

Ickenham Hall: a suggested history!

suggested by Maurice Ray

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Introduction

It was not my intention nor have I attempted to write a learned, academic history of Ickenham Hall. This is deliberately subtitled *A Suggested History*, and is a mixture of fact, supposition, assumption, conjecture, suggestion and hope that it is largely true.

The bones of this account are the verifiable facts; the flesh is constructed from the rest of the mixture. Wherever possible I have indicated where I depart from absolute fact. In general the *Table of Chronology* is fact gleaned from archival records. The dates and names are fact as are the events. Where the conjecture et cetera come in is in linking those dates, names and events correctly.

It must be borne in mind that the 'occupiers' do not necessarily own the property; nor do the actual owners always live in or on the property. The archives have gaps in them - sometimes of many years, even generations. This is why, in places, I seem to jump - it is because the records do.

Another potential confusion is that in addition to Ickenham Hall there is extant an Ickenham Manor House. That building dates back to Tudor times and was the seat of the Lords of the Manor of Ickenham - largely the Shorediche family. It must be made clear that the two buildings are quite separate and unconnected, however the Manors of Ickenham and Swalcliffe (Swakeleys) consisted of land, farms and other properties surrounding Ickenham Hall.

So Ickenham Hall is not, nor has ever been included in the Manor of Ickenham. Nor has the Shorediche family ever lived in the Hall. But many well known families have. For example, the Crosier families were in residence for several generations as were the Hilliards after them. (The Crosiers and Hilliards later merged by marriage.) Just to add to the confusion the Hilliards were, for a time, Lords of the Manor of Cowley House!

I have not restricted myself solely to Ickenham Hall and its residents. I deviate from time to time to write of other properties and families which add to the larger picture into which the Hall fits. Indeed the *Table of Chronology* includes a great deal of information which is simply there to help create the bigger picture (although it is interesting in its own right).

I have included a chapter on ghosts, poltergeists and a secret tunnel - what old house worth its salt does not have its share of these? Many of you will not believe a word of what I have written on this particular subject but do not dismiss it too readily. Some of it is written from first hand experience.

So here is a short story about Ickenham Hall set in its context of village and community. In writing it I owe thanks to the staff of the archive section of the Central Library in Uxbridge. They rose to the occasion by finding us many books, boxes of old documents, maps and photographs. They even did some photocopying for us. I have said 'us' because I also thank my wife Rita who shared in that research, finding us many interesting and useful items. Finally I owe a debt to Morris Hughes whose book *The Story of Ickenham* has provided further information which has embellished my story.

I hope you find this account an interesting mix.

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The Earliest Years: 11th to 14th centuries

It is interesting to look at where the current names of localities come from. For example in Saxon times what we now call Uxbridge was known as Woxebruge; West Drayton was West draeg-tun ('tun' meaning a community or village). A local Chieftain called Hildric gave his name to Hillingdon whilst the Ham (village) of Ticca became Ticheham and eventually Ickenham.

In 1042 during the reign of Edward the Confessor there were three estates in Ticheham. Two of those became part of the Manor of Ickenham and the third became part of the Manor of Swalclyf (Swakeleys). Quite when Ticca became Ticheham or Ticheham became Ickenham is unknown.

According to official records the land on which Ickenham Hall now stands (together with surrounding land) was awarded to Roger de Montgomery, the Earl of Shrewsbury in 1066. In view of the date and the fact that the land was 'awarded' to the Earl, it can be no surprise to learn that the gift was a reward for the Earl's support of William the Conqueror. Just how much land was awarded is unclear - he was actually known as a 'tenant-in-chief' - the actual owner being the King!

Roger, Earl of Shrewsbury was actually a cousin of William's, and had supplied him with sixty ships as part of the invasion fleet and commanded the right flank of the Norman forces. Small wonder that he was handsomely rewarded. It is entirely possible that part of his reward was actually being elevated to an Earldom - but why of Shrewsbury and with property in what is now Ickenham but then known as Ticheham? History is silent on the point - which is what makes history such an inexact subject of study - and so intriguing! My own belief is that Roger was already a wealthy and influential Earl.

It is on record that one of the Earl's (tenant-in-chief) sub-tenants was Geoffrey de Mandeville who held several fields, meadows, woodlands, and pasturelands, five small holdings and forty pigs. The total value of his estate was thirty shillings (£1.50)! However it was enough for Geoffrey to apply for and obtain the title of Lord of the Manor of Ickenham - the first of the line.

Over the next twenty years the three estates in the area thrived. By 1086 the local population had risen to 31 people. By 1094 the land was held by Roger de Belleme. It will not have escaped your notice that he was another 'Roger' - or was he? Could he be, in fact, the same man? The records are not clear, in as much as they make no mention of the possibility or otherwise. Members of the aristocracy - even in those distant days - often had several names. However the probability is that they were not the same man; it is more likely that de Belleme was a sub-tenant of de Mandeville, himself a sub-tenant of de Montgomery.

In 1102 the land was 'forfeited' to Henry, Duke of the Normans. This is an intriguing statement! Did Henry merely ride up to Roger de Belleme's residence - perhaps backed by a small army - and claim ownership on the grounds that he, Henry, was superior in rank or that he was related to William the Conqueror or that he had a bigger army? Or did Belleme fall foul of Henry in some way or owe him a debt. Was there, perhaps, even a battle which Henry won? For all we know it could have been the result of a game of cards!

In 1154 it seems that the land was 'granted' to someone, but to whom I have so far been unable to discover. What I do know is that in 1194 the land 'passed' to a Ralph de Harpenden - probably yet another sub-tenant. It is interesting to think that there might be some connection between this man

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The Earliest Years: 11th to 14th centuries, continued)...

and the district which bears his name. The chance of there being any connection is remote but not impossible. Clearly he existed and in an area just outside London.

