



The Manors

The parish was once divided up into four manors, the two principal ones being Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount. However the hamlets of Copcourt and Chalford each originally had their own manor.

The Manor at Aston Rowant

Aston Rowant takes its name from the Rohant family who were lords of the manor in the 14th century. The history of the manor house may go back to 1352 when it is known that four stonemasons and three carpenters were engaged to build a chapel for Thomas Crok. In 1584 Augustine Belson lived in the house and William Willoughby purchased the lease in 1610. At this time the house was two storied and built in a medieval pattern around a courtyard. John Clerke who bought the house in 1647 probably rebuilt it. It was obviously a very large house in 1665, as twenty hearths were returned for the hearth tax. The number of hearths indicated the size of the house; 2s was paid for each hearth and only the poor were exempt. Even then it probably had an impressive garden but by 1768 it is known to have had a formal garden and an orchard all enclosed, partly by a wall and partly by water. During the period 1658 to 1769 the manor was held by a succession of John Clerkes and they probably enlarged the house again during this time. One of the earliest John Clerkes was buried at Aston in 1683. He was described as a J.P. of the Bucks. bench and Recorder of Chepping Wycombe. He had died very suddenly and was buried in a brick tomb in the south part of the church. The next John Clerke died in 1718, he was described as an armiger and lord of the manor. His son John mortgaged the Aston and Stokenchurch Manors in 1739 and again in 1743 and the next John Clerke sold it in 1769. The Clerke family continued to live in the parish and their descendents became lords of the manor at Kingston.

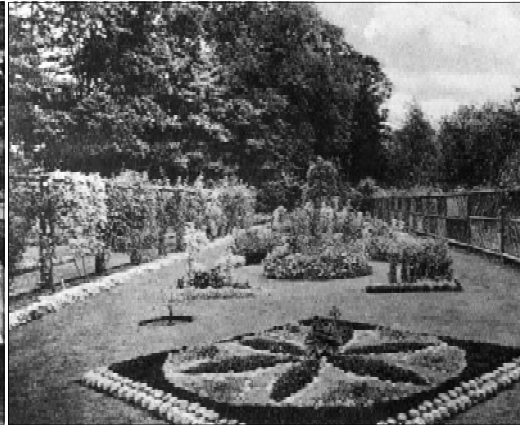
The house was sold to Brigadier General John Caillaud for £16,000. He had retired from the army and lived there until his death, aged eighty eight, in 1812. His wife had died four years earlier, aged seventy eight. John Caillaud increased the size of the estate and created an extensive park with landscaping. He bought out a lot of smallholdings and built houses including a cottage, barn and malt house at the lower end of The Green in Aston Rowant. The land with the malt house included a meadow and two acres known as 'The Moors' in the Liberty of Kingston. Some of the houses he built were let for the poor. This obviously caused him some financial difficulties as he mortgaged the house in 1800 to Isaac Bargrave of Kent. Hopefully he had some money left; as his will suggested he was a very benevolent man. He left a wonderful will full of bequests for his old servants and friends. One of the main beneficiaries of the will was Richard Clerke, whose family had once owned Aston House; he described him as his friend and neighbour. Richard was to be given first option to purchase that part of the estate, which had once belonged to the Clerke family. He not only left money for his servants but also annuities to his housekeeper and old faithful servant. All the male servants received, in addition to any legacy, one year's wages and a suitable suit of mourning. The housekeeper and the late Mrs Caillaud's maid received one year's wages whilst the other female servants received a

half-year's wages. A large legacy was left to the vicar, Rev. Holland, who he described as his worthy friend. He was also given £30 to be distributed amongst the poor persons he deemed most deserving.

After the death of John Caillaud the house was in the hands of his trustees. They were his nephews Sir Thomas Brooke Peschell, Baronet and Augustus Pechell, Receiver



Front entrance of Aston House



The formal gardens in 1928

General of His Majesty's Customs in the Port of London and his friends the Rt. Hon. Nicholas Vansittart and Richard Clerke. The house was unoccupied for a while until it was sold to Phillip Wykeham of Tythrop House, in 1819. The document of bargain of sale in that year refers to the estate owning both the Drum and Plough public house situated at the bottom of Stokenchurch Hill and the Chequers Inn in Church Lane. Five cottages on The Green were included in the sale as were two cottages of brick, with courts and gardens and a shoemaker's shop in the village. Several other cottages were included, one of them being in Chalford and also Uphill Farm. Nearly opposite the Drum and Plough there was a bowling green with a well house and orchard.

