

THE MANOR HOUSE, BYFLEET.

BY

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ALTHOUGH the Manor House as it stands to-day dates only from the reign of George I, its site is one of considerable historical interest.

Here, on "a green knoll, overlooking the river Wey," stood the hall or grange of Erlwin the Saxon, who held it under the Abbot of Chertsey in the days of the Confessor. Later on, there rose on this spot the Norman Manor House of the De Lucies, a family which numbered among its members a Bishop of Winchester, and a Grand Justiciar of England.

The list of the knightly owners of Byfleet ends early in the 14th century, when we find that the Manor House had become a royal hunting lodge, much used by the Plantagenet princes. Attached by Edward III to the Duchy of Cornwall, it became the property of the Princes of Wales, until Henry VIII, whose infancy is said to have been passed at Byfleet, included it in the Honour of Hampton Court.

Its last royal owner was Anne of Denmark, Queen Consort of James I, after whose death the house and manor were leased by the Crown to private individuals, with the Palace of Oatlands, Weybridge.

From *Domesday* Survey we learn that in Erlwin's days Byfleet had a church, mill, and fishery. The estate then consisted of two hundred acres, with six acres of meadow-land, and a wood yielding pannage for ten swine.

In the time of King Edward the Confessor it had been valued at 100s.; at the Survey it was stated to be worth £4.

In 1179 the manor belonged to Richard de Lucy, Justiciar of England, a trusty counsellor of Henry II, and a strong opponent of Archbishop Becket. He was Keeper of Windsor Castle and of the Tower. Byfleet was still held of the Abbot of Chertsey.

Richard's son, Geoffrey de Lucy I, was also a supporter of the Angevin kings. He held the Cap of State at the Coronation of Richard I, fought for John, and also for the boy king, Henry III, at the battle of the Fair of Lincoln in 1217. He married Juliana, widow of Peter de Stokes, was Governor of Jersey, and took part in the Crusade of 1236. He died in 1252.

His son, Geoffrey II, did not inherit his father's royalist views. He supported Simon de Montfort in the "Mad Parliament," signed the oath to abide by the arbitration of St. Louis in 1263, fought bravely at Evesham in 1265, and after the battle made a heroic attempt to hold Gloucester for the baronial party. Forced to surrender to Prince Edward, he received a free pardon and retired to his manor of Byfleet.

Poaching was at that time very prevalent in Surrey, and Sir Geoffrey seems to have made an attempt to check it. In 1267 he impleaded John le Fraunceys and others for entering his park and manor of Byfleet, and taking away deer, horses, and cattle.¹

In 1279 he claimed before the King's Justices at Guildford his rights as Lord of the Manor of Byfleet, and also to the fishery mentioned in *Domesday Book*; all his claims were allowed.² He died in 1284, seised of the manor of Byfleet, with the hamlets of Busseley (Bisley) and Frogbury, and the advowson of Byfleet Church held of the Abbot of Chertsey; paying one mark annually from the rents of Busseley, and the rest being held by service of half a knight's fee and suit at the hundred court of Godley.³ He was buried in the Church of the Grey Friars in London. He was succeeded by his son, another Geoffrey, of whom very

¹ Curia Regis Roll, 51 Hen. III, Hil. (No. 178), roll 10*d*.

² Assize Roll 876, m. 29.

³ Inq. p. m. Edw. I, File 38, No. 8.

little is known. In 1298 there is a record of a free pardon granted to one "Simon the Fisher of Byflete" for the murder of Gamelyn, and for robberies, on account of his services in Flanders.¹

In 1297 Geoffrey de Lucy received licence to enfeoff Sir Henry de Leybourne of the manor of Byfleet,² but from an inquisition taken in 1327 it would appear that the actual enfeoffment was made as early as 1294.³ Sir Henry was a member of the crusading Kentish family of that name; he was knighted by Edward I for distinguished bravery at the siege of Caerlaverock in Scotland, and is mentioned in Walter of Exeter's rhyming chronicle of that siege.

About the year 1300 he mortgaged Byfleet, with Weybridge, Bisley and Frogbury, to Ude Langton, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield.

