

Northcourt Farm

Northcourt was a grange or home farm of Abingdon Abbey. It was not named in the Domesday Survey of 1085 but was included in the great manor of Barton. It is first mentioned in c.1184-5 in the Abbey Chronicle as being assigned to the Monk of the Works - *monachus de opere* – as the produce of the farm was dedicated to the upkeep of the fabric of the great Abbey Church of St. Mary. The Tithe Barn was built in the 13th century for tithes of wool, corn, and other produce. (The great barns at Barton and Cholsey had already disappeared by 1910.)

Northcourt was near enough for the monks to walk up and oversee or work on the farm and return to the monastery at night. The monks would have stayed in a building on Northcourt Lane where the Old Farmhouse is now. The farm buildings in Northcourt were burnt down in riots against the Abbey in 1327, together with 150 quarters of corn and malt of the previous harvest, so the present farmhouse may have its origins in a 14th century re-building.

The Abbey's holding at Northcourt was a detached part of St. Nicolas parish. A long-running dispute between St. Helen's and St. Nicolas over the parish tithes was finally settled in 1372, making Abingdon a divided parish. St. Nicolas was granted the Abbey site and several detached portions – Bayworth, Northcourt, Fitzharris and Ock Mill. At Northcourt this included the land on which the medieval “curia” and farm buildings stood, with an adjacent close and a separate portion of arable and pasture connected by a long narrow roadway, possibly the monks' path to their properties at Sunningwell. The parish boundary runs through the old farmhouse along the passage from the front to the back door; when the bounds were beaten, a cross was made in the lintel over the back door. St. Nicolas parish was the area on which the monks “actively or constructively dwelt”, so the part of the house to the right of the front door which was in St. Helen's parish may originally have been a separate building such as a kitchen.

After the Black Death the Abbey increasingly leased out its lands to tenants. However, in 1473-4 the Abbey was still working land at Northcourt when Florence Wolley was Monk of the Work; but before the dissolution about 92 acres had been let off to make up a farm of medium size, later known as Lynges farm or Goodlucks, at the rear of Boar (now Bath) Street and Broad Street. One of the last acts of the Abbey was to lease this farm to one John Kepe in October 1537, but James I's Charter of 1609 still mentions a Monk of the Works as ‘lately’ owning 92 acres in Abingdon fields, part of the manor of Norecotte!

The St. Nicholas portion of Northcourt was bought from the Crown in 1547 by John Lyon, a large-scale speculator in abbey lands. It passed by marriage into the Hyde family until in 1707 the estate was sold to Sir John Stonhouse of Radley and thence to the Bowyers of Radley Hall. Other portions of the original Northcourt Manor went elsewhere and were combined in the eighteenth century to form the estate purchased in 1819 by Henry Knapp, an Abingdon banker, who built the fine mansion known as Northcourt House. His son, Henry Knapp, jun., absconded in 1847 and shortly after became bankrupt. The house and 163 acres were sold at auction in 1848 to the Bowyer family and Northcourt house became the family dower house. When Sir George Bowyer became bankrupt the house was bought by Mr M.T. Tatham whose

family occupied the house for nearly 100 years. Following its use by the College of Further Education, it is once again in private hands.

Northcourt Farm was leased to Mr James Candy in 1937. He purchased the farm buildings and 5 acres of land from the Tatham family in 1946 and built up a successful dairy business. At that time the farm buildings consisted of the 13th century Tithe Barn, two large barns of Berkshire type of c.1750, a medieval bothy which would have housed the pigs with the swineherd or farm worker living above; cattle pens, stables and dairy buildings. In 1960 the redundant Tithe barn was sold to the Parish of Abingdon to create a church for north Abingdon, Christ Church, which opened in 1961. The bothy was demolished in the 1970s and replaced by a modern office block. The whole site apart from the farmhouse was acquired by Christ Church in 2001 for church and community use.

Judy Thomas
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Sources

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