

# Barnet & District Local History Society

Bulletin no. 39

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## Oak Hill House and Park



**The main entrance to Oak Hill**

Looking towards the east across Oak Hill Park from Church Hill Road a large white house dominates the sky line, as it has for more than two hundred years. During most of this time the house and the park were part of one property. The sale of the lower land to form a public park and the loss of the western drive that linked the house to St Mary's church in Church Hill Road has made it feel more remote for the people of East Barnet. Yet at one time the house and its estate were an important part of the parish of East Barnet.

Oak Hill house, together with the land immediately around it, now accommodates Oak Hill College, a Church of England theological college. This is attended by both men and women wishing to train in religious matters and is part of the Kingham Hill Trust Corporation, a registered charity. In 1928 the

Trust were left the house and its estate by the College's founder, Charles Baring-Young.

In 1931 the East Barnet Valley Urban District Council bought 61 acres from the Trust for £25,000 and, with a gift of a further five acres to the north, was able to extend the area of public open parkland to include the eight acres already open as the East Barnet Recreation Ground. This bulletin tells the story of the house, its surrounding land and the public park.

## OakHill House

Oak Hill House was once part of an earlier estate, Monkfrith. This name is a reference to the woodland or fryth belonging to the monks of St Albans who owned the manor of Chipping and East Barnet.<sup>1</sup> The first reference to 'Le Monkefrith' was in 1273<sup>2</sup> and the first reference to 'Oak Hill heretofore called Moncken Frieth or Monkham Frieth' in 1790.<sup>3</sup>

When the Manor of Chipping and East Barnet was sold in 1553 to John Goodwyn of Debden and John Maynard of St Albans, Oussage Wood and Monkenfreth were occupied by a Thomas Savage, who shortly afterwards bought both properties.<sup>4</sup>

In 1660 Sir Edward Alston, president of the Royal College of Physicians, was granted a royal licence to open a deer park of 160 acres that included Frith house. The estate was sold by Sir Edward Alston and his son William to a George Hadley. On 23 June 1774 John Hadley sold a messuage and farm occupied by Richard Abbott for £4020 to Robert Udney and in July a capital messuage or mansion called Moncken Ffrieth and a large area of parkland beyond the brook to Robert Bulkeley. The following year Bulkeley sold this on to Udney.<sup>5</sup>

A map of c1790, drawn up by J. Taylor of 119 Chancery Lane, is held at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies. The total estate covered 156 acres 2 roods and 2 perches.<sup>6</sup> The map mentions neighbouring land referred to as 'late

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<sup>1</sup>Frith means a hedge or coppice. Fredk Cass p.12 refers to 'boscum qui vocatur Monkfrith' - woods called Monkfrith.

<sup>2</sup>*British Place Names Hertfordshire*

<sup>3</sup> Fredk Cass, *East Barnet Parish* p. 87

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* pp.21,22

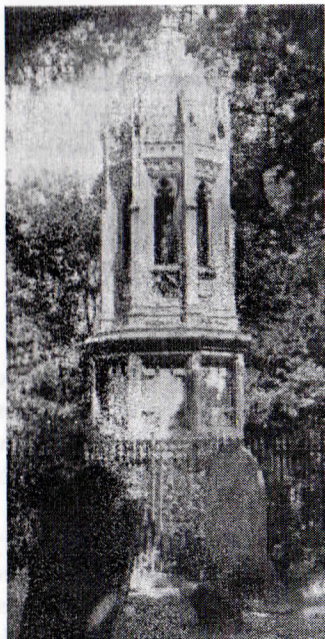
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* p.87

<sup>6</sup> See enclosed map

Robert Bulkeley Esqre land' and Robert Udney is shown as owning the land to the north of the estate.

Oak Hill house was bought in December 1790 by John Kingston for £7,000. It was described as newly built on the site of the house previously known as Monkfrith. In 1810 he sold it for £18,900 to Sir Simon Haughton Clarke of

Kingston, Jamaica, the 9th baronet, who was reputed to have made his money from sugar and when the slave trade was abolished lost much of his wealth. Sir Simon had a great interest in horticulture and was a Fellow of the Horticultural Society. He is reputed to have built a vinery in about 1811, possibly designed by the architect John Shaw



When Sir Simon died in 1832 a monument was built at the edge of St Mary's churchyard, sited to enable his widow to view it across the valley from the house. Sir Simon had collected a valuable gallery of paintings that were sold after his death. Initially the house was let by the Haughton Clarks and in 1837 the tenant was Baron Bunsen, the Prussian ambassador to the Court of St James. In 1856 Sir Philip Haughton Clarke, the second son of Sir Simon, sold the estate to William 2nd Baron Feversham.

