

## Weddington – Heritage Leaflet Version 2

The story of Weddington is as complex and eventful as any small community in England. Before 1000 A.D. human beings were casual visitors in this locality who left some traces of their activities.

During the reign of Edward the Confessor Hereward held the land. By the time William the Conqueror invaded Britain a small hamlet and church been planted on the flood plain of the River Anker.

A new Norman owner held great swathes of Warwickshire including Weddington. This was the court of Meulan (also known as Earl Mellant). At the time the manor was called WATITUNE due to its proximity to the Watling Street.

In 1066 A.D. the Domesday Book recorded a few people and their possessions. After the court of Meulan was given the Manor by the Conqueror, the former Saxon owner was allowed to stay on his land.

The manor eventually passed to the Astley family in 1100 A.D. who held it of Henry de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick, Meulan's brother. The local poor farmers were in effect slaves or serfs and all their hard work provided food and money for the Lord of the Manor.

The conditions at that time meant people died young and Weddington was no exception. Many succumbed to the Black Death in the period 1345 to 1480's. This wiped out most of the men and no one was left to farm the land.

The Lords of the Manor gradually turned the land over to sheep pasture because it was easy to maintain and produced wool which was a very profitable business then. Weddington also recorded as having a Royal Hunting Lodge.

The land past to the King's favourite Reginald, Lord Grey in about 1450. By 1491 Weddington became what we know today as a 'Deserted Mediaeval Village'. A descendant of the Greys, the Marquis of Dorset turned the residents of the hamlet out of their homes.

The manor of Weddington passed from the Grey Family to Humphrey Adderley, Queen Elizabeth's Groom of the Queen's Robes in 1561. The Adderley dynasty began to develop Weddington.

A hall or Mansion house was constructed on the Elizabethan period, several farms existed and other buildings as well as the church. During this time a Mr Trye rebuilt the village and made habitations 'mete for husbandry'.

In 1642 the country was in political turmoil and Cavalier-Roundhead skirmishes were rife. William Purefoy of Caldecote, the adjoining parish to Weddington, was a well-known anti-Royalist. It was in that period that the church was partly burnt down (according to the local historian-journalist Alfred Lester Scrivener (1845-1886) by Prince Rupert's men as they marauded around the district.

The Adderley family continued to own Weddington. They rebuilt the church in 1733. Through the marriage the estate passed into the occupation of Francis Vincent, who was the second husband of Mercy Sheldon, whose first husband was Thomas Adderley.

The hall was occupied by Thomas Loptrott, (1706-1797) Rector of Fenny Drayton and Weddington, as well as being schoolmaster of Nuneaton Grammar School, in the 1753-8 period. For the next 50 years or so the Hall and estate remained fairly unchanged.

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1809, Robert Lugar (1773-1855), a well-known architect, County Surveyor of Essex, who had a reputation for designing 'picturesque lodges' was commissioned by Lionel Place (1766-1838), the new owner, who had brought it at an auction in 1807, to re-design the Hall and castellated it in the fashion of the day.

This also involved landscaping the grounds and building or modifying the north and south gatehouses. The work was carried out by encapsulating the Elizabethan Hall, which dated back to about 1600 within a decorative stone façade.

The Place family were from the Yorkshire area and were related to titled gentry in that county and were descended from the Places of Dinsdale in Co. Durham. Lionel Place became High Sheriff of Warwickshire in 1826. After Lionel Place died his family sold their Weddington property in 1857.

Prior to the estate and hall being sold there was a sale of furnishings held on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1843. The sale catalogue list several paintings by Turner, Moreland, Molinaer and Towns, as well as a well-stocked library of 509 books and manuscripts and 129 antiquarian books printed before the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1860 William Henry Cooper (1820-1906) a clergyman, occupied the hall. William Cooper later became rector of Deeping St James in Lincolnshire.

Weddington passed through two more family ownerships, the hall (or Castle as it was now known) was sold to Henry Kay 1864. Mr Kay was a cotton and silk merchant from Manchester. Henry Kay died in 1869 and was succeeded by his son Frederick Henry Kay who was just 21 years of age at the time of his father's death.

In 1876 the Hall was sold to Henry Cuncliffe Shawe (1833-1911) who married Georgina, second daughter of Sir William Nigel Gresley, of Netherseal Hall, Leicestershire. Their son Henry Nigel Pole Shawe (1874-?) sold the property and extensive pleasure grounds in 1923 to Percy Howe, a local builder, who demolished the Castle in 1928 to build houses in the grounds. This was the start of Weddington as we know it today.

The manorial rights appear to have lapsed at that time. During Mr Kay and Mr Shawe's ownership the Hall and pleasure gardens were well known for local fetes and garden parties.

In April 1916 Weddington Hall was converted into a Red Cross Hospital to treat the wounded returning from the battlefields of the First World War. Doctors in charge were Drs Wolfendale and Nasons.

Rooms on the first floor were converted into hospital wards and named after local industrial companies who contributed to their upkeep: 'Griff', 'Arley', 'Hall and Philips', 'Birch Coppice'. 'Haunchwood', were names painted onto the doors of each ward. In 1916 there were 42 patients.

December 1900 saw the River Anker flood the area, in May 1932 a worse flood inundated many square miles of the Anker valley including Weddington.

During World War II several Weddington houses were destroyed by German air raids. The fields to the rear of the church were made into a dummy runway to divert enemy bombers away from Lindley airfield. Several people were employed to repair the lighting and smooth over the numerous craters of this mock air field.

