



The Manor House in about 1960 (Photo: Hammersmith Public Library)

SANDFORD MANOR HOUSE, FULHAM

KEITH WHITEHOUSE

WITHIN the grounds of Fulham Gasworks, only 50 yards from Stanley Bridge, the boundary between Chelsea and Fulham, in the New King's Road, a manor house has stood for over 600 years.

In the Patent Rolls at the Public Record Office and in the Court Rolls of Fulham Manor, several persons are mentioned bearing the name "Sandford" or "de Sandford." During the reign of Edward I a "John de Saundeford" held a tenement in Fulham and in 1363 there is mention of another "John Sandford" of Fulham.

London and Middlesex Fines for 7 Ric. II (1383) shows that a "John Saunford" of Fulham Purchased

1. Harleian Mss. 608, pg. 5, British Museum.

from "John Wodhous" a messuage in Fulham. The Court Rolls for 1391-92 speak of a "John Samfford," presumably the same person. This could mean that this was the Manor of Sandford, because a Court Baron, held in 1430, states that this Manor was formerly in the possession of "John Sampford." In 1383, Warren de Lisle died at a house in Fulham, which he held from "John Saundford," this house must have been Sandford Manor that is later spoken of as Lord Lisle's Place. At the time of his death, the Manor consisted of 1 messuage of 3 acres, 3½ acres of meadow land and 1 acre of pasture land.¹

During Henry VII's reign the Abbots of Westminster became the owners. In 1509 the Abbot was ordered to scour the ditch (creek) between Fulham

and Chelsea, while in 1549 the church surrendered the Manor to Henry VIII in exchange for other lands. It remained Crown lands until Queen Mary, in 1558, sold it to William Maynard, a citizen and mercer of London. At this time the Manor consisted of 43 acres of arable land and 2 acres of meadow.

Local legend has it that Nell Gwynne resided here and that the present house was built for her by Charles II; both stories are somewhat dubious. However, Lord Macaulay, the 19th century historian, said that he believed the Nell Gwynne legend. Thomas Faulkner in his *History of Fulham* also believed the legend and states that a plaster medallion of Nell was found on the estate.² Faulkner obviously considered that house to be one of the more important ones in Fulham as there is an engraving of it on the title page of his book. Lysons makes no mention of the legend in the section on the Manor.³ Other relics discovered are a thimble bearing the initials N.G. (Nell Gwynne?) engraved on it, and a so-called Freemason's badge or jewel, purported to have belonged to Charles II, was found under the floor boards of a room on the first floor.

In the *Domestic Intelligencer* for 5th August 1679, is the following: "We here that Madame Ellen Gwyn's mother, sitting lately by the water side at her house by the neat-houses, near Chelsey, fell accidentally into the water and was drowned." A contemporary diarist says that she "fell in a ditch." These two references together suggest that it must

have been the creek and not the Thames.

From 1762 the Manor ceased to be solely a residence and was turned over for manufacturing purposes. A saltpetre (pottasium nitrate) factory was set up, to manufacture it for use in the making of gunpowder. The rate books for 1785 state that the "Salt-Petre-Manufactory" is empty.

Three years later in 1788, William Howard purchased the Manor. The rate books for 1790 show that James Ruel or Rewell (Rewell Street runs along side the house) is rated for the "Salt Petre House," which was being used as a pottery for the making of crucibles, mugs, etc. The Manor was again sold in 1798 to Henry Mist, who rented the house to a Mr. Hart who in turn converted it into a cloth factory.

Once again, in 1811, the Manor was sold this time to Messrs. Brown and Co. for the making of a patent cask by machinery; Mr. Brown stated that the premises consisted of extensive and capacious warehouses, workshops and other buildings where 200-300 people are employed. These buildings may indicate that the house itself was not used as a factory but may have been offices or a residence or both. During the Napoleonic Wars, the factory made large numbers of wooden canteens for the use of soldiers; this sideline stopped at the cessation of the War. By 1816 the business of making casks had ceased.

Mr. Brown then instituted a plan and issued a circular, "for alleviating during the approaching winter the distresses of the poor." He proposed to take in 2,000 people to feed and house them and find them employment. The employment was the cutting and bundling of firewood to be sold to the public at a reduced price. The plan had the patronage of the Bishop of London, and commenced on the 23rd December, 1816 but ceased on 1st March 1817.

From 1821 the Manor was rented by Robert Lyon who ran a bleach and dye works. The dyehouse still remains today and is on a site then known as Sandford Field.

In 1824 the Imperial Gas Company purchased the entire Manor and began to erect their gasholders. Later, in 1844, the house was much modernised and divided into two separate residencies.

