

= Somerhill House =

Somerhill House is a Grade I listed Jacobean mansion situated near Tonbridge , Kent , United Kingdom . It was built for Richard de Burgh in 1611 ? 13 . The estate was sequestrated by Parliament in 1645 , and restored to its rightful owner in 1660 . The building had become derelict by the mid @-@ eighteenth century but was later restored . Somerhill was painted by Turner in 1811 . It was bought by a member of the Goldsmid family in 1849 and greatly extended between 1879 and 1897 , making it the second largest house in Kent , after Knole House , Sevenoaks .

Somerhill housed a Prisoner of War camp , Prisoner of War Camp No. 40 , during the Second World War , following which it became the home of the d 'Avigdor @-@ Goldsmids and was visited by many celebrities of the time . Somerhill was sold by the d 'Avigdor @-@ Goldsmids in 1980 , and again went into decline , being damaged by vandalism and storms . In 1993 , The Schools at Somerhill moved in , as of July 2016 the building is used as a school .

= = Location = =

Somerhill House lies 1 1 ? 2 miles ( 2 @.@ 4 km ) south of Tonbridge at grid reference TQ 6086 4510 , in the civil parish of Tudeley @-@ cum @-@ Capel , which falls under Tunbridge Wells Borough Council .

= = Description = =

Somerhill is built of sandstone . The stone also contains iron , which gives it a red colour . This stone is known as Calverley Stone . The house is in the shape of a letter " H " , with the main hall forming the bar of the " H " . The main elevation of the house faces west . The building is three storeys high , with a half @-@ basement . It has five gables on the main elevation . The roof is of an A @-@ frame construction , clad in Kentish peg tiles . The south wing houses the library , the second longest room in Kent at 93 feet ( 28 m ) long , exceeded only by the Gallery at Knole House , Sevenoaks . The main staircase is in the south wing . The north wing housed service rooms and the kitchen , with a parlour at the rear .

As built , the house measured almost 100 feet ( 30 m ) in depth internally . The hall measures 23 feet ( 7 @.@ 0 m ) by 47 feet ( 14 @.@ 3 m ) . To its north was a 22 feet ( 6 @.@ 7 m ) by 25 feet ( 7 @.@ 6 m ) drawing room . The dining room , located to the right of the hall measured 22 feet ( 6 @.@ 7 m ) by 33 feet ( 10 m ) . As extended , Somerhill provides around 49 @,@ 000 square feet ( 4 @,@ 600 m<sup>2</sup> ) of floorspace .

The house shows the transition from medieval architecture , in which the hall was the main living and entertaining room , to the more modern plan , where the hall became a reception room . Somerhill is one of the earliest examples of this . When built , this was an innovative design .

= = History = =

= = = 17th century = = =

The land that Somerhill was built on originally formed part of the estate of South Frith , one of two deer parks in the Lowey of Tonbridge . At one time the estate covered 6 @,@ 500 acres ( 2 @,@ 600 ha ) . Built on the site of an earlier mansion , and designed by John Thorpe , the house was built between 1611 and 1613 , dates which are to be found on the surviving leaden rainwater heads . Somerhill was built for Richard de Burgh . The design was based on that of the Villa Valmarana , Lisiera , Italy , which was designed by Palladio .

De Burgh died in 1636 , and Somerhill passed to his son Ulick . Following the Battle of Naseby in 1645 , Somerhill was sequestrated by Parliament , which gave it to Robert , Earl of Essex . On his death in September 1646 , Parliament gave Somerhill to John Bradshaw . John Evelyn , who visited

Somerhill on 29 May 1652 , described Somerhill as " situated on an eminent hill , with a park , but has nothing else extraordinary " .

