the All Nations Christian College is based.



Thomas Fowell Buxton The Black Eagle Brewery Signboard One of the Buxton Beers

From the very first day The Buxtons got involved with High Wych village life. The family hosted parties for the school children. In 1919 a festive gathering took place at the Manor of Groves to celebrate the end of the first world war. Henry Buxton also paid for the memorial cross in St. James's Church Yard honouring the fallen from that war. He was involved in the building of our village hall and donated a billiard table to the men's club that met there. It was Major John Fowell Buxton however who was most involved locally. He was actually resident at the Manor. In 1930 John had married Katherine Mary Bacon better known as Kat. They had six children. In 1934 John Buxton followed his father as a member of High Wych Parish Council. That same year the Buxtons donated a plot of land in the centre of the village which was to become the George V playing field. From 1946 to 1949 John served as chairman of our Parish Council.

The estate was extensively modified during the time of the Buxton's tenure. A number of farm buildings were there already. In 1915 a building was added to the left of the entrance to the main grounds. This was to be called "the Lodge" which some people found confusing as prior to that the main house was called Grove Lodge. In 1918 the two "Peace Cottages" were built at the back of the Manor and in 1937 Alexander Cottages, the latter named after one of the Buxtons' sons. The Manor and indeed High Wych was a different place then. The Buxtons employed many people. In the late forties there were Mr. Hurrell and his wife, butler and cook, who lived in Nr. 2 Alexander Cottages and Mr. Bramham and Mr. Holden both gardeners who lived in the Peace Cottages. There were also live-in maids.

Gas and electricity came to the Buxtons before they came to the rest of the village. Both Peace Cottages and Alexander Cottages originally got their gas simply piped through from the main house unmetered. Electricity for the main house came from the Buxton's own generator.

Henry Buxton who now lives near Ware is John's son. He spent his early years at the Manor of Groves. He remembers the pond, a swing and pleasant times during the summer holidays. He can still recall a lot of names from those days: Ethel Brett, May Holden, Mr Jacobs, the chauffeur, Mr Hurrell the butler, who lived to over a hundred and of course Grace Dunn. He also remembers poplars being planted so that they did not have to look at Harlow New Town.



Henry Fowel Buxton

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the butler and his wife, the cook

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John Buxton

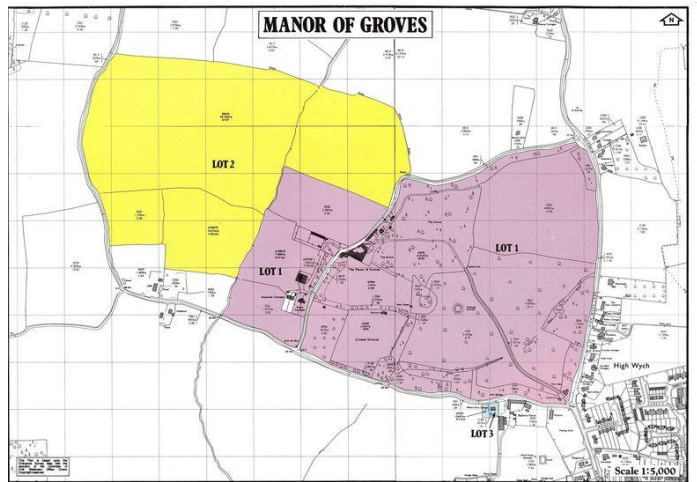
In 1957 the Buxtons sold the Manor to the Egertons. Cyril Reginald Egerton (1905 – 1992) was born on 7 September 1905. He was the son of Major Hon. Francis William George Egerton and Hilda Margaret Curteis. He married twice. In 1934 he married Mary Campbell, and in 1954 Mary Truda Lea, daughter of Sir Thomas Sydney Lea and Mary Ophelia Woodward. The Egertons were well liked. In the sixties, the occupants of Alexander Cottages had the opportunity to buy their cottages but could not get a mortgage. Cyril Egerton helped them secure a mortgage. Egerton Sr. died in June 1992. His son Francis then inherited.

Francis says the Manor of Groves was a happy family home, particularly compared with London where he had lived after the war. "By the time my Father, Cyril Egerton, bought the Manor of Groves I was fourteen and away at school. I remember happy holidays with my sisters and working in the woods and planting trees. I remember well wonderful beech trees in the wood by the house. Each summer the local Cricket Club played on the Cricket Field near the house which was good entertainment."

