

Some notes on the history Eartham Estate

Unless you have walked along the Monarch's Way immediately west from where it crosses the A285, 3-4km north of Halnaker, the chances are that this sturdy post (SU 931 109) with a cast iron top will not have been noticed, and even if spotted, would still be a mystery. Neither an internet search for WMB nor an initial enquiry with the Chichester Record Office produced an answer. A more thorough enquiry at the Record Office however, searching for Eartham Estate, identified the post as carrying the initials of the past owner, William Montfort Bird.



1: SU 9215 1150
on Monarch's Way, Selhurst Park.



2: SU 931 109
Corner of footpath, Selhurst Park Farm

They are in fact gate posts, which would have been in pairs to carry a 10 ft gate originally, although damage or removal occurred later as large machinery needed wider gateways. Consequently, of the 13 WMB posts that have been found so far, only one pair is still extant. The smaller pathway versions have just WB inscribed on top.

Others have been found at the following locations:



3: SU 92876 09679
Entrance to Selhurst Park drive



4: SU 93516 09434
Footpath W of Eartham



5-6: SU 94304 08408
at same gateway, Upper Britten's Lane



Gateway opposite Chaff Barn Cottage, Eartham Lane



7-8: SU 93637 08662



9: SU 94254 08432
Roadside Gateway on Britten's Lane with damaged top



10: SU 94231 08226
Britten's Lane, 50m from Duke's Road



11: SU 94676 09384
Beside path at Inground plantation, Nore Hill



12: SU 92670 08726
End of path through Thicket Beeches



13. SU 93328 08227
Eartham Lane, corner of Sandpit Plantation

Early history of Eartham Estate

Chichester Record Office has manuscripts (MSS) of the Eartham estate from 1603 to 1862 (deposited by Dreyfus & Co Ltd, Ling House, Dominion Street, London in July 1957 – presumably a law firm). In one such summary (MSS 4749-5153) it says:

“Until the 18thC there appears to have been no landed estate of any size centred on the Eartham parish, and the lord of the manor was non-resident.

(1) The modern Eartham estate dates from 1742, when Thomas Hayley of Chichester purchased for £200 a ruined and decayed messuage (a dwelling house with outbuildings and enclosed area of land) called Cross House, and a stable, lately a messuage, called Dawtreys (Add. MS. 4764) upon which he built a villa. Thomas Hayley died in 1748. His son William, the poet, soon succeeded to this property upon the death of his elder brother, Thomas, in 1750, bought a messuage called Bowdens and thirty acres of land for £525 in 1768 (Add. M. 4843), another messuage and lands for £500 in 1785 (Add. MS. 4791), another messuage and lands in 1775 (Add. MS. 4791), and small pieces of land in 1775 (Add. MS. 5020), 1777 (Add. MS. 4769), 1786 (Add. MS. 4772), and 1787 (Add. MS. 4771), all in Eartham, and enlarged the villa into a substantial residence.

(2) He also contributed £900 of the £1,200 which his cousin John Godfrey paid in 1798 for a messuage and lands in Eartham (Add. MS. 4834, 4856).

(1) The manor of Eartham had for many years belonged to the owner of Slindon Estate.

(2) For a contemporary illustration, see ‘The Topographer’, vol. 4 (1791), reprinted in ‘Gentlemen’s Magazine’, vol. 94, pt 1, pp. 30-32, under the title of ‘Description of Eartham’.

William Huskisson first appears in these records in 1799, when certain lands in New Fishbourne, and properties in Eartham, were mortgaged to him by William Hayley as collateral security for the payment of a bond debt of £3,600 (Add. MS. 4856). Soon afterwards Hayley moved permanently to Felpham, and Huskisson became tenant of the house at Eartham (Add. MS. 4775) (1).

(1) When Huskisson later purchased the property, it was said to be ‘used and occupied’ by him (Add. MS. 4775). There is however no confirmation from the land tax assessments of Huskisson’s having been occupier before becoming owner. Morchard Bishop (Blake’s Hayley, p200, says that Hayley had been anxious to let the Eartham house since about 1796).

In 1803 William Hayley disposed of his main property at Eartham; the house and 26 customary acres of land to Huskisson for £3,600 (Add. MS. 4775) (2) and the remainder to two local landowning brothers, Joseph and James Bayley for a total of £2,400 (Add. MS. 4858, 4960) (3).

Hayley was famous at the end of the 18th century for his poetry. He died in 1820 and there is a blue plaque to commemorate Hayley at the front gate of the present-day Great Ballard School.



William Huskisson of Eartham

The Record Office manuscripts state that in 1804

“Huskisson contracted with Joseph and James Bayley for the purchase of twenty acres of land although legal complications considerably delayed the ultimate conveyance (Add. MS. 4779), and in 1805 he purchased a copyhold cottage (Add. MS. 4777).

