



ROTHLEY COURT

Rothley Court: Ages & Residents

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Eo ad pan' ~~hesstan~~. lbi fe. xii. caruc' t're. lbi .xx.
sochi cu' .v. uillis 7 i. bord' hnto. vi. car' 7 dim'. lbi .xxvii.
ac pra. Tot' ualuto .x. lib. modo .xxvii. lib.
Rex ten' ~~bractone~~. lbi fe. xii. caruc' t're. In dño. e'
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car'. lbi. c. ac pra. Valuto. iii. lib. modo. viii. lib.
h. ii. an' tenuto Morcar. Modo ten' Hugo ad firmā de rege.
Rex ten' Rodolei. Rex. E. tenuto. lbi fe. v. car' t're.
In dño fe. ii. de his. 7 lbi. ii. car'. 7 xxix. uilli cu' pbro
7 xxviii. bord' hnto. vi. car'. lbi molin de. iiii. solid'.
7 xxx. vii. ac pra. Silua dñica. i. leu' lq. 7 dim' leu' lat'.
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h uilla ualeo p annu. lxxii. solid'.
Huic an' pan' subsequencia mebra.

Rodolei features in the Survey of 1086, the Domesday Book



The Arms of Edward the Confessor, Lord of the Manor & Soke of Rothley, pre-conquest.

Nearly 20 years into his reign as William 1st of England, the Duke of Normandy ordered a complete survey of his kingdom. Inspectors descended on every place putting together information on the number of people and their status, the worth of the economic activity, and whether the ownership had changed pre-and post conquest. It was all beautifully written up in 1086.

On the ownership question the inspectors recorded that Rothley was a King's Manor, now in William's ownership, and that was the same position pre-conquest, since "King Edward held it".

The Inspectors saw Rothley as an important place. Not only was Rothley itself 40% owned directly

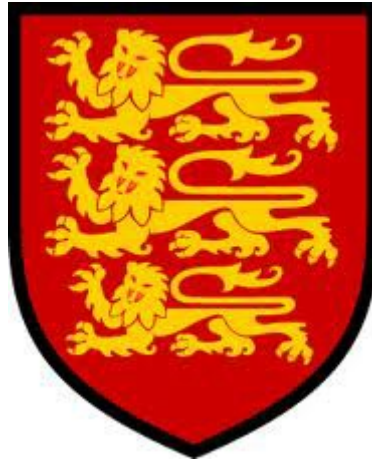
by the King, its Manorial jurisdiction extended over 22 other settlements in East Leicestershire in what was called the Soke of Rothley. The King as Lord of the Manor & Soke was the Lay Rector, responsible for the provision of Christian Ministry in Rothley itself, and five other Soke settlements where there were rudimentary chapels. Rectorial Tithe income would thus flow into the Lord's hands, as well as the Lord claiming other duties of service owed to him.

Probably underneath the present Rothley Court building lie the remains of an earlier house used by a succession of King's bailiffs, who would have looked after the King's *ancient demesne* and his wider interests in the Soke generally for more than 200 years.



From the effigy on the
tomb of King Henry III
in Westminster Abbey.

1316-1272



The Arms adopted by
Henry and other
English Kings

Henry was presiding over England at a time when the Knights Templar had been established for over a hundred years. They had established a strong network of fortresses to support the four Christian Kingdoms in Palestine that had come about after the Crusades. The Templars were also well accomplished at the business of assisting Jerusalem-bound pilgrims with travel arrangements, money transmission and security. All this effort was financed by networks of manors and land-holdings all over England and the continent, the result of gifts and bestowals that guaranteed very large income streams. The Templars also ran a treasury and bank, looking after deposited funds and valuables. Some of King Henry's treasury was vested in the Templar's safekeeping.

1231-1309



There was a conversation between Henry III and the Templars which centred on Henry's concerns that on his death his body may not be decently and honourably buried. He struck an understanding with the Templars that they would take care of this delicate and sensitive matter. Out of gratitude Henry asked if he could do something for them. "Well", they are likely to have said, "we always have need for more lands to generate income for our work in Palestine". "We do have a small plot at Baggrave in Leicestershire, it would be good to have some more to go with it". Henry had a look at his inventory, and saw the Manor & Soke of Rothley as an ideal compliment to the existing Baggrave holding. And so the Manor and Soke was vested in the Knights Templar in 1231.



