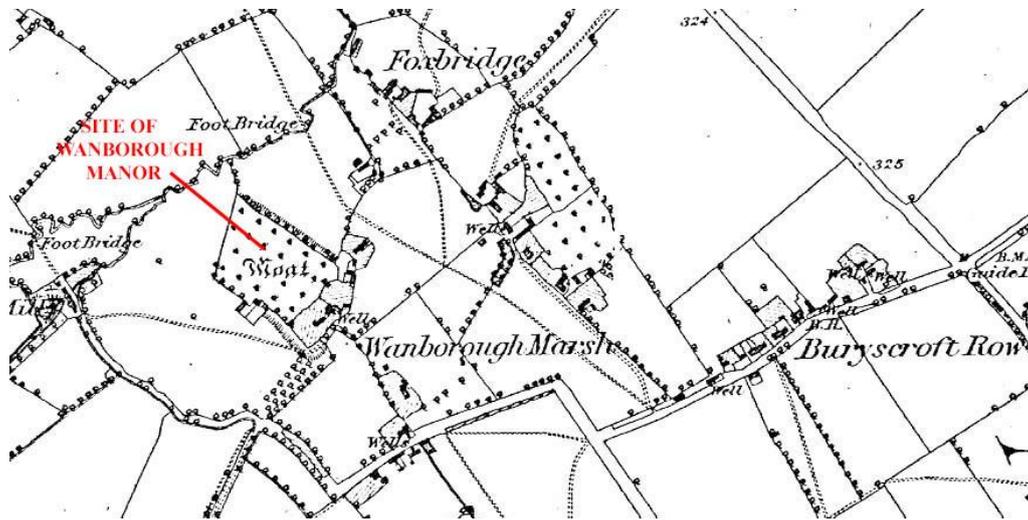


WANBOROUGH MANOR & ST KATHERINE'S CHAPEL.

Moat Cottage and Lake Cottage stand on Wanborough Marsh at the southern end of a moated site where the court of the medieval lords of Wanborough manor once stood. Although over the years the moat has gradually been filled in, its course can still be traced across the fields. Tradition says at one time a copper bridge spanned the moat where these cottages now stand.



The site, called at various times Cold Court, Colne Court and Court Close, has never been excavated so the nature and extent of the buildings which were enclosed within the moat can only be guessed at from the documentary evidence which survives. Documents from the 13th century onwards have been preserved by Magdalen College, Oxford. These tell us that Cold Court with the chapel of St Katherine, surrounded by a moat and close to the great fish pond, was situated south of a stream known as the Lidd in Wanborough Marsh. We know very little of the buildings which housed the lord of the manor, and that from hearsay, but several old deeds and other documents provide us with information about St. Katherine's Chapel.

The chapel was built by Emily Longspee, Countess of Ulster, in her court at Wanborough in memory of her husband Stephen, lord of the manor and a nephew of the Earl of Salisbury. The chapel was of considerable size, having a chancel and more than one altar. There were three priests belonging to it, the senior called Custos or Warden and two chaplains. A deed dated 1270 records that a chamber and wardrobe for the priests were built nearby on a piece of ground 5 perches square (80ft x 80ft) in the courtyard on the south side of the granary. An inventory of the chapel in 1411 identifies the following rooms: a hall, a chamber, a kitchen, a pantry and a brew-house.

The manor of Wanborough passed by marriage from the Longspees to the Lovell family and it is hearsay about this period which provides the only information we have about the manor house which occupied the site.

Captain Symonds of the army of King Charles I visited Wanborough in 1644 and noted in his diary "Neare unto Foxenbridge in this parish, is the mote and some foundation of an ancient seate, belonging to the Lord Lovell". John Aubrey, writing later in the same century, also mentions Lovell's mote, but it is from William Morris's articles on Wanborough published in the Swindon Advertiser in 1888 that we learn most.

Morris writes "It was within the moat at Court Close that probably the most important of all Wanborough's mansions stood. Tradition seems to be somewhat mixed as to what the

building really was, it being sometimes accredited as the residence of Francis Lovell, and sometimes as a monastery. This only is certain: It was a building of considerable pretence, for even now centuries after the structure itself has disappeared, the ground a foot or so under the surface, is full fragments of the most elaborate tessellated pavement, tiles and coloured glass, and other evidence of a costly and pretentious building”. He also reports the finding of a lead coffin on the site containing the skeleton of a tall young woman. A coin found with the coffin dated from the reign of Edward II, 1307 – 1327. Morris sums up by saying “An inspection of the site, the character of the ground, and the area over which the remains of buildings extend all point to the presumption that the place was of an extensive and most elaborate character”.

So what happened to the manor and chapel after the time of Francis Lovell?

Francis, Lord Lovell was a favourite of King Richard III. In 1483 he sold the chapel, together with a small estate which provided the income to support it, to Bishop Wayneflete, who the same year gave it to Magdalen College, Oxford. Two years later Richard was defeated by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth. Francis escaped to his estate at Minster Lovell but died there soon afterwards. All his property, including that remaining in Wanborough was forfeited to the crown. It was probably at this time the house was pulled down or left to fall down.

The chapel survived a while longer. Records at Magdalen College refer to visits by the President and Bursar of the college to Wanborough to preach at the chapel on St. Katherine’s day in 1485, 1488 and 1498. The last reference I have found was an entry in the accounts for 1512 recording the purchase of a service book for the chapel.

The chapel was probably closed and demolished in the late 1540s during Edward VI’s suppression of chantry chapels and other religious houses. There is an entry in the college accounts for 1549 recording the sale of stone at Wanborough to Thomas Hinton. Macray, who catalogued the Magdalen College records, suggests this stone was from the destroyed chapel. Thomas Hinton was at that time living at Earls court, so perhaps some of the fabric of the chapel is incorporated in the older part of Earls court Manor house. I have found no mention of the fate of the Warden’s house that was adjacent to the chapel, but in many instances when religious buildings were destroyed, associated living accommodation was retained for secular use. So maybe Moat Cottage and/or Lake Cottage are the greatly altered remains of the medieval building.



Moat Cottage 1993 ©B Clarke



Lake Cottage 1993 ©B Clarke