While Lord Feversham and his family were living at Oak Hill Park the gardens were well-known for their pineapples and grapes, known as Black Hamburgs. Two famous head gardeners were John Davis and Charles Dowding. In 1858 Alexander Forsyth, who had worked under Dowding as a journeyman gardener for Lord Feversham, wrote in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* of 24 July 1858 that the Oak Hill grape culture was 'the best in England'. Forsyth moved on to take charge of the gardens at Alton Towners. Loudon wrote in *Suburban Horticulturist* that 'the most abundant crop of pineapples was raised in the shortest time in the most economical manner'. The grapes were exhibited at shows and recorded in trade journals and sold at Covent Garden at 16s a pound. Forsyth provided John Claudius Loudon with a detailed description of the gardens.

*Nine kinds of pineapple were grown and twelve hundred plants ... of which five hundred fruited annually. They were Queens, Providences, Brown and Striped Sugar-loaves, Globes and Antigua Queens. One was called Feversham's Pine. ...Beside the Black Hamburgh were grown the Muscat of Alexandria, Dutch Sweetwater, White Frontignan, White Muscadine, Black Prince, Black Frontignan, and on the walls Black Esperione and White Muscadine. There was also a peach house, a cucumber house where melons were grown, a strawberry house, pits for French beans, potatoes and autumn cauliflowers ... at the western end of the mansion was the beautiful conservatory, glazed with plate glass in very large squares coming down to floor level. Here no stages were used but irregular shaped beds with stone curbing in which camellias and orange trees were planted out. The roof was draped with kennedyas, mutisias and passion flowers. There were two Lapageria rosea in pots trained on trellises. Palms and tree ferns stood here and there. At the end of the conservatory a flight of steps led down to a circular flower garden approached by four entrances, hedged with yew and backed by shrubs and trees ...*<sup>7</sup>

In about 1858 part of the estate to the south was sold off and a new house, also confusingly called 'Oak Hill' was built. A map of 1875 shows both houses, one called 'Oak Hill Park', which is the present theological college and the other called 'Oak Hill House' to the south. This second house survived until the 1930s when the Monkfrith estate was built.

It provided a home for the Mason family. The 1861 census shows Henry Mason, aged 48, had been born in Beverley, Yorkshire and his wife Anne, aged 35, in Camberwell, Surrey. Their children Anne aged 8, a scholar had been born in the USA but of their other children, Louis, aged 6, had been born in Camberwell, Eugenie aged 4 in Brixton and Ashlane C. aged 3 and Fanny aged 1 had both been born in East Barnet. They must therefore have been living locally, presumably in their new house, by 1858.

The family were still resident ten years later but in July 1873 an auction was held of the contents of a house called 'Oak Hill'. The rooms included seven bedrooms, a dining room, bath room, day nursery, night nursery breakfast room, drawing room, smoking room pantry, kitchen, scullery and store room There were also a dairy garden and yard and a pony 'a capital shooting cob, quiet to ride and drive'. The auctioneers were Messrs Jackson & Son of Hertford, Ware and Bishops Stortford.

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<sup>7</sup> Pines and Vines pp 29,30

Another famous gardening name linked with Oak Hill Park is that of Michael Rochford, who had succeeded John Davis. There seems to be some confusion about the sequence of events and there may well have been some overlapping of his period working at Oak Hill and that spent setting up his own business. In about 1856 he appears to have been employed by Lord Feversham as a gardener for the estate continuing to grow lime and pineapple cultures. He moved to Tottenham in 1857 and set up the firm of Rochfords. By June of 1858 he was paying rates at 2 George Villas, Page Green and was growing and selling plants in two acres of land there. By 1861 he was employing five men and a boy. In 1862 he was described in the London Directory as 'Market gardener and florest'. In the same year that Lord Feversham sold Oak Hill to Charles Baring Young Michael seems taken over the garden at Oak Hill on his own account for a time and was also growing for market but the 1861 census shows the garden house at Oak Hill was occupied by John Moyland gardener. The gardens were reputed to have deteriorated after he left.

