

THE HOLT HOUSE, BERKSHIRE

There has been quite a bit written about the Manor of Beches in Wokingham, Berkshire that was the home of the Whitlock family in the 1500 & 1600's. Attached to this Manor was the Dower House called The Holt House. The old Manor House of Beches burned in 1953 but the Dower House still exists and since 1930 it has been a school for girls.

The earliest reference to Whitlocks at The Holt appears in the Wokingham parish registers for the burial July 20, 1589 of John Whitlock of Hoult. This John Whitlock was married to Agnes Planner in the 1550's and they had a large family of more than 10 children. According to the family history written by Sir James Whitlock (1570-1632) in 1609, John Whitlock did not marry until he was 45 and he lived until he was 80. Agnes Planner was reputed to be 17 at the time of her marriage. Agnes was buried at Wokingham July 20, 1630 and her will dated June 8, 1629 is extensive.

By deed dated June 10, 1617 John Whitlock (1509?-1589)'s son William Whitlock and his wife Ursula (Beresford) Whitlock lease lands including The Holt House to William's cousin Richard Whitlock (d.1642) for a period of 21 years. William and Ursula Whitlock appear to have lost all the Beches Manor properties and when Richard Whitlock died in 1642 his will leaves the Manor of Beches to his son Richard Whitlock (1616-1666). It is assumed William transferred the estates to his cousin Richard Whitlock (d.1642) sometime after 1617. William Whitlock and Ursula Beresford had descendants who can be traced down into the 1700's in London but they had no claim on the Whitlock estates.

In 1644 Richard Whitlock (1616-1666)'s brother Robert Whitlock (1618-1671) bought Richard's portion of the Manor of Beches for £300. Richard Whitlock (1616-1666) was a graduate of Oxford University, A doctor of physic and a fellow of All Souls College. In 1654 he published "Zootomia: Observations on the present manners of the English" and was considered a man of wit and learning. While Richard had supported or at least accepted the changes during the Interregnum, at the restoration in 1660 he "wheeled about" and took holy orders and was granted the benefice of Foxton in 1660 and became Vicar of Stowe in 1661. As Vicar of Ashford in Kent he clashed with his parishioners and took to etching phrases and sentences into the glass of the windows of the Vicarage reflecting his frustrations. He was buried there October 24, 1666.

Robert Whitlock (1618-1671) was the more successful of the two brothers. He was a member of the Himmer's Company of Clapham, London and a successful merchant in Surrey. The Manor of Beches including The Holt House passed to Robert Whitlock's son Richard Whitlock (1651-1706) of Amersham, Bucks. In the 1680's Richard Whitlock enters into several mortgages with Richard Hawe and by 1687 the entire estate was sold to Richard Hawe. This ended at least 100 years that The Holt House had been associated with the Whitlock family. The property in 1687 included both the Manor House of Beches plus The Holt House and fifty acres of land included tenements and messuages. In addition four closes of land containing 16 acres in the tenure of John Rance of Wokingham.

Since 1930 The Holt House has been school for girls and is known as The Holt School. The buildings were renovated in 1886 and again in 1997. During the latest restoration Steve Thomas photographed each stage of the restoration and has given us a disc of these photographs. It shows the interior of the house stripped down the wooden beams, many irregular shaped sections of tree incorporated into the building. This use of tree shaped beams help date the building to pre 1600.