



The Babraham Institute
**History of Babraham Hall
and the Estate**

Babraham Hall and the Estate

The Babraham we see today has been shaped by every occupation of the land in its long and colourful history. Back before the institute, before the modern hall, before the hall of the 16th century, before the Normans, before the Saxons and even before the Romans, people lived in Babraham. Every man, woman and child made Babraham their own. It has seen many different owners and constructions but there is something familiar about the river and the green hills throughout time.



Prehistoric Babraham

Life began in the area now encompassed by the Babraham site in the Mesolithic (or Middle Stone Age) period. Geographically it is a prime place for habitation; it has always been close to a water source, it was situated close to the prehistoric trade route the Icknield Way and it is overlooked by the Gog Magog Hills (an obvious fortification). However the site does not appear to have been permanently populated, but was just used for its flint or for seasonal hunting.



Later in the Bronze Age the area is believed to have been populated. The Gog Magog Hills were fortified and there is evidence of a great Bronze Age conflict. However, it is uncertain whether habitation spread down to the Babraham area.

Roman British Babraham

Occupation here by the Romans seems to have lasted from the Late Iron Age right through the 2nd and 3rd centuries and well into the 4th century before the site was abandoned. The Romans left most of the archaeology that has been recovered so far, although we still do not know entirely the settlement's purpose other than it was a small Roman settlement in a rural area.

A great deal of metalwork and coinage has been recovered. The proximity to both the Icknield Way and the Via Devana suggests that there was significant passing traffic such as the Legions passing from Colchester to Godmanchester.



Occupation of the site probably exploited the ford and the existing Celtic trade routes between the Icenii in Norfolk and the Catuvellauni of the Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire area. There were also the emerging Roman markets in the 1st Century AD that may have used the area as a gateway to the northern territory (or to the south and Europe depending upon the direction of the traveller).

Anglo Saxon Occupation

After the Romans left Babraham the area was probably abandoned for a while. There was a Badburgh (equivalent to the name Barbara today) who lived here in the early Saxon period and gave the place its name (Babra – ham, home of Barbara). She was probably the daughter of a chief and her tribe was most likely wiped out by the Viking invasion.

The Domesday book tells us that the majority of the land was owned by Ediva the Fair, wife of King Edward the Confessor and sister to Harold II. She owned two of the five manors spoken of, one of which was held by Alric (or Aluric) the Priest. The third Manor was owned by Algar, Earl of Mercia, and held by Godeva. The last two manors were owned by Ulwin and Godric respectively.

The village was populated by 38 tenants and had 205 sheep as well as a watermill. Domesday also records that the land of Babraham was sized at seven hides (1 hide being 4 virgates, 120 acres or 485,622m²).

Mediaeval Babraham

Babraham was not abandoned after the Norman conquest, though while the land changed hands, the Saxon village remained. If we judge it by tax collection the village was wealthy for the area. In 1250 the village paid more tax than any other village in the Chilford hundred and in 1327 was second only to Linton. Tax also tells us about the population, the village reached a high point in the mid-14th century when 121 people were taxed.

The lands of Ediva the Fair were given to Count Alan the Red of Brittany. However, Alan went on to become the Earl of Richmond and although the land passed to other owners it was said until the 15th century that the land was 'being held of the honour of Richmond.'

Count Alan's tenant was Brian de Scallers and his descendants lived on the land for nearly two hundred years; a Geofery de Scallers gave Babraham church to Waltham abbey in the 1180s and the last de Scallers on the land was John de Scallers who is said to have gone on crusade around 1271.



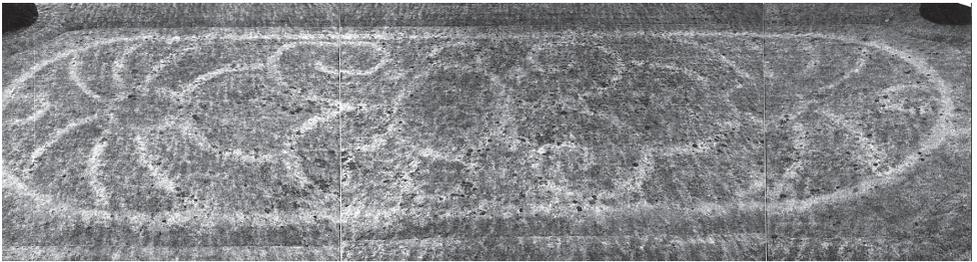
Aerial photograph of Babraham church circa 1955

The lands of the five manors passed through a series of different hands but as with many medieval manors in less crucial locations large parts of it were given to the church in return for pardons, land elsewhere or simply a safe conscience. The last of Alan the Red's lands in the larger Manor - once lived in by the de Scallers - was given to Bruisyard Abbey in 1390 by Roger Ferrour in exchange for lands in Norfolk.

The First House

At the beginning of the 16th century most of the land was owned by the Church. However after Henry VIII split from the Catholic Church he began seizing their lands all over the country and in 1539 the lands of Babraham were surrendered to the Crown.

The land passed through several owners in a short space of time until in 1576 when Robert Taylor, 'a teller of the Exchequer', purchased the estate and proceeded to buy out all other owners in the area. In 1576 Taylor built the first of three Babraham halls. In the process of building the hall Taylor demolished the village of Babraham which had begun in Saxon times and moved it to its present location.



Photograph of the gardens at the rear of the house during a very hot summer which revealed an older garden plan

Taylor had barely time to live at Babraham before he lost his fortune when repaying the £7,500 one of his servants had embezzled. Taylor mortgaged his house to Horatio Palavicini (known as a malicious lender) and in 1589 was forced to sell his home to Palavicini.

