

The Old Rectory Guide Book



The History of the Building

The Old Rectory represents a rare survival of a stone built manor house structure dating substantially to the 13th century.

The earliest surviving record of a rector is of Bertram, Dean of Lichfield in 1193. By 1220 Hugh Despenser is named as Lord of the Manor of Loughborough and patron of four parts of the church. A fifth portion is recorded as being held by Philip de Cortlingstoke (taking the name from Costock in Nottinghamshire) who evidently held a house and manor in the town and supplied his namesake – one A de Cortlingstoke – as vicar to the church. This entailed the vicar paying the Rector R de Verdon supplied by Hugh Dispenser a pension of 8 marks for the privilege.

In 1228 it is recorded that

“Henry, (the) chaplin, (was) presented by Thomas Turville, rector of the church of Loughborough to the vicarage of the church of Loughborough...” saying later of the vicarage, “the dwelling house of the church which was Robert of Cortlingstok’s near the church”.

This is possibly the earliest direct reference to this Old Rectory which by 1228 appears to have been acquired by the church from the Cortlingstoke family. It had doubtless been built years before 1228 when the first surviving records of this family in Loughborough appear.

From its size it is quite possible that as Loughborough grew prosperous as a merchant town in the later Middle Ages it formed a residence housing both Rector, together with attendant church chaplains, and servants.

In 1344 the Rector was taxed at 44 marks and paid 14 shillings for Peter’s pence. For the year 1534-5 the value of the rectory was £26. A 16th century clergyman speaks in his will of “ the great reparations” made by him to the rectory during his lifetime.

A set of Glebe terriers dating between 1605 and 1674 give a very detailed description of the Old Rectory. These, together with the architectural remains, enabled reconstruction drawings to be made.

In addition to the Old Rectory itself the then substantial grounds also contained a tithe barn of ten bays length, a Glebe barn of four bays, a hay barn of three bays, swinestyes and stables.

The stables mentioned were probably the ones used by cavalry during the periodic occupations by both Royalist and Parliamentarians during the Civil War period. In 1644 the Rector, Nicholas Hall, escaped mounted royalist Cavalry, who tried to seize him from his pulpit in church. Eventually he was unwillingly evicted

from the Rectory and replaced by Oliver Bromskill. In 1662 he in turn was ejected and Nicholas Hall restored.

James Bickham, the rector from 1761 to 1786, compiled a major collection of books which he bequeathed to the Rectory as an inheritance for all his successors to enjoy. It is now housed in the School of Librarianship, Loughborough Technical College.

The earliest known picture of the Old Rectory is an engraving dated 1794 and is contained in Nichols "History of Leicestershire". It shows the frontage facing the church with a square headed front door and four gables running into the long hall roof behind. The artist has taken licence to omit the medieval windows and doors by then blocked up, its medieval porch has gone and shown is a ground and first floor row of square headed windows that indicate major internal reconstruction of the old medieval hall sometime in the late 17th or early 18th centuries.

In 1799-1800 extensive repairs and improvements were carried out, under the supervision of the Loughborough architect Christopher Staveley, at an estimated cost of £1350. Nichols in his history dated 1804, says
"A little distance from the churchyard gates stands the Rectory, or parsonage house, an ancient, strong edifice, built in the times when good English oak was plentiful hereabouts, as appears by the roof of this building in the inside"

In 1826, a terrible fire gutted the inside of the building and largely destroyed the ancient roof. As a result a late Georgian style block of reception and bedrooms was added making a new frontage at right angles to the old on the greensward area facing the road beyond the present ruined hall walls. The shell of the older part of the building was converted into kitchens and working domestic rooms and capped by a brick second story of servants' bedrooms. In this state it survived until 1958.

Over this later period the extensive pasture and farmland belonging to the Rectory, giving it an air of a country mansion, gradually diminished as Loughborough grew. The numerous fetes and grand local occasions associated with the 19th and early 20th century Rectors are beyond the scope of this guide. For many however, the nostalgic memory of the great rambling creeper covered Old Rectory that age made slightly mysterious, set amid lawns, trees, and little paths winding through ferns and bluebells, still survives.

It naturally had a strong tradition vouched by the last Rector, Archdeacon Lyon, of a secret tunnel from the Old Rectory to the Church. Such structures often really do exist and often prove to be medieval drain systems.

With the retirement of Archdeacon Lyon the building's centuries old function as a Rectory ceased. In 1958 the Old Rectory and some two thirds of its immediate grounds were purchased by the Corporation as a site for old people's dwellings. For some time its fate hung in the balance.

Between 1958 and 1961 members of the Loughborough and District Archaeological Society made a detailed examination of the whole building and compiled an invaluable record of photographs and drawings despite terrible

vandalism. From this it was possible to piece together the greater part of the medieval plan that lay hidden behind the later alterations.

The interest generated locally and nationally by this work resulted in total demolition being avoided. In the autumn of 1962 all but the essential medieval core was demolished. The former extent of the building can be studied on the plan in the Old Rectory Museum.

Between 1963 and 1967, restoration work under the supervision of the Ministry of Works was carried out to initial outlines provided by the Loughborough Archaeological Society. The cost of this was met by the Corporation, with the help of a government grant. Today it serves as a small museum in a quiet oasis of a busy town.

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