

Frognal

Frognal is a Jacobean mansion standing on the boundary between Sidcup in the London Borough of Bexley and Chislehurst in the London Borough of Bromley.

The name is believed to be a corruption of frog pool. In 1253 the land was held by Thomas Le Barbur, who obtained charter of free warren from Henry III. By 1327 it had passed to the Cressel family, one of whose members, John de Cressel was a benefactor of St Nicholas' Church, Chislehurst. A descendant, also called John, is recorded as holding the property in 1419. The last of the line, Richard Cressel died in 1508 leaving land to his wife and then to his two daughters. Thereafter the property passed either by marriage or purchase to a family called Dynely or Dyngley, who seem to have built the original house. Markes Dyngley of Frognal died in 1550 leaving three sons. While his second son inherited the estate, Markes' will provided that each of the other sons should retain a room in the house.

His eldest son, John was to have the new chamber over the closet, while the youngest, James was to get the chamber over the new cellar. Markes' grandson, Sir John Dynley sold the estate to William Watkins sometime during the reign of James I. According to Hasted it was Watkins who dramatically altered the layout of the house in keeping with contemporary fashion. Jacobean mansions differed from their Elizabethan predecessors in several important respects. A growing desire for privacy led to the replacement of large interconnecting rooms, with smaller rooms, each with its own door, lock and key, linked by corridors. This scheme lent itself to courtyards and galleries, which became popular features. Bricks manufactured locally since the end of the sixteenth century replaced the more expensive stone as the building material of choice. In the grounds' formal gardens, terraces, arbors and grottos satisfied the desire for views.

At Frognal the original Tudor house was re-configured along these lines. Standing only two storeys high on sloping ground, the main house consisted of a square building, within which lay a central quadrangle. An entrance hall on the northwest side was connected to a kitchen and offices on the left and to a study and dining room on the right. A series of libraries, drawing rooms and sitting rooms occupied

the south western and south eastern sides of the mansion. On the first floor stood a high gallery, which ran the whole length of the south east wall. An arch and one of the staircases were all that remained of the original Tudor construction.

The Warwicks

In 1649 William Watkins, a Royalist, fearing that his property might be confiscated by the victorious Parliamentarians secretly sold Frognal to Philip Warwick, the former MP for Radnor. Warwick had been one of the few Members of the Commons to oppose the bill of attainder against Charles I's unpopular Minister, Lord Strafford. When the Civil War broke out, he left Westminster and joined the King at Oxford, for which offence he was immediately expelled from the Commons.

The King however appointed him as his Clerk of the Signet. He remained with the unfortunate monarch until his imprisonment at Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. Elected once more to Parliament at the Restoration he was rewarded for his loyalty by Charles II with a knighthood and his old post of Clerk of the Signet to which was added that of Secretary to the Treasury. Sir Philip was married twice, firstly to Dorothy Hutton in 1637 and secondly to Joan Boteler, widow of Sir William Boteler Baronet, another Cavalier, killed at the Battle of Cropredy Bridge and daughter of Sir Henry Fanshawe. She already had a son by her first husband and this Sir Oliver Boteler Baronet is recorded in possession of Frognal in the Hearth Tax assessment of 1662. At that time the house with its twenty four chimneys was by far and away the largest in the district. Sir Philip died in 1682 bequeathing the estate to his son, Philip, sometime Envoy to Sweden, who sadly died without issue the following year. His widow, Elizabeth married the Earl of Holderness. After Lady Holderness's death in 1691 Frognal passed to Rowland Tryon, the heir of one of Sir Philip Warwick's sisters.

