

The history of the Priory of St Osyth, reflects closely the history of England; it was here 400 years before the Norman Conquest that a religious house was set up, then lost with the dramatic martyrdom of the Saxon Osyth, wife of Sighere, King of Essex and mother of King Offa of Mercia.

This account covers a mere millennia – the 421 years of Monastic life; the 346 years under Manorial rule; the 123 years of residential – commercial occupation, but begins in the period leading up to the Norman Conquest – 1066 and all that.

St Osyth Priory

and its people

Compiled by Phyllis M Hendy
HISTORY RECORDER FOR ST OSYTH



*The view from the Darcy Tower, 1950. Note the *Quercus Ilex* tree left and walnut trees on the right.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to Keith Cornell, who prepared the photographs electronically – and to Brian Tuley and the late Ken Clow whose collections of some of the original photo's are held at St Osyth Archives †.

DEDICATION

To all the Priory staff – some families who, like me and mine – had the privilege of working there, some living there or on the Estate, enjoying the freedom that entailed and which changed our lives forever.

Throughout the text are references to artefacts and documents that are part of the St Osyth Archives. They are denoted thus †, and are available for scrutiny on request.

PART ONE

CHICHE ST OSYTH

In the year 900AD Chiche St Osyth was part of a large hunting park of King Knute; the King bequeathed the land to Earl Godwin, who in turn granted it to the See of Canterbury and thence to the control of the Bishop of London.

In the reign of Edward - before the Norman Conquest of 1066AD, the village consisted of 36 Villains, 20 Bordars and 16 slaves. There were 31 ploughs each "plough" means the plough itself but each also needed 8 oxen, a total of 248 Oxen. In all valued at £29 per annum to a Lord of the Manor.

By the time of the Domesday Book, † created in 1086, the village was three smaller manors, each a single holding with its own Manorial Court. In total the manors compromised 12½ hides, each hide roughly 120 acres or more, so some 1,500 acres was in cultivation. There was a Mill, 15½ acres of meadow, marsh pasture for 400 sheep and woodland for 1,212 pigs. However the population had declined, there were 22 Villains, 21 Bordars, 10 slaves and 168 oxen with 21 ploughs, as well as 7 sets of hives and swarms of bees.

The value of these Manors totalled £30 income per annum.

RICHARD DE BELMEIS

In the Great Fire of London in 1037 the Cathedral church of St Paul was lost, rebuilding was slow, but by 1085 the Norman Bishop Maurice of London had created a shrine to the Saxon Saint Osyth, which included Saint Osyth's relics.

This and similar shrines to Saxon Saints was part of a scheme to honour all Saxon Saints, an attempt to make the acceptance of the Norman Conquest more palatable to the Saxon population. By 1108 Richard de Belmeis was appointed Bishop of London and completed the rebuilding of what became known as Old St Pauls. Richard attempted to set up the See of London, by this action he fell foul of Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury; the Archbishop saw this as attempting to rival the See of Canterbury and his position of Primate of the Church of England.

Richard became aware of early signs of ill-health; greatly concerned because leprosy was rife, he began a search for a place of retirement. Recently he had exchanged lands in Sussex for land at Chiche St Osyth in remote North-East Essex. Gaining a grant of the entire village and large grants of land from King Henry 1st, Richard retired to Chiche St Osyth and in 1118 work began.

Twelve monks came to form the new fraternity. They were Austin Canons, and brought with them Artificers, and with the neighbourhood joining in the

labour, the monks' cells and a small chapel were soon raised. The winter of 1119-20 saw the provision of the iron, timber and utensils (tools) that would be needed for the building of a handsome church.

The workmen laboured from devotion; it is recorded - *"some brought stones, other made mortar, others applied to the wheel machinery which raised them on high."*

Richard de Belmeis arranged to have some of Osyth's remains brought to Chiche St Osyth. Her skull and arm - each in a gylte cradle - were with ceremony buried at the high Altar of the Priory Church.

The Priory was then dedicated to Saint Osyth and St Mary and the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

The festival of St Osyth was established on August 7th; cures for healing of diseases which refused to yield to medical skills were obtained by drinking water from the spring in Nuns Wood, said to have gushed forth on the spot Osyth was beheaded.

Subsequently all who came to worship her relics initially were remitted 20 days penance and afterwards for every year's attendance 7 days penance.



The original 12th C entrance to the Priory.

WILLIAM DE CORBEUIL

The first Prior at St Osyth was a Frenchman, born near Paris. According to Gesta Stephani; *"He was a man of smooth face and strictly religious manners, but more ready to amass money than to spend it."*

However he was to remain at St Osyth for only a few years.

When the time came to appoint a new Archbishop of Canterbury there were two factions at loggerheads over the backgrounds of the possible candidates for election - the Bishops who wished a secular priest be appointed and the Chapter of Canterbury who wanted to elect a monk. William was the compromise candidate, he had been a secular priest and was now a monk.

In the event he was not popular with either faction. According to the Bishops - *"William, of whose merits nothing can be said - for he has none,"* whilst according to the Chapter, *"William of Corbeuil - William of Turmoil."*

THE AUSTIN CANONS OF ST OSYTH

In England the Canons of the regular order of St Augustine were called Austin Canons, they had enjoyed a revival of the Order towards the end of the 11th Century. By 1118 AD places were being set up, where clergyman who were desirous of leading a more regular course of life, could retire to live communally; one such place was the Priory at Chiche St Osyth.

Austin Canons took the usual vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, but also of Care and Education, thereby committed to work in the outside communities. The monasteries were therefore the sole source of learning, of relief for the poor, and the only haven for those sick in mind and body, especially the Lepers.

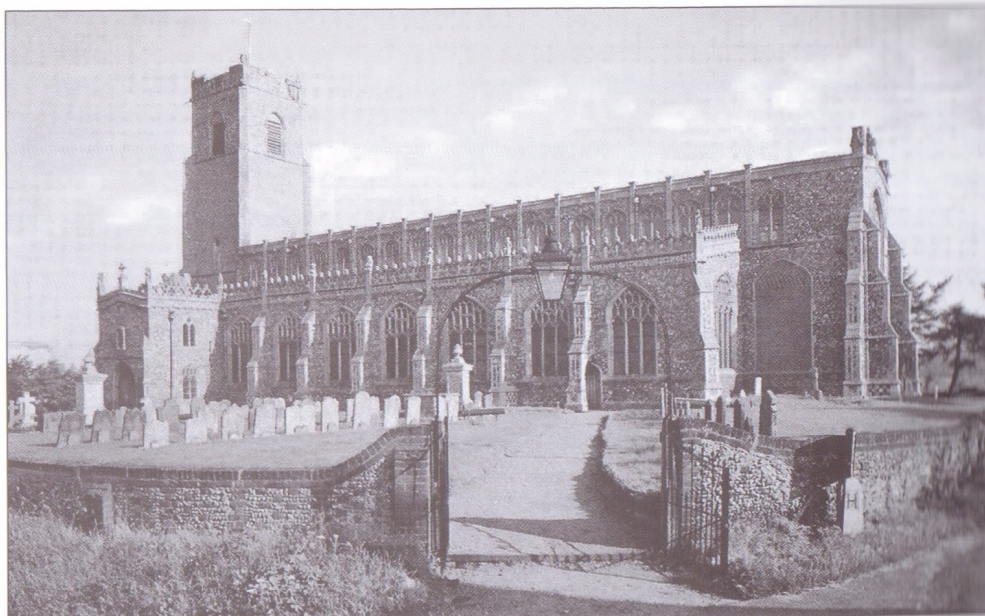
Initially the Priory was in the control of the Prior, Sub Prior and Third Prior.

Next came the senior Monks who each had a Sub Canon to assist them. The Chamberlain was master of the guesthouse. The Cellarer was responsible for stores, food and wine. The Sacristan was in charge of the Priory Church and safeguarding Osyth's relics. The Chanter was in charge of ceremony and also Choir Master. The Bailiff had accommodation near the Brewery, Bakehouse and Tithe Barn, the better able to supervise work on the Farms, the Gardens and Dairies. The Almoner and the Infirmer provided medicines, ran the Physic garden and the monastery hospice and attended the sick living in the outside community.

The Almoner was almost certainly in an outpost at the Heath, Amperswick is thought to derive from Almonerswick and the Pest House stood on the edge of Chisbon Heath. The Physic Garden would have provided laxatives such as Chervil and Fennel, whilst Coriander would relieve flatulence. Parsley cured headaches, whilst colds were relieved by Sage, Mint and Poppy. The sleepless were given Borage and Lemon Balm to relax and sooth. Rheumatism responded to Marjoram and upset stomachs to Dill. Burns and inflammation were treated with Marigold mixed with goose grease.

A good insect repellent was the powdered leaf of Pennyroyal, often sprinkled between documents or the pages of books, it has a peppermint odour.

Other Canons became Chaplains within Manorial households, Curates at Churches or School masters in the many parishes held by the Priory.



Blythburgh Church, Suffolk. Built by monks from St Osyth Priory.

By 1200 AD the status of the Priory was raised to that of Abbey, with the appointment of an Abbot.

SECULAR MONASTERY LIFE

Because of the heavy commitment to Education and Care the Austin Canons did not carry out the menial tasks, usually carried out by the Brethren.

An army of Abbey servants were needed for this work. The average workforce consisted of 14 Farmworkers, 14 Gardeners, 5 Brewers, 5 Bakers, 8 Cooks, 6 Waggoners, 5 Accolytes and 3 Laundresses, all of whom laboured to meet the needs of the Brethren but also so that the vow of care to the community was well provisioned.

Building of Churches began, perhaps the most notable was the



Blythburgh Church interior, which resembles the parish church at St Osyth.



The Cannons Hall, 1511. Built at Great Clacton.

Church of Blythburgh in Suffolk. It bears a striking resemblance to the Priory and was achieved by the materials being taken by barge along the coast.

At St Osyth the Saxon Nunnery Church was replaced by a larger building, built it is said on the same site. Certainly as the Abbey prospered so the parish church was developed by the Canons.

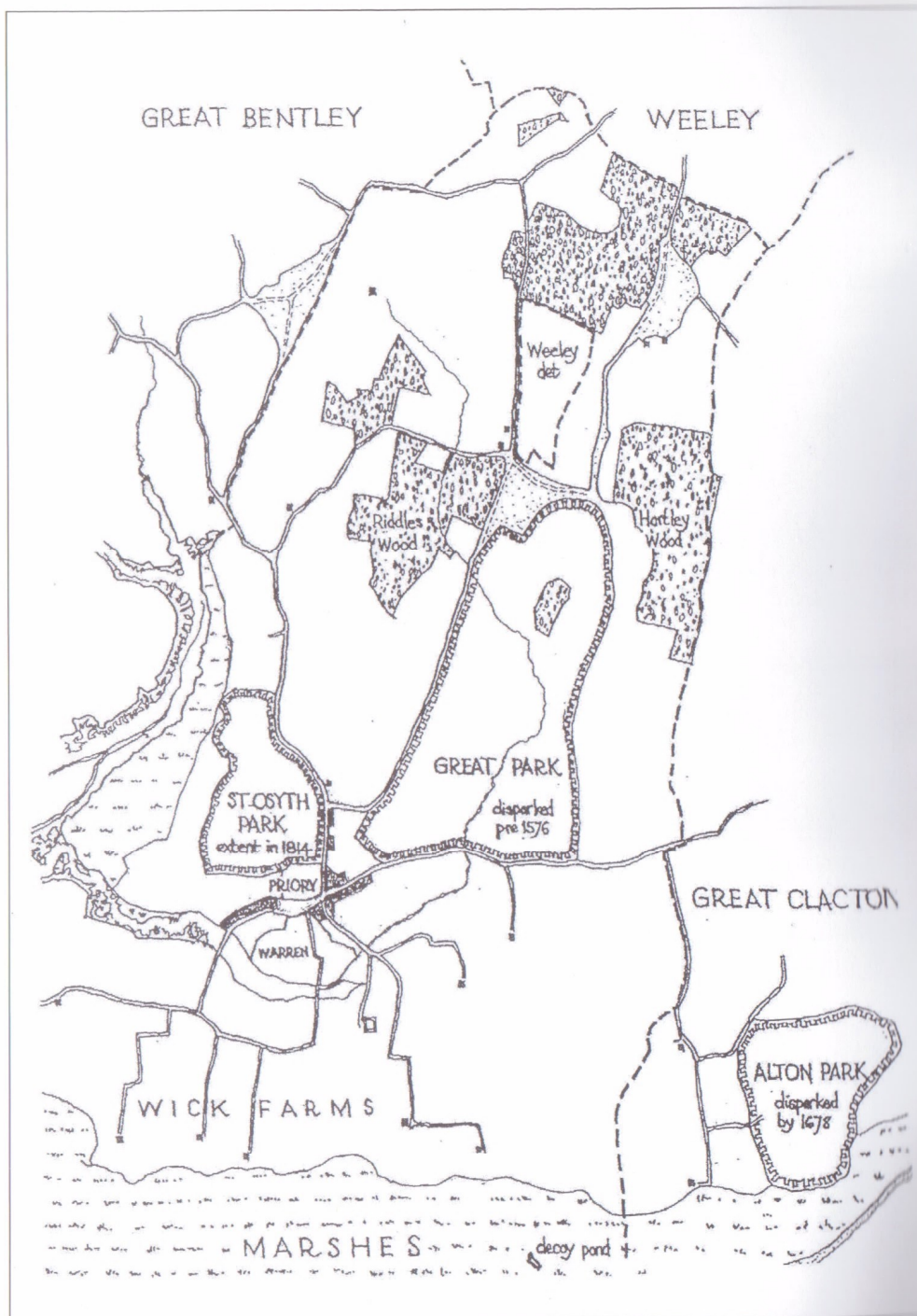
Latterly when the Abbey was at the pinnacle of its powers, in 1511, a hall was built at Clackton Magna. This was needed to house the overspill of Canons, who lived and provided education in the communities such as Clackton Magna and Parva, Holland Parva and Wyleigh. It was known as the Cannonshall, today called Cann Hall.