However following Charles Baring Young Senior's purchase of the estate he extended and improved the grounds. Old trees were removed and new ones planted, the glass houses had Ormson's boilers installed and were heated. Improvements were carried out by the gardener Mr Richardson. The kitchen gardens formed a square. Against the south west wall nectarines and peaches were grown. Dessert cherries were planted against the east wall. Against the north wall Morello cherries were planted and plums on the west wall. The walls of this garden still survive.

In 1865 Mr Whitehurst became head gardener at Oak Hill, after the grounds had been landscaped by Robert Marnock, the famous garden designer who laid out the circular garden in Regents Park. He is reputed to have been responsible for the low terrace walls with vases that are now below the dining hall. He may also have been responsible for the conservatory, the flower garden to the north east of the house and the walk through the woodland.

In July 1872 Messrs Debenham, Tewson and Farmer, auctioneers and land agents of Cheapside had the Oak Hill Estate up for auction, but it did not sell. The sales particulars described it as:

*a spacious family residence with capital stabling, model farmery, entrance lodge, charming pleasure grounds, kitchen gardens, vineries, thriving orchard and richly timbered park-like pastures in all about 52 acres. A portion of which forms a fine site for another residence - this comprised 27 acres 2 roods and 9*

*perches. A small area of land, 1 acre 3 roods, was also for sale. It lay on the east side of the high road from Southgate to Hatfield ...*

The house is described as having been built in the Italian style of white Arlesey brick, with stone dressings from the designs and under the supervision of the architect, Henry Currey. It was approached by a neat carriage drive, skirted by hedges of laurel, thorn etc and having a good lodge.

There was a further attempt to sell the estate for the *Barnet Press* of 12 May 1888 included an advertisement from Messrs Woodard, Hood and Wells, solicitors of the city, for a sale by auction by auctioneer David J. Chatt on Monday 11 June of a:

*Freehold residential estate Oakhill near East Barnet comprising a commodious family house with spacious and lofty reception rooms, complete domestic offices dairy etc 11 bed 2 dressing and bathrooms conservatory vinery etc good stabling 2 lodges laundry farmery pretty but inexpensive pleasure grounds and gardens ..tennis lawns, orchard and well timbered park-like pasture and wilderness the whole embracing 53.5 acres in a ring fence enjoying a delightful rural position with beautiful views and surrounded on all sides by gentlemen's seats of a like character.*

This time there is no mention of the 27 acres included in the earlier sale particulars, so we can assume these had been sold.

Charles' son, another Charles, lived from 1850 to 1928. He and his brother Arthur spent much of their childhood at Oakhill, when the estate provided food for the households both in East Barnet and in London from its own kitchen gardens. On the death of their father at his house in Hyde Park Terrace in 1882 Charles Junior inherited the estate comprising the house and ornamental gardens, farmland, a park and woodland. He also owned Bohun Lodge and it was there that theological training was initially provided in the 1920s. Until 1930, and the sale of land to make up Oak Hill Park, the area farmed at the Oak Hill estate was quite large and was run by a bailiff and a gardener.

In 1956 the 43 acre farm was managed by Mr Morgan, who farmed eight fields of about five acres each and two and a half acres of land around the farm buildings, used for market gardening. He had been appointed in 1953, and had two other permanent helpers and two Saturday boys. Local women came in to pick the blackberries when they were ripe. There was a small dairy herd and chickens. The farm closed down some years ago.

In 1984 an application to develop part of the estate for private housing was refused both by the London Borough of Barnet and that of Enfield, following much local opposition. An appeal held the following year also rejected the application. Since then some building work has taken place to provide accommodation for staff and students. The college continues to thrive, providing an ever widening range of religiously based education.

