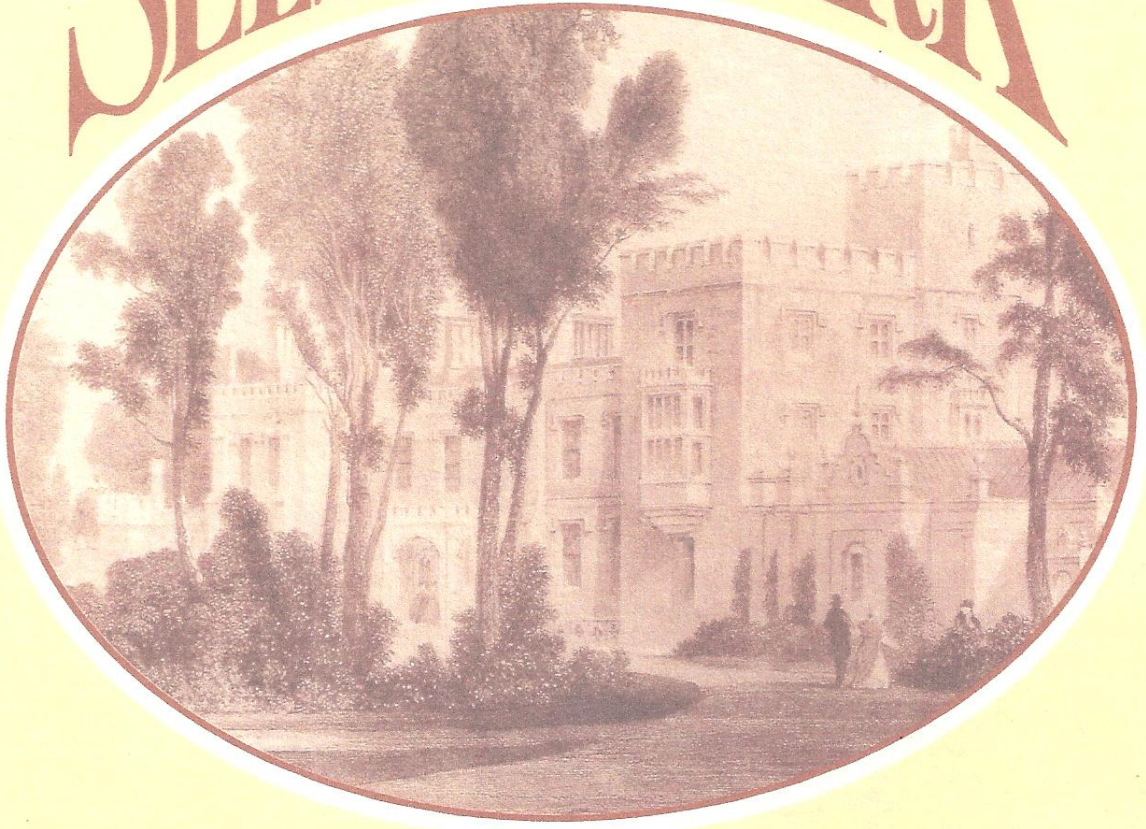


SELSDON PARK



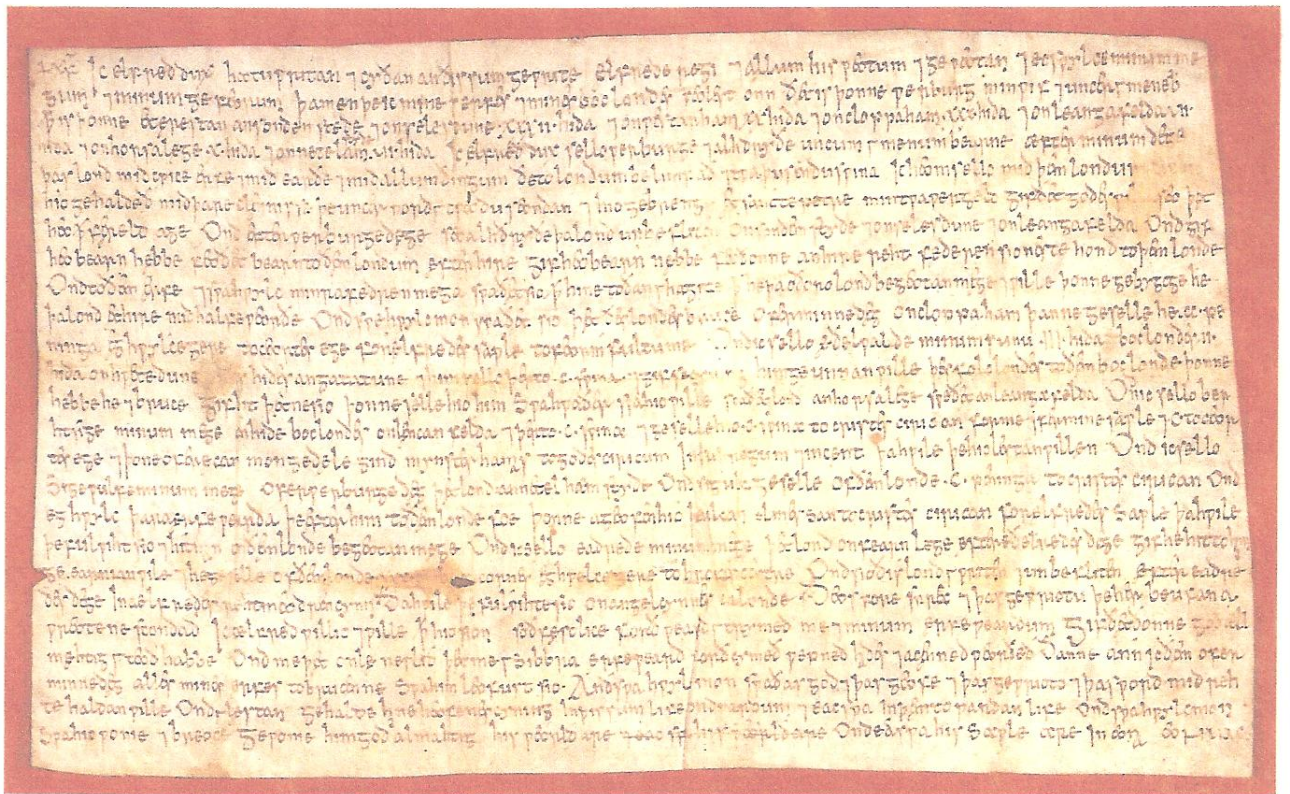
The History

A decorative flourish consisting of a complex, symmetrical knotwork or scrollwork design, centered below the word "History".

"There is nothing that more divides civilised from semi-savage man than to be conscious of our forefathers as they really were and bit by bit to reconstruct the mosaic of the long forgotten past."

*G.M. Trevelyan.
"The History of England", 1942.*

The history of Selsdon Park spans almost a thousand years and includes a rich pageant of historical figures — members of royalty (both past and present), politicians, financiers and



The Will of Duke Aelfred, 891 A.D., Anglo-Saxon Charter (British Library).

noble paladins — all of whom have helped to create our unique and illustrious heritage. This litany of past figures associated with Selsdon Park, together with its architectural development, form the central motif of this historical reconstruction.

The destiny of Selsdon Park to become a noble residence was etched long ago — as far back as the ninth century, in the Anglo-Saxon period, when the area was named "Selle Dun", which meant mansion on the hill. The type of mansion has, of course, varied through the ages: Anglo-Saxon "hall", Medieval farmhouse, Tudor and Elizabethan manor house, Victorian country seat and now one of Europe's finest hotels. Historically, the transference of ownership, in many instances, parallels the development and

transition of power and wealth in English society.

We begin, however, with the first recorded existence of Selsdon in the early Anglo-Saxon period, at the time of Alfred the Great (871 – 900 A.D.), when Britain was mustering its forces under the direction of Alfred, to wage battle against the mighty invasion of the Vikings. At this time, the manor of Selsdon was owned by Earl Aelfred, who received his Earldom after the battle of Thanet. His success in this battle was acclaimed by King Alfred, who bestowed upon Aelfred the title, Earl of Surrey. Little is known about this Saxon nobleman, apart from two recorded facts that he was instrumental in Alfred's first defeat of the Danes, and that he owned extensive and widely scattered estates in

Surrey and Kent. A Saxon nobleman was distinguished by the property he owned, so we may positively assume that because of his extensive ownership of land he was a figure of some standing in South-East England.