There were Monastic Rules which included:

- During meals monks are not to wipe their noses on the table linen.
- Nor may they help themselves to food in the warming room or when passing food through hatches.
- In the dormitory monks are not to linger near or look out of the windows.
- Nor to read by candle in bed

And finally

- If anyone is obliged to leave when all are asleep, he is to open and close the lavatory door, so gently, as to awake none of the brethren.



The Priory Parks.

In 1168, Henry II had granted the right of Free warren in Chiche St Osyth. This meant that the monks were allowed to hunt with a brace of hawks and a brace of hounds, but the killing of the King's deer was strictly forbidden. One can picture the portly figures bowling along, tonsured heads bobbing, habits flapping as their sandalled feet pounded away.

At Warren Park, (now Warren Farm) the brethren had established a source of meat, from the conies (rabbits) kept there. Also along the St Osyth Creek oyster 'dairies' and fish traps were set up. Pigeon and dove-cotes were built, the young squabs made good eating.

TITHE SYSTEM

This was the main source of income to the Priory/Abbey, payable by the tenants of the many holdings throughout Essex and Suffolk, as well as from within the village.

The Tithe was one tenth of the harvest and/or the stock. Traditionally based on - *"a tenth of the produce of and or nurtured by the earth."*

Usually the payment was made in kind, hence the need for the huge Tithe Barn and the six Waggoners. Disputes regularly broke out as to how much was due, what land each tenant held as acreage, what crops had been produced, or how many livestock he had.

A few made payment of a monetary rent, always due on Michaelmas Day in the Autumn.

Another source of income was from the Fairs and Markets, held on the Bury and the Square, between the free standing Parish Church and the Abbey Wall. Licence to trade was granted by the Abbot - for a fee.



The Tithe Barn Roof looking to the west end pigeon loft.

PRIORY BUILDINGS 1120 - 1200

Monastic life centred around the Cloisters, these were central, 105ft long and almost as wide. To the south of the Cloisters stood the massive Priory Church, this had a central tower and consisted of nave, south aisle, transepts, chancel with three chapels.

Adjoining the north transept of the Church was the eastern range with chapterhouse, anteroom, warming room, with dormitories and lavatories above.

North of the Cloisters was the Frater and to the west the Cellarer's range, the Prior's apartments above these.

ABBEY BUILDINGS 1200 - 1539

With its higher status some rearrangements were necessary. An extension was added of a new kitchen, replacing the Frater, (the Dining room). A new Frater was built above an Undercroft and the Cellarer's range was rebuilt much as it stands today.

King Henry III visited the Abbey in 1235 AD and whilst here by Royal Command arranged for timber to come from Colchester by sea, to complete the work.



The 1285 Abbey Seal.

By 1285 the Abbey seals and counterseals were in use. The Abbey seal shows St Osyth carrying her head, beneath a multi-spired building, flanked on the left by pillar and sword and on the right by key and pillar, for SS Peter and Paul.

The Prior's counterseal has the legend - Chiche St Osyths Austin Canons Priory, but little of the design is legible.

Later in the 15th Century three more seals were in use.

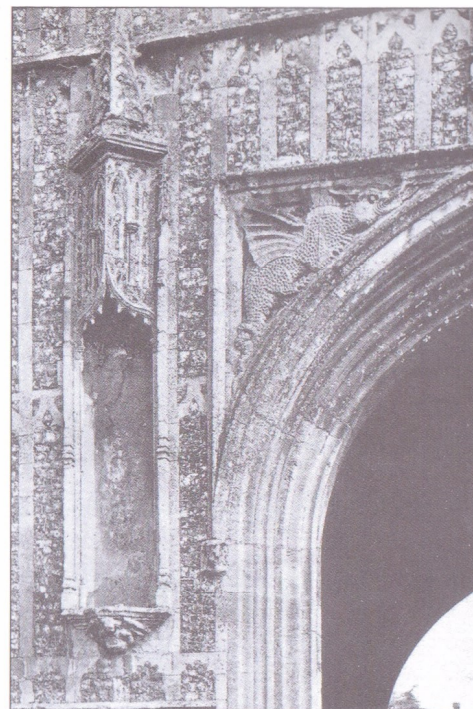
The original seals are held by the British Museum, however a replica set is usually on display at the Parish Church.

It was to be at least another 250 years before any further major structural changes were to be made to the Abbey.

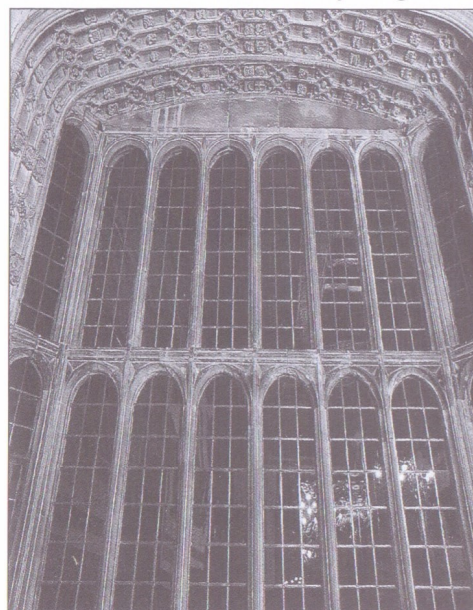
In 1475 the Great Gatehouse was built and the Tithe Barn was extended. Now one of the three richest monastic centres in Essex, by 1510 the newly appointed Abbot John Vyntoner had rebuilt the Prior's apartments and extended these to create the Bishop's Lodgings, ostensibly to accommodate guests, but in reality to occupy himself. This included an enlarged upper room with an ornate Oriel Window under which an archway and passage led to the northern gateway. Naturally the rebus of Vyntoner and the many patrons featured prominently.



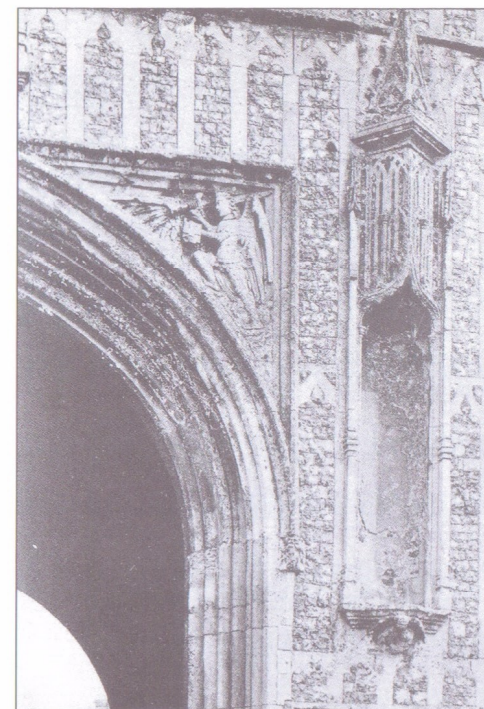
An impression of the carving at the foot of the Gatehouse niches, 1475.



St Michael (right) and the Dragon (left) 1475. The dragon is defeated. Note the knot in its tail. St Michael has two sets of wings and bells on his tunic.

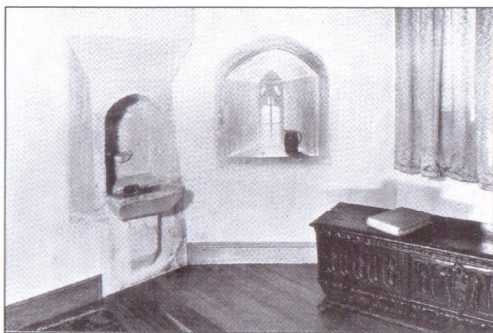


Vyntoner's Oriel Window. This has 88 different Rebus, in panels of Tudor roses dated 1527.



Vyntoner's Panelling has the Rebus of Vyntoner and other donors.

ENDOWMENTS



The Gatehouse Piscina and the Beggars window 1475.

When the Priory had been set up by Richard de Belmeis in 1118, the holdings were quickly increased.

Bishop Foliot of London had given Clackton Parva and Magna, Southminster, Meiland and Alesthorn.

Richard also obtained Ampnerswick, Welwic, Howic and Cocketwick. To which had been added Erleshall and Withston (Whyers) Hall.

Soon after completion of the Priory Henry I gave Blythburgh and Stowmarket in Suffolk. Not to be outdone Adeliza de Vere and her son Aubrey, the First Earl of Oxford, gave no less than seven Suffolk villages to the Priory. Adeliza's younger son was a Canon at the Priory.

In the 13th and 14th C gifts to the Abbey continued with 100 acres in Messing, Costhall at Brentwood and Tolleshunt.

In 1377 Richard II gave the Manor, Rectory and 200 acres at Michaelstow, Ramsey and the Rectory at Adberton - to which William de Mont-Chesni added the Manor of Adberton (Abberton Hall). In 1382 Alberic de Vere, 10th Earl Oxford added the Church and Rectory of Elmstead.



De Vere Rebus. The Earls of Oxford a mullet, eating a small fish.

As a consequence the Abbey of Chiche St Osyth was now one of the three richest monastic centres in England.

The Abbey holdings in Essex now extended to Brentwood where a chapel was built dedicated to St Osyth; they held the Market and Fair rights at Boysars (Brentwood). These were held on the vigil and feast of St Thomas A'Becket, patronised by pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury. The holdings in Suffolk, whilst they extended to Stowmarket, did not include markets or fairs, but were approaching a dozen villages.

The Abbey was granted "Freedom from all suits, services and taxes - Imperial or Local." The Abbot attended all deliberations in the Royal Parliament.



Vyntoner Rebus IV = John Vyntoner.



King Richard II Rebus. The White Hart holds fruit of the vine.



Vyntoner Rebus. Has Bishops mitre and crook and shows the vine in fruit.

PROMOTIONS TO HIGHER OFFICE

As already recorded William de Corbeuil became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1123. In 1144 a Canon of St Osythes was made Prior of St Bartholomew London. When in 1177 the Episcopal Commissioners needed to replace the disgraced hierarchy at Waltham Abbey - four Canons of St Osees were selected.

In 1198 Canon de Sancta Maria of St Osees became Bishop of London, whilst Canon William Barlow became Bishop of Asaph in 1535, Bishop of St Davids in 1536, Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1547 and finally in 1558 Bishop of Winchester.

FALLS FROM GRACE

Having been extremely generous to the Priory by 1379 Richard II was somewhat displeased demanding a forced loan of £40 from the Prior, followed by a second loan in 1397 of 40 marks (a mark was about 13s/4d).

In 1403 implicated by the Countess of Oxford in a plot against the throne the Abbots of Colchester and Saint Osithes were thrown in jail. However the Countess was found out and imprisoned and all her goods acheated. The Abbots were released from jail. More serious, especially in the consequences of their sins, are these lapses.

In 1299 Abbot Robert de Glotinges was removed for "*Dilapidatione, Sacriligio, Adulterio Et*".

In November 1387 King Richard II had the Abbot of St Osees thrown into jail for "*killing the Kings Venison*".

In January 1433 Abbot John Fowler was deprived for stealing, all paid with their lives. Then in 1526 it was revealed that John Abbot of St Osythes had borrowed money against some plate and jewels belonging to the Abbey. Later he borrowed a further £20. John Sharp the moneylender of London had died, his son James appropriated the goods in lieu of repayment. Found guilty of heresy the record shows

"Abbot John Henningham punishment Anno MDV upon 2nd Sunday in Lent stood at Poules Cross - Prior of Seynte Osythes and five other heretics."

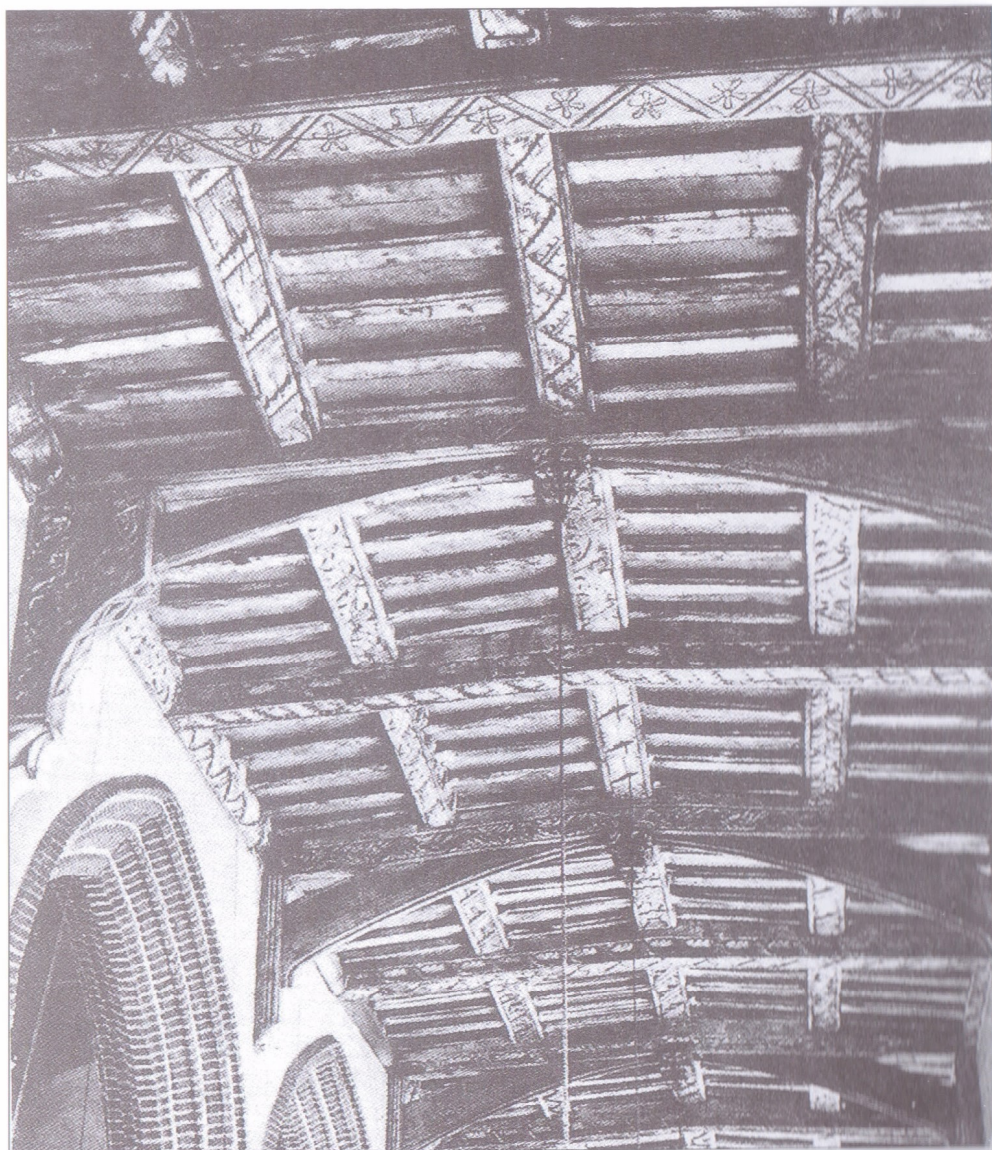
The Abbot was burnt alive at St Paul's Cross.

