

The Landmark Trust

FIELD HOUSE, MINCHINHAMPTON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Field House was left to us by Miss Eileen Jenkins in 1985. Nothing in it is disagreeable to look at, from the overall design to the minor details, and a house such as this can tell us as much about the attitude of our forebears to their surroundings as any building where the great craftsmen or artists of the day were employed. Field House, for a long time known as Hampton Field Farm, appears to be a straightforward Cotswold stone house, dating, at a guess, from about 1830 or 1840. Its simple name may be the faintest echo of the great medieval open fields, held by the lord and farmed in strips by his villeins. Landmark's restoration work revealed the remains of earlier staircases showing there to have been at one time three or four small dwellings here, forming a U shape and overlooking a small yard. Their outlines, one room up and one room down can be seen quite clearly on the plan of the house. The yard was later filled in to form a central hall, and the existing rather grander staircase inserted. At the same time, doorways were knocked through from one room to another, to form a single house. This came to be called Field House, as shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map, and was farmhouse to Hampton Field Farm, to which the surrounding fields belonged.

The Tithe Map of 1839 for the parish of Minchinhampton shows a slightly different shaped house with no outbuildings and the accompanying schedule shows the owner as a John Fowles. It is possible that this house was a much smaller building, standing roughly where the range containing the dining room and part of the sitting room is now, with the well-made cellars underneath – indicating that it was something more than a humble cottage even at this time. To this, in the 1840s perhaps, two wings were added, and at the same time the original house was itself divided into two further dwellings, but for what purpose, charitable or industrial, remains a mystery - although with the weaving industry so important in this area, it could have been connected with that. In any case, within a generation of that, Field House became a single dwelling.

There is a local tradition that a building has stood on the site of Field House for several centuries, and that its vaulted cellars are all that remain of it. This seems not to have been the case, however, because on another map of the parish of Minchinhampton, drawn in 1803, only fields are marked. The only houses in the immediate area to have existed at this date are Crackstone Farm and Peaches Farm, slightly to the north of Hampton Fields, and Aston Farm to the south-east, in the neighbouring parish of Avening. The reason for a hamlet growing up here soon afterwards lies partly in the history of agriculture at this period, and partly in the history of the manor of Minchinhampton itself.

For centuries the wealth in the Cotswolds came from sheep rearing and arable farming, chiefly grain. The arable land of the manor was concentrated in three large open fields, each consisting of some hundreds of acres, subdivided into strips, held directly by the lord of the manor or by individual tenants. The strips were made up of the characteristic wide 'ridge and furrow' formed by medieval ploughs, which are still to be seen in fields here and there, undulating under the later turf.

The enclosures of the 16th and 18th centuries subdivided some of the fields including the Hampton Field whose southwest corner is shown as three fields on the 1803 map, marked as Pasture, Field and Arable. Parcels of land were sold off allowing the hamlet of Hampton Fields to come into existence, and the farm called Matchless Farm too, all of which appear on the 1839 map. It was an obvious place for a settlement, on a crossroads that had been in existence since

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at least 1584, and with the old main road from Minchinhampton to Avening and Tetbury, upgraded to a Turnpike Road in 1758, passing through it.

Minchinhampton and Avening Manors

The earliest owners of the lands on which Field House stands were nuns from the Abbey of Caen. The name Minchinhampton derives from the Old English for Nuns' (munechene) Hampton. The manors of Minchinhampton and Avening parishes were then a single unit and remained so until the early 19th century. By the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 the lands were owned by Syon Abbey in Middlesex, after which they passed to the Windsor family. By the mid-18th century, the Sheppard family were the new owners. In the 1770s, they built a new house for themselves at Gatcombe Park, replacing the old manor house in Minchinhampton itself. Financial difficulties forced the family to sell the Avening estate in 1812 to the Playnes, of Longfords Mill, Avening. Two years later the Minchinhampton, or Gatcombe, estate was sold as well, to David Ricardo, an economist and author.

The Ricardos, remodelled Gatcombe Park and bought back as much of the estate as they could before selling it to Samuel Courtauld just before the Second World War. Courtauld later left it to his son-in-law, R. A. Butler (RAB), 'the Prime Minister that wasn't' and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. It was he who sold it in his turn to Her Majesty the Queen, to be the home of the Princess Royal and her family.

Restoration of Field House

Over the years various alterations and additions had been made to Field House, including a grandiose porch and a lean-to conservatory on the west side. These were removed, and a rather simpler passage/porch building made, in local materials. The coach-house was given a new arch, and a partition taken down, so that it could be used as a garage. The cement rendering of north wall was removed and its two bathroom windows were reset to be level with each other.

On the west front, a new door opening was made, with a window over it, centred on the gable above. The stone surrounds for both of these were new, the design copied from those on the south side of the house. The two small windows on either side of the new door, however, were moved from the demolished porch. New leaded panes were put in all of these, and in the two upper windows on the south front into which plate glass had been inserted.

Inside the only alteration was to divide up the dining room again, and to have a long sitting room on the south side of the house instead, by opening up the partition between the two rooms there. The fireplace at the south end of the former dining room was blocked up, and the surround moved to be in the present dining room. Most of the joinery in the house was in good condition, with wide elm floorboards throughout, and only two new doors were needed. The lower flight of the staircase was also renewed, with a new mahogany handrail as well. The alcove bookcases in the sitting room are new. Upstairs, no alterations were made at all, except to insert wooden fireplace surrounds, which were found in the stables, into the two east bedrooms.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Field House sleeps up to 6 people. To book this or any other Landmark building for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk