A History of

The Manor, Stoke d'Abernon

Chris Hodgson

PARKSIDE
SCHOOL

***Top**: Now used as the dining room for many hungry boys, this room is largely unaltered with its decorative ceiling and marble pillars.*

***Middle:** The Salon, shown here in the mid 1950's, still houses this magnificent Rococo fireplace. The room is now used for school assemblies and private functions.*

***Bottom:** This rich, oak panelled room is now the Secretary to the Headmaster's office, where the intricately carved fireplace and ceiling remain.*

Foreword

Over the years, teachers and staff at Parkside School have been asked many times about the history of the Manor and grounds. Everyone has acquired a little knowledge but there has never been a definitive history of the Manor that they could refer to. That is, until now.

Chris Hodgson, who has worked at the school since 1998, has worked long hours meticulously researching historical documents, selecting pictures and compiling the story in a very readable fashion. The story is packed full of interest and covers some 2,000 years from Roman times to the present day. Chris is a man of many talents and everyone at Parkside School is very grateful to him for supplying us with "The History of the Manor".

From now on, whenever anyone is asked about the Manor they can say that they have just the thing to give them. I have the feeling that we will be giving this booklet out for a very long time to come!

Graham West
Chairman of Governors

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Acknowledgements

I have always had an interest in history, particularly the physical evidence of it. Summer days as a boy, digging fruitless holes in the garden looking for archaeology or crouching in the coal bunker, armed with a hammer searching for fossils were typical, if not popular, activities. The arrival of the metal detector in the early seventies really fired my imagination and with experience and advances in technology, wonderful and often ancient coins and artefacts came to light, giving me endless satisfaction in identification, dating and conservation. Although luck plays a significant part in the pursuit of this amateur archaeology, research into the ancient use of land is really a prerequisite. Inevitably, the Manor became the subject of my research too and evidence of its history gradually accumulated over the years in written, photographic and as we shall see, physical form.

Eventually this disparate pile of paper and my penchant for wandering round in muddy fields became known to those in high places at Parkside, with the result that the Chairman of Governors, Graham West, with touching faith, chose it as a project. I must also mention that Eve-Lucille McCann, the School Bursar, sanctioned my disappearance from the day to day work over an embarrassingly long period to make this potted history a reality. Thanks are also due to David Aylward, our Headmaster, for the loan of even more documents and photographs, Pauline Connell (Assistant Bursar) for translating my scrawl into print, Rev. David Vincent (retired) for past borrowings and his gift of the 1976 'parch-mark' photograph and Peter Wells, the verger, for his critical eye, patience and encyclopaedic knowledge of the church. Finally, I appreciate the forbearance of my colleagues on the Estates Team who continued to beaver away in all weathers while I sat in the warmth at my desk pretending to know what I was doing. My sources of information are numerous and scholarly, some of them unidentifiable. Where known, I have appended them for anyone inclined to delve even deeper.

Within the twin constraints of time and brevity, I hope to have painted a coherent picture of the history of this amazing place and its people, together with an outline of events, often beyond our shores that have had direct and very local consequences. Any errors or omissions must be laid at my door. I do hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed putting it together.

Chris Hodgson

Estates Team
March 2008

Beginnings

On reaching its centenary year in 1979, Parkside School acquired the superb Manor and grounds at Stoke d'Abernon. We are of course only the latest incumbents of this ancient site, it's development reflecting the staggering changes of fortune that have occurred on a national and European scale. It is truly a microcosm of England's history. The Manor has seen the rise and fall of empires and individuals, king and queen have gazed at the view over the river as we do today and knights have ridden out from here to do battle for them. People have lived, loved and died here for 2000 years. It is a rich and unique inheritance.

It is no accident that the manor house sits on an idyllic terrace on the north bank of the River Mole, only 18 miles from Westminster. A dwelling has certainly stood here since the 7th century and could have been preceded by a Roman one. Our so called 'primitive' ancestors were very astute in choosing a site for settlement and this is no exception. The terrace is safely above the river's flood plain where rushes aplenty for thatching would have grown, together with the surrounding mixed woodland for building, fuel and game. The rich alluvial soil provided lush grazing and the basis for the growing of cereals. Several natural springs for drinking water complete the picture.

Although our story really begins with the first signs of settlement, it should not be forgotten that people have left their mark hereabouts for the last 10,000 years. The nomadic Mesolithic people would have hunted and fished in our area. Flint axes have been found locally, for example at the Leg o' Mutton field in Cobham. The succeeding Bronze Age people, those prodigious clearers of forest and determined farmers, have left traces too; a pottery cremation urn has been found at Leigh Hill.

An example of Tudor architecture; our Manor House would have once looked similar, though only parts of it remain today.

The Men Of Iron

Soon after 1000BC, the warrior/farmer race of Celts migrated west from central Europe, bringing with them the 'new' and highly advantageous technology of iron smelting. They lived in villages and fortified enclosures, surrounded by hand hewn earthworks, some of which are colossal in scale; Maiden Castle in Dorset is a prime example. Their tribal system was ruled by a warrior aristocracy and priesthood, the Druids, whose deities represented the forces of nature.

They were superb artists in metal with a distinctive, almost impressionist style which may be seen on their gold, silver and bronze coins, the first to be minted in Britain. Their coinage invariably depicted a horse, their symbol of power and mobility in trade and warfare, tribe against tribe. Locally, one of their hill forts has been identified at St George's Hill, which would certainly have heavily influenced the scattered farming communities around here, including Cobham which is thought to date from this period.