RESTRUCTURING OF MONASTERIES

Under Abbot John Slowman the Abbey survived the reduction of holdings and powers imposed in 1410 AD by Henry VI, the only change was that St Osyth had become part of the See of Canterbury, as it had been in 900AD.

Being isolated and a far flung outpost of that Diocese had had its advantages. Far from any reduction of holdings - additions had been made, particularly the Gate house and Bishop lodgings and the Cannonshall had been constructed at Clackton Magna.

But religious control was coming to an end, by 1532 the Abbot was being pressurised by Thomas, Lord Audley; Abbot Witherick had tried to placate him with the gift of Abberton Hall. By 1539 Abbot Witherick was to concede to the Reformation. For some years work had been ongoing with the rebuilding and enlarging of the Parish Church, the Nave had been rebuilt, when the Dissolution began in 1539 work ceased, leaving the Nave and Chancel offset.



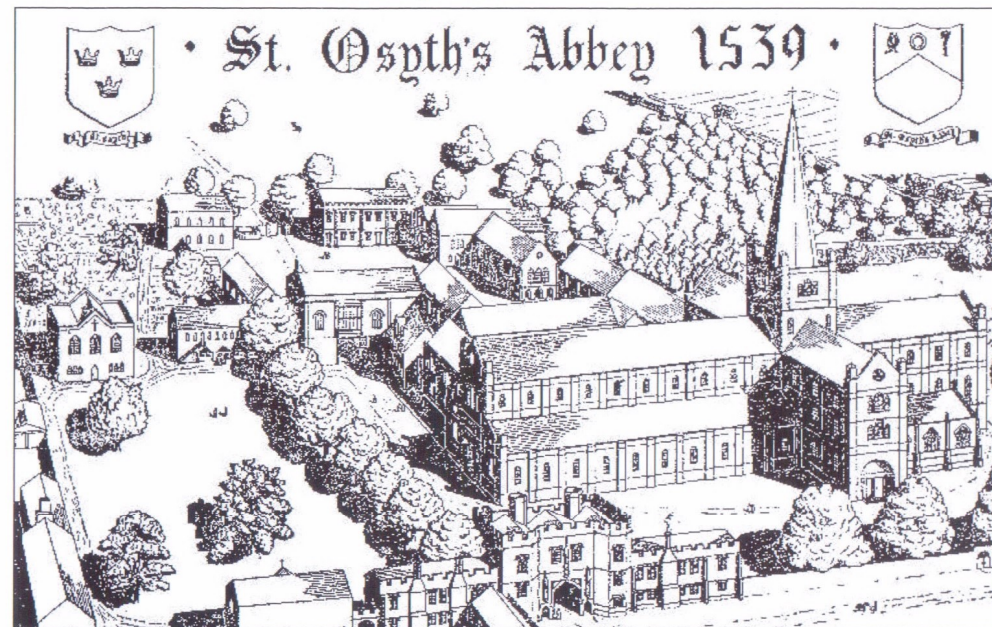
The Parish church roof, with the incomplete carving.

PART TWO – DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERY

THE REFORMATION

In 1539 the King's Commissioners arrived at St Osyth, armed with a warrant dated as 8th August of the 31st year of Henry VIII reign.

Acting under the Privy Seal for the Dissolution of the Monasteries they were Sir John Seyntcler of Seynclers Hall; Sir William Purton, John Perkins, Thomas Mildmay and Francis Jobson.



This impression gives an idea of the scale of the Abbey Church. It dwarfs the gate house.

They began to compile the Inventory † - first they listed the many Manors and Advowsons held in Essex and Suffolk. Then the Titheable farms, mills and houses within Chiche St Osyth.

Finally the annual income was reckoned at £680 0s 0d. At the time of the Dissolution a good fat Ox cost 24/- or a good Fowl 2½d.

Abbot John Colchester was rewarded for his loyal submission to the Dissolution by the award of pensions for himself, the Canons and the lay Abbey Servants.

The Abbot was awarded £100 per annum and the Prior John Russell £10 pa. The senior Canons - Cornelius Williamson, John Harwiche, John Sherman, John Thorpe and George Thurston were each granted £8 pa. The

Canons Edmund Grove, Richard Symnell, Ralph Dale, Robert Sprotte, Thomas Heywood, William Newman, Nicholas Bushe, Richard Wood and William Jolly were each granted £6 13s 4d per annum.

Staff received pensions in pence - the least of these - named by their trade - was Rat Katcher 12d per annum.

Interestingly some of the Commissioners purchased items, but not before everything was listed, weighed, valued and priced.

The Inventory †, held at the British Museum, is long, detailed and difficult to read. However we do know that all of the furniture was delivered to a Richard Weston - *"for the use of my Lord Chancellor Thomas Lord Audley."* This included 13 porringers valued at 3/-.

Sir John Seyntcler of Seynclershall purchased for 53s 4d a Cope of blue velvet with Deacon and Sub Deacon vestments.

Francis Jobson purchased 6 carthorses, carts and apparel for £5 0s 0d - a blind horse for 3s 4d and an old lame horse for 12d.

The relics of Seynte Osythe were dug up and were *"put by until the Kings pleasure be known"*. These were the Shrine of Osyth (her arm) *"garnysshed with 82 ozs gylte plate and 82 ozs of white plate"*. The Skull of Osythe *"closed in a sylver gylte parcel with a crown of sylver gylte, garnysshed with counterfett stones"*.

There is no record of what happened to St Osyth's relics.

The lead roofing - a valuable item - was all removed leaving the buildings open to the elements.

The total of all the plate amounted to a value of £853 17s 3d. The Commissioners expenses came to £12 6s 8d.

THOMAS - LORD AUDLEY

For the past seven years Audley had been angling to gain the grant of St Osyth Abbey. Now he wrote to his chief rival for St Osyth - Thomas Cromwell. Audley was caring for the one year old Prince Edward, Henry VIII son and heir, at Havering and the first part of the letter concerns the health and welfare of the young Prince, it then continues.

"Such brutes hathe runne sythen my last departing from your good lordshypp, concerning the dissolution of the Abbeyes of St Johns Colchester and Seynt Osees, that I am bold to wryte to your good lordshypp after mine old sute for the contynuans of the said 2 places, not as they be religious, but that it mought plesse the Kings Mageste of his



Thomas - Lord Audley who coveted the priory.

goodness to translate them into collegys his Grace may have of eyther of them a £1,000, that ys for bothe £2000 Seynt Osyses stondyth in the mersches, not very holsom, so that few of reputation will keep contynual house in eny of them"

Cromwell however, as Audley remarked later, knew the Priory and had already marked it out for himself. Certainly he had ensured there had been no demolition of buildings at St Osyth, whilst in most cases elsewhere this had been total.

THOMAS CROMWELL - EARL OF ESSEX

The zeal with which Cromwell had served Henry VIII was rewarded in 1539 by the gift of the living of no less than 30 Monastic Manors and valuable estates including St Osithes Abbey, he was to hold of the King, in capite, by the service of a whole Knights fee.

On 14th April 1540 the King created Thomas Cromwell the Earl of Essex, however all these gifts, honours and wealth from the Royal hand saw a strengthening amongst Cromwell's enemies, chief among them Thomas, Lord Audley.

Cromwell - well aware of the growing enmity - sought to consolidate his position by an alliance with Flanders. He promoted the marriage of Henry VIII to Anne of Cleves, whom Henry on sight dubbed the Flander's Mare.

The disgust of Henry at his bride, fuelled by Cromwell's enemies pouring a flood of complaint into the King's ear, soon led to Henry VIII developing a strong dislike to the marriage promoter.

Cromwell was arrested on 10th June 1540, charged with Treason, Heresy, Oppression, Bribery and Extortion. A Bill of Attainder was brought before Parliament on 19th June 1540 and was instantly passed by acclamation.

According to Hall - *"The Lord Cromwell, being in Council, was suddenly apprehended and committed to the Tower. The which many lamented, but more rejoiced and specially such as had been religious men"*.

Bearing in mind that foremost amongst his accusers was Thomas Lord Audley, it cannot be coincidence that Cromwell's execution was delayed to 28th July 1540, one year exactly to the day Cromwell was granted the Priory at St Osyth over Audley.

But even now Thomas, Lord Audley was to be thwarted. St Osees Priory reverted to the Crown.



Thomas Cromwell - Earl of Essex - 1540.

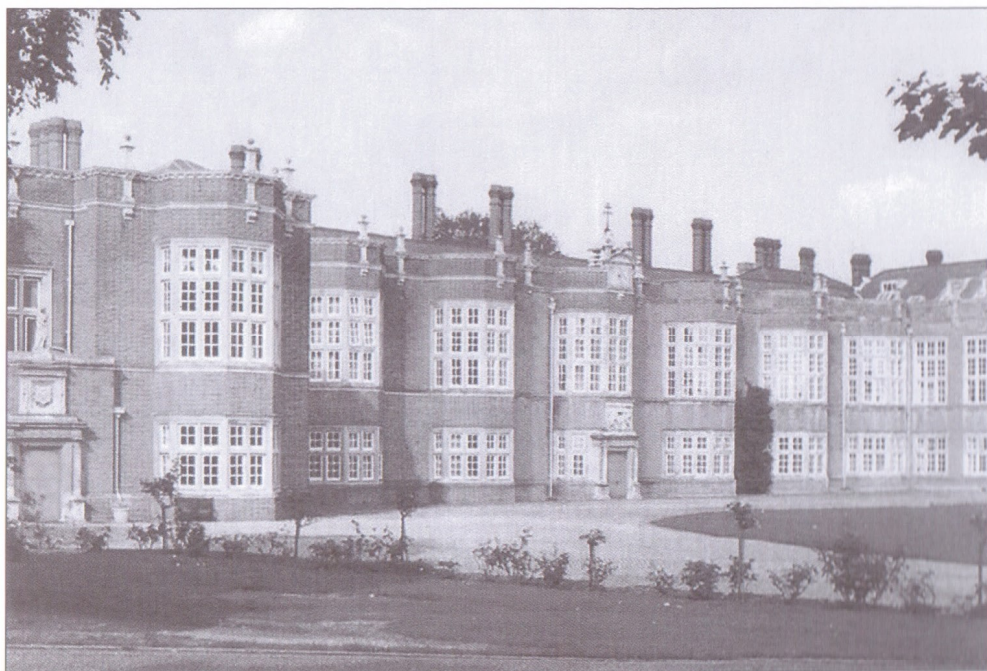
THE PRINCESS MARY

The Priory, parks and possessions, with other property were now granted to Princess Mary for her benefit during her lifetime or until an honourable marriage could be arranged by King Henry VIII.

However, in 1541, Henry VIII granted the Stewardship to Sir Thomas Darcy, who was a cousin of his beloved and much mourned Queen Jane Seymour – who had provided Henry with his longed for male heir Prince Edward.

Henry visited the Priory in the summer of 1543, to see the rebuilding of the monastery into a mansion, and was pleased.

Princess Mary was a virtual prisoner at New Hall in Boreham, a staunch Catholic in Protestant England. In 1550 Mary plotted her escape, via her property at St Osyth on the coast, thence to the Continent. The plot was foiled, Mary was taken back to New Hall and remained there as a prisoner, at the command of her half-brother, the young King Edward VI.



New Hall, Boreham, Essex, where the Princess Mary Tudor was held.

PART THREE – LORD OF THE MANOR

SIR THOMAS DARCY – STEWARD

In 1541, Darcy immediately commenced the erection of a great mansion. Pulling down the Abbey Church and some of the Abbey buildings, using the materials for his new mansion – built in chequerwork. The Frater became the central dwelling and the Cellarer's range was incorporated into a new wing, which included the Clock Tower and linked up to Vyntoner's Bishop's Lodgings and Oriel Window. Another large wing included the Dorter Range and the Darcy Tower was erected above the 12th C original monastery. In 1547 Edward VI appointed Darcy Lord Chancellor and on the 5th April 1550 Edward created him Baron Darcy of Chiche St Osyth.



Thomas Darcy KT created Baron Darcy of Chiche St Osyth 1550 cousin to Queen Jane Seymour.

THOMAS – 1ST LORD DARCY

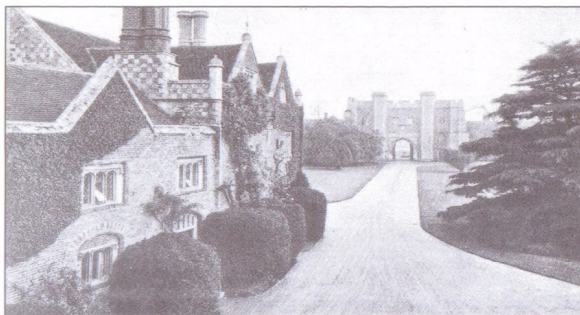
Thomas now wanted possession of the Priory and persisted with his suit. This persistence was rewarded by Edward VI who wrote to his sister – the Princess Mary, who was still incarcerated at New Hall, Boreham, asking for her agreement to exchange St Osyth Priory, offering her Eye and Framlingham in lieu.

Extract from Mary's reply dated December 3rd 1552 to Edward VI.

