Church Farm

Church Farm, Stinchcombe Gloucestershire

Estimated reading time: 12 minutes

History and residents’ recollections from 1968 – 2021 by Russ and Jill Holloway and Pippa Leggate



Aerial View of Church Farm 2015

Background

Church Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building located in lower Stinchcombe opposite St Cyr's Church on Stinchcombe Lane, adjoining Echo Lane.

The house is constructed of squared and coursed marlstone with a stone slate roof, T- plan gable to street and projecting short central wing to the south, long block coped gables, a stack off centre probably opposite the former entrance from the south. Some mullion windows are evident in the rooms facing the street and south front.

Historical Records

There are records of Church Farm Stinchcombe dating back to the 18th century but no mention of a property identifiable as Church Farm in the 17th century documents seen to date. It thought however that the house was first constructed in the mid- 17th Century and then added to over the years. Early references to Church Farm appear on the Burcombe Estate Map of 1766 and then again in a reference to some form of dispute over tithes between several local families and the Tustin family who owned the land and property. To date it has not been possible to look further into these records.

Past Residents

Records suggest that the property was farmed by tenant farmers over the years with several families providing continuity in the management of this small farm. Traditionally, the Vale of Gloucester was associated with dairy farming with pasture for beef plus orchards. This would support more recent memories of Church Farm when as a working farm the road opposite the church had to be kept clean on Sundays for churchgoers!

During much of the 19th century it appears that Church Farm

which included about 85 acres of land was farmed by the Hooper family. Church Farm was auctioned in 1834. The tenant at that time was Richard Hooper who occupied the property until he died in 1852. The tenancy was then taken over by his son William who was at Church Farm during the 1861 and 1871 Census. There is no reference to who occupied the property in the 1881 Census, but it was part of the Mary Mabbett estate which was auctioned in 1890 Lot 14 as indicated in the map below.

