

Earliest references

There is some doubt about the earliest reference to Ottershaw. According to 'archaeological collections' of 1858, the land in this area was given to the Abbey of Chertsey by Frithwald, Viceroy of Surrey, under Wlfare of Mercia in 670. However, it is thought by some that this event did not happen until later. The name 'Otreshagh' or 'Otershaghe' first appears in 889, when a charter was given by Alfred the Great to the Abbey of Chertsey. The spelling of these early writers was, however, a little vague: in 1227 for instance, it was spelt 'Otershawe', in 1301 'Ottershaghe' and 'Ottereshawe', and in 1337 'Otershagh'.

Ottershaw in the thirteenth century

In 1223 Alan, Abbot of Chertsey, had a dispute with Richard Stapulford, Rector of Walton, respecting the tithes of a part of the woods of Ottershaw which had been grubbed up and planted with corn. The matter terminated in the Abbot's favour. The matter was again brought in question in 1279; when it appeared that the wood belonged to the Earl of Hereford and Nicholas de Cruce (Croix). And it was then acknowledged that the Abbot of Chertsey was entitled to the tithes of all the tenants of the Earl and of Nicholas in the wood of Ottershaw.

Little is known about the estate between 1279 and 1540. The Victorian Histories of Surrey (1911) does, however, make several references to the estate in this period.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries:

In 1301 Walter de Langton, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, received licence to 'assart' three hundred acres of his wood of Ottershaw, which he held for life through the death of Humphrey de Bohun, sometime Earl of Hereford and Essex. Forty acres of the estate came into the possession of Geoffrey de Paris, whose kinsman and here conveyed them to John de Tighele, from whom Williams Ingelard acquired them. From his heir Edward atte Brugg they passed to Robert Dachet and William, his son. However, the Dachets were arraigned for entering into possession of land without licence from the King. Pardon and restitution of the estates were, however, granted to them in 1337.

Ottershaw : 1540 - 1761

In 1540 John Danister, a Baron of the Exchequer, died, possessed, inter alia, of the estate of Ottershaw, which, by this time consisted of a messuage of forty acres, which included the house etc., and three hundred acres of woodland in addition. His daughter and heiress Ann married Owen Bray, second son of Sir Edward Bray of Shere and Chobham. A court case arose at this time concerning Ottershaw. A complaint was lodged by Owen Bray and his wife against one Sir Francis Dawtrey, on the ground that he had committed great spoil in their lands; in Ottershaw in particular he had cut down and sold sixty oaks of the value of ten shillings each. During the reign of Charles II Ottershaw belonged to the yeoman family of Roake, who still possess landed property in this part of Surrey. In 1684 John Roake married Margaret, daughter of Law(Lawrence?) Porter the elder of Woking, and on his decease, about the year 1722, without issue, Henry Roake of Moated Farm, Chertsey, his brother and heir, conveyed the estate to the said Law Porter. That person, conjointly with Mary his wife, sold the estate to Thomas Woodford, Esq., of Threadneedle Street, London, who, in November 1758, bequeathed it to his eldest son, the Rev. Thomas Woodford, from whom, in 1761, it was purchased by Thomas Sewell, "sq., a barrister, who was afterwards knighted and became Master of the Rolls.

Ottershaw : 1761 - 1819

Sewell pulled down the existing house, and erected a mansion in the Italian style on a more elevated spot - the mansion which preceded the present one. The estate passed to his son, Thomas Bailey Sewell (1784) who married Lady Elizabeth Birmingham, daughter of the Earl of Louth. They were divorced, however, in 1799. When the Surrey Fencible Cavalry was raised in 1794 Sewell was its Lieut.-Colonel. A local guide of the

May 29th 1660 Charles II. pro. named King
John married Margaret 25 Nov. 1684 St Peter, Woking

time, published in 1784, has this to say of the estate at that time : 'Nearly adjoining the above (Chertsey) is Ottershaw, the seat of Thomas B. Sewell, a noble stone edifice built by Sir Thomas Sewell, many years Master of the Rolls and father of the present possessor. This seat is large, has an air of grandeur, and is well designed for both pleasure and convenience. In front of the house is a lawn of considerable extent, from which is a most enchanting picturesque prospect for many miles over the surrounding country.'

