

## **SELF GUIDED WALK AROUND THE MANOR FARM SITE AT RUISLIP**

### **INTRODUCTION**

We are about to explore a site that has been at the centre of the village of Ruislip since written records began. It has been continuously occupied since the middle of the 11th century at least.

This area was at the heart of Wlward Wit's Ruislip estate in late Saxon times and, after the Norman Conquest, it was given to Ernulf de Hesdin and was both the military and administrative centre of a manor that stretched from the Middlesex/Hertfordshire boundary in the north to Northolt and Down Barnes in the south. It joined Pinner and South Harrow on the east and Harefield and Ickenham on the west. There was a wooded hillside north of the River Pinn and flattish heavy clay land suitable for arable to the south.

Ernulf de Hesdin gave the manor to the Norman Abbey of Bec *circa* 1087 and by the 13th century the central audit of the Abbey's English lands was being held at a priory here.

King's College owned Ruislip from 1451 and embarked upon a programme of building improvements about fifty years later. Thereafter buildings were modernised and new ones built from time to time. The manor courts continued to be held at Ruislip Court, as Manor Farm was named, until 1925 and the manorial demesne or estate was farmed from here until the land started being sold for the development of a Garden Suburb early in the 20th century.

King's College gave Manor Farm to the Ruislip-Northwood Urban District Council as a gift for the people of Ruislip in 1932 and it became a public amenity. Following restoration of the buildings with Heritage Lottery Funding 2003-6, Manor Farm has become a Heritage Centre.

We hope that you enjoy your visit.

Let us make our way to the Notice Board beside the Little Barn (Manor Farm Library) where we get a good view of the motte

### **THE MOTTE-BAILEY CASTLE**

Before us lies the motte of what was almost certainly a motte-bailey castle, the type of defence work that was introduced into England by the Normans. This one was probably built quite soon after the Battle of Hastings in the autumn of 1066. The valuation of Ruislip decreased from £30 in the time of King Edward to £12 when received by its Norman owner, Ernulf de Hesdin, suggesting some catastrophic happening, such as the stripping of the fields by a Norman column passing through en route to London. Perhaps the Normans created the castle for fear of Saxon reprisals. According to the Domesday Survey there were still four Frenchmen living in Ruislip in 1086, possibly occupying the castle.

The builders dug a moat and cast the soil into the middle to create the mound. As seen today the motte is only 3 metres high, but would have been higher, with a wooden building defended by a palisade on the top.

The motte has never been archaeologically excavated, but a geophysical survey in October 1998 possibly identified 'revetments' connected with the feature. The motte's secrets await discovery.

Walk to the left round the motte into the former bailey.

### **THE BAILEY**

This flat open space was also originally surrounded by a moat. The portion between motte and bailey was back filled centuries ago, presumably with earth from the top of the motte. HJ Ewer, the farmer living in the house filled in the rest of the moat in 1888. There would have been wooden buildings in the bailey, serving as stables, granaries and barns that could sustain a garrison in troubled times.

Go onto the motte noting that you are crossing the moat that divided it from the bailey.

### **VIEW FROM THE MOTTE**

As you look around you will realise that you are standing on ground that slopes downwards to the River Pinn, to the north, but is high enough to be free from flooding, making it a suitable site for settlement. Now look south to Ruislip High Street. The scene is dominated by St Martin's church, probably an early Norman foundation. A priest at Ruislip is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 and almost certainly had a church. The present St Martin's was largely rebuilt in the mid-13th century. The manor and church governed administrative and ecclesiastical affairs in Ruislip until late Victorian times.

Walk across the bailey towards Manor Farm House that stands on the site of Ruislip Priory. Stand on the footpath between the grass and the knot garden.

### **RUISLIP PRIORY**

Ernulf de Hesdin granted Ruislip to the Abbey of Bec circa 1087. Several Norman knights endowed the Abbey of Bec with their newly-acquired English land. The abbey owned 24 manors spread across 14 counties before 1100. At first, French monks ran the estates from small cells. Ruislip had a prior by 1176 and by 1240 the priory had become the home of a Proctor-General and was the venue for the central audit of all Bec's manors, broadening the horizons of the rural inhabitants of Ruislip by bringing them into contact with people from other parts of England.

When the present Manor Farm House was being built in 1505-07, parts of the old

priory buildings were demolished, but the hall and a tower that must have been in front of the new building line, perhaps where the flower beds are, were retained. Extents (inventories) made in 1294, 1324 and 1336, when the property of Alien Priors were confiscated by the Crown owing to war with France, tell us of a chapel furnished with ornaments, a guest house, three barns, granges in Northwood and at Bourne (South Ruislip) and the crops growing in the fields. It is interesting to note that there were two swans and 17 peacocks at the manor in 1294.

The last prior of Ruislip, William de St Vaast died in 1404, severing the Bec connection. Henry IV's son, John, Duke of Bedford held the manor until his death in 1436 when it passed into the king's hands. Henry VI eventually gave Ruislip outright to his new foundation, The King's College of St Mary & St Nicholas at Cambridge, in 1451.

