The History Of Sutton Coldfield Manor

These notes have been compiled from a variety of documents that accompany the deeds of the property now known as Manor House and which is built on land once attached to Sutton Coldfield Manor. The authorship of the documents is not known although much of the material is most likely based on information originally obtained from Sutton Coldfield Library. It might be of value to read the notes in conjunction with the archaeological notes that report on a visit to the site made on 7 April 1977, presumably by the Sutton Coldfield Local History Society.

John Dann

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During the reign of Edward the Confessor, from 1042 to 1066, the manor of Sutton (probably then known as Sutone) was held by Edwin, Earl of Mercia until his death in 1071- It was then passed to the Crown, under William the Conqueror. As a result Sutton Chase, part of the vast hunting grounds that stretched from the Midlands to Southern England, became a Royal Forest in which The Manor House served as a hunting lodge.

It is probable that a new Manor House was built in the early Norman period. Courts were held there and it would be used to entertain various Kings and Nobles. The little hill on which the building stood offered a secure position, strengthened by the area of muddy, boggy ground that was formed below the Manor House where there were two large pools. Between the pools a raised causeway, still visible, divided the meadows and led to the parkland. At the end of the lower pool was an embankment, walled up with stone and known as The Dam, which formed a route into the small town. This embankment was only partially destroyed when a new road (The Parade) was built in 1826. Following this date the Manor House appears to have been the focus of early roads.

The manor remained in the possession of the crown until 1135 when King Henry I exchanged the manor of Sutton with Roger de Beaumont (also known as Roger de Newburgh), the 2nd Earl of Warwick, for the manors of Hockham and Langham in Rutland. The manor thus passed to the Earldom of Warwick with whom it remained, with a few exceptions, for most of the next 300 years. And since this meant that Sutton Forest was no longer in the possession of the crown it became Sutton Chase. The uses of the Manor House, all connected to hunting wild deer in the Chase, were still the same as those established by the customs of King Athelstan who was one of the Kings of Mercia and is widely regarded as the first true King of England (reigned 927 - 939).

Henry I reigned from 1100 to 1135 and was succeeded by Stephen I (reigned 1135 - 1154) who in turn was succeeded by Henry II (r. 1154 - 1189), Richard I (r. 1189 - 1199) and John (r. 1199 - 1216). It is recorded that on 7 April 1208, King John visited Sutton Coldfield and issued a royal command from the Manor House. At that time the manor was held by Thomas de Beaumont the 6th Earl of Warwick and was known as Sutton-in-Coldfield. On his death in 1242, Thomas left the manor to his widow, Ella Longespee, who married Phi lip Basset in 1265. In 1267 Ella then exchanged the manor with William de Beauchamp for the manor of Spilsbury in Oxfordshire. William was the 9th Earl of Warwick so the manor of Sutton-in-Coldfield was once again in the possession of the Earldom of Warwick.

Records mention that in 1315 a manor house was attached to the Manor of Sutton-in-Coldfield on a site named Manor Hill, west of the parish church. The Manor grounds are described as oval in shape with the longest diameter of 100 yards. There were three towers on the outer wall and one standing in the north-west corner. The entrance was on the eastern side and consisted of twin towers, a portcullis and a gate. Within the eastern wall stood the Chapel of St Blaize, the patron saint of wool combers, which was dedicated in the reign of Edward Il (reigned 1307 - 1327).

In the Hundred Years War Sutton Chase was used as a training ground for archers. And the turbulence of the 15th century was felt in Sutton-in-Coldfield. During the Wars of the Roses between 1455 and 1487 the manor was leased out in the absence of its owners.

In 1397 King Richard II (r. 1377 - 1399) punished Thomas de Beauchamp, 12th Earl of Warwick, for being a member of the Lords Appellant, a group of peers who tried to impeach a number of the king's favourites. He confiscated all of Thomas de Beauchamp's possessions including his land at Sutton which was transferred to Thomas Holland, 3rd

Earl of Kent. When King Richard died in 1400 Thomas de Beauchamp's possessions were returned to him although he died in 1401 and was succeeded by Richard de Beauchamp, the 13th Earl. He in turn was succeeded by the 14th Earl, Henry de Beauchamp who died soon afterwards in 1446.

The earldom passed to Henry de Beauchamp's daughter, Anne, but she was only two years old and Henry VI seized the profits of her lands. Anne died in 1448 and the estate passed to her aunt Anne Neville, wife of Richard Neville. Due to the deaths of her brother and niece in 1446 and 1449 Anne and her husband jointly became major landowners, taking possession of lands extending from Cornwall to Yorkshire including the Manor of Sutton Coldfield.

