



LITTLE COMPTON MANOR – A HISTORY

Little Compton

The village of Little Compton forms the southernmost tip of Warwickshire, between Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. The parish is just four miles long from east to west and less than two miles across from north to south. The village lies in a 'combe' or valley, from which the name Compton is derived. The epithet 'little' distinguishes it from the neighbouring Long Compton. The houses are mostly built from the local Cotswold stone, which is yellow in colour and turns grey with age, as in neighbouring parts of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.

First Written Records

The recorded history of Little Compton begins in the 11th Century, but it is likely that the village had already existed for three or four centuries by this time. In 1056 King Edward the Confessor re-founded the nearby monastery at Deerhurst as a priory dependent on the great Abbey of St. Denys near Paris, where many of the French kings are buried. The Manor (now Reed Business School) and the Church at Little Compton formed part of the endowment of the priory, which accounts for the dedication of the Church to St. Denys. It is the only Church in England that goes by the name of St. Denys.

The dedication meant that Deerhurst and its possessions were liable to be treated as enemy property when Henry V was at war with France; however in 1415 the priory escaped dissolution when it was 'made denizen' or independent of St. Denys. This independence was short lived and in 1467 the priory and its property was made over to the neighbouring Abbey of Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, to which Deerhurst became a cell.

Henry VIII's Legacy

In the time of Henry VIII, a survey of all ecclesiastical property was made. In this Latin record, known as the "Valor Ecclesiasticus", the net annual value of the Manor and the Church in Little Compton was given as £30 – 14 – 0³/₄. The name of the parish was recorded as Compton in Floribus, or Compton in the Flowers, a tribute to the beauty of the local countryside.

In 1539 Tewkesbury Abbey, like other English monasteries, was dissolved and its property, which included the Manor and Church at Little Compton, confiscated. In 1546 Henry VIII granted the Manor to a layman, Sir Thomas Pope, the founder of Trinity College in Oxford, and the Church to the newly founded Cathedral of Christ Church in Oxford.

The Civil War

In 1641 Thomas Juxon brought the Manor from Sir Thomas Pope's successors. He died in 1644 and left the Manor to his brother William Juxon, then Bishop of London. William held various positions including Lord Treasurer of England, the first bishop to do so, and was a member of the King's Council. William advised King Charles I during the Civil War, which ended in 1648 with the King's defeat. At the request of the King, Juxon voluntarily surrendered himself to arrest and shared Charles's captivity. The following January, the King was executed, with Juxon the only priest to accompany him to the scaffold.

The King's body was embalmed under Juxon's directions and he bore the coffin into St. George's Chapel in Windsor, although he was not permitted to read the burial service. These scenes are now represented in a beautiful stained glass window in Little Compton Church. The same year, Juxon was deprived of his bishopric by Oliver Cromwell and forced into retirement.

Juxon made Little Compton his refuge, where he indulged his great love of hunting. His deer park originally included the whole of what is now the south garden of the Manor. The smaller field, which exists today, is reputed to be the smallest deer park in England. William was forced to live quietly at Little Compton until the restoration of Charles II in 1660, when he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He died in 1663, leaving £100 to the poor of the parish. Juxon's portrait hangs in the dining room and in the National Portrait Gallery in London. His coat of arms is set above the fireplace in the Manor.

More Recently

The Manor was passed down through the Juxon family until it was sold in 1792 to Michael Corgan, a banker of Chipping Norton. In 1794 the Parish Enclosure Act was passed, and by an award of the following year, much of the land previously cultivated and used in common was divided into separate holdings, the greater part being allotted to the Manor. Michael Corgan was bankrupt by 1812, and his creditors eventually sold the Manor House and much of the land to William Harbidge, whose family occupied it for the rest of the 19th Century.

In the 20th Century ownership changed hands several times. One owner was Lady Alexandra Metcalfe, daughter of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India. Lady Alexandra hosted house parties at the Manor, attended by the high society of the 1920's. Her guests included the Prince of Wales, who was soon to be crowned King Edward VIII before abdicating from the throne in 1936. The Manor is mentioned in the recent biography 'The Viceroy's Daughters', written by Anne de Courcy.

The Manor Today

The oldest parts of the Manor House date from the 15th Century. The dining room is one of the oldest rooms in the house and is at a lower level than the rest of the building. It is likely that this room was originally the grange of the Tewkesbury monks.

The Manor now houses Reed Business School, a venue for professional examination tuition, business management training and conferences. Last year the School hosted over 21,000 training days for accountancy students, internal Reed Co-Members and external delegates.