Melksham Court

Introduction

Estimated reading time: 23 minutes



Melksham Court, Stinchcombe. A line drawing by John Pinch

Each morning I look out of my bedroom window over part of the estate of Melksham Court and imagine how people were dressed, the animals and carts that roamed the fields and the important people coming and going over the centuries.

The story of this ***Grade II**** manor house, a fine architectural example of the Cotswold style dating from 1360, is fascinating.

It has been home to the rich and famous; seen misery and celebration, provided a safe haven for people in need and is a focal point for local history.

Throughout its existence Melksham Court has been developed and adapted to suit the needs of the changing times and culture. Through careful and spectacular landscaping, the estate has matured into a home for exotic species of trees, surrounded by

beautifully laid out gardens.

The house has been given new leases of life over the centuries through renovation and improvements. Utilised for farming, equestrian pursuits, housing collections of motor cars; a home to academics, vicars, teachers, farmers, multi-million pound business magnates, this wonderful house has seen some history.

From before ***William Tyndale*** to the present day, the house has been home to generations of many important families that have left their stamp on the estate. Some families stayed only a short time, while others lingered for centuries.

Tales of the house razed to the ground, witnessed by Thomas Tyndale being forced to flee a band of Royalists and hiding in a yew tree on Stinchcombe hill for three days and nights… just one of the stories that add intrigue to this magnificent Court.

Imagine Edward Huchyn's deathbed revelation to his children that their real name was not Huchyns, a name he had assumed to avoid capture when fleeing from Tyneside during the War of the Roses, but Tyndale.

If only the house could speak, what magical secrets it would tell. Sadly, all you have is my account, but I hope you enjoy as much as I have learning about just one house in our wonderful village.

John Pinch

Melksham Court – the property today

The main house is a Manor House dating from C16 and C17. It is built of squared and coursed marlstone, with a stone slate roof and is Grade II* listed. The barn and old mill are both Grade II.

The house is grouped around formal gardens with the barn and

former mill and is a very grand version of the Cotswold style. The main house today has four reception rooms, a billiard room, a kitchen/breakfast room, six bedrooms, four bathrooms and extensive wine cellars. There is a well in the kitchen that has been covered with a toughened plate glass floor. Electric lights illuminate the shaft to reveal the almost pristine stone walls that disappear out of sight below.

Other buildings on the site include a half-timbered summerhouse, an early Victorian former mill house, an 18th-century tithe barn, a staff cottage, a coach house and an artist's studio. Amenities include a swimming pool housed in a new timber framed building, a hard tennis court and substantial equestrian facilities including indoor and outdoor arenas with modern stabling for 14 horses.

How the house has changed over the centuries

It is understood there has been a house on the site of Melksham Court since 1360. A description of the layout of the house as it was in 1374 with its high chamber with chimney and stone roof and the various farm buildings is recorded in the *Inquisitiones Post Mortem.*

between the two moors of Astmerssh, 2 ridges at Cadelestyghel, and 2 at Glasmerssh.

STYNDESCOMBE.

Assignment made as above, 28th June, 1374.

The escheator assigned to the said *Ela* one-third of the manor, to wit, in the messuage of the Court [*mesuag' Cur'*] formerly *David de Melksham's*, the high chamber there with the chimney at the south end of the hall roofed with stones, with the kitchen annexed to a chamber at the north end of the said hall, with a henhouse over the bakehouse, and pigsty annexed. Also one-third of the oxhouse at the east end, and the grange called 'Godewynesbern', roofed with straw. The waggon-house in the same court to be in common. He also assigned her one-third of the dovecot of Melkesham, with the charge [*cum onere*], and a sheepfold