It is interesting to ponder the different terms: 'granted' to, 'passed' to, 'forfeited' to, 'awarded' to. They certainly have different meanings but have they simply been used by whoever compiled the records without reference to their real meanings or do they really mean what they say?

In 1290 the land again 'passed' from Geoffrey de Mandeville to a man named Brok or Brook - both spellings are used. It appears that de Brok was related in some way to de Mandeville. Certainly in 1334 a William de Brok held the land but the Manorial rights remained with the de Mandevilles. A few years later the land had passed to John de Brok who, I assume, was a son and heir to William. Just when Roger de Montgomery disappeared as 'tenant-in-chief' and for what reason I do not know.

In 13?? John's daughter Juette (perhaps an early form of Juliette?) was married to a Nicholas Shorediche. In 1348 John de Brok conveyed his property in two parts. The first part to his daughter, Juette and her husband, Nicholas Shorediche; the second to a John de Charleton. Why he did so is not known; perhaps he was nearing the end of his life, perhaps he wished to 'retire' (if people 'retired' in those days!). At that time the property is described as including several cottages and outbuildings. Juette was a direct descendant of Geoffrey de Mandeville. She therefore inherited the title of Lord of the Manor of Ickenham. In fact Nicholas Shorediche became the Lord by marriage.

I have not been able to ascertain whether the daughter and her husband actually occupied the conveyed property or whether John de Charleton did so. It could, of course, have been shared occupancy bearing mind that there were several dwellings involved. The Shorediche family (into which Juette de Brok had married) were to hold the title of Lords of the Manor of Ickenham for 470 years. At the time of the Norman conquest the Shorediche family had been dispossessed of the Manors of Hackney and Shoreditch (in addition to the spellings 'Shorediche' and 'Shoreditch' there is also mention in the records of 'Shoredyche'). It is interesting to see how the fortunes of a family fluctuate up and down.

Some time in the fifteenth century the Ickenham Manor House was built on the site of an ancient motte-tower, a fortress like building. Surrounding it was a deep and wide moat. Parts of these defences can still be seen today.

In 1400 Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester was in legal possession of the de Mandeville estate. Quite where that left the de Broks I do not know but it is a fact that they became the legal Lords of the Manor of Ickenham.

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The Middle Years: 15th to 17th centuries

In 1416 a John Cherwyn is listed on the court roll as changing the name of his property from 'Cherwyns' to 'Sherwyns'. Another record of the same year names John Crosier as owning Sherwyns. It is most probable that the right name was Crosier because there is no other reference to John Cherwyn but many to the Crosier family. Whether it was Cherwyn or Crosier the property so named stood on the exact site where Ickenham Hall now stands. It is clear that he was a farmer with several fields round and about but not necessarily adjoining the Hall or each other.

The Crosier family held a number of properties (mainly individual fields and small holdings) dotted around the Ickenham area. In 1500 their 'Home Farm' is listed as being in the vicinity of the 'Coach and Horses' public house and possibly incorporated the present pond. By 1547 the population of Ickenham village had reached 80 in number. The Crosiers were listed as being 'Yeomen' - small farmers who rightfully owned their land and were not serfs or sub-tenants of anyone else.

Both the Shorediche family and the Crosiers figure prominently in village records. For example in 1554 a Mister Edmund Shoredyche and his 'Wyfe' Helyn together with Mister Robert Shorediche were recorded as being 'at a wedding'. In 1576 Alexander Crosier and his daughters Alice and Elizabeth are recorded as owning 'Sherwyns' - the land on which Ickenham Hall now stands.

An interesting item in the Middlesex County sessions records the fact that an Elizabeth Waters of Ickenham was found guilty of not attending any place of common worship and was sentenced to two days in the pillory! In 1592 Michael Shorediche is recorded as becoming the Lord of the Manor of Ickenham.

In 1613 a Robert Crosyer (Crosier) was Constable of the village and therefore responsible for keeping the peace. There is a record dated 1624 of Robert Crosier (probably the same man albeit with a different spelling) owning 'Sherwyns' and taking a tenant called 'Stone'. The Constable would sometimes be involved in 'serious' matters. For example on one occasion two men stole two horses and a saddle worth collectively £7.75 in current coinage. One man was not caught the other was hung!

No-one was above the law, not even a member of the Shorediche family. In 1615 Michael Shorediche was brought before the court for "*speakinge divers unfitt and mutynous speeches touching on a rate made by His Majestyes Justices of the Peace ...*".

William Crosier is recorded as owning in 1624: 'Long Croft' (four acres); 'Short Croft' (one acre); Ley Grove (two and one half acres); plus forty acres of 'open' fields. This was quite a substantial holding for a yeoman in those days. Whether William owned 'Sherwyns' at the same time is unlikely as it is not listed as being his property. It was probably still held by Robert.

In 1627 'Sherwyns' is listed as including one close pasture or meadow of about three acres known as 'Reynold's Close' together with stables, barns and a range of other outbuildings. Remember that 'Sherwyns' is the property which eventually became Ickenham Hall. In the same year a Mister John Nicholas and his wife Agnes 'surrendered' (sold?) to Michael Crosier twenty-six 'selions' of land; a one acre meadow and a 'parcel' of meadow called 'a hook'. This land adjoined 'Sherwyns' and is probably the land now bordering the railway line.

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The Middle Years: 15th to 17th centuries, continued...

In the same year Michael Crosier built on 'Reynolds Close' a house and a barn. This became known as the Home Farm attached to 'Sherwyns'. (Not to be confused with Home Farm near the 'Coach and Horses'!) In 1654 William Crosier married Mary Cheney of Stoke Poges. In 1664 there were thirty-seven households in Ickenham assessed for 'hearth tax'. This was an early form of rates or council tax.