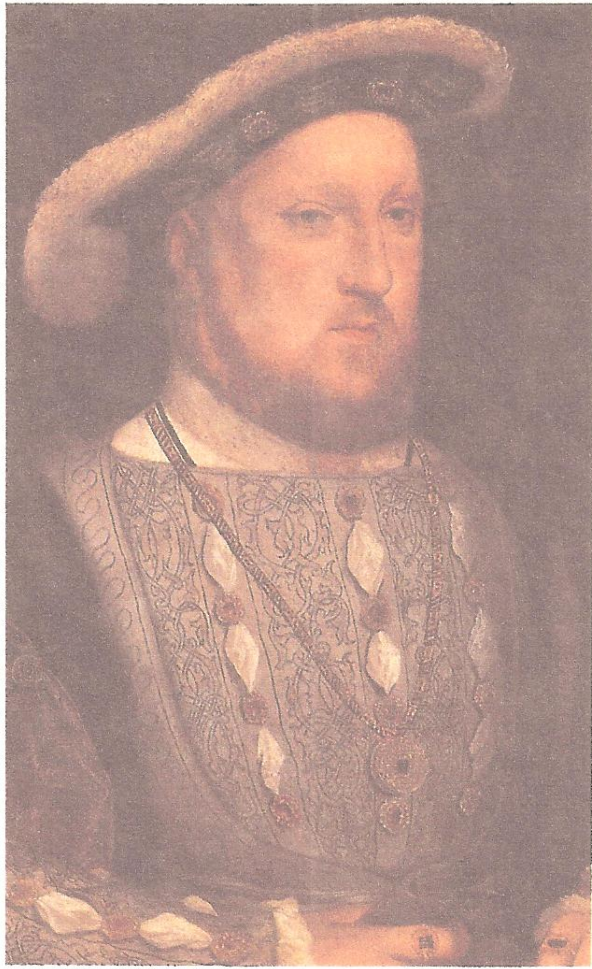
Earl Aelfred and his family lived at Selsdon, where their "mansion" was somewhat meagre by today's standards. However, compared to the other homes on his estate, in which his peasants lived, the "hall" was sheer grandiose luxury. The building, befitting a nobleman of the period, was probably about 82 feet long by 50 feet wide and made up of a wooden floor, vertical plant walls, cobbled porch and a thatched roof. The settlement would have been used for the rearing of livestock.

In 891 A.D. the Earl made his will, addressed to King Alfred. In it he bequeathed the estates of Selsdon and Sanderstead to his wife Werburg and daughter Althryth; the document records the sum of two thousand swine on the settlements, and that the land was rated "for thirty-two hides". A "hide" was a measure of land, supposed to provide the needs of one family.

Later, during the period of the Saxon reconquest of the Danes, the manors were made the property of Lady Athelfled, daughter of King Alfred. Lady Athelfled and her brother Edward the Elder (who became the first overall King of England) led independent armies against the Danes and were eventually successful in reconquering vital positions held by the invaders. Whilst the Anglo-Saxons were



The Knights Templar. 12th-Century Fresco of Cressac, Charente (Musée des Monuments Français).



King Henry VIII, 1491-1547. Painting after Hans Holbein (National Portrait Gallery).

bringing about the defeat of Danelaw, the English Kingdom was being formed: areas were made into shires, laws were passed, feudal systems developed and Christianity spread. The basis of power and wealth was transferred to the Church.

Lady Athelfled gave the manors of Selsdon and Sanderstead to the Abbey of Hyde, near Winchester, in 911A.D. The Abbey was one of the largest, richest and most influential in the whole of England. It was the home of the Benedictine monks, who administered the manors for a considerable length of time — from the tenth century until the Reformation.

