

The History of Coulsdon Manor

The Manor of Coulsdon originally known as Curedesdone (c 675) approx 500 feet above sea level

In 1782 Thomas Byron a wealthy business man bought estates at Coulsdon, Hooley and at Oxgate and Willesdon from the Earl of Radnor and became known as “Thomas Byron of Hooley & Nottingham Place”.

In 1801 he moved from London into Hooley House a rebuilt country mansion house.

The tithe map of Old Coulsdon dated 1837 shows that about half the parish belonged to Thomas Byron as Lord of the Manor.

Manorial lands included such farms as Portnalls, Tollers, Old Lodge, Colegrims, Stoats Nest, Greenways, Garston and Place House. They stretched from Purley in the North to Caterham in the South and from Chipstead in the West to Kenley in the East. The Byron family held the Manor of Coulsdon from 1782 -1921. It is not thought that they were related to the famous poet Lord Byron.

Thomas Byron (2)

Twice married Squire Thomas Byron died in 1821 childless. Thomas Byron (MP) his married nephew, became the principal beneficiary of his will and he inherited the estates at Hooley, Coulsdon and Nottingham Place (London) and considerable wealth from his uncle. Thomas and his wife Julia moved into Hooley House. In 1838 he sold a large amount of land to the “London to Brighton Railway Company” for the new Brighton Line.

Hooley House stood in the way of the railway and was demolished so they moved into Portnalls Farm, also on his estate.

The Old Coulsdon Court

Coulsdon Court a c16th/17th century farm of about 1000 acres, stood next to St Johns Church (c1260) in Old Coulsdon and the house was used as a Court House for the locals.

The farm formed part of Squire Byron’s estate and in 1850 the house was renamed “The Grange” and the name Coulsdon Court was given to the new building being constructed. A house called “The Grange” still stands on the site today.

What is now known as” Grange Park” was then known as Church Green and was part of the farm. In 1927 the park was bought with the help of local donations for £6,375. The local authority took over the upkeep.



Entrance Porch, South-West.

The New Coulsdon Court

The foundation stone of the new house was laid in 1850 by Thomas's son, Edmund then aged

six and it took six years to complete. The name "Coulsdon Court" was given to the new manor house.

The new Coulsdon Court was built on the site of Old Hartley Farm which can be traced back to 1235 when it was called "Hartlees". The new house is said to have been built from bricks made locally at "Crossways"(Coulsdon Road, Old Coulsdon).

Squire Byron resented the public road called "Hartley Old Road " passing so close to his new house so in 1854 he created a new road called "Byrons New Road " (Now called Hartley Down) to enable travellers to bypass Coulsdon Court. He created a gated drive at the head of Hartley Old Road. The line of the carriage road can still be traced across the golf course on the 12th & 13th holes up to the house. In 1856 they moved into the new Coulsdon Court. Squire Thomas Byron (2) died in 1863 and he left behind his wife Julia and two sons Edmund and Henry. Edmund then aged 19 being the eldest son became Squire of the manor.

The family remained at Coulsdon Court until 1921 and the family crest is still over the old front entrance to the house now covered by the new porch. The family pew and graves remain at the parish church of St John's in Old Coulsdon.

Thomas Bainbridge's Map dated 1785 gives us names of the fields that once surrounded Old Hartley Farm and now form part of the golf course. Names of interest are, Kempstone Lodge, Merchants, Spat Grove and Peppers Field & Great King Hill., whilst others are descriptive such as 12 Acres, Chalk Pit Field and Kitchen Garden.

Edmund Byron

Edmund had a passion for field sports and later became master of the "Old Surrey Hounds" which were kennelled at nearby Garston Hall, Waddington. He rode a famous Irish horse called "Pat" who was described as a "A rum un" to follow and a "Bad un" to beat. As a result of a number of falls Byron walked with a limp. He liked to shoot and had pheasants reared on the estate for this purpose. The largest wood at the time was "Inwood" which covered about 40 acres. Part of the wood remains on the east side of the golf course, it was probably there that Squire Byron entertained the local gentry and farmers with huge shooting parties. He was known as "Nobby" to his close friends. He refused to have either gas or electricity installed in his house preferring instead candlepower. He was a deeply religious man and attended church twice on Sundays. He was married to Emily Byron who died in 1908.

At a general election in 1885 Squire Byron sent down his newly enfranchised farm workers to the polls with instructions to vote for the Conservative candidate for East Surrey.