Atrebatic gold stater

Collectively the people called themselves Britons, but thanks to the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus, we know that the tribe governing our area were the Atrebates. They had traded with Roman Gaul (France) for many years and were ready to recognise the benefits of Roman rule if it came to an invasion, whereas other tribes were fiercely anti Roman. Hit and run chariot warfare was the Britons' speciality with fearsome warriors, body painted and sporting long moustaches. But they were no match for the highly disciplined, tactically brilliant Roman armies, when in AD43 the Emperor Claudius sent his legions under General Plautius.

Hit and run chariots

Pax Romana

So we come to the period which must have shocked the living daylights out of the Britons. Pitiless military subjugation, the imposition of laws, taxes and alien language and customs and, when opposed, enslavement became the order of the day. However, the Romans also brought economic stability, towns, roads, the written word, magnificent stone buildings, baths and plumbing, a national identity and currency, amphitheatres and a massive influx of luxury goods. In short, civilization. Gradually the Britons integrated and earned or bought their freedom as dutiful citizens. Roman rule lasted for 360 years. To put that into our time frame, equating their departure to today; their arrival was back in 1640 during the reign of Charles I. Their legacy cannot be overstated.

At last, we have physical evidence of the Romano-British period here at the Manor. The church of St Mary the Virgin and the Manor House are of course inseparable and the church holds great secrets. Although essentially 7th century in its original incarnation, there are several tons of Roman masonry incorporated into its structure, particularly visible along the external south wall. There, tiles, over 100 bricks (both singly and in herring-bone clumps set in Roman mortar) and pale dressed stone set around the 'thanes' doorway may be readily seen. The material has all the hallmarks of having been part of a high status building, perhaps a villa, bathhouse or temple.

The Saxon builders who robbed this very useful stonework would have sourced it from a very limited radius. An early 20th century rector was seemingly responsible for the assertion that the material came from a 'villa' under the Manor and that the hypocausts (furnace-fed tunnels to warm the water and rooms) of its bathhouse were under the south lawn.

That there is a grid-like structure under the lawn (right) is indisputable, but the County Archaeologist, Dr Bird and others were sceptical of its date, preferring to assume it to be medieval. A search was made of the various flower borders for datable potsherds without success. The lawn has never been excavated so its tantalising secret remains. Other candidates for the source of the Roman structure include Pachesham Farm (signs of occupation but no villa) or the Roman bathhouse discovered in 1942 at Chately Farm, close to the River Mole, some 4-5 kilometres by crude barge. A Romano-British temple on the site of the church cannot be entirely discounted either.

We have no idea what is under the Manor House and there is no cellar. However, further evidence has come to light in the form of three Roman coins that I have found (above); two sestertii (large brass coins)

of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and of his wife Faustina Junior, late AD161 to AD180 respectively, and a small broken silver siliqua attributable to the latter half of the 4th century, a time span of approximately 200 years.

The Dark (Or At Least Murky) Ages

By the time that little silver coin was minted, the Western Roman Empire was in trouble and its end was not to be far away. Change was coming to our little corner of the world too. Military threats along the Rhine/Danube border in particular, became increasingly difficult to repulse, not helped by the Roman policy of recruiting Germanic mercenaries to try to stem the tide of population surges to the west. They had of course observed Roman military tactics and weaknesses at first hand. That information and lack of effective leadership in the Western Empire saw the gradual collapse of the frontier. In 401, Aleric the Germanic leader invaded Italy. Panic-stricken, the Emperor Honorius ordered the remaining Roman legions home, thus leaving us almost defenceless against Saxon raids. These were initially carried out by pirates who had been harrying south eastern ports for some years, despite a series of shore forts that the Romans had built from 368. Our Romanized governors appealed to Honorius for help but were told to look to their own defences (while he apparently attended to his pet chickens!). The last Emperor died in AD476. Rome's rule of Europe was at an end.

As early as 408-9 the money supply had all but ceased and a general economic collapse ensued. Despite spirited resistance and some major military successes, by 550 the pagan, land-grabbing Saxons controlled the South-East of Britain, driving the (by then) indigenous Celts further to the west, notably Cornwall, Wales and Ireland. Many emigrated across the channel to the ancient Celtic lands of Amorica: so many in fact, that it became known as Brittany.

We refer to them all as Saxons but in fact they were a mixed influx of Saxons, Jutes and Angles from the cold lands of the eastern Baltic, the Rhine delta and Jutland. Nor was it an army of intent. Instead, a piecemeal conquest launched by individual kings was undertaken over a long period, culminating in kingdoms like that of the southern Saxons (Sussex), the west Saxons (Wessex) and the North Folk (Norfolk). Our Saxons never actually achieved a kingdom but they named their territory – Surrey or Suthrige as it once was. Though the Angles were not the dominant group, their presence is recorded by a name that encompassed most of our mainland – Angleland, or England as it came to be known. Although many place names with a Celtic origin still exist on the western fringes, the vast majority of our towns and villages are of the 'Saxon' type often prefixed by a name lost in the mists of time and a suffix like ham (homestead), tun (farm), worth (enclosure), wic (dwelling) and ing (ingas – dwelling of a usually named person); hence Cobham,

originally Coveham. These people were to give us the basis of our culture, language and the division of the country into shires and hundreds, not to mention our Germanic temperament and flaxen hair (writing as one who had some once!)