In 1685 William Crosier bought a property called 'Rayners' and a house in Long Lane called 'Milton Farm' (no longer existing, demolished to make way for housing). The marriage of William Crosier (son of William) to Elizabeth Lanchester took place in 1695. They were given 'Rayners' as part of their marriage settlement. In 1699 Michael Crosier and his son John bought a one acre meadow close to Ducks Hill, Ruislip. By about 1700 the Crosiers were regarded as being 'Gentlemen', that is ranked above 'Yeomen'.

The Later Years: 18th and 19th centuries

By 1723 the population of Ickenham village had dropped again - to only thirty families. 1740 is the most important date in this supposed history (although this particular date is not 'supposed', it is fact). It is in fact, the year in which the Crosiers, probably because of their new status within the community as substantial land owners, decided to build themselves a house in keeping with that new status of 'gentlefolk'.

They demolished virtually all of 'Sherwyns' and built on its site a larger and typically Georgian house - Regency in style and a substantial residence in keeping with their new status. All that now remains of 'Sherwyns' is a few internal timbers and parts of the front garden wall.

In 1779 Elizabeth Crosier, the then owner of Ickenham Hall and its properties, married a Mister George Hilliard. This is a significant event because from then on the owners of the Hall and its lands were the Hilliard family. However the Crosiers had not vanished and were still prominent residents of the village.

In 1781 the Ickenham Hall Home Farm was known as 'Stone's Homestead'. It will be remembered that 'Stone' was a sub-tenant of Robert Crosier in 1624. This 'Stone' was obviously a descendant of that first tenant. There is a record dated 1785 in which Mister Edward Hilliard is described as 'Lord of the Manor of Cowley House' (just to confuse the situation). Edward was the second son of George and Elizabeth.

On a 1790 map of the Ruislip Inclosures (Enclosures) Ickenham Hall is shown as plots 65 and 66. It clearly shows that in addition to the Hall there is also a cottage and a range of outbuildings on the site. By 'Inclosures' is meant that certain commonly held fields were 'inclosed' with hedges or fences and became the legal property of individuals - usually those who had used them the most and had petitioned for ownership. This is probably an over simplification of the process but describes it in essence.

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Interestingly, the map shows several properties held by the Crosiers and two fields held by a Mister Hillyard. This may or may not have been Edward Hilliard and could equally be an entirely different family. Spellings can be a minefield.

In 1801 John Crosier died and left his freehold 'messuages' (land holdings and other properties) to his nephew Edward Hilliard who was the second son of George and Elizabeth Hilliard. These properties were, of course, outside the estate of Ickenham Hall which had been held by another branch of the Crosier family. However Edward had already also inherited Ickenham Hall estate so had become a very substantial land owner.

By now the population of Ickenham had reached 213 people. In 1809 Edward Hilliard died and left his properties to his brother George. Meanwhile the fortunes of the Shorediche family were in decline. Michael Shorediche had run up considerable debts and mortgaged his entire estate to the hilt. By 1810 he realised that he could not pay off the debts and a Mister George Robinson foreclosed on him taking control of all his properties.

The Later Years: 18th and 19th centuries, continued...

Michael Shorediche went on to meet and marry a West Indian Princess from Antigua where they went to live. In 1815 the entire Ickenham Manor estate went up for sale including 114 acres of land and the Manorial rights (carrying with them the right to the title Lord of the Manor of Ickenham). In 1816 the Hilliards also began to sell off their properties in a piecemeal fashion. History has not recorded the reason for this and I can only surmise that either they too were in debt or had entered into other business enterprises with no appetite left for farming. Finally in 1818 the Shorediche family relinquished all Manorial rights having held them for 470 years. The new Lord of the Manor of Ickenham was George Robinson.

The population was continuing to rise and by 1841 had reached 396. By now all that remained of the former Ickenham Manorial demesne was a narrow strip of land near the Manor House - Ickenham Manor House (not Ickenham Hall which, remember, has never been connected to Ickenham Manor).

By 1846 the village had acquired a school with both a dedicated schoolroom and a schoolmistress. It was, in fact, not the first school in the village. Between 1828 and 1833 there was a school for girls - very unusual in those times. The new school was, in fact, privately owned and funded by Thomas Truesdale Clarke the Lord of the Manor of Swakeleys.

By 1851 the population had fallen to 351. No doubt disease and old age were accounting for this rather than a movement of people in and out of the village. In 1855 George Hilliard died. His son Edward David Crosier-Hilliard had died in 1853 so other members of the family inherited and continued to hold the properties until 1927 - presumably having ceased to sell them off.

By 1853 the title of Lord of the Manor of Ickenham was jointly held by Francis Robinson (obviously a descendant of George) and Henry Mason. By 1857 it was split three ways! In 1857 George Robinson's will (the man who foreclosed on Michael Shorediche and became the new Lord of the Manor of Ickenham) was disputed. What Francis and the others did about this I do not know but as a result the property was sold to Thomas Truesdale Clarke and merged with the Manor of Swakeleys.

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The Later Years: 18th and 19th centuries, continued...

There is extant a letter dated 1859 from a G.R. Shorediche to a brother to the effect that he had *“recently visited Ickenham. Local farmers told me that the late owner of Ickenham Manor Farm had no legal title to the farm or the Manorial rights. Apparently the locals consider that Mister Clarke had ‘purchased’ other farms for half their true value! However I was also advised that the ‘quiet’ possession of such for upwards of twenty years would be sufficient title.”*

Thomas' father who was also Thomas Truesdale Clarke, met a mysterious death by drowning in a very shallow brook. This caused something of a local sensation. Suicide was suspected but never proven and whilst the inquest was in progress James Winch, a stud groom employed by Mrs. Clarke's brother, hanged himself! Many a murder mystery has been shaped round such a scenario!

