



Quarrendon Leas

To many, Quarrendon is a suburb of Aylesbury built in the 1950s and extended in the 1980s, but, in fact, the name comes from a deserted village situated on the other side of the River Thames. It may have derived from the Old English Cweorndun meaning 'hill where mill stones are obtained'. There is evidence to suggest that the village dates back to Anglo Saxon times, as the village was reputedly the birthplace of local saint St Osyth.

Quarrendon is an outstanding example of an English village that was depopulated in the 16th century and redeveloped in Tudor times with the construction of a grand manor with moat and landscape incorporating much of the site of the village and its chapel. Fortunately, because the area has been maintained as grassland for over three centuries, the outline of these features has largely been preserved.

Quarrendon Leas is protected by law as a scheduled ancient monument, but over the next few years will be affected by housing developments at Berryfields to the west and Weedon Hill to the east. However, a legal agreement allows Quarrendon Leas to be transferred from its current owners, Taylor-Wimpey, to the newly formed Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust once 300 houses have been occupied at Berryfields.

The Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust has been set up by Buckinghamshire County Council, with the support of Aylesbury Town Council and the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, to help conserve and enhance the County's historic and natural heritage, and promote public appreciation of this rich inheritance. Its first project is to care for the ancient monument at Quarrendon Leas, and with funding from Aylesbury Vale Advantage, Buckinghamshire County Council and English Heritage, work is underway to improve public access within the site with a new path. This will be suitable for disabled users and will run for 700m from the eastern edge of the new Berryfields development, past the ruined church of St Peter, to a water-filled moat, which is believed to have encircled a mansion built by Sir Henry Lee in the 16th century. The

new path follows the historic road into Quarrendon from Berryfields Lane, which before the 18th century was the main Aylesbury to Buckingham Road.

Sir Henry Lee used this approach to show off his wealth to best effect. The Lee family had become wealthy through the cattle business and as a consequence, gained access to the royal court enabling Sir Henry to become a favourite of Elizabeth I. She was reputedly entertained at Quarrendon Manor by Sir Henry in 1592. At Quarrendon, the Lees replaced the old mediaeval village with a mansion, a grand water garden featuring high embanked walkways, and an elaborate rabbit warren, making it a pleasure-ground fit to entertain royalty.



Sir Henry eventually went bankrupt, leaving the mansion and gardens to fall into disrepair but, unlike most grand Tudor houses, nothing was constructed over it so the historic ruins and gardens are still visible. A farm replaced the mansion, but this was eventually demolished in the 1970s.

The only remaining building in the old village is the ruined church of St Peter which in an early 19th century magazine article was described as 'a melancholy object of contemplation'. Until the 1930s there were substantial remains – old aisles with octagonal piers and double-chamfered arches. All that remains now are two low sections of wall and the foot of one of the south aisle buttresses.

Over the next few years Quarrendon Leas will be enhanced with interpretation boards and will prove to be a great asset to the people of Aylesbury.

Roger King
With thanks to Sandy Kidd, County Archaeologist

Photos by Roger King