Perhaps before, but certainly soon after Augustine brought Christianity to these shores in 597, a Saxon of some note had built a house on or very close to the site of our present Manor. It would have been of their preferred timber and wattle and daub, its timbers set deeply in the ground, an earthen floor and central smoke hole in the roof. No doubt over time it would have been modified and enlarged by a succession of occupiers.

By the late 7th century, the owner was sufficiently wealthy and pious to go to the vast expense of building a church in dressed stone and flint, one of the first in the land, in the grounds of his house – and there it sits today, disguised by medieval and Victorian additions, a place of worship for at least 1400 years.

The very words STOKE or STOCHE refer to a stockaded manor and dairy farm of the period (the d'Abernon was a later appendage). Perhaps the stockade was built to defend the Manor from the depredations of those fearsome opportunists, the Vikings, who began to raid the area in the early 800s via their favoured route, the Thames (we are only 7 miles from where it joins the Mole). In 871, they sacked Chertsey Abbey, killing the Abbot, Beocca, Edor the mass priest and ninety monks, burning buildings and laying waste the land. Between 870 and 886, good King Alfred finally freed southern England from their menace.

A typical Saxon Hall

Within 200 years, we come to the man who inherited Stoke and all its lands, but with tragic results, and we have at last our first name! Bricsi Cild was the free servant and companion to our penultimate Saxon King of all England. Edward the Confessor had a hunting lodge at Sutton Place and almost certainly visited here. Bricsi's title of thegn (or lord) came with the wealth of his inheritance but also with the responsibility of an Office in the King's Hall and as a warrior when required. The blocked up high stone doorway on the south wall of the church would have admitted this important man via exterior wooden stairs to sit above the hoi polloi and hear mass, one of the earliest English examples of a church with a thegn's gallery.

Young Bricsi's enjoyment of the Manor was short lived however, for on 5th January 1066, King Edward died, leaving his cousin, William, Duke of Normandy, his sworn successor. Unfortunately, the Normans, though culturally very similar, were hugely unpopular here and the pressure from the immensely powerful Earls

What the Manor may have looked like before the D'Abernon's arrived.

of Wessex over the preceding years caused the Witan (meeting of the elders) to proclaim Harold as King. The aggressive and ambitious William then drew up plans for invasion. Harold knew what to expect but his fleet and army were urgently needed in the north when Harold Hadrada, King of Norway, landed with 300 or more ships, aided and abetted by our Harold's brother, Tostig. Harold did not have the means to fight on two fronts so he force-marched his army to meet the immediate threat from Norway.

William the Conqueror

They fought at Stamford Bridge near York. On Monday 25th September battle commenced. At its conclusion Tostig and Hardrada were dead. The remnants were allowed to sail for Norway in only 24 ships having sworn an oath never to return to English soil. Only two days later, William embarked his men, horses and equipment for his invasion, unsure of which Harold he might face.

Imagine King Harold's horror at the news that William had landed an army 7000 strong 240 miles to the south! Within a fortnight he covered the distance, collecting more troops along the way and wearily faced the enemy at Hastings on Friday 14th October. In numbers, the armies were fairly evenly matched, but William's were more professional, disciplined and battle-hardened after years of campaigning in France. The battle lasted all day until the English line broke at dusk following, as the story has it, the death of Harold from a stray arrow into his eye.

Bricsi was almost certainly present at Hastings and we know he survived because a document attests that he was later summarily ejected from his manor and his lands were confiscated. His misery was complete when he was outlawed. We will never know his ultimate fate.

William was crowned King of England in the newly completed Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066. Ironic really, the word 'Norman' being a corruption of 'Northman', for they were descendants of the 9th century Vikings who plundered and settled in north west France. So Scandinavia won England after all!

A section of the Bayeux Tapestry depicting the death of King Harold.

The French Connection; The d'Abernons Arrive

During 1085 and 1086 William commissioned a complete survey of the whole of England, its peoples, land, stock, forests and fiscal value. Astonishing in its scope and precision, it would not be surpassed for 800 years. It quickly became known as The Domesday. At a stroke, William settled years of muddled dispute over land ownership and furnished himself with the perfect base for taxation and military dues. Needless to say, the knights who fought beside him at Hastings were amply rewarded with huge swathes of land, property and the virtual ownership of the common people. The French feudal system had arrived.

At the time of Domesday, one of the most powerful Norman barons was Richard de Tonbridge, son of Gilbert de Brionne. He was made Lord of Clare and was granted vast estates in the south and east of England and was the largest land holder in Surrey. It was he who held the Manor of Stoke following Bricsi Cild's expulsion.

The Domesday account of Stoke (as translated from the French) reads as follows:
Under Edward the First it was assessed for 15 hides[1]; now under William for 2 hides and 5 acres. The land is for 6 ploughs[2].
In demesne there are 2 ploughs and there are 10 villeins[3] and two cottars[4] with 2 ploughs. There is a church and 7 serfs[5] and a mill worth 7 shillings and 4 acres of meadow. Wood worth 40 hogs[6].
In the time of King Edward and now, it was and is worth 4 pounds.
When he received it, 3 pounds. (25% discount then!)

In the same manor (ie manor as in land holding, rather than THE MANOR) the same Richard has 5 hides which Otho held for King Edward. Now it is assessed for half a hide. There are 2 villeins with 6 oxen and a mill worth 6 shillings. The land is for 2 ploughs. It was and is worth 20 shillings.

