

THE IMPORTANCE OF ABBOTSTONE

By

Raymond Elliott

The origin of Abbotstone is said to derive from 'Abeds Dune' the fortified hill or dune of a Celtic chief of that name, or 'Abbotston' the settlement of a Saxon tribe. There *is* much evidence of early occupation in the surrounding hills and valleys, and there is a charter of Ethelred c1010 that tells us the church at Winchester 'held ten hides of land at Abbotston'.

Archeological investigation confirms the site of the settlement or village that developed on the high ground adjacent to the Candover stream, straddling the ancient highway, or trade route, from early Winchester and the south passing through to the 'Alder' ford (Old Alresford village green) and on to the north and east of the country.

Later records in the Domesday Survey for Hampshire in 1086 tell us 'In Bountisborough Hundred Hugh de Port holds Abbotstone from the Bishop It is and was of the Bishopric Before 1086 and now it answered for 9 hides...land for 5 ploughs...a mill at 15s.... Hugh de Port also held Basing, he was a close companion of William the Conqueror and held in Hampshire '55 manors directly of the King' together with the '12 he held of Oda the Bishop of Bayeaux'.

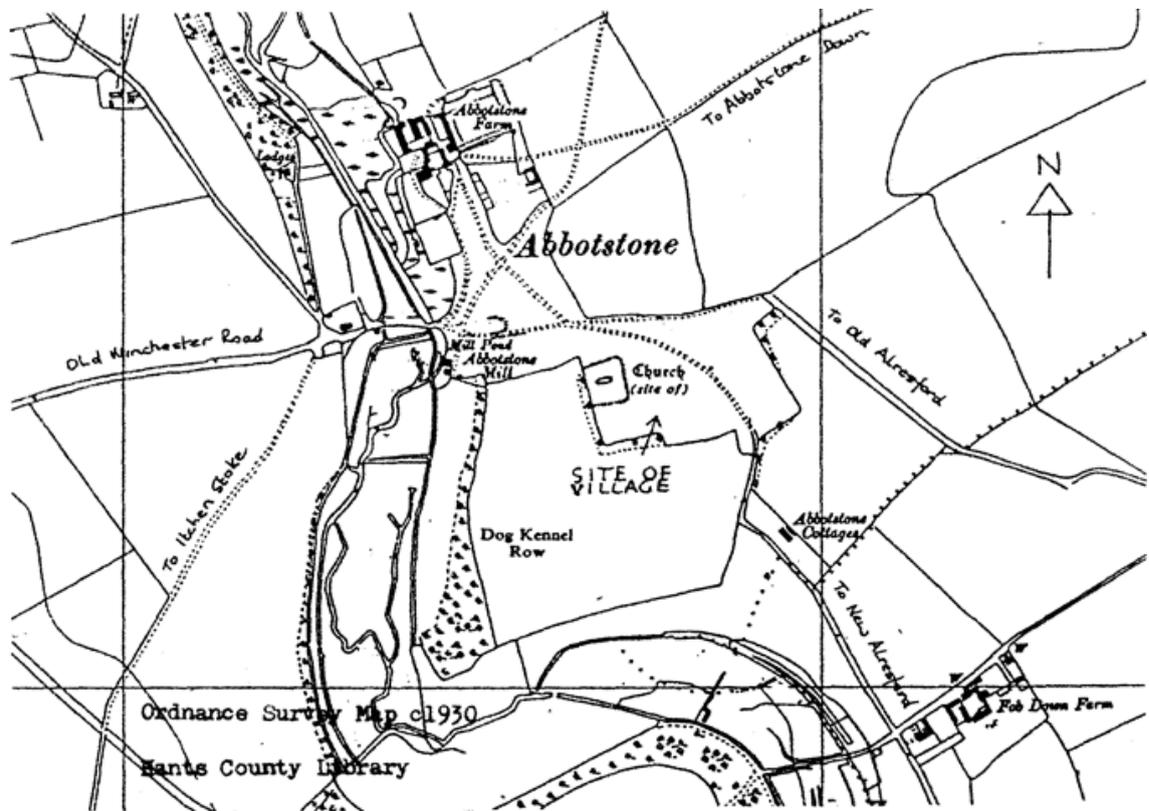
Research confirms that the de Port family descendants owned, and intermittently occupied Abbotstone from the Conquest until the year 1819 when the entire estate was sold to Alexander Baring, the first Lord Ashburton. By then, through successive marriages the family name changed to St. John, then Poyning, followed by Paulet. During the reign of King Edward VI, Sir William Paulet was made the Marquis of Winchester and in 1689 the 6th Marquis was created the 1st Duke of Bolton.

