

The Ilsington Estate – Puddletown

The history of the Ilsington estate involves a number of famous names from English history; those with direct links to royalty, as well as those who have played an active role in the history of the nation. The Ilsington estate can be traced back to the 12th century, when it was granted, as part of Puddletown manor, to the Redvers family. In the 17th century, the manor was granted to Henry Hastings by James I, but by the late 18th century, the estate was in the hands of Robert Walpole, second Earl of Orford, and son of the first Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. Passing through the Walpole family, the estate was also held by Sir Robert's youngest son, author, Horace Walpole, fourth Earl of Orford and the famous creator of the house, Strawberry Hill. In 1861, the Ilsington estate was purchased by John Brymer and for over 100 years was held by members of the Brymer family

Normans and early medieval Puddletown

For much of its early history, the Ilsington estate has been part of Puddletown manor. The Earliest records show the first lords of the manor of Puddletown (or Piddletown) were the Redvers family. Richard de Redvers was a Norman lord who came across with William the Conqueror in 1066 and later became a key supporter of William's youngest son, Henry I. He was granted vast quantities of land and also became the Earl of Devon. The manor then passed to the Montacute family, who later rose to become Earls of Salisbury. However, by the 13th century when Edward I was on the throne, the Montacute family passed the manor of Puddletown to the Priory of Christchurch Twynham.

James I and Henry Hastings

The manor was held by the priory of Christ Church until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1540s. By the early 17th century, when James I had become King of England, the manor of Puddletown had been granted to Henry Hastings. A Letters Patent still survives in the Dorset County Records from 1615 granting the estate to Henry Hastings and citing a previous grant through Elizabeth I.

Ancestors of Henry Hastings

From this time, the manor of Puddletown continued through the descendants of Henry Hastings, who was the second son of George, fourth Earl of Huntingdon. The Hastings family had long had links with royalty, including Henry, third Earl of Huntingdon, who was knight of the garter and had charge of Mary Queen of Scots, as well as George, third Lord Hastings, who attended Henry VIII at the battles of Therouenne and Tournay in France, and was created the first Earl of Huntingdon, and right back to their ancestor, William de Hastings, who had been steward to Henry II.

Country sportsman – Henry Hastings

The Henry Hastings of Puddletown was described as a great country sportsman. "He kept all manner of sport hounds, that ran buck, fox, hare, otter and badger and hawkes long and short winged. He had all sorts of nets for fish." And his estate in Puddletown "supplied him with red deer, sea and river fish." The estate passed to his son, Sir George Hastings when Henry passed away in 1657 (almost 100 years old) and then to Sir George's daughter, Francis.

Sir Robert Walpole – the first Prime Minister

However, by the 18th century, Puddletown manor and estates passed to Robert Walpole, Baron Walpole of Walpole Norfolk and son of the great Sir Robert Walpole, first Prime Minister. Sir Robert Walpole is commonly acknowledged to be the first British Prime Minister, even though the official title was not created until after his departure. Walpole was a Whig statesman, who was closely allied to George I and in particular George II and Queen Caroline. In 1715, he became first lord of the treasure and Chancellor of the Exchequer, creating the position that would become known as Prime Minister. Despite a break in 1717-20, he remained in the role until 1742, becoming the longest reigning Prime Minister in history. In 1735, No.10 Downing Street was granted to Walpole and has remained the home of the British Prime Minister ever since. After Walpole's resignation in 1742, he was created Baron of Houghton, Viscount Walpole and Earl of Orford.

Robert and George Walpole

Sir Robert passed away in 1745, at which time his son, Robert became the second Earl of Orford, however, he only lived for a few more years. After his death, in 1751, the estates and privileges passed to his son, Sir George (King George II and Queen Caroline were sponsors at his baptism), but he died unmarried and the estates then went to Sir Robert's youngest son, Robert Walpole's brother, Horatio Walpole, who became the fourth Earl of Orford in 1791.