I presume that Otho was also a thegn who tenanted a holding for King Edward at another Surrey location and who suffered the same fate as Bricsi after Hastings. This second manor was, as we shall see, also to become part of the D'Abernon holdings.

1. *A hide was an amount of land, not necessarily measured, that was used for tax purposes and value depended on its quality.*
2. *A plough was just that, together with 8 oxen to draw it.*
3. *A villein was a peasant with land.*
4. *A cottar, a lower class peasant, perhaps with a cottage but very little land.*
5. *A serf (or slave) owed personal service to his or her owner and was therefore un-free and unable to move home or work or change allegiance or to buy or sell, without permission.*
6. *The value in hogs (pigs) was a rough measure of an area of woodland (ie how many hogs could be supported on it).*

Shillings and pounds did not exist as coins – only the silver penny circulated. They were for accounting purposes, but with the same values as they were to have when they did appear. Mill values reflect the rental potential.

One of Richard de Tonbridge's equerries at arms was Roger who was the feudal tenant of a small village in Normandy called Abernon. Following the Norman Conquest we know that Roger held Moulsey Priors in East Molesey, then known as Molesham.

Soon after 1086 we see that our Manor was granted by Richard to Roger 'Dawbernon the Normand' and the name Stoke d'Abernon was born. He was also granted as mesne tenant (representative Lord), Moulsey, Aldbury and Fetcham, any of which may have been the former seat of the thegn Otho. (The suffix d'Abernon has appeared over time with a number of spellings including; d'Aubernoun, d'Abernoun, Daberon, Dauberon, Aberrene, Abern and, as late as 1843, d'Alborne).

From Roger, the estates were passed down through a a succession of d'Abernons; Ingelram d'Aberrene in 1112, Ingelranus de Abern in 1131 and Roger ll, probably son and heir of the last, succeeding his father in the reign of Henry ll (1154-1189). At this point, the d'Aberon waters become muddied. We know that, in 1189, Sir Enguerrand was in place because we have the distinction of the earliest recorded honeymoon in English history taking place at the Manor. It was lent that year to a young knight William Marshal who had just married Isobel de Clare, heiress to the Earls of Pembroke. Isobel, being a Crown ward, had her trousseau paid for from the public purse, the bill amounting to the princely sum of £9.12s.1d, roughly £25,000 today. Later, William, at 80 years old, became Regent of England between the death of Henry ll and the coming of age of his son Henry lll.

At this point, five hundred years after the Saxon church was built, a north aisle was added circa 1190. Two transitional arches and a pillar survive from this period.

We then have a plethora of d'Abernons, all recorded within a very few years. Walter, Ingleram, William and Richard appear to have been here at the same time. It is thought that most, if not all, were brothers. (Walter bore arms against King John and may therefore have been one of the stroppy 'barons' who were instrumental in his later signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, close by, at Runnymede). It is interesting to note that the family also held land in Devon shire, Cambridgeshire, Hampshire and Bedfordshire in the 12th century.

Roger III, heir to Ingelram II, appears in 1210 followed by his eldest son Ingleram III who died in 1235 and was succeeded by Jordan de Abernun. Gilbert, his uncle, exchanged land with him and took over the Surrey estate almost immediately.

A detailed line drawing of the brass of Sir John d'Abernon II, Sheriff of Surrey

The beautiful little chancel in the church was built at around this time during the reign of Henry lll. Victorian craftsmen uncovered part of a 13th century mural of The Adoration of the Lamb which originally covered the east wall – a portion of it may still be seen. Gilbert's son John I succeeded in 1253. He became Sheriff of Sussex and Surrey and served with Edward I in the war with France.

In 1265 Sir John was involved in a potentially violent dispute with a William Hod of Normandy over the theft in transport of 10 hogsheads (barrels) of valuable blue woad (dye from a plant of the Brassica family). Sir John lost in the court proceedings and had to pay compensation of 'six score marks'. A mark was the weight of a silver coin to the value of 13 shillings and 4 pence or £2/3, he was therefore liable to the tune of £79 or 19,000 silver pennies. A master mason at the time earned 4 pennies a day!
Henceforth his shield carried a blue enamel background. It is his son, also Sir John, who lies under the chancel floor of St Mary's Church, covered with his brass effigy in full battle regalia; the greatest treasure in our little church. It is one of the oldest brasses in England and the only one in the world to feature a lance. It is 6′ 6″ (1.98m) long. If life size, Sir John II was a very imposing man indeed.

He wears a coat over his chain mail and his noble face peers out from his close-fitting chain mail helmet. He carries a four foot sword and his prick-spurred feet rest on a lion, which playfully holds the shaft of his lance between its teeth and paws.

King Edward I, energetic, capable, lawgiver and great soldier, stayed here at the Manor as a guest of Sir John on the 28th/29th May 1305. Subsequently, Sir John fought for his son, Edward II at the Battle of Boroughbridge in 1322, when forces loyal to the King defeated those of the rebels under the Earl of Lancaster. Sir John's shield and pennon still show traces of the blue enamel today, a bitter reminder of the woad incident.

Sir John II died in 1326 or 1327 and Sir John III succeeded him. At the same time, Edward III became King. He continued the wars against Scotland and France with conspicuous success, but at enormous financial cost. Sir John III is entombed next to his father and is also covered by an impressive brass. The fashion for chain mail having given way to some extent to jointed plate armour by then, he wears a bascinet helmet, his hands together in an attitude of prayer.