In 1305 Henry de Leybourne still held Byfleet, for it was found that Philip de Willoughby (Wileby), who died in that year, held of him as of his manor of Byfleet certain lands in Buckland, co. Kent.⁴

When and why the manor became the property of the Crown has not been discovered; we only know that Edward II lived at Byfleet in the early part of his reign, and that writs and warrants signed by him on the spot are still in existence.

The most important warrant is that which ordered the arrest of the Knights Templars in England, signed on December 20th, 1307. Other writs signed in November, 1308, concern grants of money to his extravagant sister, Princess Mary, Prioress of Amesbury, who was addicted to gambling in spite of her vows as a nun. There is also a writ relating to a grant of money to some Jew converts.

Edward gave a charter of free-warren in Byfleet to the worthless Piers de Gaveston, who had married the

¹ Patent Roll 26 Edw. I. m. 9.

² Patent Roll 25 Edw. I, p. 2, m. 10.

³ Chan. Misc. Inquis., file 106.

⁴ Inq. p.m. Edw. I, File 116, No. 214.

King's niece, Margaret de Clare.¹ Manning believes that he made him a present of the whole manor.²

When young Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, was married at Guildford in 1310, Queen Isabella, who absolutely refused to meet the favourite, stayed at the Castle, while Edward, Princess Mary, and Gilbert's youngest sister, all went off to Byfleet on a visit to Gaveston and his wife.

In 1312 the angry nobles seized and executed Gaveston, and Edward retired to Byfleet in rage and grief.

He was there again in 1320, when the church was restored and re-dedicated, and also in 1321, when Humphrey de Waleden was appointed steward.

In 1324 or 1325, we learn that the parcel of the manor of Byfleet in Bisley (Busseleye), which consisted of 54 acres of land, 2 acres of meadow and 4 acres of wood, were seized into the King's hands by Thomas le Longes, his bailiff of the said manor. In 1327, John de Ardern and Agnes his wife, petitioned Queen Isabella for these lands, and referred to an inquisition which had been taken in March of that year, whereby it had been found that, in 1397-8, Henry de Leybourne had enfeoffed by charter Hugh de Smerhull of the Bisley lands; Hugh in turn had enfeoffed, in 1304-5, Avicia de Chabeham and her son Thomas, who by fine levied at Westminster in 1318-9, had granted the lands to John and Agnes de Ardern. The inquisition had further found that John and Agnes had not remitted the premises to Edward II, and that they held them of the Abbot of Chertsey by service of 13s. 4d. yearly. The petition was referred by the Queen to her son Edward III, who on 22nd May, 1328, ordered the Chancellor to do right in the matter, and if he delivered the lands to the said John and Agnes to assign others of equal value to Queen Isabella.³

The grant to Queen Isabella by Edward III of the

¹ Charter Roll I Edw. II, No. 7.

² Manning and Bray, *History of Surrey*, III, 183.

³ Chan. Misc. Inq., File 106 (formerly Inq. p. m. Edw. III, 2nd nos. 67).

the manor of Byfleet, then assessed at £40, together with other castles and manors for her life, was made on 1st February, 1326-7.¹ These lands were afterwards taken from her by the King, who in 1331 created his brother, John of Eltham, Earl of Cornwall, a title which Gaveston had held. The King at the same time granted him the manor of Byfleet.² When Prince John died unmarried in 1335, Edward granted the custody of the park and warren of Byfleet to John de Chestre for life;³ the King must have visited the manor occasionally, for he signed no less than twenty-six warrants at Byfleet in 1338.

In that year, on the Monday after the Feast of S. Matthew, Edward granted the manor and park of Byfleet to his son Edward—afterwards known as the Black Prince—and to his heirs for ever, provided that they were Dukes of Cornwall and eldest sons of the reigning sovereign. The grant stated that it was made in order that the prince might properly support the dignity of the Dukedom of Cornwall at that time conferred on him.⁴ The manor was attached to the Duchy of Cornwall until 1540.

In 1340 the King was again at Byfleet, and signed two warrants; five more were signed here in 1343. In 1346 the Black Prince made a grant of money to Sir Bartholomew de Burghersh charged on the rents of Byfleet. A gift to Sir Miles Stapylton, one of the first Knights of the Garter, of “a black nag from our stables at Byflete” is also on record.

The prince died of consumption in 1376, and his son, Richard of Bordeaux, succeeded to all his titles and dignities. The boy had been charged by his dying father to provide for his old and faithful servants, and the Patent Rolls show that he carried out these instructions.

