

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS - THE EVER-CHANGING COUNTRY HOUSES OF BYFLEET

Iain Wakeford 2014

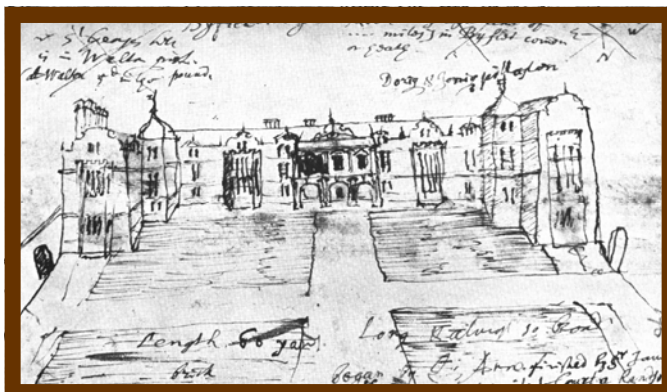


In earlier articles I have looked at the history of Byfleet Manor, notably at the time of the Black Prince, but the house we see today (in the adverts for the National Lottery and as Dame Maggie Smith's house in Downton Abbey), is far from medieval. Indeed the Manor House at Byfleet has been built and rebuilt so many times in the past, that a complete history would probably take up a whole book.

In the 1540's the Manor of Byfleet was the home of Sir Anthony Browne, Master of the

King's Horse to Henry VIII. It is said that when he was given Newark Priory at the time of the dissolution, he demolished the old monastery and used the material to rebuild the house at Byfleet.

Later, in the early 17th century, the manor became part of the Duchy of Cornwall, but in 1616 the Queen Consort, Anne of Denmark, was granted the manor and park starting extensive repairs (her accounts showing £250 spent in 1617), part of which are claimed to be incorporated into the present house.



John Aubrey in his *Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* described Byfleet as a 'noble house of brick begun by Queen Anne, who lived not to finish it; but this was done by Sir James Fullerton', although John Evelyn in his diary of 1678 mentioned 'My Lord St Alban's house at Byfleet, an old large



building' which in 1686 is further described as 'a great old messuage or house called Byfleet House, which is in so much decay that the revenue of the Park will not be sufficient to maintain the same'.

