

Grange Farm

By Elizabeth Haughton

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Few people in Gosport today know the whereabouts of Grange Farm. Even local residents of long standing find it hard to direct you there. Indeed its site, tucked away behind the warren of Rowner Naval Estate and the Caravan Park and flanked on the other side by the Municipal rubbish dump seems an unlikely spot for a house of such important proportions.

Yet the site gives a clue to what may well be the earliest part of its history ; it is close to the banks of the Alver on a patch of high ground and to Castle Mound, a Saxon fortification. Recently a small Saxon Settlement was excavated close by and from a Charter of 948 setting out the boundaries of Alverstoke, we may suppose that Grange Lane was an ancient trackway - so it would seem reasonable to think that a farm of some sort existed here from Saxon times. The name 'Grange', however, stems from the Norman word 'Grongin', meaning a great farm with barns, stabling and stalls, so that the original farm may well be later than Saxon date.

During the Middle Ages, the history of the Grange is inextricably linked with that of Rowner Manor and also with that of Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight, which was founded in 1132 by Baldwin de Redvers, Earl of Devon. William the Conqueror granted to Walkelin Bishop of Winchester a gift of 3 hide of land at Quarr with the liberty to dig stone there, and later a large quantity of this stone was used to build Winchester Cathedral. A Charter of Hamo Brito de Leya confirmed to the Abbot of Quarr a grant of land at Cherc, and the monks were to have their ship 'free of toll and quietly' along the Cherc Seaboard. So it seems that the stone destined for Winchester would have been landed in the vicinity of Grange and it is possible that some was left there and actually used in the construction of the house, for we know that during fairly recent alterations stone of this type was found incorporated in the brick walls.

More interesting perhaps was the right of monks of Quarr to grind their corn at the mill at Cherc, and in the early 13th Century, Gilbert le Brit not only compelled his own tenants to use this mill to the exclusion of any other but granted the monks 'free access and regress through his land.' In 1266 an agreement was made between the Abbots of Quarr and Titchfield that the monks should pay a rent of 2s. yearly for the mill at Cherc. We may suppose that the Grange called Cherc was in fact the homestead of Grange, but the mill itself poses a mystery : it is still commonly thought that 'windmill mound', a barrow-like structure only a stones-throw from the present farm was the foundation of the monks' mill. But research showed that this mound was in fact a Saxon fortification and it was re-named 'Castle Mound.'

If this is accepted, what happened to the mill? It is exciting to conjecture that some trace of it may be discovered during the course of the modern developments encroaching steadily on to the grange land.

In 1277, Rowner Manor, which had passed to the Crown was given to Sir William Brune and remained the property of the Brune family until modern times ; Grange Farm was undoubtedly part of the estate, but we hear nothing of it until 1554 when a grant concerning a yearly rent of £12 "out of a grange called 'Cherc' was made by Sir Oliverly Wallope and Henry his son to Sir John Brune, then Lord of the Manor. Sir John died in 1559 and his Will gave to his wife for her lifetime his Grange of Charke of the value of £12. Possibly the house mentioned in this Will was to be re-built for it is thought that the present house dates from about 1570. Many of its Elizabethan features have disappeared and the complex chimney stacks and some dormer windows from the front of the house, but its mode of construction and its 'E' - shape denote Elizabethan origin.



Again some time lapses before we hear of the Grange, but a pedigree of the families of Hollis, Larcom and Paffard tells us that a John Paffard born in 1688 became a tenant of the Grange which he held from Charles Brune. We know that the Paffards of Grange were country gentlemen and extremely hospitable, and their neighbours the Hollisses into whose family Hannah Paffard married had a good farm at Privett. But the family showed a greater inclination for service life than farming. William Paffard, son of John,

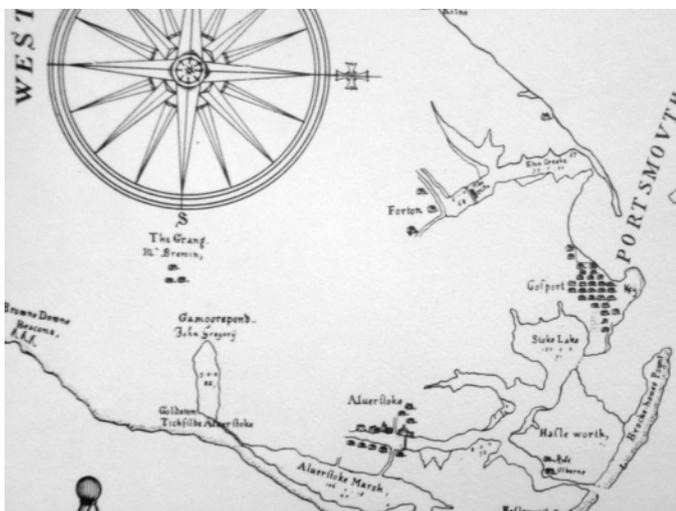
forsook the Grange for the Navy and his sister Hannah had a son who became an Admiral and only some small farms were kept in the family. Two of Hannah's daughters married Naval Officers also, one of them, George McKinley likewise becoming an Admiral so the farming tradition was well and truly broken.

A survey of about 1800 shows Grange as still the most important farm of the district. It was let to Mr. John Stares at this time and had an acreage of 696 though over a sixth of this was 'furze and waste.' The names of the fields, such as Newton's Marsh, Butcher's Meadow and Clover paddock are picturesque and conjure up visions of a rural Gosport unimagined to us today.



Hangman's Coppice occupied eight acres but we are not sure who was hanged there ; we do know though that a local character called 'Rabbit-skin Jack' a trader in furs, was found hanged by his boot lace close to the farm-members of the Ayling family who succeeded the Stares used to end the cross which marked this spot.

Such events live on in tales handed down - more ominous perhaps was the first compulsory purchase of Grange land to provide for the new railway and land taken by the War Department. Interestingly the first air balloons were anchored in the field in front of the house, where later the pioneer Grange airfield was developed.



Since then the story of the house is one of decline; today it is a sorry spectacle of neglect. But there are several plans to Additional Reading:

Stepping Stones of Time (1290-20000) at Grange Farm, Rowner

by Robert Whiteley. Published by The Friends of Gosport Museum in 2000 give it another chance and to preserve the still beautiful wild grounds which flank it.

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