Abbotstone is today classified as a 'deserted village'. Lord Ashburton continues to farm the lands together with the adjacent Northington and Itchen Stoke estates. The manor of Abbotstone was united with manor of Itchen Stoke in 1539 being granted to Sir William Paulet by the King; previously Itchen Stoke was held by the Abbess of Romsey Abbey but had been sequestered by the dissolution of the monasteries.

Historical evidence suggests that the decline of the community and village of Abbotstone was linked with the growth of nearby Alresford Burgus in the thirteenth century. The trade route had changed, for gradually traders and journeymen took the lower southern route from Winchester and Southampton, passing over the newly constructed embankment (holding the new fishpond) at Alresford, and so on to London. Less travellers used the old route through Abbotstone, and the de Ports and St. Johns were content. No attempt was made to revitalize the old trading post probably because the family had so many important estates in Hampshire requiring constant attention.

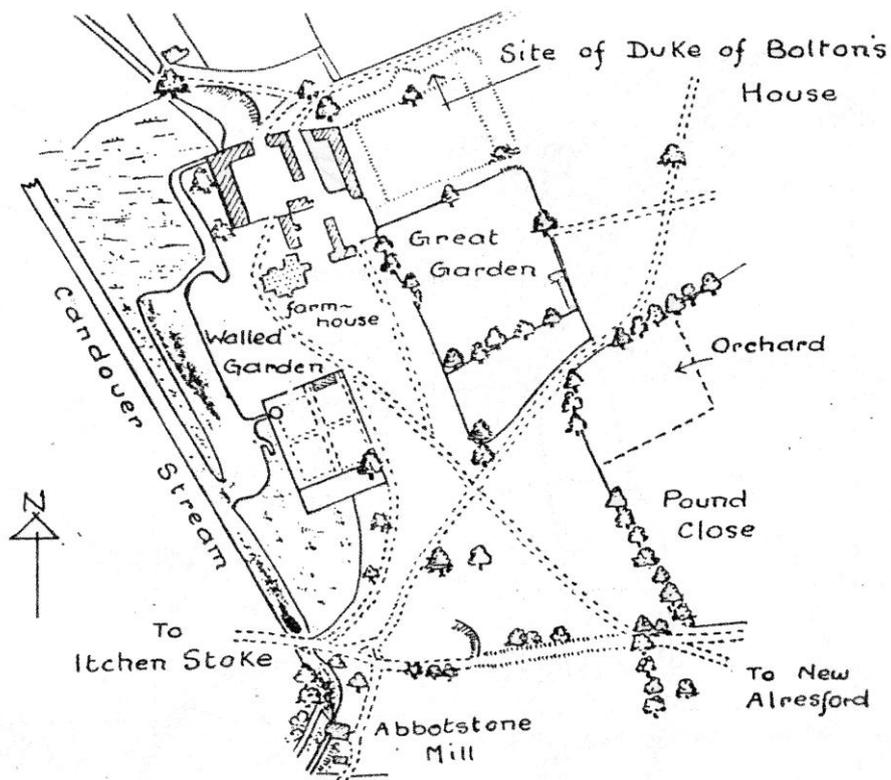
The major family seat *was* firmly established at Basing, in the north of the county, but there is evidence that from time to time a prominent member of the family - an important brother or son - would take up residence at Abbotstone.