To manage their new Rothley Manor, the Templars appointed a Preceptor, and built a hall-type Preceptory as his living quarters. Once that was completed they added a chapel accessed through the base of of a small tower. The chapel would meet the need for regular Christian devotions required of the Templar vows.

A stone effigy of one of the six Preceptors who served here is presented inside a special casket in the present day chapel.

1313-1540

The Knights of the Hospital of St John at Jerusalem were granted the Manor & Soke of Rothley after the demise of the Templars. That fall from grace of the Templars began after the fall of Acre in 1291, and the withdrawal from Palestine to Cyprus. Now a well organised, wealthy and pious 'militia' without a role, the King of France and the Pope found the Templars very threatening. By 1309 the whole Templar order was closed down, and much of its estates handed over to the Knights Hospitaller.

The Hospitallers had their major local Commandery at Old Dalby, and ran their other holdings at Rothley & Heather by putting in Bailiffs.

In the 1530s the lead Knight at Old Dalby was a Sir John Babington. He knew that big changes were coming as Henry VIII contemplated the dissolution of the Monasteries. Sir John encouraged Humphrey Babington to take a lease on the Temple Preceptory and the local demesne lands. The lease held good when the Hospitallers were dissolved in 1540, and it passed on the death of Humphrey to his son Thomas.

Various behind the scenes manoeuvres by Sir Ambrose Cave, himself a Hospitaller, gradually put together the original Manor & Soke holdings, which allowed the sale of the whole to be made to the sitting tenant, Thomas Babington, in 1565. The Babingtons thus began their long period of tenure at the Temple.



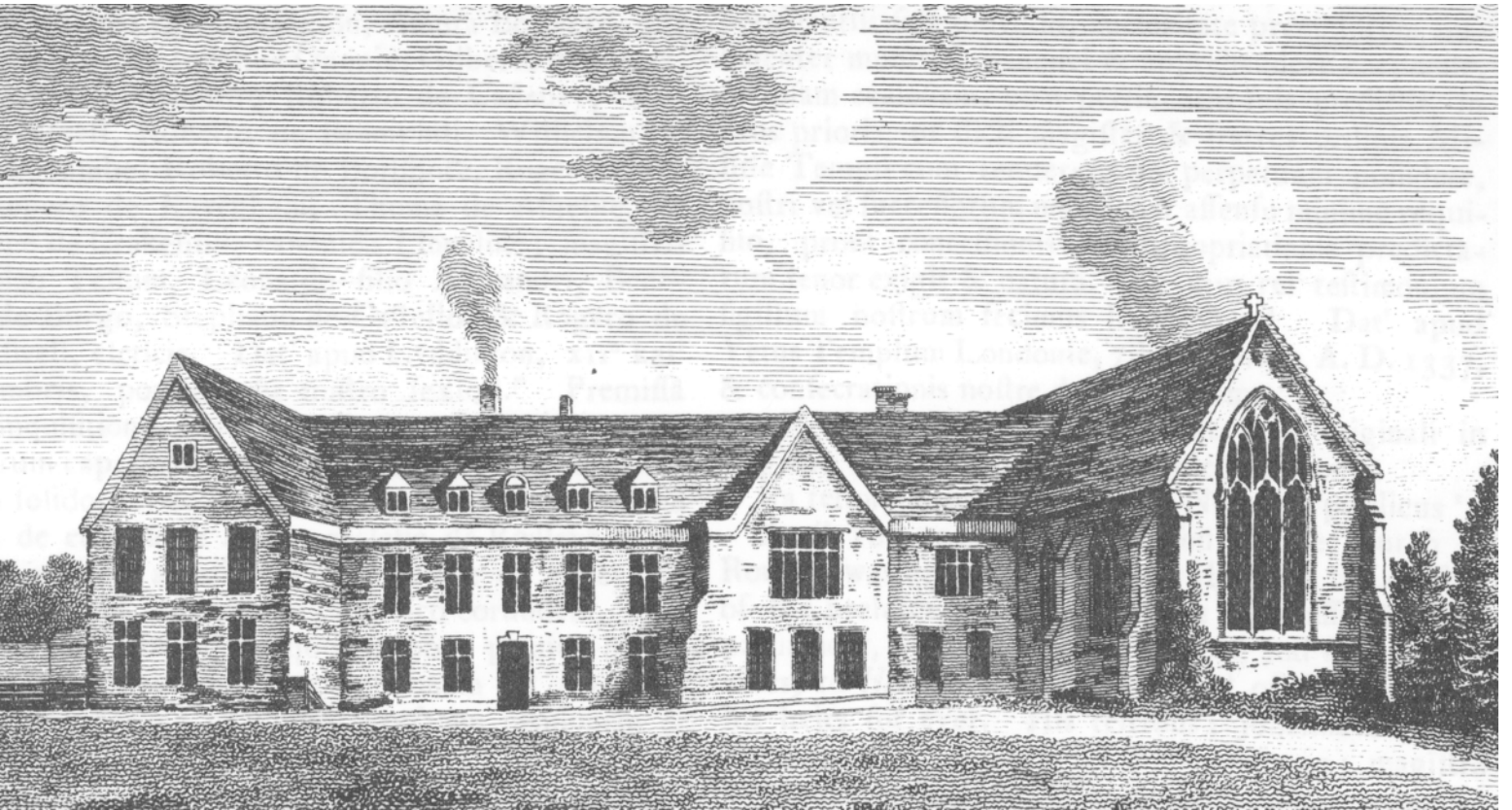
Photograph of the Knight Hospitaller window on the staircase at the modern hotel. Terry Sheppard