In 1822 Sir Francis Desanges was living there but nothing is known about him. Sir Henry John Lambert Bart, bought the estate in 1828. He also bought up property, including four cottages from the Poor Law Union in 1838. Two houses, which had been used as the pest house, were bought from the Union in 1848. He himself served on the Board of Poor Law Guardians for the Thame Union. In 1831 he is known to have taken out a mortgage for £31,549 on the estate for which he was paying interest at four percent. Lady Lambert supported a National school, which opened around 1830 and Sir Henry donated land to the village on which the National School was built in 1844. Sir Henry sat as a magistrate at Watlington Petty Sessions and on one occasion the defendant had failed to appear so the case was adjourned and was later heard at Aston House. Lady Lambert died, aged fifty seven, in February 1857 and was buried in the family vault at Aston. Sir Henry died on 17th December 1858. His estate was valued at £34,454, which was left to his son Sir Henry Edward Francis Lambert also of Aston House along with some monetary bequests to his other children.

In 1859 the estate was sold to Thomas Taylor who had made a fortune in the Lancashire cotton mills. It was sold by auction in London and was described as a manor house with various smallholdings and nearly all of the village of Aston Rowant including at least thirty cottages and three farms, in all 950 acres. It was said to be suitable for a Nobleman or a Gentleman with a good establishment. The gardens were described as rich parkland with beautiful lawns, parterres and diversified pleasure grounds with gravelled terraces and shrubbery walks. Thomas Taylor was responsible for further improvement and the



Rear of Aston House and greenhouses in 1928 Stable Block of Aston House in 1928

parkland, which now occupied 160 acres, had extensive shrubberies and gardens with a lake in front of the house. There were several large greenhouses, the last of which have been pulled down in the last fifteen years to make way for modern housing. A cricket pitch must have been laid out as games were regularly played there in the summer. The eighteenth and nineteenth century house was made of Haseley stone dressed with Bath stone. Internally there was a grand staircase and picture gallery, which was added by Thomas Taylor around 1877 to house his extensive art collection. He regularly allowed the park to be used for events and in 1879 the first festival of the newly formed Girls Friendly Society was held there. During the day the art gallery was open for viewing and also Taylor and his daughter gave rides on the lake, rowing the boat themselves.

Thomas Taylor was a magistrate and regularly sat at the Watlington Petty Sessions. He was also president of the Thame Institute, which provided a library of books and periodicals and was open to the public daily from 10 am to 10 pm. In 1870 there was a newspaper report of Thomas Taylor being in the chair for a series of lectures in Watlington on Geology and Genesis. Taylor introduced the speaker who was discussing the new theory of evolution put forward by Darwin in his 'Origin of Species' published in 1859. It was quite controversial and caused much debate. Mrs Taylor supported the women's suffrage movement and held 'at homes' for the cause at their other residence in Hyde Park Gardens.

Taylor was chairman of the directors when the Watlington and Princes Risborough Railway Company was set up to fund the building of the line. Taylor himself put up most of the capital, which turned out to be a poor investment as the railway struggled to make a profit and it was a drain on his resources. Thomas Taylor lived at Aston House until 1889 when the estate and manor were offered for sale by his creditors. A letter written in 1890 by Thomas's wife Sara Helen described all of the rooms in the house. They included a library, a billiard room, a morning room, dining room, numerous bedrooms each with dressing rooms, a bathroom, picture gallery, a schoolroom and all of the usual servants quarters, kitchen etc. There were also stables and a coach house. Thomas Taylor died on the 15th March 1892 in Southport leaving only £361 12s 6d to his wife.

Sir William Chichele Plowden, K.C.S.I., J.P. bought the house. He had been a member of the Bengal Civil Service and like Taylor also had a London house. He was said to have been very good to the villagers and he held whist drives and dances in the picture gallery at the house. Apparently there was no outside entrance so people had to go through the main house. In 1913 a special meeting was held there by the parish council to discuss the proposed extension of the churchyard. Sir William kindly offered some of his land. Lady Plowden had her bog garden where Plowden Park is today; there are several amusing stories of horses regularly getting stuck in the mud there and also contractor's equipment sinking when they drained the area to build houses. Sir William died on the 4th September 1915 and his wife on the 29th November 1915. At the next churchwarden's

meeting the following was said ' We would like to place on record our recognition of the great loss which the parish has sustained by the deaths of Sir William Chichele Plowden and Lady Plowden and sincere appreciation of the many services they rendered to the parish during their nineteen years in residence at Aston Rowant.' It is believed that Sir William's married daughter, the Rt. Hon. Margaret Baroness Vaux of Harrowden, lived in the house for a while after his death before she decided to sell.

