

## Wace Court

Ewelme News, Dec 2018-Jan 2019

On the site of Chaucer Court stood the largest and oldest manor in Ewelme established by a Norman dynasty named Wace. A succession of Wace Sir William's or Sir Gilbert's are recorded as lords holding a Knights fee to the King from the 1240s. One Sir William who died in 1309, is reputedly buried in the nave of the church, marked by an oblong stone with surrounding Lombardic script still visible - a relic from the earlier church called All Saints.



There remains in the nave of Ewelme Church (St. Mary the Virgin) a slab which marks the grave of one of the Wace Family. It is an oblong stone with surrounding Lombardic script still visible.

+ WIL .....E : GIST : IC[Y : DIE]V : DE : S[A :  
AL]ME :EIT : MERCI : [QVI : PO]VR : SA :  
ALME : PRIERA : C : IOVRS : DE : PARDOVY :  
AVERA

WILL ... E LIES HERE. GOD HAVE MERCY ON  
HIS SOUL. HE WHO SHALL PRAY FOR HIS  
SOUL, SHALL HAVE A HUNDRED DAYS  
PARDON

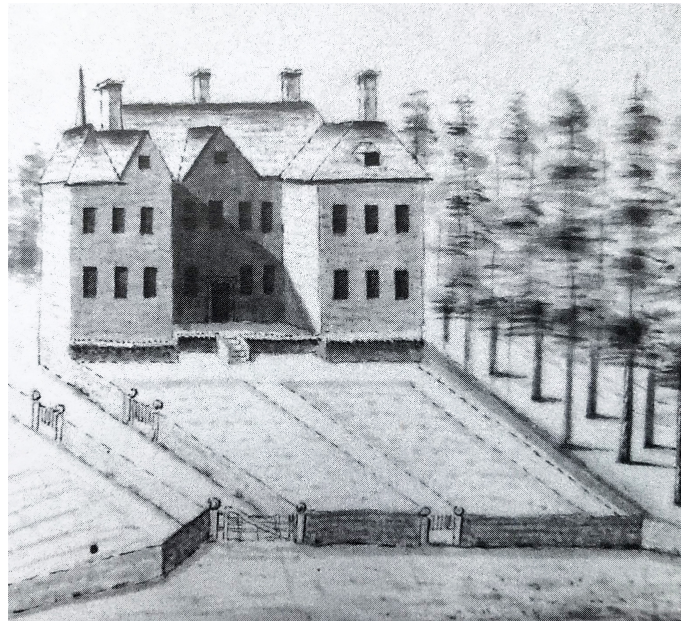
This is thought to be a relic from the earlier church called All Saints. It is probably that of Sir William Wace who died in 1309. It is thought that Thomas Chaucer left the slab when he was remodelling the church into St Mary's. Thomas Chaucer had bought Wace Court Manor from Sir Gilbert Wace in 1397. Sir Gilbert Wace (died 1409) was still alive at the time of the church re-building.

The last Sir Gilbert Wace (obit 1409) conveyed the lands and Wace Court Manor to Thomas Chaucer in 1397 for a £20 life annuity. With the subsequent building of the Chaucer/de la Pole Manor further down the hill, Wace Court ceased to be the largest manor house for over a century.

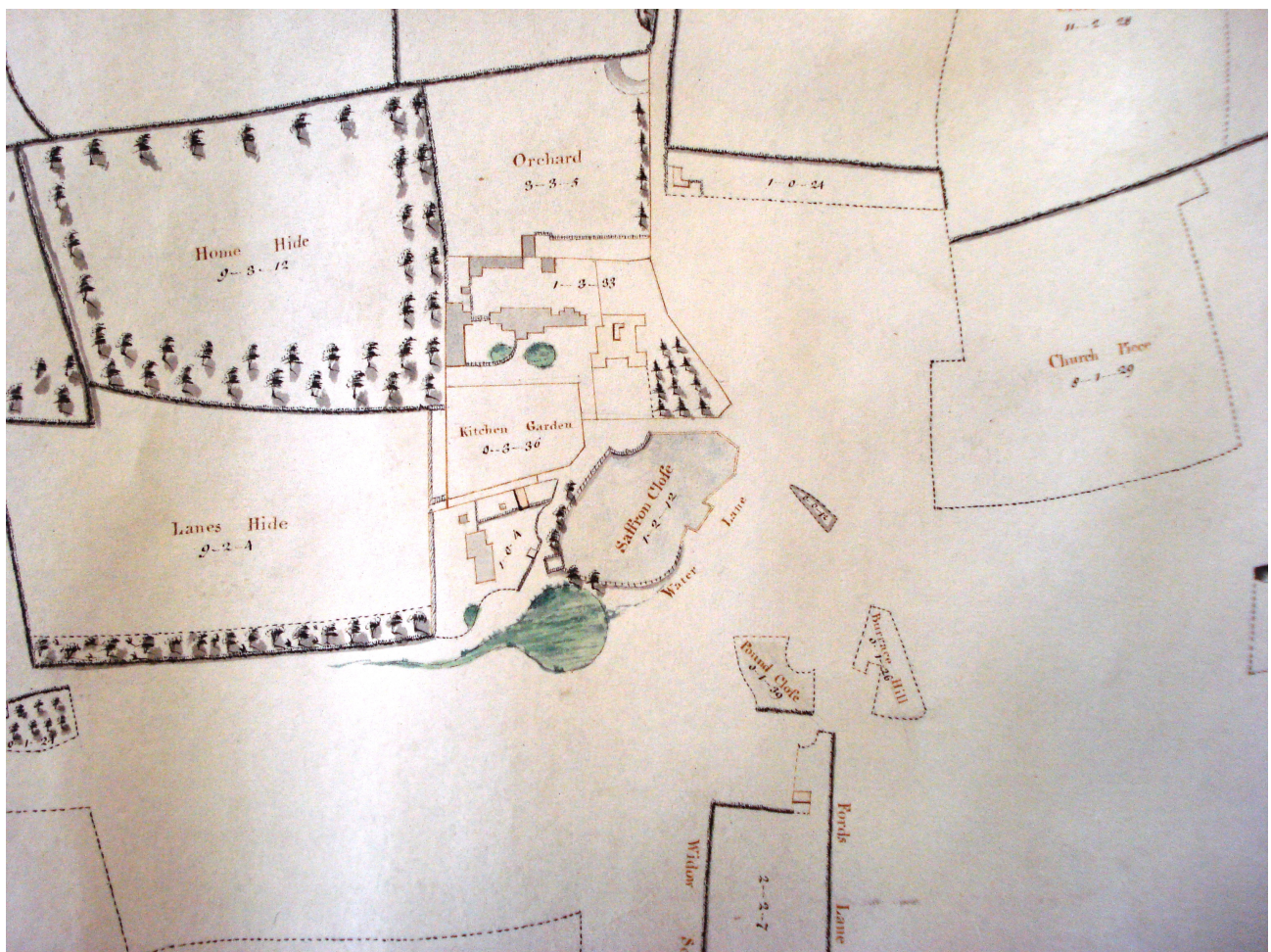
In 1501 the de la Pole estates were forfeited to the Crown. Henry VIII and Elizabeth I sporadically visited their former Manor house, whilst Wace Court was leased to prominent Tudor courtiers. One was Sir Henry Norris, who lost his head in 1536 (falsely accused of adultery with Queen Anne Boleyn!) Wace Court regained the largest manor house distinction after 1613, when the de la Pole Manor had been completely demolished. In that year, it included a – *‘six bay dwelling house, five and six bay barns, a stable, a dovecot, brewhouse and gatehouse.’*

