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During August the monthly whist drives held in the Court House will be suspended, to be resumed in September.

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COUNTRY LIFE IN VICTORIAN TIMES

The Rossway Centenary

SO MANY OLD ESTATES have been sold and broken up that it is refreshing to find one which has remained in the ownership of the same family for several generations. It was exactly 100 years ago when the Hadden family acquired Rossway, the large estate which fills the south-west corner of the parish of Northchurch and extends into Wigginton and Hawridge.

Walkers are probably more familiar with the mansion than motorists. It stands a short distance off the ancient footpath from Berkhamsted to Hawridge and comes into view when one passes the ruins of Marlin Chapel to enter Rossway Park. The sturdy Victorian mansion is partnered by an older house, various farm buildings and a fine walled garden.

ANCIENT MANOR

After crossing the park the footpath continues over one of the three long drives to Rossway. A lodge stands at the entrance to each drive and, according to its location, is known as the Berkhamsted, Tring or Chesham lodge. The drive from the Berkhamsted lodge (near Shootersway) is magnificent, passing through tall beeches and masses of rhododendrons to present a sudden view of the mansion.

The name Rossway means a clearing, and first appeared in 1432, spelt Rothe-way. It was a small manor in Northchurch parish, consisting of a messuage or tenement with 50 acres of land. In early Stuart times it was held by members of the Wethered family, who for generations lived at Ashlyns. By the time of the survey of 1616, which tells us that the tenement was sometimes called Pratt's Place, the little manor had passed to Russell Webb.

COUNTRY SEAT

The tenement was replaced by a farmhouse, which in turn was enlarged to make a sizeable country seat. It was purchased in 1802 by Mr. Robert Sutton, a London mercer, and at the time of his death in 1848 the estate had grown to over 570 acres.

From Mr. Sutton, Rossway passed to Mr. Charles Stanton Hadden, a Ceylon coffee planter who, on 29th July, 1863, wrote to his sister stating that he had "purchased 577 acres, all Rossway, today for £34,500."

This letter was recently shown to me by the present owner of Rossway, Major Adrian Hadden-Paton, to whom I am indebted for much of the material in this article.

Unpublished reminiscences written by a member of the family recall the original house with its "mixed collection of tall chimney pots", great walled garden, stables, bowling green and carriage-drive skirting a moat-like pond.

The old farmhouse was undoubtedly picturesque, but Mr. Hadden soon tired of bad drains, smoking chimneys and endless repairs. He decided to rebuild and called upon the services of Mr. Evans, the architect brother of the novelist who wrote under the pseudonym "George Eliot."

A site was chosen beside the old house, which was not wholly destroyed; the kitchen end was saved to provide a nice little home for Gregory, the first butler. Fireplaces from the old drawing room were transferred to two bedrooms in the new mansion, which was built by Robert Young, of Lincoln, for £3,776 1s. 4d.—less than one would pay today for a very modest bungalow. The stable yard and kitchen garden were preserved and survive to this day.

TRADITION

The housewarming took place in December, 1866, and in that year a charming tradition was born. Every Christmas morn, at 7 o'clock, "Christians, awake", was sung by servants in the hall, to the strains of a concertina played by Gregory. I understand that this custom has died out, as there are no longer any servants. The present owners are woken at a much earlier hour and in a far less charitable manner by their four sons.

In hard winters, friends from miles around flocked to Rossway to skate on the moat. Some parties arrived in sleighs, with bells jingling on the harness. Gregory handed round claret cup and mulled wine to the skaters, a tricky job on the slippery banks of the moat.

Ice was transferred to the ice-house, which is still in existence in the wood down the Chesham drive. It is dated 1831. The ice was thrown into a deep pit, smashed up, and left to freeze into a solid block. The top of the pit was filled

with straw to keep out the air, and far into the summer blocks of ice were taken to the kitchen, sometimes for use in making strawberry ices. It was then the time for tennis, archery and cricket. A great annual event was the cricket match between Haresfoot (colours pink) and an eleven got up by the Haddens and their friends (colours blue).

FAMILY PEW

On Sunday morning, winter and summer alike, everybody at Rossway marched off to St. Mary's, Northchurch. The use of the carriage on Sunday was forbidden, and illness was the only excuse accepted for not attending church. The ladies put on Sunday bonnets, tied under their chins, and Mr. Hadden and male visitors donned their chimney-pot hats. Down the hill trooped the whole family, followed at a respectful distance by the servants.

Remote happenings affected Rossway in 1884. A disease struck the coffee plantations in Ceylon, and in one year this plant was virtually wiped out from the island. While Charles Hadden and his brother were busy establishing another plant from India, tea, there were not sufficient funds available for the family to continue living at Rossway.

Accordingly, in 1886, the property was leased to George Frederick McCorquodale, head of the large printing firm.

The Hadden family reluctantly moved out, saying farewell to their servants, among whom was the faithful butler Gregory. He took a public house in London, and on retirement lived in Berkhamsted.

In 1900 Mr. McCorquodale made great efforts to purchase the property, but on 25th June of that year he received the following reply from Mr. Hadden: "I value Rossway far too highly to accept your offer, if it were for sale, but I have no intention of selling it. I have always told Mr. Foulkes that I would not sell, I am too fond of the place to do so."

Mr. McCorquodale, however, was given permission to make some alterations to the house; a new billiards room was built, and a servants' hall with bedrooms over it was added to the south-west corner.

MODERN CHANGES

Periodically one member or another of the Hadden family returned to see Rossway, and there came a day in 1903 when the events of 1886 were reversed. The McCorquodales moved out and the Haddens returned to their country seat, the ownership having been transferred by Charles Hadden to his distinguished son, Major-General Sir Charles Frederick Hadden. Older readers will not need to be reminded of the active part that the General and Lady Hadden played in local life. The General increased the size of the property to 1,100 acres.

In 1949, on the death of Lady Hadden, the property passed to the General's grandson, Major Adrian Hadden-Paton; and both he and his wife are continuing the family tradition of public service. Their activities and interests extend far beyond their house and farms to town and county, and back again to the

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countryside in their work for the National Trust.

Times have changed. Development proceeds apace. But Rossway is still a fine house in an attractive garden, surrounded by the greenest of parks and fields, where mechanisation has worked wonders undreamed of by Mr. Charles Stanton Hadden and his army of farm and estate workers one hundred years ago.

"BEORCHAM".

(Further notes on Rossway will appear next month.)

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