Hayley seems to have disposed of the remainder of his property at Eartham when he sold a messuage and lands to Joseph and James Bayley for £525 in 1811 (Add. MSS. 4852, 4785), for his name does not appear in the land tax assessments thereafter. (4)

(1) No property at Eartham was included in the settlement made by Hayley in 1809 upon his second marriage (Add. MS. 1276). Huskisson, incidentally, was appointed trustee of the personal estate settled by Hayley at the same time.

Huskisson became the largest landowner in the parish in 1817, when he bought out the major part of the properties of Joseph and James Bayley for £3,959 (Add. MSS. 4789, 4854, 4875, 4877). (5)

(2) The figure of £3,959 includes an outstanding mortgage for £1,000 (Add. MS. 4875). Huskisson had, as we have seen, previously bought small properties from the Bayleys (Add. MSS. 4779, 4783).

He thereafter continued to add to the estate until his death in 1830, his widow, who lived at Eartham until she died in 1856, doing likewise. At the time of the Eartham tithe award, 1839, Mrs. Huskisson was owner of 838 acres in the parish, and lessee of a further 227 acres; she is also shown as owner of 123 acres in the tithe award of the adjacent parish of Aldingbourne.”

The Record Office also holds many “Deeds of small copyhold properties in Eartham” too detailed for inclusion here.

Eartham resident David Hobson has researched Huskisson:

“Huskisson was born in 1770 but his mother died when he was aged four and his father remarried. He was educated in three schools before being shipped to France at the age of 13 to be under the tutelage of his maternal great uncle, Dr Richard Gem, who spent most of his adulthood studying French physic and was appointed as Physician to the British Embassy in Paris in 1762 where he remained for the next 30 plus years.

Gem died in 1800 aged 83 and Huskisson inherited his wealth. The British Embassy in Paris was closed in 1792 during the Revolution and Huskisson returned to England with the Ambassador, to whom he had become a secretary. Due to his diligence, Huskisson was recognised as a competent administrator and became a Member of Parliament in 1796 [and later] the MP for Chichester from 1812 to 1823.

His association with Chichester was the purchase from William Hayley of Eartham House in 1800 and his marriage in 1800 to Emily Milbanke in 1799, daughter of the Admiral of Portsmouth, Mark Milbanke. Eartham House was a focal point later in Huskisson’s political career with visits by prominent politicians.

After the Inclosure Act of 1813 and the death of her husband in 1830 [the first recorded death on a railway], the Tithe map of 1840 shows that Mrs Huskisson had bought or rented most of the parish and was paying the Vicar a lot in rent! However, the Milbanke family continued to live in the house up to the late 1800s until Sir William Bird bought it in 1905.

Huskisson’s strong belief in free trade meant that he was very popular with merchants and he has a statue in Chichester cathedral and a plaque on the south wall of St Margaret’s church in Eartham.



William_Huskisson_by_Richard_Rothwell



1840 Tithe map of Eartham Estate - the village is just below the centre

William Montfort Bird & Earham House

Sir William Barrott Montfort Bird JP MP was born on 11 Jul 1855 in Bloomsbury, Mx.

In the 1861 census he lived with his parents, brothers and 4 servants in Wilmington House in Kent. In 1871 he lived with his parents, siblings and 2 servants at 27 Hamilton Terrace in Marylebone and despite being only age 15, was an articled clerk to a firm of solicitors.



By 1881 he was lodging in the Verulam Buildings, Grays Inn, Finsbury and working as a solicitor. His whereabouts in 1891 is uncertain – perhaps he was travelling. He married Margaret Elizabeth Spencer in 1895 but there were no children of the marriage.

He was both a partner and cousin of Sir Ernest Bird, a past President of the Law Society and on the board of a bank and two industrial companies. He was appointed High Sheriff of Sussex in 1912, knighted in 1920 and represented Chichester as a Unionist MP 1921-23.

Earham house and estate were purchased by Bird in 1905 for £37,000. The house was restored and extended by Edwin Lutyens. This refurbishment included the provision of running water from a pump house built to the east of the village, beside the footpath to Nore Hill, in 1907.

In 1906 an auction (by Stride & Co) of over 1,000 items of antique furniture, books and other household objects,

took place at Earham House on 11-12 January, presumably inherited from his predecessor Hayley.

Knighted in 1920, Sir William's fortune came from the Stavely Coal & Iron Co and also a Director of numerous other concerns. It seems that he enjoyed using the house for large social occasions; this 1921 photo records a visit by the Mayor and Corporation (of Chichester presumably) with 32 guests:



Back: EM Clarke, A Foyden, WG Pink, PEH Lewis, HJ Morgan, H Slaney, JGH Wallace, G F Bevis, E Cutten, WG Wills.

