



## Westlands Farm

Westlands Farm is believed to sit on the very location of a lost medieval village – East Itchenor. The now long gone village is only slightly remembered by the neighbouring and surviving village of West Itchenor, but for most people it is long forgotten. Surviving documents give us a picture of the history of East Itchenor, but sadly the exact location of the lost village is uncertain. Archaeological studies have been attempted, but as yet a full survey is yet to be done that will ascertain the exact location – it is almost certainly a job for Time Team. From the 19th century, the current house has sat amongst open fields much as it does today.

### **Romans and Anglo-Saxons**

The area of Chichester Harbour and in particular West Itchenor, Birdham and the former East Itchenor can be traced back to the time of the Romans when it was used as a landing place for travellers arriving for Chichester. However, the first occupation of the area was in the Anglo-Saxon period, in the 7th century, when it was occupied by Icca, the son of the ruling Saxon Cissa (who was in the former Roman encampment at Chichester). The peninsula became known as 'Iccen Ora' or 'Icca's landing place' which slowly became Itchenor.

### **Normans and thriving East Itchenor**

By the time of the Domesday Book in 1086, Itchenor and Birdham were under the lordship of Earl Roger and East Itchenor was recorded with three families. East Itchenor was originally part of the Priory of Boxgrove and by the 13th century both Birdham and East Itchenor had churches. In fact, by 1291 East Itchenor was larger than Birdham, recorded with a value of £8 opposed to Birdham's £5 6s & 8d.

### **Plague hits small village**

It is during the medieval period that East Itchenor's history takes a turn. Records show that in 1332 the manor of East Itchenor was tenanted to William de Hunston, while the church and attached lands were still held by Boxgrove Priory. However, it is thought that when the Black Death came to England in 1348, East Itchenor was badly affected. However, we know from records that the parish of East Itchenor survived until the 1440s, when it was united to Birdham, almost 100 years after the plague swept across England. This appears to be a long time, but it is possible that the after affects of the plague were ultimately to blame for the ultimate demise of the village. After 1441 the church at East Itchenor became a chapel of ease.

### **Village disappears**

The manor of East Itchenor continued through the hands of wealthy owners, but it is clear that there was no longer a parish and people living in a village, but rather it was relegated to farming land as part of the manor and church lands. The section where Westlands Farm is located today, on the edge of the peninsula, was part of the church lands, connected to what would have been the small village near the church. However, further archaeological studies would need to be completed to verify this. What is known is that the lands were not part of the manor, but belonged to the Priory of Boxgrove.

### **Sir Richard Sackville and the Dean and Chapter of Chichester**

At the time of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, the land was acquired by the Crown and in 1557 was granted to Sir Richard Sackville. Sir Richard Sackville was under-treasurer of the exchequer and chancellor of the Court of Augmentations, along with a number of other positions he held in Sussex. However, only seven years later Sackville transferred the estate to the Dean and Chapter of Chichester. Further information from the Victoria County History of Sussex tells us that in 1575 'Old Ichynore' cemetery was rented by Roger Hale and the former church, also thought to have been the school house for a time, was demolished in 1708.

### **Farmhouse constructed - Westlands**

Westlands farmhouse was built in the early years of the 19th century, with the first specific recording in the 1828 land tax records, showing the house and land leased from the Dean and Chapter of Westminster by a Mr. William Gibbs. William Gibbs was also recorded as owning other sections of old East Itchenor, including part of the old manor. The tithe documents also record William Gibbs as occupying large parts of the area, amounting to hundreds of acres. Interestingly, in 1830, a part of the neighbouring manor of East Itchenor was briefly held by the 1st Duke of Wellington, the hero of Waterloo.



### **William Gibbs and agricultural labourers at Westlands**

William Gibbs and his family continued as leaseholders of Westlands and neighbouring land into the 1850s. However, we know from the census returns and Sussex directories that the house was in fact tenanted to agricultural labourers. The 1841 census shows the house shared by William French, agricultural labourer, aged 45 with his wife Annie, along with John Heberden, also an Agricultural labourer, aged 55 with his wife Lydia. The 1851 census shows that the farmhouse was occupied by other members of the French family. Firstly, in one part of the house, was William, an agricultural labourer with his wife Elizabeth and their five children (under the age of 9), and secondly, James French, agricultural labourer, only 23 with his wife Ruth.

### **Westlands for sale**

In 1854, we find the house and farm on the market, promoted as 'the very compact and fertile farm...comprising a double tenanted brick built and thatched cottage, having 4 rooms to each tenement, with detached washhouse, jointly used'. From these details we know that the farmhouse was divided into two dwellings and was originally thatched. The property details in 1854 also tell us that it was still owned by the Dean and Chapter of Chichester and the leasehold had passed to William's sons, Wyatt, aged 24 and Edward, aged 19. The sales particulars show Lot 1, Westlands Farm, sold for £1550.

### **Agricultural labourers working the land**

The management of the farm continued in the same way after the sale, with the farmhouse rented by agricultural labourers. The 1861 census records that one part of the house was occupied by James Peters, agricultural labourer, aged 72 with his 70 year old wife, Rebecca. The other part of the house was occupied by James Bowers, agricultural labourer, aged 33 and his wife Anne and their four children. Their eldest, 10 year old William was already working as a labourer.

### **Boughton family come to Westlands**

The farmhouse continued to be the home of agricultural labourers through to the late 19th century, while the leasehold continued in the hands of the executors of Stephen Farndell. However, by the 1890s Westlands Farm became the home of the Boughton family, who established a family run farm that continued into the middle of the 20th century. The 1901 census shows that the farmhouse had become one single home with head of the house, Henry Thomas Boughton as 'farmer', 39 years old with his wife, Fanny, 38 years old. Henry and Fanny had six children between the ages of 17 and 6 at this time.

### **The Boughton Brothers**

The Boughton family continued to farm at Westlands during the early 20th century, adding further farm buildings, while the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (official office for church lands) were lords of the manor and had taken over the leasehold of Westlands. Even in the 20th century, Westlands Farm was rarely named in records and was simply known for the 'Boughton Brothers'. During the 1920s and 30s the farm was run by brothers, Henry Thomas (Jnr – known as Harry), Frank and Frederick Boughton.

### **The Mason family move to Westlands**

However, by 1935 things began to change, with cottages leased to different families, and by the outbreak of World War II, the cottages and the farmhouse were all leased to different families. By the end of the war, Westlands Farm was leased to Antony Mason, who had formerly been living at nearby Itchenor House. In fact, Mr Mason was asked by the war office to run the farms attached to Itchenor House during the war. In 1945 he permanently moved to Westlands Farm, where his family have continued to this day.

### **Farm cottages to single family home**

Westlands Farm has seen great change since it was first built in the early 19th century, with the replacement of thatch for a tiled roof, as well as the conversion from two dwellings into a single family home. The 20th century saw further alterations with an extension added to the northern section of the house and further developments attached to the land.