

Abbots Barton: From Farmland to Desirable Villas

The Worthy's local history group received a talk on the 12th of March from Christine Grover, a lecturer from the University of Winchester. The area Christine discussed was between Andover Road and the River Itchen, which comprised Hyde Abbey lands. The land became fragmented upon the fall of the Abbey during the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell. Commissioner Thomas Wriothesley acquired the Abbey lands near Winchester. The water meadows made the land in Abbots Barton desirable for agriculture which was the main use of the area for some time to come.

Christine then described Abbots Barton and the Gentry. Elizabeth Knight inherited the lands along with land in Chawton, she was a strong woman and had 2 husbands, both MP's. Her 2nd marriage settlement however ensured that her husband, unusually for the time would not inherit her land. Upon the death of Elizabeth Knight Abbot Barton estate is then inherited by Thomas Broadnax. His son, Thomas Knight inherits the land and adopts Edward Austen, brother of Jane Austen. At this time the Abbey lands are held by the 4th Duke of Bedford who then sells them to Thomas Knight. This unites the Land under one owner for the first time since the dissolution of the monasteries. The area then most described by Christine was the uplands of Abbots Barton.

The lands change hands again when Edward Austen sells the land to William Simonds, the Simonds were a brewing family from St Cross, where William Simonds resides despite owning land at Abbots Barton, presumably hiring other people to farm or manage the land. On the death of William Simonds, his son William Barrow Simonds inherits the lands and begins development on the site, building a house in Hyde. The railway then cuts across the Abbots Barton Uplands in 1835-37. In 1852, Lankhills house is built for Frederick Bowker, a solicitor, the property includes a large amount of land and a smallholding. The two families become related when William Barrow Simonds marries Bowker's daughter.

Things progress well for Barrow Simonds until the agricultural depression in 1855-59. The income from crops drops along with rents and imported barley becomes cheaper for breweries than local produce. In response Barrow Simonds looks instead to develop the land for wealthy members of society looking to move out of the city. The first development was Limekilns near Park Road. The properties were used as schools, mainly prep schools run by individuals involved with Winchester College. However, the large properties often did not survive.

A further development went underway in the Old Hop Garden, property there was inhabited by Charles James Warner, the family name still being present in Winchester today as Warner solicitors. Other properties built included Abbey Hill Lodge, inhabited by Captain Tyson of the Royal Navy, the property also went on to be a hotel. Frederik Bowker's son also commissions a house for himself on the land. Property being developed at this time is inhabited by people of high social status.

By 1895 the land below Park Road, but not above had been developed. However Barrow Simonds fortune turns for the worse during the Edwardian downturn, the wealthy individuals renting houses leaving the area. Barrow Simonds, now elderly, continues to plan more development for the area, till his death in 1912. Alice Bowker is still living in Barrow Simonds property in 1911.

The land is then further developed by Ashton Sawyer, who builds smaller properties. On the death of Frederick Bowker, the North Eastern land is sold to pay for death duties. Most of the original large houses have gone, some due to neglect, and replaced with smaller properties and flats.

Review by Phoebe Nunn