

The disposal of Hyde Abbey's lands

Within four years all monasteries in Hampshire were dissolved. Over the next decade the lands were mostly sold, with the peak year being 1543. Some lands were also given away. The closure of Winchester's four friaries and three monasteries took place between May 1538 and November 1539. The Cathedral (but not the Cathedral Priory) and Winchester College escaped dissolution. In 1541 the new Dean and Chapter were endowed with most of the manors and the related rights belonging to the Cathedral Priory, the rectories of Hyde Abbey, and various properties in Winchester. These included both tangible assets, such as houses and buildings in the City and suburban parishes like St Bartholomew, and rights, such as rents, tithes and reversions.⁴⁶ Winchester College benefitted from the closure of the lesser monasteries, gaining the sites of the Carmelites in Kingsgate Street, the Austin Friars in Southgate Street, the Dominicans in Eastgate Street, and the Franciscans in Middle Brook Street.

Valuable gifts were made to the King's ministers and servants as a reward for their services and continuing support. Over many generations, these land-owning families continued to dominate society and mould the landscape. The social environment of the time is summed up in an article about Thomas Wriothesley:

One observes immediately in the correspondence of the time the fever of avarice that set in - the greedy grasping for church land, the jostling and pushing, the buying and selling, the pulling down and building up, the accumulation and dispersal of fortunes: features conditioning much of social life for the remainder of the century.⁴⁷

In Hampshire the initial beneficiaries employed at the royal court or in government included William Paulet and William Sandys, both of whom were well established in the county.⁴⁸ The old West Country Catholic family of Paulet (Paulett, Pawlett or Poulet) had acquired land in Somerset, Devon, Wiltshire and Hampshire through a series of marriages. Sir John Paulet married his cousin Alice Paulet and resided at Basing House. Their descendants played an important part in the history of Hyde Abbey's lands after the Dissolution. Paulet's elder son William, who later took the title of Marquess of Winchester, had a distinguished career and was a close associate of Wolsey and friend of Cromwell. He was a steward to the Bishop of Winchester - Richard Fox - joint Master of the King's Wards and Comptroller of the Royal Household. He held the post of sheriff of Hampshire on three occasions and served as Lord Treasurer until his death in 1572. As reward for his services to the Henry VIII, he received eight per cent of the Hampshire grants including Netley Abbey which he converted into a country mansion.⁴⁹ Sir John and Alice Paulet's younger son, George, was married three times and had nine children. One daughter, Mabel, married Thomas Chaundler and, on his death, married Roger Corham, both of whom became owners of the former Hyde Abbey's land.

In April 1538, Hyde Abbey was transferred to the King. A pension of £13 6s. 8d. p.a. was awarded to the prior, £10 p.a. each to three senior monks, and either £8 p.a. or £6 p.a. for the rest. The closure of the Abbey did not eliminate the monks' influence in Hyde or the City. Of the 20 monks expelled from the Abbey, many stayed in religious service close to Winchester: two remained in Hyde as vicar and curate of St Bartholomew's, two became curates in City parishes, one moved to the Cathedral, another became the keeper of the charnel chapel, and a further five monks were appointed to parishes within Hampshire.⁵⁰

Although Cromwell received some annuities out of the Abbey funds, Wriothesley was the prime beneficiary, receiving valuable manors, including Micheldever and Stratton along with the lease of the Abbey site. His residence at Micheldever was short lived and in 1538 he moved to Titchfield. However he retained the manorial rights. After Cromwell's execution in 1540, the rate of disposal of monastic lands was rapid as the government was in dire need of finance to support wars with Scotland in 1542 and France in 1543. The estimated cost of these was £2 million - equivalent to eleven times the annual value of all monastic properties. To raise these sums, two-thirds of monastic estates were sold over the period 1543 to 1547.⁵¹

Since the aim was to destroy the abbeys and to appropriate their property, any valuable parts of the buildings were stripped and claimed by the Crown. Bells were sent to the foundry at the Tower of London to be melted down for cannons and lead was systematically stripped and melted down for transportation. The roof timbers were used to fuel the fires. If anything valuable was left on the site, the new owners had to pay extra for it. There was a difference between the treatment of fixed assets and those which could be readily disposed of. The real estate consisted not only of the monastic buildings but also gardens and orchards, demesne lands, urban plots, outlying granges and manors, some of which were let on long leases. The assets more readily disposed of included the stock of crops collected as tithes, monastic furnishings, vessels, plate and ornaments, and agricultural equipment and stock. The latter were offered to the new farmers irrespective of whether their tenure was leasehold or copyhold.

Wriothesley's short tenure of the Abbey enabled him to dismantle it and sell the materials. His lease clearly stated the royal claims on the estate:

The stone, tymber, slates, iron and glasse, remayning within and upon the Church cloister, chaptre house, dormytery, frater, the Convent Hall, with the lodgings adjoining and the Gatehouse, deemed by the King's Comysioners to be superfluous houses, to be rased and taken to thuse of the kinge his majestie. And likewise of all the leade, remayning upon Thabbotts Hall, the Chapell, the Treasurer, the new Chamber and oder houses assigned to remayne for the fermour. To be reserved to the use of the Kinge his Highness.⁵²

This destruction contrasts markedly with former abbeys like Titchfield and Mottisfont that became the country seats of those who purchased them.

This desecration of Hyde Abbey is recorded by many writers.⁵³ Leland in 1539 wrote ‘In this suburb stood the great Abbey of Hyde and hath yet a parish church.’ In 1695 Camden found the site as ‘deformed with heaps of ruins, daily dug to burn lime.’ All that remained were ‘some ruinous outhouses, a gateway and a large barn supposed to have been the abbot's hall.’ In 1723 William Cole describes the Abbey as ‘a close with pits and holes of foundations.’ The barn (thought to be the refectory) was still standing and ‘good houses have been built’ with the stone being recycled. Even in 1788, following quarrying and institutional use, the foundations were still clearly marked.

Little of the Abbey buildings have survived except St Bartholomew's Church (the parish church) and the Abbot's Gatehouse. The gatehouse, built in the fifteenth century, was a rectangular north-facing building. The entrance was on the west side whilst the east side consisted of a two-storey building accessed from the Abbey's precincts.⁵⁴ Figure 1.4 gives an artist's impression of the south side of the gateway in the eighteenth century and Figure 1.5 show the building in the Victorian era and today. There are remains of several walls in the vicinity; some have survived intact but are hidden between recent developments; and some foundations have been added to or strengthened with brick corners and tops (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). The scattered stones were ideal for the construction of cottages in nearby Hyde Churchyard (Figure 1.8). Although remaining stones continued to be used as building materials, the site remained undeveloped for 300 years.

Figure 1.4: Hyde Abbey Gateway in the eighteenth century



Source: Warner (1795)