

THE GREAT HOUSE AT DOWN HATHERLEY AND ITS OCCUPANTS

by Hugh Conway-Jones

Looking at the present buildings of the Hatherley Manor Hotel, it is not easy to appreciate the old family home at its core, but internal examination reveals a grand staircase and two panelled rooms dating back over three hundred years. The old building was known at different times as the Great House, Hatherley House and Hatherley Court, and it was familiar to a number of nationally-known figures, including the millionaire banker Jemmy Wood, the champion of Queen Caroline Sir Matthew Wood and the inventor of the collapsible step-ladder Allan Jones.

The old core of the present building appears to date from the second half of the seventeenth century, although it is possible that some parts may pre-date this as the house stands in the centre of a mediaeval moated site. The old county histories record the descent of the manor of Down Hatherley from Domesday times, but this does not necessarily imply the ownership of the moated site, and this article will take up the story when the records can be associated with the surviving building.

In the 1680s, the big house at Down Hatherley was occupied by Henry Brett, grandson of his namesake who had been Member of Parliament for Gloucester prior to the Civil War. However, it is likely that Brett moved out soon after 1695 when he built a new manor house at Cowley on the estate inherited from his grandfather. Brett was passionately fond of bell-ringing and by 'continually travelling about the country with a company of ringers, at a vast expense, dissipated a plentiful fortune'. Probably it was he who gave the bell now in nearby Norton church that bears the inscription:

If you do ask who gave mee
Sqr Bret of Hatherlee

Presumably to raise money for his hobby, Brett first mortgaged the Hatherley estate and then sold it in 1704 to trustees for the use of Henry Gibbes and his family. The estate included the New Great House at Down Hatherley and land in Down Hatherley, Twigworth and Norton.

Henry Gibbes died in 1705 and his wife Ann in 1707, and the house and estate passed to their son William Gibbes. He let most of the land to tenants, but it seems he lived in the house until his death in 1777.

Under the will of William Gibbes, the property then passed to Sir Richard Sutton, Bart. of Norwood Park, Nottinghamshire, who sold it to trustees for the benefit of his younger son Richard. There is no indication that the Suttons made use of the house, and in 1806 Richard Sutton junior sold the estate to John Turner who also bought much other land in the parish.

BANKER JOHN TURNER

Turner had made money through continuing his father's coach operating business and had gone into banking in Gloucester in partnership with members of the Jeynes and Morris families. He moved into the house and was probably responsible for the bow window in the drawing room which has the style of this period. Unfortunately, Turner and his partners were forced to stop payment during the economic crisis of 1825 when over 30 country banks failed and many customers were ruined. At a

meeting on 27 December, creditors were told that the partners' assets exceeded their liabilities, but the general distress of the period and subsequent difficulties in calling in outstanding debts prevented them meeting their obligations.

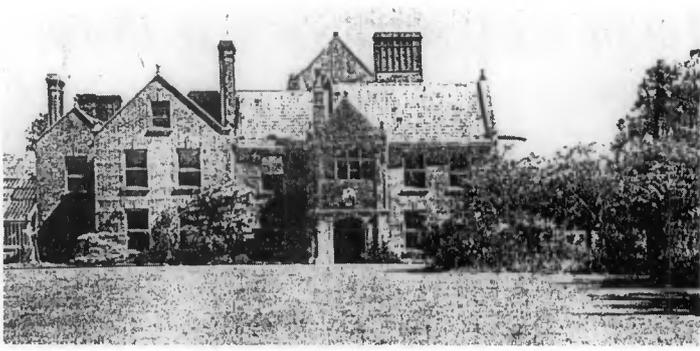
In his efforts to stave off bankruptcy, John Turner first raised a mortgage on the Hatherley estate and then put it up for sale. The sale particulars in 1827 described the house as spacious and convenient with all necessary offices attached and detached in complete repair. There was a double coach house and stalls for nine horses, walled gardens stocked with fruit trees in prime bearing, pleasure grounds and shrubberies all amounting to about six acres. Unfortunately, in those troubled financial times, there were no ready buyers, and in 1828 Turner was forced to sell by auction at a lower price than he had wanted.

The buyer who then came forward was fellow-banker Jemmy Wood. He too had been under strain during the crisis, but his immense wealth was so well known that he was able to survive. He tried to let the house, but the roof and some of the flooring had got into a poor state, and it seems there were no takers until he arranged for major repairs and improvements to be done prior to making the house available to Alderman Matthew Wood (no relation) from London.

ALDERMAN MATTHEW WOOD

Alderman Wood had twice been Lord Mayor of London and was one of the four Members of Parliament for the City. In the 1820s, he was the leading champion of Queen Caroline when George IV was trying to disown her, and he spent much of the fortune he had acquired through business in paying for her court in London. These activities attracted the support of Jemmy Wood's sister Elizabeth, and she left him her house in Gloucester in her will. Alderman Wood soon became a regular summer resident in Gloucester and developed a close relationship with Jemmy Wood. (It was said that he deliberately aimed to worm himself into Jemmy's good graces.) So after the repairs and improvements were carried out in 1834-5, Alderman Wood and his family moved into Hatherley House and apparently lived there rent free. The improvements carried out at this time included the filling-in of part of the moat close to the house and the building of the lodge. It was also around this time that Alderman Wood arranged for a new road to be constructed linking Down Hatherley with the turnpike road between Gloucester and Cheltenham.