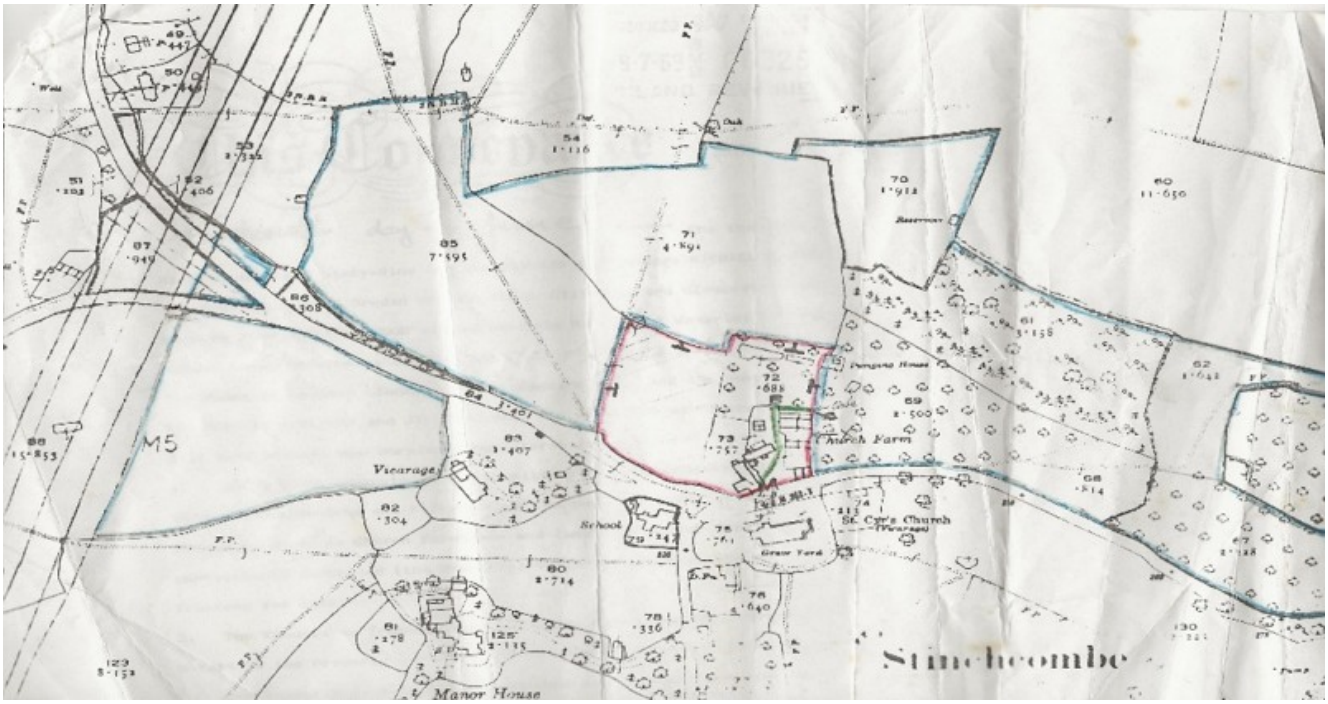


The Mabbett Estate at the 1890 Auction



The Zoomed image of Church Farm on the Map

During the period after the ***Mabbett*** auction in 1890, Thomas Dorney Ford from Berkeley, his wife Mary and their seven children were in residence from 1891- 1916. Most of their offspring married into local farming families and remained in the area. The 1921 census however has not yet been published, so there is a gap until the 1939 Register when Cyril and Rona Lovell who were dairy farmers were registered as living at Church Farm. They farmed the land until the early sixties when they died in 1963 and 1961 respectively and are buried in the churchyard at St Cyr's. Over the years the area and the property has changed with time as developments have occurred not least the development of the M5 Motorway.



Plan of Church Farm – 1968

OUR LIFE AT CHURCH FARM FROM 1968 to 2003

By Jill and Russ Holloway

In 1963 Cyril Lovell's son John took over the tenancy, soon after this plans were drawn up for the construction of the M5 motorway. This meant that Church Farm would no longer be a viable farm. Many of the fields were sold to adjacent farms and the house was put up for sale with 3 acres of land. John, who had recently lost his wife received compensation which enabled him to start a new life in Somerset.

Thus, in the autumn of 1968 when we were expecting or 4th child we began the search for a bigger house, preferably in Stinchcombe. A close friend, who happened to be the local estate agent, suggested we might like to have a look at Church Farm. Having seen the conversion of a friend's dilapidated farmhouse in Coaley, we were able to see beyond the rotting floors, wet walls and other signs of decay and saw the potential for a welcoming and happy home. Russ, (the

socialite) exclaimed “just think of the parties we can have here!”

Our Coaley friend’s builder came to have a preliminary look and established

a. The roof was sound
b. The damp could be dealt with by lifting interior stone floors and installing damp proof membrane, removing wet plaster from walls and fixing the outside drainage.
c. Tie bars were needed
d. Some beams would probably need replacing
e. Dry rot, woodworm and death watch beetle needed attention.
f. Plumbing, heating and electric wiring required
g. Fireplaces could be restored to their original state.

At this stage we could not afford the £9000 asking price and had to pray for a reduction. But we knew we had a buyer for our Taits Hill Road house and that there were grants up to £1000 available for bathrooms and above all we had enormous optimism and determination, although our parents thought we were totally mad and being very foolish.

Thus in early 1969 knowing that the ***Prevost*** estate was anxious to sell quickly we gambled and offered £7250 before it went to auction.

Thankfully this was accepted and we exchanged contracts on June 14th 1969.

The basic layout of the house was much as it is today.

The front had three doors, the middle one of which is now a window. The left hand door was exactly as it is now and the right hand opened into a stone floored passageway with a larder and scullery on the right. This is now the kitchen and

was divided from their kitchen by the existing wall of wattle and daub construction . The kitchen (now the living room) had a stone floor and large range. The rest of the ground floor rooms had wooden floors and 1930’s tiled fireplaces.

Upstairs there were 4 bedroom and we discovered that in the one above the kitchen there were 3 layers of floorboards. As one rotted another had been laid on top and then this was repeated once more. In this room it is still possible to see the beams in the wattle and daub screen. The 3 attic rooms were accessed via an enclosed staircase from the middle of the landing.

And so in June 1969 the hard work began with Russ working full time in a busy NHS Dental Practice and working on the house some evenings and every weekend

The builders moved in and floors were re-laid with waterproof membrane. Russ and an enthusiastic friend started to strip the plaster from the walls to reveal the beautiful stonework underneath. The decision was taken to leave many of them uncovered to dry out naturally. The council agreed to this with the proviso that if any damp appeared within the first year they would have to be lined with a membrane.

When the builders were due to point the walls, we were adamant that the pointing should be recessed and not become the main feature, as often seemed to happen. Russ arrived home after a long day at the surgery to find that they had gone totally against his wishes and he worked until the early hours scraping back the offending material before it dried. It was Jill’s job to pacify the builders the next morning and persuade them not to down tools.