Charles Vincent Sale bought the house and was living there by 1919; he also had an address in London. He was High Sheriff of Oxfordshire in 1925. Charles Sale was also good to the villagers and would hold events for them. He allowed the school to have sports there and village fetes were held in the meadow. He had some external steps cut through up to the picture gallery, which was above the stables, as he was worried about the need for a fire escape. He had an army hut put in for the villagers down the lane behind The Green for use as a sports pavilion. In 1919 the parish council met to consider



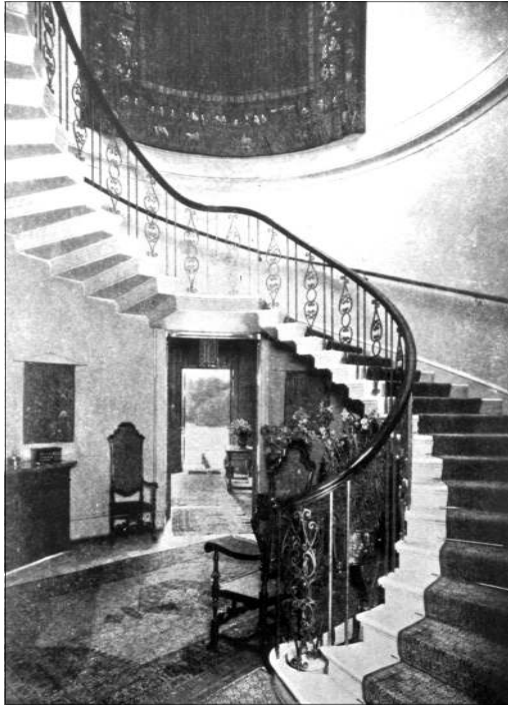
Aerial photograph of Aston House and Parklands 1951

how to celebrate Peace day and Charles Sale invited the whole parish to Aston House for tea at 5 pm. He was a big businessman but was thought to have had connections with the film industry. He certainly used to show films to the villagers. He would get some boys to put up a big screen and afterwards would provide coffee and sandwiches.

The house was put up for auction in 1928. The auction was held at the Clarendon Hotel, Oxford on 17th October. The estate then consisted of 441 acres, with two farms, Home Farm and Middle Farm and fifteen cottages including all of the ones around the Green and the lodge on the Oxford Rd. The house had twenty bed and dressing rooms, seven bathrooms, four reception rooms a billiard room, library and a fine ballroom or picture gallery. It had central heating, electric light, a private water supply and a telephone. Edward Hayes Dashwood, a property developer, bought the house. He too allowed the long gallery to be used for concerts and gave the school treats at Christmas but he had a door cut through the garage to allow access so people did not have to go through the house.

He still allowed the grounds to be used for fetes.

After his death in 1950 the manorial rights lapsed. The estate was then split up completely and some of the grounds became a market garden. The house was sold to a grass drying company and was totally burnt down in 1957. The only remaining features are some large trees, for which the estate was noted, the lake and the stables of the house, which are now used as a stud farm. Many of the older houses in the village belonged to the estate in the 19th century and it provided employment for the majority of the villagers.



Main staircase and inner hall 1928



Newspaper cutting 1957

The Manor of Kingston Blount

Kingston Blount takes its name from the Blount family who were there from 1237 until the early 15th century. In Kingston Blount there were at least two manor houses and two estates were mentioned in Domesday but their sites are unknown. It is possible that Moat Manor represents one of them. In 1631 a manor house was mentioned which was lived in by Robert Chapman, a gentleman. It was sold to Andrew Crook, who paid tax on four hearths so it was not a particularly large house. Joseph Wingrave of Stokenchurch sold a manor of Kingston in 1756 to Thomas Blackall of Great Haseley. Blackall bought up large amounts of property in Oxfordshire, including Great Milton Manor, and Kingston stayed in this family until 1829 when Walter Long, the Blackall's heir, sold it, with about 165 acres for £5,950 to John Brown. John had married Mary Elizabeth Clerke, the daughter and heiress of Richard Clerke (d.1820), the half brother of the John Clerke, who had sold Aston Manor. After John Clerke sold Aston and Stokenchurch Manors it was discovered that Stokenchurch Manor was actually a separate manor so Richard Clerke bought it back on his marriage in 1787 and settled it on his wife.