*"and wheare your Majestys pleasure to desire is to have me exchange other land for the Manor of St Osythes, Little and great Clackton and Wylleighe, wt their appurtenances, I shall most humbly wt my whole harte and wyll, obeye and satisfye your highness leasure and desire in that behalf.
Your Majestys most humble sister Mary"*

Thomas Lord Darcy was given the task of surveying the seven Bulwarks in Essex. In 1552 the cost of maintaining these, which included the men of the Train band, was £873. The survey was to see which could be dismantled, needless to say not the Bulwark of St Osyth which was known as the Blockhouse and later became Blockhousewick Farm.

Thomas was now Lord Chamberlain, Master of Ordnance and Knight of the Garter. On 23rd January 1552 he took his seat in the House of Lords. Married to Elizabeth, the daughter of the 15th Earl of Oxford, they had sons



Where the lower red brick Vyntoner building adjoins the higher chequer work Darcy Mansion, 1541. Slightly misaligned.

1558 and was buried with Elizabeth in St Osyth church, his legacy the spectacular rebuilding of the monastery into a mansion.

JOHN – 2ND LORD DARCY

John was married to Frances, daughter of Lord Richard Rich of Leez Priory. They had four children Thomas, John, Robert and Elizabeth. John took his seat in Elizabeth I's parliament on 25th January 1559.

Two years later Elizabeth I broke her journey to Leez Priory to visit the Priory; for John this would have been a great honour, but also an incredible expense.

Extract from Nicholl's – Progress to Leez Priory:

*"St Ossyes Mercurii tricesimo die Julii ibidem et St Ossyes. - £100 6s 4½d.
Jovis ultimi die Julii ibidem et St Ossyes - £105 9s 5d."*

This translates as Wednesday 30th July in that place and time Thursday last day of July etc.

The Royal visit was cut short by Elizabeth I who recorded the reason in her journal,

"about 8 or 9 was as great thunder and lightning as any man ever heard – 'til past 10, then great raine 'til midnight" adding that she thought "the end of the world was come".

In 1566 John represented local fisherman by writing to the Privy Council. The Colchester Bailiffs had seized the men's boats, claiming that only they held the fishing rights in the River Colne. The Privy Council found for the local fishermen, and their boats were restored.

Lord John does not appear to have made any alterations to either the Mansion or the gardens and parks.

In 1579 – 18 years after her first visit – Elizabeth I again broke her journey

John, Robert and Alberic, and daughters Thomasine and Constance.

On 22nd May 1553, in consideration of £3,974 9s 4½d the Priory came into the possession of Thomas Lord Darcy, his heirs and assigns for ever.

After only five years both Elizabeth and Thomas were dead. Thomas died at Wivenhoe on 28th June



An impression of an Elizabethan hawking party, painted by J. Temple -1897.

at the Priory on her way to Blickling Hall, the ancestral home of her mother Anne Boleyn.

During this visit Elizabeth called in all the local J.P's. Briant Darcy of St Cleres Hall was JP for St Osyth. The J.P's were berated for their failure to apprehend and try Witches.



The tombs of Lord John 2nd Lord Darcy and the Lady Frances.



Lord Thomas 1st Lord Darcy and the Lady Elizabeth.

Nicholls records a gift from Lord John to his Queen as

"Item – a juell of gold being a trumpet garnyshed with sparcks of diamonds on the one side with a banner garnyshed with sparcks of rubies and dymond on the one side, and the Arms of England on the other side, and three perles pendant, hanging at a bodkin of sylver and gylte."

John died in March 1581 and was buried in St Osyth Church.

In his Will he provided for the monuments in the Chancel to be raised for his parents Lord Thomas and Lady Elizabeth, and also for himself and the Lady Frances.

THOMAS – 3RD LORD DARCY

When Thomas succeeded to the title in 1581 he was a bachelor, he was keen to marry Mary Kytson, but she was not interested in Thomas.

Mary was the daughter of Lord and Lady Kytson of Hengrave Hall in Suffolk, who were extremely wealthy. There were many suitors for Mary's hand. Mary herself had preferred the suit of Lord Percy, but she was overridden by her parents who favoured Darcy, with his royal connections.

In 1583 Thomas married Mary Kytson, the wedding was a sumptuous affair. Lady Kytson, Mary's mother, kept meticulous accounts. "She recorded – *"black velvet for her nightgown at 23s a yard"* and also *"silk stockings at 40s a pair"* and finally *"sum total of the whole charge of my douter Marys apparel and juells against her marriage - £662 6s 11d"*.

Despite producing a son Thomas and four daughters Elizabeth, Mary, Penelope and Susan, the marriage was not a happy one.

In 1588 on the 14th July, Thomas incurred the wrath of Queen Elizabeth; despite now being hugely wealthy he had been slow to furnish the levies imposed to fund the resisting of the Spanish Armada. He wrote to his Queen, excusing his tardiness and added – *"I am ready with 10 lances, 10 light horse and 10 petronels, well furnished and would venture this life for my Queen, in this or any quarrel she might be pleased to appoint"*.

After 10 years Mary and Thomas separated by mutual consent. Mary moved to Colchester, and it appears her main preoccupation became adding codicils to her will †.

Meanwhile Thomas began in 1600 to pull down the central portion of his grandfather's mansion and rebuilt the mansion in red brick, between the Darcy Wing and Bishop's Lodgings and the Darcy Tower.

This work was interrupted by Queen Elizabeth in February 1601 when he was commanded to be present at the execution of the young Earl of Essex.

In 1617 he was granted licence to enclose 400 acres of land as the Great Park, and to rebuild the Hunting Lodge within the Park, but the land was soon allowed to revert to cultivation – (roughly what we know as Park Farm today). There already existed the Priory Park, Alton Park and The Warren.

By 1626 in recognition of his service to the Crown he was created Earl



*All that remains of the brick built mansion of Thomas 3rd Lord Darcy – 1600.
The Darcy Wall.*

Rivers, to add to his knighthood and title of Viscount Colchester. Sadly the title was not to be kept in the Darcy family for long.

For Thomas Darcy – heir to the 3rd Lord Darcy – despite being strong and healthy, tragedy was looming on the horizon.

Young Thomas had distinguished himself at the Court of King James I, succeeding at the jousts and barriers. By 1610 he was page to Prince Henry – Prince of Wales, his maternal Grandam, Lady Kytson had again borne the costs, recording the details of his *"apparel and juels for Court"*.

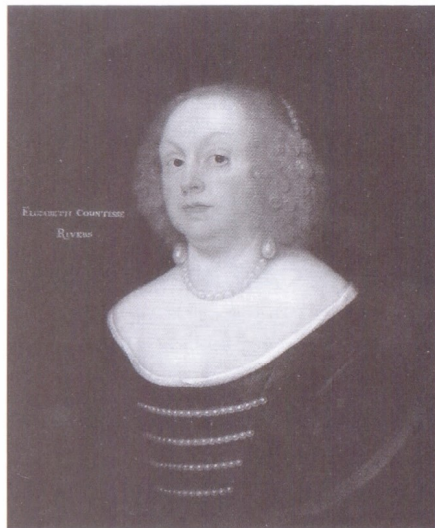
Aged 22, he married an older widowed lady, but Mary died in a few years, without issue. Thomas died age 26 in 1613; he was taken to Hengrave Hall and buried there at his Grandam's home.

The 3rd Lord Darcy's brothers were all dead; having no other sons, he made his eldest daughter Elizabeth Savage (nee Darcy) his heiress.

Thomas – 3rd Lord Darcy died on 21st February 1639, 45 years after his legal separation from Mary. Mary was buried at Colchester – Thomas was buried at St Osyth.

PART FOUR – UNDER THE COMMONWEALTH

ELIZABETH – VISCOUNTESS SAVAGE THE COUNTESS RIVERS



*Elizabeth Savage nee Darcy.
Countess Rivers -1641.*

Delays meant Elizabeth was not created Countess Rivers until 1641. At the time of her inheritance she was £14,000 in debt for the refurbishment of the Savage family home, Long Melford Hall in Suffolk, and she had 13 surviving children to care for. Her son and heir John was also deeply in debt, and had



Long Melford Hall, front view.

By the time of her father's demise Elizabeth was a widow. She had accrued huge debts and despite inheriting a small fortune from an aunt, was virtually penniless. Her cousin John Cordell, described her as "*an impecunious but ingenious courtier – on the make*".

At Court, Elizabeth was a Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Henrietta Maria. She had married Viscount Savage of Rocksavage, said to be a love match; Elizabeth had produced over 28 years no less than 19 children. James I, despite opposition, had created Sir Thomas Savage a Lawyer to his Court. Charles I created him Chancellor of the Queen's household – Thomas and Elizabeth colluded with the Queen to covertly celebrate Mass.

all the wrong credentials in the troubled times prior to the Civil War.

In November 1641 she mortgaged Long Melford Hall to her cousin John Cordell for £15,000 thereby clearing her debt. Elizabeth now retreated to her old family home – St Osyth Priory, but only for a few months.

In the summer of 1642, on August 22nd, at the commencement of



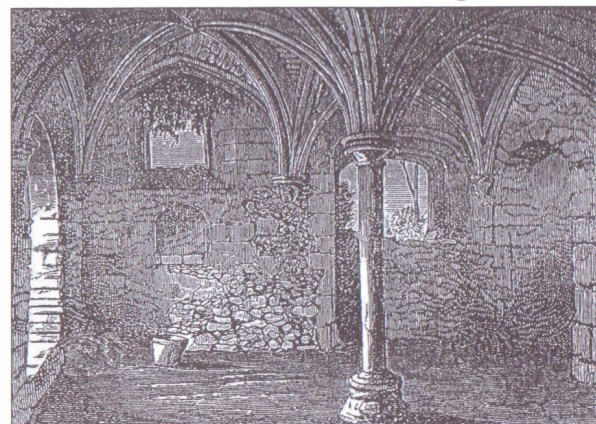
Long Melford Hall, rear view.

hostilities, the Countess received a short warning of a furious mob marching from Colchester to St Osyth, so she fled back to Long Melford in Suffolk.

The Essex Puritans, as they styled themselves, finding Elizabeth gone unleashed their fury on the Priory; the mansion was looted, then the lead was stripped from the roof, every window and door was smashed and finally the Darcy mansion was set on fire. It was at this time that the three statues in the gatehouse niches were pulled down and smashed. They were of St Osyth and SS Peter and Paul.

Not content, the mob then pursued Elizabeth to Long Melford, where once again the house was destroyed. Elizabeth attempted to reach the coast and escape to the Continent, and when this failed she fled to London, where she was finally caught and imprisoned.

The Commonwealth had succeeded over the Royalists; England was now ruled by the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, at whose hands Elizabeth was to suffer much humiliation and deprivation.



*Ruins of Darcy mansion the undercroft.
St Osyth Priory.*

Faced with enormous fines, Elizabeth was forced into selling off some of the Priory holdings to meet the £16,979 9s 10d total. This exceeded the fines of every other person during the Commonwealth. Elizabeth, in prison and sick, now decided that since no one in Essex had come to her aid, it would be some of the Essex estates which would be disposed of; Clackton Magna and Parva,

Wyleighe, Great and Lt Oakley, Beaumont, Gt Holland, West Mersea, Fingringhoe, Thorpe le Soken and Kirby raised sufficient funds.

Elizabeth never returned to her ancestral home at the Priory and died in 1651.

The Savage family showed no interest in the estate, although the 1662 Tax records show the Priory in Stewardship only, but there were "78 hearths at St Osyth Priory".

For the next 70 years the Priory slowly deteriorated and by 1700 was close to ruin.

MANORIAL COURT 1639 ONWARDS

The day to day recordings of these legal transactions were conducted by the gentleman Steward to the Manor of St Osyth.

Proceedings were recorded as "by the Rod," - the staff of office - which was always on view during the Inrolment Sessions. The negotiations were also recorded as "by the acceptance of the Steward".

The transactions recorded are known as the Court Rolls at St Osyth - but as Court Bulls elsewhere.

Thus there is a record of all Copyhold absolute or conditional surrenders, (conveyances) and licensing for all trades and possessions. Warrants of satisfaction, sworn to by both sides of financial transactions, necessary before any further sale could take place.

The custom at St Osyth was to "Examine in secret" the wife, before the husband when a Copyhold was to be surrendered. Only if the wife had "freely and voluntarily" consented could the exchange go ahead.

RICHARD 4th EARL RIVERS

Richard was Elizabeth Savage's (née Darcy) great-grandson. He had had a liaison with an Elizabeth Cullerton, who had given birth to Richard's natural daughter - Bessy Savage.

When the 4th Earl Rivers died in 1712, the Rivers title and other estates went to the legitimate branch of the Savage family, but to Bessy Savage he left the ruined remains of St Osyth Priory and the sum of £10,000.

PART FIVE – RETURN OF THE LORD OF THE MANOR

BESSY SAVAGE

Bessy had married Frederick Nassau, a member of an illegitimate branch of the Royal House of Orange, from Kasteel Zuylestein. Frederick's Grandfather had come to England with his "cousin" William III and had been created the 1st Earl of Rochford.

On 27th July 1710 Frederick had succeeded to the title of 3rd Earl of Rochford. Bessy was now a Countess.

In 1712 Frederick and Bessy, began the task of restoring Bessy's inheritance and spending the £10,000.