in the court formerly *Peter de Styndescombe's*, roofed with stones, and one-third of the grange there towards the west, roofed with straw, and one-third of the dovecot there, with the charge. Also all the close called Styndescombes orchard. Of arable land in the Northfeld he assigned to the said *Ela* 2½ acres in Ryforlang, one acre called Horscroftacre, 2½ acres lying in 3 parcels at Sloogh, one acre at Nyweburghestoppe, one acre in 2 parcels at Sandacrecrosse, one acre called Hevedeacre, one acre of land called Mayster Davidysacre, one acre called Wytherstop-acre, one acre abutting on Sellewyn's land, 3 'buttes' containing half an acre at Sandacrecrosse, one acre called Northlyngacre, 5½ acres on Crowepen, 7 acres on 'la Toote', one acre abutting on Berkleweye, and half an acre abutting on the land of *William Taillor*. Also, in severalty, 2 acres in the croft called Wodelst' and 2 acres in Estwodecroft. Of arable land in Westfeld: 2½ acres in Shortlond, 1½ acres at Bourhey, 2 acres at Wowelond, 1½ acres formerly Melksham's lying in Wolverdale, and 3 acres there of the land formerly *Peter Styndescombe's*, 2 acres under 'les leesacres', one acre at Homede, 4 acres in the furlong called Redepury, 6 acres in 'la langeryge', 2½ acres in Holley, half an acre on Westhulle, and one acre in Boele. Of arable land in Aldewyk: 2½ acres in Styndescombesforlang. He also assigned her 3 acres in Shipenforlang, 6 acres in la Burifeld, 4 acres in Wodeforlang, 3 acres in Goreland under *John Beverston's* croft, half an acre at Coldeasshes, 3 acres in two furlongs [*culturis*] at Bovechurch, and half an acre in [land called?] Anketilrudyng. He assigned her also a former [*quondam*] meadow called Extoworth, containing 9 acres, 5 acres of meadow in Wodewode, 2 acres of meadow in Oldemedessplot, and half an acre of meadow lying by itself in Litilwodemede. Also 5 acres of pasture in Calfrudyng, one acre in Jonetcroft, and one in the close called Litelrudyng. Also certain groves, to wit, Bolgrave, Yertecombe, Rudyngrove and Middelgrove; and 11*s.* 11½*d.* rents from *Richard Cullyng* of Standecomb and *Walter Burgh*, free tenants, and 4*s.* 3*d.* out of the yearly rent of 6*s.* 4*d.* paid by *Edward Prest*, free tenant, for 2 messuages and a fardell of land. He assigned her also one messuage and 9 acres of land which *Henry Moritr* holds at will, and 9 acres in Bourhey in Chystelay, which *Richard Cullyng* holds at will, and a messuage and curtilage in the tenure of *Roger Buryard*, and a messuage and 2 acres of land which *Richard Holdare* holds at will, and a messuage in a fardell of land which *Walter Seleman* holds at will, a cottage with a curtilage in the tenure of *Richard Beverston*, a messuage and 8 acres of land in the tenure of *William Lerwynch*, who holds for term of his life; also 21½*d.* out of a messuage and 8 acres of land, which *John Laurenz* holds at will.

Chan. Inq. p.m., Ser. I, 48 Edward III, 1st Nos., No. 86.
New reference, Chan. Inq. p.m., Edward III, File 139

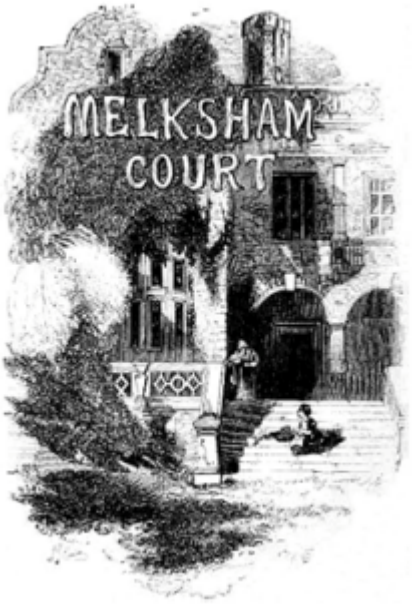
A description of the layout of the house as it was in 1374 with its high chamber with chimney and stone roof recorded in the *Inquisitiones Post Mortem*.

To see a larger copy of the extract .

Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem for Gloucestershire, *Part VI 33 Edward III to 14 Henry IV 1359-1413*, abstracted by Ethel Stokes, London: The British Record Society Ltd, pp84-85

Under the feudal system all land belonged to the monarch and was therefore held by him directly or on his behalf. Inquisitions post mortem were local inquiries relating to valuable properties to discover what was due to the crown and determine the rightful heir.