The Tryons

The Tryons seem to have been of humble origins. Rowland's grandfather had been a plasterer from Bibury in Gloucestershire. He himself had made a fortune as a merchant trading in the West Indies. A print of Frognal in his time appears in John Harris's History of Kent. It shows a stately mansion built of brick around a central courtyard. The house is set amongst formal gardens, orchards, fountains and tree

lined walkways. The external features would appear to date the building to about 1670. However the outbuildings, which had been quite separate in the initial design, were joined to the house by further construction in about 1700. Rowland died in 1720. His brother William inherited the estate. A man of some importance in the City, he was also a noted philanthropist, acting as a Governor of both Christ's and St Bartholomew's Hospitals and holding the post of Treasurer to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. On his death in 1742 his son, Thomas took possession of Frognal. Like his father Thomas was a very worthy man and served as Treasurer of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. However he lacked his father's financial acumen and when his business failed he managed somehow or other to expose the Society's funds to his losses. Facing ruin he killed himself in 1747. The estate was bankrupt and to preserve her own fortune his widow renounced the probate. Frognal fell into the hands of the High Court of Chancery to be sold for the benefit of the creditors.

The Townshends

In 1752 the house was bought by the Honourable Thomas Townshend, the third son of Viscount Townshend. His wife, Albinia had been the only daughter of Colonel John Selwyn MP, Lord of the Manors of Chislehurst and Scadbury. On their marriage in 1730 Selwyn had settled the extensive Scadbury estate, adjoining Frognal, on his new son-in-law. Townshend pulled down the old manor house that had once belonged to the Walsingham family and planned to replace it with a more fashionable country home. However his wife's death at the young age of twenty five in 1739 led him to abandon the project. Instead he purchased Frognal and established it as his family seat. He died in 1780, when the house passed to his son Thomas Townshend MP. A leading opponent of Lord North (Prime Minister 1770-1782), Townshend secured the office of Home Secretary, in the short lived government formed by Lord Shelburne (Prime Minister 1782-1783). The King impressed by his service rewarded him with the title Lord Sydney of Chislehurst and he was restored to his old office when William Pitt became Prime Minister later that same year.

As Home Secretary, he had responsibility for the Colonies and a recently discovered harbour in New South Wales was named Sydney in his honour. Although Pitt's brother had married Lord Sydney's daughter it did not prevent him removing him from the Cabinet in

1789. The pain of his demotion was soothed by the award of a viscountcy and the honorary post of Chief Justice in Eyre South of the Trent with a salary of £2500 per year. He remained a man of considerable influence in the local area and Edward Hasted dedicated the second volume of his History of Kent to him. Viscount Sydney died in 1800. His son John Thomas Townshend inherited the title and estate. Although he lacked his father's political influence the second Viscount was a leading benefactor of local churches and charities. He extended the house by adding a billiard room, within the quadrangle, using panelling taken from Farrington's Place, a neighbouring house he had recently had demolished. On his death in 1831 he was succeeded by his son, John Robert Townshend. His wife Emily was the daughter of the Marquess of Anglesey, the Duke of Wellington's second in command at the battle of Waterloo. He often stayed at Frognaal and one of the rooms decorated with his family paintings was named after him. Lord Sydney pursued a career in the Royal Household serving as both Lord Chamberlain (1859-1866 and 1868-1874) and Lord Steward (1880-1885). Created an earl in 1874 he died at Frognaal in 1890. He had no children so the titles became extinct and on the death of Countess Sydney in 1893 the property passed to his nephew the Honourable Robert Marsham, son of Lord Sydney's sister, Lady Romney on condition that he added Townshend to his name.

Robert Marsham-Townshend died in December 1914 and the following year his son, Hugh Sydney Marsham-Townshend sold Frognaal and 1740 acres of land to the government as the site for a new hospital. At the same time the contents of the house were auctioned off, including 284 paintings, 1048 books, vast quantities of furniture, porcelain, plate and antiques of every description. The hospital named after Queen Mary, who acted as its patron was built using funds raised by the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem. The first patients were admitted in July 1917 and the hospital soon became a pioneering centre for plastic surgery for soldiers wounded in the First World War. The original hospital closed in 1929, but re-opened the following year under the auspices of London County Council. In 1948 it was taken under the control of the National Health Services. Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup is today the principal general hospital for the district. The old house, which for many years was used for administrative offices, has now been converted into special retirement housing.