In the fourteenth century approximately 12% of the population lived in cities or towns. London by far the largest city, housed perhaps 65,000, Norwich 13,000 and York 10,000.

Top: The brass of Sir John II. The oldest in England, 1277. Bottom: Sir John III, his son.

The vast majority worked the land, living in villages, ours being typical at the smaller end of the scale.In 1348, into these already unremittingly hard times, came a horror without precedent, a true vision of hell on earth. The Great Plague, or Black Death, arrived via an infected seaman who's ship landed at Weymouth in Dorset in June/July that year. By Christmas it was in Hampshire and, in the spring of 1349, ravaged Surrey. Between 35% and 50% of the population died, usually within 3 days of contraction. Priests fell like ninepins, having to give the last rites. Cattle and fields were left unattended, doctors were useless and at times it was difficult to find the manpower to bury the dead. To the medieval mind, it could only be the wrath of God, and it would return again in 1665 when it killed 65,000 in London alone.

Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Of course, some of the wealthy great and good survived by isolating themselves (King Edward being a case in point) but the majority had to rely on their body's natural defences and just hoped to get through it. We, today, are the descendents of those survivors and we carry their resistance in our genes.

The Turn Of The Girls

Our Sir John III died at this time, perhaps as a plague victim. His son and heir, William, inherited a very different estate. The old feudal system had received a mortal blow with the loss of so much of its workforce. For a while men and women were paid inflated wages, in coin, to make the land viable again. Although the feudal ways returned, they were changed forever.

William was the last male direct descendent of Roger d'Abernon and he died in 1359 without a son. He had two daughters. The younger, Margaret, died in infancy, but the other, Elizabeth, married William Croyser or Crosyer. His claim to fame, as far as the estate goes, is that in 1395 he furnished massive oak beams for the King's Great Hall in the Palace of Westminster from trees here. It is thought that the fine oak in Manor Farm Barn (opposite Holly Lodge), which used to be part of the estate, also came from the same source. We also know that a substantial pigeon house stood in what is now Seymours Garden Centre. It was a much envied and officially sanctioned source of protein for the rich. His son, also William, later inherited but died in 1416, his widow, Edith, in 1419.

Their son John died without issue, but in 1464 the Manor of Stoke d'Abernon eventually passed to the Norbury family when John's sister, Anne, married Sir Henry Norbury.

The Norburys were kinsmen of direct descendents of King Harold of Hastings infamy. What goes around comes around! Incidentally, one of the church bells dates from about 1450, cast by the famous female bell founder from Croydon, Joanna Sturdy. It still sounds today.

We have skipped lightly across the five hundred year medieval period with the comings and goings of the residents of the Manor. However, it is worth remembering that England was often riven by armed uprisings, if not full scale civil war. Poverty and disease were endemic, taxes were swingeing and wars begun by Henry ll in France were to continue unabated for generations. We were at times politically, economically and morally bankrupt. Our romantic view of noble knights, just causes and the winning of maidens' hands does not even come close to reality. Life was short for most, sometimes almost anarchic and starvation often a close companion. Perhaps the wolves and wild boar that roamed freely then, took advantage of the opportunities presented during human mayhem.

Tudor Sons And Largesse

The third Norbury - the Sir John who founded the superb chantry in our church – died unmarried in 1504. Perhaps he built it in gratitude for his survival at the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, when Henry Tudor defeated Richard III, so ending the civil War of the Roses. After that, the church was to remain essentially unmodified until the 19th century (The exterior flints would have been plastered over and limed during the medieval period). The Manor then passed to Sir John's sister's daughter Anne who had married Sir Richard Haleighwell. One child, Jane, was born. She entered into an arranged marriage with Edmond Bray (later Lord Braye) in the hope of a male heir, but it was not to be. Frances Bray, daughter of Edmond and Jane carried the estate to Thomas Lyfield in marriage and their daughter, another Jane, brought it to Thomas Vincent on their union in the late 16th century. There are two memorials to Jane Lyfield in the church; a little girl at prayer with her parents and a life size reclining effigy below that of her husband.

Queen Elizabeth I on a Royal visit ('progress') in 1590

Now at last, continuity of family was to last for nearly 200 years. Thomas set about major work on the old 14th century L-shaped Manor with its massive oak timbers and possibly still extant Saxon Hall (precisely where our current hall is). He added a west wing, making the house a three sided square, the open end facing the river. Thomas Clay's map of 1614 shows it as a full square but the south wall was probably relatively low to form a courtyard.

Queen Elizabeth I visited here in 1590 and again in 1601, when on the 25th September she knighted Thomas Vincent in the oak parlour, where the oak panelling and ceiling decorated with doves in flight remain much as it was on that day. The room now serves as the office of the Headmaster's PA. The staffroom and its annexe, although somewhat modernised over the years, is the west wing that dates from this period. A narrow stairwell and some timbers nearby in English Room 1 allow further glimpses of Tudor workmanship.

Sir Thomas would have had to pay dearly for his hospitality. The costs and logistics of inviting the monarch with all their bags, baggage and entourage were enormous and a frightening prospect. How nervous he must have been, but how wonderful for us to think she was here.