Horatio Walpole – politician and author

Horatio Walpole is most remembered today as the creator of the gothic villa, Strawberry Hill in west London; however he was also a politician like his father, as well as an author and man of letters. He wrote a number of books, including *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of Richard III* (1768). The line of Walpole's died out after Horatio

passed away unmarried in 1797 and the estate of Puddletown, with Ilsington, passed to Horatio's cousin, also Horatio, Baron Walpole of Wolterton.

Generations of Horace Walpoles

In 1806, a second creation of the Earls of Orford was bestowed on Horatio Walpole, who then became the first Earl of Orford. The first Earl of Orford married Rachel, youngest daughter of William Cavendish, the third Duke of Devonshire. The title then passed to his son, another Horatio, who held a number of prominent positions, including M.P. for Wigan and King's Lynn. His son, another Horatio, third Earl of Orford, inherited the titles and estate at the death of his father in 1822. Prior to inheriting the estates, the third Earl was attaché to St. Petersburg and later Madrid, before Lord of the Admiralty and a Commissioner for Indian affairs.

Absentee landlords – leasing of the house and land

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Walpole's continued as absentee landlords and the land and estates were managed by a land agent, while Ilsington house was leased. The most renowned lessee of the house was General Thomas Garth, principal equerry to George III, and it was at this time that the young princesses, Mary, Sophia and Amelia, along with the Duke of York stayed in the house.

Other parts of the estate were leased, including the fishing and sport rights at Ilsington. A lease from 1856, in the Dorset County Records, shows the agreement of the Right Honourable Earl of Orford to Herbert Williams, Esq. to "sport and fish over lands in the said manor and in the rivers Frome and Piddle".

Ilsington sold to John Brymer

In 1858, the estates in Puddletown passed to Horatio William Walpole, fourth Earl of Orford and it was during his time that change came to the manor of Puddletown. In 1861 the Ilsington estate, along with the manor house and a number of farmhouses, were sold to John Brymer, Esq. John Brymer set about making a number of alterations to the house and established his home at Ilsington House, after years of absentee landlords.

Colonel William Ernest Brymer

The estate passed to his son, William Ernest Brymer, who held a number of prominent positions, including M.P. for Dorchester from 1874 to 1885 and then M.P. for South Dorset from 1891 to 1906 and also took an active role in Puddletown and from 1887 was High Sheriff of Dorset. He actually farmed parts of his own land and was behind the establishment of the annual barley show and was a member of the Dorset yeomanry for 37 years, retiring as Colonel. *The Times* obituary in 1909 said "As a landlord Colonel Brymer, with the fine example of his father before him, showed an exemplary solicitude for the welfare of the cottagers on his estate...he also built a handsome block of schools and a reading room."

Reverend John Brymer and Wilfred Brymer

After Colonel Brymer passed away, the estate passed to his brother, Reverend John George Brymer, who was rector of Childe Okeford, as well as J.P. for Dorset. In 1949, the Ilsington estate passed to Reverend J.G. Brymer's nephew, Wilfred Brymer, rector of Charlton Mackrell in Somerset and Archdeacon of Wells, who remained the owner until the late 1950s. Memorials for William, John and Wilfred Brymer, along with other members of the Brymer family, can still be seen in St Mary's church in Puddletown.

Gamekeeper – Len Macey

It was during the time of Wilfred Brymer's ownership of Ilsington that local man, Len Macey was the gamekeeper of the estate. His memories of being a gamekeeper on a country estate during the mid 20th century, when this form of land management was in decline, are recorded in the book, *From Bird Scarer to Headkeeper*, and give a fascinating insight into a lost world. His stories of hunts and management of a country estate allow an insight into how country estates had been run for generations. Macey also said of Wilfred Brymer that he "was a true country squire who really lived for the estate".

Country pursuits at Ilsington

Country pursuits, in particular fishing and hunting, have been an integral part of the Ilsington estate, right back to Henry Hastings through to Wilfred Brymer. Although the Hastings and Walpole families were absentee landlords, they still sourced produce from their Dorset estate and took advantage of what the estate offered, much as it did for the Brymer family through to today.