1565-1845

The Babingtons began their eight generations of residence at Rothley Temple as Lords of the Manor and the Soke. Because the Manor was a King's possession at the time of the conquest, and some lands were actually owned then by the King as *ancient demesne*, the parish and church were an *Ecclesiastical Peculiar*, outside the jurisdiction of any Bishop and Archdeacon. The Babingtons added the additional southern extension to the original preceptory to form a comfortable Manor House which came to be known as *Rothley Temple*, and developed the surrounding gardens and lake.

The last Babington, Thomas, was the radical social reformer and MP, philanthropist, and arch-Slave Trade Abolitionist at the side of his university chum, William Wilberforce. After his death in 1837 his wife Jean lived on in the Temple until her death in 1845. The Temple, Manor & Soke were sold in 1845 to son-in-law Sir James Parker, an eminent QC.



The engraving of the Rothley Temple of about 1794 that appeared in Nicholl's *History & Antiquities of Leicestershire*.

The Parker Era

1835-1851+

Thomas Babington's daughter Lydia Rose married a clergyman, Joseph Rose, who was installed as Vicar of Rothley in 1819. The couple had five children, one of whom, Edward, went on to be a parish priest in Surrey. Joseph died in 1822, and so her father Thomas, as patron, arranged for his son John, Rector of Cossington, to double up as Vicar of Rothley until 1835. This enabled Lydia and her children to stay on in the Vicarage. That ended with the appointment of William Acworth as Vicar in 1835, and Lydia moving into the Temple. Lydia stayed there through her parents' deaths in 1837 and 1845, moving in the 1850s to a cottage near her son in Surrey.

1861 & 1871 Census

The new Temple owner, Sir James Parker, died of a heart attack at the Temple in 1852. His son Harry Rainy Parker inherited the estate, but he does not figure in the census schedules until 1881. Some of the time he was living in New Zealand, probably on some sort of Government service.

In 1861 a retired army Major, Edward Dyson, was resident at the Temple with his family and entourage. It is likely that the proximity to hunting country was a draw. The 1871 census records a similar family and entourage of a Robert Henty filling up the Temple's rooms.

1881 Census

Harry Rainy Parker and his household are in residence. His family included three children aged 8, 6 and 5 all born in New Zealand, and a 7 months-old baby born at the Temple. Harry was a JP, and at this time he was actively reviewing the future of the estate. In 1877 he initiated a series of sell-offs of 29 Cottages, and several other properties in the Village. Most of these properties were old and run down, and many became development sites for more modern Victorian terraces. No doubt he was also thinking about the long term future of the Temple itself and all the farmed acres. Also resident at the Temple in 1881 was his father-in-law, Col. Henry Horatio Kitchener.

1894-1902

In 1893 Harry Rainy Parker launched the complete sell-off of all his Rothley-based estate in a number of imaginative lots. The smaller lots would see many creative village developments, including the creation of the Sleath building firm at the end of Woodgate.

The Temple and the main farming lands were bought by German-born Manchester Cotton Merchant Frederick Merttens, who quickly set about modernising and extending the Temple. It was not until July 1897 that Merttens finally moved in with his new wife Margaret. Three children were born at the Temple and baptised in the restored chapel.

The Merttens settled into working up a life as the Lord of an English manor and as the village squire. However, plagued by persistent hangovers from the effects of tropical diseases picked up when he worked in Brazil, Merttens consulted an eminent German doctor in London. The diagnosis and prescription were stark. To survive, Merttens was told to forsake Rothley and go and live on the snow line in Switzerland. Within a month most of the staff were paid off and all the animals sold. On Monday 3rd February 1902 a massive sale was held at the Temple of everything moveable. The family had already left for Switzerland before Christmas, taking a small specimen fir tree from the garden with them to light up on Christmas Day in the snow. A tenant for the Temple had already been signed up.

The Merttens Crest-Good Luck



The young Frederick Merttens



1902-1916

Catherine was born in 1860 at Brighouse in Yorkshire to parents Joseph and Catherine Rayner.

In 1881 the family were living at West Bank, Great Crosby, Liverpool. Joseph, born 1829, was the Town Clerk of Liverpool, and his household included a cook, kitchenmaid and two housemaids.

In the summer of 1883 his 23 yr-old daughter Catherine married widower Thomas Brooks at the Priory Church, Great Malvern. Thomas at 53 settled his new wife into his residence at Barkby Hall, surrounding her with a staff of ten.

Joseph Rayner died at Cannes on 20th April 1883. His Will was worth £12,970. [£626,000 in 2005]

The 1891 census at Barkby shows that Thomas and Catherine Brooks had two children together, though the second son doesn't show up on the usual other sources. Thomas Brooks died aged 70 on 21 June 1900 at Barkby Hall. His Will proved in London was worth £6,246 [£356,000 in 2005]. In 1901 Catherine the widow is heading up the Barkby Hall household of eight servants, with none of her two sons present. Her son Thomas Edward Brooks, born in 1886, is resident at a school in Cheltenham.

Catherine has probably been on the lookout for another place to live just when the medical crisis descended on Frederick Merttens at Rothley Temple. Catherine Brooks, widow, moved in as tenant after the dramatic sale of effects in 1902.

1916-1950

Catherine Brooks may well have met Ernest Howard Broadhurst by Mertten's links with the Cotton Trade in Manchester. Broadhurst was a principal with Tootal and Lee in the jointly named textile firm, Tootal Broadhurst & Lee. The 39 yr-old Ernest Howard Broadhurst married the 53 yr-old Catherine Brooks at St George's Hanover Square in the March quarter of 1916. The couple would play a long role as tenants at the Temple. Catherine died aged 86, Ernest moving out of The Temple soon after onto Swithland Lane, and in 1950, Warner Sheppard and Wade held a big auction to move all the household effects and furniture into new hands. Ernest died in 1951 at the Regent Hospital, Leicester, and was buried with his wife on 28 September.

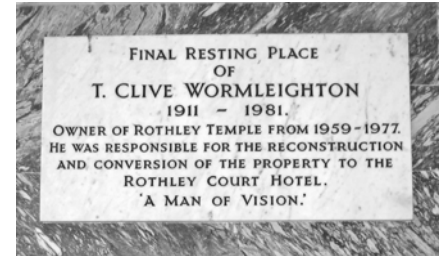
1950-1956

Merttens as landlord died in 1935 but before that he had switched his property interests into the family company, Rothley Temple Estates Ltd. The company quickly found a new tenant in the person of Mollie Dorothy Ward, who set up a Nursing Home at the Temple. Mollie D Orgee was born at Tenbury in 1908 and married Norman H N Ward in Leicester in 1938. No doubt the old Temple manor house was a difficult place in which to run an efficient home, and when the Church authorities decided to sell the mainly Georgian Vicarage next to the Church, she bought it and transferred her operations to the now Old Vicarage down in the village.

Clive Wormleighton

Rothley Temple Estates looked at the repair bills for the Temple and decided to sell it. Speculative builder Wormleighton, who had just completed the creation of the Mallory Park Racing Circuit, saw the Temple as his next project. He converted it into a hotel and in 1959 handed a 14-year operating lease to Ind Coope Hotels. After ten years Ind Coope handed the lease back, and the Wormleightons ran it themselves for a while. After a couple of false starts, the hotel was sold to Trust House Forte in 1977. Wormleighton was very proud of the long history of the place, and installed a pair of commemorative plaques outside the hotel on a plinth. He also had himself sworn in and admitted to the modern Order of Templar Knights. He died in 1981 and his

ashes are inured behind this memorial tablet in the chapel.



Greene King plc now own the hotel, and operate a thriving wedding and conference trade at the hotel within its subsidiary division Old English Inns.