The Domesday Book records that at the time of Edward the Confessor (1042 — 1066), the manor of Selsdon was “rated for 18 hides . . ., the wood yields 30 hogs . . .”. In the time of Edward, the land was worth 100 shillings (the equivalent of one pound). Under the administration of the Abbey, the land and buildings were leased to many families who lived by subsistence farming.

Medieval society was based upon an arrangement between knight, churchman and peasant farmer, for the protection of a rustic settlement against plunderers and evils, in return for the production of food and livestock. The main aim of the powerful intellectuals of the Middle Ages, was to provide men and women with permanent homes and unchallengeable beliefs in a law-abiding society. To achieve this aim, overlords were introduced in order to protect society against itself.

The overlords of the manor of Selsdon were the famous and historically romantic figures of the much acclaimed Order of the Knights Templar, who are perhaps better known for their courageous pursuits in the Crusades. In the reign of King Richard the Lionheart, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter, gave the tithe of Selsdon to the Templars.

The Knights were noblemen with strong Christian beliefs, stout hearts and fighting spirits. They took their vows for life and they alone wore the famous white linen mantle with its eight-pointed red cross on the left shoulder, and white girdle. The discipline of the Order was austere, excluding all needless luxury and display in food, dress or armour. All worldly pleasures were forbidden, including hawking and hunting all animals, with the characteristic exception of the lion. Members of the Order, when they were not fighting in the Crusades, would have visited the manor to offer protection to the peasant community and no doubt train and practise in the area, which afforded easy access to London and the coast, whence they

would embark on their epic adventures in the Crusades.

During the subsequent reign of King John, the estate reverted back to the management of the Abbey of Hyde, which continued to lease the manor to farming families. Methods of farming and life-style were developing slowly, but the greatest change and shift of power and wealth was to come with the Reformation.

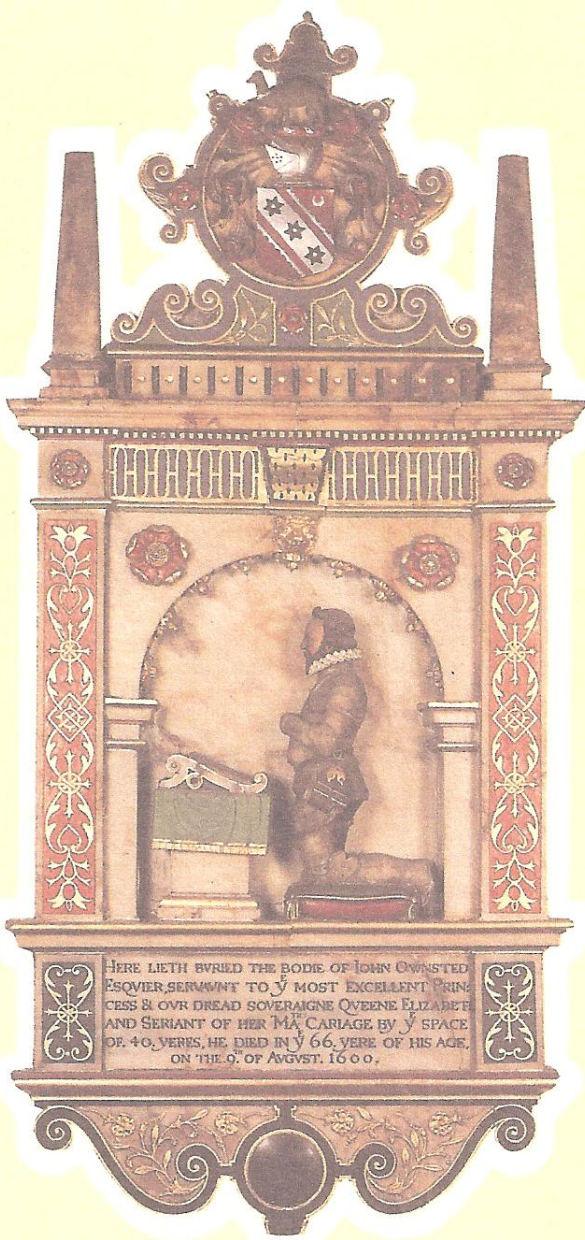
At this time, the principal architect of the Reformation, Henry VIII, was to become closely associated with the manor of Selsdon, both in the transference of ownership of the land and the formation of an important and historic romantic attachment nearby.

