

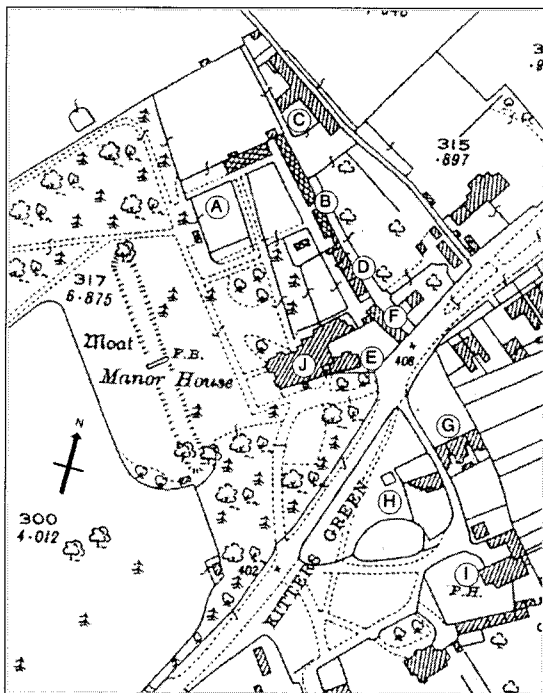
Abbots Langley Manor House

Gone but not forgotten

by Lesley Brooks

Manor House Pavilion, Manor House Gardens, Manor House Allotments – all names referring to the manor house which stood on the left opposite Kitters Green as you entered the village from Gallows Hill Lane (previously known as Station Road).

You can still see the evidence of where this manor house once stood, both on the ground, and in old maps, such as the 1896 Ordnance Survey map shown. If you have use of a satnav, the front steps were on or close to TL 09299 01844, Lat 51.704700, Long -0.41968587.



Annotated extract from 1896 Ordnance Survey map showing location of Manor House

Alongside the pavement by the road are brick footings where the wooden panelled boundary fence once stood.

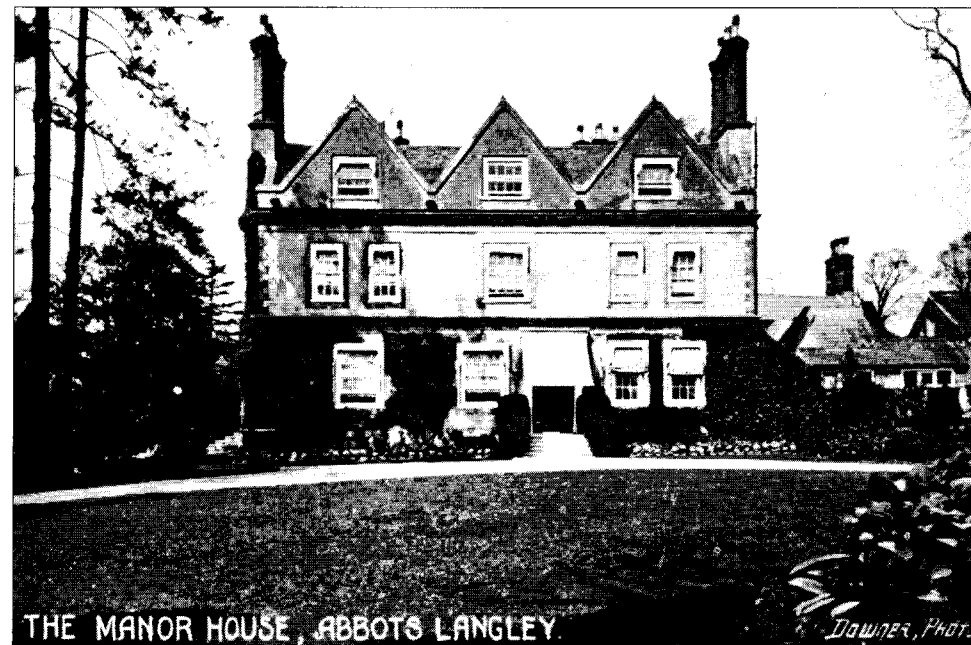
The original kitchen gardens (A) are today our Manor House Allotments. You can still see the original walls which protected the garden from the elements and the walls that supported the south-facing greenhouses (B).

The dairy (C) was North of the gardens and the stables (D) and potting sheds closer to the house where today the parish and park grounds men have their yard and storage facilities.

Adjoining the manor house itself was the more recently built billiard/snooker room (E). Still in use today as the police station, it was preserved after the manor house was demolished as our first village library from 1953 to 1982, and after that used as the Manor Lodge, which you could hire for small social or business gatherings. The continuing existence of this building gives us the exact location of the manor house itself.

In buildings behind the Coach House (F), the last Squire, Major Drake, kept his staff and family cars c1920/30. His own private car he kept in the coach house. This area became The Manor House Garage (Flowers Garage) which was in turn pulled down in the early nineteen eighties and is today occupied by a block of flats appropriately named 'The Grange'.

Opposite the Grange are the three terraced cottages (G) – still standing



The Abbots Langley Manor House. Photo: Brian Nelson Collection

today – which were originally used to house estate workers.