Following the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660 , Somerhill was given to Margaret , Viscountess Muskerry , the daughter of Ulick de Burgh . Lady Muskerry had extravagant tastes , and gradually sold off much of the lands of South Frith to various people . She died in 1698 , and Somerhill passed to her son , John Villiers , who styled himself the Earl of Buckingham . Villers sold the Manor of South Frith to one Dekins . Some 1 @, @ 200 acres ( 490 ha ) of grounds was sold separately to Abraham Hill of Sutton at Hone , Kent . Somerhill itself had been let to a warrener .

= = = 18th century = = =

Dekins sold Somerhill to one Cave , who sold it in 1712 to John Woodgate of Penshurst . Woodgate lived in the house , and on his death it passed to his son Henry , who lived at Somerhill until 1769 , and then within the town of Tonbridge until his death in 1787 . On 5 August 1752 , the house was visited by Horace Walpole , who described its setting as commanding " a vast landscape , beautifully wooded and has quantities of large old trees to shelter itself " . By 1766 , Somerhill was in a " ruinous " state . It was to remain derelict throughout the century . In 1787 , Somerhill passed to William Woodgate , who was Henry Woodgate 's nephew and had been living at Somerhill . In 1792 , Woodgate was one of three partners who set up The Tonbridge Bank .

= = = 19th century = = =

In the spring of 1810 , J. M. W. Turner made a drawing of Somerhill , and then in 1811 he painted it for the Woodgates , choosing a view across the lake in the grounds , with the house in the distance . The painting , which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1811 , is now in the National Galleries of Scotland , and the sketchbook containing his earlier drawing is at the Tate .

Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent agricultural depression , coupled with the collapse of the Tonbridge Bank in 1812 , Woodgate was declared bankrupt in 1816 . In that year , Woodgate offered Somerhill for sale to the Duke of Wellington , who declined to buy it as the foxhunting was not good enough for his liking . Somerhill was bought from the descendants of William Woodgate in November 1819 by James Alexander , MP . By 1830 , Somerhill had been substantially repaired , and new landscaping was undertaken . In 1832 , Anthony Salvin was engaged to make improvements to the house , but retaining its original style . During the severe winter of 1835 @-@ 36 , skating was possible on the lake at Somerhill for four weeks .

In 1842 , Tonbridge Priory was demolished to make way for the building of the first railway station . A stone coffin from the priory was bought by Alexander and taken to Somerhill , where it can still be seen . In 1849 , Somerhill was bought by Sir Isaac Goldsmid , who passed it on to his son Frederick in 1859 .

The lake at Somerhill , which Turner had painted in 1811 , was used to supply ice for the house , as a watering place for the estate 's cattle , and for recreational boating . The lake was fed by the Calverley Stream , which flowed through the grounds of Somerhill . In 1860 , the stream became polluted by sewage discharged upstream from a sewage works owned by the Tunbridge Wells Improvement Commissioners , rendering the water in the lake unfit for use . Frederick Goldsmid tried to get the Commissioners to stop fouling the stream , but they refused to act and the situation worsened . Finally , in 1865 , Goldsmid sued the Commissioners . They denied responsibility , claiming that the pollution was not caused by their sewage works but by a farm downstream . The court rejected their claim and ruled in Goldsmid 's favor .

In 1866 , Somerhill passed to Frederick 's son Sir Julian Goldsmid ( later known as d 'Avigdor @-@ Goldsmid ) . Sir Julian returned the house to something nearer its original condition . In 1879 , Somerhill was extended as more room was needed to accommodate Goldsmid 's large family ? he had eight daughters . The stable courtyard was rebuilt at this time , with the date 1879 being cast in the rainwater heads . The building work took until 1897 to complete . The expansion made Somerhill the second largest house in Kent , after Knole House , Sevenoaks . Somerhill House itself covers an

area of 2 ½ acres ( 1 ha ) .

A ghost in the form of a lady in white is said to haunt the Julian staircase , located in the Victorian part of the house . D 'Avigdor @-@ Goldsmid allowed people to drive their carriages through the grounds of Somerhill , although the house was not open to the public . Sir Julian died in 1896 , and Somerhill passed to Sir Osmond d 'Avigdor @-@ Goldsmid .