The dissolution of monasteries took place in 1538 at the behest of Henry VIII, as part of the overall transference of power and wealth from the Church to the State. The suppression of the orders of the monks and the secularisation of their property was instrumental in securing the Royal Parliamentary Reformation. The King sold most of the confiscated abbey lands to Peers, courtiers and close friends.

In 1540, King Henry VIII granted the manor of Selsdon to his friend and financial adviser, Sir John Gresham, who was a wealthy mercer and financier. He was also a member of a mercantile dynasty – his nephew, Sir Thomas Gresham, was to become the founder of the famous Royal Exchange.

Sir John became the first lord of the manor and during his ownership, Henry VIII courted Anne Boleyn at her uncle's house Wickham Court (then known as Havers Castle), which is very near Selsdon. It is probable that whilst the King, already married, was discreetly courting Mistress Anne, he would have stayed at his friend's manor.

The transference of ownership of the manors of Selsdon and Sanderstead to Sir John Gresham in the sixteenth century paralleled a profound change in local society. It was the beginning of an era in which the rich and powerful landlords of the manor influenced the development of the area. The manor's connection with royalty was also to continue.



John Ownstead Memorial. Sanderstead Church.



Queen Elizabeth I, 1533-1603. Painting by or after George Gower, c.1588 (National Portrait Gallery).

Richard Gresham, a descendant of Sir John, sold the estate to John Ownstead in 1591. Ownstead was in the close employ of Queen Elizabeth I; his official title was "Sergeant of Carriages", which he held for forty years. The Queen visited the area frequently – no doubt the manor held a sentimental attachment, as Elizabeth was the only daughter of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII. The "mansion" of Selsdon at the time was probably a farmhouse. The land was still used for farming, not on a subsistence, feudal basis, but planned and directed by the lord of the manor. Hunting deer and wild boar was a great Elizabethan pastime, which probably took place in the manor grounds. Queen Elizabeth reputedly planted a tree in honour of her faithful subject, Ownstead, in the grounds of the estate: this tree is still in existence today. John Ownstead was highly respected by the families who lived on the manor, due to his connection with Good Queen Bess, and they relied upon him for their livelihood. In the church at Sanderstead there is a splendid arabesque memorial to Ownstead. He died in 1600 and the estate was bought by Harman Attwood, a very successful attorney at Cliffords Inn, London.

The Attwood family owned the manors of Selsdon and Sanderstead for over 150 years and they exercised considerable influence over the local population. They were devout Christians and benevolent landlords, who helped the poor and needy of the area.

At the time of the Attwood's ownership of Selsdon and Sanderstead, England was thrown into the power struggle between Crown and Parliament culminating in the Civil War. Its aim was to produce political and religious liberty, but the immediate effect was chaos and turmoil. Family and religious loyalties were

challenged and broken; all subjects of the realm were divided into Royalists and Puritans, waging bloody battles and committing appalling atrocities against one another. The manors of Selsdon and Sanderstead did not escape the effect of the war; Harman Attwood instigated a custom, which is still kept today, for the Parson of Sanderstead Church to preach a sermon on November 1st "in thankful remembrance of God's great mercy in delivering Church and State from the horrid treason of the Gunpowder Plot".

In 1670, at the time of the Restoration, in the reign of Charles II, the Attwood family leased what is now Selsdon Park to Christopher Bowyer. He constructed a new farmhouse on the manor and this building forms the core of the present architecture. He lived in the farmhouse, which was made of stone and wood, until 1711. Bowyer is buried in the cemetery at Sanderstead Church. His memorial states that he was a "generous and hospitable person". He was obviously well-liked in the parish, and although there is little record of Bowyer's life,

we may assume that he was responsible for the actual development of the foundations of Selsdon Park house.