Sir Thomas died in 1613 and his bearded figure reclining nonchalantly on an elbow and wearing the baggy breeches of his day, may be seen in the chapel (above). Below him, lies his wife in ruff and Paris hood, her head on two cushions. Sir Thomas Vincent's son, Francis, who was one of the privileged few to have been knighted by James I at Whitehall before his coronation in 1603, gave the church its magnificent pulpit (right) on being created the first Baronet in 1620. Made in Flanders, the pulpit's seven sides are elaborately carved with strange human monsters, lion heads and flowers. His wife Dame Sarah never saw the pulpit as she sadly died before its installation. Under a round arch in the Norbury chapel, her prim figure in hood, ruff and tightly-waisted dress may be seen. Below, on the front of her tomb are the kneeling figures of her five sons and two daughters. Her husband Sir Francis appears to have died elsewhere as his tomb remained unfinished.

The Manor then passed to his son Sir Anthony and thence to his son Sir Francis II who is thought to have built the great barn in about 1630 (now the Nursery and DT/IT departments). Vincent quatrefoils remain on its west wall. Next in line was yet another Sir Francis who died in 1735 at the advanced age of 90. His son, Sir Henry, the sixth Baronet was therefore no youngster when he inherited.

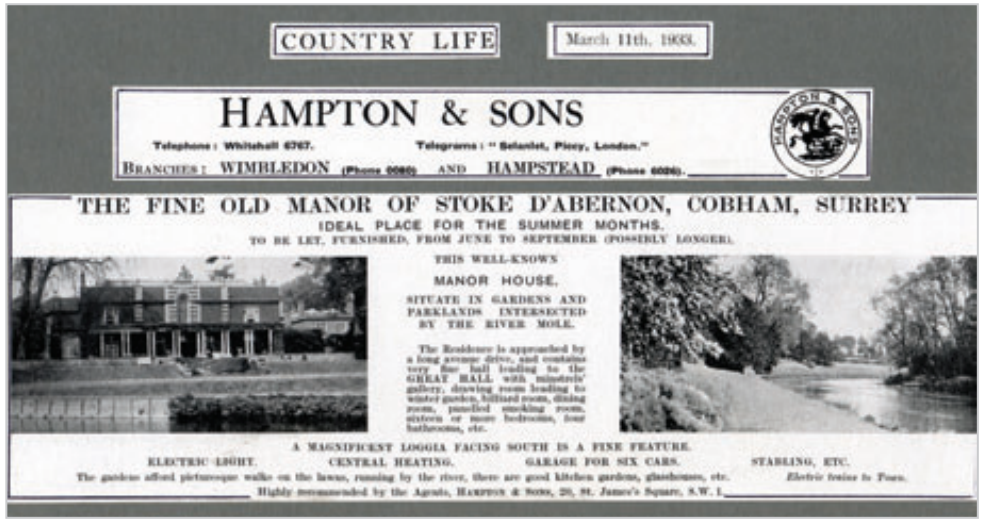
The Manor through the ages

St Marys, Stoke d'Abernon Church in the early 19th century, taken from a contemporary water colour painting (note the stone arch leading to the Manor).

The church today.

Above and below: The Manor pre 1850. These are thought to be the earliest photographs of the Manor. At this time the Manor hosted many national events with garden parties and pageants on the lawns for local people.

Top: Dated 28 July 1909, this postcard shows the Manor was once painted white, by 1933 it returned to brick (below), but has since lost some of the white and black brick work.



COUNTRY LIFE — March 11th, 1933.

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THE FINE OLD MANOR OF STOKE D'ABERNON, COBHAM, SURREY

IDEAL PLACE FOR THE SUMMER MONTHS.

TO BE LET, FURNISHED, FROM JUNE TO SEPTEMBER (POSSIBLY LONGER).

THIS WELL-KNOWN MANOR HOUSE,

SITUATE IN GARDENS AND PARKLANDS INTERSECTED BY THE RIVER MOLE.

The Residence is approached by a long avenue drive, and contains very fine hall leading to the GREAT HALL with minstrels' gallery, drawing room leading to winter garden, billiard room, dining room, panelled smoking room, sixteen or more bedrooms, four bathrooms, etc.

A MAGNIFICENT LOGGIA FACING SOUTH IS A FINE FEATURE.

ELECTRIC LIGHT. CENTRAL HEATING. GARAGE FOR SIX CARS. STABLING, ETC.

The gardens afford picturesque walks on the lawns, running by the river, there are good kitchen gardens, glasshouses, etc. *Electric trains to Town.*

Highly recommended by the Agents, HAMPTON & SONS, 20, St. James's Square, S.W.1.

This advert appeared in Country Life when the Manor was put up for sale in 1933. The advert boasts "electric trains to Town," "electric Light" and suggests its the "ideal place to spend the summer months."

A familiar sight to all pupils and parents, the driveway was once much more private and enclosed than it is today. This picture was taken in the mid 1950's.

Taken in 1955 this aerial shot highlights the proximity of the Manor to St. Marys. In days gone by the original driveway would have led guests to the much grander entrance at the front of the Manor, facing the river Mole.

The salon provided a very grand room for entertaining, with excellent views to the River.

Now the staff room, this room was once Lady d'Abernon's boudoir. To the right hangs a portrait of Lady d'Abernon, which can now be found in the City of York Gallery.

The hall and Georgian staircase is still as grand today as it was in the mid 1950's.

In 1979 the top pitch playing field was nothing more than a hay field!

Georgian Gentrification

The Manor House received another architectural transformation when, between 1742 and 1745, its current Georgian appearance took shape. By then, Sir Henry was an elderly man, but it is thought that he undertook the massive project when his son Sir Francis, seventh Baronet married the daughter of a wealthy banker in 1741. He possibly made over the Manor to his son in advance of his own death. His demise was preceded by that of his daughter-in-law who died in 1744 and didn't live to see the work completed. It is thought that the design was overseen by Giacomo Leoni, the architect of Clandon Park. His bold vision was to encase the entire timber framed Tudor building in warm red brick without ornamental detail, installing the newly fashionable large sash windows to all aspects and to roof over the courtyard to make the vast, magnificent, two storey Palladian Salon. This incorporates a little of a once much larger minstrels' gallery on the high east wall. The richly carved rococo stone chimney piece was installed as the finishing touch. The medieval great hall became an entrance area with the addition of the ornate baroque staircase and ceilings. On completion of this great programme, Sir Francis married again, this time to Miss Mary Howard, a granddaughter of Lord Howard of Effingham. The formal gardens here were laid out in this period and still retain much of their original plan.

The hated window tax was introduced in 1696. This was payable on houses with more than six windows and increased for those with an excess of ten. The earliest photograph of the Manor (about 1840) still shows two bricked up – the favourite response at the time!

At about this time, there occurred a 'mini ice age' when temperatures plummeted in the winters, culminating in the Great Frost Fairs on the Thames, with horses and carriages, numerous shops and even bonfires on the ice. No central heating in the Manor then, but I bet they had enormous fun on the frozen Mole!

There followed seven successive Vincents, all distinguished in politics or diplomacy. The second Baronet, Sir Anthony, paid the price of loyalty to King Charles I during the Civil War. His grandson, another Sir Francis, would have witnessed the red glow in the north eastern night sky when in September 1666 London burned for four days. The eighth was the last British Ambassador to the then Republic of Venice, but before he could succeed to the Manor and its estates, it was sold in 1776 to Paul Vaillant, Sheriff of London, under the terms of a marriage agreement 30 years earlier. He held it until 1803.

The Clergy Take Possession

There is a report that in this period Josiah Wedgewood II, son of the originator of the famous pottery, lived here as a tenant for about five years with his wife Elizabeth. Their daughter Emma was to marry Charles Darwin. In 1820, the Manor was sold again to Hugh Smith, a wealthy lawyer who bought it and the advowson (the right to a benefice or living from the church) for his son the Rev. Hugh Smith. On his death in 1852, it was purchased by the Rev. Frederick Parr Phillips, the grandson of the Duc d'Orleans (who voted for the execution of Louis XVI, only to follow him soon after to the guillotine). The advowson came with it, (together with practically the whole parish of about 1000 acres, including Bookham Lodge, Slyfield House and all farms and cottages as far as the Tilt in Cobham).

The octagonal buttery and North Lodge by the Manor gates were both built in 1869, probably by local builders Shoosmith & Lee. Once a focal point of the village, Mrs F P Phillips bought the old blue tiles that line its walls, on her visits abroad.
Milking took place in The Manor barn opposite, and twice a day the herdsman would carry the milk across the quiet dirt road in buckets suspended on a yoke across his shoulders.

Butter of course was made, most of the cream went to the Manor and the villagers came with their jugs to fetch their skim-milk at a penny a pint. Women and girls were expected to curtsy and men to doff their hats if the lady of the Manor passed by in her carriage. The Manor itself hosted national events with garden parties and pageants on the lawns for local people, often accompanied by the Cobham or Claygate band. Annual harvest treats and suppers for the farm workers and their wives were well received. There is a plaque on Stoke Village Hall in remembrance of Canon F P and Mrs Phillips and their son Frederick 'who had at heart the true interests of the parish'. Labour was plentiful and relatively cheap in those days and a snapshot of the Manor from the census in 1881 is quite revealing:-

Manor House

Owner:	Frederick P Phillips	Age: 61
	Wife Jane	Age: 62
	Granddaughter Norah	Age: 3
	Grandson Noel	4 months
	Plus 12 servants (8 female)	16 to 61
Manor Dairy		
Head Cowman:	John Bond	Age: 39
	Wife Emily	
	4 Children	2 to 8 years
	Plus 1 Servant and lodgings for Coachman and Groom	
Manor Farm		
Head Farmer:	Daniell Hatch	Age: 36
	Wife Elizabeth	
	On 304 acres employing 11 men and a boy, plus 1 Servant	
Manor Farm barn		
Head (and only) Shepherd:	Thomas Sims	Age: 50
Manor Farm Cottage		
Head Agricultural Labourer:	James Exell	
	His wife sarah	
	3 Children	7 to 15 years
	Plus 3 lodgers	

Three of the underlings were sent forth into the world with the names James Pink, Esther Bodfish and John Egg (I wonder if he ever met a Miss Bacon?)

The church underwent substantial (and some have said, merciless) modernisation in 1866. Antiquarian regret was tempered by the enhancement of the interior, particularly the hammerbeam roof, and the lengthening of the west end to produce a more balanced whole. There were casualties, however, notably the rounded arched entrance to the chancel which was replaced with a neo-Norman version and the chancel east window, now much modified.

The Manor saw the building of the South Lodge in 1880 and Holly Lodge in 1903. Long before the coming of the motorway bridge which replaced an old stone one, there was a wooden bridge across the River Mole on the old Fetcham road built by Sir Francis Vincent around 1760 but only used in times of flood, a ford being the usual means of crossing. Traces are still visible on both banks and a line of oak trees mark the old ford road.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the main and far grander entrance was via a sweeping drive from near South Lodge and ending at the impressive Salon entrance above the river. A 1912 map still shows remnants of it.

