

May Place, Crayford

The May Place estate lay to the north of St Paulinus Church, Crayford. Before the 1939-1945 War a mansion in Jacobean style stood here, its grounds adjoining those of the Crayford Manor House. The Golf Club used what was left of the original building, which suffered from enemy action in that war. Beneath it are still older foundations and cellars.

May Place was probably constructed originally for the Apylton family. Roger Appleton (or Apylton) was one of the auditors to Kings Henry V and VI and their Queens, and to the Principality of Wales and the Duchy of Cornwall.

The Appletons were followed at May Place by the Draper family who came from Erith, where they owned the manors of Bedonwell and Herring Hill. William Draper and his wife, Mary, are buried at St Paulinus Church. Their son and daughter, and a child who died at birth, are shown at the feet of their parents. After the death of Cresheld Draper, who, like his parents, was a benefactor to the poor of Erith and Crayford, the estate was purchased by Sir Cloudesley Shovel. Shovel began as a cabin-boy, and rose to become admiral and commander-in-chief of the British Navy: he died when his ship 'The Association' was wrecked off the Scilly Isles in 1707. Lady Shovel lived on at May Place until 1732.

Lord Carmichael, husband of Sir Cloudesley's daughter, Elizabeth, now came into the ownership of May Place, together with Ellam and Newbury, Crayford.

He sold the estate to Nathaniel Elwick, a former Governor of Madras, whose daughter and heiress married Miles Barne of Sotterley, in Suffolk. The Barne family were to own the house until 1938, but rarely lived there. Tenants included the rich and popular heiress Mary Verney a descendant of the Apylton family. Her mother, when a young widow had married Richard Calvert of Bexley and Mary was brought up by him at Hall Place. In 1791 she inherited her uncles estates and the following year George III created her Baroness Fermanagh. She moved to May Place shortly afterwards and spent some 7,000, then a very large sum, on improving and modernising the house, including building the elegant music room in which she entertained the Prince of Wales (later George IV).

Later residents included John Fasset Burnett and Edward Horner, both well known local characters and also Rev Thomas Barne, a younger brother of Miles Barne, who was responsible for the rebuilding of the Manor House, then known as Newberry Farm. The district of Barnehurst is named after the Barne family, on whose land the station was built.

***For further information, please visit the Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre,
Central Library, Townley Road, Bexleyheath, Kent. DA6 7HJ.
Telephone 020 8836 7369 Or E mail archives@bexley.gov.uk***