¹ Patent Roll 1 Edw. III, p. 1, m. 2.

² Charter Roll 1 Edw. III, No. 12.

³ Patent Roll 1 Edw. III, p. 1, m. 39.

⁴ See the recital of the grant on Close Roll 1 Hen. IV, p. 1, m. 27.

Walter Payne, a valet, Thomas Tyle, the butler, "Cok" Ferrou, John Maudelyn, keeper of the wardrobe, and Alice his wife, all received pensions or grants charged on the rents of Byfleet.

In 1378 a restoration of the Manor House began, under William de Hamay as clerk of the works, and until 1389 there are constant references to wages for workmen, orders to cut wood, and inquiries into the state of the park fencing, which always appears to have been a difficulty on account of the scarcity of timber.

At this time Sir Peter de Courtenay was appointed keeper of the manor and park and of the venison therein, for life.

Richard II now granted the manor to Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland. He only held it for two years, and in 1391 the King resumed it. He then leased it for ten years to John, Bishop of Salisbury. At this time another clerk of the works was appointed and more building was going on.

In 1399 the revolution occurred which sent Richard to his dungeon at Pontefract and placed Henry IV on the throne. All the fallen King's grants were revoked by Parliament, and on October 15th Henry conferred the manor of Byfleet on Henry of Monmouth, as Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall and eldest son of the reigning sovereign.

The boy-prince was sent off to learn war under Hotspur in Wales, and Byfleet was let to Sir Francis à Court.

Sir Francis was afterwards a trusted friend and adviser of Prince Henry. He was once sent on an embassy to the Duke of Burgundy, concerning a proposed marriage of the prince with a princess of that House. His wife was Lady Alice de Vere, sister of the unfortunate Earl of Oxford.

Between 1410 and 1413 Prince Henry was constantly at Byfleet; he found it conveniently near London when the Council was sitting. After his accession to the throne there is little mention of the manor, excepting the records of appointments of parkers.

Henry VI took some interest in Byfleet, and in 1447 a considerable sum was paid for repairs done at Byfleet Park to the lodge itself, and to the bridge close to it; also for keeping the rabbits within the said park. Some stonework was unearthed in the garden in 1905 which may have belonged to this lodge.

The manor passed with the Duchy of Cornwall to the King's only son Prince Edward of Lancaster, and remained nominally his until his early death at Tewkesbury in 1471. It was then transferred to his unfortunate cousin Edward, Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward V, and then once more to Edward of Gloucester only son of Richard III, who died at the age of nine.

Arthur, Prince of Wales, son of Henry VII, was its next owner; Sir Thomas Bouchier being continued as keeper, by an exception in the Act of Resumption of Grants of 1 Henry VII,¹ with Thomas Poyntz as deputy. Prince Arthur died at Ludlow in April 1502, and the King transferred all his titles and lands to the second son, Henry, Duke of York, who succeeded to the throne in 1509 as Henry VIII.

Aubrey says that Henry was nursed at a house, situated on the Wey, between Newark Abbey and the Earl of St. Albans' Mill. This suggests the site of Byfleet Manor House—"the King's House," as it was often locally called. He afterwards speaks of the Dorney House at Weybridge. Tradition has always connected Henry's childhood with Byfleet, but there has been frequent confusion between these two houses even in later times. "King Henry's Room" was the name given to a small attic in the present Manor House; it is, of course, of far later date, but is lined with panelling from the Tudor building.

Sir Philip Draycott, writing to the Earl of Shrewsbury in September 1514, speaks of a visit of the King to Byfleet.² He says:—

"The King went to Oatlands, and there in the meads under Chertsey was killing of stags holden

¹ *Rot. Parl.* (Rec. Com.), VI, 359.