Be all that as it may the Clarke family continued to hold on to their properties. In 1859 Edward Ricaut Shorediche, the grandson of Michael and his Antiguan Princess, came to London for the purpose of rescuing his Manorial rights. There was no chance of rescuing the actual properties, they had been irredeemably lost but the Manorial rights were a different matter. However he was two years too late - the Manorial rights to the Manor of Ickenham were now part of the Manorial rights of the Manor of Swakeleys.

By 1871 the population of Ickenham was once again on the rise - to 386. In 1890 the Saich family took occupancy of Home Farm (Reynolds Close - which had, for a time, also been 'Stone's Homestead'). In 18?? two thirds of Ickenham Manor House was pulled down - for what reason I have not been able to ascertain. This would not be allowed to happen today - it was a fifteenth century Tudor Manor House. However a 17th century staircase was preserved together with several other interesting parts of the building. After this it became Manor Farm.

By 1873 the village school had 37 pupils and a salaried schoolmistress who lived next door. It was financed by 'school pence' a small payment of one or two pennies a week for each pupil - possibly the first example of school fees! However any deficiency in finance would be made good by the owner - Thomas Clarke. (So it is also an early example of a private school.)

It is interesting to read the School Register:

1878: None of the little ones at school today - the snow is too deep. Sarah at home for a month to take care of her brother and sister while her mother is at work. Annual tea party at Swakeleys today. Charlotte left to go into service.

1895: Seven girls and three boys punished for playing kissing games in the playground.

1897: Spitting on slates vigorously put down.

1898: Many children away picking blackberries. George away - scaring birds. Fred was abusive so I have locked him in the porch for the afternoon.

It is interesting to recall that the Coach and Horses pub was used during the 19th century as the venue for the 'Court Baron'. This was a local court used for the purpose of hearing cases of land encroachment, non-payment of dues and rents, neglect of property and minor cases of theft. It was

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last used for such in 1878. One of the last 'criminals' to be 'tried' had the unlikely name of Goodluck Drawater. There's a name to conjure with.

Recent Years: 20th to 21st centuries

In 1900 the Great Western and Great Central Railways jointly acquired land from the then Lord of the Manor of Swakeleys. In 1901 the population of Ickenham had fallen, yet again - to 329. In 1902 the land adjoining Ickenham Hall was sold to the Uxbridge and Harrow Railway Company. Records are a little confusing on this matter. Some state that the land so sold included Ickenham Hall others do not make this statement. Let us assume that it did include the Hall and that subsequently it was realised (discovered?) that it was not all needed. Much of it was then sold again this time to Charles de Winton Kitkat.

In that same year of 1902 The Great Western and Great Central Railways jointly opened a railway line that passed through Ickenham on its way to London - on the land acquired from Swakeleys. On the 30th of June 1904 a special train left Harrow on the Hill to mark the ceremonial opening of the line to Uxbridge - on the land acquired from Ickenham Hall.

By March 1905 the steam trains that had inaugurated the service had given way to electric engines and the service had been extended from Uxbridge to Baker Street. However, there was still no stop at Ickenham and the Parish Council passed a resolution asking Uxbridge Rural District Council to approach the Metropolitan Railway (as it was called by then) to provide a 'halt' in Ickenham.

On 25 September 1905 a 'halt' had been built. It was a modest structure, not meriting the description of 'station' and consisted of planks of timber resting on concrete blocks. There was no shelter and room for only three carriages at a time to stop at the 'platform'. Longer trains had to stop twice and this arrangement lasted until the 'platform' was extended in 1922. The first ticket hut was not built until 1910 and even then would-be passengers had to queue in all weathers out in Glebe Avenue. In the early days the Avenue was very muddy, so muddy in fact that the staff in the booking hut looked after passengers' wellington boots until their return! It was not until 1971 that a proper ticket office was built.

One happy consequence of the arrival of the railway that it brought in many day-trippers to visit what was still a picturesque village. The villagers were very quick to respond to this by opening tea rooms, flower shops and the like but local farmers were not so pleased and had to put up notices to stop these 'ignorant' townspeople from trampling all over their fields.

In 1916 Hill Farm, a Crosier/Hilliard property, was absorbed into Northolt Aerodrome. Already the twentieth century brought great changes to the locality - with the arrival of trains and the proximity of an airfield. We really are now entering our recent history.

In 1918 Ickenham Hall was once again up for sale and this time it was bought by The Honourable Dame Maud Agnes Lawrence D.B.E. Dame Maud's father had been Lord Lawrence, Viceroy of India. She herself was Director of Women's Establishments at the Treasury. She was created a Dame for her services to Women. She not only bought the Hall, she lived in it. Lawrence Drive is named after her.

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By 1921 the population of Ickenham had risen to 443. Another consequence of the railway was that it brought in many new residents who found they could 'commute' easily into London. The sale of the Swakeleys estate freed up much land for this development and houses started to be built along Long

Recent Years: 20th to 21st centuries, continued...

Lane and Swakeleys Road. Milton Court was built on the site of Milton Farm which had been demolished along with its pond and 'listed' barn to make way for all this building.

In 1922 the Saich family, who had been tenants of Home Farm since the 1890s, bought it from the Hilliards. In 1923 the Lord of the Manor of Swakeleys, Thomas Bryan Clarke-Thornhill, was living in his other home Rushton Manor in Northamptonshire. He decided to sell off Ickenham Manor and to sell it piecemeal to his tenants. Thus Ickenham Manor as such ceased to exist. The old Manor House then known as Manor Farm was bought by the tenant.

