

Ensbury House/Manor

The largest house was Ensbury Manor or Ensbury House, a house whose foundations and deeds were 700 years old. It would seem reasonable to suggest that, in the absence of an alternative, this was the manor house of Kinson. Its grounds adjoin the lands of Kinson or Manor Farm, the oldest farm in the area, and the vicarage for St. Andrew's situated in Ensbury, further east of the Manor. Against this is the fact that the farm took on the name of Manor Farm only around one century ago. The house was pulled down in 1936 but had been set back from the main road behind a screen of trees. A high white gate opened on to the drive, whose path is now followed roughly by Avebury Avenue, which led on past the house and outbuildings and eventually to the farm at Waterlane. There was no New Road. The main part of the house comprised of two late 18th-century wings of stucco-covered brick with a tiled roof and Venetian windows on the ground floor. On the third side was a Victorian addition with older parts at the back. The inside was said to be a maze of passages and an assortment of curiously-shaped rooms, and there were two staircases. The windows were shuttered on the inside and some were guarded by iron bars on the outside. Perhaps the most interesting feature was a Jacobean fireplace. It was 15 feet high, made of oak and carved and paneled over-all in typical Jacobean style. The lower portion was flanked by two carved pillars and the part around the heavy metal fire-basket was tiled. Other items to note would have been a staircase, tiles and paneling from the hall as it is said that these, with the lawn, were bought and transported to America. I think it can be assumed that the fireplace was sent also.

The house had its share of ghosts, which included a seaman thought to be a smuggler in dripping oilskins which left no marks on the floor. Another - it is to be hoped a specter - snatched the bedclothes from the maids' beds. There was also a locked room, perhaps connected with the noise of rustling silk and the draught of someone passing unseen. The lad whose task it was to hand-pump water up to the cistern in the roof recalls the reluctant journey up to the attics to check the progress of the water, and the helter-skelter rush down again pursued by what?

In 1868 the house was advertised as 'containing front hall, four sitting rooms, five best and six servants' bedrooms, commodious offices, stables and other premises, gardens, lawns and croquet grounds. Shooting and fishing.

A farm formed part of the estate leased to others or farmed by a bailiff until separated from the estate as Waterlane Farm. There were two wells in the grounds. The house was said to have been a rendezvous for smugglers, and indeed brick-lined cavities were unearthed from beneath paving stones. These were large enough to take not only goods but men also, but perhaps served the more innocent purpose of an ice-house. Bare patches on the lawn led to the further discovery of 18-inch high brick tunnels: a house with such old foundations may well have had a long-forgotten sewage drainage system leading to the river. The 'Park', an area of trees including a giant cedar, separated the Manor from the land farmed. The rookery was in the large trees around the house. Most of these trees were cut down, but the birds have moved over to the nearest trees on either side and continue to fill the air with their raucous calls. The rookery, the cedar, the Manor's doorstep, tiles used to roof nearby houses and a selection of buried horseshoes are all that now remain. Mrs. Catherine Austin and her son, Captain Henry Hiley Austin, Clerk of the County of Dorset, owned the Manor and land near by, living there in the second half of the last century. His forebear, Charles Hiley, had owned extensive lands at Kinson until selling most to Gulliver. Henry's father, John, styled

a naturalist, seems to have killed for his collection more birds than he studied live. He was a local antiquarian and excavated Purbeck barrow, his finds being in the county museum. His researches brought to light the story that many years ago, in the neighbourhood of Ensbury, a man was buried up to his neck, alive, with a guard placed until his death to prevent his rescue or relief. Austin Avenue commemorates this family.