

My Story ; South Ash Manor

My wife and I were in Kent on holiday in autumn last year and we thought we would visit my grandfather's beautiful old farmhouse, South Ash Manor, now part of the London Golf Club. I was shocked at the state it was in, empty and unloved. This was my grandparents family home for over forty years, the place of memories going back before I was born.

Memories full of familial love and the bustle of a working farm. Farm workers and the manager, visitors coming and going. The smell of woodsmoke and grandpa's "Gold Block" pipe tobacco. His collection of late Pre-Raphaelite paintings and other late Victorian painters as well as his artist friends from the 1930s. Childhood memories of Christmas and the welcome at the porch with a roaring fire, glasses of sherry for the adults and tales of woe of the farming year. Carvings in oak of pilgrims outside the front door, said to come from previous house built on this spot two hundred years before the present house. 16th Century painted murals in the dining room and 17th Century wooden panels in the lounge/hall. The home of my mother and aunt in their teenage years. We were taken to see the giants in the attic, but somehow they'd always just gone! All that was left were a few boxes of the girl's dolls.

The garden itself was full of delights and history. An old Blenheim Orange Apple tree, planted on the anniversary of the Battle of Blenheim, although nobody knew which anniversary? Philip the gardener, seemed even older than the house with his musty shed and greenhouse. Tennis court, sunken gardens, a well and weeping willows round a pond where the girls learned to skate. A family home and farm house, belonging to the Hodsolls for much of its four hundred year history.

Grandpa had to retire in 1988 and was advised to sell the house and farm as property was worth more than farmland at that time. Bought by a Japanese consortium who wanted to build what was to become The London Golf Club. They had no use for the house and for the last 35 years, apart from a period where it was bought as a business for rented office spaces, it has remained unloved and unloved in.

I am very sad that it has been empty for so long and some of the historical features have disappeared. Now the London Golf Club is under new management and as part of my research into the history of the house I have met some of the development team. I hope their plan to turn South Ash Manor into a wedding venue can succeed. After all my parents were married here! I wish them well with bringing this magical house back to life.