

THE MANOR OF BARTON

The Manor of Barton was the original landholding of Abingdon Abbey which is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. Its lands extended almost to Oxford, and included Cumnor, Seacourt, Wytham, Shippon, Sandford, Bayworth, Sugworth, Sunningwell and Kennington. – in all some 60 hides (a hide was a land unit reckoned as about 120 acres) before 1066. It had 64 villagers and 36 smallholders, plus “*10 merchants dwelling in front of the church gate*”.

Barton itself had 2 slaves, 24 freedmen, 2 mills, 5 fisheries, 200 acres of meadow, pasture land and two more mills in the Abbot’s court. Barton provided vital supplies for the monks of the Abbey – 5,600 eggs and 136 hens a year, and five loads of straw three times a year for the floor of the refectory.

The Manor House, ‘le Berton’ was originally within the Abbey precinct in the area bounded by the line of the later railway on the south, the Vineyard on the west, the Radley Road to the north and Barton Lane to the east, an area later known as Convent Close.* Other spellings include Bertone, Bartonne, and Bertun.

The house was burned down by rioters on their way to attack the Abbey in 1327 and probably rebuilt in 1328, but it was still within the Abbey boundary in 1372. Some time later (date unknown) it was moved outside the Abbey boundary to the east of Barton Lane and renamed Barton Court. The land formerly called ‘le Berton’ was renamed Convent Close.

At the time of the Dissolution of the Abbey, Barton Manor was occupied by the last Abbey Steward, John Audlett. On his death in 1537 his widow, Katharine Audlett inherited the lease, which passed to her cousin Thomas Reade on her death. In 1548 Thomas bought the manor, and in 1553 he rebuilt the old house with stone from the tower of the abbey church. The buildings at this time are said to have covered four acres. In the Deeds the King reserved the right of Royal Hospitality for himself and his descendants, and the place is described as “The King’s House at Barton

The Reade’s were strong Royalists and Thomas Reade’s grandson, Sir Thomas, entertained Charles I and Henrietta Maria at Barton several times. On 27th August 1629 in returning from Woodstock they stayed at ‘Berton’. In 1636 and again in 1638 the St. Helen’s Accounts record: ‘To the ringers when the King came to Bartonn, 16s; to the ringers upon the King’s returne, 16s’. Finally, on April 17th 1644, the King and his pregnant Queen had a tearful parting at Barton before she took the road to Exeter and thence to France. They were never to meet again.

During the Civil War, when Abingdon was occupied by Parliamentary troops, Barton was still held for the King and several attempts were made by the Royalists to retake the town. The house was finally burned down, probably in the course of an ambush in 1646. Compton Reade, the then owner of Barton Manor, left England but returned with Charles II at the Restoration of the Monarchy. He decided not to repair the old house, but built a new mansion in the grounds which was known as Barton Court.

The estate passed by marriage into the Stonehouse-Bowyer family around 1800. Its last private owner was a Mr Player Isaacs. In 1926, Barton Court and about 47 acres of land were bought by Our Lady’s Convent.** An area of about 5 acres became the school’s sports ground and the house became a nursing home run by the nuns. In 1935 the house was enlarged and the nursing home was leased out. In 1960 a Catholic Primary School, St. Edmund’s, was built on another 3½ acres. In 1966 the nursing home closed following the death of the matron, and the house was demolished in 1967 after it became vandalised. The stones became part of the foundations of Didcot Power Station. In 1974, 15 acres, including

land on which Barton Court once stood, were sold by the Community to help finance extensions to the school buildings. In 1976 the plans were passed for a Council Housing estate of 140 homes. The ruins of the 16th century manor house still stand on the green surrounded by the houses of Sherwood Avenue.

A strong oak door, formerly the entrance to Barton Court, is now one of the entrances to the Convent.

** The nuns recalled that, when Barton was put up for sale in the 1920s, the Convent tried to buy some of the land for a school playing field, but they were told that they could only have the land if they bought the house as well!! The Mother Superior described this as like 'buying a grocer's shop for a packet of pins!'

Some information from Mother Catherine of Our Lady's Convent.

Illustrations: Two photographs of Barton Court (from NMR) – 'Abingdon in Camera' no.118; 'More of Abingdon Past & Present' p.130 (with ruin). Old door.

BARTON COURT FARM

Barton Court Farm is the site of an excavation on farmland to the north-east of Barton Manor. The site was discovered by aerial photography in 1969 and excavated prior to housing development in 1973. The dig revealed a farmstead dating from the Iron Age around 50 BC, followed by a new farmstead about 70 BC after the Roman conquest, but still occupied by native Celts.

About 270 AD a much more substantial farmhouse or villa was constructed and in the fourth century a new complex of yards and paddocks was built around the farm. The buildings were systematically demolished in the fifth century and the stone carted away. In the middle of the fifth century Saxon settlers appear. They buried their dead in the remains of the Roman buildings. There is also evidence of Saxon settlement in the shape of sunken huts, timber houses and fences.

The area continued as farmland until 1973.

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