Middle: AJ Grainger, J Pennicott, GH Cover, D Kimbell, Sir A Garland, GM Turnbull, **Sir WM Bird, Lady Bird**, HS Aylmore, W Leggatt, T G Willis, CC Allen, CW Doughty, G Kemp

Front: W Farr, PT Wingham, CA Johns, AJ Marshall, H Turner, WP Breach, AG Pink, TF Lummas, C Hooker, CS Gould

After his wife Dame Martha Bird died in 1933 age 77, Bird commissioned 3 items for the church, a memorial tablet to with an inscription panel and coat of Arms carved in 'Ancaster Stone and Dark Derbyshire marble', a stained-glass window, and a brass tablet in the choir. He also commissioned an 'Oak Reredos & Panelling' for the church in 1944 (by the same craftsman who created the memorial tablet).

At home in his later years, Sir William Bird enjoyed country pursuits and acquired an extensive knowledge of bird life, trees and shrubs. He died on 13 Nov 1950. The following year a sale of "a considerable quantity of very valuable antique English furniture, and the collection of English, Continental and Oriental China in addition to the modern furnishings", was arranged at the house by Wyatt & Son, auctioneers over 11-14 June 1951.

Ten years later the house had been converted into a school, which opened in 1961.

Daily Telegraph
2/11/01 1931A

8. 3. 61.



GREAT BALLARD, Camberley, an old-established boys' preparatory school, has been sold to Surrey County Council for use for educational purposes. The school, a fairly modern building, with some 18½ acres of playing fields, adjoins Old Dean Common, part of which has been acquired by Frimley and Camberley urban council for a housing estate for overspill population in Metropolitan Surrey.

Great Ballard School has moved to Eartham House, Eartham, near Chichester, which I illustrate.

Eartham, dating from 1743, was redesigned by Sir Edward Lutyens in 1907 for the late Sir William Bird. At one time it was the home of William Hayley, the poet, whose friends Romney, Gibbon and Cowper often stayed there.

It lies in the Goodwood area in 17 acres and is listed as a building of special architectural and historic interest. For the school, Densham & Lambert acted in both transactions, and Wyatt & Son, Chichester, were agents for the vendors of Eartham House.