Anne's inheritance was unsuccessfully contested by her three older half-sisters and in 1454 she was confirmed as Countess of Warwick and her husband Richard Neville became the 16th Earl of Warwick in right of his wife. It is believed that in 1460 Richard and Anne built a new manor of timber-frame construction with a lease given by Henry VI to Edward Mountfort, suggesting that the manor was then occupied by the Mountford family.

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, allied himself with the Lancastrian Henry VI and regained both his power and possession of Sutton Manor. He went on to play a leading role in the Wars of the Roses, becoming known as "The Kingmaker". After a protracted and bloody conflict he was eventually killed fighting against the Yorkists at Barnet on 14 April 1471.

On learning of her husband's death Anne, now the widowed Countess of Warwick, sought and was granted sanctuary at Beaulieu Abbey in Hampshire. In 1473 she moved north to Middleham Castle and lived with her daughter, also Anne, who was married to Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later to become Richard Ill). The following year an Act of Parliament gave both George, Duke of Clarence and Richard, Duke of Gloucester the right to claim lands held by the Countess as their wives' true inheritance - *'as though she were naturally dead and that she should be barred and excluded there/ram'*.

During the following years Anne's activities are not clear. It is noted in some records that until her death she was imprisoned in Sutton Coldfield Manor which was then her only possession. But this does not agree with other accounts.

However, it is known that after Henry VII (Henry Tudor) took the throne in 1485, following the death of Richard III at Bosworth, Anne's fortunes changed. Her husband was no longer considered a traitor because he had died fighting for the Lancastrian cause. It is possible also that at this time Anne petitioned Henry for the return of her estate. Whether or not this is the case, in 1487 she was granted lands by Henry and a pension of 500 marks. Later that year an Act of Parliament annulled the Act of 1474 and restored to her the family estates. According to some reports this was on condition that she broke the entail and remitted the bulk of them to Henry VII. One month later the Countess conveyed most of her lands back to the Crown but in 1488 she was given back for life a number of manors including Sutton Coldfield.

None of this suggests that Anne was imprisoned at Sutton. Nevertheless, the previous fifteen years had seen the death of her husband along with her youngest and oldest daughters and brought her nothing but severe hardship and misery. It is certain therefore that during her final years her circumstances condemned her to loneliness and isolation

with little or no contact beyond the confines of her manor. This could be perceived as a wretched form of imprisonment.

Anne died quietly in 1492, aged 66. A number of sources report that she was buried at Bisham Abbey in Berkshire and this seems likely as it is the burial place of her husband.

Around 1510 the Manor House was demolished by Winston, a servant of King Henry VlIl and the timbers were sold to Thomas Grey, the 2nd Marquess of Dorset. Grey used them in building Bradgate House in Leicestershire, at that time the home of Lady Jane Gray. The site of Sutton Manor then remained unused until around 1543 when a farm house was built there and occupied by a relative of Bishop Vesey.

Vesey was born John Harman around 1462. He was the son of a yeoman farmer, living in a farmhouse now known as Moor Hall Farm, Sutton Coldfield. He was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford ~ here he gained a doctorate in Canon and Civil Law and formed a friendship with Thomas Wolsey who went on to become Cardinal Wolsey and Lord Chancellor, the King's chief adviser. Following his ordination Harman was appointed chaplain of the chapel of St Blaize in Sutton Manor in 1495 after which he rose dramatically to become the Bishop of Exeter in 1519 when he changed his name to become John Vesey.

John Vesey became a friend of Henry VIII and used his wealth, along with his friendship with the King, to restore the fortunes of his home town, Sutton Coldfield and its inhabitants. He obtained 40 acres of land on which he built his own home which he called Moor Hall. He persuaded Henry to grant a Royal Charter of Incorporation for the town in 1528, creating a new form of local government which was named the Warden and Society of the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield. The Society was formed from 25 of the most prominent residents of the town who could be elected by all inhabitants over 25. The Charter also gave inhabitants permission to hunt and fish freely in the grounds of the Manor of Sutton Coldfield as well as allowing the construction of a house, enclosing up to 60 acres, within the manor grounds.

Vesey improved the local church, revived the markets and built a marketplace, paved the town, built 51 cottages for the poor and founded and endowed a free grammar school that still operates as Bishop Vesey's Grammar School. He cleared trees from large tracts of land in hunting land which had been donated to Sutton by King Henry, thereby allowing residents to graze cattle there for a small fee. He then enclosed wooded areas within the land, added gates and fences, brought in horses and generally set the foundations for the preservation of what is now known as Sutton Park. He removed the stone walls of the ruined Manor House and used them to build two bridges, one at Water Orton and one at Curdworth.

Vesey survived the fall of Cardinal Wolsey in 1529 but fell out of favour under Thomas Cromwell when he opposed the English Reformation in 155l. He was deprived of his see in exchange for a pension of £485 per year but was restored to the see of Exeter when Mary Tudor came to the throne in 1553. He died in 1554 and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Sutton Coldfield.

