

West Wantley – Sullington



West Wantley is Grade II* listed, with the core of the house dating back to the medieval period. It was home to a renowned 17th century author, Richard Haines, but it was also owned by the Shelley family, including Sir Timothy Shelley, 2nd Baronet, father of the celebrated romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley would have inherited the house, but due to his untimely death at the age of 29, the house eventually passed to his son, with Mary Wollstonecraft, Percy Florence Shelley. The house features many original architectural details including a stone plaque with the initials of the owners and the date 1656, as well as exposed timber beams, large inglenook place, and a lead drain head, also with the date 1656.

Medieval Wantele

The ownership of the land and estate of West Wantley has been traced back to the 12th century, when in 1199, Philip de Wantele sold land at Wantele for 100 shillings. Later records from the 13th and 14th centuries show further transactions and references to the Wantley family around Sullington. In 1327, records show Philip of Wantley transferred a house and yardland [sic] in Sullington to John of Wantley. The exact date for the original building of a house on this site is uncertain, but it is believed, the core of the house could date as far back as the 14th century. By the early 15th century, records reveal that Roger Wantley conveyed the property to John Bartlett, and by 1448 the 'lands, tenements, rents and services in Sullington and Storrington called West Wantele' were granted to Thomas Bartelot, son of John and Elizabeth Bartelot.

Tudor West Wantley and the Archbishop of Canterbury

By the time Mary I was Queen of England, during the 1550s, Thomas Bartlott was lord of the manor of West Wantley. However, by 1560, when Elizabeth I had taken the throne, West Wantley was recorded as Crown land, and was granted to Robert Mitchell. The records then show that by 1633, West Wantley was purchased by George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, but he died in that year and the property passed to his nephew, Richard Abbot. Richard and his wife, Anne then sold it to Gregory Haines, in 1641.

Richard Haines - writer, reformer and inventor

When Gregory Haines passed away in 1645, we get a glimpse of life at West Wantley, with an inventory of the house detailing his 'feether beeds' (feather beds) and 'brase pootes' (brass pots). When Gregory's eldest son, Richard, came of age in 1654 and married later the same year, the trustees of his father's estate conveyed West Wantley to him. It was at this time that the house was extended and largely re-built and a date plaque, situated above the entrance porch, shows the date 1656 and the initials 'R H M' for Richard and Mary Haines. Richard Haines was a noted writer, philanthropist and social reformer. He wrote a number of books, including *The Prevention of Poverty* (1674) and *A Model Government* (1678). Haines was also an inventor and is recorded as submitting a number of patents, including a spinning engine in 1678. He gained high acclaim for his work.



The Shelley's and the Harraden's

Richard and Mary Haines lived at West Wantley for 30 years from 1654 through to 1684, when they both passed away. At this time, the house and land at West Wantley passed to Richard's son, Gregory, but by 1691, Gregory had sold the house to Edward Shelley. When Edward Shelley passed away in 1748, the manor, including West Wantley, passed to his nephew, Timothy Shelley, and by this time the house was occupied by the Harraden family. By the 1780s, land tax records reveal the owner of West Wantley was John Shelley and it was occupied by Richard Harraden.

Baronet's of Castle Goring and the poet Shelley

By 1795, West Wantley was owned by Sir Bysshe Shelley, 1st Baronet of Castle Goring, grandfather of renowned romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. In 1815, Sir Bysshe Shelley passed away and the estate and property passed to his eldest son, Sir Timothy Shelley, 2nd Baronet, father of the poet Shelley. However, by this time, Shelley was 25 and had written a number of books, been married and run off to Switzerland with the writer, Mary Wollstonecraft. The poet Shelley appears to have had no direct connection with West Wantley, and by 1822 had died in a boating accident in Italy. When Sir Timothy passed away in 1844, the baronetcy and estate passed to the son of the poet Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft, Percy Florence Shelley. Meanwhile, West Wantley was occupied by a number of tenants, and by the 1830s and 40s had become the home of the Skinner family.

Farmers and agricultural labourers

The 1841 census shows that 'West Wantley Farm' was occupied by agricultural labourer, Charles Willard and his wife Hester, along with their two young children, Charles and Harriet, and a young agricultural hand, George Hatton, just 10 years old. However, by the time of the 1851 census West Wantley had once again become the home of the Skinner family. At this time the occupants were recorded as John Skinner, 26 years old, farming 115 acres and employing two labourers, along with his sisters; Sarah, 28; Ruth, 17; Fanny, 11; and one house servant, William Downes. By this time, after 150 years, the Shelley family had sold West Wantley to George King.

Victorian farmers

By the time of the 1861 census, West Wantley was home to widowed Cecilia Skinner, 44 years old, and her widowed sister, Jemima Ann May, 51 years old. The two sisters were responsible for 118 acres and employing two labourers and two boys, with the help of Cecilia's brother, Richard Pottinger and 'foreman on the farm' George Ellecombe. The two sisters also had one live-in domestic servant, 14 year old Eliza Searle. By the 1880s, West Wantley had become the home of farmer, Frank Wood, 52 years old and farming 167 acres, along with his wife, Mary Ann and their three children, Mary and Charlotte, both listed as 'dressmakers', and 17 year old Worthing, recorded as 'farmers son'. The census records that the Wood family had one general servant, 13 year old Maria.

Clementine Hozier – future wife of Sir Winston Churchill

By the 1890s, West Wantley had become the home of Cecil and Mary Paget and it was at this time that Mary Paget invited young Clementine Hozier, the future wife of Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, to stay. Clementine was the second daughter of Sir Henry Montague Hozier and Lady Henrietta Blanche Hozier. She is believed to have visited the house a number of times when she was a girl, before she was a teenager and travelled to Europe with her family. Clementine married Winston Churchill in 1908, and had a long and happy marriage, lasting 57 years.

'A valuable pleasure farm'

West Wantley was still owned by members of the King family during the early 20th century, but in 1921 it was placed on the market as part of the Fryern estate. It was described as 'A valuable freehold pleasure farm' and 'an extremely interesting ancient farmhouse chiefly constructed of stone...very pleasantly situate in rural surroundings with capital vegetable and pleasure gardens attached.' It was also described with key features of a telephone and a 'capital tennis lawn'.

Architectural treasures

Today, West Wantley still retains exceptional historic features, including exposed oak beams, casement windows, oak front door, and a lead drain head featuring the date 1656. The interior also features an inglenook fireplace with cupboard for salt, as well as a seat, and 'high up within the chimney is a recess for curing bacon and it was large enough for a man to lie in at full length'. The house also features a number of original local building materials creating a picturesque exterior, with local sandstone, red bricks, Horsham slabs and red tiles.