

Tor Bryan in Essex Ingatestone

The houses of the Tor Bryan estate (NGR: TQ64590) stand on fields on the south east side of the great Roman road between London and Chelmsford, formerly part of the land bought by William Petre for £849. 12. 6d in December 1539 from King Henry VIII following the Dissolution of Barking Abbey (E.R.O. 1962).

The name seems to have been translated from Devon by Sebastian Petre, the younger brother of William, the 12th baron. Tor Bryan near Totnes is a delightful hamlet with a mill, Old Rectory House, an inn and a fourteenth century church containing memorials to the Peters, the Devonian spelling (Buffet, 1961). William Petre, later Chancellor to Henry VIII, was born in the neighbouring parish of Tor Newton, and the Petre family held the manor of Tor Bryan until about 1700.

Before the Norman Conquest the name of the Devon manor was Torre (Old English = a hill or tower). The land belonged to the Saxon Brihtric who was sent to Flanders by Edward the Confessor and, while there, was unwise enough to attract the attention of Matilda, the future wife of William the Conqueror. For this he was imprisoned in Winchester castle on his return to England, and died incarcerated there (Dooke, 1965). His widow Godeva held the land in 1086, and, on her death, the manor was confiscated to the Crown. About 1154 it was given to Henry II's follower from Brionne in Normandy. The name Torre Briane is first recorded in 1238 and Wydo, de Brianne held the manor four years later. The de Briane family were lords of the manor for 250 years; perhaps the greatest of the long line was Guy de Briane who was standard bearer for Edward III at the capture of Calais, was created a peer and Knight of the Garter and is buried in Tewkesbury Abbey.

George Sherrin designed several large house such as 'Ardtully' (1882) and the 'Gatehouse' (1884) in Station Lane, at about the time that he also built a large residence 'Heybridge House' on fields to the south of Ingatestone. This land, part of Heybridge Farm, belonged to Lord Petre, and was farmed by Marjoram Self and his grandson George in 1881. The Self's held other land - such as the Maltings (south west of the present 'Avenue Road') and New Inn in the town. Sebastian Petre took the lease of Heybridge House from his uncle. In 1894 he agreed both to fence the land boundary and not to build at a density of more than one house per acre. He gave Heybridge House as his address in 1895.

Sebastian, born in Cowes, Isle of Wight, was a solicitor. Sometime around the turn of the century he took the freehold of the house and land, and by 1910, had renamed it 'Tor Bryan House' to distinguish it from Heybridge Farm further to the south, the site of the old tanyard (now Heybridge Hotel). Sebastian married Catherine Wilhelmenie Sibeth born in Dulwich of American stock, and had a daughter Mary born in 1883, and subsequently, at two yearly intervals, sons Henry, Edward, William and John. Tragically, Edward was killed in 1912 when his aeroplane crashed, and John, a naval pilot, died in the Great War.

The house was a substantial building of two storeys with double bay windows on the ground floor, and, in 1891, supported five servants to the family. It was built immediately to the east of a small pond in the middle of a field, which was developed as a feature of the garden. The house was approached from the main road about 70 yards along a drive lined with lime trees, which passed round its eastern side. A tree-

lined path led north east to Ingatestone Lake, fed by the stream which passes in a culvert beneath the main road by Whadden Chase.

Sebastian gave part of the land for the building of the new Roman Catholic Church just to the south of Tor Bryan House, and contributed £1000 for the purpose. The church was designed by Frank Sherrin (1879 - 1953), and the foundation stone was laid in 1931. Frank, son of George Sherrin (1843 1909), also built 'St Ethelburgas' on Roman Road, a hundred yards south from his father's 'Arduully'.

After her husband's death in 1934, Catherine and Mary Petre stayed on at Tor Bryan House during the Second World War, until it and surrounding land was sold to Dorothy Mary Howe in 1946. Two years later it was in the possession of Lewis Alfred Bayman. The house was pulled down in 1962/63, and in 1966 the land was bought by A. Saunders and Co. of Brentwood, a development company which, over the ensuing six years, built the present estate of 72 houses designed by Design and Manning Associates of Notting Hill Gate. These were described by a local newspaper as 'before their time!' The estate is bounded on the south west by a new road, Petre Close, which separates it from the Roman Catholic Church, on the north east by the stream and Lake, and on the south east by the railway. The pond was retained as a feature at the centre of bungalows. In 1972 the final house of the estate was built on the tennis court.

The building of the Tor Bryan estate continued the policy of development of land around and replacing oldest houses, begun with the demolition in about 1958 of Docklands at the north east end of the town (Beagles, 1994), and of the Chase Hotel at the south west end about 1960. Docklands owed it's name to Dockey Fields (relating to the dock plant Rumex (Field, 1989) by which name they were known in 1849 when they were inherited by the surgeon Cornelius Butler from his father. Replaced by the Whadden Chase estate - whose western extent was shaped by the old boundary between the former separate parishes of Ingatestone and Fryerning (Kemble, 1993)- the Chase Hotel provided a focus of social activity and parties, It also had a swimming pool. The development of estates continuing into the 1980s (such as the western end of Avenue Road) contributed to a significant rise in the population of the village, which, including Fryerning, by 1991 had reached over 4, 800.

James Kemble.

I am grateful to John Lord Petre for information about Sebastian Petre.

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