Following the death of Canon Phillips in 1903, his son Frederick Noel Phillips succeeded and soon set about the last building phase in the neo-classical style that we see today. He engaged Sir Aston Webb, architect of Buckingham Palace, to design and build the Loggia on the south wall, an east wing (now the kitchen and part of the Pre-Prep area), the raising of the roof by three feet to provide accommodation for the servants and topped with stone urn finials. His design for the baroque porch was built in 1911. The highly decorated ceilings and fireplaces in the staffroom, its annexe and the dining room are thought to date from this period, as are the garden statuary and gazebo. The Revd Frederick died in 1904 followed only four years later by his son E. A .Phillips, who died in an accident.

The Final Blaze Of Glory

The Manor was then leased to Colonel Bowen-Buscarlet who married F.N. Phillips' widow. She died in 1925. In 1933 it was bought by the 16th Baronet Edgar Vincent, the first Viscount d'Abernon who therefore returned to his ancestral home, albeit with a much reduced landholding. He and his beautiful and gifted wife set about restoring it to even greater glory with the addition of Adam and Directoire furniture and installing many portraits of his forebears, accumulated over the years. They also extended and enhanced the gardens and brought two gigantic Georgian stone urns from their previous, much larger home at Esher Place. Edgar Vincent had acquired riches, honours and power; he had been soldier, traveller, banker, politician and diplomat, and cut a very imposing, almost Elizabethan figure. He died in 1941 and his ashes are in a Roman casket in the chantry of St Mary's Church. A whole book could and should be written about this great man's life.

Top: Sir Edgar Vincent
Bottom: The Roman casket can be found in the chantry of St. Mary's Church

Lady d'Abernon, the former Helen Venetia Duncombe, daughter of the Earl of Feversham, was a renowned beauty. After her death in 1954 aged 89, the Aga Khan described her as 'the most beautiful woman I ever knew, utterly unspoilt, simple, selfless, gay, brave and kind'. This extraordinary couple died childless and were therefore the very last of the d'Abernon line. Her grave lies to the west of the church.

Lady Helen Vincent

Education, Education, Education

The Estate then passed to Lady d'Abernon's niece who subsequently sold it in 1956 to the Welsh steel company, Richard, Thomas and Baldwin who used it as a training college for their young graduate engineers. The British steel industry faced a difficult time in the early 1970s with world steel demand falling, attendant job losses and rationalisation in the UK. The company was forced to modernise and closed many of its elderly plants in Ebbw Vale. They sold the Manor to the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) for use as a teacher training college. Unfortunately, the politics of the period was leaning towards the abolition of the Greater London Council (and ILEA) so the writing was on the wall (rather than the blackboard!). The Warden's house, now Head-master's was erected by them.

In 1978 the Manor was on the market again and Parkside School, having outgrown its site in East Horsley and in desperate need of long term security of tenure, not to mention room to expand, became the new owner in the summer of 1979. Initially, the school faced a daunting task to convert and modernise and transform hay fields into sports pitches, all within the twin constraints of planning and conservation, and that process, always hard won, continues today.

Bringing us completely up to date, we must include all the new buildings on site that have so enhanced the Manor as a first class preparatory school.
In 1981 the essential Sports Hall, (outdoor) pool and Science Centre were built, followed in 1985 by the music rooms and pre-prep extension. Old implement sheds were demolished to make way for a pair of staff bungalows in 1988. The Sports Hall was revamped and the pool enclosed in 1995 and the superb Crescent Block was completed in 2002.

The Manor has, of course, borne change ever since the days of Bricsi, nearly a thousand years ago, but the accommodation of change has been the reason for its survival. Today human rapacity is putting life itself at risk on a global scale. Future generations, including the boys who are here now, will face many great challenges, not least our energy needs, climatic change, population movements and the political will to see beyond mere national identity. Perhaps this enviable place will produce men of the required calibre to make a difference to our world. Men who won't forget that they were once part of the long, long history of the Manor of Stoche d'Abernoun, beside the River Mole.

Ghosts

No history of the Manor would be complete without the inevitable ghost stories that have persisted over the years. Many people have heard a baby crying and unaccountable 'shufflings' but more startling was the experience of a Parkside matron (in the days of boarding) who was thrust to the floor in her room. A previous headmaster, who shall remain nameless, was quite terrified by the sound of a piano being played in an empty Salon. A horse and groom have been seen and figures passing windows outside is a common theme. A member of staff recently followed a tall dark-coated man into a classroom, convinced that it was David Aylward, only to find that he had vanished! No doubt there have been many more, consigned to oblivion for fear of ridicule, but everyone laps them up just the same.

Postscript

As I wrote at the beginning, the Manor church is truly an integral part of the whole, and to cite every item in its astonishing inventory of treasures would not do it justice. So many of the men and women that have lived at the Manor and served the church now repose there, expressing a great sense of the continuity of the ages with its ancient Saxon/Roman south wall, 13th century stonework, English and Flemish stained glass 500 years old, Elizabethan pulpit, 17th century crucifix and a font at which babies have been baptised since Tudor times. There have been numerous detailed publications on its architecture and relics which will satisfy the most enquiring minds. Best of all, just go inside and absorb the history that quite overwhelms the senses.

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This magnificent shield is made up of a number of shields belonging to the various families which married into the d'Abernon's. The yellow chevron on a blue background (bottom right) is the original d'Abernon shield.

Serva Fidem

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PARKSIDE
SCHOOL

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