= = = 20th century = = =

In 1912 , there was an army camp held in the grounds of Somerhill . The soldiers were housed in bell tents . On Sir Osmond 's death in 1940 , it then passed to his eldest son Sir Henry . During the Second World War , Somerhill was the site of a Prisoner of War camp , known as POW Camp No. 40 . Italian POWs were amongst those housed at Somerhill . The Army were in possession of Somerhill from 1940 ? 49 . Squatters occupied some of the 40 @-@ plus huts in 1948 , they were locked in by the Colonel in charge of the camp at the time .

Post @-@ war , the house was the scene of much lavish entertaining . Lady Rosemary d 'Avigdor @-@ Goldsmid likened it to a hotel , " except that the guests didn 't pay ! " Amongst the distinguished visitors were John Betjeman , Hugh Casson , David Niven and Enoch Powell . The house was listed on 20 October 1954 . It is assessed as Grade I. On 19 September 1963 , the d 'Avigdor @-@ Goldsmid 's daughter Sarah was drowned in an accident , which occurred off Rye , East Sussex . Artist Marc Chagall was commissioned to design a set of stained glass windows in All Saints ' Church , Tudeley , in her memory .

In 1976 , Somerhill passed to Sir Henry 's surviving daughter Chloe , who lived at Hadlow Place Farm , Hadlow . She sold Somerhill in 1980 , and it was sold thrice more in the next eight years . The house was damaged in a storm and also by neglect and vandalism . Somerhill was bought by Mr & Mrs Weir in 1979 . The Weirs removed the carved wooden hall screen and also large areas of panelling in the entrance hall and the salon upstairs . A sale of the contents of Somerhill was held by Sotheby 's on 23 and 24 June 1981 . Somerhill was advertised for sale in May 1984 at a price in excess of £ 1 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 . Beginning in 1988 , the house was extensively restored with assistance from English Heritage . The works were undertaken by R. Durnell & Sons of Brasted , who celebrated their 400th anniversary in 1991 with a party held at Somerhill as the restoration was completed . Fielden and Mawson were the architects for the work .

In 1993 , The Schools at Somerhill moved to Somerhill House , having previously been at Tunbridge Wells . The Schools at Somerhill comprise three schools in one location . Somerhill Pre @-@ Prep is for boys and girls aged 3 ? 6 . Derwent Lodge is for girls aged 6 ? 11 and Yardley Court is for boys aged 6 ? 13 . In 1998 , the attic rooms were converted to provide classrooms and art room . A former granary has also been converted to classrooms , whilst some stables have been converted to workshops . Also in that year , a bridge over the lake in the grounds of Somerhill was added to the Buildings at Risk Register by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council , in whose area Somerhill falls . In 2000 , the central span between the old stable courtyard and the stable courtyard was reinstated at a cost of £ 720 @, @ 000 to provide accommodation for Somerhill Pre @-@ Prep School and administrative offices . Also in that year , planning permission was granted for the building of a sports hall on the top sports terrace .

= = = 21st century = = =

The reinstated central span opened in January 2001 . The new sports hall was completed in 2002 at a cost of £ 1 @, @ 400 @, @ 000 . An artificial turf pitch was added in 2003 . In 2004 , the bridge over the lake was repaired at a cost of £ 170 @, @ 000 , aided by a grant of £ 32 @, @ 000 from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council . In 2006 , planning permission was granted for the conversion of the walled garden into a dining hall and indoor swimming pool . Work began the next year and was completed in January 2009 . The dining room and swimming pool were given a Design Award by Tonbridge Civic Society in 2009 . As a working school , Somerhill House is not normally open to the public . It has been open as part of Heritage Open Days . Somerhill House was open in 2006 , and

also in 2010 . The grounds of Somerhill contain 152 acres ( 62 ha ) of land .

= = Listed buildings = =

The table below shows the status of the various listed buildings in the grounds of Somerhill House .