*Bessy Nassau nee Savage
Countess of Rochford also known as
"The Lass of St Osyth."*

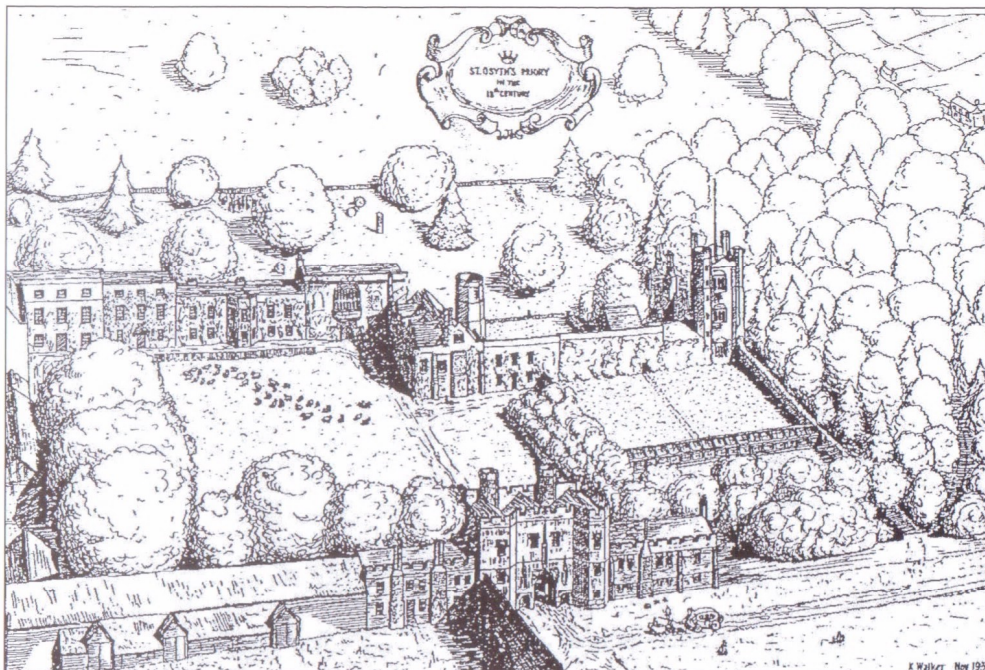
FREDERICK NASSAU – 3RD EARL OF ROCHFORD

Work was put in hand about 1715; Frederick and Bessy took up residence in the parts made habitable, after what remained of the brick built Darcy House had been cleared away. This being the Bishop's Lodgings and the Cellarer's range, leaving the Darcy Tower, undercroft and refectory in isolation.



Frederick Nassau 3rd Earl of Rochford.

Frederick and Bessy began the extension to the north of the upper saloon, and below, this by enclosing the arch and passageway, created the lower saloon. Extending to the west, the Rochford Wing was built, comprising some nine bedrooms, with dressing rooms and six large rooms on the ground floor. The Rochford Wing was completed at right angles by a wing to the south, where it met the range of buildings from the Gatehouse to the Bailiff's Cottage. This enclosed the



An impression of the restored priory and the completed Rochford wing.
Note: no cupola on the clock tower.

Inner Courtyard. Typical of its period, it had major saloons linked by long corridors and a gallery along which ladies and gentlemen paraded.

Frederick and Bessy had two sons - William Henry and Richard Savage de Nassau. Having endured the restoration, Frederick was only spared a few years of peaceful occupation of his stately home; he died on June 14th 1738.

Bessy, who was apparently still an attractive lady, only five months later had remarried. On November 14th 1738 Bessy married the Reverend Philip Carter the Rector of Tunstall. Philip had composed a sonnet in Bessy's honour - called "*The Lass of St Osyth*". †

Bessy died on 23rd May 1746. Her legacy was twofold; a son who was to rise to the highest levels in Royal circles and the rebuilt Priory - whose footprint is much as we see it today. The £10,000 well spent.

WILLIAM HENRY - 4TH EARL OF ROCHFORD

The 4th Earl was a prominent man in Court circles, a friend of King George II and King George III, he was in their service for many years.

William Henry married Lucy, the daughter of a Wiltshire squire. Lucy was a Court beauty who attracted the attentions of more than one member of the Royal Family. According to Walpole, himself a noted womaniser - "*she is large, but handsome with great delicacy and address*".



William Henry - 4th Earl of Rochford.



Lucy - Countess Rochford.

Lucy, perhaps wisely, was however childless, but apparently very accommodating, to such an extent that her husband's mistresses both gave birth at the Priory, whilst Lucy was herself in residence.

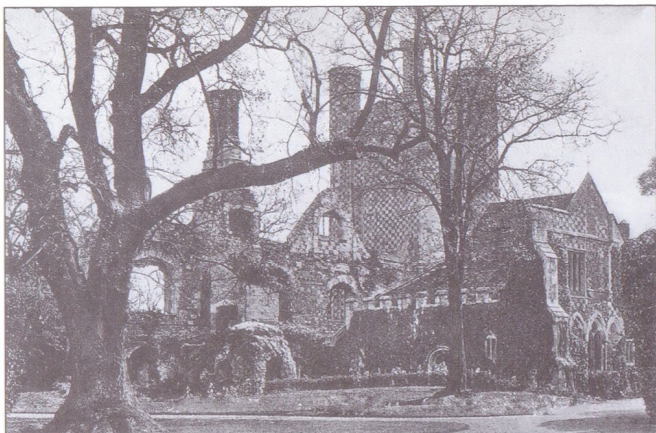
Lucy died aged 57 in 1773.

During his forty years service to the Crown William Henry held many posts, several Ambassadorial appointments, and was a Privy Councillor, Secretary of State as well as a Knight of the Garter. In 1760 as Groom of the Stole he was granted all the contents of the room in which King George II died. These were brought to the Priory and the King's Room was re-created, the exception being the royal bedspread which was used as an Altar Cloth at the Parish Church.

One item, a Breeches bible, dated 1610, was included. This had the Royal Arms on the cover. (Genesis 3 v7 refers to breeches not fig leaves).

As Secretary of State William Henry influenced world affairs. As holder of that office, he made the casting vote against the abolition of Tea Taxes, which led in turn to the Boston Tea party and eventually the American War of Independence.

King George III twice visited St Osyth during his reign, giving his host life size portraits of himself and Queen Charlotte, by Allan Ramsey. These were hung either side of the fireplace in the upper Grand Saloon. George III, despite being much vexed by the loss of his American Colony, appears to have held the 4th Earl in great esteem, as in 1775 he granted an annuity of £3,000 per annum, passed by the Great Seal.



The Tulip Tree, extreme left, taken around 1890, it was already over 100 years old.

from Italy the first Lombardy Poplars to be planted in England. Other specimens, such as the Tulip tree, came from America.

He was also very innovative, introducing the idea of land drainage by laying locally made clay pipes. † Four course rotation of crops and setting winter wheat were also pioneered at St Osyth. Then there was the experimentation using different types of fertilizer such as guano, which he had imported via the Quay.

In 1772 there is a reference to "the men have been ha-haing" - which is a strong indication for the date of the ha-ha - which divides the north lawn from the mowing ground, but is not visible.

From the Accounts † of the 4th Earl we can form some idea of how the Priory was managed. Taxes amounted to £156 a year, Land and Window; Carriage; Servants and Poor Rate. Staff wages £149 4s 0d, the Curate and Steward £50 each, Park Keeper and Housekeeper £20, whilst Daniel Wood - Kitchen Lad - got £4 4s 0d. The item for Henry Cook, Gardener, is much larger - however this would have been a contract. The custom was that Henry Cook provided staff, equipment and seeds etc, hence the large sum of £206 16s 0d.

The school master and mistress were each paid £10, with £4 7s 3d "for things for the school children".

A doctor was always retained, living nearby, on call for the Lord of the Manor. Dr Inman held the post in the 1770's, and was paid £52 10s 0d. The doctor, at the Earl's discretion, would attend parishioners and was at times loaned out to nearby parishes. Inhabitants of surrounding parishes, envious of this privilege, began to refer to "Toosey treaclemines", a sly reference to living close to the Priory.

There is a small emblem of the sun, let into the central niche above the Gatehouse arch. This a firemark, issued by the Sun Alliance Co, in respect of policy 525510 taken out in 1780's.

One passion the 4th Earl held in common with George III, ("Farmer George") was agriculture. With his many high offices William Henry visited several countries, living there for short periods. It was from these countries that the rare and unusual trees were collected and established at the Priory. In 1768 he is said to have brought

In the event of a fire, the Company horse drawn engines would turn out - at the gallop - but would only deal with fires at buildings which displayed their firemark.

Whilst on the Income side, - the accounts show

From my estates	£4,412 0s 0d
Government pensions	£5,320 0s 0d

The mill produced a £40 rent, whilst from nine farms £1,788 3s 0d. These were according to acreage; Thomas Martin at Park Farm was highest at £269 10s 0d, the lowest Carrington Wilson at Cocketwick at £150. In all income of some £11,559 3s 0d.

So he could easily afford to spend a Guinea for "A peal of bells on the Kings Birthday and mine birthday".

The 4th Earl was known to have fathered at least four children, by at least three mistresses; William Henry provided for them all. The heir, to his title however, was a nephew - also William Henry. One lady had a lane named for her - "Fannys lane" at the Heath, whilst another was ensconced at a thatched cottage at the Heath, named the "Pretty thing", (now Kimbolds).



The ruins of the Darcy mansion, left in isolation after the rebuild in 1714. Note the four arches of the undercroft with the converted refectory above.

During his lifetime he ordered a handsome china service for use at state occasions, decorated with his motto and Coat of Arms. The motto was SPES DURAT AVORUM - "the hope of our ancestors endures", but the painter wrote SPES DURAT AMORUM - "the hope of our love affairs endures". Thus unwittingly underscoring the 4th Earl's peculiarities.

William Henry was particularly fond of cricket and he financed matches at St Osyth, but also on Gt Bentley Green.

Another pastime he enjoyed was swimming, but not at St Osyth. According to the Earl he disliked having to wade through saltings, marshes, seaweed and mud at St Osyth, so he built a bathhouse at Walton on Naze, in a meadow near the shore - because - "the sea at Walton is subject to flux at the point of time when all the foulness of the shore, seaweeds and filth of the first current are carried away, so that the tide comes in the highest purity and strength".

William Henry died on 20th September 1781 and was buried with Lucy, in the Church. He was succeeded by his nephew to his Earldom, but the

Priory was left to his natural son, not yet into his teenage years - Frederick Nassau born to Martha Harrison.

MR FREDERICK NASSAU

Frederick was born at the Priory on 31st July 1771; his mother Martha had also given birth to Frederick's sister Maria at the Priory.

However by the time of Frederick's inheritance in 1781, his mother had been replaced by his father's next mistress. Anne Labee-Johnson (Fanny) had produced Frederick's half-sister Anne, known as Nancy.

Frederick and Nancy were sent to London to be educated, the year's entrance fee being £11 0s 0d each.

Meanwhile the Priory was in the hands of Trustees, who did not hesitate to make good use of this authority to strip the Priory of its assets, maybe including the valuable Breeches Bible. The Trustees, who included Anne Labee-Johnson, ensured that during the period of Frederick's minority the Park was denuded of trees, mainly oak, including the famed Bulmers Oak. It was said five men could not span the trunk. Its fate was immortalised by W Crabb in his poem "St Osyth in 1790" †

*"The rooks are shot, the trees are felled
and nest and nursery expelled.
With better fate the Giant tree
Old Bulmers oak is gone to sea."*

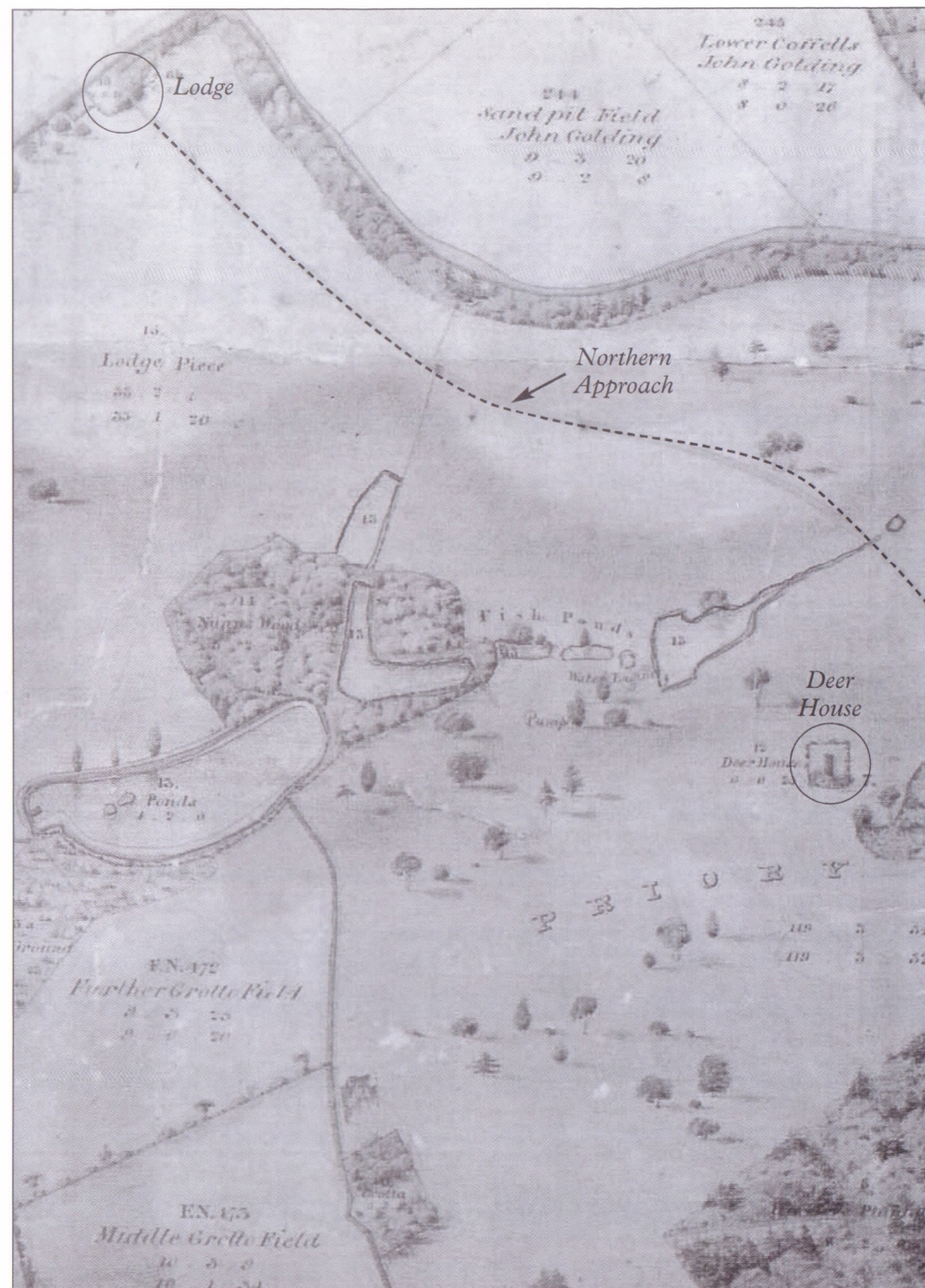
Frederick was a small slight young man; in 1797 he went on a Grand Tour of Europe. When visiting Switzerland he met and wed Catherine Rose - Baronne de Brackall; on their return Frederick took control from the Trustees. Catherine's boudoir, the Swiss Room which featured scenes of her homeland, was created in the Rochford Wing.

