

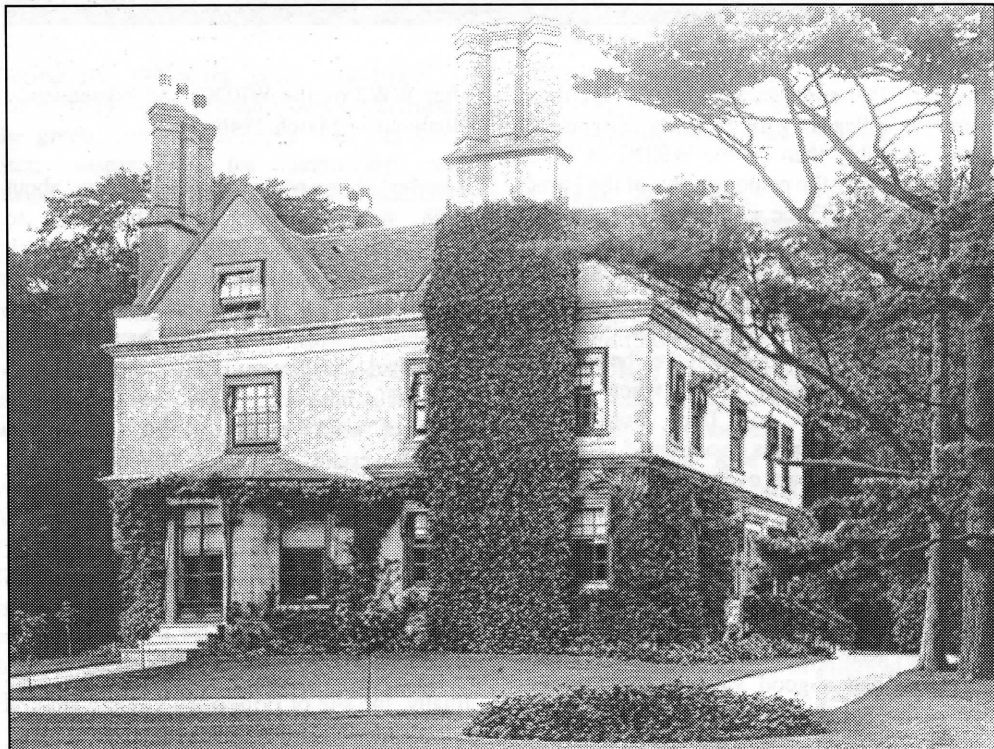
George Washington and our Manor House

It is unlikely that many will know of any link between the Manor House at Abbots Langley and the first President of the United States of America, George Washington. But it was recently drawn to our notice, by Mrs Joan Mills (née Mitchinson) - another of our WW2 evacuees, now living near Sunderland and a recently joined member of our society.

Near where she lives is the village of Washington. Its manor house, rebuilt in local sandstone in 1613, is known as Washington Old Hall. The Washingtons had lived in it for generations; and although the senior branch of the family had earlier moved away, the junior

branch (which included George Washington's grandfather) had stayed on, before eventually moving away to Northamptonshire and then Tring in Hertfordshire, and in 1656 from thence to Virginia, the longest established of the original American Colonies. George Washington had been promoted to the rank of General and had led the colonists to victory in their struggle for independence from the British, before becoming President in 1789.

Since its rebuilding, and after the Washingtons left it, the Old Hall has had a succession of tenants. By 1936 it had become run-down, derelict and unfit for human habitation, and the



Abbots Langley Manor House, 1897. Photo: ALLHS Archive

local authority proposed to demolish it. But it escaped the fate of our Manor House because a local historian, a Mr F Hill, formed a committee to preserve it. Appeals were launched in England and the USA for money to restore the ancestral home of the first President. The work was carried out and Washington Old Hall was officially re-opened again in September 1955. Since then it has become a National Trust property - open to the public.

But the connection with Abbots Langley is not simply via Mrs Mills and her husband Tom. It will not have escaped the notice of those of our members who know their Abbots Langley history, that the refurbishment of Washington Old Hall was completed only two years after our own Manor House was demolished in 1953. One of the rooms in the Old Hall - *the panelled room* - is lined with quarter-oak panelling rescued from Abbots Langley Manor House. Mrs Mills can find no details of how the panelling got there, except that it was a gift from Miss Mabel Choate, in memory of her father who was American Ambassador to Britain.

So, the only known remains of our Manor House (apart from the Manor Lodge) have been put to good use and are being well looked after. And ironically they have found a home in a house built around the same time as that from which they were taken.

Thus the link between George Washington and Abbots Langley - which prompts me to think that truth is sometimes stranger than fiction - and that our world is perhaps smaller than we suppose. If you are ever in the Washington, Tyne and Wear area you might consider a visit to Washington Old Hall.

(Based on information supplied by Mr Tom Mills and Mrs J Mills to our Honorary Secretary, who was at school with Mrs Mills fifty years ago.)

Clive Clark

The Village Room Library

The following report of the Hon. Librarian appears in the Parish Magazine - "After many unavoidable delays, the long-expected lending library was opened on Monday, February 6th, with over 300 books (about 50 more being added in March), and the year's work closed on December 17th, the room being opened every week during that time. The number of borrowers was 108, and as many as 64 volumes have been issued at one time. The more serious works have not been taken out to any large extent, but the lighter reading matter (which is, however, of a proper character), has been very popular, and the institution, therefore, duly carries out its object, and provides a healthy and entertaining recreation for the home fireside during the long dark evenings of winter. The unqualified success of the undertaking is mainly due to Mr. H. W. Henderson, who gives it the greatest support, both personal and material, and is very glad to know how much it is appreciated. Other kind supporters were the Vicar and Mr. Cleasby, and books were also given by Mr. Tidford, the Misses Henty, Miss Watson, Mrs. Armstrong, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Mr. Ward, Miss Drake, Miss Hodgson and Wilfred Overy. The books have been carefully used and it is a great pleasure to attend to the work every week. A supplemental list of 160 books has just been added, the gift of Mrs. Cleasby, Mr. Henderson and Mr. Ward, the last being a very generous contributor. Mrs. Cleasby's liberal gift is especially welcome, the volumes being more suited to the younger readers' tastes."

From the *Watford Observer*, 26th January 1907
Submitted by Janet Hemming