

Madeley Court No.5

Madeley Court stands in a little valley to the north of Madeley, separated from the main part of the town by well forested pit mounds. The architecture of the house dates from the middle ages and its history goes back beyond that.

In the 8th century St. Milburga is said to have bought the estate at Madeley from Sigward a follower of King Ethelbald of Mercia, and it remained a possession of the priory she founded at Wenlock until 1540 when it passed to the Crown. A survey of the Madeley estate in 1379 mentions the capital messuage, a watermill, fisheries, three carrucates of land, three acres of meadow and the grazing of the park land. The house with its demesne lands seems to have been a grange of the priory as well as the administrative centre of the manor.

The last prior, John Bayley surrendered the priory and its estates to the commissioners of Henry VIII in 1540, but was allowed to retire to Madeley Court until his death in 1554. Ten years earlier, however, in 1544 the estate had been sold to Robert Brooke, a native of Claverley and a prominent London lawyer. He became Speaker of the House of Commons and Chief Justice of Common Pleas in 1554 and was knighted in 1555. On his death in 1558 Madeley descended to his son John and then to John's son Basil in 1598. Basil Brooke was a leading English Catholic who was knighted in 1604. He was also a prominent industrialist, with works in the Forest of Dean as well as in Madeley, and a strong royalist until his death in the late 1640s. Brooke's industrial activities, which were carried on after his death by his son left the estate encumbered with debt.

In 1705 Comberford Brooke sold Madeley Court and some of the manorial demesne to Mathias Astley of Tamhome in Staffordshire for £5,400. The Astleys did not live in the house but leased it to various tenants. Abraham Darby I leased it in 1712 while a new house was being built for him in Coalbrookdale but in 1717 he spent one night in his barely finished new house, became ill and died after returning to Madeley Court.

Other tenants followed Darby, mostly farmers who leased the surrounding land. The last descendant of Mathias Astley who owned the estate was Mary Dyott, who died in 1826. James Foster, a Stourbridge ironmaster bought it in 1828 perhaps intending to live in the house, but mainly for the exploitation of the minerals under the land.

In the 1840s extensive mining operations began and Foster built three furnaces nearby. The house began to fall into disrepair and this was accelerated by the removal of panelling from various rooms to another of Foster's homes. Part of the house became used for an agricultural store.

Pit waste began to mount up and the whole landscape was altered. The original fish ponds which had also served as a mill pond were filled up with slag, and the Washbrook was diverted to form the ponds to the north of the house. The pit mounds have now become so well afforested that they seem to have always been there, and the old mill looks quite out of place beside them.

In the present century the estate was sold to the tenant farmer, Mr. C.J. Barnett, and it remained with his family until it was sold to Dawley (now Telford) Development Corporation in 1964.

Architecturally, Madeley Court is a mixture of many different styles and periods. Parts of the building date from the medieval period but much of the present house was built by the Brooke family. The medieval hall range is to the north, against the present pond and there is a late 16th or 17th century wing on the east side. Archaeological excavations have uncovered the foundations of another western range, which suggests that the 17th century house was U-shaped.

Unmistakably 13th century features still exist in the windows and doorways of the main range, particularly in a basement level door on the north side.

The porch and gatehouse added in the late 16th or early 17th century appear to be by the same architect. The gatehouse consists of what was originally a central archway, now filled in, flanked by polygonal towers. Both the porch and gatehouse are decorated with similar roundels carved from a single stone bearing stylistic designs of roses, crosses, etc.

By the mid-20th century all the buildings at Madeley Court were in a very derelict condition and becoming more dilapidated all the time. In 1973, Telford Development Corporation announced plans for the restoration of Madeley Court to mark the New Town's 10th birthday, and this extensive work is now well underway.