Palavicini was Genoese and came from a powerful Italian noble family. He had come to England at the time of Queen Mary and served as a Papal tax collector, being most capable in the collection of the taxes but less successful in sending those taxes on to the Pope. When Mary died he kept the taxes for himself and loaned some of his new fortune to Mary's sister Queen Elizabeth. In 1587 he was knighted. He also commanded a ship in the battle against the Armada as a civilian volunteer captain. However in latter years he fell out of favour with Elizabeth and retired from Court to his Babraham estates.

While Sir Horatio was said to be a miser his heir Sir Toby (who inherited after Sir Horatio died in 1600) was less careful with money and soon lost the family fortune. He had to sell Babraham to the Bennet family in 1632. Thomas Bennet had his land confiscated in 1651 by the Cromwell government because of his support of Charles I, but had his lands returned and was made a Baronet in 1660 when the Monarchy was reinstated.



Babraham village almshouses

Sir Thomas was succeeded by his son Sir Levinus Bennet who was MP for Cambridgeshire from 1679 to 1693 when he died. When Sir Richard Bennet died in 1701 his heir was his only daughter Judith, who died a minor in 1713. As a result the land passed into the hands of Sir Richard's five sisters.

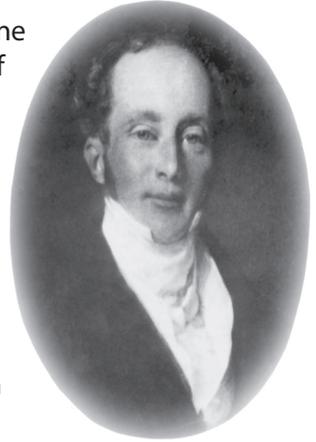
Most of the land ultimately passed to Bennet Alexander and the rest to William Mitchell. In 1765 Mitchell owned almost all the land and in 1770 Babraham was sold to East India Company director Robert Jones. The first house was pulled down in 1768 and piece by piece was sold off.

The Second and Third Houses

Jones built a square brick house that the Adeanes would later regard as small. It was a country house, not the grand hall of Taylor and Palavicini. Robert Jones' only child Anne married Colonel (later General) James Whorwood Adeane who was also MP for Cambridgeshire from 1780 to 1784 (the same seat Sir Levinus Bush held one hundred years previously). General Adeane died in 1802 leaving his 38 year old son Robert Jones Adeane as owner of Babraham.

Robert died in 1823 leaving his son Henry John Adeane Esq. (right, his wife Mathilda below) as owner of Babraham. He did not like the house of Robert Jones and between 1832 and 1837 the house was pulled down and the present grand hall was built, although most of the outbuildings to the hall have since been destroyed.

The hall was designed by Philip Hardwick, an eminent Victorian English architect who is most famous for the now demolished Euston Arch in London.



The Adeanes owned the land and for the first time we are able to hear information on the lives of villagers at Babraham with whom the Adeanes appear to have lived amicably for a predominant period.

However, it wasn't all tranquillity, for example in 1820 William Wisbey (a shepherd who worked for the Adeanes) was murdered by a poacher called William Bonnet who was never caught. Also there was the night in August 1826 when 33 sheep were struck by lightning.

Life at Babraham in the 19th century is perhaps best summarised by Sir Edward Cadogan, seventh son of George, the 5th Earl of Cadogan:

'Secluded, it stands like its elder and statelier brethren in a small park with the traditional foliage of oak, beech and elm spreading shadows over the springing turf. I know not how to appraise its architecture. It is of red brick... its proportions thrown out of balance by a tall ungainly tower at its western extremity. A long balcony with a colonnade tangled with roses, clematis and jasmine runs the whole length of the garden front...whatever its aesthetic value I loved the place, and that was all that mattered to me...once on the lawn we could not help but pausing.



The tranquillity of it all was so overwhelming even to our unromantic senses. There was that wonderful country silence which will never again be experienced in civilization. No roar of charabanc and motor-cycle, no hum of aeroplane broke the perfect and lasting stillness of those long summer days long long ago.'

The Cadogans lived at Babraham from 1875 to 1889, leasing it from the Adeanes. During the Second World War it is said that the house and grounds were used by the Canadian Air Force and also that a Spitfire crashed in the grounds on its return trip to Duxford air base.

The Babraham Institute

After the Second World War the Adeanes no longer remained in Babraham. They sought a buyer and found one in the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), who bought the estate in 1948. By the early 50s the first of the large animals were introduced and the building of the first laboratories had begun.

The Second World War awoke the UK to its dependence on trading partners and the Government decided that future means of food production must be secured, with an emphasis on fundamental research on the physiology of farm animals.

Ivan de Burgh Daly FRS was appointed to establish a new National Institute for Animal Physiology. He threw himself into this task with enormous enthusiasm, a characteristic much needed during the first formative years.

Daly's first steps were to turn the breakfast room of the Hall into a laboratory and operating theatre, the drawing room into laboratory stores and offices, and the basement into workshops and darkrooms.

He held to the principle of trying to find first-class people and largely letting them direct their own research. To help attract staff, he built The Close to provide housing on site.



In 1993 the Institute was renamed 'The Babraham Institute' and over the next five years the agricultural research was phased out. Today the Institute undertakes innovative research to understand the biological events that underlie the normal function of cells and the implication of failure of abnormalities in these processes.



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