In 1824 Henry Alexander Brown, John's brother, bought the Grove, called Walter's Grove, a substantial house at the foot of the Chilterns up Kingston Hill. Because he spent much of his time in St Leonards and London, between 1849 and 1863, he hand-

ed all his property in Kingston to his brother in exchange for an annuity. John Brown bought the manor of Kingston in 1821 and had Kingston House built in 1855. There was an earlier house on that site, parts of which still exist. He also had a private gallery built for his family at the east end of Aston church. In 1869 Arthur Henry Clerke-Brown, John's son, was living at The Grove. After his father's death on 20 March 1870 he moved to Kingston House. Members of the family have lived at Kingston House or The Grove since then.



Front entrance of Kingston House

Arthur Henry was a J.P. and barrister on the Oxford circuit. He was also a Poor Law Guardian, a conservative councillor of the Thame district and governor of Lord Williams's School. He was very involved in village life and allowed his grounds to be used for school and Sunday school treats. He also donated the land on which the Chapel of Ease was built. As a manager of Kingston Blount School he and his wife were regular visitors. In 1830 John Brown had bought The Red Lion Inn at the foot of Kingston Hill but it seems that Arthur Henry decided not to renew the licence so it had to be run as a coffee house and was formally opened for the sale of tea and coffee at the end of 1879. This was probably because he was a staunch supporter of the Church of England Temperance Society and would chair their local meetings. He said 'A great deal of time and money is spent on frequenting public houses which is a great evil in this and other parishes'. He regretted so many men and lads falling into evil habits. He had a comfortable room with a fire opened in the village, where people could go to read papers and magazines and play harmless amusements such as bagatelle and draughts! Arthur Henry died on the 16th March 1889, aged sixty two, and was buried on the north side of the churchyard by the side of his wife. His estate passed to his two sons Henry and George.

Henry was also a J.P. and Barrister of Law and took on the school duties both at Kingston and Aston where he inspected the registers and logbooks. He supported the

church at Crowell as well as Kingston and Aston. Henry's wife Mary (Minnie) was a Commandant at Swyncombe Hospital in the First World War and was awarded the M.B.E. for her work. Henry was also at the meeting to decide on events for Peace day and declared he would give all of his workmen dinner. He died in 1919 and his wife continued to live at Kingston House. Early in the 20th century the Clerke-Brown family bought a considerable amount of land at Crowell and Mrs Clerke-Brown was considered lady of the manor there in 1935.

Henry's son, John, lived at Lower Farm where his children John Henry Charles, Arthur and Rachel were born. John was a J.P. and a land agent. The family later moved to The Grove where electricity was installed in 1936. Their son John Henry Charles was killed in the Second World War and his name appears on the war memorial together with two other members of the family, Lawrence and Richard who were killed in the First World War. The family moved to the village during the war and lived in Hester's cottage for a while. John Clerke-Brown died in 1964. His son Colonel Arthur Clerke-Brown was awarded the O.B.E. in 1945 for his war service. He was in the Oxford and Bucks. Light Infantry. He married his wife Anne in 1944; she died aged fifty eight in 1979. The Colonel was a well-respected figure in the village and lived at The Grove until his recent death. His daughter and family still live at Kingston House.



The Grove, Kingston Hill

The Manors of Chalford and Copcourt

Both Chalford and Copcourt were part of the manor of Aston Rowant. It is not known when Chalford became a separate manor but Copcourt was recorded as one in the 16th century. Chalford was owned by the Prior of Wallingford in the 12th century and was leased in 1360 to Lady Eleanor Rohant and later to the Hester family. In 1531 the manor belonged to the Crown and in 1544 it went to Lord Williams of Thame. It passed through

many hands until in the 18th century it belonged to the Lowndes Stone family. In the 19th century it was incorporated into Thame Park and owned by Wykeham-Musgrave. It was sold in 1917 to Mr Browning who farmed there. In 1613 the Hester family leased the house and William Hester built, for his son when he married, a house of four bays with a barn. The house was later occupied by Robert Munday and had six hearths in 1665. It has a timber frame with chequer brick and a row of dormer windows. In 1917 the house of brick and plaster with a tiled roof had two rooms with old plaster work ceilings and a fine oak panelled room. There was a water corn mill on the site.

The Crispe, later Cripps, family lived in Copcourt from 1279 to 1620 and they probably had a house on the site of the present manor house. It was known to have two dovecotes in 1575. The present house, built of brick with a tiled roof has undergone much modernisation. It dates from the 18th century. In 1917 it was described as a 'Gentleman's house standing amid park-like pastures'. There is a moat, which probably dates back to an ancient house. 16th and 17th century barns and an 18th century granary are also on the site.



Manor Farm, Chalford in 1917



Moated house at Copcourt in 1917