## **Oak Hill Public Park**

Oak Hill Park was opened to the public on 28 October 1933 by the Rt Hon Viscount Hampden. The development work cost £3,240 and grants were made by the Carnegie Trustees and the National Playing Fields Association of £1,500, the Hertford Branch of the National Playing Fields Association of £250, the Herts County Council of £250, the East Barnet Valley Committee on Unemployment of £390, and the balance of £850 was met by the local Council

The Pymmes Brook was widened and improved, paths were made and a pavilion erected. Three football and two cricket pitches were provided. During the 1939-45 War much of the park was used for allotments (see Bulletin no.34) and a large area of the park extending from the west bank of the Pymmes Brook to the base of the hill leading up to St Mary's Church and Church Hill Road. It was reclaimed eventually, grassed over and now forms part of the extensive playing fields in the park. The path that was used as 'The Dump Road' is now a wide footpath offering a pleasant walk through the western side of the park.

In the 1940s the East Barnet Urban District Council ran events in Oak Hill Park as part of a scheme to encourage 'Holidays at Home'. In 1943 the programme of events included performances by the band of HM Grenadier Guards, a fancy dress parade and dancing on 31 July. On Sunday 1 August there was an open rabbit show. The Welsh Guards played and there was a religious brains trust held in the band enclosure and organised by the Council of Christian Churches. The following week included a sports meeting, a punch and jury show, the City of London Police Band and a trailer pump display by local firemen. There were dancing displays, a gramophone concert and talent competitions.

At the Parkside Gardens end of the park the 'Golden Gates' from Littlegrove were put up when that house was demolished. During the 1950s the gates provided a local landmark where the 5th East Barnet Cubs met to walk up the hill to St Mary's for the monthly church parade. The gates were removed in the 1960s but their present whereabouts is unknown.

In 1953 the East Barnet Council increased recreational facilities in Oak Hill Park by providing tennis courts, a cricket pavilion and table. In 1955 a new path was laid alongside the brook.

In August 1962 the *Barnet Press* reminded residents of a proposed link road which had been envisaged much earlier and would have provided a route from Hampden Square through to East Barnet Village, joining Brookside North and Brookside South, and cutting across the park. The need to provide a road suitable for buses was overcome in 1956 when Church Hill Road was widened and improved at a cost of £52,000 but the earlier idea was not dropped until some time later.

In 1992 the London Borough of Barnet put forward a proposal to provide an upgraded golf course, a floodlit practice driving range, clubhouse and additional parking facilities. There was strenuous opposition from local residents who were concerned at the loss of an area of open land for schools, walkers and footballers, the visual impact of the landscape and the increased danger of flooding. The Borough were persuaded to abandon their plans.

The park now covers 74 acres and continues to be used for all sorts of village events. Since 1995 it has been the venue for the East Barnet Festival. The Festival draws revenue from John Biddall's Funfair, enjoyed by local families from Thursday to Sunday and from the many charity crafts and businesses that hire stalls.

## **Bibliography**

*Barnet Press*

Cass, Fredk., *The Parish of East Barnet*

Warren B., 'The Land use of the Barnet Area and a survey of Oak Hill and Ferney Hill Farms' (Culham College 1956)