The house that we see it today is thought to date from c.1600 and the marlstone used in its construction was very probably sourced from the quarries along Taits Hill.



There is evidence that the building on the site of Melksham Court before it was razed to the ground in 1645 was architecturally significant.

The house featured an oriel window mentioned in an account of

Melksham Court in a book entitled ***"Ruins and Old Trees associated with memorable events in English History"*** written by Mary Roberts in the 1800s.

An engraving from the book shows an Elizabethan gable end wall with window faintly noticeable in the background – not dissimilar to the existing Elizabethan barn that still stands at Piers Court today. (below left)





This feature might well have influenced the design of the arched gateway in the wall between Court Barn and Melksham Court. (above right)

The house owes much of the significant renovation and development since the 1950's, to three owners; ***Sir Maxwell Joseph***, Mavis and George Clarke and more recently Phil and Yvette Pridmore. The entrance drive to Melksham Court was re-

sited by Sir Maxwell Joseph and two aerial photographs show the original and current drive. (Click on the photos below to see a larger copy) Surrounding the house, as shown in the first photograph, were a range of farm buildings and the brick wall separating the adjoining property, Lamport Court, still stands today.

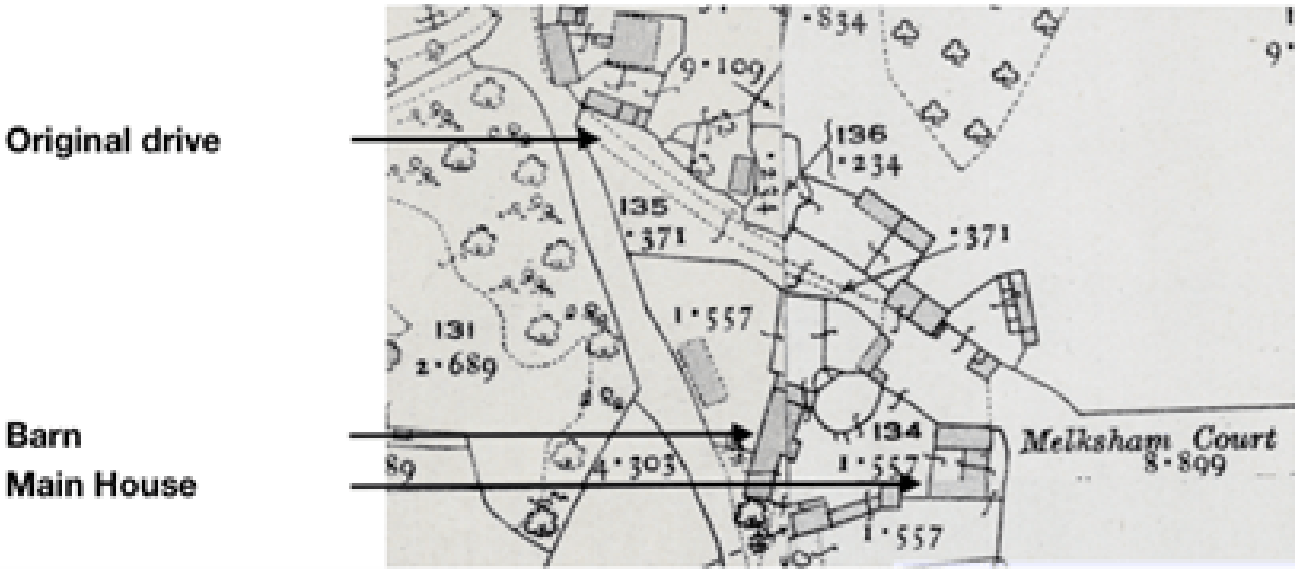


One of two early c20 aerial photographs of Lamport Court and adjacent buildings, including some of Melksham Court (Date unknown)



A later aerial photograph showing the new drive to Melksham Court (Date unknown)

A map from 1912 illustrates the original access drive as also shown on the first of the two aerial photographs. There appear to be quite a number of farm buildings dotted around the estate.



A map from 1912
The Tithe Barn (just out of view on both aerial photographs) but situated in front of the main house dates from the 18th century and overlooks the dew pond with views back towards the house. The main doors on the porch on the west of the barn include some significant medieval stained glass that was later built into the oak doors. The wooden arched doors on the interior side facing the main house are believed to have come from Nottingham town jail.

