

Restoration

On 19 May 1925 Mrs Alice Sarah Rose of Rock House sold to Mrs Leslie Milne eight cottages at Wheatley known as the old Manor House. After an adventurous life, living alone in North Burma where she composed a dictionary in order to translate St. John's Gospel, she settled in Holywell and intended to restore the house as a dignified home for a nephew whom she had not consulted. Her architect was F.E. Openshaw of St. Giles. When Charles Shepherd sold Ambrose Farm land by the new London Road, Mrs Milne (who wanted vacant possession) bought plots for James Tombs and for Archie Harding and his wife Emma Munt, and for Charles Shorter. Celeb Harris, the milkman, and F.W. Barlow, a road engine driver, tenants of two Breach cottages and later (5 September 1939) William Goodlake, received building plots on the edge of the Breach Field next the Little Green. Her name lives in that of James Tombs' "Milne Cottage". She began to study the history of Wheatley. In the Bodleian Library W. O. Hassall was appointed to help readers doing historical research and was looking for a home. On 11 August 1939 Mrs Averil Grafton Hassall, his wife, bought the Manor House (without the Breach Field and cottages) with £1295. The staircase had gone since 1925, some floors were earth, the east wall had to be rebuilt, water, gas, closets, baths, electricity and central heating and drains were installed in spite of the outbreak of war and the absence of W.O. Hassall as an AA gunner. On 13 June 1941 the furniture was moved in and Averil's second son was born.

Mrs Bessie F. Hassall, Averil's mother-in-law, came 'for the war'. Evacuees included Mrs Fisher from Shepherd's Bush (with her son) to teach her evacuated school in the Merry Bells; one evacuated child, specially sent as she had been abused at her previous billet; an officer with a batman (who insisted on camping in the garden as he was embarrassed at having to eat at the same table as his officer); and many others who were asked according to an inscription on the bathroom wall 'please use individual toothbrushes'. Internal bells (not used) were automatically installed and there was even a pre-war resident cook until Averil became unable to take her the early morning tea to which she was accustomed in her "houses".

Mr Goodlake had a stable and trap-house which enabled him to take market garden produce to Oxford. James Turner, the (gardener?), married to Lady Ottoline Morrell's housemaid Millie Woodward, cycled from Garsington until a Breach cottage fell vacant (1945) to grow vegetables for the household of 12-14 people.

Averil had help with her children from Emily Stanley (sister of a quarryman who had been injured) who lived in Blenheim, Eva Nixey (Mrs Hilsdon), and May Tombs (Mrs Bowler) niece of Alderman Tombs. Reg's wife Ottie also helped her. She was christened Otteline at the suggestion of Lady Otteline who was canvassing in (Littleworth?).

In 1980 my youngest son, Tom, brought his family to live in the east and central parts of the house after further restoration. A strong stone partition wall which had divided the great hall was removed, a nineteenth century low ceiling in the west wing was scrapped, revealing an earlier one above, Mrs Angela Hassall restored the pleasure garden and a beech hedge was planted inside the boundary wall towards the street. Necessity prompted the opening of a door in the SW corner and it was found that there had been one in that position before the manor house was divided into separate cottages? for under the debris was found a cardboard label "Mrs P. Cooke, Manor House, Wheatley by Mr Tipping the Ickford Carrier to Wheatley". Possibly she was the woman caretaker who received Squire Henley in 1851.

Other small finds (revealed in decades of gardening work) are medieval pottery, armour buckles, 15th century Nuremburg casting counters, Elizabethan carved wood, a small civil war canon ball, a seventeenth century tradesman's token, a duelling bullet, white clay pipe heads, patterns to keep nineteenth century lady's shoes