In 1806 Frederick was appointed Captain of the Homeguard, in charge of 134 men, whose weapons were stored in the large room over the Gatehouse arch.

Three years later, when a William Howard of Blockhouse Wick Farm died, the King's Breeches Bible was found in his possession; Howard had been an



The Tomb of William Henry – 4th Earl of Rochford and of Lucy – the Countess of Rochford. Extreme right.



Nuns Wood ponds, left to right, Dolphin, Breeches, Conduit and Engine Ponds. 1814. Note the 16th century deer house still in situ, plus the lodge and northern approach.



The lodge at the start of northern approach - 1814. Note the strong Dutch influence in the design.



The carriage circle on the north lawn - 1814. Leading to the north door Rochford wing. (Photo taken 1890).

intimate friend of Frederick's father - the 4th Earl of Rochford - who it was supposed "gifted" it to Howard. The Breeches bible is now held at the Parish Church.

By 1814 the Park had been transformed.† The drive across the Mowing ground from Colchester Road had been abandoned. Now a lodge had been built on the Parks northern boundary - the Northern approach through the Park still led to the carriage circle and main entrance in the Rochford Wing.

The series of ponds in Nuns Wood had been reshaped, stocked and named according to their shape. Within the Hermitage the Grotto houses had been created. Gradually the Priory Park was refined into a more fashionable ornate area, whilst some of the older features such as the Deer House had been preserved.

Frederick was to live at the Priory for 60 years, his presence was to ensure a higher degree of care developed at the Priory, but also an increase of care for the village inhabitants. Frederick and Catherine Rose had four children, William Frederick, John Augustus, Anne and Frances. The youngest, Frances, died as an infant. Whilst the children were young there were no problems but when they became young adults the relationships between



The Grotto. The shell house created for Catherine Rose Nassau nee de Brackall. Built of septaria and flint built 1800.



The walls and ceiling were decorated by shells, this shows the central feature of the ceiling, note the branches also covered in shells to the right.

Frederick and his offspring became extremely fraught.

William Frederick became a man of enormous girth at 26 stones; he was wildly extravagant and his excesses knew no limits. John Augustus was equally dissolute, his excesses leading to the loss of his sight. Anne following her brothers' example and was very rebellious and a forward young lady.

In 1833 Frederick was thrown into Marshalsea Prison for debts incurred against his estate by William Frederick his son, who had borrowed against his inheritance. Having secured his release by payment of the debts, Frederick had the entail terminated by a process called Common Recovery. Once this was in place he had his children removed from the Priory, of William he wrote,

"when he is his own master he may make as great a beast of himself as he thinks proper".

John, now totally blind, was installed at Waterloo House at the Crossroads. Anne had removed herself from the scene by eloping to Gretna Green with a Thomas Manning.

In 1814 Frederick had an Estate Map † drawn up. Then in 1840 the Great Tithe Map † was created, which with the terriers gives full details of the parish - thus we know exactly what land was in Frederick's possession five years before his demise.

Frederick died on 3rd July 1845 aged 74, leaving Catherine-Rose to his estranged son and heir's mercy.

WILLIAM FREDERICK NASSAU

William had formed a liaison with the local Miller's daughter. They had two daughters, Eliza and Elizabeth, both registered at baptism in the local church with their mothers surname of Garnett. †

William terrorised the village by driving his horses at speed, he being strapped in to avoid being thrown out. Another anecdote was that a carpenter was hired to cut out a semi-circle of his dining table to accommodate his - "corpulence".

On his father's death William moved his mother Catherine to the Dower House in Mill Street, and Elizabeth Garnett and daughters into the Priory.

Catherine Rose died at Mill Street on 4th November 1857. William's "wife" Elizabeth died shortly before.

Only 12 years after coming into his inheritance and deeply in debt William sank into gloom and depression and according to his daughters became somewhat deranged by these deaths.

Elizabeth, William's daughter, had married and was now Mrs John Roberts Kirby. Eliza was now Mrs Charles Brandreth.

On 24th November 1857 William was found with knife wounds to the neck, but no bloodstains and no weapon. He died a few days later. Scandal erupted, William's brother John, alleging murder, claimed the estate. This was disputed by Kirby and Brandreth, on behalf of their wives.

What followed was a lengthy and very costly law suit, heard in July 1858 at Chelmsford Assizes. † Eventually the court found for the two daughters, whose rather dubious claim that their parents were secretly married was reluctantly accepted.

Now however they faced debts, mortgages and legal costs in excess of £200,000 0s 0d. Insurances on their father's life raised £80,000 0s 0d, the Priory contents were sold, including the Royal Portraits, raising £89,765 6s 0d. Within a month of the legal case being settled the Priory and 27 other holdings were put up for sale in London on 20th August 1858. † This raised £129,920 0s 0d. However the Priory itself and the 400 acres of Park and Farm did not reach the reserve price and were withdrawn.

Eliza and Charles Brandreth lived at Hill House on Flag Hill before they moved into the Priory. It was by now in a state of dilapidation, in the main unfurnished, and the Park and Gardens had deteriorated.

Having very little money it was during this period that Charles Brandreth caused the demolition of two thirds of the Rochford Wing to be carried out, † at a stroke destroying Catherine-Rose's Swiss room and the 4th Earl of Rochford's King's room. Within 18 months the Brandreths sold out their half share to the Kirbys for £12,000 0s 0d and moved back to Hill House. The Priory was finally sold and by 1862 the Kirbys had also departed.

The whole unhappy story was immortalised by Wilkie Collins, whose novel, "*No Name*" is a thinly disguised version of the story of William Nassau, his daughters, their illegitimacy, his murder, their gain and the public scandal.

In 1862 the Priory was occupied, but not owned, by the family of Lord Allenby, including the infant boy who was to grow up to become the distinguished First World War hero - Field Marshall Hynman Allenby.

PART SIX – DISPERSAL OF THE MANORIAL COURT

The Enfranchisement of the Manor of St Osyth followed the sale which effectively broke up the Estate - after the demise of William Frederick Nassau in 1857.

However because of the legal battle of 1858 - John Nassau v Brandreth and others this was not straightforward. William Frederick Nassau's sons in law, with others and their offspring were adjudged as Trustees of the Estate, and were subjected to a subsequent lengthy legal process, in Chancery, on Probate well after 1858.

As a consequence issues relating to compensation on Copyholds were not settled for many decades, the last in 1913 to 1927. The Manorial Court Rolls of Inrolement, kept from 1639 onwards, proved to be invaluable to claimants; held at the Essex Records Office, they are basically over 300 years of conveyancing and licencing. Land at Chisbon and Rough Heath now passed into the ownership of the Copyholders, each plot numbered and allotted by the Enclosure Commission Awards.

One effect of there being no Lord of the Manor was that the hitherto Donative living at St Osyth Church now became the responsibility of the Church of England, who now had to house and pay the Incumbent, having interviewed candidates and making a choice. But there is no record regarding the extinguishing of the Chancel dues.

PART SEVEN – PRIVATE RESIDENCE

JOHN JOHNSON

Elizabeth and John Johnson, lived in London at Gt Portland Street. John was a successful merchant, Elizabeth was an invalid, the couple were childless. Elizabeth stayed mostly in London and died aged 47, although she was buried at St Osyth.

John purchased the Priory in 1863, when the house, gardens and park were very run down. Especially unsightly was the area of demolition where the former Rochford Wing had stood; there was now a huge gap in the N.W. corner of the Inner Courtyard.

Employing vast numbers of staff, tradesmen, specialists and advisers he set about the restoration, all under the supervision of the Head Gardener George

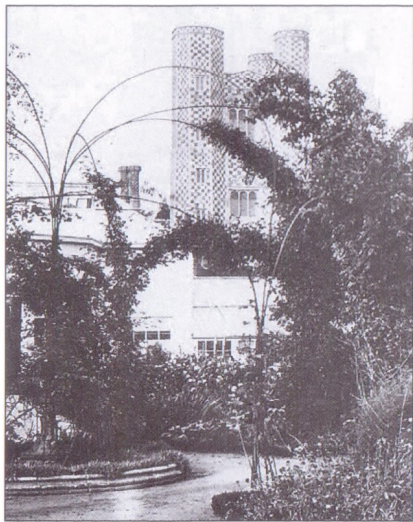


Sir John Johnson - 1870.

Kent. Some 6 years later a gathering of Essex Archaeologists arrived to survey the work undertaken thus far. Whilst they approved of the gardens and park, especially the “*Gothicising of the Rochford ruins*” - they had reservations about the interior works, not appreciating John’s hobby of fretwork! A poem written by J A McLeod called “*St Osyth in 1869*” † lauds the improvements made by John Johnson.

One thing John did do was to track down and purchase the lifesize portraits of King George III and Queen Charlotte, restoring them to their former position.

Now created Sir John, he had the Johnson wing built. This necessitated the demolition of the existing kitchen area, which became the Butler’s pantry, Housekeeper’s parlour and stores on the ground floor. On the first floor, accessed



The Rose Garden with arbours for ramblers central. The orangery is visible, viewed from the south.



The South Terrace, the Victorian formal planting. Cupola on top of the clock tower.

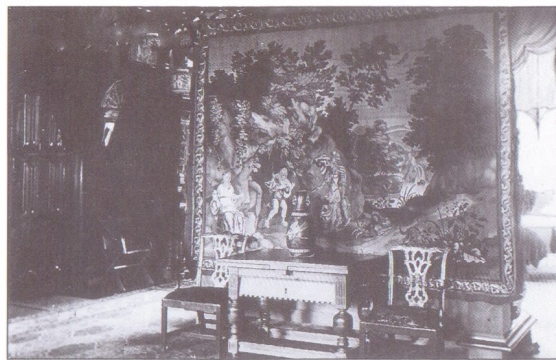
by a new oak staircase were the Butler’s and Housekeeper’s bedrooms. To the south of this, the Cellarers range was converted to the staff hall below and the manservants’ bedrooms above. The new east wing accommodated the kitchen and two stillrooms and the scullery. The maid servants’ rooms were above this, so that genders were strictly separated by the Housekeeper’s rooms and the Linen room.



The Orangery, situated in a lowered section of the Topiary Lawn.



Upper Drawing Room, the original Oriel window looking South.



Lower Drawing Room looking North.



The new Oriel window looking North in the Upper Drawing Room.

The Upper Grand Salon was extended to its present size and the matching North Oriel window was introduced. The access to the cellars was via a concealed door in the Oak panelling. In order to achieve symmetry with the western Rochford wing several false Tudor style chimneys were added.



The beginning of the lily pond, the basis of the Japanese Garden - 1890. Note the new Johnson wing in the background.



The mature Japanese Garden. 1900.

Next Sir John set about converting the old undercroft into a Chapel; above; this the old Refectory became a huge fruit store.

Outside, the rustic Rochford screen had been erected, to disguise the area of demolition and to allow time for the lawn and planting which surrounded the Japanese Garden and Lily Pond to mature and create a pleasant vista.

The Rochford screen was planted with ivy, vines and Virginia creeper. The grounds were opened to visitors at 6d per head. By the end of the 19th Century the Japanese Garden and Lilypond had been completed.

In 1872 the Secretary of State rescinded the licence to hold Fairs on the Bury, these moved to the field behind the Mermaid Inn. (Now the Kings Arms.) The cessation was necessary to accommodate the horse drawn buses and private vehicles.

Sir John entered into life of the local community. He founded the St Osyth Priory Lodge of Freemasons in 1884. † He was a Churchwarden and twice funded restorations at the Church. These however were achieved against a background of animosity, which surfaced when, without consultation with the P.C.C., Sir John replaced the wooden sheepfold Communion Rail with the present the marble version.

Then in 1898 the Priory Chapel was consecrated and the Sunken gardens created so that visitors could walk among the ruins and in and out of the Chapel, going under the Tower.

The extract from the Gardeners Chronicle of Jan 12th 1895 † describes a visit the previous Summer -

"The first sight I saw in passing through the old gateway was a score or so of happy children from the East End slums of London at dinner. These were the guests of the proprietor of the Priory, whose custom it is to ask them down in battalions throughout the Summer. To give them free run of parks and pleasure grounds, and free bed and board until their bleached faces rejoice and blossom as a rose".



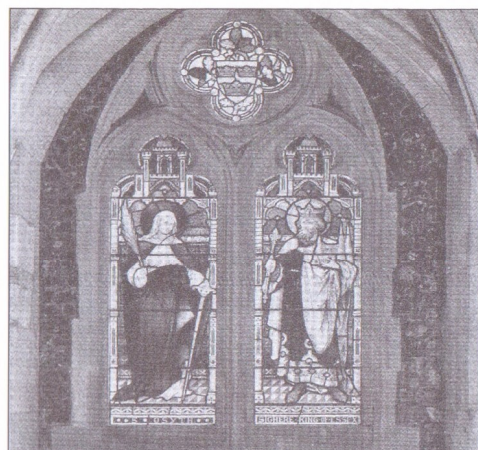
The Rochford Screen newly constructed about 1870.



The mature Rochford Screen.



The Chapel, the former undercroft of the abbey, restored by Sir John and consecrated in 1898. Note the window right.



The window depicts St Osyth receiving Priory from her husband King Sighere of Essex. Note the shield of Osyth above, three crowns.

Two years later another article † describe the Park and views and noted with wonder that five of the Lombardy Poplars planted in 1768 still stood.