Past residents

David de Melksham – from Edward I until 1374

Possibly the first resident of Melksham Court and from where the house derived its name, was noted in the account of ***David***

de Melksham. “Maystre Davidysacre was a parcel of the land on which the beautiful manor house known today as Melksham Court still stands”. It is believed that he was resident here from the time of Edward I until 1374. He was the vicar or Berkeley from 1349 – 1368 and was close to the Berkeley family. He chose the location at Melksham Court in Stinchcombe because it was less than four miles from his church at Berkeley.

Robert Owlepenne II

Robert Owlepenne II sold Melksham Court, Stinchcombe, which he had inherited through marriage with the de Mylkesham family, to Sir Walter de la Pole in 1413. His successor, John (owner 1441-1462), was a man of substance, farming the alnage (as an inspector of cloth) for Gloucestershire with Thomas Tanner of Dursley, and defeating the Berkeleys in a suit over property in Cam.(***From the history of Owlpen and its owners***)

The Tyndale family, 1378 – 1768

In 1378 there were two Tyndale families living in the village. One was at Southend on Wick Lane, and the other at Melksham Court. The Southend family in time disappeared from history and there remained only the one at Melksham Court.

It is believed that William Tyndale, “architect of the English reformation” and translator of the Bible from Latin into English, was born at Melksham Court in 1494.

Thomas Tyndale, (died 1671), “a gentleman of the Parliamentary party” was compelled by approaching Royalists in 1645 to flea from his house at Melksham Court and hide in Stinchcombe Wood for three days and nights. From the safety of a large yew tree, he had the misfortune to witness not only his own house, Melksham Court, but also Piers Court burned to the ground by the Royalists. It is believed this is the derivation of the recently closed pub, The Yew Tree, at the end of the Avenue.

- More information on the importance of the Yew Tree is located in the excerpt from the book, ***"Ruins and Old Trees"***
- More information on the William Tyndale and family can be found the page "***The Tyndale Family***" on the website.

Captain Morse and his descendants, 1768 – early C20

Following ownership by the Tyndale's, the Morse family took possession of the house and the 40acre estate of Melksham Court from 1768 until early in the C20.

The surname, Morse, was first found in Gloucestershire where, conjecturally being of Flemish origin they were one of the many settlers who were invited into England to improve the industrial capabilities of the nation.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STINCHCOMBE

MESSRS. D. LEGGE, SON & PEARCE

AT THE OLD BELL HOTEL, DURSLEY

Some years prior to 1901, ***according to the newspapers***, Thomas Morse moved to New Zealand and sold four properties in Gloucestershire, one of which was Melksham Court.

This suggests that he might have leased the property to the following three occupants until 1901.

- More information on the ***Morse family***

John Attwood – mason, 1841

As well as John's wife, Sarah and their son John, there was a farmer, Samuel Camm with his wife Sarah also living at Melksham Court.

Samuel Camm – tenant farmer of 210 acres, 1844

Samuel became the tenant of Milk House (Melksham) Farm Stinchcombe in 1844, when mention of the Attwood family disappeared from the electoral role. There was a house servant called Fanny Manning and a farm labourer, David Till also living at Melksham. Samuel's wife died sometime between 1851 and 1861, when Thomas Camm, his son took over the running of the farm with his sister, Mary and cousin, Ellen.

In 1871 Thomas was still running the evidently very successful farm, employing 5 men, 3 boys and 2 women. He was now married to Hester and they had two daughters. There was also a general servant living there, called Clementine Lord.

In 1881 it looks like the two daughters married and had moved away from Melksham and Samuel Camm now employed six men and two boys as well as Mary Mitchel who lived at the house and who was the dairy maid and servant.