In 1932 Captain Paul Ricaut Shorediche-Churchward went to Brazil in search of the ill-fated Colonel Fawcett but his expedition was in vain. In 1933, Dame Maud died and Ickenham Hall was put up for auction by Harrods. They produced an interesting brochure which describes the property as: "... *nicely timbered house, paved terrace, tennis court, lawns, grass orchard, kitchen garden, herbaceous borders, paddock; in all about five acres.*"

Dame Maud had made different use of the rooms as that made by her predecessor. In the sales brochure the interior was described as: "... *panelled entrance hall; panelled staircase and inner hall; garden lobby; cloak room; drawing room; oak panelled dining room; panelled morning room; kitchen; butler's pantry; larder; scullery; cellar with boot room, wine cellar and cool larder; seven bedrooms; bathrooms and WCs.*"

The brochure goes on to list: a large garage; a range of wood, stores, coal and apple sheds; a delightful old cottage with 4 rooms and a scullery.

It is difficult to exactly match this description with the present situation but one can nevertheless recognise what is being described. The rateable value was a mere £100 the rate being 11s 4d (56 pence) in the pound. There was a water charge of £7.11s 6d (£7.57p) per annum.

The property was bought by The Reverend Ralph Guy Potts. At the time of writing I know nothing about the Reverend Potts - whether he was in retirement or still active within the church I have no idea. It does strike me as being a rather large house for a clergyman - unless he had a very large family.

During much of the nineteenth century Ickenham had an annual pleasure fair - usually in May or early June. This fair was held by virtue of a charter the terms of which stipulated that if even one year was missed the charter became null and void. Sadly, in 1936 no stall or sideshow turned up. Not one soul arrived to entertain or amuse. As a result the right to hold an annual fair was lost to the village of Ickenham for all time!

In 1937 Ickenham village was absorbed into Uxbridge. In 1947 the Reverend Potts died and Ickenham Hall was sold to Middlesex County Council. It had been a private residence for 207 years. In 1948 it

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was used as a Community Centre. In 1950 a woodyard occupied part of the site where the Compass Theatre now stands. During the 1950's the Hall was used as a school for pupils awaiting places at Glebe School.

Recent Years: 20th to 21st centuries, continued...

Also in 1950 the Tudor built Ickenham Manor House (Manor Farm) was bought by Captain Shorediche-Churchward (he of the attempt to find Colonel Fawcett). It thus returned to the Shorediche family after one hundred and thirty-five years.

From the 1950's events moved on more rapidly. Under the Middlesex County Council Ickenham Hall was used to house youth services and in 1959 was renamed 'North West Middlesex Youth House'. Then in 1965 the MCC became part of the Greater London Council. During that same year agreement was reached to build a Theatre on the site and three years later the new 'Ickenham Youth Theatre' was opened by the then well-known Minister for the Arts, Jennie Lee.

Six years later in 1974, the 'North West Middlesex Youth House' and the 'Ickenham Youth Theatre' were merged and a new structure was built to join the two separate buildings. This newly formed complex was named 'The Ickenham Centre' but almost immediately it was re-named 'The Compass Community Arts Centre'. Two years later it was re-named yet again, this time to 'The Compass'. In 1982 the communicating building between Ickenham Hall and the Compass Theatre was christened 'The Bistro'. Three years later the Theatre was re-named yet again - as 'The Compass Arts Theatre'. One year later it closed for re-construction!

Between 1987 and 1989 a major project was carried out and the Theatre was virtually re-built and re-equipped. During this time plays, concerts and cabarets were performed in Ickenham Hall itself with some smaller plays being performed in the Bistro. In addition a marquee seating 200 was erected in the grounds to accommodate larger productions. In 1990 the 'Compass Arts Theatre' was re-opened by HRH Prince Edward.

When the theatre was reopened Ickenham Hall was pressed into use as Council offices, used particularly for the Music and Youth services, some adult education classes and for theatre rehearsal rooms. Some time after this the 'Compass Arts Theatre' was yet again re-named - this time as 'The Compass Theatre and Arts Centre'. It is currently known simply as Compass Theatre.

This brings us up to date save to say that in 2009 a group of interested volunteers with the encouragement and support of the Theatre staff, set up a small team to raise funds for the purpose of conserving and repairing Ickenham Hall and its gardens. It is the intention to also restore it to its former state wherever possible but this work will, of course, be severely restricted by the need to continue with the current use of the house. The team works in close contact with the Council's conservation unit and with English Heritage.

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Ghosts and other Legends

A ghost at Ickenham Hall?

Of course not, after all there are no such things as ghosts - are there? Nevertheless legends persist. At a great many houses, castles, palaces and theatres - there is a legend of a lady - usually in grey - who haunts the scene of her childhood or tragic death. Sometimes she appears to be searching for something or someone but she never seems to find it or them for she has often been fruitlessly searching for centuries!

I have been given to understand that there is such a legend attached to Ickenham Hall. Apparently over the years she has been seen about the house and grounds. Several sightings have been made near the two brick pillars which are in plain view of the bistro. These are reputed (and with some evidence) to be the remains of the gateway that led from the formal gardens to the landscaped grounds - perhaps at one time even to the farmlands attached to the house. I have never actually seen her myself nor, it must be said, have I met anyone else who has actually seen her with their own eyes rather than through the eyes of legend - or indeed, with the eyes of a friend's uncle whose sister-in-law's next door neighbour has a cousin who once knew someone who had seen her.