Now let us take a look at Manor Farm House

### **MANOR FARM HOUSE**

In front of us stands Manor Farm House. It was known as Ruislip Court until Victorian times because it was the home of Ruislip Manor Courts. The last one was held here on 23 October 1925.

The Provost and Scholars of King's College leased the manor to principle tenants who were normally non-resident. The principle tenants sub-let to farmers who lived in the house and farmed the land. From 1462 to 1505 the principle tenants were local men of some substance with property in Ruislip and Harefield. The letting of the lease to Sir Robert Drury of Hawstead, Suffolk in April 1505 introduced a man of wider influence (he had been speaker of the House of Commons and was a member of Henry VII's council). Within three months work began on the new house in a modern style that would be a status symbol for the College. It has a hall and cross-wing, but whereas medieval halls were open to the roof with a central hearth, the hall here has a fireplace and chimney at one end and a range of rooms above the hall.

This house provided well-appointed lodgings for the Provost and other officials when they came from Cambridge to hold courts and attend to other business. The lodgings were in the cross-wing to the left. The hall which doubled as a court room is in the centre. Courts were normally held twice a year. The cross-wing and hall form the high end of the house. There was accommodation for the farmer and his family at the Low End of the house on the right.

This house is unusual in having a timber framed upper storey sitting upon a solid brick wall that was hidden when the upper story at the front of the house was rendered in the 18th century. The ground floor front was pebble dashed at the same time. The studs (timber uprights) are close together and the spaces between filled with decorative brick nogging. Look at the upper storey windows. The only original window is the small one on the left close to the cross-wing. Two other windows are clearly insertions as their frames cut into the studs. If you look

beneath the left hand sash windows, you can see a groove running across five studs and two peg holes in the first and fifth studs where an oriel window was originally fixed. A similar groove can be seen across one of the studs under the right hand window, but is less obvious because of repair work. Oriel windows went out of fashion and sash windows were put in during the first half of the 18th century. The architraves of the upper storey windows that stand proud of the brickwork would have been flush with the rendering that was part of the modernisation. A photograph in the exhibition inside the house shows the house as it looked before the rendering was stripped after Manor Farm came into public ownership in 1932.

Walk round to the left to view the north wall of the cross-wing.

We are looking at the outside wall of the Provost's Parlour downstairs and Provost's chamber upstairs. There appears to have been a doorway on the right into a service room adjoining the upper chamber. This entrance may have been approached by an external wooden staircase, and been intended to give access to the upper rooms when business was being transacted down below. There is a similar arrangement at Manor Farm, King's Sombourne, Hants, that was built for Magdalen College, Oxford in 1504.

At the left end of the chamber wall, there is a blocked door that gave access to an external garderobe (lavatory), handily placed above the moat. The Provost had en suite accommodation. Downstairs there is evidence of a door on the left opening into the parlour.

The diaper pattern – the diamonds made of blue headers-is a sign of a building of high quality and status. Similar patterns can be seen on other Tudor buildings such as the gateway to Lincoln's Inn in Chancery Lane.

Walk down through the former orchard, making for the Information Panel to the left. Note the sudden drop, where the moat that once surrounded the bailey, was back-filled in 1888. Farmer Ewer was making a grass tennis court. An orchard was planted in the 19th century. Two pear trees survive. Decorative trees and two medlars were planted in the 1970s.

### **EARTHWORK, part of GRIM'S DYKE**

The ditch at the bottom of the slope was once considered to be part of an earthwork surrounding the village, a mill leat or possibly to have been dug to separate the manor hall from the Park that is mentioned in the Domesday Book, where deer and other animals roamed. It is now thought to be a portion of the enigmatic Grim's Dyke which runs from Harrow Weald and is probably of Pagan Saxon date. During an archaeological excavation in 1976 Neolithic worked flints and sherds of pots made at the Roman pottery on Brockley Hill, were found in the north bank, proving that the ditch is post-Roman. It can't be defending the manor because the ditch is on the wrong side of the bank.

Return by the footpath at the side of Winston Churchill Hall

## **WINSTON CHURCHILL HALL**

This field was called Barn Close in farming days. King's College had sold it to a builder before the 1932 handover of Manor Farm. Councillor TR Parker acquired the land and gave it to the Ruislip Village Trust in 1948 to be the site of a community hall. The Trust conveyed it to the council and Winston Churchill Hall was built in 1965.

Walk to the gateway.

## **SARSEN STONES**

There are two large stones beside the gate. They are sarsens (masses of stone of Eocene age, hardened by secondary silica). They occur in the Reading Beds that underlie parts of the area. Being the only stone available in Middlesex, they are often found at old occupation sites, sometimes marking routes or being used for such purposes as sharpening tools.

Walk through the gateway, round the Stables and down the steps into the grass-covered farmyard. Note the surviving farm outbuildings.