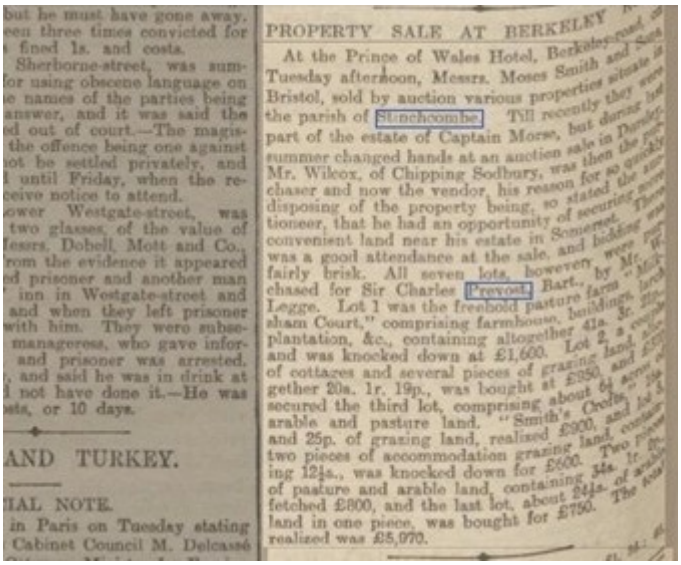
James Nicholls – farmer, 1891

It is not clear what happened next, but it looks like James Nicholls took over the lease. Unusually, there is no mention of farm labourers or helpers in the electoral register. James was married to Elizabeth and they had one son and one daughter.

Mr Wilcox – formerly of Chipping Sodbury and Somerset, 1900 – 1901

Mr Wilcox bought the house from the Thomas Morse shortly before the Morse family moved to Australia in 1901. Wilcox owned the house and estate for less than one year and explained to the auctioneer that the reason for selling so quickly was that he had found more convenient land near his estate in Somerset.

Lt. Colonel Charles Prevost (1831-1902), 1901 – 1928



but he must have gone away.
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fined 1s. and costs.
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AND TURKEY.

IAL NOTE.
in Paris on Tuesday stating
Cabinet Council M. Delcassé

PROPERTY SALE AT BERKELEY

At the Prince of Wales Hotel, Berkeley-road, on Tuesday afternoon, Messrs. Moses Smith and Sons, Bristol, sold by auction various properties situate in the parish of Stinchcombe. Till recently they were part of the estate of Captain Morse, but during the summer changed hands at an auction sale in Dursley. Mr. Wilcox, of Chipping Sodbury, was then the purchaser and now the vendor, his reason for so quickly disposing of the property being, so stated the auctioneer, that he had an opportunity of securing more convenient land near his estate in Somerset. There was a good attendance at the sale, and bidding was fairly brisk. All seven lots, however, were purchased for Sir Charles Prevost, Bart., by Mr. Legge. Lot 1 was the freehold pasture farm "Smith's Court," comprising farmhouse, buildings, land, plantation, &c., containing altogether 41a. 3r. 21p., and was knocked down at £1,600. Lot 2, a cottage of cottages and several pieces of grazing land, together 20a. 1r. 19p., was bought at £950, and £ secured the third lot, comprising about 6½ acres of arable and pasture land, "Smith's Croft," and 1a. and 25p. of grazing land, realised £900, and lot 4, two pieces of accommodation grazing land, containing 12¼a., was knocked down for £600. Two pieces of pasture and arable land, containing 11a. 1r. 20p., fetched £800, and the last lot, about 24½a. of arable land in one piece, was bought for £750. The total realised was £5,970.

Charles Prevost (3rd Baronet), bought the house and estate from Mr Wilcox at an auction at the Prince of Wales Hotel on the Berkeley Road in 1901.

Charles Prevost (3rd Baronet), bought the house and estate from Mr Wilcox at an auction at the Prince of Wales Hotel on the Berkeley Road in 1901.

His son, Sir Charles Provest (4th Baronet), practiced as a schoolmaster for a number of years and retired to live in Stinchcombe Manor that had been built by his grandfather. This was the family seat where he took his bride, Beatrice to live after their wedding in 1907.



The photograph above shows Lady Beatrice Mary Prevost (nee Burrow) outside the front of Melksham Court in 1907.

In the same year, in order to live within his means, he leased the Manor House to Lady Goodrich and built and occupied Yercombe Cottage. It has since been extended and converted into a respite home and is now known as Yercombe Lodge. The house was originally named Yercombe Woods, which is the copse

behind the present house on the edge of Stinchcombe Hill.

