

The History of Bachelor's Mead, Horton, Bishops Cannings

Bachelor's Mead, is a Wiltshire property which has sat in the heart of the village of Horton from the middle of the 1300s when Edward III was King of England and the Black Death was spreading through the nation. The house still retains original timber crucks dated to around 1350, along with segments of wattle and daub, a timber fireplace and a large double storey living room that was formerly used as the village school room.

The house has been through a number of transformations from when it was first built - as an open medieval hall with an open fire in the centre of the house and the smoke escaping through the thatch. When the house was built, Horton belonged to the Bishops of Sarum and the occupants of the house were most likely agricultural labourers.

By the 1590s we know the house was in the hands of a **John Unwyn** and passed down through members of his family until it was sold to **Symon Ruddle** in 1651. The records also reveal the occupant of the house, which is often difficult to discover, and in 1653 Bachelor's Mead was home to **George Ruddle**, believed to be Symon Ruddle's nephew. It was during this period that a number of extensions and alterations were made to the house, including the addition of the upper floor with a bedroom and the insertion of the first chimney.

By the beginning of the Georgian period, the house was sold to **Michael Cooke** by Symon Ruddle's son. It then proceeded to pass through members of the Cooke family until the 1760s when the house and grounds were sold to **George Willy**, lord of the manor of Bishops Cannings. After Willy died in 1762 the property passed to his brother-in-law, **Prince Sutton**, husband of **Mary Willy**.

By the 1780s, land tax records show the property had passed to Prince and Mary's son, **James Sutton**, the house being occupied by **James Hitchcock**. However, within a few years the occupant had become **William Skeate** who continued at 'Batchelor's' until 1800 when the recorded occupant was William's son, **James Skeate**. It was at this time that the ownership of the house passed to James Sutton's son-in-law, **Thomas Grimston Bucknall Estcourt**, MP for the University of Oxford. A survey of the estate, taken in 1805, clearly labels the house as 'Cooke's Homestead House' (passed down from the Cooke family in the 1700s) and the house and surrounding land known simply as 'Cooke's or Batchelors'. By the 1820s the occupant of the house was **Thomas Brown**, who became a significant landowner in Horton and Bishops Cannings and was later recorded with extensive landholdings and living in Horton House nearby.

During the reign of William IV the house and land was owned by **Thomas Henry Sutton Bucknall Estcourt**, son of **Thomas Estcourt**. Thomas was MP for Devizes and in 1839 he gained a royal license to change his name to **Thomas Sotheron**, in accordance with the will of his father-in-law, Admiral **Frank Sotheron**.

As Queen Victoria was starting her long reign, the records in the 1840s show the

owner of Bachelor's was **Thomas H.S.B. Sotheron** and it was occupied by **Thomas Bishop**. The 1851 census reveals more details about the Bishop family with Thomas Bishop recorded as 74 years old and 'pauper agricultural labourer'. He was in the house with his 25 year old son, **Simon Bishop** and Simon's wife, 24 year old **Diana Bishop**.



Batchelors Mead c2010

In 1858, Thomas Sotheron sold his estates in Horton and the surrounding area to the Crown and by the time of the 1861 census the head of the house was Thomas Bishop's son, Simon. The census shows that Simon had re-married and was living in the house with his second wife, **Mary Bishop** and four stepchildren, along with his own daughter, **Sarah Bishop**, all under the age of 11. It was at this time that Mary Bishop was recorded as 'School Mistress' and she ran a small school at Bachelor's Mead for the local children. It was at this time that the house was extended with the large double height room and lead-light window to be used as a school room.

Simon and Mary Bishop continued to live at Bachelor's Mead during the 19th century and it was only at the time of the 1910 Valuation and the 1911 census that new occupants were living in the house. The 1911 census recorded the house as 'The Old School House' and it was home to **Frederick Hughes**, his wife **Winifred Hughes** and their three year old daughter, **Gladys Hughes**.

From the 1930s until the 1970s, Bachelor's Mead was the home of thatcher **Herbert Grant**, his wife Emily Grant and their four children. When the new owners, the **Michelmores** family, moved into the house they set about restoring and renovating it to conserve the unique historic features, while also making it a comfortable family home.

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