## **THE FARM YARD**

The Victorian Stables of brown brick with a slate roof replaced an earlier building. The slate came from Wales and came into use in this area after the railway extended there in 1847. Older buildings, like Manor Farm House have tiled roofs. From medieval times tiles were made locally, around Tile Kiln Lane, in Eastcote and in Northwood. The Guide Hut adjoining the Stables was a cowshed and dairy, dating from the 18th century.

The Cow-byre Exhibition Centre opened in October 1980. It is on the site of a 19<sup>th</sup> century thatched building that was burned down at Easter 1976. The flints set into the west wall were collected from the site. A Granary standing on cast iron staddles was built in the centre of the yard in the early 20th century, but was struck by lightning and destroyed in August 1980.

## **THE GREAT BARN**

The Great Barn was built between 1280 and 1320 and may well have been the barn 'lying northwards and southwards' mentioned in the Extent of 1324 and was erected for the monks of the Abbey of Bec. It was used for the storage of the wheat, oats, barley, peas and beans produced on the Priory's demesne and in addition the tithes of wheat paid to the monks in their capacity as Rectors of St Martin's church. The structure inside shows advanced carpentry techniques and the high quality of the workmanship could only have been purchased by an established institution and shows the high status of the Abbey of Bec. It is the oldest aisled barn standing in the Greater London area. It is comparable to the slightly older Wheat Barn and

Barley Barn at Cressing Temple in Essex, that were erected for the Knights Templar, an extremely wealthy Military Order.

If the barn is closed at the time of your visit to the site, a detailed description of the timber-framework is given on a poster viewable at Manor Farm Library

### **THE LITTLE BARN (MANOR FARM LIBRARY)**

The Little Barn may be 'the south barn' that was being repaired at the time that Manor Farm was being built, but it could date from later in the 16th century. It was opened as a Middlesex Public Library in 1937 by Professor J H Clapham, Vice-Provost of King's College. The Children's Library with a Reference Library above was added at the western end in 1964. The fox weathervane on the roof appears in early photographs before conversion.

It is worth going inside if the Library is open.

The old raised threshing floor is to your left as you enter. The windows that were inserted to give light to the library have decorative heraldic glass; music and science at the eastern end, astronomy and learning on the west. The central window has the arms of the County of Middlesex on the left, King's College on the right and stained glass commemorating the Golden Jubilee of the Library in the centre. The latter was paid for by a bequest from Miss May Pollard, a former chief librarian of Ruislip. The glass depicts a pollarded willow (a pun on her name) and the duck pond with mallard (she was interested in Natural History).

On leaving the Library walk down to the left and note the dogs' gravestones against the wall by the road. They came from St Catherine's Farm in Howletts Lane.

Cross into the West Courtyard,

### **THE WEST COURTYARD**

19th century cart sheds on the far side and the additional outshots on the Great Barn, were converted into craft workshops in 2006-07. The high wagon doors allowed carts laden with produce from the fields that lay south of Eastcote Road, to enter the Great Barn.

### **THE RICKYARD**

The Bowling Green used to be the rickyard, filled with haystacks, for which Richard (Dick) Ewer won prizes. After the enclosure of the common fields 1804-14, hay became the most profitable crop in Middlesex because of the proximity of London and its hungry horses. The hayricks were thatched to protect them from bad weather. Harry Ives was one of the thatchers employed at Manor Farm in the 20th century.

## **HORSE POOL/DUCK POND**

The farm pond is mentioned as a horse pool in the 16th century, but was probably here earlier. It became popularly known as the Duck Pond after the Second World War, when the farm animals that would have slaked their thirst here had gone. Efforts are now being made to maintain it as a simple pond in a fairly open setting with a view to the end of the High Street and to St Martin's church.

## **MANOR FARM LODGE (Public Conveniences)**

The Lodge on the corner was built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Farm bailiffs and their families lived here.

## **THE OLD POST OFFICE AND VILLAGE SWEET SHOP (Duck House Restaurant)**

The building facing down the High Street dates from the 16th century and was given a brick skin, possibly in the 18th century. About the same time it was divided into two cottages. It came into the hands of King's College and was included in the gift of Manor Farm in 1932.

## **WAR MEMORIAL**

The War memorial was erected overlooking the graveyard extension and dedicated in April in 1920. It was moved here in 1976 as a more convenient space for Remembrance ceremonies. Manor Farm Cottages, a pair of late 19th century workers' cottages, to the east, had been demolished the same year. The pump and horse trough that had been in the centre of the High Street, Bury Street and Eastcote Road junction were moved here shortly afterwards, because they constituted a traffic hazard. The pump was taken to the front of Numbers 9-15 High Street, where it remains, in 1982.

## **DOVEHOUSE CLOSE**

The car park occupies part of a field called Dove House Close that belonged to Manor Farm. A map of 1750 shows the Dovehouse to have been about where the tall security camera pole and car-park payment points are today.