In 1795 Sewell put the house up for sale. It was taken by Edmund Boehm (or Bechin). He improved the estate by various purchases, especially of adjoining wasteland. He formed extensive plantations, built two lodge gates and also the Gothic structure facing the front door. He also improved the interior of the house. He put the estate up for auction on Thursday, 16th July, together with the adjoining Potters Park. The auction arrangements were in the hands of one Rainy who produced an announcement of sale containing a detailed description of the mansion and grounds. From it we see that the old house bore many similarities to the present mansion. In 1819 the house was of a handsome Italian style, built on groined arches. There were many interior alterations. The entrance portico on the north side was supported by Doric columns, and a double flight of steps led to the hall. The library, forty feet long, had ionic columns at each end, and communicated to the octagonal drawing room, each side of which measured $26\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and supported a circular dome ceiling. The drawing room led to a strutted terrace or balcony on iron pillars, which ran along the south front, as part of the handsome veranda, with its ornamental ironwork. A conservatory and greenhouse were attached at respective ends, each 52 feet long, 24 feet wide, and 18 feet high. The park contained a variety of trees including some foreign species of great value. One of the water areas, (now Big Black Hole) covered an area of four acres, and the stream to Durnford Mill ran through it. The entrance from Chertsey was through fine wrought iron gates attached to lodges of stone. These had been erected by Boehm, and were in the form of square figured tablets in bas-relief. From the gates an avenue ran through the fine plantations to the mansion, a distance of just under one mile. It was at this time that the small building containing the kitchen and offices was built to the north of the main building in the capricious form of a small monastic confine, in Gothic style. It was surmounted by a lofty tower in three stages, which afforded magnificent views. A contemporary account of the building runs as follows : 'It is in the form of a church, having a lofty tower, clock etc., and is partly encompassed by an iron railing, the body of the building or the nave is an excellent kitchen, lighted by a large mullioned window; adjoining is a bake-house, pantry etc. The chancel is a neat dairy with painted windows.' Even greater detail of the upper floor rooms of the mansion is contained in Rainy's notice of auction. A map of the estate at this time can be inspected in the Chertsey Public Library.

At this auction Lieut. General Sir George Wood, K.C.B. bought the estate, together with Potters Park, in 230 lots for £31,000. Together with Potters Park the estate then covered 700 acres. His son sold it to Richard Crawshay, an iron master in Wales. ? Sir William Wood

Ottershaw : 1819 - 1910

Crawshay died in 1859, and the estate passed to Sir Thomas Edward Colebrook, 4th Baronet, M.P., formerly of Abingdon, Lanarkshire, who built the village church in 1864. Lawrence James Baker J.P. was the last owner of the Old Mansion. He married twice, was J.P. for the County of Surrey in 1894, High Sheriff in 1898 and M.P. for the Frome-Somerset Division for the year 1885 -86. A picture of the estate at the time appears in "Surrey at the opening of the Twentieth Century" by W.E.Hitchen. It was Mr. Baker who sold the estate to Mr. Eckstein at the turn of the century.

Ottershaw in the Twentieth Century

1. Eckstein and the building of the present Mansion

Sir Frederick Eckstein, a millionaire, who had made his money in South Africa, where he was one of the pioneers in diamond mining, bought the mansion about the year 1906. He pulled down the existing building and by 1910 had built a magnificent new mansion on the same site at a cost of £250,000. The building is supposed to be on the lines of the Krupps mansion at Essen. The house had ninety-one rooms, but even so Sir Frederick's wife, when she saw it, said it was too small; she also disliked the view from her bedroom window and so refused to live here. During the first World War, Mr. Eckstein confined himself to the top floor of the building and let the rest of the house be used as a hospital. However, after the war he found living alone in the house, despite all his lavish parties, a lonely occupation, and so in 1919 he sold the estate to Miss Schinz, the daughter of a South American 'nitrates king'. It is said that a large picture of the Kaiser hung in the main hall (then a ballroom), in Mr. Eckstein's time, but people familiar with the house have no recollection of this. Eckstein was a naturalised Englishman, and we can safely believe that he had few pro-German sentiments.

2. Miss Schinz

Unlike Mr. Eckstein, Miss Schinz was of a retiring nature. A millionairess who kept Rolls Royces for her maids she was prone to fall for any wild schemes suggested to her. Through the intrigues of her chauffeur, Rapson, she invested in an un-puncturable rubber tyre, guaranteed for a certain number of miles, which, however, did not fulfil the manufacturer's expectations. Through this, and other ventures, she lost a lot of money, and could not afford to keep up the house.