Oak Hill College Brochure

*The Rochford Story 'Pines & Vines'*

## **HALS**

Map 1790 - 54588

## **Barnet Museum**

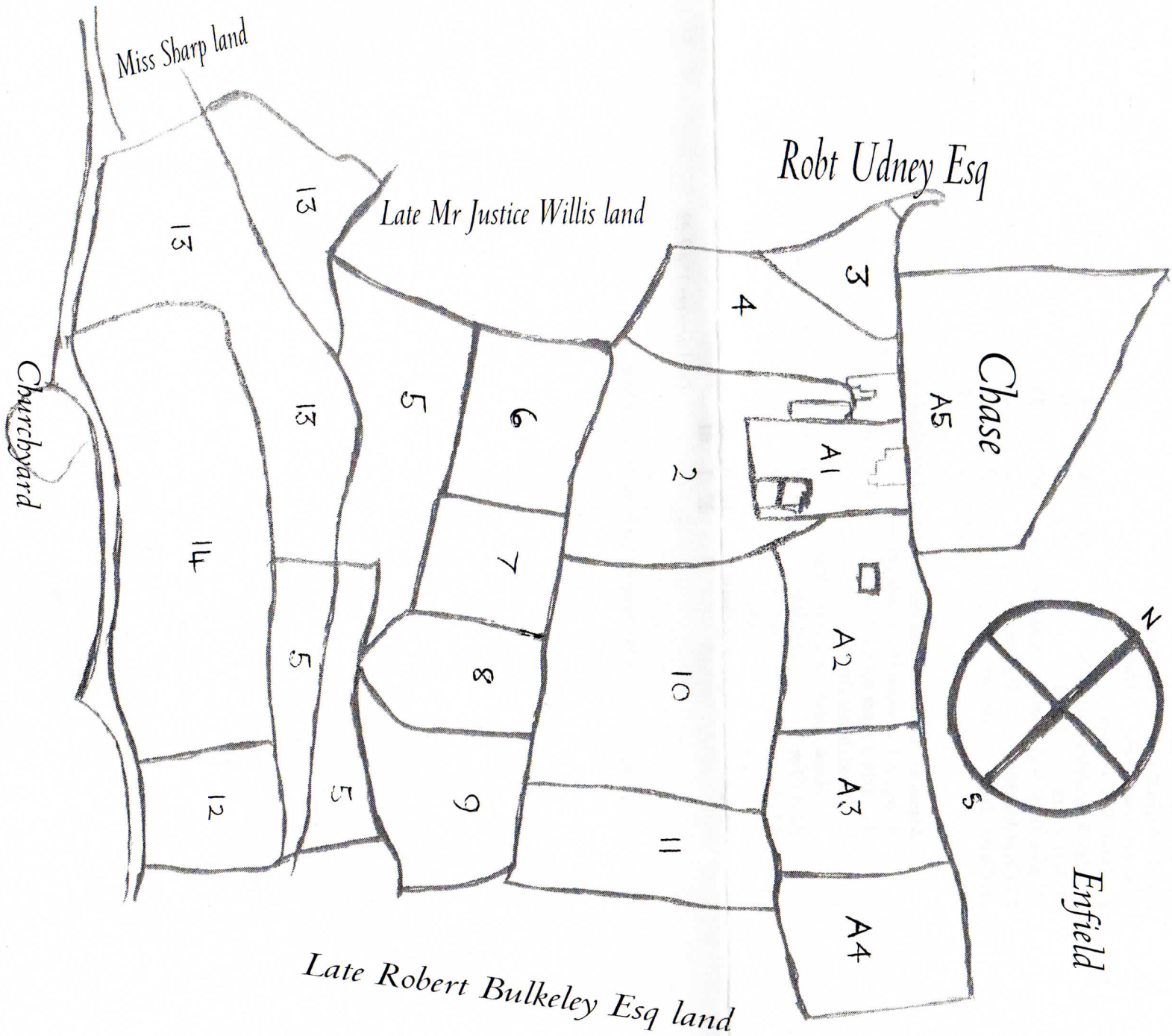
Copy ltr S.J. Butcher to Rev M. Wood, Oak Hill HO/03

Sale Particulars Oak Hill Jul 22-23 1873 HO/03

Sale Particulars Oak Hill Estate July 1872 HO/03

Ordnance Survey Map 1875





### Key

Names of Fields	Acres	Rods	Perches
1 The Farm House, barns yards etc	0	3	0
2. Warren Field	11	0	3
3. Three Corner Field	3	1	30
4. Barn Field	6	3	0
5. The Slip, part of Seven acres (late Judge Willes)	Meadow	11/4	1
Ferney Mill	Meadow	11/4	1
6. Hanging Field	Arable	6	3
7. Great Brickhill Field	Meadow	4	2
8. Little Brickhill Field	Meadow	4	2
9. Nearer Plough Field	Arable	6	2
10. Cross Nest or Coles (late R. Bulkeley Esq)	Wood	15	0
11. Part of ditto	Wood	2	0
12. Barn Fields & Cottages etc	Meadow	4	0
13. Great Meadow	Meadow	14	2
14. Church Field	Meadow	19	0
		179	1
			01

Mansions House and Land purchased and since added on.

A large old Mansion House with offices

A1. (with 3 coach houses, 2 stables. 4 1 16

(coach house Wood

(House, yards gardens & lawns

A2 A Close 8 2 03

A3. A Close 7 0 22

A4. A Close 7 1 22

A5. Chase Land in front of House 10 0 00

37 1 01

Total acreage 156 2 92

Drawn by J. Taylor, 119 Chancery Lane late 18th Century