

A SELF GUIDED WALK AROUND MANOR FARM HOUSE RUISLIP

SCHEDULED OPENING TIMES - 2014

February: Market Sundays only. 11.00am - 4.00pm

March-October : Wed-Fri. Noon - 3.00pm,

Sat, Sun & Bank Holidays. Noon - 4.00pm.

It is advisable to check the house is open before setting out.

INTRODUCTION

The Provost and Scholars of King's College were the Lords of the Manor of Ruislip from 1451. It covered the whole of modern Ruislip, Northwood & Eastcote. They leased the manor to principle tenants, some of whom, like Thomas Betz and John Edlin in the 15th century and the Hawtreys and their descendants from the 17th century onwards, were local people of property and standing. Others had connections with the College and were men of high status like the Cecils, Earls of Salisbury. Being non-resident, the principle tenants sub-let to farmers who farmed the demesne or Home Farm.

This house was built between June 1505 and the end of 1506, when Sir Robert Drury of Hawstead was the principle tenant. It was built on the site of the Abbey of Bec's priory. Some priory buildings were retained for a time and perhaps used as service rooms.

The new house was built in a modern rather than a medieval style. The differences are that the hall in the centre of the house has a ceiling with a range of rooms above instead of being open to the roof and that there is a chimney stack between the hall and the cross-wing providing fireplaces in the upstairs and downstairs rooms on both sides. Medieval halls usually had a hearth in the middle of the room and a louvre in the roof to let out the smoke. The modern improvements must have made a material difference to the comfort of the people living here.

The house was the venue for the manor courts that were held twice a year. It also provided high status lodgings for the provost of King's College, the steward and other officials when they came from Cambridge on business, but generally they would only be resident for relatively short periods. The principle tenant may have occasionally lodged here, too. The permanent residents were the sub-tenant (farmer) and his family who officially occupied the Service or Low End of the house, but probably used other parts of it as well when no officials were present.

Any house of this age will have been altered from time to time if only to keep up with changing fashions and to adapt rooms to make them suitable for different uses. Most of the rooms were given ceilings in the early 17th century, concealing the chamfered beams and joists that had been intended to be seen and admired a hundred years earlier. Most of the windows, including two oriels on the front, originally a symbol of the house's high status, were replaced by sash windows between 1720-40 and the timbers and handsome brickwork of the upper storey were rendered about the same time hiding them from view. The lower storey was

pebbledashed. There is a photograph in the Low Parlour that shows the house in this state.

ENTRANCE HALL

The front door that we have just come through opens into an entrance hall that was created in the first half of the 17th century. This was done by joining the cross-passage that was at the southern end of the hall and part of the Low Parlour. The original front door was probably in the same position as the present one and would have opened into or close to the cross-passage between the high end and low end of the house.

The wall of the new entrance hall was plastered and painted with patterns similar to those found in other parts of the house, but by 1700 an elaborately patterned wallpaper had been pasted directly onto the plaster and nailed at the edges of each piece. You can see the paper revealed on the south wall. Do you like the pattern? The paper apparently came from Abraham Price's Blew Paper Warehouse in Aldermanbury. Fashions changed again and sometime between 1720 and 1740 the entrance hall was panelled as you see it today, with tall fielded panels above the chair rail and square fielded panels below. The sash window, put in at the same period, has a seat with a moulded edge. The shutters also have fielded panels and decorative hinges. They can be made safe at night with the security bar. Go through the door by the window into the Low parlour

LOW PARLOUR

Here we are in the Service end of the house. The beam above your head is roughly hewn in comparison with the ones in the hall and the parlour, which we shall come to presently. Was this originally where the cooking was done? A kitchen and buttery were floored at the end of 1506, but they might have been situated in part of the Priory buildings that had been retained.

Only 40 years after the house was built part of it collapsed into the moat and repairs included an oven and a new chimney, suggesting that the kitchen, wherever it was, had suffered damage. When you look at the fireplace wall from the outside it is obvious that it has been rebuilt. There is also evidence that a single bay of two storeys was built onto the east side of the house, in the second half of the 16th century, where the 20th century extension now stands. That became the kitchen, leaving this room to become a parlour for the resident farmer and his family.

The fireplace that you see, with its light grey marble surround and mantelshelf was installed in the early 19th century and the semi-circular cast iron grate was inserted some years later. The windows were given new shutters and a bench seat underneath at about the same time. From 1872 the Provost & Scholars leased directly to farmers, cutting out the principle tenant and improvements to the house after that relate to the comfort of the farmers. It was around this time that the house became known as 'Manor Farm' rather than 'Ruislip Court'.

After viewing the exhibition in the room, which includes a fragment of an early 15th century casket of continental design, with angels' wings, found under the

floorboards, in 2006, return to the entrance hall. As you cross to the hall door opposite, notice that the passage to the right leads to the foot of the back stairs.