The village declined and the church of St. Martyn, sited in the north west corner of the village - now known as Chapel Close - became derelict and all its structure was removed. In 1589, at the request of the patron the Marquess of Winchester, the Rectory of Abbotstone was consolidated with the acquired Vicarage of Itchen Stoke 'as the church was in ruins and had been so for a considerable time'. Excavations in 1896 uncovered the plan of the church building, some 75'0 by 30'0 constructed of flint with stone quoining and having a circular porch at the west end. Pieces of stained glass, fragments of pottery and deers horn were recovered. A deep trench cut across -north to south - revealed a grave enclosed with large slabs of hard chalk; it had been disturbed and the well preserved bones left in a pile. The site of the graveyard was not excavated.



A large house was built by William Paulet, 1st Marquis of Winchester, in the mid sixteenth century, probably on the site of the present farmhouse. He had now become the most powerful man in England and before his death in 1572, at the age of 87 years, had served the four monarchs of the Tudor dynasty, i.e. Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I, being continuously rewarded with advancements in power. The Marquis was also an avid builder and his constant additions to the ancestral seat caused Basing Castle to become the largest house of any subject in sixteenth century England.

Queen Elizabeth lodged at Basing House many times. In September 1569 she paid her visit to Abbotstone during her progress through Surrey and Hampshire, from the 5th August to the 8th September. Passing through Guildford and Farnham the royal party stayed at Basing with the Marquis, then on to Abbotstone on the 1st September being entertained there by Lord St. John, the Marquis's eldest son. Among the royal paybooks is a bill for 'charges done at Abertone' such as 'making presses for the robes' and 'Gylbart Pollson locksmith for iiii white bolts etc'. The next day the royal journey proceeded onward to Winchester and Southampton. In 1574 a further progress was made to Gloucester and Somerset returning through Hampshire. Calling at Montisfont and Winchester the royal party and guests were entertained by the 3rd Marquis of Winchester at Abbotstone on the 13th September. Leaving the next day the royal journey continued through Alresford to Herriard, Odiham and on to Farnham. And during the year 1591 the royal progress visited Surrey and Sussex returning back through Warnford and Tichborne, then the seat of Sir Benjamin Tichborne. Moving on to Winchester the Queen next visited the 3rd Marquis of Winchester at Abbotstone on the 11th September and the next day carried on through Wield and Farleigh followed by staying three days with the Marquis again at Basing. It is difficult to understand that during the years of royal patronage, the occupation of Abbotstone appears to have changed rapidly or become very spasmodic as the Paulet mansion would have been fully occupied with intense activity before and after the days of the Queen's visits.



Site of Duke of Bolton's House at Abbotstone - Isabel Sanderson

John the 5th Marquis of Winchester was head of the family when the Civil War broke out in 1642 and he immediately declared support for King Charles. The ancestral home at Basing was placed under seige by the Commonwealth army, eventually being taken in October 1645, some eighteen months after the Battle of Cheriton. Basing Castle was finally attacked and completely destroyed and the Marquis was imprisoned in the Tower of London. All the Paulet lands and properties were seized and the Puritan parliament gave 'these Hampshire lands' to Oliver Cromwell, who promptly settled the Abbotstone estate upon his son Richard.

This break in the long ownership of the 'Hampshire lands' in the Paulet history was however of short duration, for at the Restoration in 1660, all were returned by Charles II; and Abbotstone was occupied by Lord Charles Paulet, brother to the 4th Marquis. We find that the monumental stone to Lady Elizabeth Paulet, his wife, originally placed in the church yard of the original Norman Church at Itchen Stoke (since demolished) has been placed in the present parish church of Itchen Stoke.