You may have detected a whiff of the cynic in what I have so far told you. Yes, I was cynical - until I encountered the ghost myself! For several years I served as a Duty Manager when Compass Theatre was hosting an evening performance or meeting. In those days the Duty Manager was always the last person to leave the building having done the rounds to ensure that all the lights were off, doors locked or fastened, taps not left running and so on. This meant touring both a darkened Theatre and Ickenham Hall. I never encountered the lady in grey (or any other colour) but often sensed that someone (!) was there.

The topmost room in Ickenham Hall is known as the Long Room and it does run the entire width of the building. It was once at least two bedrooms with separate doors onto the landing but is now a single, long room. It contains several wall cupboards but only one door for entrance and exit. This is immediately at the top of a flight of steps. As part of my 'security' tour I had to check this room, close the door firmly and descend to the first landing to check other rooms for lights et cetera. On every occasion by the time I had reached the third or fourth step down the door to the Long Room would swing slowly open (with the obligatory creaking noise of course).

I quickly learned that it was pointless going back up to the door to make sure that it was very firmly closed. No matter how firmly it was closed it had creaked open again by the time I was half way down the staircase. Now you might wonder why a ghost needed to open the door when he or she could just as easily have walked straight through it. I certainly wondered this but I very often felt the presence of someone on the steps behind me.

Ickenham Hall - a suggested history by Maurice Ray

Ghosts and other Legends, continued...

I can certainly confirm that going back to close a creaking door which insisted on opening itself at the top of a gloomy staircase when you are alone in an eighteenth century manor farm house can be a rather nerve wracking experience. On one occasion I did ask, in an unnecessarily loud voice, who was there and what did they want? You will not be surprised to learn that I received no reply. Perhaps it was a male ghost who took offence at being addressed as 'madam'. Then, some weeks later, I received confirmation that it was indeed a male ghost - I actually saw him (with my own eyes).

Once again I was alone in the building. I had already checked both the house and the theatre and had discovered two dirty cups and saucers which for some reason someone with a warped sense of humour had placed right underneath the grand piano in the bistro. They had probably done so because the notice on the piano requested people not to place glasses, bottles or crockery on top of the piano! I took the crockery into the kitchen and stood in the open doorway between the coffee bar and kitchen area. As I reached over to place the crockery on the draining board for later washing I became aware that someone was standing at the coffee bar counter.

Turning I came face to face (not more than five feet away) with a large man. I still had the cups in my hand so I nodded to him and said "I'll be with you in just a moment". He seemed to be preoccupied and paid me no notice, not acknowledging my comment. Without even moving from my position in mid-doorway I turned my head and reached out to place the cups on the draining board. It took a split second. Turning back immediately to find out who he was and what he wanted I was faced with an empty bistro. He had simply vanished - as silently as he had arrived.

It had happened so suddenly and so quickly that I didn't even take note of how he was dressed. He was certainly a big man, probably six feet tall and very broad in the chest and shoulders. That much I did notice but he did not speak, did not look at me and seemed totally unaware of my presence. Of one thing I was certain - he was no longer in the bistro. Naturally I went back over the entire complex - house, theatre, admin. offices and bistro. There was no sign of him anywhere. Nor had he been able to enter or exit the building because the doors were locked - and coded. I became absolutely convinced that I had glimpsed our elusive ghost.

You will have noticed that he had been standing in the bistro which is part of Compass Theatre and not Ickenham Hall. One would expect a ghost to 'haunt' an old Georgian mansion rather than a relatively modern theatre but the two are, of course, inextricably entwined. The doorway between the coffee bar and the kitchen is, in fact, part of the back wall of the Hall.

Ickenham Hall - a suggested history by Maurice Ray

Ghosts and other Legends, continued...

The doorway is the dividing line so I was in effect standing with one foot in Ickenham Hall and the other in Compass Theatre. The ghost however had been firmly (if one can use such a word to describe a ghost) standing in Compass Theatre.

One has to remember however that the theatre and bistro are both standing on ground that might well have contained garden outbuildings.

I am not the only person to have experienced the ghosts of Ickenham Hall. Tom, the Theatre Technician was alone in the building one evening. At one point he became aware that someone was walking outside past the kitchen windows. Then he realised that the figure was not outside but inside the kitchen and was nothing more substantial than the shadow-like image of a walking person. There was no-one else in the building.

Poltergeists?

We also have poltergeists and have 'enjoyed' several visitations. On one afternoon a part-time administrative assistant was working in an upstairs office in the theatre when he was interrupted by the telephone ringing. He pushed aside the file on which he was working and reached for the telephone. When the call ended he reached out to retrieve his file only to discover that it was no longer there. It was, in fact, on a table in the far corner of the office. He had not left his seat, the table was beyond the reach of his desk and there was no-one else in the office.

A few days after this I was again on duty- this time in the box office and in the afternoon. The part-time administrative assistant was also working in the room. Whilst I was on the telephone discussing a booking the fax machine on the other side of the office started clattering away. There was nothing unusual in this - if anyone had been sending us a fax message or the printing was delayed! But the machine actually printed out a page of complete gobbledygook. No-one was expecting a message and no-one ever acknowledged sending us one. It could have been a practical joke but no-one ever owned up to it so the joke would have fallen flat. It will be realised that an eighteenth century ghost or poltergeist would have no idea what a fax machine was let alone what it could do or how to operate it. But who really knows?

The third occasion concerned Rita, a wardrobe volunteer who was working alone in the wardrobe department one evening. She dressed a dummy in a full costume including an appropriate hat. Turning her attention to something else for a few minutes she returned to the dummy to find that the hat had been exchanged for something entirely different and inappropriate. There was no-one else in the department.

The fourth occasion was witnessed by five people. Back to the coffee bar.

Ickenham Hall - a suggested history by Maurice Ray

Ghosts and other Legends, continued...