Although Aubrey's work was published in the

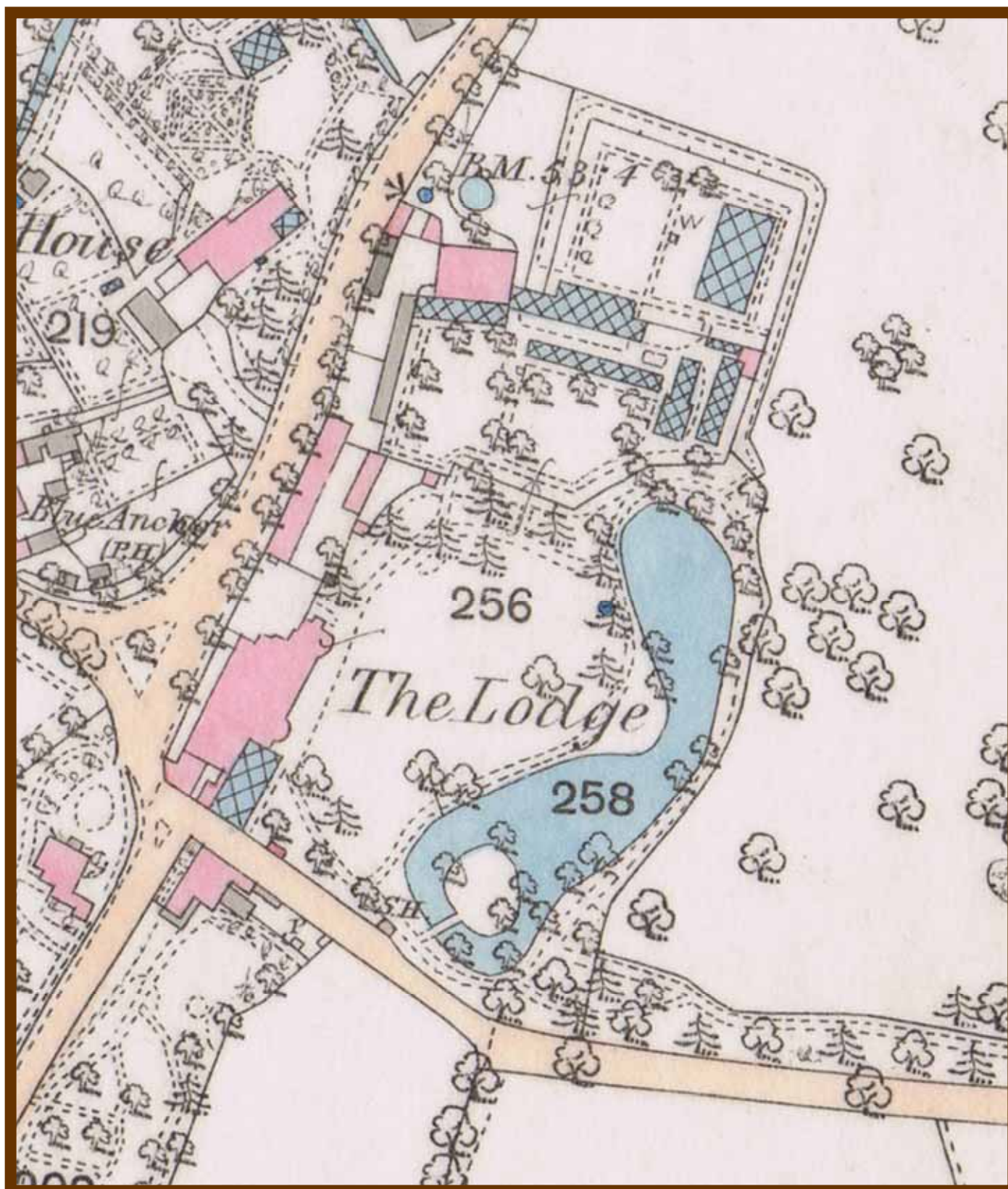
early 18th century (after he had died), the work was actually begun in 1673 and it seems strange that 'the noble building' less than sixty years old when viewed by Aubrey some time in (or about) 1673, should be 'old' only five years later when Evelyn visited and 'great old' and 'in so much decay' eight years after that, when the tenant of the property, William Sutton, petitioned parliament for permission to pull it down and replace it with a much smaller house. The Surveyor General, a gentleman by the name of Sir Christopher Wren, evidently agreed that the house could be rebuilt.

In the early part of the 20th century, Edward Warren was employed to carry out restoration work on Byfleet Manor House (probably adding the two side wings). He later wrote a report for the Surrey Archaeological Society Collections in 1907.

After removing ivy growing up the front of the building he found that the 'string course' or stone band on the line of the first floor 'consisted almost entirely of Jacobean window-jambs and sills, the mouldings of which are turned inside while the plain or "bed" faces are presented to public view as a flat or square stone band.'