The building remained intact until the end of the eighteenth century, when most of it was demolished, save the core, in order to create a new and illustrious country residence, which forms the heart of Selsdon Park Hotel. This magnificent example of nineteenth-century, gothic-style architecture, became the home of the notable Smiths of Selsdon.



*Memorial to Harman Attwood and his wife
Sanderstead Church.*



The Right Hon. George Smith MP (British Library).

Selsdon House was the Smith family home between 1809 and 1877. Their move to Selsdon precipitated profound changes in the area and their residence continued the historical association with Royalty and Parliament, in the grand figure of George Smith.

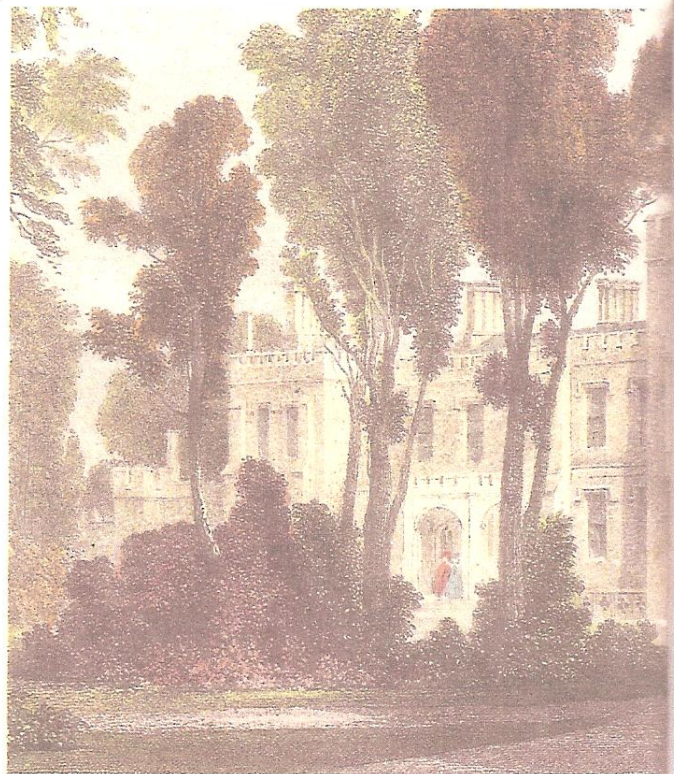
George Smith was born in 1765, son of Abel Smith who was a prominent and wealthy banker. The family bank "Smith, Payne and Smith" moved from Nottingham to London in 1765. The building was situated in the City of London "at the sign of the Phoenix, adopted after the Great Fire of London". (The symbol of the Phoenix is still used as the Hotel's emblem and can be seen in the stained-glass window which adorns the main staircase.) The bank itself remains in existence today, having been taken over by the National Westminster group.

The Smith family has a prestigious lineage, which includes the first Lord Carrington (George's brother, Robert Smith), the first Governor of New South Wales, Australia, and perhaps the most famous and revered descendant of all — H.M. Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother.

George Smith married Frances Mary, daughter of Sir John Mosely and they had fifteen children. (Frances, daughter of the Smiths' second son Oswald, married the 13th Earl of Strathmore in 1853; their son, the 14th

Earl, was the father of H.M. Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother). George became a board member of the family bank and a director of the famous East India Company; he was also a Member of Parliament for Midhurst and Wendover from 1806 to 1830. Because his parliamentary and business activities were based in London, he needed a country residence within easy travelling distance of the City, and so he came to purchase a partly constructed foundation from William Coles, a London broker. Coles had demolished the Bowyer 16th-century farmhouse and had begun building on the site, but had become bankrupt in the process.

It is George Smith who is credited with the design and construction of the early 19th-century mansion that forms part of the present building. The engraving by J.P. Neale in 1819 illustrates the elegant gothic-style house of the Smith family. At that time the house was made up of eleven symmetrical bays with castellated turrets, rising in splendour over the parapet; the castellated water tower is also shown. George Smith was obviously influenced by the gothic revival in the early 19th century. The gothic style was associated with Christianity and truthfulness, and symbolised high principles and good cheer — well befitting the new "mansion on the hill".



Selsdon House, 1819. J.P. Neale.