

Manor Buildings - A Bit of History

(a brief account compiled by Chris Aggs, the owner and resident, originally for guests at his B&B flat; he makes reference to county local studies librarian Martin Hayes' online post for West Sussex Record Office – 'William Penn in West Sussex'– click [here](#) if you wish to read this)



Manor Buildings used to be the stable block for a much larger house, Warminghurst Park that stood on a site to the East. The stable block is visible on the left of this drawing from 1750's and Warminghurst Church can be seen on the right. The remains of the chestnut avenue can still be seen in the field to the East of here as well as some of the terracing in this drawing. We called the flat Coach House Flat because of the two large openings below that must once have housed the coaches of the Butler family who built the grand house.



Warminghurst's most famous resident was **William Penn** (1644-1718).
Martin Hayes, county librarian writes '*Penn is best known as the founder of Pennsylvania, among the most successful of all American colonies, and as a leader of the fledgling Society of Friends, better known as Quakers. He promoted causes and ideas which were well ahead of their time, notably religious toleration,*

The house saw visits by many prominent Quakers such as George Fox the founder, and Robert Barclay. Secret illegal Quaker meetings, both for worship and for administrative purposes, were held here and some of the former were large open-air gatherings.

It was at Warminghurst between 1680 and 1682 that William worked on the Constitution for Pennsylvania, which was to become the basis for the American Declaration of Independence, and Constitution, a century later.

Most of Penn's significant family events happened here. Four of Penn's eight children and two grandchildren were born here, and his wife Gulielma Maria may have died here as did her mother Mary Penington (nee Springett). In early 1696 he took his ailing eldest son Springett on carriage rides in the area, in an unsuccessful attempt to cure of him an illness, probably tuberculosis. Penn's children William junior (Billy) and Letitia continued to live here from 1696 to 1707 and he was a frequent visitor.

Finally the ultimate irony was that with Penn's house purchase came an advowson, that is, in this case, the right to appoint the vicar of Warminghurst parish church! (Hayes)

The Blue Idol Meeting House, Coolham



Penn, with Benjamin Hayler, oversaw the conversion of John Shaw's timber-framed house, Little Slatter, into a permanent Quaker meeting house between 1691 and 1694. William and his family were regular worshippers here, being located in Oldhouse Lane, near the hamlet of Coolham, at the northern end of Thakeham parish and only around 4 miles from his home. His daughter Letitia was married here on 20th August 1702 and laid to rest in the burial ground in 1746. Penn's unnamed daughter who died soon after birth on 26th March 1683, may have been buried here too. This is now better known as the Blue Idol, so named after the blue wash on the plaster infill and its period of inactivity (idle-ness) in the 18th/19th centuries. It is still used by the Society of Friends as a meeting house (Hayes) and can be visited by appointment.

At least 16 Friends (Quakers) from the Thakeham area emigrated to Pennsylvania with William aboard the 'Welcome' in 1682.

Penn is reputed to have preached from a large prominent stone on the green near the pond adjacent to Abingworth Hall, Thakeham]:



Warminghurst Manor was sold, in 1707, to James Butler who lavished large sums of city money on a large modern mansion with stable block in the Queen Anne style. In Butler's own words he 'erased all trace of the old Quaker' and very possibly used some stonework from the old Penn house in refurbishing **Warminghurst Church**. There is a large memorial marble plaque to the Butler family in the church. From the Butlers the estate and house passed into the ownership of the Duke of Norfolk's Arundel Estate. It is probable that faced with high rates of 'window' tax on large properties (to fund Napoleonic wars) the Norfolk Estate chose to demolish the Butler house before it was even 100 years old. The stable block must have survived because it had some agricultural value as stabling and accommodation for grooms and farm workers. Working horses were kept in stables here in living memory (1950s)

In 1913 the Norfolk Estate added two cottages to the East end of the building as agricultural workers' cottages. The same building style using two colours of local brickwork, can be seen in Arundel town centre. At least one family living here lost a member fighting in France in 1914 – Albert (Bertie) Potts is fondly remembered and said to re-visit occasionally!

William Aggs bought the property in 1922; he already owned the Lutyens house, Little Thakeham about half a mile to the South West. Aggs was himself a Quaker and the connection to Penn must have been an added attraction. Also by co-incidence his wife Sylvia Maria (né Thompson) was related to the Bigland family who had originally sold the land to Penn in the 17th Century.

Chris and Patrice Aggs moved here in 1983 and have been slowly converting bits of the almost derelict building ever since.

(Many thanks to Chris Aggs for permission to include this on our local history site – as with most historic accounts, this is "work in progress" and may be altered as new information is discovered.

Roger Taylor, August 2020)