

Audleys Wood



AUDLEYS WOOD, BASINGSTOKE.

Photo: c.1930 showing the 1900 extension, a conservatory-ballroom with bay windows.

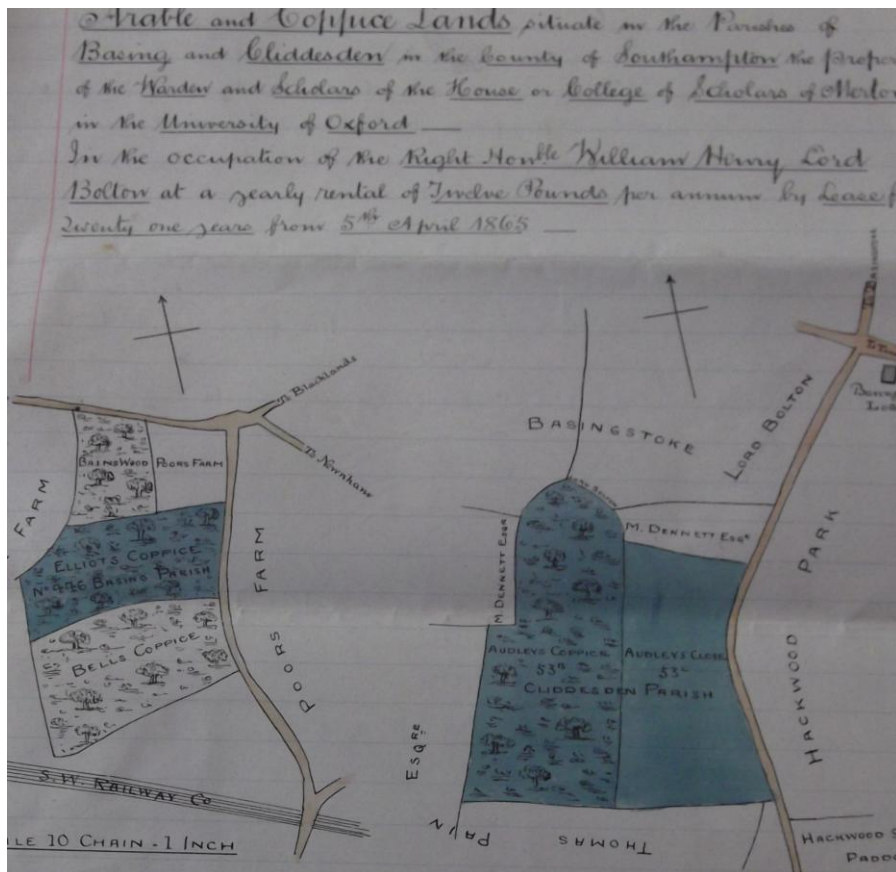
This large Victorian country house was built sometime after 1880 when Thomas Pain, a director of Tattersalls, the bloodstock auctioneers, purchased the leasehold lands of Audley's Close and Audley's Coppice from Merton College, Oxford.¹ Thomas Pain lived in *The Grove*, a house to the north-west of Audleys Wood, and this purchase added to his land holdings in the area.² A local benefactor, supporting the Basingstoke Cottage Hospital amongst other charities,³ he died at *The Grove* in 1885 but was described as 'late of *Audleys House*'.⁴

¹HRO, 11M49/E/B6/12

² HRO. 11M49/E/B6/12

³ HRO, 8M62/6.

⁴ HRO, 5M62/22 p.844.



HRO, 11M49/E/B6/12. Sale details showing Thomas Pain's existing land holdings, November 1880.

How much of the present Audleys Wood house was built for him and how much for William Bradshaw, the succeeding owner, is uncertain. William Bradshaw's time at Audleys Wood was marred by a tragic riding accident that killed his wife.⁵ The east window in St Leonard's church, Cliddesden commemorates [Isabella] Floretta [Burdon] Bradshaw and is dedicated by her mother, whilst William Bradshaw paid for the major extension of the church undertaken in 1890 as a memorial to his late wife.⁶

The house, built of red brick with stone dressings, the upper part with hung tiling and with tiled roofs, was designed in a Neo Gothic-cum-Vernacular

⁵ Hants & Berks Gazette 12 October 1889. See Assets.

⁶ Pevsner, *North Hampshire*, p.226.

Revival style.⁷ The whole building is highly irregular and has many reused fittings inside redolent of an earlier age.



