

A Brief History of Goldingtons

The medieval manor of Goldingtons existed before the Conquest (1066), and was reputedly granted by King Offa (757 -796) to the Abbey of St Albans.

The name Goldingtons is recorded from the mid-13th century when a Peter de Goldington held land here. In 1520, when the manor was conveyed to a John Baldwin, it was described as “Goldyntons in Sarratt”. The Baldwins held the title to the manor until 1583 when it was acquired by William Kingsley, who in 1538 had acquired the adjacent manor of Rooshall, there is a monument to him and his wife on the south wall of the chancel of the Church of Holy Cross.

There has been a dwelling on the Goldingtons site for hundreds of years and the origin of the present house is thought to be from 1500, presumably erected by the Baldwin family, although there is little evidence of this dwelling, save for some elements of the cellars.

The current house dates back to mid-1700, and is shown in a drawing by George Henry Oldfield made between 1785 and 1805 (source Hertfordshire Topography). It is possible to identify Holy Cross in the background on the right-hand side of the picture, but the front of the house itself appears to face in the wrong direction, looking down the valley rather than south east as is the case today. While we can only surmise, it looks like the drawing is either a composite to show the Chess Valley and the front of the house together or the artist got confused when he came to draw it up in the studio from his sketches!

What is clear is that the house was only two stories high and brick built with a hipped roof behind a parapet wall, in the Palladian style which was popular with the Georgians and is normally dated to 1750-60. There is an interesting tower or “tall lantern” topped with a cross on the roof of the single-story service range. The drawing also shows the house to have been connected to outbuildings of classical design by high garden walls.

While it’s hard to know what the grounds at Goldingtons were like, the 1766 map of Hertfordshire shows serpentine paths cut through wilderness areas adjacent to the walled gardens, and a Ha Ha” (a ditch 2m or more in depth) to separate the lawns from the adjoining parkland. There are also small ornamental enclosures which are presumed to be for deer (source Parks and Gardens of West Hertfordshire). This would be consistent with the Georgians evolving taste for informal landscapes.



'Goldingtons, Sarratt. The seat of Sir David Williams Bart.', watercolour by George Henry Oldfield, between c.1785 and 1805; note the tower of the Church of the Holy Cross to the right of the house

Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies

The house was extensively remodelled between 1820 and 1840. It was raised by a storey, stuccoed, re-roofed in slate at a low pitch with eaves and much altered internally. The entrance portico was redesigned with four paired Greek Doric columns which was very fashionable at the time – often called the “Greek Revival.”

A letting advertisement for the property in 1844 described it as having:

“a spacious dining room, drawing room, and library, with convenient kitchen and scullery, housekeepers’ room, butler’s pantry, dairy, wash-house and other offices. On the first floor there are eight bedrooms and five servants’ rooms, on the second floor six bedrooms. There are attached a coach house and excellent stabling with productive gardens, orchards and pleasure grounds”.

The last major change occurred in the middle of the 1880s when a wing for servants – the service range – was added. This contained a school room and a bigger kitchen.

Since William Kingsley in the mid 1550s Goldingtons has had many different owners, some of whom have monuments or gravestones at the Church of Holy Cross.

In the mid-1700s it was owned by Sir Gilbert Williams the vicar of Sarratt, passing to his son, grandson and finally great- granddaughter. She lived only briefly at Goldingtons and for many years from then onwards the house and grounds were rented out to a varied collection of residents including three Baronets (in the period 1737 to 1883), two MPs, a bankrupt paper manufacturer and a newspaper proprietor, eventually being acquired in 1883 by Thomas Clutterbuck of Micklefield Hall. Peter Clutterbuck, his son, chose to live in Goldingtons and the Clutterbucks owned the estate until 1977.

The meadows, orchards and arable land around the house appear to have been rented and farmed by local farmers. For example, in 1840 Henry Dawes and James Males of Green End Farm, were working the land between them. Sidney Brazier, a Watford based farmer bought the estate from the Clutterbucks, selling the house and retaining the land and stables for 10 years. In 1987, the barns, stables and certain fields were reunited with the house while other fields were sold to local farmers.

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