EARTHAM HOUSE, NOW A BOYS' SCHOOL

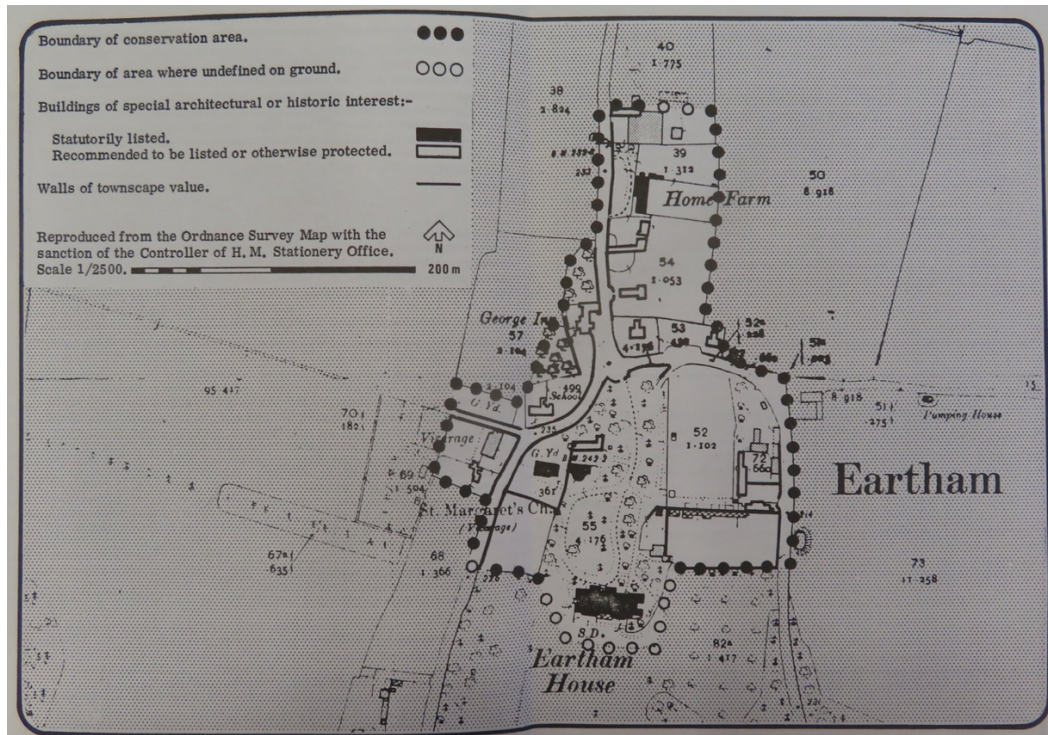
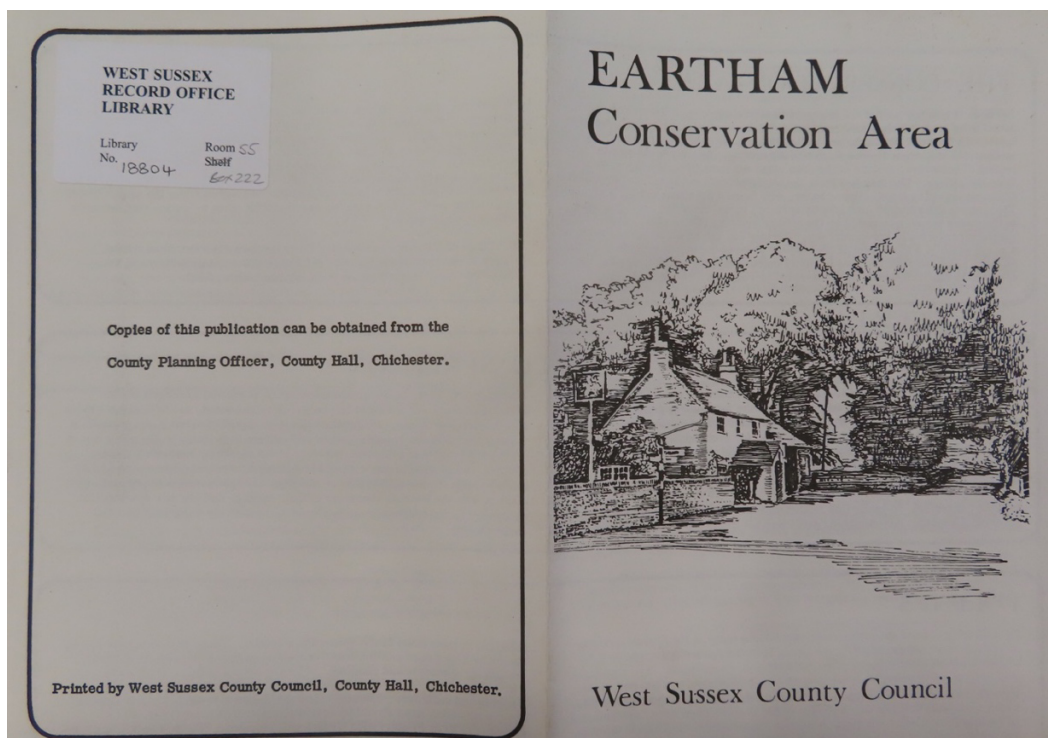


Eartham House, eight miles from Chichester, is now occupied by a boys' preparatory school, which brought with it the name of Great Ballard from Camberley whence it was moved here early last year. A more pleasant situation for a school it would be hard to find, for it is still, as Thomas Hayley (father of the poet) described it in 1743, "a sequestered spot, peculiarly embellished by nature." When Hayley bought the property, there were only the ruins of a mansion. He and later his son William built a house here, and William Hayley here entertained such famous friends as Gibbon the historian, Cowper the poet, and Romney the artist, who had a studio in the grounds (since disappeared). William Hayley also built himself a house at Felpham, where the poet and visionary Blake was his guest. After the Hayleys, the Eartham property was bought by William Huskisson, the statesman, M.P. for Chichester, who enlarged the house. He is now chiefly remembered as the first man to be killed in a railway accident, at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester line in 1830. In 1905 Eartham House was bought by Sir William Bird, also M.P. for Chichester, who lived there until his death in 1950 at the age of 95. Sir William had the house extensively altered in 1907 under the direction of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the celebrated architect, and it is really Lutyens' house which appears in Mr. Broughton's drawing, although much of Hayley's house is incorporated in the north wing. Hayley's library, with its marble chimney-piece by Flaxman, survives on the first floor. Since becoming a school, there have been more changes, including the building of two new classrooms and a gymnasium.

1970 sale

According to a study by valuers Strutt & Parker in 1970 prior to its sale, the estate extended over 3,529 acres on both sides of the A285 and either side of the Roman Stane Street, and included the Home Farm house, two private houses, and 21 cottages, mostly occupied by present & past employees, and 245 acres of woodland. The farm had mostly been worked with a rotation of arable land of corn and leys (forage crops) with various forms of livestock.

In 1973 the centre of the village was designated as a conservation area under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, in order to ensure that areas of special architectural or historic interest should be preserved or enhanced.



Compiled by John Bennett 2023, who is most grateful for assistance and interest from local resident and historian David Hobson.