During an evening performance I and a fellow volunteer had just put on a pot of coffee in readiness for the interval rush. Suddenly the pot began to rock backwards and forwards on the hot plate. It went on doing this for a full minute whereupon we called over the bar staff to witness it.

They and the Duty Manager joined us and we watched it continue to rock steadily back and forth for a full five minutes. It went on until the audience began to exit the auditorium whereupon I reached out to steady the pot.

Then there was the occasion when Kevin, a volunteer was standing at the sink in the kitchen when the top of a rubbish bin, situated underneath the draining board, suddenly ejected itself and flew across the kitchen. I think our poltergeist has a well developed sense of humour.

Finally we come back to the shadow figure Tom, the technician experienced in the kitchen. At the time he was opening a wall cupboard above the stainless steel work surface. As he opened the cupboard door a jar of coffee seemed to be balanced precariously close to the edge of a shelf. As the door opened the jar appeared to lose its balance and fall. However, it did not fall naturally which would probably have been sideways, perhaps smashing on the steel surface below. Instead it appeared to lower itself as if someone was holding it and descended in an upright position to land safely. Was the shadow ghost also a poltergeist?

A Secret Tunnel

Another widespread legend attached to old houses, castles and palaces is the hidden (and usually lost) secret tunnel leading from a cellar or dungeon to the local church. Our countryside is apparently riddled with such tunnels. Naturally Ickenham Hall has its own lost secret tunnel legend. Guess where it is supposed to start from - yes, from somewhere near the two brick pillars where the lady in grey is searching for something. Guess where it is supposed to lead to - yes, the local church of course.

It is difficult to believe that such a tunnel has ever existed given the distance between the Hall and St. Giles's Church. No entrance or exit has ever been found and had such a tunnel existed it would have been discovered - and destroyed - when the railway was built across its route. Unless of course it was dug deeply enough by the Georgians or pre-Georgians to avoid any possible future railway from cutting through it!

As to whether there really are ghosts, poltergeists or secret tunnels at Ickenham Hall you will no doubt form your own view - I have mine.

Ickenham Hall - a suggested history by Maurice Ray

Table of Chronology

- 1066 > Land in and around Ickenham awarded to Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury
- 1086 > Three estates and 31 people are listed as being in 'Ticheham'
- 1094 > Land held by Roger de Belleme - probably a sub-tenant
- 1102 > Land was forfeited to Henry, Duke of the Normans
- 1140 > Geoffrey de Mandeville became first known Lord of the Manor of Ickenham
- 1154 > Land granted to unknown sub-tenants of the de Mandevilles, themselves sub-tenants of Roger de Montgomery
- 1196 > Land passed to Ralph de Harpenden
- 1290 > Land passed on again, to whom is unknown
- 13?? > Land held by a man known as Brok/Brook, now Lord of the Manor of Ickenham and a direct descendant of Geoffrey de Mandeville
- 1334 > Land held by William del Brok
- 13?? > Juette de Brok, daughter of John de Brok, then owner of Ickenham Manor and therefore Lord of the Manor, married Nicholas Shorediche
- 1348 > John de Brok conveyed his land in two parts; the first to his daughter Juette and her husband, Nicholas Shorediche, the second to John de Charleton. The Shorediche family is recorded as holding the Manorial rights to the Manor of Ickenham.
- 13?? > The property had several cottages and outbuildings on the land.
- 1416 > John Cherwyn listed on the court roll as changing the name of his 'messuage' from 'Cherwyns' to 'Sherwyns'. This was the site where Ickenham Hall now stands.
- 1500 > A 'Home Farm' is recorded as being near to the present site of The Coach and Horses pub, and perhaps incorporating the present pond
- 1547 > The population of what was now being called Ickenham, reached 80
- 1554 > Edmund Shoredyche and his wife Helyn, together with Robert Shorediche were recorded as being 'at a wedding'.
- 1561 > The Crosier family, local landowners are recorded as being 'Yeomen'.
- 1576 > Alexander Crosier and his daughters Alice and Elizabeth are recorded as owners of land on which Ickenham Hall now stands.
- 1592 > Michael Shorediche is recorded as being Lord of Ickenham Manor.
- 1624 > Robert Crosier is listed as owning a property known as 'Sherwyns'. He had a tenant called 'Stone'. William Crosier, Yeoman, is listed as owning: Long Croft (4 acres), Short Croft (1 acre), Ley Grove (2.5 acres) plus 40 acres of open fields

Ickenham Hall - a suggested history by Maurice Ray

1627 > 'Sherwyns' listed as including one close pasture or meadow of about three acres known as 'Reynolds Close' together with stables, barns and other outbuildings. In the same year one John Nicholas and his wife Agnes 'surrendered' to Michael Crosier, 26 'selions' of land, a one acre meadow and a 'parcel' of meadow called 'a hook'. This land adjoined 'Sherwyns'.

1628 > Michael Crosier built on Reynolds Close a house and a barn. This became the 'Home Farm' attached to 'Sherwyns'.

1654 > William Crosier married Mary Cheney of Stoke Poges.

1664 > There were 37 households assessed for 'Hearth Tax' in Ickenham.

1685 > William Crosier bought 'Rayners' and a house on Long Lane called Milton Farm.

1695 > William's son William married Elizabeth Lanchester and 'Rayners' was given to them as part of the marriage settlement.

1699 > Michael Crosier and his son John owned one acre of meadow/pasture near Ducks Hill, Ruislip.

17?? > The Crosiers were now regarded and described as 'Gentlemen'.

1723 > The population had dropped again - to 30 families.

1740 > THE PRESENT HOUSE WAS BUILT AND BECAME KNOWN AS ICKENHAM HALL.

