

Oak House, Bexleyheath

Oak House, on the south side of the Broadway near Gravel Hill, had been used from 1903 to the 1979 as Council Offices. For many years the tram shed stood behind it in what had been its grounds.

At the time of the Inclosure of Bexleyheath, Neil Malcolm of Lamorbey was allotted a large piece of land including the plot on which this house was soon to be built. He seems to have disposed of it very quickly, for the rating assessments of the Heath, which began in 1816, do not mention him as a landowner there. In 1817 the rate book refers to a house owned by James Russell. Its rateable value was £40, which was much the biggest in the area and it is probable that it was the house later known as Oak Villa later still as Oak House or Bexleyheath College. The house was unoccupied until 1821, when a Captain Hackett lived there. Its R.V. had then been reduced to £25. Hackett had left by the end of 1822 and it stood empty until April 1824, when the tenant is said in the rate book to be a Mr Bartlett. By October 1824 John James Bartlett is owner as well as occupier.

From now on we have title deeds as well as the rate books as sources for the history of the house. Bartlett lived there until his death in 1845. He left the house to his widow, Maria, who followed him in 1849. Their executors sold it to James Brooker of Pimlico for £1605. He let it to tenants for short periods; a Mr Green for about two years, then a Mr Clark and perhaps a Mr Hood for much shorter tenancies. Brooker died in 1852 and his widow, Elizabeth Brooker, came to live at Oak House. She married a second husband, George Hobson Howe, in 1855. He also died before her, in 1868. She died in 1875, leaving the property (to which she and her second husband had added by purchasing two small plots) in trust for William Brooker, the infant son of John Brooker of Macclesfield, a bookseller. He was presumably a relative of her first husband.

Meanwhile, she and her husband had let the house in 1863 to Samuel Barber, a schoolmaster. One of his contemporaries wrote in later years: "Mr Samuel Barber kept a boarding school at 'The Ferns'... [he] was greatly loved by his pupils, and their numbers increased so that he had to move to more commodious quarters at Oak House ... somewhat late in life he married his French teacher". (Buckland, p402). In a lease dated 1877 Barber undertook to "reconstruct the

office part of the house, build additional rooms and make improvements according to a specification." This may have been by way of regularising some alterations that had already taken place, for the rateable value had risen from £40 to £72 in 1846 and again to £82 in 1873, while it did not change in 1877 or the following years. A plan of the house drawn in 1877 strongly suggests that enlargements had already taken place, for it shows a projecting wing which is labelled "Schoolroom". It was in the Oak Villa schoolroom that the Bexley Heath Improvement Society's first meeting had been held in 1869. (Castells, p. 112).

Barber was succeeded as master of the school by George Edward Oxley. He took over the lease from Barber in 1883 and bought the property from William Brooker in 1888 with money advanced by way of a mortgage by Charles John Last of Windsor, whose daughter joined with Oxley in 1902 in selling it to John Ellingham of Bexleyheath, a builder, for £2600.

The U.D.C. bought it the following year for £2820 plus £200 for solicitors' and agents' fees. Oak House was pulled down in 1979 to make way for Bexley Council's Civic Offices.

Sources:

Bexley parish rate books.

Abstract of Title to Oak House, 1902. (D. 237)

Bexley U.D.C. minutes, 16 February 1903

Buckland, Bexleyheath

Castells, Bexleyheath & Welling

Note on John James Bartlett

It appears from an examination of the Bexley parish records that Bartlett was active in public life in the district. He was elected to the Select Vestry (a committee that administered the parish workhouse and other poor law matters) from 1827 to 1836 (when the parish ceased to have direct responsibility for poor law administration). He was a commissioner of the local Court of Requests (a court for disputes about small debts) from 1828 to 1838. He was Overseer of the Poor for the parish in 1830 and nominated several times for the post of Surveyor of the Highways of the parish. He was also appointed to some ad hoc committees.