He was a magistrate for many years and was Chairman of the Dursley Bench. As Lord of the Manor, he took a deep interest in all village affairs and was, for many years, Chairman of the Stinchcombe Parish Council. He died of a heart attack at Yercombe Cottage in April 1939 while pruning his roses.

The payment of duties, as a result of his death, necessitated the sale of part of his real estate and Yercombe Cottage was sold. Later, on the death of Lady Goodrich, the Manor House was also sold, but the Lordship of the Manor has been handed down to all subsequent baronets. Christopher Provost, the grandson of Sir Charles sold the Lordship of the Manor of Stinchcombe to Robert John Jones of Clingre farm on August 12th 2005.

The house was eventually sold by the house in 1928 because of the cost of restoration work that would have been involved, had he retained it.

Henry William Frank Smith – schoolmaster, 1901

I can only surmise that Henry Smith rented the house from Sir Charles Provost, since he was the headmaster of Dursley Agricultural and Commercial (later Grammar) Boarding School that was founded by Canon George Madan, vicar of Cam, and Sir George Prevost? Interestingly, as well as his wife, Frances and their servant Amy Dimery there were three eleven-year-old pupils registered at Melksham. Possibly this was a sort of overflow arrangement for boarding pupils from Dursley Grammar School?

It could be that Henry had become acquainted with Melksham Court when he was courting Frances, the daughter of James Nicholls from his first of three marriages who lived at the house in 1891?

Gilbert J Nicholls – farmer, 1911 – 1928

Apparently, the lease of the house passed to another of the Nicholls farming family after Henry Smith, the schoolmaster. Gilbert was 29 years of age in 1911 and his wife Emily was 45. They lived at Melksham with Eva Parslow who helped in the house, and there was also a resident carpenter called John Herbert. Emily's sister, Alice, who had married Gilbert's brother James, moved out of Melksham Court into Overend House when they retired. Hence, two brothers married two sisters! The mother of Wendy Hamilton (resident of Manor House on Wick Lane) used to visit her aunt Alice and uncle James at Melksham Court when it was a farm in the 1920s while she was staying with her other aunt Alice at Overend Cottage.



A postcard of Melksham Court when it was a farm that was sent to Wendy Hamilton's Aunt Beatrice and Uncle Arthur dated 1921

Philip Sturdy – architect, 1930s to late

1946

Philip Sturdy, being an architect and possibly retired, was instrumental in 1945 to take on the task of improving Stinchcombe village hall. The 'tin hut' was in much need of repair or better still, replacement. A committee, chaired by Mr Sturdy was set up to raise funds and manage the construction of a new stone building to replace it. Funds were raised by local residents but the main benefactor was Miss Doris Chew-Hooper from Stancombe and the new hall was opened in 1955.

One of the '***National Life Stories***' records very interesting account when the Sturdy family took on a nanny to help with the children and also to help Mrs Sturdy with the garden. Ilse Sinclair was from a Jewish community and arrived at Melksham Court in 1940.

- More on ***Ilse Sinclair*** (Life story of a Jewish refugee)

Adrian Evelyn Powell – architect, 1946 – 1951

Adrian Powell paid Sturdy £13,750 for the house, in todays price it would be equivalent to just over £600,00. Adrian designed a mix of building types including amongst many others the village hall in Rangeworthy, the All Electric Picture House in Bristol (1935), and aircraft factories during the war.

Adrian had four children; the youngest Christopher became an architectural historian.

The photograph below shows Adrian's 1936 Bentley, in which he drove the family to see the Festival of Britain in 1951.



Robert Catcheside – Harley Street Dentist, 1951 – 1959

Mr Catcheside and his wife had two children, a daughter, Susan and a son, Dian. Dian married Elizabeth, the daughter of Louis McMeekin, the local dentist in Dursley. Russ and Jill Holloway moved to Stinchcombe in 1964 when Russ started working in the dental surgery for McMeekin. Elizabeth tells me that her family were responsible for renewing all the electrics and converted a workshop into a dairy. She remembers '***Fifinella***' the alleged ghost of Melksham Court! Elizabeth McMeekin's parents held a party at their house at 'UpAlong' on Taits Hill, to welcome the Catchesides to the village in January 1952. Dian had just started his National Service and a few years later Dian and Elizabeth, were married in 1958.

