

# Madeley Court

Madeley Court is recorded in The Domesday Book of William the Conqueror, but it is known that a building had been in existence on the site dating back to Saxon England.

In the 8th century, St Milburga is reputed to have bought the Madeley estate from Sigward, a follower of King Ethelbald of Mercia - remaining in the possession of the priory she founded at Wenlock. For five centuries the Monks tended the estate, and the Prior enjoyed the amenities of the manor. These included the right, obtained from King Henry III, to hunt in the Royal Forest of Mount Gilbert, as the Wrekin was then called.

As the Centuries passed, the Monasteries became more and more powerful and began to pose a threat to the power and revenue of the King. Therefore, King Henry VIII, having quarreled with the Pope, felt justified in closing the great houses and claiming their properties for the Crown.

The last prior of Madeley was John Bayley; who surrendered the priory and its estates to the commissioners of Henry VI in 1540. - he was allowed to stay at Madeley Court until his death in 1554.

In 1544 the estate was sold to Robert Brooke for £946 - he became Speaker of the House of Commons and Chief Justice for Common Pleas in 1554. He was knighted a year later. On his death in 1558, Madeley was passed to his son John, and to John's son Basil in 1598.

Basil Brooke was a staunch catholic and industrialist, and was knighted in 1604. A strong Royalist supporter, one can only wonder how he would have reacted to the fact that Parliamentarian soldiers garrisoned his beloved Madeley Court during the English Civil War? There is no evidence to support the claim that the house once sheltered King Charles I, however, on the East side of the house there is a chapel which contained a hiding hole in the paneling which may well have concealed other fugitive Royalists.

In 1705 Comberford Brooke sold Madeley Court to Matthias Astley, who leased the property to various tenants - the most notable of which was the first Abraham Darby. By 1712 he was living at Madeley Manor which was situated 2 miles from the Ironworks in Coalbrookdale. Darby built himself a new house but after catching a 'chill' he died at Madeley Court in 1717 aged 39 before the house was finished.

After this, the house remained separate from its Manor and was tenanted mainly by farmers that worked its land. The house was sold to James Foster in the early nineteenth Century who then left it to William Orme Foster. Their interest however, was not the house but the coal mines beneath. The spoil heap from this is now the south of the house but is now covered by trees.

All these factors contributed to the gradual decline of the building and it was not until 1964 that the Dawley (now Telford) Development Corporation bought the house and carried out urgent repairs to prevent any further deterioration. In 1973 they announced plans to convert the house into a public restaurant with the gatehouse to be used for historical display. This never happened however and it wasn't until 1984 when a Mr Martin Ebelis bought the building and started to carry out the work to transform it into a magnificent Hotel.

There is a walled garden which was laid out in the 17<sup>th</sup> century style, the main remaining feature of which is an Elizabethan Sundial. It is made from a block of stone forming a cube of over four feet which stands on four squat pillars and is topped by a stone hemisphere. It is a very unique sundial and believed to be the only one left in existence in the world.

In the summer of 2004, during further renovation of the Hotel's main staircase, a helmet was discovered, dating back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Hotel is currently waiting for information to be returned in order to discover how the helmet made its way to Madeley Court.

In February 2009, Focus Hotels bought the property and is currently undergoing a refurbishment and operating in the Hotel today.