In 1576 a parcel of land referred to as The Manor, but evidently the site of the original Manor House, was conveyed to Thomas Gybbons and Humphrey Chatterton by Thomas Kene and his wife Sybil. It is possible that this is the Sybil, who with her (presumably second) husband John Bull, conveyed the site in 1585 to Edward Sprott and another party with warranty against their heirs. In 1588 Humphrey Kene, also known as Keene,

conveyed the site to Simon Perott. The site then passed to Robert Perott who built a new Manor House on the site of what is now the rear portion of the existing dwelling, i.e the part which is of sandstone ashlar construction. The property was bequeathed to his widow Anne Perott (nee Gardener) who, on her death in 1597, passed it to her second husband, Marmaduke Dawney of York. Descendants of the Dawney family occupied the house throughout the 17th Century. In 1648 the property was conveyed to Thomas Dawney, possibly the Thomas who died there in 1671.

By 1762 the house was in a ruinous condition and occupied by a labourer although the freehold was owned by Sir Lister Holte of Aston. On Sir Lister Holte's death in 1770 he left a life interest to his brother Sir" Charles Holte. Sir Charles died in 1782 without an heir and the estate was left to his daughter who had married a Mr Bracebridge. By 1817 Bracebridge had become insolvent and the estate was therefore dismembered by Act of Parliament allowing the estate's value of £800,000 to be realised in order to meet the claims of mortgagees. Along with lands, mills and pools, the estate was divided and the Sutton Coldfield portion passed to a surviving legatee, Wriothesley Digby of Meriden. Digby bequeathed the property to The Right Honorable Kenelm Lord Somerville who had married Digby's daughter Mary.

Lord Somerville had two sons alive while his brother also had five sons so it seemed unlikely that the title would become extinct. However the family suffered a catastrophic series of deaths. One of Lord Somerville's sons and a nephew lost their lives in the Crimean War and his brother and another nephew died in a shipwreck in the Mersey. By 1860 the estate was held by the fourth son, The Honorable Hugh Somerville, who around that time renovated and extended the Manor House, using money raised by the construction of 'Somerfield' and sale of the leasehold on that property. Today the house stands at the entrance to Manor Drive. The new, enlarged Manor House was, externally at least, more or less as it exists today (although it is now named The Manor). Hugh Somerville himself died in 1864 and his son and heir, unmarried, had a fatal hunting accident in 1869. A cousin came from Australia to claim the title but in 1870, having buried his only brother, he too died, leaving no male heir. The title fell into abeyance and the property went to the sisters of the last lord but one.

In 1864 Manor House had been bought by Thomas Hayward who died in October 1900, leaving the property to his brother and sister William and Sarah Hayward. Sarah died in 1899 and William died in 190], leaving the estate to his widow, Annie Martha and his son Herbert Thomas. Annie died in 1917 after which the property was sold in 1919 to Colonel John Smart Matthew. John Matthew used the estate for property development and over the years 29 houses were built on the land until the Manor House estate became limited to the area bounded by Wyndley Lane, Clifton Road, Manor Road and Manor Drive.

One of the houses built by John Matthew in 1932 was situated in the garden immediately next to the Manor House and was provided for his mother to live in. When his mother died, the house and grounds were fenced off and sold as a separate dwelling, named Manor House. This meant that the main building on the estate could no longer use that name and it was given its present name: The Manor. Eventually all the houses on the estate were disposed of as freehold properties and the Manor itself was contained within its own immediate grounds with the new Manor House as its close neighbour .

The new Manor House

John Matthew died in 1935 and the estate passed to his widow, Eleanor Mary Matthew. In 1945 her son John Smith Matthew of The White House, Manor Hill (now Wyndley Drive) granted a lease on Manor House to Mary Emily McKay, wife of Robert Ferrier McKay. The lease was for 99 years as from 1936.

In 1950 the property passed to Thompson Leslie Gawley of 62 Rosemary Hill Road and then, in 1955, to Dennis Howard Jones and -his wife Gwendoline Mary Jones. Denis Jones was the proprietor of a sweet shop in the Parade, Sutton Coldfield and in 1973 he purchased the freehold on Manor House for £600. Five years later he sold the house to David Oliver Ward and his wife Shirley Clare Ward.

Around 1996 Manor Drive residents decided to improve the surface of the drive and, in order to give the residents control of how the drive is managed, Shirley Ward bought the drive from the Matthew family who by then had moved to Canada. In 1998 Shirley Ward herself moved away from the area and Manor House became the home of John and Margaret Dann. At the same time Manor House and Manor Drive became registered as a single parcel of land .