

ORCHARD PORTMAN AND PORTMANS

- 854** Aethelwulf (King of West Saxons) gives an estate called *orceard* to the Minster church of Taunton. The name suggests the presence of an orchard or possibly a garden
- 904** Taunton Minster and estates are bought by the Bishop of Winchester
- 1135** Elfric de Orchard is the bishop's tenant. Hereafter Orchard is a largely independent manor governed by its own lord
- 1348** Thomas de Orchard, lord of the manor dies from the Black Death. The Manor passes to his son John de Orchard. The original manor house may have stood on the same site as the later Portman mansion, or in a small field to NE where a building platform survives. The manor is thought to have comprised a hall with chambers and other rooms. Other buildings include a dovecote, watermill and the parish church of St Michael
- 1450** Following death of her first husband Christine de Orchard marries Walter Portman an aspiring Taunton merchant seeking status
- 1498** Sir William Portman is born
- 1555** Sir William Portman is made Lord Chief Justice
- 1550s** During this period and in keeping with his position, Sir Williams has a Tudor mansion built at Orchard Portman (see Kips plan of 1707-8 and J C Buckler's 1832 watercolour) which probably incorporates the old hall
- 1557** Sir William Portman dies

- 1556** The manor of Thurlbear is added to the Orchard estate
- 1595** Sir John and Sir Hugh Portman purchase the manor of Staple Fitzpaine and deer park (Staple Park)
- 1590s** Rachel Portman builds a mansion at Playstreet in Bickenhall
- 1642** Start of the Civil War. Sir William Portman (Fifth Baronet) initially supports the Parliamentarians but changes to the Royalists
- 1643** June - Orchard House is used briefly as a royalist headquarters during the king's campaign to establish control in Somerset. The house is subsequently used as a staging post by both forces during the ensuing sieges of Taunton Castle
- 1643** Sir William founds the Almshouses at Staple Fitzpaine.
- 1644** Sir William Portman born
- 1645** February: The Parliamentarians imprison Sir William in Taunton Castle. There is a bitter battle at Orchard Portman between both forces
- May: The end of Royalist siege of Taunton
- 14th June: Battle of Naseby. Sir William escapes and fights for the king. He is taken by Cromwell's men to the Tower of London where he dies
- 1649** The Portman estates are sequestered by Parliament. Orchard House is thought to have been used as an isolation house
- Later
1600s** Orchard House is 'improved' by Sir William, the 6th Baronet (1644-1690) who added the range of buildings which dominates John Kip's engraved view of the house c. 1707-08

- 1690** 17th February Sir William Portman dies childless. His cousin Henry Seymour inherits his estate and takes the name Portman
- 1728** Henry Portman dies childless. The family vault at Orchard Portman is opened for the last time. Henry's cousin William Berkeley inherits the estate and also takes the name Portman
- 1761** Both Henry and William had preferred the attractions of the Portman estate at Bryanston in Dorset and high society in London. The resulting gradual decline of the estate becomes evident. The paling for Staple Park is sold off this year with the Park itself being used for keeping bullocks. In the meanwhile the Portman's were busy developing their real estate in London's Marylebone fields – see for example Portman Square. The income produced by the ground rents of this investment alone made them one of the most wealthy families in the country.
- 1802** By this date Orchard House had lost most of its C17th additions
- 1819** The coveys at Orchard Portman are stocked with pheasants from Dorset as the Portman family rediscover outdoor sports. Orchard House is occasionally used by members of the Portman family
- 1820s** Remaining Orchard House ancillary buildings are demolished
- 1829** Staple Fitzpaine school is founded by Lord Portman
- 1830** 1st Viscount (later Baron) Edward Berkeley Portman promotes the enclosure of Neroche Forest and begins to look towards improving his Somerset estates in line with the 'Agricultural Improvement' movement of the period

- 1843** Edward Berkeley Portman gives orders for the demolition of Orchard House. which had been given over to the tenants of Orchard Portman Farm
- 1927** Lord Edward Claude Berkeley Portman's love of hunting and racing is reflected by his establishment of the racecourse in Orchard Great Field
- 1942** The death of Lord Edward Claude Berkeley Portman marks the end of the Portman association with Somerset
- 1944** Following crippling death duties the Portman family are forced to sale the Orchard Portman estate to the Crown Lands Commissioners

For further information see Tom Mayberry '*Orchard and the Portmans*'

St Michael's Church contains the family vault, the Portman memorial chapel built in 1910 and some linen fold panelling rescued from Orchard House

Edward Claude Berkeley (1898-1842) was an enthusiastic member of Staple Fitzpaine cricket team, which flourished before the war

A watercolour by J. C. Buckler of the Staple Fitzpaine Almshouses endowed by Sir William Portman, 5th Baronet in 1643
(Somerset Natural History and Archaeological Society)

Pupils at Staple Fitzpaine School c. 1885. In 1875 F B Portman, the rector, sacked the headmistress for being absent without leave for three days

Extract from Taunton Deane Enclosure Map 1851 showing the outline of Orchard House

Extract from OS 6-inch 2nd Edition Map 1905 showing the site of Orchard House