



Mesh Wick House – Downton

Mesh Wick House is part of a grand late Victorian country house, formerly known as Wick House. The house was completed in 1890 and first home to a Captain Archibald Hicks Beech. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Wick House was home to a number of notable residents, but after World War II it transformed into the Wick House Girls School, run by Mrs Grenfell, wife of Captain Russell Grenfell of the Royal Navy.

Architect and style

Wick House is an archetypal late Victorian country house, inspired by the Dutch and 'Queen Anne' styles. The design of the house was attributed to architect, Mr. Fred Bath of Salisbury; however, no plans or details have survived. Fred Bath was responsible for a number of buildings across southern England, including the Fordingbridge workhouse and St Leonard's Church, both in Hampshire.

Captain Beach and family

In 1890, the newly married, Captain Archibald Hicks Beach (sometimes spelt Beech) moved into the brand-new Wick House with his family. The census in 1891 shows a large household living in the house and along side 31 year old Archibald was his 32 year old wife, Victoria and their two young daughters, Cecily and Winifred. The family had six live-in servants including two nurses to assist Mrs Beach with the two young children. Captain Beach is recorded as part of the 5th British Rifle Brigade.

Henry Curtis Gallup

Captain and Mrs Beach only remained at Wick House for less than 10 years, as by the turn of the 20th century the house had become the home of home of Henry Curtis Gallup. At the time of the 1901 census, Henry Gallup was a wealthy young man of 26 living on his own means. The only other resident in the house was Henry's friend, 27 year old James Rawlence, also living on independent means. The two young men were in the house with six live-in servants, a housekeeper, butler and four maids.

Master of the Hunt and Prisoner of War

Henry Gallup was an active participant in local affairs while resident at Wick House and was president of the Downton Quoiting Club, as well as Master of the Wilton Hunt. It is also recorded that he held many committee meetings for the 'Hunter's Improvement Society' in his house. He continued as Honourable Secretary of the Hunt until 1906, which is when he left Wick House and Downton. Henry C. Gallup also saw active service during World War One and was taken prisoner at the fall of Kut in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) in 1916. He returned to Downton in December 1918 after the peace and "was welcomed by his many friends and the church bells rang out to mark his freedom."

Physician – Doctor Francis Penrose

After Henry Gallup's departure from Wick House in 1906, the house was purchased by Doctor Francis George Penrose. The 1911 census reveals that Francis Penrose 'Doctor of Medicine', 53 years old, was in the house with his wife of 16 years, Mary. Their youngest daughter, 14 year old Frances was also in the house, along with a visitor, Emma Turner, a 'lecturer in Ornithology'. The family had seven live-in servants, including groom Herbert Adams who was also recorded as in the Army Reserve. The 1911 census also records that Wick House had 23 rooms.

The Bonvalot family

Francis and Mary Penrose also only remained at Wick House for a few years, until 1912 when the house became the home of Antoine and Emily Bonvalot and their two sons, Edward and Cecil. The Bonvalot brothers are most remembered for their service during World War One and most particularly Edward, who was killed during the Battle of Loos in 1915. Edward was educated at Eton and Cambridge and served as a second Lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion of the Coldstream Guards. His brother, Cecil followed him into the Coldstream Guards and rose to the rank of Captain by the end of the war.

The Bonvalot Memorial Garden

After the war, Mrs Bonvalot now also a widow, donated two acres of ground (to the west of Wick House) for a memorial garden in memory of her son, Edward. The Bonvalot Memorial Garden was opened in August 1922 for the use of all residents of Downton.



For Sale - 1934

Mrs Bonvalot remained at Wick House throughout the 1920s and it was only in 1934 that the house was on the market. An advertisement in *The Times* in March 1934 shows the house for sale with Rawlence & Squarey (an agent with historic connections to Chesterton Humberts). The house was promoted as a “well-built brick residence contain[ing] 3-4 reception rooms, magnificent billiard or music room and 14 bed and dressing rooms with good domestic offices.” At this time the house and grounds covered over 51 acres.

Mr John Read

Wick House then became the home of John Read, who remained at Wick House throughout the turbulent war years. In fact, the billiard room at Wick House was used to billet soldiers during the war. Building plans show that after the war, Mr Read then converted the old billiard room into living accommodation for his staff. However, within a few years John Read sold the house and estate.

House and estate for sale

Sales particulars for Wick House in 1949 give great detail for the house and grounds. At this time, the house featured a drawing room, sitting room, dining room, gun room, six principal bedrooms on the first floor and five bedrooms on the second floor. The house also featured rooms for staff and two self-contained flats.

Wick House Girls School and Captain Russell Grenfell

It was at this time that Mrs Grenfell moved her girls' school from Camden House in Burley to Wick House. The school officially opened at Wick House in August 1949. Mrs Grenfell was the wife of celebrated naval captain, Russell Grenfell, who had many naval successes through World War I, but also wrote a number of books, including *The Art of the Admiral* and *The Bismarck Episode*.

Girls school to high quality homes

Wick House continued as a school into the early 1960s, complete with playing field, tennis court, two netball pitches, archery range and riding field. However, by the mid 1960s the buildings surrounding Wick House and the country house itself had been developed into residential homes. Wick House was divided into three to become Wick House, Mesh Wick House and Mesh Wick Hall.