From c.1650, Westcourt, as Wace Court had become known, was owned by Colonel Francis Martyn, the Parliamentarian soldier who saved the church from desecration in the Civil War. Colonel Martyn largely rebuilt Westcourt and in 1662 it was taxed on a vast 19 hearths! (A sizeable house would perhaps have 5 and most had only 1!) When he died in 1682 the estate covered c 1,265 acres, half of it Enclosed – being the largest landholding in Ewelme leased to tenant farmers. The house itself was described as *‘a new brick house with a well planted walled garden, three great barns, six stables, a*

*pigeon house and two yards surrounded by farm buildings.’ A drawing dated 1764 shows the size of the house facing south which was described as “‘H’ shaped of 2 storeys and attics, opening to a forecourt garden. The central hall flanked by projecting parlours and dressing rooms with services around a rear courtyard and barns and cottages in two large yards to the west’.*



**Drawing of Wace Court 1764**



**The 1764 Map referred to above.**

A 1764 site map, shows that the existing flint and stone barn, once known as Cherrills Barn, was already built (now converted to three dwellings), and also the cart shed, (now the Cart House). Remnants of the old stone farm walls remain on the western boundary of [Cherrills] barn, and to the southwest side and frontage of The Hyde. The late Elizabethan cottage called The Mount, is shown as being seemingly attached to the barn extending towards Westcourt. Also indicated are two fairly large ponds, probably its fish ponds. (The larger one could be the remains of the 'well' that swallowed half a digger when building Chaucer Court. Tony Leathem, whose family were the last to live at The Mount before it was demolished, remembers a spinney on the site with a 'well' where running water could be heard, and a sheep dip - maybe on the site of the smaller pond behind the cart shed).

After Francis Martyn died in 1682, Westcourt was occupied by a succession of wealthy gentry, the last of whom was a Catholic Dissenter, the flamboyant Sir Hildebrand Jacob Bt. He planted an avenue of Lime trees extending along the existing Hyde bridleway to Eyres Lane along which, according to legend, he was driven in his carriage and four. After Jacob died in 1790 the house became a boarding school for young ladies run by Anna Mason (later Kirby). (An intriguing mention is of the Curate, Rev John Halse taking up the cause of Anna Kirby when she was accused of adultery!)

Following Mrs Kirby's enterprise. James Garlick took over Westcourt and adjacent premises to establish a boy's boarding school. The 1841 Census records James and his wife Elizabeth lived at The Mount with their 6 children and 4 domestic servants. Of the 48 boarding pupils, 25 lived at Westcourt and 23 boarded in another nearby dwelling, with an additional 5 adults of various ages and occupations. After James died in 1843 Elizabeth carried on running the boarding school until her death in 1875, after which Westcourt was demolished.



The Mount became the home of the Cherrill family, the long serving village carriers, who kept their horses and carts in the surrounding agricultural buildings - the last Cherrill carrier died in 1938. The Mount was demolished in 1965 and the subsequent modern site development of Chaucer Court was begun. Remnants of The Mount remained as a rear garden excavation at No 1 Chaucer Court uncovered a 'floor' of cobblestones. Tony Leathem believes they are part of the drive leading up to The Mount. Also, a rare Elizabeth I three farthing coin dated 1577 was unearthed nearby. What other treasures lie buried under the Chaucer Court development? Given the site's antiquity, it is regrettable no professional investigations were made before the bulldozers moved in.

*Ewelme Village Archive*