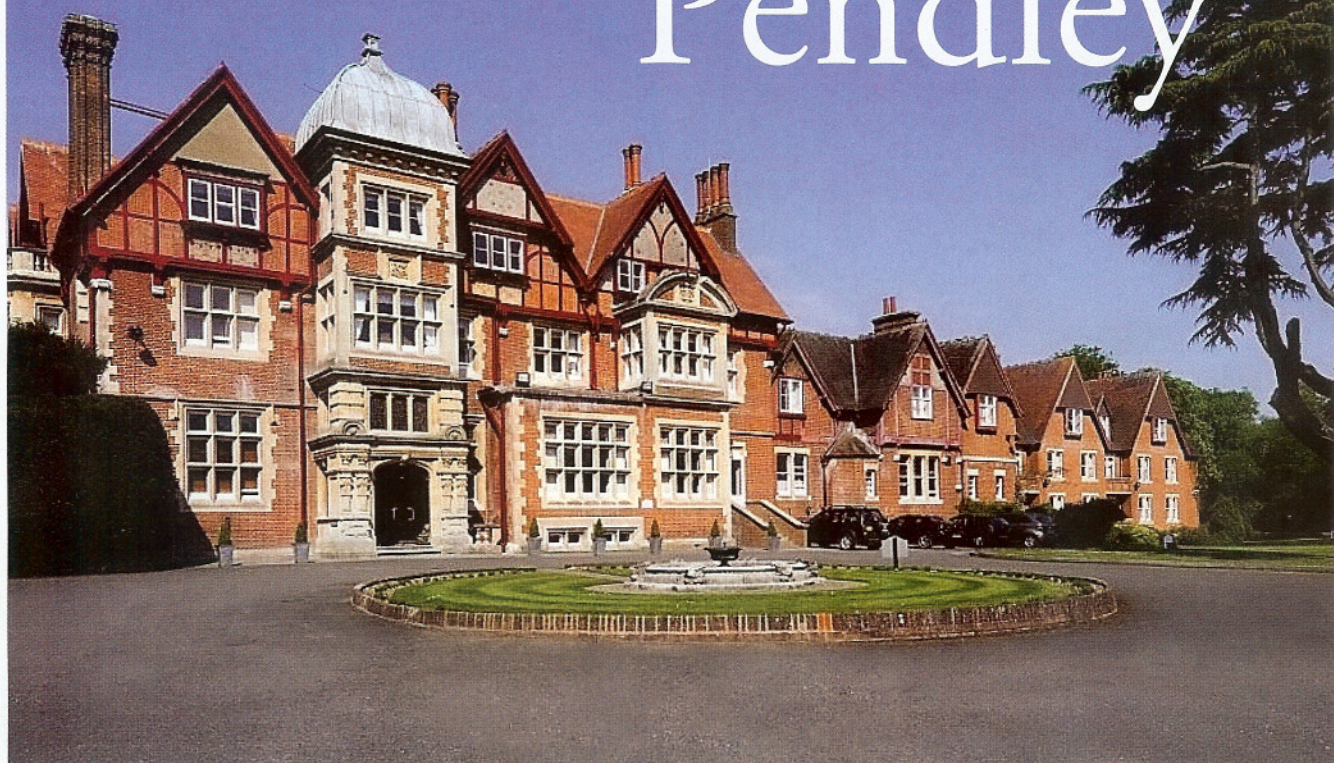


Historical estates: Pendley



From Ancient Britons to a BBC show jumping commentator, via ambitious medieval nobility, a great many people have shaped the Pendley we know today, as Bob Little discovers



FOR all I know, it may have been Dorian Williams who introduced peacocks to Pendley. For many years, he was the BBC's voice of televised showjumping and the owner of Pendley Manor, near Tring.

His last broadcast was in 1985, a few months before he died, aged 71. On his death, Pendley's Grade II listed country house and its 35 acres of grounds – most of it wooded parkland, patrolled fastidiously by a number of narcissistic and garrulous peacocks – passed into commercial hands and the manor house is now a four star hotel.

At a mere 140 years old, the current house is only the second in a line of manor houses which have been built on the ancient settlement of Pendley –

variously spelled, over the years, as Penley, Pendele and Pentlai.

Early days

The village is first recorded in the fourth century – bordered by the Roman Watling Street to the south; with the Icknield Way only half a mile to the north. As Roman rule in Britain faded, there is some evidence that a British tribe, under the kingship of Cynwyd, son of Cynfelin who was the youngest son of King Arthwys of the Pennines, moved into the area. Later, these people – then ruled by Cynwyd's son, Cadrod – changed their tribal name to 'Calchwynedd', taking their name from the area's chalk hills. Archaeological evidence suggests that Britons survived here until the seventh century.

The invading Anglo-Saxons took over the area at some point after 630AD. Eventually, these Chiltern Saxons – who were under Mercian rule – became subsumed into the West Saxons.

The last Saxon in charge of the Pendley area was a nun, called Eddeva. After the Norman Conquest – and certainly by 1086, when the Domesday Book was compiled – the manor was owned by Robert, Earl of Mortain. Among other things, he had been given ‘two hides of land in the manor’ as a reward for supporting his relation, the conquering William.

At that time, Pendley contained ‘one village with six smallholders who shared a plough and enough meadowland for one and a half ploughs’. The whole place was valued at 30 shillings – despite it being said to have been worth 40 shillings before 1066.