Alan Sheasby compiled his series of Bird Observations in Weddington during 1955-60 period. It is a considerable piece of dedicated recording that is all too rare locally.

In July 1958 the river Anker was flooded again. Weddington and Nuneaton, with most of Sandon Park was a lake for a short time.

In 1959 the Old Rectory was demolished. With its demise the new housing development began. Weddington Road received a new rail bridge in 1965 although this line closed a few years later.

Then the closure of the Nuneaton-Ashby Joint railway line in 1969. The road bridge which carried the Ashby and Nuneaton joint near Church Lane was demolished in 1972 shortly after the track was removed.

After many years of debate a flood relief channel for the River Anker was constructed to help alleviate flooding in the town centre. A new drainage ditch passed through Weddington in connection with this scheme. This diverted water around the town.

On the land, farming practices changed and many field boundaries were uprooted to make the giant fields. The old Nuneaton and Ashby railway was converted into the first Green Track footpath and cycle route by Nuneaton Borough Council in 1983.

## Dates in Weddington History

7500 BC	Middle Stone Age Mesolithic man and flint making: Anker Valley
1 <sup>st</sup> C	Pottery and/or tile kilns have been found Weddington Road near the public house (formerly The Grove). By the time the Romans were in the area de-forestation had begun.
c.1000	Saxon Weddington existed. WATTITUNE
1042	Hereward held Weddington before the Norman conquest. A wooden church probably existed.
1066	Doomesday Inquest records Weddington as Watitune. The land belonged to Count Meulan.
1100	Land given to Philip ASTLEY by Henry 1
1125	St James' Church font dates back to 1125
1312	Reverend Geoffrey de Sutton was the first recorded vicar of St James.
1348	First wave of Black Death in the area. Weddington village suffered many fatalities.
1450	Weddington had passed down female line of Astleys finally to Reginald Lord Grey.
1491	Thomas Grey the Marquess of Dorset enclosed Weddington's land. 300 acres were lost, 10 homes ruined and 60 persons were driven off.
1538	St James ceased being Catholic and became Anglican.
1561	Mr Trye rebuilt Weddington Village.
1607	Weddington has a growing number of pastures and many decayed husbandry houses.
1639	Humphrey ADDERLEY the 3 <sup>rd</sup> died, manor passed to John ADDERLEY.
1642	28 <sup>th</sup> August Thursday. The church burnt by Roylists (Caveliers).
1663	Earliest recorded Parish Registers for St James Church.
1733	St James Church rebuilt by ADDERLEY family.
1805	Robert LUGAR, architect, re-designed WEDDINGTON HALL or CASTLE incorporated the older house. The grounds of Weddington Castle were landscaped.
c. 1818	The Grove and Grove Cottages built.
1844	London North Western Railway negotiated land purchase for new route with the PACE and HEMING family.
1869	August Ashby Railway line under construction. Contractor Barnes and Beckett of Rochdale, contract valued at £171,900.
1873	Nuneaton-Ashby Joint Railway line open for goods traffic. 1 <sup>st</sup> Sept Nuneaton-Ashby Joint Railway line open for passenger traffic.
1916	Henry Pole SHAW started a Red Cross hospital at Weddington Castle.
1922	Percy H HOWE bought the Castle from Henry Pole SHAW for £7000, agents were Nixon, Toone and Harrison. He wanted to convert it into luxury flats. 22 <sup>nd</sup> Sep, Weddington Castle Plans published to it into flats and to build houses on the estate lands.
1923-4	November to July Weddington Castle converted to flats. The plans for houses are extensively discussed at meetings. Numerous objections

	on the necessity for housing and inadequacy of sewerage arrangements.
1926	2 <sup>nd</sup> January Heavy floods at Weddington.
1928	19 <sup>th</sup> October Castle demolished. Most of the rubble was used to build Castle Road on. Some possibly went to the Countess Road area.
1928-9	Weddington Gardens & Alsted Lodge build by Hope and Aldridge. Some of the Castle timber is believed to be in the later.
1931	12 <sup>th</sup> April Nuneaton-Ashby Joint Railway passenger service closed. Weddington incorporated into Nuneaton.
1933	River Anker straightened.
1936	Coronation walk created for the coronation of King Edward VIII. This did not happen but the plan was retained by King George VI coronation in 1937.
1937-8	The GROVE converted into a hotel.
1940	Bombs damaged part of Weddington. German aerial reconnaissance photographs Dummy airfield near railway diverted bombs from Lindley.
1959	August/September Old Rectory demolished; new houses in Church Lane, Wimpey Estate and Castle Road Wimpey estate expands.
1969	17 <sup>th</sup> August Nuneaton-Ashby Joint Railway closed. Wagon storage only.
1971	19 <sup>th</sup> July Nuneaton-Market Bosworth railway closed to all traffic.
1972	21 <sup>st</sup> July Weddington Road bridge blown up. Weddington Jct Signal Box burnt down.
1972-3	Hedges and field boundaries begin to change with mechanised agriculture. The old castle's southern gateway demolished.
1974	March-May. River Anker was dredged and deepened. July Weddington gardens abandoned, sold to build Cleaver Garden flats.
1977-8	Flood Relief Culvert began construction.
1983	10 <sup>th</sup> October 'Weddington Walk' officially opened as a Green Track.
1988	Lower farm demolished, discovery of timber framed building of high quality. It belonged to the South Western School and had numerous carpenters' marks.
1996	February Roman mortaria and Samian pottery found in ditch of pit structure beneath 284 Weddington Road.

## Historical Links

<http://www.weddingtoncastle.co.uk/>