

The Church and Abbey House Farm - Goosey

by Rex Whitworth

If, wandering through the Vale of White Horse between Wantage and Faringdon, you should be tempted by the intriguing signpost to the north Goosey 1/2 mile, I suggest you first have a look at the 13th century Church. It stands white washed and diminutive on the south eastern corner 'of the great Goose green'. It is an aisle-less nave much like a barn roofed with tie beams and king posts. You will certainly notice the early chalkstone carved corbels which sustain the roof trusses. On the south is the head of a crowned King, opposite a Bishop or more likely perhaps a mitred Abbot. It is said the King is Offa who did a land deal with the Abbot of Abingdon, surely grand enough to be mitred. Offa coveted some land near Abingdon for a palace beside the Thames which here marked the frontier of his Kingdom of Mercia. In exchange he gave the Abbot land at Goosey. The



Benedictines had much land in the area anyhow, their bailiff residing at Charney Manor, but whether the Royal gift of Goosey was really made or not it is certain that the Abbey pinned its title to Goosey on a charter of King Offa, which some legalistic Clerk may well have forged at a date much later than the 8th century.

It is true that the monks had a farm at Goosey and Abbey Farm is on the site of what was once quite a small stone house. But soon after the Dissolution of the Monasteries the population of Goosey were thought worthy of a bigger Church, and a new bay was added to the east end. About a hundred years later, during the Civil War, the landowners of Goosey got together and applied to the Commonwealth Commissioners to modernise the landholding layout. Giving up the old manorial strip system and rationalising the individual holdings allowed drainage schemes to be put in hand which greatly improved the agricultural output.

At this time the Tubbs lived at Abbey Farm. They were classified as Gentlemen, not Yeomen, and Richard Tubbs was Churchwarden. His son, John, was evidently rich enough to make large additions and improvements to his house and garden. This John

Tubb had a son John who made a stylish marriage into an influential local family, the Southbys of Carswell. The Southbys had land in Buckland and Appleton and provided a succession of local V.I.P.s such as M.P.s and Sheriffs over a number of years. There was only a single daughter of this marriage to Hannah Southby. She married a Tipping, and the Goosey Tubbs died out. However, from the brief period of their prosperity, they left behind them something of great interest to this day. John Tubb the first died in 1710 and from his will of 1707 we can learn quite a lot about the improvements he made to the monks' old dwelling. He built a grand wide new staircase to give access to a whole new range of rooms - a parlour on the ground floor, a 'wainscot closet' on the first floor and a big attic room under the turret-like eaves at the top.

In his will, he left to his widow, who lived to the great age of 86, dying in 1738 - four years after her son John - a great part of the enlarged house. Perhaps this was the reason for her living to such a great age! He bequeathed to her 'in the house where I now dwell the use of the Old parlour and the chamber and garret over the same and the furniture in the said rooms and also the use of the wainscot closet, with passage to and from the farm together with the use of bottle house under the stairs, the use of the new garden with full liberty to take so much fruit growing in the orchard belonging to the said house'. He also left her an annuity of £30 a year on conditions she did not remarry! Her son, John, daughter-in-law, and daughter lived in the remainder of the house towards the green and farmed the land.

The main interest in the wording of the will lies in the use of word 'wainscot closet'. This must mean the first floor panelled room, which has a romantic landscape painted on the panel over the fireplace and marbling and graining on the long and short panels in the room. These panels are divided from each other and from the wooden cornice at the top by narrow stiles, painted black and decorated with numerous little figures in bright red. Such wainscot was fashionable in the late 17th century, being generally pine imported from the Baltic and installed by fashionable interior decorators, who employed journeymen painters to decorate the wood in a fairly narrow range of colours, red ochre and white being common. On the black stiles Chinese figures are depicted, taken from pattern books of kingfisher circulating in the 1680's when tea was also becoming fashionable together with Chinese porcelain. Many of the figures are of a Dutch rococo type of decoration, colourful pheasants in full flight and human figures in a landscape carrying buckets and so on.

Since the Tubbs were not followed in Abbey Farm by fashionable modernisers, the fashionable interior decoration of the late 17th century remains untouched in this 'wainscot closet' to this day. In most houses either the old marbling and graining was painted over, or the panelling has been ripped out. One house in point near Chesham was reported to have had several such rooms in 1942 but there is no sign of them now, so Abbey House is probably somewhat unusual in having retained what is a 300 year old fashion. It is fast becoming fashionable again among the rich.

This article was reproduced from "The Blowing Stone" Autumn 1991.

The Vale and Downland Museum is a registered charity (No. 270466) which aims to preserve and provide information and objects relating to the Vale and Downland area, Wantage, Oxfordshire.

The Museum encourages access to historical records for non-profit making purposes. This article may be used for such purposes, however the information must not be edited or reproduced for commercial purposes without prior written permission.

Vale and Downland Museum Trust, 19 Church Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire, OX12 8BL
Telephone: 01235 771447 e-mail: museum@wantage.com