3. The O.P.I.C. & Ottershaw College

The estate was then acquired by O.P.I.C. - The Ottershaw Park Investment Company. This company had great plans for developing the rim of the estate and it built some houses, which it was unable to sell for some time, near Durnford Bridge. In 1932 the middle estate, comprising the grounds of the present school, was bought by Ottershaw College. (The company interested in forming the school first rented and then bought the inner estate from OPIC). This was a school on very broad lines for boys from all parts of the world. Mr., later the Rev. Jeffreys was the first Headmaster. He had previously been at Bryanston, but when his ideals conflicted with the school's policy he founded Ottershaw College. The cost of upkeep of the school was tremendous and several times it faced financial hardship. However, Mr. Barry Cooper, father of one of the boys came to the schools rescue when he founded the Chertsey Public School Company Limited, of which he was the sole shareholder, to finance the college. In this way the school survived until the start of the second world war, when it closed. The school was run on the Dalton system, whereby boys attended classes voluntarily and did a certain amount of work each week in their own time. The system met with varying success according to the type of boy! Many of our present amenities were first added by the college. They built the squash court, and had hoped to build a second beside it. The stage was added at this time, for the college boasted a competent dramatic society besides a highly successful orchestra, under the direction of Mr. Hartley, who now resides on the estate at 'Woodwind'. He was second master in the college. The walnut room, formerly the billiards room, was consecrated as a chapel, and used as such, for the school had a distinct religious outlook. The college turned four of the six grass tennis-courts into hard courts. Many boys came from abroad, and at one time boys came from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy, U.S.A., Holland and Denmark. Mr. Manning, one of the masters took over the Headmastership for the final term of the school's life.

In 1935 Garden Court was built - the residence of Major Plummer.

4. The War- 1948

The college closed just before the start of the war, the presence of many German boys causing an awkward situation. In the first part of the second world war the Vacuum Oil Company, now Mobiloil Co., moved part of their office staff into the mansion, where they worked throughout the war. The pitches were used as a vegetable garden, and were ploughed up, whilst the formal gardens grew to seed - no one was allowed to work in the formal gardens in connection with the war effort. Whilst the oil company worked and slept in the mansion, the army used the woods as a vehicle park, covering the ground with tons of rubble from bombed London, to prevent the lorries from bogging down. This rubble has gradually poisoned the ground and is the cause of the many dead trees in the park. Woodwind was taken over as a residence, first by the oil company (for a director - Mr. Holiday) and then by the Army. Huts were erected on the area where West House now stands, and in Mr. Hartley's garden.

At the end of the war the oil company stayed on for a time in the mansion, but the estate was sold to the Rudolph Steiner Foundation, who planned to expand their Devonshire school up here. However, the Surrey County Council made a compulsory purchase order on the property, and planned to develop it as an 'experimental council boarding school for boys'. When the Rudolph Steiner Foundation heard that they were to have to look elsewhere for their new school they stripped the mansion of all its fittings - these included valuable sports equipment left by the college - which put the present school at a disadvantage when it started.

5. Ottershaw School

Ottershaw School opened in 1948, with A.E. Foot, Esq., C.B.E. as its first Headmaster. It was the first school of its kind in the country and this gained it the title of 'experimental'. Since 1948 the mansion has been re-decorated, three science labs. built, West House, a dormitory block for sixty boys erected, as well as three masters' houses.

This is a rather brief, and perhaps sometimes inaccurate survey of the main events in the history of Ottershaw Park. Many points have been omitted - the use of the artesian well water until 1931, the building of the mansion, of which we can find little mention. The receipt of any information not included in this survey will be gratefully received by the compilers who are ~~xx~~ anxious to make this report as full and accurate as possible.

We are indebted to the following for their valuable assistance :- The Headmaster, R.G. White, Esq., Mr. and Mrs. Hartley, Miss Otter, The Vicar of Ottershaw, The Surrey Herald, The Surrey Advertiser, and the staffs of the reference sections at Esher, Chertsey and Woking Public Libraries.

(Compiled by two boys - M. Trump and D. Palmer after G.C.E.
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