Duke of Bolton

Now soon after coming to the throne in 1689 King William created Charles Paulet (the 6th Marquis of Winchester) the 1st Duke of Bolton. Owing to the destruction of Basing House the Duke had built Bolton Castle as the replacement family seat. Later the 3rd Duke of Bolton started building activity again in Hampshire. Large extensions were commenced to the hunting lodge, Hackwood House, situated at the southern part of the Basing estate, together with the building of a new mansion adjacent to the site of the sixteenth century house at Abbotstone.

The 3rd Duke, who was a keen huntsman, commenced 'the large noble house at Abbotstone as a convenient hawking seat. It was built after the Italian manner opening a vista from one end to the other and constructed of brick with stone dressings, the rooms being panelled with oak and excellent carving'. It is further recorded that 'the very fine wainscot had been enriched by a great deal of most excellent carving by Grinling Gibbons'. The architect was James Gibbs, but it was never fully completed.

Building work, enlarging and refurbishing Hackwood House however continued sporadically over the same period and by 1720 the 5th Duke decided to concentrate on Hackwood and abandon Abbotstone. His architect, John Vardy, visited and surveyed the unfinished Abbotstone house in order to consider and report 'on what part of it might be introduced in the new wings to the south front of Hackwood'. A second visit was made to 'give directions about taking down the house at Abbotstone' and a third 'to inspect the stone coping that was to be sent to Hackwood'. The demolition was completed by 1760. And so, at Hackwood, we find the Great Hall was adapted to the reception of the very fine wainscot that was removed and brought from Abbotstone enriched by a great deal of most excellent carving, together with the exceptional large doors 6'6" wide by 15'0 high.

The Duke of Bolton's splendid house at Abbotstone had been much admired together with the Great Walled Garden constructed at the same time. The house has gone but parts of the walling of the garden exist today. In his visit to Abbotstone, Daniel Defoe recorded 'The Duke of Bolton has another seat, tho' not large, it is a very handsome beautiful palace, and the gardens not only very exact but finely situate, and the whole very well kept'. And Celia Fiennes on one of her journeys, also in the early eighteen century writes 'there we go by Aberstone, the Duke of Bolton's house stands on the side of a hill where there are fine Gardens and much fruite'.

The splendid house at Abbotstone was completely demolished and the beautiful enclosed garden allowed to decay. We find in the Vestry Book of Old Alresford Church, when the structure and tower were being rebuilt that in May and July 1769 the churchwardens accounts record 'By cash paid Button, Brown and Green for cleaning of bricks at Abbotstone 7s3d. and To cash paid George Shepherd for carriage of old bricks from Abbotstone at 41- per thousand, E1.4s'. So the church tower today exemplifies for us today the beauty and warmth of the brickwork of the last manor house to be built at Abbotstone.

The removal of the manor house from Abbotstone enabled the whole estate to continue as a prosperous and viable farmstead, which is the position today. Under the ownership of Lord Ashburton, the ancient parish of Abbotstone still nestles quite happily within the beautiful rolling landscape of the mid Hampshire countryside.

Probably the last reminder of the ancient village of Abbotstone was the water mill which served the community continuously for many centuries. Through the auspices of the Curtis Museum of Alton and the Hampshire County Council the mill machinery was carefully dismantled by Mr. Daborn of Shere and transported to the Science Museum in London. Here it will be expertly repaired and restored and in due course reassembled, as a working example, in the Main Hall of the Kensington Museum, illustrating ancient British industrial machinery and rural craftsmanship.

Copyright

Raymond Elliott

October 1990

Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone Tithe Award
1838 HRO Ecclesiastical History VCR
Hampshire Vol. 2 Hampshire Museum
Services Chilcomb
Isabel Sanderson - Deserted Medieval
Village RHO St. Martyns
Church Abbotstone Duke of
Boltons Gardens NHL
E.K. Chambers - The Elizabethan Stage 4
Hilary Cripps - Preservation of Abbotstone
Mill
Ella Conybeare - Abbotstone - RFC
1897 Diane Coldicatt - Hampshire
Nunneries 1989 Rev. G.W. Minns -
Hackwood Park - BM 1899