Lords of the manor

William de Bocland owned the manor at the beginning of the 13th century. On a partition of his manors, in

1218/19, Pendley went to one of his three daughters, Hawisia, who had married John de Bovill. Towards the middle of that century, the manor came into the possession of Roger, son of John de Messeworthe. Before 1290, it had passed to Adam Aignel. From Adam’s son, John, the manor went to Adam’s great-grandson, John – who died in 1361, leaving only an infant son (also called John). While still a minor, this John Aignel married the daughter of Sir John de la Hay.

By the beginning of the 15th century, the manor had passed to two of Sir John de la Hay’s daughters. Initially it was controlled by Joan, who married Walter Pain and, later, John Impey but, around 1414, Robert Whittingham – who had married de la Hay’s other daughter, Alice – fought a legal battle for the manor and won. Robert and Alice’s son, Robert and his wife, Agnes, inherited the manor in 1440.

Park life

It was this Robert Whittingham who, as

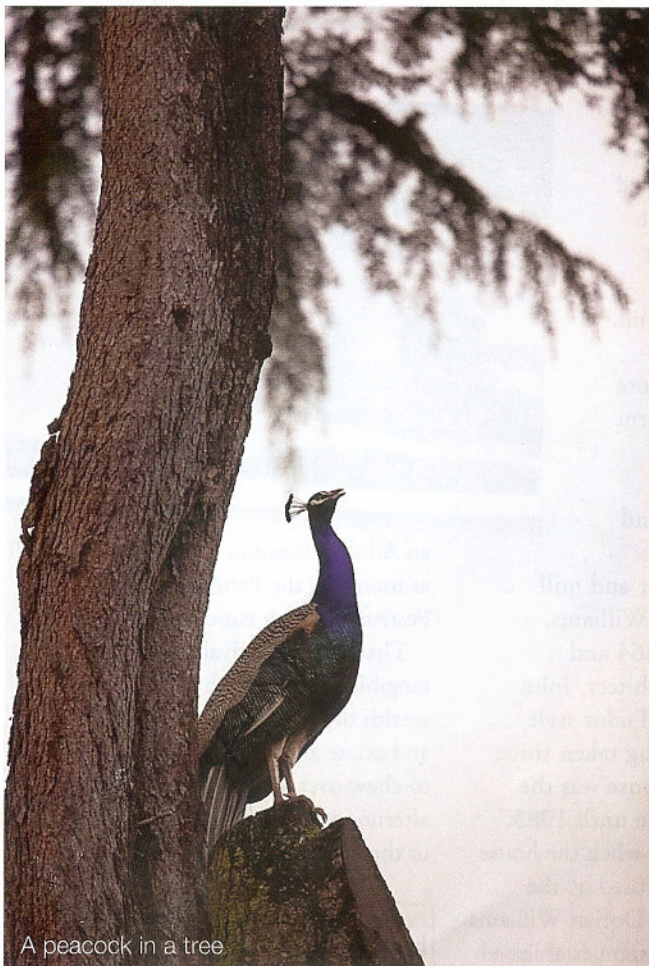
Sheriff of the county, obtained ‘free warren in the manor’ (allowing him to snare rabbits) and was granted a licence to enclose 200 acres in the parish for a park. This enabled him to destroy the town of Pendley to create a park and build the first manor house.

This trend – of enclosing areas in Hertfordshire as estates for large houses – had started around 1400. By 1485, there were some 40 substantial parks in Hertfordshire.

Whittingham’s house was noted for having a double courtyard. It was also reputed to have had a cloistered inner court, such as can be seen in contemporary buildings including Herstmonceux Castle, Ockwells and Eton College.

Whittingham’s manor house stood slightly to the east of the present house. That house burnt down in 1835 and no trace of it now survives.

Sadly Whittingham chose his royal allegiance unwisely – supporting Henry VI during the Wars of the Roses. Consequently, in 1461, Edward IV



A peacock in a tree



The manor's grand staircase

PENDLEY MANOR



LEFT TO RIGHT The reception area; back of Pendley; Pendley Manor postcard

granted the manor first to George, Bishop of Exeter; then to Thomas Montgomery; to Henry Bouchier, the Earl of Essex, and, in 1469, to George, Archbishop of York. When Edward IV fled to Flanders in 1470, Henry VI returned to the throne and re-instated Sir Robert Whittingham. By this time, his daughter and heiress, Margaret, had married John Verney and she succeeded to Pendley.

Their son, Ralph, inherited the manor and a succession of his heirs owned Pendley until Edmund Verney died, without heir, in 1558. The manor came to his third brother, who died but was survived by his second wife. She had persuaded him to divide the inheritance between her son, Edmund, and her stepson, Sir Francis – who later sold his share and went abroad.

In 1606/07, the rest of the manor was sold by Mary Verney to the Anderson family. They owned Pendley for the next four generations, after which it was inherited by the Harcourt family.

A new manor

It was Sir William Harcourt who abandoned the Manor in protest at the construction of the nearby London and Birmingham Railway and, it should also be said, because the ancient house and other buildings burnt down in 1835. The Harcourt family demolished the ruins and auctioned the site.

The local landowner and mill owner, Joseph Grout Williams, bought the land in 1864 and commissioned the architect, John Lion, to build a new Tudor style manor in 1872. Having taken three years to build, that house was the Williams' family home until 1983.

After World War II, when the house and grounds had been used by the Women's Land Army, Dorian Williams inherited Pendley. He soon established



an Adult Education Centre there, as well as founding the Pendley Shakespeare Festival – which continues to this day.

That annual festival provides a tangible link with the past but there's a wealth of hidden history at the house and estate at Pendley. That's something to chew over as you sample your afternoon tea or enjoy an evening meal in the house's Victorian splendour.

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