

Down Grange – the History of a House and its Occupants

The history of Down Grange was one of the first projects that Kempshott History Group undertook in 2012 when the group started.

In the first few years of research on Down Grange - almost entirely undertaken by Barry Hedger – it became clear that the story had more twists and turns than an Agatha Christie who-done-it.

While research has continued sporadically and significant help has been forthcoming – sometimes from unexpected sources- we concluded that this was a story which needed to be told and researched comprehensively.

So, we have gone back to the beginning.... and have set ourselves the task of completing the documentation of the house and its occupants from the 1780s to the 1980s in 5 phases:

1. The Creation of Down Grange - 1780s to 1825.
2. The Mistress of Down Grange and the Victorian years – 1825 to 1887
3. Down Grange into the 20th century – 1887 to 1919.
4. The ups and downs of fortune - 1919 to 1960
5. The Whistler /Portsmouth family – North Hampshire farming after the agricultural revolution 1820 – 1930.
6. Postscript – 1960 to the Present.

We have given ourselves a stiff task. We had hoped to have the first phase completed and written up by summer 2019 with Phase 2 completed in 2020. However, the best laid plans of mice and men.... So now, in the second half of 2022 we will have completed the complete redesign of the website before Christmas and then turn our attention as a matter of urgency to the original task of recording the history of an estate – Down Grange.

History Timeline for the Down Grange Estate 18th – 20th century

Pre 1780	Kempshott area is known as Basingstoke Down - common land for grazing & site of Racecourse 1762-3 Lord Bolton's estate maps which include this area are compiled	1760 George III becomes king	
1780s	1786-88 Enclosure of agricultural land in Basingstoke 1788 Down Grange estate created in southern half of common land - held by Davis family of Basingstoke.	1789 French Revolution	1783-85 extreme weather variability - cold winters, summer droughts
1790s	Tax returns indicate buildings on Down Grange estate	1795-1815 Napoleonic wars 1797 Suspension of Gold Standard 1798 Pitt introduces temporary tax to finance wars	1788-1815 Agriculture prospers and prices rise
1800s	1808 After death of John Davis, John Levy of Alton owns Down Grange estate	1805 Battle of Trafalgar	1806-1815 Agricultural prices for staples rise so cost of living rises
1810s	1818 Down Grange estate bought by Augustus John Hankey, London banker & improvements begin	1815 Corn Laws enacted to protect UK wheat production 1815 Battle of Waterloo	Post 1815 crash in wheat prices and agricultural economy suffers depression
1830s	1832 Augustus Robert Hankey dies, Down Grange house & farm split – Cassandra Terry life tenant of Down Grange house, farm tenanted	1832 Great reform Act 1838 Victoria becomes Queen	Agricultural Depression continues 1830 Swing Riots in Basingstoke 1839 the railway reaches Basingstoke
1840s	Whistler – Portsmouth family association with Kempshott farms begins	1841 First National Census taken 1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws	1840-75 agriculture prospers 1839 - 41 Tithe commutation in Basingstoke 1848 Railway line Basingstoke to Reading opens
1850s	1853 Cassandra Terry dies - nephew Robert Augustus Hankley lets Down Grange house to tenants	1850 Great Exhibition 1853-5 Crimean War	1856-7 Thomas Burberry, Wallis & Steevens agricultural engineers factory opens, Milwards shoe factory open in Basingstoke
1860s	Down Grange house tenanted until 1887		

1870s		1870 Foster Education Act puts elementary schooling in reach of all children 1871 Trades Unions legalised in Britain	1873-96 Agricultural depression in southern England due to imperial imports (wheat) 1870-80 Rise of the dairy industry serving large conurbations
1880s	1887 Robert Augustus Hankey dies & estate is sold to Petter family - never resident	1888 County Councils set up in Britain	1881-82 Massagrainians riots follow Salvation Army presence in Basingstoke 1883 Outbreak of Foot & Mouth disease
1890s	1890 Farmer Portsmouth builds new Down Grange farmhouse – Beechdown	1899-1902 Boer War	1889-97 weather variability from drought to flood 1898 Thorneycroft Company opens factory in Basingstoke to build steam and then combustion engine vehicles
1900s	1905 Down Grange house bought by Col Lycett Engledue May. New pig sties and cow sheds on farm 1909 Homesteads Ltd re-development on Down Grange/ Old Down farmland proposed	1901 Queen Victoria dies and Edward VII becomes king	1901 Alton Light Railway opens
1910s		1914-18 World War I	
1920s		1926 General Strike	Post WWI agricultural depression
1930s	1933 Henry Portsmouth dies & Down Grange house sold, sold on again 1937 -38	1938 George VI becomes king 1939 - 45 World War II	1939 Eli Lilly Pharmaceuticals factory opens in Basingstoke
1940s		1945 WWII in Europe ends	1943 Lancing Bagnall factory opens in Basingstoke 1946/7 Coldest winter on record
1950s		1952 Elizabeth 1 becomes Queen	Post War reconstruction and house building
1960s	Down Grange estate becomes public park Down Grange farmland becomes housing estates House used by local authority for offices then social club.	1967 Britain first applies to join EEC	1961 London Overspill - Basingstoke expansion planned 1969 Thorneycroft factory closes
1970s	Completion of urbanisation of Kempshott with housing, local shopping centre and schools. Sports facilities in Down Grange Park laid out.	1971 Decimalisation 1973 Britain joins the EEC	1971 M3 motorway past Basingstoke opens 1973 AA headquarters building opens
1980s	1985 Down Grange house bought by Grand Met, renovated and opens as a Berni Inn. Beechdown becomes a private sports and fitness club.	1982 Falklands War	1987 Hurricane fells 15m trees in southern England