On the 22nd April 1884 the Priory escaped virtually unscathed during the Colchester Earthquake. The Mill Street medieval wall needed strengthening iron X or S in places and the 12th C side gate on the Bury required a new pair of brick built buttresses.



Head horsemen to Sir John - James Beales and wife Rosina, with their five sons. L-R. 1) John who followed his father as head horseman at the Priory. 2) Harry also became a horseman. 4) Alfred who became a thatcher. (They also had ten daughters).

Sir John decided to adopt one of the Curate's children as his heir. Reverend Langley-Watts had many children, it is said all were put into one large bed with just faces showing to disguise gender and age. Sir John chose Mary Mabel; one can only speculate what changes came into the little girl's life, moving from the vicarage in Mill Street to the Priory.

Sir John died on October 7th 1909.

MARY MABEL BEATRICE WATTS

When Mary succeeded her adoptive father in 1909 she was unmarried. Sir John had overseen the demolition of the properties in Church Square including the Queens Head; the Lych Gate and the North entrance to the Church were completed; the unconsecrated land where houses had stood was now fenced in and part of the Churchyard.



Lady M. Mabel Cowley née Watts, adopted daughter of Sir John. L-R. Lady Cowley, her mother Mrs Langley-Watts and one of her sisters in Nuns Wood.

Work had started on the Working men's club, formed in 1910. Mary now decreed that this be completed, naming it the Johnson Institute in her father's memory, but with a tiny conceit had her own initials MBW and the date 1911, built into the west elevation.

By 1914 Mary had married and was living at Priory Cottage - Dr Arthur Cowley was Chief Librarian at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

There is no record of Mary occupying the Priory after her marriage or of her elevation to Lady Cowley until well after she had sold the Priory. In 1914 the Priory was closed, Mary sent all her male staff to Colchester to enlist. The main house was commandeered for officers, the soldiers under canvas



The Priory staff sent in 1914 to enlist at Colchester.



Assembling for a church parade, 29th September 1917.



1st Royal Devon Yeomanry under canvas on Jubilee Piece 1915.



Officers grooms around the Horsecwash in the Priory farmyard. Horses were walked down into the water, swum across and out.



Troops watering their mounts at Seal Pond off Brightlingsea Avenue Priory Park, after exercises.

in the Park, the horses of the Cavalry Regiments stationed here, in the Mill Street stables and at local farms.

Three of the Priory staff were killed; Mary had three white poplars planted on the edge of the mowing ground near the walled garden to commemorate their sacrifice.

The Cowleys never returned to St Osyth. The Priory and its contents were put up for sale in 1920, † the sale of the contents taking up to five days to complete.

On finally cutting her ties with St Osyth, Mary gave the Bantan field and Little Maltings field in Mill Street to the village. Trustees were appointed, but a condition attached that any development on the Recreation Ground must be approved by whoever owned the Priory. "Cowley Park" was given to commemorate the loss of 55 men during the war, so named to honour the donor.

BRIGADIER GENERAL KINCAID SMITH - C.B. G.M.G. D.S.O. D.L. J.P.

Kenneth Kincaid-Smith retired to the Priory in 1924, bringing with him his batman, Beaumont, as Butler and Mrs Beaumont as Housekeeper, and Burgess his chauffeur with his wife and family.

A bachelor and a quiet elderly man, he lived a country squire's life. The Priory was once again fully staffed and open to the public. In 1927 the wall - Bar Corner to the Bury - was set back by 10ft to accommodate the larger vehicles such as omnibuses. Then in the early 1930's a silent movie, black and white film called "Silas Marney" was filmed at the Priory; visitor levels increased when this was released.

Almost immediately local people were taken on to work on the farm, in the gardens and orchards, as well as indoors as maids. The outdoor staff were managed by Mr "Jock" Murphy the Bailiff, who lived in the Gatehouse east wing.

As Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Essex the General played a part at the opening of Clacton Town Hall, † he also sat on the board of Clacton Cottage Hospital. A Freemason, he eventually became Grand Lodge Master of the St Osyth Priory Lodge at Clacton. † Many times over the years he entertained members of the Royal Family who were either



The General. Photo taken in 1936. Grand Master of St Osyth Priory Lodge.



The General in cap with the 1st Scout Troup 1921. Gibson - Under Butler in trilby. Beaumont - Butler in black suit. Note the iron gates in the archway.



The General and his staff. Top row: 1. Chilvers, 2. Fred Smith - Gardener, 3. Hubert Last - Gardener, 4. Bluff Coe - Gardener (Harry), 5. Fred Brett - Farm, 6. Probert - Gamekeeper. Second row: 1. Poppy Reid - Poultry Girl, 2. ?, 3. Gibson - Under Butler, 4. Joe Mills - Carpenter, 5. Charles Ede - Orchard, 6. Mr Beaumont - Butler, 7. John Beales - Head Horseman, 8. Albert Bell - Gardener, 9. Mrs Chilvers - Parlour Maid, 10. Burgess - Chauffeur, 11. ? Third Row: 1. Albert Scotney - Dairyman, 2. Arthur King - Dairyman, 3. Mary Gardiner - Poultry Girl, 4. Brig. General Kincaid Smith, 5. C. Carrington - Secretary, 6. Peter Murphy - Farm Bailiff, 7. Mrs. Beaumont - Housekeeper, 8. Cyril King - Horsekeeper. Seated in front: 1. Vic Gilbert, 2. Anthony Almond, 3. Len Beales - Garden Boys.



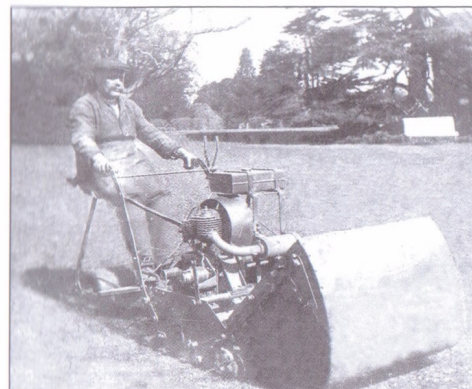
Mr Peter Murphy -1927 with the newly installed ornamental gates made by Percy Offord the village Blacksmith.



Queen Mary's visit in 1937 with Lord and Lady Byng.

attending events in the area or were on holiday at Frinton - these included Queen Mary, the Duke of Kent and Princess Alice of Athlone, all of whom planted trees near the Japanese Garden.

During the 1930's the huge Holm Oak on the Bury split its main trunk, caused by the weight of its canopy. The village postman, Darkie Rampling was struck by a branch and his arm broken. The tree was repaired by huge chains around the main branches, which when pulled together brought the tree almost upright, the trunk was then reinforced by a huge mound of earth against the medieval wall.



Mr Bell, Gardener on the state of the art lawnmower, cutting the north lawn.



Mr Beaumont serves the Stirrup Cup to the Master of the Hounds.



Bill Almond, Gardener, painting a popular scene.



The site chosen for the public toilets, needed to accommodate the visitors to the Priory - 1929.

The General played an active part in village affairs – at the Church, making regular visits to the school and supporting the parish charities and organisations. One example of this was when no-one would volunteer to become a trustee for Cowley Park, he intervened in a timely and effective way in village

disputes. Main events were always held at the Priory, the entrance fee enhancing the profits.

Only once was there any serious challenge to the General's authority, when the village was split into factions over the siting of the proposed Public Toilets. Disgruntled residents, who did not appreciate the annual influx of tourists which made this necessary, recommended "*Knocking a hole in the Priory wall and putting them there - after all only the General gained from admission fees*".

The General's boon companion was General Arthur Foreman. They were usually seen strolling together in the Park or gardens, always accompanied by black Labradors, the last of whom, a bitch called Fan, is buried by the pillar on the north lawn.

There were a dozen or so units of tied accommodation around the estate, occupied according to the posts held. At North Lodge, near the Woods and Marshes were Gamekeepers Craske and Probert. In Colchester Road the gardeners' cottages housed the Wilmott and Bell families. In Mill Street by the medieval wall the former vicarage housed the King family, dairymen, and the estate carpenter, Joe Mills. The Beales family lived in the two cottages on the edge of the stables and barns which housed the Suffolk Punch horses and their equipment. On the Quay the cottages were home to the farm labourers. Just before the Second World War the first member of the Hendy family began work there, Harry my brother. I was given the job of fetching the milkcan from the main house and delivering the required amount of milk and eggs to the Housekeeper,



"Dumpling" on his way to be shod, with John Beales, Head Horseman. All the farm horses were Suffolk Punch breed. Note the brick buttress added after the Colchester earthquake.



The Tithe Barn viewed from the Bantan Garden. Mr Gibson Under Butler and some of the Scouts.

my rate of pay was an apple each day and 6d a week and freedom of the estate with other Priory children.

The General was a familiar figure, Harris tweed plus four suits, yellow waistcoat and matching flat cap. When in 1939 the war began the General became O.C. for the area's Homeguard. As in 1914 the troops were quartered at the Priory, in Nissen huts in the Park and on the Bury. The General who remained in residence, presided over the Officer's mess at the main house. It was he, in full khaki uniform, who took the salute at the

regular inter service parades. However it was at the Victory parade that he appeared in full navy blue Dress uniform, cockade hat with white feathers, spurs and sword, attended by bowler hatted Beaumont and Burgess. He was cheered to the rafters!



Tied housing, left, in Colchester Road, home to the Bell family.



Tied housing Mill Street L-R Stables, cart sheds then the home to Beales family. Orchards, the former Vicarage then successively home to Mills, Kings and Hendy families.



Tied housing, on the Quay, home to the King family (now Quay House and Summer cottage).

When in 1948 the General died over 700 people attended the funeral, silent parishioners watched the coffin on a simple farm cart drawn by a Suffolk punch as it crossed to the Church, escorted by the entire male staff, taking the General on his last journey.

Queen Mary had first choice of the contents of the Priory. Selecting the Sevres china and some of the portraits - including those of George III and Queen Charlotte. The remaining contents were sold.



Sports day 1944 for troops billeted locally. They always took part in War Weapons weeks activities.



The General's funeral, a farm cart drawn by "Mark", led by Cyril King, escorted by male staff.

PART EIGHT - CONVALESCENT HOME

THE LOYAL ANCIENT ORDER OF SHEPHERDS

The East Anglian branch had pre-war had a Convalescent Home in Clacton. This had been requisitioned for the duration of the war and, left in a derelict state, it was sold in 1947.

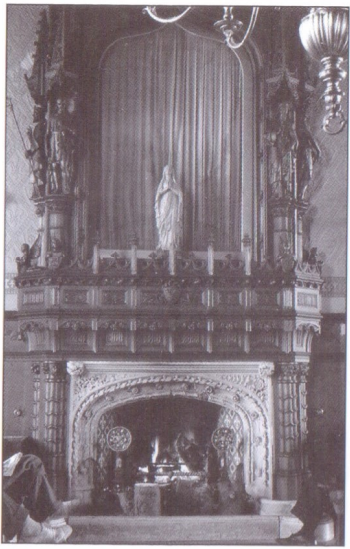
Thus when the Priory came on the market in 1948 its possibilities were immediately seen. The Priory could be converted to a Convalescent Home and would be preserved as an historical gem. The newly formed North East Metropolitan Hospital Board for National Health patients quickly came into the scheme and work began to establish the convalescent home.

Conditions post war were very austere, so only one small addition was built near the Clock Tower, using stone collected from around the grounds, this was a mandatory requirement to accommodate extra bathroom facilities.

On safety grounds a fire escape was added to the 19th C Johnson Wing.



Aerial view 1953. Bottom right the Orchards, Horsewash in farmyard. Patients deckchairs on South Terrace. Note the ornate wilderness garden, centre to top left.



The wooden fireplace surround – upper saloon converted to patients lounge.

The Vyntoner/Darcy wing and the Johnson wing were converted to two, three and four bed bedrooms and a communal bathroom was added to each wing. This work was carried out by Norman and Gardiner.

At the junction of the two corridors the old Housekeeper's linen room became the dispensary and surgery. After 500 years the Priory was to see the resumption of care for the sick and disabled.

Before the Convalescent Home was opened the Priory was to become once again, the venue for a movie. To be called the "*Chiltern Hundreds*" it starred A E Matthews, Lana Morris and David Tomlinson as the Lord of the Manor. Filming lasted for several weeks, locals worked as extras, all earning £3 3s 0d per day. The film crew stayed at the main house.

The Rochford Wing was the accommodation for day and night use by the Nursing and Senior Domestic staff. The Library became the

office. The upper state room became the patients' lounge and the lower hall became the dining room, still resplendent with a billiard table, huge book cases at the north end, the walls holding game trophies including a Black Rhino head. The room also held Elephant foot umbrella holders and a huge glass case of three black maned lions; all were the General's trophies.

Both halls boasted linenfold panelling and each had a huge open fire which required a full wheelbarrow load of logs at one go.

The Farm was run by Mr Aspland with dairy men Albert Scotney and Cyril King and the Gamekeeper was Walter Craske. Head Gardener was Jim Emmerson, with Fred Smith and Sid Hills, who all toiled to supply top class produce, from which the patients benefited, their recovery speeded.

The milk was from a herd of an historic breed of cattle - the Park White. Out of the blue this supply was cut off when the dreaded Foot and Mouth disease struck.

What the 32 patients made of their surroundings was quite diverse. Some loved it, staying a minimum of three weeks, others



The doors leading from the patients lounge to the Blue Gallery landing and grand stairs.

likened it to a prison but endured it - whilst a few were totally spooked and left as soon as they could!

In the early days of the Home a book was published, written by Denis Wheatley, "*To the Devil a Daughter*". This is clearly set at the Priory and mentions places at Colchester and Thorpe.

The office was run by Chief Executive Mr Herbert Titmarsh, the Lady Almoner was the formidable Miss Daisy George.

Matron was Mrs Aspland, Sister was Miss Barbara Titmarsh, aided by 2 S.R.N.'s. The first Medical Officer was Doctor Fox of Clacton. The domestic

staff, three live in maids plus a small army of part timers, were managed by Mrs Hilda Hendy Housekeeper. Cyril Page was the houseman and I - aged 17 - was the cook.