Jemmy Wood died in 1836, and his will directed that his estate (reputedly worth around one million pounds) be divided equally between his four executors of whom Alderman Wood was one. It was generally expected that Wood's share would include the Hatherley estate, but the will was contested and the matter was argued in the courts for several years. In the meantime, a man accused of poaching defended his actions on the grounds that he believed the dispute left the estate without an owner! In spite of these difficulties, when Alderman Wood was made a baronet by the new Queen Victoria (reputedly in reward for his role as a trustee of the affairs of her father the Duke of Kent), he took the title of Sir Matthew Wood of Hatherley House. Eventually the dispute over the will was settled, and Sir Matthew obtained formal ownership of the estate shortly before his death in 1843.



HATHERLEY HOUSE in 1946
(By kind permission of the Gloucestershire County Record Office)

THE JONES FAMILY

Sir Matthew Wood left his property in trust to be sold for the benefit of his wife and family, but his trustees initially made no attempt to sell the Hatherley estate. Instead, in 1844 the house and its immediate surroundings were leased to Anthony Gilbert Jones, a rising Gloucester solicitor with a young family. When the estate was eventually put up for sale in 1857, Jones bought the house together with 79 acres of land. At this time the sale particulars enthusiastically described the house as 'a very comfortable family residence, placed upon a lawn in finely timbered park-like grounds, approached by a carriage drive and newly erected lodge with entrance gates'. Downstairs was an entrance hall with a wide oak staircase, a drawing room with a bow window opening to the lawn, a school room, a comfortable dining room panelled and grained in imitation of oak and domestic offices for the servants. Upstairs were three excellent bedrooms, dressing room, water-closet, two other bedrooms, a nursery and a large play room. Outside was a double coach house, four stall stable, dovecote, large greenhouse heated by hot-water pipes, delightful pleasure garden and a large kitchen garden walled on two sides.

At the time of the sale in 1857, some of the associated land was held on leases, but as these fell in it seems that Jones took over direct management and leased some more. In 1871, at the age of 61, he described himself not only as a solicitor but also as a landowner farming 110 acres and employing four men. It was probably around this time that he built a fine set of model farm buildings just beyond the moat. His direct involvement with this venture may not have lasted long, however, as he was appointed a magistrate for the County and just listed this as his occupation in 1881. He also made changes to the house, refacing the badly weathered stone frontage with brick and adding a small extension with pseudo timber framing to provide a bathroom, and he changed the name of the house to Hatherley Court as being more befitting for a local squire.

Anthony Gilbert Jones and his wife Elizabeth had two daughters and seven sons. Francis William and John Henry became solicitors like their father and eventually took over his practice in Gloucester. Charles Allan also trained as a solicitor, but he had an inventive turn of mind and set up a firm in Gloucester to make a new type of stepladder. The story goes that he saw how difficult it was to move the locally-made stepladder that the servants were using to hang curtains at Hatherley Court, and so he set about designing a lighter version with lattice sides. He also made the steps collapsible with a clever sliding joint which he patented in 1882. To make the steps, he set up the Hatherley Works in the Tredworth district of

Gloucester, and from the early days he adopted mass-production methods with each man confining himself to one operation. His firm soon became the largest manufacturer of stepladders in the world, and it was said that 15,000 of them were always kept in stock. As the business prospered, he introduced further original designs, including various kinds of folding tables, cycle stands and poultry houses.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

After Anthony Gilbert Jones died in 1887, his widow and her unmarried children continued living at Hatherley Court until she moved out in 1907 shortly before her death. The next occupants were Ernest de Winton and his wife Ada. de Winton was born at nearby Wallsworth Court and spent his working life as a tea planter in Ceylon. Sadly, Ada died in 1911, but eighteen months later he married again.

Ernest de Winton and his second wife Mary are remembered as traditional old fashioned country gentry. If anyone were ill in the village, Mrs de Winton would take them something like fruit or honey, and at certain times of year the local children might well be invited into the garden to help themselves to fruit. To the north of the house was a walled fruit and vegetable garden that was divided up into about twenty plots with pathways lined with little box hedges about a foot high. All around the interior of the wall were fantrained peach and apricot trees. In the north-west corner was a greenhouse with a small boiler-house to provide warmth. To the east was an orchard (now the hotel car park) with rows of apple, pear, cherry and walnut trees. The moat went right round the garden and orchard, and this was home for a number of mallard ducks with clipped wings that were kept mainly for their eggs.

When Ernest de Winton died in 1940, the house was put up for sale and taken over by the Government. During the War, it was a home for people who needed support but who could still contribute to the national effort by working on the land. In 1946, the house was bought by William Lawrence Edmunds and his wife Violet. After Edmunds died in 1964, his widow continued living at Hatherley Court until her death in 1983.

Then the house was bought by David Stevens and his wife, who set about a major programme of restoration and extension to convert it into a hotel. Its name was changed to Hatherley Manor to avoid confusion with Hatherley Court in Cheltenham. The hotel has subsequently changed hands and has seen further extensions. It is now part of the St Georges Group of hotels.

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