

Hurst Place and Hurst Farm, Bexley

Notes based on manorial surveys, Bexley rate books, an article by J.H. Aird and E.B. Sinfield (in Hurstra Bulletin, September 1957) and other papers at Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre.

1. The name "Walter atte Hurst" occurs in a subsidy roll of 1348 but this is not evidence for the existence of any particular house at that time. See the annual reports of Woolwich & District Antiquarian society. Vol. XXIII, p.33.
2. The manorial survey of 1608 mentions 40 acres of arable and woodland at Herst, and also Herst Field, Herst Spring, Great Hurst and Little Hurst but there is no suggestion of a house such as Hurst Place. See typed transcript of this survey, pp. 6,11, and 23.
3. The survey of 1681 says that one Elizabeth Cooper, widow, owned a house and other property at Hurst. It stood on the south side of the highway from Bexley to Halfway Street and there was a barn on the other side of the road. Her tenant was Henry Thorowgood. See our copy of this survey, p.35.
4. The old maps are mostly on too small a scale to be much help. The name "Hurst" occurs on Bowen's map of Kent (1762). The Andrewes, Dury, map of 1769 shows a small cluster of buildings at Hurst. Later maps all name the spot but we cannot infer anything about Hurst Place or Hurst Farm from them.
5. The main source is the series of rate books for the parish of Bexley, reaching back with few breaks to 1790. They indicate that Hurst Farm existed before Hurst Place but an unfortunate gap in the series between 1796 and 1807 makes exact dating difficult. The names "Hurst Place" and "Hurst Farm" do not occur in these books before about 1860 but one can trace the first occurrence of the names with some confidence. By this we learn as follows.

Hurst Farm

Owners: Thomas Coventry, 1790-1836, Lewin, 1836-1839, Lord Bexley and the Vansittart family, 1839-1931

Occupiers: H. Watkins, 1790-1831; G. W. Skeen, 1813-1815, J. Littlewood, 1815-1822; Saunders, 1822-1826; Barlow, 1826-1833; Dowling, 1833-1848; James Brown, 1848-1855, Burton, 1855-1860; Thomas Banks 1860-1879; W. & E. Vinson, 1879-1899; Harry Vinton, 1899-1931

Hurst Place

Owners: Littlewood, 1808-1823; Joseph Watson, 1823-1832; Watson's executors, 1832-1839; Lord Bexley and the Vansittart family, 1839-1931 (or perhaps the Kinnisons bought it, circa 1923)

Occupiers: Littlewood, 1808-1823; Joseph Watson, 1823-1827; W.A. Meriton, 1827-1842; Lt. Col. Dickson, 1842-1848; James Brown, 1855; Major Rutherford, 1855-1857; G. G. Newman, 1857-1885; Mrs Newman, 1885-1888; Charles Carrington, 1888-1894; Robert Moore, 1894-1899; Alfred Henry Houlder, 1899-1909; J. A. Kinnison, 1909-1923; Clive Kinnison, 1923-1931

The rate books at Hurst Place do not continue after 1931.

6. Notes on some of the people listed above.

Thomas Coventry was Lord of the Manor of North Cray, as were Lord Bexley (Nicholas Vansittart, Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1812-1823) and his successors. The Lewin family owned The Hollies and much of the land in that area. The Vinson's were an old Erith family who extended their possessions considerably in the 19th century. In 1949 the Secretary of the Hurst Horticultural Society quoted Henry Vinson as saying that the farmhouse was over 300 years old and the barn probably of the same age, though a floor had been added to it in 1811 for a hop-pressing room and the second oast house had been built at the same time. Mr Newman extended Hurst Place and planted some trees. Mr Houlder added the billiards room. Mr and Mrs Kinnison built a servants' wing and an observatory.

7. Other notes.

Hurst Place was used as a convalescent home in the 1914-1918 war. In the 1939-1945 war its cellars were used as A.R.P. shelters. The council bought it in 1946 and housed bombed-out families in it. Later in c1957/1958 rooms overlooking the terrace were used by Hurst Junior School for first year pupils as an overflow whilst new buildings were being erected at the main school in Dorchester Avenue where the remaining three year groups were taught. The toilets were outside across a yard in an out building and the children played in what is now the car park. It is now used as a community centre. The main road, which originally passed close in front of Hurst Place and Farm, was diverted in 1865 to its present route. An official plan of this diversion has survived. It shows the relative positions of the building and the adjoining lands.

Hurst Farm was bought by Harry Vinson in 1934 and re-sold by him to W.H. Penfold. He sold it to Walmont Properties, Ltd., in 1937. Bexley Corporation bought it in 1948. It was described in 1955, when it was demolished, as a half-timbered, stucco-covered, semi-cruck type of building with king posts, constructed of red brick, with central chimneys. Its timbers were roughly adzed beams, some of them showing signs of use in another building. A yellow brick wing had been added, probably not more than 40 years earlier.

Note: Bexleyheath Observer reprinted an advertisement from The Times of 1854 about Hurst Place on 23 May 1974.