The patients, all male, mostly came from London. They arrived pale and washed out, some ex P.O.W.'s or servicemen. After a week or so they began to visibly bloom, but by week three were bored and anxious to return home. Under the Shepherds' Society the grounds remained open to the public, the money raised ploughed back into the Home and patients' welfare.



Convalescent Home staff 1949. L-R Olive Garvie, Mary Graham, Phyll Hendy and Ivy Cattermole.

After over fifty years the Holm Oak on the Bury wall once again was on the verge of collapse. The chains were replaced by iron bands, the canopy was taken back to reduce the weight, and once again the centuries old tree was saved.

In 1954 the Priory was put up for sale as a profitable concern, as the N.H.S. was now up and running.



The Park White and other cattle, waiting to go to the milking parlour at the Chase gate, off Jubilee Piece.



The Patients Lounge. To the left the door to the oak staircase. Note the linenfold panelling.

SOMERSET DE CHAIR

Somerset purchased the Priory for £29,500 in 1954. He had recently resigned as an MP, among other reasons being his extra marital affairs. An ex-soldier, author † and poet † he had been an MP since 1935.

An army of staff from Norfolk arrived to replace some of the existing staff. Matron Lyon, Arthur and Doris Skinner came to run the farm and keep house for the family; a new, very dour houseman and several young maids.

There was now an abrupt change of direction, it was to become a profit making business, staff reduced to a minimum.



The restored entrance to the Gatehouse. Used as schoolroom for evacuees in 1939-40.



The dining room in the West Wing, door connects to Gatehouse.

Soon after Somerset's acquisition of the Priory work began on the central portion of the Gatehouse, under Mr Darcy Braddell Architect, a descendent of the Darcy family. The renovation was extended to include the West Wing, this was to become the de Chair residence.



The drawing room which extends across the top floor of the Gatehouse.



The Rembrandt Room – the master bedroom West Wing.

Leaving wife Thelma (née Arbuthnot), sons Rodney and Peter at Blickling Hall in Norfolk, Somerset arrived with "Carmen", real name June Appleton, and their two sons Rory and Carlo, the results of a two year liaison at a house in Eaton Square, London.

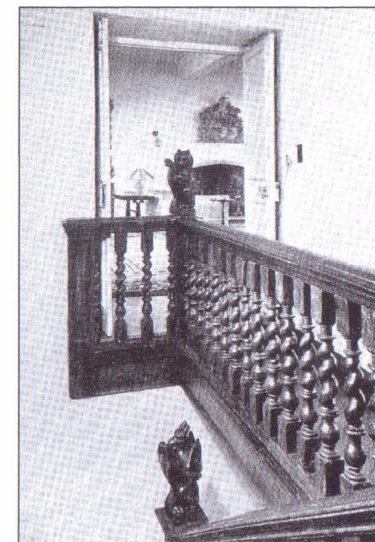
The completion of the Gatehouse renovation was delayed by the addition of a Charles II staircase from Costessy Hall. This was too large to fit initially, so some rooms in the Rochford Wing were hastily prepared for their use. Strangely, other than this brief stay the de Chairs never again resided at the main house. The Gatehouse renovation was funded by grant, which carried with it an obligation to allow public access to the grounds. Gradually other buildings were renovated, including the East Wing of the Gatehouse and the derelict Bailiff's cottage. Funding was created by, once again, selling timber from the estate and by selling aggregate extraction rights within the Park, the land eventually to be restored to Agriculture.



The entrance to the East Wing, with the new staircase.

left under no doubt that they were to practise economy and quite often essential items in dire need of replacement were not forthcoming.

In 1956 Somerset ordered the closure of the Bury, intending to make a little on car parking charges. He was astonished when his right to do so was challenged. Furious letters † appeared in the press filling the correspondence column. In the event Somerset did not pursue this - but he never forgave the locals and they never forgave him.



The Charles II staircase, which replaced the winding stone staircase and linked the Gatehouse and West Wing. Door leads into the drawing room above the Gatehouse.

In 1955 one of the patients overdid the piling of logs into the dining room hearth, leaving the room. The wooden surround which reached to the ceiling caught fire, this ornate structure and the huge still life painting it framed was destroyed.

One of the early casualties of Somersets "economies" were the North Lodge cottages, rather than renovate he had these demolished - a practice he followed several times - afterwards, with the estate cottages.

Staff were not replaced. Those remaining both indoor and out were



The Jade Buffalo the first piece of the jade collection.

It was about this time that Somerset purchased the Jade Buffalo, for "only £10,000." A certain young lady cook was asked to admire it, but was left totally bemused having recently been denied 10/- to replace a large cracked mixing bowl.

The massive Tulipiferi Liriodendron (Tulip Tree) was struck by lightning; although it survived it was left distorted and the huge green "tulips" were never seen again.

In the East Wing of the Gatehouse in 1961 a huge painting of the Running of the Bulls at Pamplona was created on site by Fernando Calderon; Fernando slept most of the day and painted at night †, much troubled by what he called the night birds (bats) which flew in and out of the windows. At this time the Gatehouse was opened to the public for the afternoons, creating more income. Whilst the Gatehouse and gardens were kept in a good state, the Park was deteriorating in the areas not rented out for agriculture, especially near Nuns Wood, and the Grotto, the farm buildings and Homestalls showed signs of wear and tear.



The Tulip Tree after being struck by lightning.

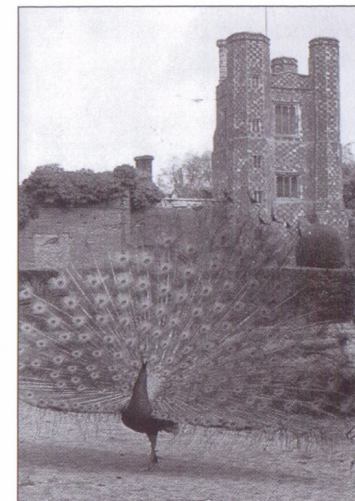


These two sketches were drawn by Fernando Calderon to show me he had understood the story of Osyth's beheading. Note: left, the nightbirds; top right, his signature.

Somerset had introduced deer into the Park and Golden pheasants and Cranes into the gardens. The Cranes disappeared and were soon replaced by blue and white Peacocks. All regularly escaped and at times strange sounds - the stags in rut, the peacocks in alarm - resounded around the village.

By now, after a few acrimonious months "Carmen" had absconded with the Captain of Somerset's yacht and "Contessa" (Patricia Manlove) had arrived with their daughter Teresa. "Tessa" played the hostess to perfection in all aspects, but this was curtailed later, when during a shooting party Somerset suffered a severe haemorrhage from a stomach ulcer, and subsequently could not have their former rich diet of food and wine.

Still practising economy, the Wilderness, Sunken gardens and Bantan Gardens had virtually disappeared and the Japanese garden became unrecognisable. Having by now lost most of the garden staff, Frank and Kath Morris (né Hendy) arrived; living in the Bailiff's Cottage, Frank was the new Head



The Priory peacock. against the red brick Darcy Wall and the Darcy Tower.



Staff party 1964, in the lower saloon, then the patients dining room. Somerset de Chair standing behind Contessa de Chair.

Gardener. Having got the equipment back into working order Frank drew up the order for seeds etc, sufficient to supply vegetables for the 50 strong Home residents and the de Chair household for twelve months, it totalled just under £50; Somerset balked and as a result the Morris family returned to Dorset.

In 1962 tragedy struck; Peter de Chair, Thelma's second son committed suicide by means of a rifle Somerset had given him for his twenty first birthday.

It was about this time the village wanted to make the pavilion on Cowley Park into a village hall, and the Scouts wanted to build their hut on the lower end of the Park. Despite various compromises by the community Somerset adamantly vetoed all development whatsoever.

The Priory was visited by thousands each year, including visitors from the Continent, mainly German and Dutch. At the gate was Mrs Elizabeth Atkins, brown as a berry, in charge of admissions who also had a range of Somerset's books to sell. †

Somerset once famously stated, "it helps if every other wife has money". Thelma most certainly did, but "Carmen" and "Contessa" whilst strikingly different, had other attributes. In 1972 Somerset met Lady Juliet, the only

daughter of the 8th Earl Fitzwilliam. Juliet's fortune was said at that time to be in excess of £28 million. However in 1972 Juliet was married to Victor Herve - 6th Marquess of Bristol. Somerset was 61 - Juliet 37. In 1974, after divorces, they married.

Lady Juliet owned other magnificent residences and was not overly enamoured by St Osyth and the cramped accommodation at the Gatehouse. Consequently there were to be lengthy absences whilst they were elsewhere. Now however staff additions were made, for example each now had a private secretary, Mrs Gladys Colby was joined by Mrs Shirley Wells.

After a gap of over fifty years Somerset and Lady Juliet's daughter Lady Helena was christened in the Priory Chapel, the last baby christened there being Bill Burgess in the early 1920's, the General's chauffeur's son.

During the 1980's the first part of the TV series "Campion" by Marjorie Allingham was filmed at the Priory, starring Peter Davison in the title role. Concerning black magic, the woods provided the necessary eerie background. One very spectacular shot involved a stunt girl falling backwards from the top of the Darcy Tower.

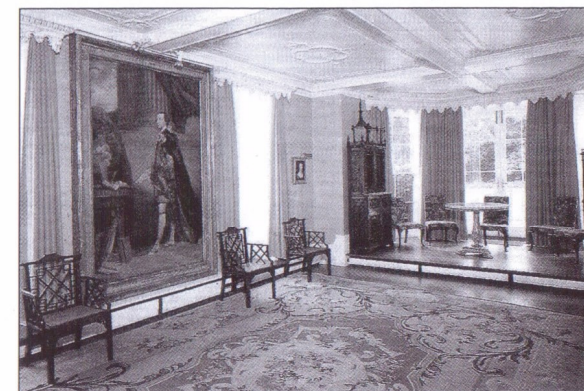
The notorious storm of 1987 wreaked havoc on the Priory, casualties were the Tithe Barn roof and the Tudor and Georgian chimneys. Avenues of trees within the park were devastated, as were the Tulip tree, the seven King's beeches on the Tumulus and the magnificent Walnut trees around the Inner Courtyard.

By 1991, with English Heritage grants, the Tithe Barn and the chimneys were restored, but subject to a condition the Priory remained open to the public until 2001.

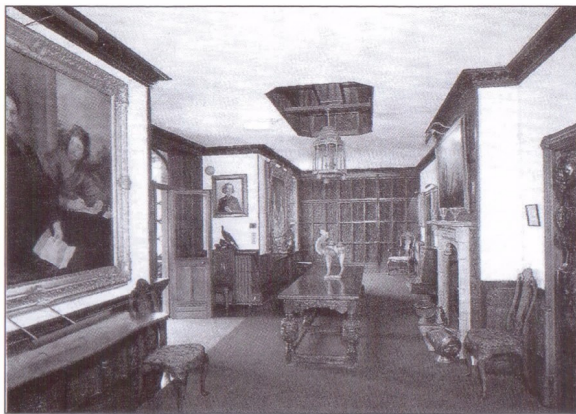
It has to be said however, that despite the planning condition imposed at the time consent was given that all land should be returned to agriculture, no attempt was ever made to restore the vast areas of craters devastated by removal of the aggregate.

Somerset allowed events to be held at the Priory, for example the hierarchy of the Conservative Party held weekend conferences there, led by Rab Butler and Lord Hailsham. When Winston Churchill died a fund raising party was held to raise a handsome donation to the fund.

Over the years changes had been made at the Convalescent Home, shortage of patients had necessitated having female as well as male patients. By the early 1980's advances in medical techniques meant that for many cases



The Whistlejacket Room. Note the lowered floor and ornate ceiling.



The Blue Corridor. Note the Vyntoner panelling. The 18th C doors were carved to match this in the Blue Corridor and gallery.

main house, to see the Rochford wing, with blue corridor and gallery, taking in the lower and upper main halls, exiting via the oak staircase and front door.

Exhibits were mainly paintings of Lady Juliet's famous Fitzwilliam and Rockingham ancestors, but also the works of George Stubbs, including the life size portrait of the Morgan Stallion Whistlejacket, to whom an entire room was dedicated - after lowering the floor to accommodate the huge painting. Later the painting was sold to the National Gallery for over £10m.

After a period of negotiation a significant portion of the Estate was sold. Some 186 acres known

as the Howlands was purchased by the Essex Wildlife Trust, it is now the largest marshland Nature Reserve in Essex. It is bordered by Flag Creek and was used from 1118 onwards for grazing, there is also an area called Landing piece which related to marine trade for the Priory and the Flag mill.

The Priory now became the venue for Civic receptions and weddings. Perhaps the most spectacular was that of Teresa, Somerset and Tessa's daughter. On marriage Teresa de Chair became Lady Tobias Clark.

Another spectacular event was on the 22nd of August 1991 - Somerset's 80th birthday. A sorbus tree was planted on the Bury.

Celebrations included an extremely noisy firework display. This had been planned for 10pm, but delayed by heavy rain it began closer to midnight and

convalescence was no longer appropriate. Added to that were the increasingly stringent Health and Safety requirements, which clearly could not be incorporated within the Planning constraints which attach to a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Home closed with the consequent loss of local employment.

Eventually the main house reopened, now housing Lady Juliet's famous art collection.

Visitors could now enter the



The State drawing room, after the Convalescent Home closed. Note the portraits centre top, where the portraits of George III and Queen Caroline were hung.



Reception for E.C.C. Chairman Tom Dale on the North Lawn. Note the Johnson wing in the background.

It has to be said the people of St Osyth in general were always a bit in awe of Somerset, yet at the same time grudgingly amused at his life style. The only organisation to receive his patronage was the Royal British Legion. Somerset, an ex Blues and Royals officer, with Bowler hat, medals and rolled broly, always marched with the R.B.L. on Armistice Day with his son Carlo.

By the start of the third Millennium the Priory was sold for £1.8 million, and Lady Juliet had remarried. The uninhabited parts of the Priory were put on the 'buildings at risk' register in 2007.



Wedding reception for Julia White and Colin Rushford on 22nd April 1995. Taken in the Priory Chapel.

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OTHER TITLES BY PHYLL HENDY

"A Toosey Twelvemonth" 2006
"Treacherous Tides" 2007

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