1751 > Robert Shorediche, Lord of Ickenham Manor, held: Further Field, Bleak Hill, Home Field

1779 > Elizabeth Crosier, then occupier of Ickenham Hall, married George Hilliard.

1781 > Home Farm now called 'Stone's Homestead'.

1785 > Edward Hilliard is described as 'Lord of the Manor of Cowley House'.

1790 > The present Ickenham Hall site is plots number 65 and 66 on the Ickenham Enclosure Award Plan. This plan shows several properties held by the Crosiers and two smaller fields held by Mr Hillyard.

1801 > John Crosier died and left his freehold properties to Edward Hilliard his nephew and second son of George and Elizabeth. This included Ickenham Hall and the other Crosier properties. The rest of the property was left to Edward's brother, George. The population of Ickenham village was 213.

1810 > Michael Shorediche, Lord of the Manor of Ickenham, mortgaged most of his property to pay off heavy debts. A George Robinson foreclosed on the mortgage and took control of the properties.

1813 > Michael Shorediche married a wealthy West Indian Princess from Antigua and went to live there.

1815 > Ickenham Manor was put up for sale, to include the Manorial rights and 114 acres of land. It was bought by George Robinson.

1816 > Edward Hilliard died and left his property to his brother George. The Hilliards start to sell off their properties in a piecemeal fashion.

1818 > The Shorediche family forced by circumstances to relinquish the Manorial rights to the Manor of Ickenham - having held them for 470 years.

Ickenham Hall - a suggested history by Maurice Ray

- 1841 > The population of Ickenham had risen to 396. All that remained of the Manorial Demesne was a narrow strip of land near the 'Manor House'.
- 1851 > The population of Ickenham had fallen again - to 351.
- 1855 > George Hilliard died. His son Edward David Crosier Hilliard was already dead but the remaining properties were kept in the Hilliard family until 1927.
- 1857 > George Robinson died. His will was disputed and his property sold to Thomas Truesdale Clarke and merged with the Manor of Swakeleys.
- 1859 > Edward Ricout Shorediche, the grandson of Michael and his Princess, came to London in a bid to rescue his Manorial Rights. He was two years too late.
- 1871 > The population of Ickenham had risen again - to 386.
- 1890 > The Saich family occupied Home Farm (Reynolds Close).
- 18?? > Two thirds of Ickenham Manor House was pulled down.
- 1901 > The population of Ickenham had fallen yet again - to 329.
- 1902 > The land is sold to the Uxbridge and Harrow Railway Company.
- 1904 > Some of the land is sold on to Charles de Winton Kitkat.
- 19?? > Ickenham Hall is bought by Dame Agnes Maud Lawrence. Her father had been Viceroy of India and she was honoured for her work on behalf of women.
- 1916 > Hill Farm is absorbed by Northolt Aerodrome.
- 1918 > Dame Maud Agnes Lawrence owned and occupied Ickenham Hall.
- 1921 > The population of Ickenham was rising again - it stood at 443.
- 1927 > The Saich family, tenants of Home Farm since the 1890s, now bought it from the Hilliards.
- 1932 > Captain Paul Rycout Shorediche-Churchward went to Brazil in search of Colonel Fawcett - he did not find him!
- 1933 > Dame Maud died and the property was auctioned by Harrods, described as: "*nicely timbered house, paved terrace, tennis court, lawns, grass orchard, kitchen garden, herbaceous borders, paddock, about 5 acres.*" The property was bought by the Reverend Ralph Guy Potts.
- 1937 > The village of Ickenham is absorbed into Uxbridge.
- 1947 > The Reverend Potts died and the property was sold to the Middlesex County Council. Ickenham Hall had been a private residence for 207 years.
- 1948 > Ickenham Hall used as a Community Centre.
- 1950 > Ickenham Manor House was purchased by Captain Shorediche-Churchward and thus returned to the Shorediche family after 140 years.

Ickenham Hall - a suggested history by Maurice Ray

1950s > A wood yard occupied part of the site where the The Compass Theatre now stands. Ickenham Hall used as a school for pupils waiting for places at Glebe School.

1959 > Ickenham Hall named 'Middlesex Youth House'.

1965 > Middlesex County Council became part of the Greater London Council. Agreement is reached to build a theatre on site.

1968 > 'Ickenham Youth Theatre' opened by Minister for the Arts, Jennie Lee.

1974 > 'Middlesex Youth House' and the 'Ickenham Youth Theatre' were merged. The new complex was named 'The Ickenham Centre', then quickly changed to 'The Compass Community Arts Centre'.

1976 > The name of the complex was changed again - to 'The Compass'.

1981 > Death of Captain Paul Rycout Shorediche-Churchward.

1982 > The communicating building between the house and the theatre became 'The Bistro'.

1985 > The Theatre was renamed yet again - as 'The Compass Arts Theatre'.

1986 > Theatre closed for re-construction.

1987-9 > Major work carried out; theatre is virtually rebuilt and re-equipped. Performance of plays, concerts and cabarets in Ickenham Hall during repairs/reconstruction of the theatre auditorium. Small plays were performed also in the Bistro. A marquee seating 200 was erected in the grounds to accommodate larger productions.

1990 > The Compass Arts Theatre reopened by HRH Prince Edward. Ickenham Hall used as Council offices for Music, and Youth services and for theatre rehearsal rooms.

19?? > 'The Compass Arts Theatre' was again re-named - as 'The Compass Theatre and Arts Centre'.

20?? > The Theatre is referred to as 'Compass Theatre'.

2009 > 'Friends of Ickenham Hall' are established to raise funds for and oversee the conservation, repairs and, where possible, the restoration of Ickenham Hall.