In a letter I received from Elizabeth, she mentions the three

staircases at Melksham Court; the spiral staircase that went up from the cellar to the servants bedrooms on the top floor, the wide main staircase and the straight flight that went up between the dining room and kitchen to a flat where Dian's sister Sue and her husband Peter lived after their wedding. The drawing room was also called the music room with an impressive fireplace and lovely views over the rose garden. She also remembers a topiary garden. Her most comical memory is that of the outside loo by the kitchen door where there were squares of newspaper hanging from a piece of string for 'personal' use!

Sir Maxwell Joseph – Millionaire businessman, 1959 – 1969

Sir Maxwell Joseph started and owned the Grand Metropolitan Hotel chain in London and used the greenhouses and barn at what is now Court Barn to grow all the flowers for the tables and displays in his restaurants and hotels. The greenhouses were later sold, leaving the walled garden in a very poor state.



Sir Maxwell Joseph.

The property tycoon and hotelier, made several sympathetic and extensive improvements to the house and grounds with particular emphasis on the beautiful landscaped formal gardens and planting of specimen trees, many of which have reached maturity and complement the buildings and estate.

It is known that Sir Maxwell Joseph also owned Lamport Court and used the building as accommodation for his employees at Melksham Court. It is believed that it was he who was responsible for dividing the house into two dwellings and for removing the wooden paneling from the sitting room at Lamport Court and installing it in Melksham Court.





Melksham Court during restoration by Maxwell Joseph C1955

Sir Keith Joseph,not sure when – if at all!

Coincidentally, it is documented that there were two Joseph's that owned Melksham Court. The late Sir Keith Joseph was a politician and became Margaret Thatcher's Secretary of State for Education and Science from 1981 and was responsible for introducing GCSEs, and the establishment of a national curriculum. Despite reference made in the Tyndale Society blog as to previous owners of Melksham Court, sadly there is little evidence of when Sir Keith Joseph actually lived at Melksham Court, if in fact he ever did!

McFadyen-Walsh, early 1970s – 1973

He was the owner of a Lamborghini that was often seen parked at the entrance to the drive up to the house, more often than not to indicate that a party was in full swing! The couple only stayed there for a couple of years, but in an account sent to me by Alison Cullen, she explains that her mum (Pam Heard who was living in Lamport Court) “met the gardener and he says that Mr Holding is moving this week (1973) and the M-Ws are in France…” and then later goes on to add, “Private detectives called yesterday, but I was out walking the dogs so they went to see Rex Wood (from the Malthouse) about the M-Ws. He is really being chased now and we gather he is in Rio. Rex was full of it! But I have no idea what the M-Ws were supposed to have done?”

Mr Jim Holding – 1973 – 1975

Perhaps it was the opposition from villagers to his plans for the barn that Mr Holding did not stay long at Melksham Court. Fortunately Joyce and I did not have the same problems when we later bought the barn and converted it into a house in 1985-87.



STINCHCOMBE IN CRITICAL MOOD ABOUT PLAN

MORE THAN fifty Stinchcombe residents — a few of them born and bred in the village — crowded into the meeting room of the village hall on Wednesday evening.

They were there to discuss what Mr. Jim Holding, a newcomer to the village, should be allowed to do with his own property.

Mr. Holding is the owner of the Elizabethan manor, Melksham Court. He has been given planning consent to convert oneof the two barns on the property into living accomodation for domestic staff.

The barn is of Cotswold stone adjacent to Lamport Court and is a listed building of architectural interest.

to 1939 and his wife was born in the village.

He explained that the barn with its ivy concealed dovecote originally went with Lamport Court.

He had arranged a meeting on Saturday with Mr. Holding, he said, and the owner had been "only too happy to meet any architecutural amend-ment."

safety of the proposed occupants whom they'd never met.

Since the barn is a listed building consent for its change of use has to come from the Department of Environment.

The resolution demanding refusal or a public inquiry was made on

The article from Gazette in November 1973 where locals were opposed to his plans to convert the barn next to Lamport Court into staff accommodation

Lionel Amos – Transport and property company owner, late 1975? – 1980?

