

History of Saffron House

This house has had several names in the last two centuries, Ewelme House, unnamed but on the Hill, Ivy House/Ivy Bank (an old photograph shows the entire front covered in ivy), Saffron Close and now Saffron House.



Saffron House is on the left.

It was called Ewelme House when owned by the Rudge family and it has an intriguing connection to the old Manor house. Edward Rudge Snr had bought Ewelme 'Palace' in 1817 from the Ewelme Trust. He and his son Edward, demolished much of the accommodation range building and remodelled the remainder into the Manor we see today. A 1907 document by Charles Rudge confirms that his grandfather took surplus material, including bricks and stone slabs from the 'Palace' site *'to form the foundations and walls in the garden'* of Ewelme House, which he also owned. There is a carved stone set into the garden, which is also thought to have come up from the Palace site.

The Rudge's lived in the Manor and rented Ewelme House. Until her death in January 1844, the house was rented by Lady Taunton, the aunt of Blanche Hawkins, whose story as Blanche Lush is told elsewhere. In her 1843 diary, of Lady Taunton mentions *'dining with the Rudge family'* so would have known the relevant history. A descendent of the Lush family visited from Auckland, New Zealand, and disclosed there was a family story that *"flagstones from Ewelme 'Palace' were laid in Ewelme House."*

It could be that after 1868 when the Manor was sold to the Ewelme Trust that the Rudge family took back possession of Ewelme House, as a third generation Edward Rudge who died in 1881 is recorded living there.

Lawyer and Barrister Frederick Dunstan and his wife Louisa lived in the house during the 1880's. Their 8-month-old baby son died in December 1882, but another son was baptised in August the

following year, and another in December 1884. A daughter was baptised in July 1886. An unlikely connection to the Dunstan's came from Barry and Arlene West, stamp collectors from Florida. They had acquired the envelope for the stamp but were intrigued as it contained a letter dated 26th April 1888 addressed to 'Frederick Dunstan Esq., Ewelme, Wallingford, Berkshire'. Such obscure address necessitated research into Dunstan's professional links, and after 6 months of emailing we could narrow it down to the British Library. Their records again showed no house name, but Dunstan was recorded as being a 'freeholder of premises with coach house, stabling and gardens, near the church.' As the occupants of other large houses 'near the church' were known, it seemed Saffron House was the likely address. Barry and Arlene West visited Ewelme in 2007, 'reposting' the letter through the front door and donated it to the archive. The stabling and coach house buildings were later confirmed on a 1878 map, by memories by wartime evacuees and a future owner Catherine Hare.

Between the Dunstan's leaving and the purchase by the Maxwell family the house was occupied by an elderly lady. The 1891 census records The Hill, Ann Casemore 82, living on her own means.

1891 13-Aug 06-Aug Casemore Ann 83

It was sold at the end of the 19th century to the Maxwell family. Catherine (1842-1926) and her sister Beatrice (1861-1945). It seems this is when it was renamed Saffron House, a name on old maps for the property extending to the pond. The Maxwell men had a strong military history. Cedric Maxwell (1854-1901) was a Lt Colonel in the British Army and was the brother of Lt General Sir Ronald Charles Maxwell (1852-1924).

Cedric died in the Boer War.

MAXWELL – Lieut-Colonel Cedric – Royal Engineers

Died after fall from horse at Rouxville. 20th May 1901. Aged 46. Son of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles F. Maxwell (82nd Foot). Born July 1854. Served Afghanistan 1878 (medal, MID), Zhob Valley 1884.

The Reredos in St Johns Chapel was donated by the Maxwell's to his memory.

After Catherine died in 1926 Beatrice lived on in the house and in World War II handed it over for use by the Air Ministry and went elsewhere for the duration. The Knowles family arrived in Ewelme from Liverpool when Corporal George Knowles was stationed at RAF Benson. They initially lived at The Lamb with the Dymond's until it was demolished in 1942. They then moved with widowed Granny Dymond and her family to Saffron Close. The Knowles children Eric and Carole enjoyed their time there, playing in the old coach house in the garden (they remembered derelict horse drawn vehicles). The original driveway was accessed on Parsons Lane – where The Courtyard is now built. At Ewelme school they made lifelong friends and often returned. Their memoirs are in the archive. The families of two RAF officers were also billeted there, joined by widowed Granny Dymond and her family after The Lamb Inn was demolished in May 1942. This arrangement had its benefits, as the presence of the officers ensured that an airman from the camp came daily to pump up the domestic water into the roof storage tank.

Beatrice Maxwell died in August 1945 aged 84.

The Rowse family occupied Saffron House with Anthony and Barbara Rowse recorded at Saffron Close in 1951. The garden stretched towards to the Street and was utilised for the building of a Rowse Honey factory. This operated until the late 1980's.

Professor Mervyn Hare and his wife Catherine followed the Rowse's and lived at Saffron House for many decades. They hosted John Webster, the curator of Ewelme Cottage who visited from Auckland and were photographed in the garden, and Catherine met the West's from Florida in 2007.

The Maxwells were a large family. Lt. Col. Charles Francis Maxwell born 1806 in London married Thomasina Ionia Hankey in 1839. They had the following children:

- Admiral William Henry Maxwell 1841-1919
- Catherine Jane Maxwell 1842-1926
- Mary Jane Maxwell 1845-
- Florence Maxwell 1847-1929
- Lt. Frederick Thomson Maxwell 1849-1881
- Cmdr Everard Ellison Maxwell 1851-1892
- Maj-Gen Ronald Charles Maxwell KCB KC 1852-1924
- Lt. Col. Cedric Maxwell 1854-1901
- Maj. Nigel Maxwell 1856-1945
- Revd. Gerald Spiers Maxwell MA 1858-1915
- Beatrice Maxwell 1861-1945
- Aymer Claud Maxwell 1863-1947

The 1991 Census records the house being Ivy Bank

- Beatrice Maxwell 39 being the head
- Ethel Maxwell 40 her sister in law
- A Cook
- And 2 servants

Ethel Mary nee Allen 1860-1954 was the widow of Everard Ellison Maxwell.

Burials in St Mary's Ewelme

1926	16-Dec	12-Dec	Maxwell	Catherine Jane	84		
1945	14-Aug		Maxwell	Beatrice	84		
1951	12-Oct	09-Oct	Maxwell	Emily Mary	81	West Malling, Kent	Wife of Ronald Charles obit 1924