² *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, Vol. I., p. 873, No. 5383.

in for the purpose, one after another, all the afternoon, although they were warned by the trumpets and made known thereby if there did enter any deer of prize . . . and on Thursday the king lighted at Byfleet, and from there I took my leave, and from Oatlands he removes to Chobham or Woking, I know not whether the first, and then to Guildford, and so on to Windsor, and there Holy Rood Day, and by estimation he will be at every one of these places four days or thereabouts. Written at my house at Smithfield, next house to the Elephant (the new tavern), the 4th day of September, by the hand of

“Your assured old bedeman,

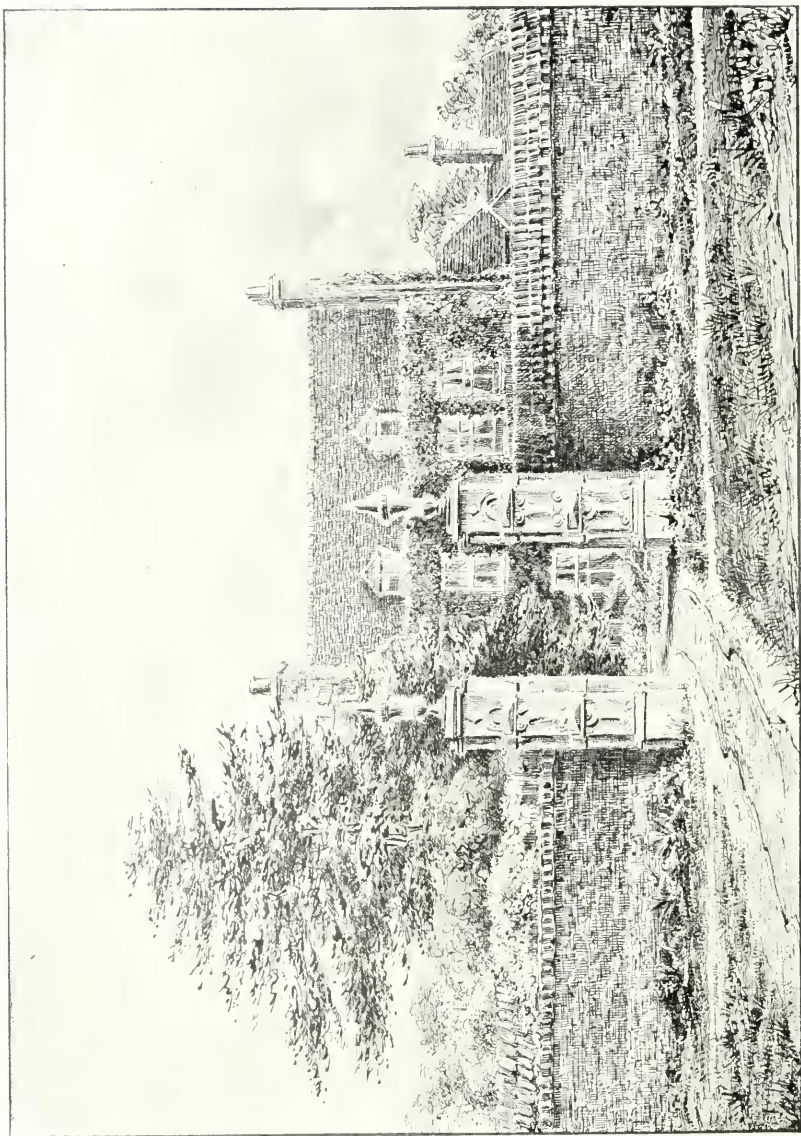
“PHILIP DRAYCOTT.”

In 1540 the King annexed Byfleet to the Honour of Hampton Court. He granted part of the estate to his Master of the Horse, Sir Anthony Browne, who had married Lady Elizabeth Kildare, the “Fair Geraldine” of Surrey’s poems. Sir Anthony built a house, called “Byfleet House,” near Byfleet Bridge; only the garden wall remains.

Norden, in his *Survey of Windsor Forest*, made about the year 1607, gives the following account of Byfleet:—

“Byflete Park in Surrey, whereof parte lyeth
 “within, and parte withoute the boundes of the
 “Forest, all yet belongeth to the Honor; whereof
 “Sir Edward Howard is Chief Keeper, and hath
 “about 100 fallowe deer, about 30 of antlers, and
 “14 Buckes. $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles in circuit and so much it
 “paleth; few or no timber trees to mayntayne the
 “fence. It containeth in quantity about 380 acres
 “of meane ground. The Hooping Bird (Wild Swan)
 “vulgarlie held to be ominous much frequenteth
 “this Parke. 1607.”

