

Oxfordshire

THE ORIGINS OF FRIAR PARK

Unlike Badgemore, Henley Park or Fawley Court, the Friar Park estate is a creation of the 19th century. In 1842-3 (the date of the Henley tithe award), the lands which were later included in the Park were divided among several local landowners, including Frederick Hodges of Bolney Court, E.F. Maitland of Park Place, and Charles Lane of Badgemore. The land was entirely agricultural, and there were no buildings.

Part of the land was sold for development before 1866, when a newly published *Guide to Henley* noted that

Friar's Park, near Badgemore, was in 1866 divided into plots suitable for building detached villas, some of which were at once commenced.

This was a time when Henley's reputation as a social centre and inland resort was burgeoning, partly on the back of the Regatta, and suburban house building was developing apace. The reference confirms that the name Friar Park predates Sir Frank Crisp and his punning architectural references to medieval friars by several decades. One of the fields in the area was called Friar's Field by 1842, probably recalling the surname of an unknown owner or farmer.

Two houses appear to have been built around 1866, one of them called Friar Park (on the site of the existing building), and the other, a little further east, called Friars Field. Both were shown on the first large-scale Ordnance Survey map of 1879, though neither were on the scale of the existing building. By then there was a 'lodge' on the site of the present-day Middle Lodge, though nothing on the site of Top Lodge or Lower Lodge. The 1871 census shows Friars Field House occupied by Lieutenant-Colonel Hew Dalrymple Fanshawe and his family.

In 1889 the London lawyer Sir Frank Crisp bought Friar Park from the Revd J. Collard, as related a few years later by Emily Climençon in her *Guide to Henley-on-Thames* (published 1896):

'Mr Crisp pulled down the whole of the original house, with the exception of a few walls, and the present splendid mansion was built in French Renaissance style, with Gothic details. The architect was Mr M. Clarke Edwards. The stonework of the outside of the house is exquisitely carried out. The hall is a vast apartment, with galleries running round it; panels of the flowers for every month in the year are carved on them. The whole of the wood-carving was executed by the School of Art, from the designs of Mr Carr.'

The description implies that the house had been complete for some time, and as Crisp was living at Friar Park by 1891, most of the building work may have been completed in 1889-90. Part of the initial landscaping was probably also completed by then. An engraving of the house and terrace garden (with fountain) was included in H.E. Milner's *Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening* in 1890, and a *Country Life* article in 1905 implies that the gardens were created around 1890, although their full development was the work of decades. The 1899 Ordnance Survey map shows both house and park in a

fully recognisable form, with all three lodges in place. The second house (Friar Field) was by then long gone.

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