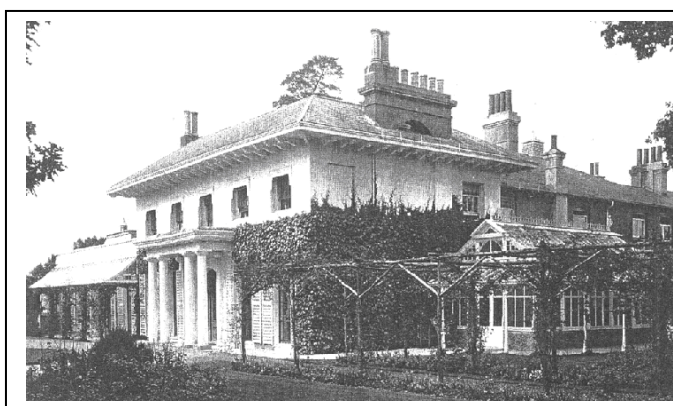


CHESTHAM PARK, HENFIELD

Records of a house and land at Chestham, to the north of Henfield, go back to the early 17th century and a family named Gratewick. A century or so later, in 1702, Chestham, which presumably got its name from the nearby Chess Brook, came into the ownership of John Norton of Twineham who, in due course, left the property to a nephew, Henry Woods in 1757.

Between 1816 and 1830, Henry Woods' son John built 'a competent mansion' on the site of the old house and it was probably at this time too that the kitchen gardens to the west of the house were built.

An attractive building of the Regency period, John Woods' '*competent mansion*' appears on the Tithe Map of 1845. The Tithe Map also shows the park around the house, which by then covered about 40 acres (16.2 hectares), having been formed by the gradual addition of fields to the west and by the absorption of many of the small gardens and cottages which had once been part of the hamlet of Chestham. Chestham Park became noted for its trees, particularly its oaks, a magnificent specimen of which still stood on the front lawn in 1976.

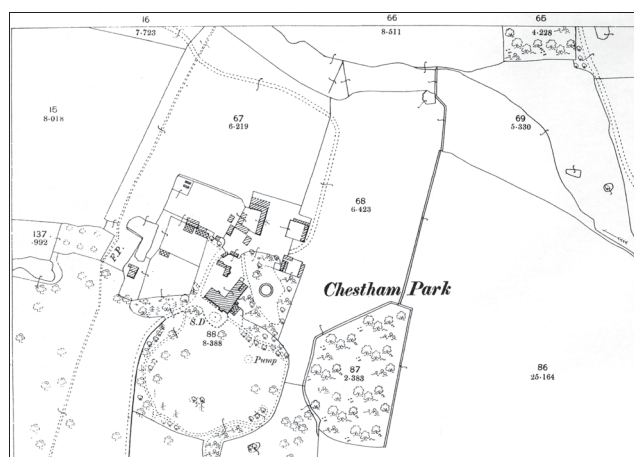


Chestham Park, from M Carreck and A Barwick's 'Henfield: A Sussex Village', Phillimore, 2002

Chestham Park remained in Woods family ownership until 1874 since when it has changed hands several times. The house itself has undergone various alterations and additions over the years, particularly during the lifetime of Prince Littler, a theatre impresario who bought the property in 1945 and remained there until his death in 1973.

Prince Littler made important changes to the gardens too, employing Percy Cane to redesign them in the 1960s. While there was an avenue of limes, there was no cohesive plan for the garden, so Cane designed a new forecourt which provided a vista of the park. To the south he opened up the link between the house and the lawn. To the east he introduced a new turf walk and herbaceous borders which led to beds of azaleas and lilies. A new rose garden was enclosed in yew hedges and a round lily pool with a fountain was created in a sunken garden, surrounded by lawn and then shrub planting. The pool was fed by a nearby spring.

Shirley Penny



Chestham Park, Ordnance Survey map, 1981