The plan of the park, which is appended to this notice, shows the old Manor House, a group of buildings



THE MANOR HOUSE, BYFLEET — THE ENTRANCE GATES.

of considerable size, with a square garden, one wall of which still stands. In 1609 James I granted the manor to his eldest son Prince Henry, but the latter died in 1612, at the age of nineteen, lamented by the whole nation. James then gave it to the Queen, Anne of Denmark, who took much interest in Byfleet.

In 1617 she was granted £250 for repairs which she had ordered at the lodge and park. In one of her letters to Buckingham, she speaks of having been over to "Byfield Park," as she calls it, from Oatlands, and of having found very few deer.

Another time she speaks of having sent twelve horses, a present from her brother, the King of Denmark, to Byfleet; she also thanks Buckingham for having arranged for some repairs to the fencing.

In 1618 a survey was made of the park, with a note relating to the profits of Sir Edward Howard from pasturing cattle there, about which the King would determine in the future.

The Queen then "began to build a noble house of brick" at Byfleet, according to Aubrey, but as she died in March 1619, after a long illness, very little can have been done. When the present house was built, between 1724-40, materials derived from an older house were used throughout, but whether from some part of Anne of Denmark's building or from the hunting-lodge shown in Norden's plan of 1607 it would be difficult to state with certainty. John Evelyn in 1678 visited the house, and speaks of it as "a large old building." He would hardly have called a house which had been standing a little over fifty years "old."

The forecourt, walls and gateway belong to the Jacobean period, and may have been erected by Anne or by Sir James Fullarton, who had been tutor to her son Prince Henry, and who, on the Queen's death, received Byfleet as a gift from the King. The land was to be held by him in trust for Prince Charles.

After the Restoration the manor came into the possession of Henry Jermyn, Earl of S. Albans, late Comptroller of the Household of Queen Henrietta Maria.

John Evelyn mentions him in his *Diary*, and visited him at the Manor House in 1678.

In 1690 a family named Warburton owned Byfleet Park, and while they were in possession the house was rebuilt. A tile from the roof stamped with the maker's name bears the date 1724, and in 1905 a halfpenny of 1734 was found embedded in the mortar of one of the walls. These dates, 1724-34, give some clue as to the period at which the old house was rebuilt.

In 1763 the house was rented by the Hon. Thomas Murray.

In 1773 Henry Pelham, Duke of Newcastle, leased Byfleet with Oatlands from the Crown.

In 1804 Frederick, Duke of York, son of George III, was empowered by Act of Parliament to purchase the Manors of Oatlands, Walton, and Byfleet. From this date all connection with the Crown ceased, with the exception of the presentation to the living.

The Duke of York mortgaged the property heavily, and at his death in 1826 the manor became the property of E. Ball Hughes, Esq.

In 1829 Lord King bought part of it, which he bequeathed in 1833 to his son, the Hon. P. J. Locke-King. The Manor House had, as a rule, been sub-let, and had passed through many vicissitudes. Portions of it were pulled down early in the 19th century.

In 1891 it was bought by Mrs. Albert Rutson, who added the wings. The old walls surrounding the fore-court and garden were repaired.

In 1905 Mrs. Rutson bought the adjoining farm-buildings and some of the land near them. Fine stone-work, evidently taken from the ancient hunting-lodge, was found forming pavement in the cattle-sheds.

In November 1905, on removing a thick growth of ivy from the Manor House, it was discovered that parts of the walls were in a bad condition, and that the roof was unsafe, owing to the fact that material from the more ancient house had been used throughout the Georgian re-building. Very careful repairs had to be carried out.

The fine old Scotch firs in the garden are said to have

been planted by James I to remind Anne of Denmark of her northern home.

The ancient drain in the garden is interesting. It probably belonged to the royal hunting lodge, and was long believed to be a subterranean passage on account of its size.

There is no ghost-story connected with the Manor House, but one or two half-forgotten legends linger still.

Anne of Denmark is said to have been seen moving through the lower rooms of the house; a very dim tradition describes a dwarf in purple velvet, who wanders in the fore-court.

A third story, and a quaint one, relates that Queen Anne came to Byfleet, and watched Marlborough win the Battle of Blenheim from the top of the hill on which Fox Warren now stands. This tale has evidently arisen from some confusion in the village mind between Anne of Denmark, Queen Consort of James I, and her great grand-daughter, Anne, Princess of Denmark by marriage, afterwards Queen of Great Britain, France and Ireland.