The covered entrance, a two storey porte-cochère, with wooden oriel window above.
Photo: D. Reavell

A 1930 sale catalogue for the ‘Highly Attractive and Valuable Freehold Country Estate known as *Audleys Wood*, Basingstoke’ described the accommodation as follows:

The entrance to the house is through a fifteenth-century, traceried, nail-studded door opening into a large hall with an early eighteenth-century staircase. The dining room and drawing room are both completely paneled in seventeenth-century old dark oak, the dining room with oak frieze, both rooms with elaborately carved mantels over the fireplaces and with incorporated paintings. The suite of reception rooms is completed by a billiards room, a sunny morning room and a large conservatory-ball room. On the first floor are eleven bedrooms, two of which double as day or night nurseries, dressing rooms, a wardrobe room, three bathrooms, housemaids’ cupboards and closet and a linen

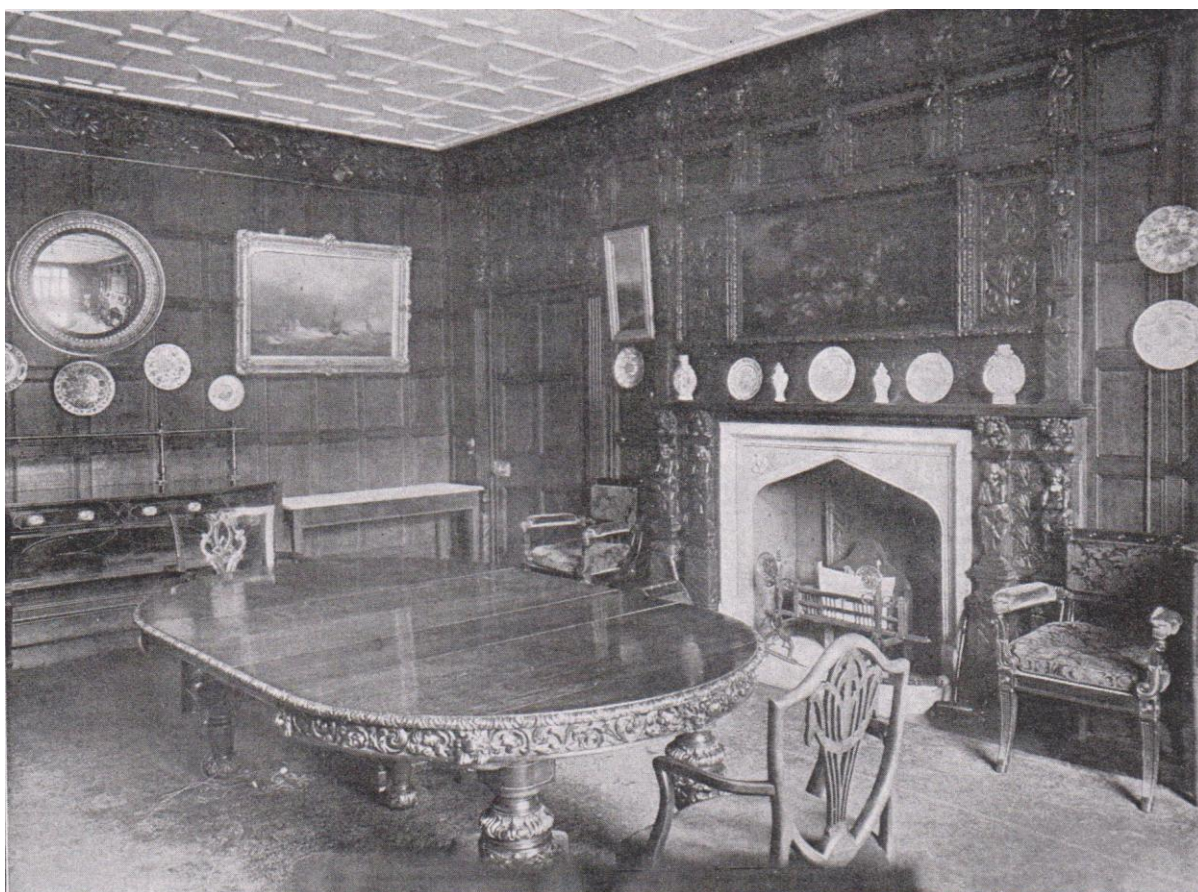
⁷ The National Heritage List for England (<http://english-heritage.org.uk/>) List No. 1092713, Audley’s Wood, Cliddesden, accessed 10.8.2014.

room. The attic floor has eight bedrooms, some with fireplaces and others with slow combustion stoves.⁸



The Entrance Hall c. 1930

⁸ HRO, 68M72/DDZ17.



The Dining Room c. 1930

The conservatory-ball room at the rear of the house was an addition made by H.A.Simmonds who purchased the estate in c.1900.⁹ Henry Adolphus Simonds (1823-1910) was chairman of Simonds Brewery of Reading, an old established family business. Childless, Henry Adolphus made his great-nephew Louis de Luze Simonds (1852-1916) his heir and Louis, with his wife Mary Elizabeth, joined him at Audleys Wood.¹⁰

Designed in the form of Roman baths, this elaborate and unusual room had three circular bay windows, stone and brick walls with an iron and glass roof and a minstrels' gallery ¹¹ Large balls were held there, including an annual

⁹ Kelly's *Directory of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, 1903.