In 2000, Francis Egerton succeeded his first cousin once-removed as 7th Duke of Sutherland. His residences now include Stetchworth House near Newmarket and Mertoun House in the Scottish borders.

Anna Scott bought the Manor of Groves from the Egertons in 1965. She and her husband Douglas moved there from Wiltshire to be nearer to London where Douglas had secured a job after leaving the army. The Scotts brought up their children at the Manor. Their youngest was only six months when they arrived. They built a tennis court and a swimming pool, enjoyed the use of the squash court, croquet lawn and everything else. Douglas tells us that it was "a wonderful place to bring up a family. We loved it, and all the people round-about. We had weekend house-parties there, led by Christian speakers (the house lent itself wonderfully to that kind of thing); and we were quite involved in the community". Anna Scott was president of the Silver Lining a role she took over from Mrs. Egerton. Mrs. Scott entertained the club to tea in the garden every summer and attended their meetings in High Wych village hall. In 1970 Douglas left his London job and after attending Writtle Agricultural College he ran Broomshawbury farm near Hatfield Broad Oak as well as the grassland around the Manor of Groves. In 1977 they started the Grove Herd of pedigree South Devon cattle which is still going strong. Hadrian their prize winning bull was in fact quite famous. Locals remember how once a new black bull was mistakenly put in the same field. A fight ensued, Hadrian of course came out the winner!

By 1987, when the Scotts' children showed no inclination to take up farming, Douglas and Anna decided to sell the Manor. They were under the impression they were selling to a private buyer. This proved not to be the case.



Hadrian the bull

A map from the Manor of Groves sales brochure from 1987

The Manor was in fact bought by the Sharer family. Bakers Farm Cottage was sold separately. Over the next few years Stuart Sharer, his family and associates set about changing the estate into a hotel cum golf club. An extension was built at the back and the coach house was also refurbished so that the hotel could accommodate 43 rooms. The front porch of the main house which was removed by the Buxtons was reinstated. A golf course opened in 1991 as a “pay and play” outfit, the golf club started one year later. It soon became clear however that the Sharers had overreached themselves financially. The Lodge, and Peace Cottages were sold off but that was not enough. The bank had to foreclose; Stephen Hung and his associates then bought it from the bank.



1916 the front of the house with porch and columns – 2016 new porch and columns are back

Hung proved a more cautious operator than the Sharers; he took some 3-4 years to decide on and put in effect a number of changes. The Coach House was demolished and a new wing added to give the hotel 80 rooms in all. A State of the Art Leisure Club with an indoor pool and exercise facilities completed the complex.

March 2006, the original golf clubhouse was substantially modified to provide wedding and banqueting facilities. The golfers relocated to their present location: the Viewing Gallery.

Planning permission for other modifications was sought but not acted upon.

On Wednesday 12th October I visited the Manor and talked to Bob Walker secretary of the golf club there and with James Barker who now manages the hotel.

Bob is a local having lived in Sawbridgeworth since the early seventies. The 18-hole golf course was much in use when I called and the club hosted a raucous party of old boys on their "special day". The Manor of Groves club now has some 300 members of different types, full, five day, junior etc. James Barker is a local too. He started as a washer upper in 1992 and worked his way up in the Stephen Hung organisation. The hotel has 80 rooms all with en suite marble bathrooms, broadband Internet access, satellite TV, ironing facilities, hospitality tray and direct dial telephone. Where the coach house once stood is now a sumptuous reception area. In the main house, on the first floor, the Baldock or bridal suite is where once servants slept. The State of the Art fully air-conditioned 3000sq ft Leisure Club is available to residents at no extra charge and outside members. Senior citizens are charged half price there.

Bob Walker says: "although the Viewing Gallery is suitable it lacks the intimacy of the original clubhouse". He went on to say "I understand that the Scotts were disappointed that the house had become an hotel but it does give a lot of pleasure to a lot of people



Sources were and help came from: Ancestry.co.uk, James Barker, Henry Buxton, Francis Egerton, John Clarke, Peggy Holden, Colin Jackson, Douglas Scott, Bob Walker, the Manor of Groves website, and as always Hertfordshire Archives and Libraries. We still need your personal contributions, memories, stories and photographs as well as your criticism, positive or negative. E-mail theo@vandebilt.co.uk or phone 01279 725468.