

Lamorbey



Lamorbey Park House.

The Lamorbey Park estate probably originated as a subdivision of the manor of Bexley. The present building, now part of Rose Bruford College, dates in part from 1744 or at least 1784.

The first recorded owner of the estate was Thomas Sparrow, or Lamienby the Deputy Reeve of the Manor of Bexley in 1495. A reeve was an official appointed by a lord to manage his estate and in this capacity he would have had great influence locally and it is probable that because of his position he was either given or able to acquire the Lamorbey estate. When he died in 1513 he bequeathed it to his daughter Agnes. She and her husband James Goldwell built a "good house" there in about 1515. They called it Lamienby-Goldwell, hence the modern name. Their house was probably timber-framed but two brick-built wings may have been added later at right angles to the original building for John Goldwell, grandson of James and Agnes was assessed for an astonishing ten chimneys in the Hearth Tax of 1664. In the later part of the seventeenth century the Goldwell family sold the estate, which then passed through a number of different owners and tenants, including Charles Fitzroy, Duke of Southampton although there is very little information regarding his occupancy.

The estate was purchased in 1744 by William Steele who appears to have been the sitting tenant since at least 1723. He rebuilt the centre of the house but continued the tradition of a Great Hall, still in use today as a Common Room. The two single storey wings, which stood at right angles to the main building, helped to form an entrance courtyard. From the courtyard a drive ran to Burnt Oak Lane through the grounds, which were laid out formally for the first time.

On the death of William Steele the house and estate were inherited by his four daughters subject to a lease held by Robert Dingley who then bought a fourth share of the freehold from one of the Steele sisters. The three remaining owners placed the house and land on the market in 1761 and their three shares were bought by Michael Lejay. A sale catalogue of that year shows what are now the college's administrative offices as Kitchen, Pantry and Brewhouse. The other side of the courtyard was Laundry, Dairy, Bottle Room, and so on. Michael Lejay bequeathed his share of the estate to Anthony Chamier. He died in 1780. A new owner, a Scottish doctor, David

Lamorbey

Orme MD, bought the house including the share owned by the Dingley family in 1783, and in 1784 was able to "make several additions and improvements to this seat". The additions were probably a block at right angles to the Laundry. They allowed more space inside the house for a number of rooms including a Powder Room, a daughter's study, and conversion of the old kitchen into a library. At this time, the entrance to the house was under a colonnaded portico, supported by plain Ionic columns, across the inner end of the courtyard.

Dr Orme died at the age of eighty-four in 1812 and his daughter Mary Ann married another Scot, Neill Malcolm. As regards the building the story is unclear. It is possible that in the late 1830s or early 1840s the architect John Shaw, altered the building substantially to its present-day Jacobean appearance. This would have been either for Neill Malcolm I or his son Neill Malcolm II and would have involved moving two staircases, removing some interior walls, enlarging outside rooms, and installing the panelling. The Malcolms occupied Lamorbey until about 1857 when they moved to the main family seat at Poltalloch, Argyll but the family had left their mark on the district in a number of ways. In 1841 "Mrs Malcolm's School" was opened in Burnt Oak Lane in a building that is still recognisable today. There were the gifts of land, with some handsome endowments, for Holy Trinity Church slightly north of the present building. In about 1860 an entrance lodge was built in Hurst Road and in 1874 John Malcolm, brother of Neil II was responsible for the three cottages on Burnt Oak Lane, although he himself was by then in Poltalloch. In about 1908 a vicarage was built near the church, while a church school was built on the south side of Hurst Road in 1880.

For a while the house and grounds were let to tenants but eventually they were sold and in 1910 the house became a private hotel, continuing as such until purchased by Kent Education Committee late in 1946. Life in the hotel was described by Ursula Bloom in her book "A Roof and Four Walls" (Hutchinson, 1967). The K E C very quickly opened the building as an Adult Education Centre in January, 1947, occupancy being shared with the Rose Bruford Training College from 1950.

The Estate

The estate covered 326 acres in 1761 and included the portion next to Harrow Manorway at the extreme east of Plumstead parish. The main block on which a herd of at least 100 deer had to be maintained, formed an irregular shaped island bounded by Hurst Road, Penhill Road, the Blendon Estate, Burnt Oak Lane and Halfway Street Road, with another considerable portion to the north-east of Burnt Oak Lane up to Blackfen. In 1761 there were several additional small parcels. Large estates are rarely static, of course, the owners and tenants both become older and are replaced by younger people, while marginal plots change hands. We know, for example, from the deposited plan for the Dartford Loop and from local title-deeds that, later the Malcolms owned more land to the south of the main estate.

There is no evidence that the park was ever formally landscaped by, for example a Repton or a Brown, but advantage was taken of the local landscape to create three lakes, possibly originally dug either for brickmaking or for gravel? Dr Orme probably altered the entrance drive, abandoning the direct route to Burnt Oak Lane in favour of a longer one sweeping across the parkland to Hurst Road. Yet by 1842 the estate would have been hardly distinguishable from the surrounding countryside, with arable fields, pasture, meadow, and a wood quite close to the house. By the 1860s the gardens had been extended into the area of today's Glade and an appearance of parkland restored to the fields towards Hurst Road.

The main block of the estate remained substantially unchanged and formed an ideal environment for outdoor activities, with boating, swimming, fishing, rabbiting, a cricket

Lamorbey

ground, and so on. There was even a bath-house installed in the 1780s. Things continued in this way until 1910 when the house changed from a private residence into an hotel. The grounds nearest the house were retained but the main part of the estate between the house and Hurst Road was leased to the Sidcup Golf Club and an excellent course laid out, reputedly by James Braid. The deer were replaced by sheep and a sheep dip constructed. When the next stage of Sidcup's development commenced in the 1930s, the fringes of the estate along Hurst Road and, later, the eastern portion at Penhill, were sold to New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. After 1946, when the Kent Education Committee purchased the freehold of the remainder of the main estate much of the land was used for school buildings. Lamorbey Park now supports four, alongside half of an 18-hole golf course.

Prepared by Bexley Local Studies Centre
April 1997

***For further information, please visit the Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre,
Central Library, Townley Road, Bexleyheath, Kent. DA6 7HJ.
Telephone 020 8836 7369 Or E mail archives@bexley.gov.uk***