Also shown on this 1896 map are the Pound (H), and of course the Royal Oak Public House (I)

The Manor House – Early History

The manor house itself (J) was Stuart. Built in the mid 17th century with tall chimneys and 3 gables (from the front) facing S/E. There was evidence internally that the house had been built on the previous site of an Elizabethan house. You can see evidence of a linear pond labelled as a 'moat' on the OS map looking west from the house. There is a photo of a previous occupant and gentleman of the manor, Squire John Inett Ward, on a bridge over the 'moat' when resident between 1892 and 1921 (see page 10 Journal 28, 'Gentry and Villagers of Abbots Langley').

We don't know exactly when the house in the

photo (or its predecessors on the plot) were built, but do have some history of the landowners.

After the dissolution of the monasteries Henry VIII granted the manor of Abbots Langley to Sir Richard Lee, his military engineer, in 1544 who eventually sold the manor back to the crown (Elizabeth I) in 1575.



The manor house boundary wall brick footings, March 2012. Photo: Lesley Brooks



The Police Station (previously the Manor Lodge), March 2012, originally adjoining the Manor House as a snooker room. Photo: Lesley Brooks

The house later came to the ownership of Francis Combe, possibly through one of his two marriages, first to Barbara Ewer and after her death to Anne Greenhill (sister-in-law of the famous Elizabeth Greenhill (née White)).

Francis Combe, a wealthy miller from Hemel Hempstead, bequeathed the ownership of the manor house after his death to two colleges, Sidney Sussex, Cambridge and Trinity College, Oxford in 1641 (1644 in one reference). This was on the condition that the Greenhills and succeeding generations would have the advantage of their education in perpetuity and that the family could continue to live in the manor on one-third rent. This would continue for the family until 1820.

Many other gentlemen and their families would continue to occupy the manor house. With the vacant occupancy in 1938 caused by the very last squire, Major J H Drake 1922-38 leaving for Scotland and the onset of war WW2, the manor house was commandeered for use by evacuee and village children to cope with the overcrowding in the village and its school. With the added problem of no maintenance and decorating in war time as all concentration had to be turned into the war effort, the manor house, by now about three hundred years old, fell into serious decay.



The rear of the stables before they were demolished. Photo: Eve Durnall, 14th August 1988

1945

The war was now over and the parish council were again looking for land to become a village play area. The idea had been mooted back in 1938 when the house first became unoccupied but all plans had to stop when war came. Now with the war over negotiations could be started up again.

The colleges were serious about selling the manor house and the land and so the deed was done. The manor house was bought by the parish council with grants from the Herts. County Council. The manor house would be a community centre. The grounds would be playing fields.

Unfortunately no one could afford to restore the decaying manor house which had been further damaged by unauthorised occupation. The parish council did try their best to save and sell the manor house but the general opinion from the HCC was that 'it would be highly desirable if this building were demolished at the earliest possible moment, owing to its dilapidated condition'.

Sad to say in the end it was decided by the then parish council to pull the manor house down.

A new era indeed

The private grounds of the manor looked to

the south and round to the west. From the late Victorian times permission was given from the occupying squire to play the game of cricket on their meadow, the teams being made up of Abbots Langley vicars, tradesmen and farmers.

To this day the game of cricket is still played on the green on the same spot from April until the end of summer along with football in the winter and tennis, basketball, rollerblading and skateboarding all year round on the hard surfaces.

There's the cricket pavilion, the Manor House Sports and Social Centre and swings and slides for the young, all in the grounds we call the park, which are the Manor House Grounds. Thanks to the Abbots Langley Parish Council for their persistence leading to the purchase of these wonderful grounds in 1952 for us all to use. ■

Lesley Brooks

Researched, written with photographs by Lesley Brooks, Spring 2012, including references from:

- The 'Newfangled Scheme' – the First Hundred Years Centenary 1894-1994 by C W Clark 1994
- British History Online (<http://british-history.ac.uk>).
- Abbots Langley 'A Hertfordshire Village' by Scott Hastie and David Spain

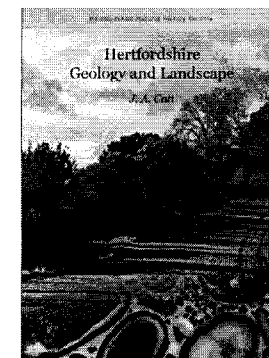
With thanks to the following for their contributions:

- Billy Crush
- Parish Councillor Jane Lay and Leon Lay
- Steve Davis of Garston TV and Radio
- Jo and Chris Bromwich
- Brian Nelson
- Eve and Ken Durnall

Hertfordshire Geology and Landscape

by J A Catt

Hertfordshire Geology and Landscape was published in late 2010, sixty years after the Council of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society stated the need for 'a book designed for naturalists who are not geologists'. After a general introduction to the county and to some geological principles (Chapter 1), about half of the book (Chapters 2-6) provides a



definitive account of Hertfordshire geology, ranging from what is known of the rocks at depths exceeding 100 metres to the most recent glacial, fluvial and other deposits that form the present land surface. These chapters describe the deposits formed over the last 100 million years and the various processes involved in development of the county's landscape. The remaining four chapters cover various aspects of applied geology, such as soils, ecology and agriculture, prehistoric archaeology and human occupation, water supply, water pollution, canals and civil engineering, and finally mineral resources and building stones. The book was edited by John Catt from contributions written by 14 local specialists, and includes 105 colour plates and 107 colour maps and diagrams.

<http://www.hertsgeolsoc.ology.org.uk/HertfordshireGeologyBook.htm>