

The History of Holbrook House

A number of streams rise off the forest marble which gives Holbrook its name and cuts its hollow – a deep gully arriving around the Northside of the house – goes to join the river Cale downstream from Wincanton. This in turn is destined for the River Stour beside Henstridge Airfield and finds the sea at Christchurch. Higher Holbrook is the dividing line for the catchment areas. From the other side of the hill the spring water heads for the Bristol Channel.

Holbrook evolved from a farm into a Gentleman's residence. The earliest known occupier of the ground is Giles Hose who in 1201 – 02 was a tenant of a hide of land in Holbrook. The first owner of note was Sir Thomas Hungerford from 1381 to his death in 1398. He was the speaker of the House of Commons and he was to leave his mark on another Somerset house, Farleigh Hungerford, near Bath, which he converted from a manor into a castle.

Following various other owners, John Farewell of Bishops Hull near Taunton and his family took over the land in around 1550 and were set to own the property for a couple of hundred years. The Farewell family line died out and the new owners, the Mallet family took over the property and assumed the Farewell name to perpetuate the connection. It was from this line that Holbrook's most famous son was born.

Francis George Farewell was born in 1784. He joined the Royal Navy as a midshipman two years after the Battle of Trafalgar and his small part in the building of the British Empire was to establish the first trading station at Port Natal, Southern Africa in August 1824.

The landscaping of the parkland grounds at Holbrook dates from the Farewell centuries including the giant Cedar of Lebanon which could date back to 1676. These trees have grown into the most stately trees in Europe.

In 1830 Major General Henry Shrapnel was living in semi retirement at Holbrook. He was the inventor of the fearful anti personnel weapon using bursting charges, hence the name "shrapnel".

John Angerstein came to Holbrook in 1903 – 4 and started the last major enlargement and rebuilding. The land in the South which was originally the front of the property was raised to give the house the right proportions of height and width and the basement windows covered over along with the doors to the current cellar which are to the right of the present entrance. These works were carried out by Sir Reginald Bloomfield who was particularly fond of working on English country houses.

In 1945 the new owner Freddi Somerset, a butcher from Frome was planning to turn the property into a Hotel and Country Club with a partner. After a year he got cold feet and put the property back on the market to be purchased by Geoffrey Taylor, who had to leave the City, due to a rare deteriorating eye problem, to live in the country. Holbrook was bought for the sum of £7,500 and opened on Christmas Eve 1946. Geoffrey Taylor lost his first wife in 1971 and his second wife was to organise the hotel allowing her husband to have semi-retirement in the timber bungalow to the side of the outdoor swimming pool.

It was in 1998 that the new owners John and Pat McGinley took over the hotel and embarked on a refurbishment programme and development which included the health suite, indoor pool and garden rooms.