

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 Wilfare of Mercia in 670. 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 a little vague: in 1227 for instance, it was spelt Otershawe, in 1301 Ottershaghe and Ottershawe, and in 1337 Otershagh.

Ottershaw in the 13th 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 but was again raised in 1279, when it appeared that the wood belonged to the Earl of Hereford and Nicholas de Cruce (Croix). 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 does, however, make several references to the estate during this period.

The 14th and 15th 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 kinsmen conveyed them to John de Tighele, from whom William Ingelard acquired them. From his heir, Edward atte Brugg, they passed to Robert Dacet 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 Sir Francis Dawtrey, on the grounds that he had committed great spoil in their lands. In Ottershaw in particular he had cut down and sold sixty oaks, valued at ten shillings each. During the reign of Charles I, 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 Lawrence Porter the elder of Woking and, when he died, around 1722, without issue, Henry Roake of Moated Farm, Chertsey, his brother and heir conveyed the estate to the said Lawrence Porter. He and his wife Mary sold the estate to Thomas Woodford of Threadneedle Street, London, who bequeathed it to his son in 1758 from whom, in 1761, it was purchased by Thomas Sewell, 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 Lieutenant Colonel. A local guide of the time, published in 1784, states:

"Nearly adjoining the above (Chertsey) is Ottershaw, the seat of Thomas B. Sewell, a noble stone edifice built by Sir Thomas Sewell, for 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 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) who 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 before putting the estate up for auction together with the adjoining Potters Park. From the auctioneer's detailed announcement of the sale, 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. 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 verandah 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 Mole, 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 were 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 is as follows:

"It is 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 the auction notice.

At the auction, the estate was bought by Lt. Gen. Sir George Wood, K.C.B. for £31,000. Together with Potters Park, the estate then covered 700 acres. His son sold it to Richard Crowshay, an iron master in Wales. A map of the estate at this time can be seen in the Chertsey Public Library.

Ottershaw 1819-1910

Crawshaw 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 20th century

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 in the building. During the First World War, Mr. Eckstein confined himself to the top floor of the building and the rest of the house was used as a hospital. However, after the war, despite all the lavish parties, he found living alone in the house a lonely occupation, and 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.

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. However, it did not fulfil the expectations and through this, and other ventures, she lost a lot of money and could not afford to keep up the house.

The O.P.I.C. and Ottershaw College

The estate was then acquired by OPIC - 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. Jeffreys, later 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 school's rescue when he founded the Chertsey Public School Company Limited to finance the College. He was the only

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 in addition to 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: Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy, U.S.A., Holland, Denmark. Mr. Manning, one of the masters, took over as Headmaster for the final term of the school's life.

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

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 Company, 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 rubbish from bombed London to prevent the lorries from bogging down. This slowly 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 one of their directors, and then by the army. Huts were erected on the area where West House now stands and also 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.. 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 look elsewhere for their new school, they stripped the mansion of all its fittings - including valuable sports equipment left behind by the College - and put the present school at a disadvantage when it started.

Ottershaw School

Ottershaw School opened in 1948 with Mr. A.E. Foot 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 redecorated; three science labs built; West House, a dormitory block for sixty boys erected, as well as three masters' houses. Mr. Foot retired in 1964 and was succeeded by Mr. A.E.R. Dodds, the present Headmaster.