In 1877 there was a famous lawsuit brought by the Hall Brothers who farmed "Little Roke" to the North East of the estate. Byron was taken to the Court of Chancery for restricting the commoner's rights. Hartley Down had already been enclosed and there was a threat of further enclosures and the removal of turf and excavation of gravel from Coulsdon Common and Riddlesdown. After a long battle, the brothers won but found themselves faced with £3510 costs. This event was thought so important that it was reported in The Times.

William Hall was a good business man and caused the City of London to take interest in the commons. In 1883 the City Corporation paid Squire Byron £7000 for 346 acres of Coulsdon Common. They also paid Hall's legal costs. Hartley Down never returned to public open space.



The Private Estate

A description of the house in the early 20th century tells of a downstairs hall with diamond shaped tiles on the floor, a drawing room and a dining room which was the largest room. The Squire had a library downstairs and a secret room where he kept his guns. There was also a butler's room, a head housemaid's room, staff room sitting room and scullery. Most of the rooms could be identified until the end of the late 70's. Butter was homemade and meals were cooked on an oil fired "kitchener". At that time water was collected from the roof or it came from a well on the property. Hot water had to be carried upstairs where there were hip baths in the bedrooms. The Squire's needs were attended to by his butler, who was assisted by a footman. Head of the female staff was the head housemaid who was in charge of the ladies' maid, cook and kitchen maid. In the stables which stood on the site of the modern terrace houses to the North west of the house, there were two hunters and a four horse coach which were looked after by the groom. There was also a coachman.

The Garden

Near the stables was a walled garden where there were violet pits, strawberry beds, a conservatory and vinery with two vines. On the wall of the garden grew fruit trees including peaches and nectarines on the south wall, plums on the east, morrello cherries on the north and figs and pears on the west walls. This walled garden had been built on what was a kitchen field in the days of Old Hartley Farm. The site is now occupied by the tennis courts. A road ran down the north side of the walled garden to serve the lower fields, the remains of the wall can still be seen and a large fig tree still remains at the western end. The ornamental gardens were where the car park and four council owned houses now stand. On the southern side of the house were well kept lawns studded with fine trees. To the western side trees were planted to partially obstruct the view of the new Cane Hill Sanatorium. North east of the house was a grove of mixed trees. Part of what is left of the grove remains between the 7th tee and the 9th hole. On

the south side of the house one can still see a Ha-Ha which divided garden from parkland, there is a small bridge over it now, and there was also a pond. A Ha-Ha is a concealed wall which prevents cattle or deer from wandering into the garden yet allows unrestricted views from the house over the parkland. The parkland beyond this had been well planted with deciduous trees to the south and west and conifers to the east. Many were planted quite early in the development of the estate. It was said that there was a specimen of every native tree (Unconfirmed). Splendour was added by two peacocks which strutted around the lawn. The garden was maintained by three gardeners and three gamekeepers were employed to breed the pheasants and keep down the poachers. The head gardener Charles Stoneham made Christmas wreaths each year from a variegated holly trees growing adjacent to the house.

The End of the Dynasty

In 1921 Edmund Byron died aged 77. He was buried in the family tomb which was lined with moss by the staff. The coffin was carried across the park by his tenants and staff to St John's church. School children who attended the funeral were each given a shilling (5p in today's money) and the tenor bell tolled 77 times once for every year of his life. As Lords of the Manor the Byron's were local benefactors. They built Alms houses for their retired staff (opposite Coulsdon Bowls Club) and gave land on which Smitham Bottom School was built. Coulsdon as it is now known was then known as Smitham Bottom. In 1803 Thomas Byron had proposed the Coulsdon workhouse which was built shortly afterwards and also cottages for the poor. He left a married son and a grandson Arthur and they moved to Wiltshire after his death. Arthur later returned to London and was well known as an athlete and author. He is also buried at St John's with his family.

Golf Course Development

Following Edmund Byron's death the estate was placed in the hands of the trustees. On the 24th of October 1922 the whole estate was put up for auction this included mansion and grounds, farms and residential properties, a total of 1226 acres. In 1923 the trustees sold Coulsdon Court to a local developer, Charles H Cearn, for £32,500.