¹⁰ Simonds family (c.1768-1960), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/96984, accessed 4 July 2014

¹¹ Pevsner, *Hampshire North*, p. 227



The Conservatory-Ball Room c. 1930

Servants' ball.¹² Outside were pleasure grounds and three grass tennis courts. This was a sporting estate and, in addition, Louis de Luze Simonds held sporting rights over Hatch Warren Farm, Manor Farm, Church Farm and Swallick Farm.¹³

Whilst Hackwood Park and Farleigh House were near-by, Audleys Wood was the only gentry house, other than the rectory, in Cliddesden parish. It was a source of employment for local people with seven resident servants in 1901¹⁴ and, presumably, numerous daily staff.

In 1930, after the death of Mary Simonds, the house was put on the market and,

¹² Cliddesden W.I., 1965, see Asset.

¹³ HRO, 68M72/DDR15.

¹⁴ Cliddesden Census, 1901.

whilst unoccupied for a time, by 1935 Frederick A. Simonds (Eric) eldest son of Louis and Mary was living there.¹⁵

At the start of World War II, Eric Simonds moved to Mortimer and leased Audleys Wood to Lord Camrose who had given his Hackwood Park estate to the Royal Canadian army to be used as a military hospital.¹⁶ Proprietor and editor-in-chief of the Daily Telegraph, Lord Camrose entertained many public figures at Audleys Wood between 1939 and 1945.¹⁷ The Simonds family returned after the war, remaining until 1951 when the estate was broken up, with Pensdell Farm and much of the land sold as separate lots.¹⁸



William Ewert Berry, 1st Viscount Camrose.

Photo: Howard Coster, 1939. NPG 10258.

¹⁵ Kelly's *Directory of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, 1931, 1935.

¹⁶ www.friendsofwillis.hampshire.org.uk/story_of_hackwood.htm accessed 12 August, 2014.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ HRO, 5M70/3.

With the passing of the National Assistance Act 1948, local authorities were required ‘to provide residential accommodation for persons who, by reason of age, illness, disability or any other circumstances, are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available to them’.¹⁹ Hampshire County Council’s Welfare Department initiated a programme of purchasing large houses, many of which were no longer proving viable for their owners to maintain; the new, domestic, surroundings were in sharp contrast to the previous Poor Law institutions. Audleys Wood was acquired in 1951 as a Home for some fifty elderly people from the Basingstoke area.²⁰ Visiting from the town was fairly easy for relatives and the residents enjoyed not only the pleasant architecture of the house, which had many nooks and crannies as well as grand rooms, but also the equally attractive grounds.



Dining Room at Audleys Wood, 1960,

Photo: A. Purrington for HCC.

¹⁹ 11 & 12 George 6, c.29: Part III, s.21a, National Assistance Act 1948.

²⁰ HRO, 57M71; H/SS1/1, H/SS/2. H/SS1/3.

Reports of a fire that broke out in the kitchen one Sunday afternoon, 22 March 1964, give interesting evidence of life in the Home.²¹ Many residents had gathered in the dining room for tea but five were in their bedrooms and preparations were in hand for a religious service to be held after the meal. Fortunately the fire was quickly put out with no injury to residents or staff and the Warden and Matron, Mr & Mrs Potts, were congratulated by the Chief Fire Officer on their prompt and appropriate action.

By 1985, with the increasing age and infirmity of those requiring care, a converted house such as Audleys Wood no longer met the needs of residents. Purpose-built homes were the order of the day and Audleys Wood was sold to the *Thistle Hotel* chain for whom major alterations and extensions were undertaken by architects *Peter Inston*.²² In 2014 Audleys Wood was a four star hotel, owned by *Best Western* hotels, with 72 bedrooms and was a popular venue for wedding receptions and the like.²³ A blue plaque, erected by Basingstoke Heritage Society, commemorates Gavin Turnbull Simonds (1881-1971) who served as Lord Chancellor in Winston Churchill's second government from 1951-1954.

A centre for people with physical disabilities was established in the grounds of Audleys Wood by Hampshire County Council in the late 1960s which by 1986 consisted of a workshop, warehouse and residential hostel.²⁴ It was redesigned in 1996 by the County Architect's Department as a single storey L plan building around a courtyard garden.²⁵ In 2014 the Social Services centre, known as

²¹ HRO, H/WLF1/79.

²² HRO, H/ES2/3/3/20; Pevsner, North Hampshire, p. 227.

²³ www.audleyswoodhotel

²⁴ HRO, H/ES2/3/3/29.

²⁵ Pevsner, North Hampshire, p.227.

Audleys Resource Service, provided day services for adults including activities, rehabilitation and respite.²⁶

²⁶ HCC leaflet, *Audleys, A day resource for adults with disabilities*.