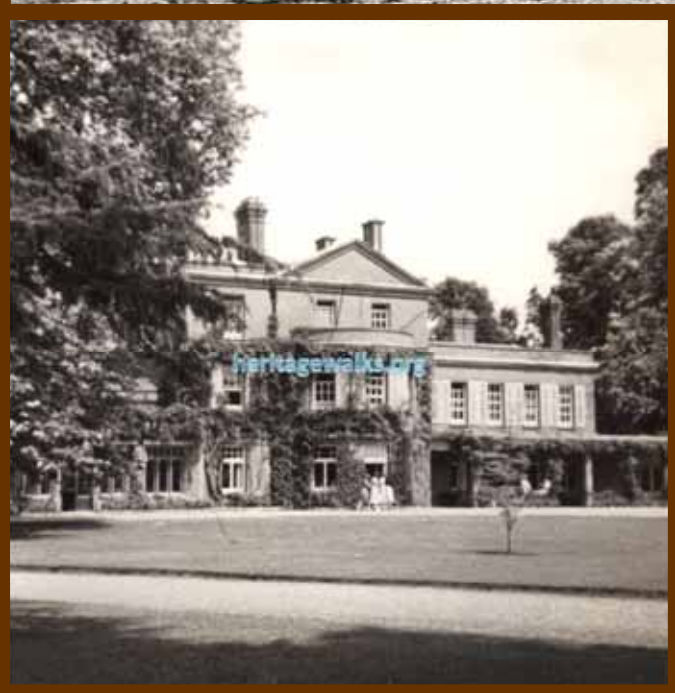
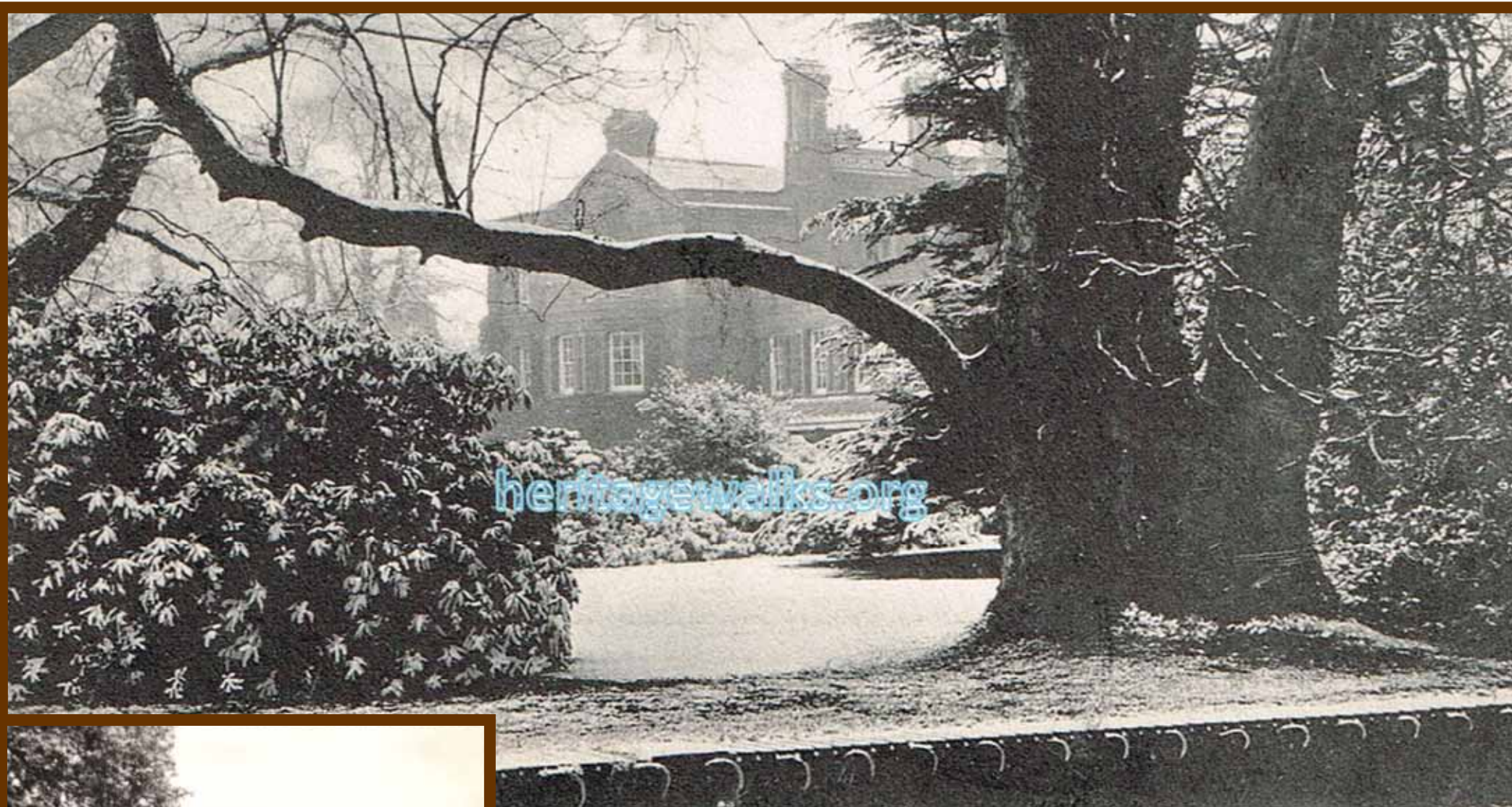
So as we can see, Byfleet Manor House is the result of centuries of recycling and re-using material from elsewhere, which is also what happened with another old building in the village where the Clock House is said to incorporate the balustrade from the old Waterloo Bridge!