THE HALL

This is the main room of the house and served as the court room when the manor courts were in session. The furnishings required were quite simple consisting of trestles and table boards, forms and stools and probably a chair for whoever was presiding. These could easily be adapted for dining and other domestic uses at other times.

The courts were held twice yearly, presided over by the Steward on behalf of the Provost & Scholars of King's College. There were two types of court, Court Leet and Court Baron, held one after the other at the same session.

The Court Leet was a public jurisdiction, dealing with minor offences, such as breaking the Assize of Ale and Assize of Bread. The Constables and Aletasters were appointed there. In 1611 Thomas May, Aletaster presented that John Reading, Thomas Kyrton and John Murdock had filled beer in pots not sealed according to the statute and were fined accordingly. Common assaults, often referred to as 'making a bloodshed' were dealt with here, too, and usually punished with a fine. Edmund Winchester, in 1611 was fined 6s 8d for making a bloodshed upon Richard Hoddesden and another 6s 8d for an assault upon John Kyrton, son of Thomas Kyrton. Serious woundings and murders were a matter for the Crown's courts and went to the Middlesex Assizes at Clerkenwell.

The Court Baron was a private jurisdiction belonging to the Lord of the Manor. The main business was to do with Surrenders of, and Admissions to, property. Tenants formally surrendered their property to the Lord, or if they were making provision for dependents to the 'uses of their will'. New owners, either through inheritance, exchange or purchase, were admitted and granted seisin – that is possession. They paid a fine upon admission and were handed a copy of the entry in the court roll, making them copyholders. The court also administered the rights of lord and tenants in relation to the common fields and wastes. Officials such as the Reeve and Hayward – he looked after the fences- were elected at the Court Baron.

The Court Rolls recording the proceedings are in King's College Archives and there are some Court Books in the British Library that note just the surrenders of and licences to lease properties.

Now let us turn to the hall as it is today. The ceiling was installed in the early 17th century and conceals chamfered joists supporting the floor above, but part of the moulded spine beam into which the joists are tenoned, can still be seen. At floor level you can see a deep skirting board with a top moulding. The wall on the right is the original external wall. A lean-to corridor was built against it early in the 19th century to link the Provost's parlour in the cross wing with the kitchen extension, presumably to speed the delivery of food. The French windows probably replaced an earlier window about the same time.

The fireplace has a 20th century wooden lintel and mantelshelf. There are traces of

a geometric pattern in red and cream on the inner plasterwork of the brick jambs, which are original. This is a little difficult to see. The studded partitions on either side of the chimney stack are Victorian.

Go through the door on the left of the fireplace. This space was originally the site of the main staircase. The stairs were moved to the other side of the stack about 1600, and the space that you are now walking through became a closet. Go straight ahead into the Provost's Parlour, which used to be entered from the other side of the hall fireplace.

PROVOST'S LODGINGS - PARLOUR AND CHAMBER

Here we stand in the Provost's comfortable heated parlour. Look up to see how the hall roof would have looked before the ceiling was added. Here you can see the heavily moulded spine beam and hollow chamfered joists. The joists have run out stops at the spine beam and five joists at the eastern end are stopped at the north wall as well. This is all work of the highest quality, suitable for the accommodation of College officers and other important visitors. The parlour may have been used as a place to adjourn for private discussions on court days.

There are two ante-rooms at the western end, one of which may have been used to keep muniments associated with the manor courts and the running of the estate.

There is a modernised entrance from outside through the gable end of the cross wing into the smaller room, which would have made it easier for officials to come and go when the court was busy and access through the main door difficult.

The chamber above the parlour enjoyed the comfort of a garderobe in the north east corner, traces of which can be seen on the outside wall. Unfortunately the chamber and principle staircase are not normally open to the public. The timbers in the roof are as fine as those down here and the plaster was decorated with a painted pattern in the early 17th century. At the western end there is a walk-in closet and next to it a room that was part of the Provost's suite and could accommodate his servants or companions. An external wooden stair is thought to have given access to this room when the house was first built. You can see the door from the outside wall. Both stair and garderobe were swept away during the 18th century modernisation of the building.

Although the last manor court was held in 1925, the lodgings had already been taken over by the resident farmers and altered to suit family needs. The parlour fireplace was enlarged in the late 19th century to make it suitable for cooking, as the once splendid room became a kitchen. The walls were lined with plank panelling and the windows were enlarged. The muniments room next door was altered as well, but the hatches in the division wall were not put in until the 1930s when the house was in the care of the Ruislip-Northwood Urban District Council.

Before you leave Manor Farm House, watch the short audio-visual that traces the development of the site. We hope that you have enjoyed your visit.