The house stands in its own grounds of approximately an acre, including a large garden at the rear; in front there is a semicircular drive. In one corner of the garden is a lily pond no more than six feet across and may perhaps be an old well. There are fig and pear trees, together with an ancient mulberry supposed to have been planted by Nell Gwynne. Apart from the fact that a sloping pathway leads to the house due to the gasworks grounds being built up when the creek was dried and turned into a rail-



The fine oak staircase
(Photo: Paul Dong)

2. T. Faulkner, *An Historical and Topographical Account of Fulham* (1813).
3. Daniel Lysons, *The Environs of London* (1795).

way, the garden has remained much the same for the past two hundred years.

The house faces east and consists of two main storeys with four attic rooms making a third storey, and a cellar. Another legend is that in the cellar a blocked up arch forms an entrance to a subterranean tunnel going under the creek to the Horticultural Ground, Chelsea Vale, and is even said to penetrate as far as the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, a major link with Nell Gwynne. This legend cannot be taken seriously.

An early print shows that the house originally had three gables; the three attic windows which were once flush with the facade, are now dormer windows; these gables were removed and replaced by a low parapet. There are seven bracing rods at the top of the house, which would appear to indicate that the gables were removed because of a structural fault.

The plan of the house is rectangular with a small addition on the south side of the 1820's. The two chimney stacks have been rebuilt, probably on the original plan and are Elizabethan in character.

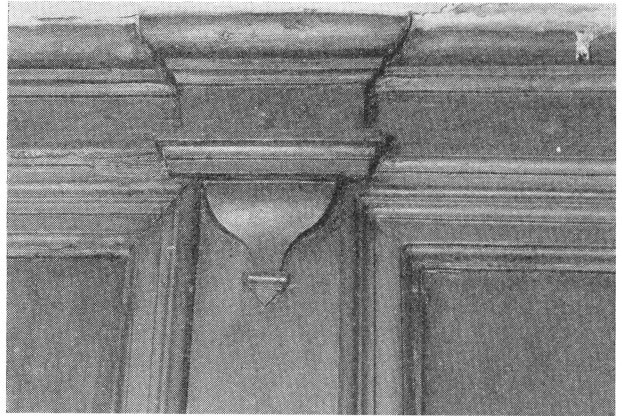
The fine oak staircase situated in the centre of the building, with its wood-panelled walls in the main entrance hall, is the gem of the house. It rises to the top storey in seven short flights of six steps each around the central well. It has richly moulded strings and handrail, square newel posts with moulded pendants and square finials and turned balusters. The staircase and panelling are considered by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments to be fine examples of the period of Charles II. On each of the half landings a door faces the stairs approaching them, while each of the two large landings have two doors which face each other.

Panelling has been found in the drawing room, overlooking the back lawn, under planks of wood nailed to it covered with wallpaper. The twenty-odd rooms of the house lead into one another in a rambling way and in the case of one or two you have to pass through one room in order to reach another. This may indicate that the house was originally larger with other stairs.

The date of the present house is uncertain but is believed to have been built in the latter part of the 17th century, although there are indications of a previous house, particularly as we know there was an earlier house in medieval times. On the north side, bricked up windows and possible entrances, seem to indicate that the house had a wing or wings. Also, the back of the roof has a gap in it with a flat roof-top more modern in character. This may be an indication that this part of the house was originally a courtyard.

After the house was altered in the 1840's, the resident was Daniel McMinn, manager of the Counting

4. C. J. Fèret, *Fulham Old and New* (3 vols.) (1900).



A detail of the panelling

(Photo: Paul Dong)

House and Stores Department of the Gas-works. He lived here for over fifty years until his death in 1899. The house was unoccupied for several years and began to decay. In 1900, Charles Fèret, the author of the monumental work on the history of Fulham,⁴ wrote to the *Fulham Chronicle* saying that the house and land had been put up for sale and unless a fund could be raised, he feared that the house was doomed. However, by 1907 when the London Survey Committee set up by the London County Council to record historical places in London, considered that Sandford Manor House was of such architectural and historical importance, that they authorised an architect, W. Arthur Webb, to do a survey and history of it.⁵

The Gas Company had by then repaired the house and put in new tenants, but the London Survey Committee were fearful about the future as it and its land were still up for sale.

However, the house and its garden have survived to the present day, due to its unique position within the grounds of the gasworks. Time has stood still and once in the garden it feels as though you could be anywhere deep in the countryside as the gasworks are hidden by its tall overhanging trees.

Unfortunately the house has been empty for several years and is suffering from the weather. The North Thames Gas Board have put it up for sale and state that the site will probably go to a developer. Fortunately the house is listed as a protected building of architectural or historical interest, classified Grade II, and cannot be demolished without the consent of the Minister of Housing on the advice of the Historic Building Division of the Greater London Council.

At this moment, a campaign is in full swing to prevent the house from deteriorating any further and to get it put to a good use for posterity.

5. W. Arthur Webb, *Sandford Manor*, Monograph no. 8, the London Survey Committee (1907).