The Oatlands Estate map of 1822 shows a very small house on the site called "Byfleet Cottage", but the listing notes it as dating from the 18th and 19th century – the name 'Clock House' being first recorded in about 1912 by which time presumably the old cottage had been massively extended and added to.



The Clock House, Byfleet.





Another local mansion that has been rebuilt and extensively added to over the years is West Hall, by the Wey Navigation off Parvis Road.

The deeds mention 'tenement, barns, stables, gardens, orchard and 6 acres of land' belonging to Richard West in 1777, with 'West Lodge' being owned by Robert Sparkes in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

In 1812 Robert Sparkes sold the estate (which by now included several properties and about two or three hundred acres of land) to his brother in law, Thomas Tickner, who sold the house in 1817 to James Spakes for £3,990.

James Spakes, later sold the property to Robert Hay Murray, J.P., - which is why the lane from



Byfleet Church (over the M25) towards the house is called Murray's Lane – who in turn sold the property to F.C. Stoop (hence –Stoop's Bridge, an alternative name to Murray's Bridge over the Wey Navigation).

In 1890 Frederick Cornelius Stoop pulled down the old house and built the mansion we see today. He was a Dutch oil tycoon, later becoming a leading light in the newly merged Shell and Royal Dutch Oil Company.

Stoop was a great benefactor to the village paying for the building of the Village Hall in Byfleet, setting up the boat club on the Wey Navigation, giving money for the construction of St John's Church at West Byfleet and for the Waif's and Stray's Society homes at Pyrford. He died in 1933, after which the house was put to numerous uses including accommodation for Land Army girls during the Second World War and later as offices.



GRASMERE - ONE OF THE VANISHING MANSIONS OF BYFLEET

Many old farms and mansions in Byfleet have not been so lucky – although the names of many have been preserved in the more humble housing estates that have taken their place.

The maisonettes at Old Orchard stand on the site of what was a Queen Anne house called Old Lodge, formerly known as Albany Lodge or House, in which the Rev Joseph Spence lived from 1749 to 1768. Another occupier, from 1879 to 1882, was the widow of the writer Charles Kingsley.

Grasmere, shown here, was once known as Atkins and later as Green Lane Cottage, the earliest known record of which goes back to 1749 when it belonged to a Martin Freeland.

During the 19th century the property passed through the hands of many local people, including a gentleman called John Barnes in 1835 (who lived at another large house called The Cedars) and later the Stevens family who in 1887 built a house called Weymede in the grounds.



ANOTHER LONG-LOST MANSION - SHEERWATER COURT



Almost opposite the entrance to the Sheerwater Estate off Sheerwater Road used to stand this property – Sheerwater Court.

It was the home of the Ricardo family and later the Gibbs, another group of local philanthropists who in 1885 paid for the tower

and bells of Ottershaw Church.

In 1898 Mr Hugh Fortesque Locke-King, who had already constructed the New Zealand Gold Course just up the road, built a nine-hole golf course on the fields behind the house, before going on to lay out the Bleakdown Course (now West Byfleet Golf Club) in 1906 – the same

year he started construction of Brooklands Motor Racing Track in Byfleet.

The little nine-hole Sheerwater Course did not last long, and in the early 1930's when Sheerwater Court was sold and demolished it too was developed with what is now Woodlands and Hollies Avenues.