Lionel Amos applied for planning permission to erect a transmitter mast at the top of Stinchcombe Hill, behind Melksham Court. The mast was never erected, but the excavations are still evident today. Reference to an Aerial is made in a deed of conveyance in Roger Batty's possession. Planning permission was granted in 1981 with a proviso that the mast should not exceed 100 feet in height. Amos also used the big barn (without planning permission!) to sell remnants of cloth and fabrics that he bought from bankrupt stock from mills in the north of England. One of his companies was Black and White Coaches.

Richard Leslie Arnold 1980? – 1981?

I cannot find any information, except that ownership could

have only been for approximately one year.

George Moleneaux – Engineer, 1981? -1985, formerly of Amberley Court

It was Moleneaux who carried out many of the internal reinforcing works on the roof structure by inserting RSJs (Rolled Steel Joists). Just before selling Melksham Court to the Clarkes, he sold the barn (formerly belonging to Lamport Court) that had become part of the estate of Melksham Court to Joyce and I in 1985.

George and Mavis Clarke – Engineering company owner and carriage driving, 1985 – 1994

George was a retired company director and collector of vintage cars, but his wife Mavis was a very accomplished carriage driver. She often competed in trials with Prince Phillip. They created the manége and outdoor arena in the 1980's. The excavated spoil produced during the work was generously given to the Joyce and I at our newly acquired Court Barn to provide topsoil for a suitable garden surface where only gravel and clay had been previously. George employed our son Russell as a teenager at weekends to help sort out his office. Each Christmas, George and Mavis would invite villagers into their house for mulled wine and mince pies and to listen to carols played by the Stinchcombe Silver Band.

Roger and Rhegan Maggs – Venture capitalist and equestrian business, 1994 – 2004

With its impressive banqueting hall and minstrel's gallery the baronial Tythe barn is currently used as a private banqueting hall but the feature fireplace was built during Roger Maggs's

ownership. It was Roger who commissioned me to redesign the interior of the small mill house into a library, following a directive from English Heritage due to the building being in very poor shape and in danger of collapse.

Hugh Grant – Actor, nearly owned Melksham Court!

*According to the **celebrity press**, Hugh Grant is reputed to have bought Melksham Court in 2002 for £2m but in fact he did not! Michael Gatt said they bought Melksham Court for £2.1 million in 2004 after Hugh Grant pulled out of a prospective purchase.*

It seems Grant wanted to be near his former girlfriends home, Liz Hurley, who was living in Barnsley (although she moved quite shortly afterwards). True, it was not unusual to see the paparazzi parked at the entrance to Melksham Court, waiting for an opportunity to snap or interview the actor, who was a keen golfer and could often be seen on the links of Stinchcombe Golf Course. Hence, Hugh Grant never actually owned Melksham Court.

Michael Gatt – Property developer, 2004 – 2008

The Gatts bought the house in 2004 after Hugh Grant pulled out of a prospective purchase. They were responsible for renovating and extending the adjoining timber-framed house, known as Cedar Cottage to what it is today and renaming it New England Lodge. Having been declared bankrupt, they sold Melksham Court and separated New England Lodge from the estate. The current owners of Melksham Court bought the house and estate and subsequently, New England Lodge from the Gatts.

Yvette and Phil Pridmore – wedding venue proprietors, 2008 – present day

The current owners, Yvette and Phil Pridmore have owned Melksham Court since 2008, and have made further significant and sympathetic improvements to the property. The attention to detail is superb and this not only includes the main house and outbuildings but the grounds generally, returning the gardens to their former glory following years of neglect by the previous owners.

The house and grounds are now seen and appreciated by more people than possibly ever before thanks to its current use as a ***venue for weddings and other celebrations***.

Thanks go to…

Much of the information in this account has been obtained by interview with current or past residents from the village. Kath Hudson and Trudy Chinn have been particularly helpful in providing links to documents that have been found previously or during the course of this study.

Hence, I should like to thank;

- Kath Hudson
- Trudy Chinn
- Russ and Jill Holloway
- Christopher Prevost
- Elizabeth Catcheside
- Wendy Hamilton
- Hugh Mildmay
- Alison Cullen (Bob and Pam Heard's daughter)
- Tim Heard (Bob and Pam Heard's son)
- Kate Longstaff
- Yvonne and Nigel Cant
- … and of course, the internet!

Always interested to hear new stories and comments, so please add to the comments below.