In July 1925 Mr Cearn conveyed 220 acres to Coulsdon Court Estate Ltd, a development company, for £70,600. Under an agreement he would lay out a golf course on the 35 acres that he retained, construct 6 tennis courts and reconstruct Coulsdon Court to suit the purposes of a golf club. Mr Cearn's expenditure would be limited to £6000. This was to remain a Country Club for at least 15 years. The developer on the other hand was to build houses on his land and every house purchaser would have the right to become a club member for a fee of 20 guineas. The club had a ceiling of 200 members. Mr Cearn commissioned Harry S Colt to build the course. Harry S Colt was a famous golf course architect known for the design of Sunningdale, Royal Lytham St Annes, St Georges Hill and over 300 courses worldwide. His design principal was that the golf course must blend in and not be imposed on the landscape. The course was a private course until just before the second world war and the first golf buggy in England was used on the course. (Still have them I think). Leslie Cotton, Henry Cotton's brother was course Professional. Henry & Leslie played many a match here. The development company however later pulled out of the housing scheme and Mr Cearn had his 220 acres back in his possession. In 1934, Mr Cearn sold his estate and golf course to Ukrainian Mr Nenski for £62,200 who resold it to a development company, Purley & Coulsdon Estates Ltd that he controlled, for an additional £15,000

In February 1936 the development company offered the golf course, land and house for sale to

the council who agreed in principle but not to the price. As the price could not be agreed upon the company threatened to sell to a builder for development. The Council took out a compulsory purchase order. This led to a public enquiry in November 1936 which resulted in the Ministry of Health (Forerunners of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government) confirming the compulsory purchase order. The Urban District Council tried to obtain a green belt grant towards the purchase but did not succeed.

The Land Values Reference Committee had to be called in to fix a price. Frank Hunt a former valuer to the L.C.C and a resident of Croydon was appointed as official arbitrator. The price was fixed at £54,735 for just over 146 acres to include the golf course, house and other buildings. A further £1,600 was paid for certain effects in the house and on the estate and the purchase was completed on the 26th November 1937.

Municipal Golf Course

Even before the purchase was completed the council appointed a special committee known as Coulsdon Court Committee to consider the future use of Coulsdon Court. In July 1937 by the casting vote of the Chairman, the Council agreed that the estate should be retained as a public open space. The Coulsdon Court committee were authorised to investigate the possibility of leasing the course to the existing club or opening it as a municipal course. They decided on the latter. The course was opened to the public as Coulsdon Court Golf Course on the 8th January 1938 just before the onset of World War II.

During World War II Coulsdon Court was commandeered by the R.A.F as a mess and leisure centre. The Grange, mentioned earlier, was used as an operations centre for Fighter Command Kenley from September 1940 and was visited by King George the VI. Men and women working for fighter command used to walk across the course between shifts to get to the club house. During a raid in 1940 a German Messerschmitt 110 crashed in flames killing all the crew. It is thought it crashed somewhere near the 4th tee damaging some of the houses nearby. Also a few bombs fell onto the course and it is thought two craters still remain until this day on the side of the 7th fairway and between the 8th and the 9th fairways (Disputed by Hector Fudge).

The Coulsdon and Purley U.D.C(Later to become part of Croydon Council) took the golf course back after the war, filling in some of the bomb craters and relaying the turf where cereals had been growing as part of the war effort.

The 35 acres at the northern end were still open parkland but were used when the course was extended and changed after the war bringing the total to 140 acres. The course has been considerably altered from the original design. It was said that at some point in its development it had 365 bunkers, one for every day of the year.

The Golf Course was opened again to the public in 1946. As far as records go it shows that the Artisan club was formed in 1946 with Tom Searle being among the founder members. Hector Fudge also became Assistant Pro in this year when he was just fourteen and a half. The Ladies club was formed in 1947 and the Veterans in 1949.

There used to be a green keepers cottage at the bottom of what is now the driving range and 10th hole and this can be seen in the Hector Fudge painting played for each year by all the clubs.

Further Developments

By 1981 the house was falling into disrepair and threatened with demolition so Croydon Council, not wanting to spend money on it themselves, decided to lease out the house and the

course. The house and course were acquired by Waites Builders going under the name of All Weather Sports who leased the whole site from Croydon Council. They created the Hotel and increased the capacity by building an extension and also a Squash club was built with its own bar. When they had plans for a housing development on the side of the course turned down they sold the lease to Best Western Hotels who made a few minor changes but otherwise it was business as usual. They in turn sold onto Marston Hotels who changed the name to Coulsdon Manor Hotel although the golf clubs still retained the Coulsdon Court name. In April 2005 the lease was sold on yet again to Swallow Hotels and they subsequently sold to Oxford Hotels, the current owners. In 2013 Bespoke Hotels took over the running of the hotel and golf course and plans for a further extension are on hold. Croydon Council retain overall ownership.

First written by Tom Searle and Tony Wise and updated and added to by Nigel Messett