At one stage the builders had given up all hope of finding a reclaimed 23ft oak beam for the lounge and a new one was beyond our means. Luckily at a Cirencester Rugby Club dinner dance Russ got talking to the owner of a reclamation yard who

had that day sold an unspecified load of oak beams of all sizes to Whitbreads. For the price of a ”green one”(£5) our builders were invited to get there first thing on the following Monday and take their pick of anything they wanted before the Whitbread transport arrived. Incidentally another lucky break was the acquisition one Sunday morning of a piece of greenheart timber which was lying with other superfluous wood at Sharpness Docks. Russ planed this for use as the lintel above the big open fireplace in the lounge.

It should be noted at this point that there was no internet and all sourcing of materials had to be done by visiting suppliers in person. This was Jill’s job with a 3-year-old and small baby in tow. On December 17th 1969 we moved in with a habitable kitchen and living room one good bedroom for the 4 children and a small room with plastic covered window for ourselves.

We were very fortunate to have had a wide circle of good friends who shared our enthusiasm and helped us along the way particularly Basil, Russ’s technician, who did the rewiring in his spare time and Harold Ford who was with us every inch of the way and with his wife helped with painting and decorating. Thus, over the next 6 months we were able to complete the basic work.

Over the next few years, we created a covered link from the kitchen to the outhouse opposite. We opened up the landing and attic rooms by installing an open staircase, we created a large utility room in an adjacent barn, the metal windows which were all we could afford in 1969 were replaced with the present double glazed oak ones (made by John Pinch)

Living in Church Farm 1969 to 2003

This proved to be the most wonderful place to live and bring up our family. Russ’s vision of parties was certainly realized! Christmases were magical and Boxing Days were

memorable. The house always seemed to be full of noise and laughter. We had many visitors of all ages and many wonderful and amusing occasions There were a lot of fund-raising events including one to raise money for the statue of St Cyr installed in an empty niche on the Church to mark the millennium. At one stage whilst St Georges church was being repaired services moved to Stinchcombe and Sunday School took place in our dining room and lounge!

And so in 2003 it was time to move on and as in 1969 when we had happily handed over Tocra (now Beech House) to the loving care of Bruce and Maeve Aldridge , we confidently gave the keys to David and Pippa Leggate to take the house we had loved so much forward to the next stage.

THE LEGGATE PERSPECTIVE 2003 – present

by Pippa Leggate

In 2003 Church Farmhouse was sold by the Holloways to David and Pippa Leggate who had moved to Stinchcombe from Badminton. In deciding to downsize however, the Holloways retained a part of the original farm and built on the footprint that allowed them to develop their new home on familiar territory. This provided two families with the opportunity to enjoy the wonderful setting of lower Stinchcombe and to make further developments to Church Farm.

For the Leggates, it has been rewarding to further enhance the house and to add to the improvements conducted over the years by the Holloways. Developing the kitchen with the installation of an AGA was an obvious priority which soon made it the heart of the house.

Other developments focused on the top floor with the addition of a bathroom and the installation of central heating! Such

luxurious improvements were loudly commented on by the Holloway offspring when visiting their old home, as they had grown up at Church Farm without such amenities on the top floor!

Over the years, it has been exciting to add to the remarkable groundwork conducted by Russ and Jill and to continue the tradition of hospitality and happiness. This has remained a striking aspect of Church Farm, apart from when in 2007 a chimney fire was discovered that had been burning for over a year! Thankfully, the local fire brigades efficiently extinguished the fire with limited damage and we have continued subsequently to improve the house!

As both David and Pippa, worked from Church Farm when conducting their overseas work commitments, it was important to create two working offices. David's office adjoined the big Barn and led to further improvements including a handy loo and other developments to the Barn, adding a concrete floor, improved lighting and opening up the Barnyard leading into the garden. All these developments have extended the amenities and have allowed us to host a variety of social occasions. Barn dances, art exhibitions, BBQs and other events both for the benefit of the local community and to mark significant family occasions have provided a host of wonderful memories. Sadly, David died at the end of 2016, but it was from the Church Farm Barn that we were able to host his wake and wish him a fond farewell as he was buried in St Cyr's churchyard near the home he loved.



Church Farm Today

One of the joys of living in an old house is the sense of time and history which it provides. Families come and go over the years as we lead our little lives, but the permanence of those old stone Cotswold tiles and the wonderful blocks with fossils embedded in the stone, tell a tale of continuity and survival. It would be fascinating to hear the house tell us some of its memories, but we are fortunate to have a home which has provided happiness and comfort to many over the centuries. There is a warm and caring feel to Church Farm, which seems to absorb people and reflect the past as well as the present. Maintaining Church Farm in its present form with the mature garden that surrounds the house, inevitably requires care, but it remains a source of much pleasure, which it is hoped contributes to the village as a whole.