

The Vernons and Shrawley



Hanbury Hall

The first Vernon in Hanbury was the Rev. Richard Vernon (1549-1628) who moved from Staffordshire to Worcestershire in 1580 to take up a living there. The Vernons gradually acquired land around Hanbury but it was the Rev Richard's great grandson **Thomas Vernon (1654-1721)**, a wealthy Chancery lawyer and Whig MP who commissioned the building of Hanbury Hall in the early 18th century on the site of the previous mansion, Spennall Hall.



Thomas Vernon (1654-1721)

Significantly he also bought a substantial amount of land and property in Shrawley including Wood Hall from Alan Cliffe (later where Wood House was built) and the Great Wood. Over the next few years he continued to purchase more land in Shrawley including Severn Bank. After his death and much legal wrangling the estate passed to **Thomas Bowater Vernon (1683-1735)** in 1721.



Thomas Bowater Vernon (1683-1735)

Thomas Bowater Vernon and his family spent most of their time in London but also lived for a brief time at Holt Castle as Thomas Vernon's widow Mary continued to live at Hanbury Hall until her death in 1733. It was Thomas Bowater Vernon who commissioned the Worcester map making family, the Doughartys, to produce maps of the Vernon estates in 1731-3 which are hugely valued by historians. During this period Bowater's younger brother **Captain Thomas Vernon (1686-1735)** was living at Wood Hall (now Wood House)

In 1735 Bowater died and his son **Thomas Vernon(1724-71)** inherited the estates at age of 11. He became MP for Worcester at age of 21. He died of a stroke at age 47 on a hunting trip in 1771 and the estates passed to his daughter Emma.

Emma Vernon (1754-1818) inherited the Hall and she with her husband 1st Marquess of Exeter, Henry Cecil extended the house and commissioned the parklands. Messy divorces caused the hall to remain empty until 1804 when Emma and her third husband John Phillips moved back in. After Emma's death in 1818 a further period of turbulence followed as her third husband was able to stay at Hanbury Hall until his death although ownership had actually passed to **Thomas Shrawley Vernon (1759 – 1825)** who moved into the Hill in Astley, now known as Astley Hall. His second son Rev William Vernon (1793-1855) was briefly the curate at Shrawley in 1820 before moving to take on larger curacy at Hanbury.



Thomas Shrawley Vernon (1759-1825)

The Wood House in 1820 was being rented by Rev Wharton who was married to Elizabeth Cliffe (a descendant of original owner Alan Cliffe) but in 1822 they vacated it and **Thomas Shrawley Vernon** started major renovations to create the property we see today but these were sadly not completed by his death in 1825.



Wood House, Shrawley

A very modest memorial tablet in Shrawley Church remembers him but there is a very impressive hatchment of his coat of arms above the balcony in Shrawley Church. His widow Elizabeth and unmarried children moved into the completed Wood House until her death in 1850, she too is buried in Shrawley Church. The Wood House was then rented out again.

Thomas Tayler Vernon (1792-1835) as eldest son inherited his father Thomas Shrawley Vernon's estate in 1825 and went on to purchase Severn Bank House (previously known as Cock Bayliss) from Thomas Southall an heir to Severne family in 1835. Edward Vernon (1801-1885), one of his younger brothers rented Severn Bank until his death in 1885. However, with John Phillips still in situ at Hanbury Thomas Tayler Vernon continued to live at the Mount in Bromsgrove until John Phillips remarried in 1829 and left Hanbury Hall so at this point Thomas Tayler Vernon was able to move in.

Thomas Shrawley Vernon's third son **George Croft Vernon (1794-1856)** had a rather sad life. He married Mary Elizabeth Carleton (1804-31) from Dublin but sadly their first two daughters did not survive infancy and were buried at Shrawley Church. Even more tragically in 1831 Mary died herself six months after giving birth to twin daughters Lucy and Ellen and Lucy also died a little time later. Interestingly, Mary's family had a lakeside home near Ambleside in the Lakes and were friendly with the Wordsworths hence a poem by William Wordsworth appears on the memorial to her in Shrawley Church.

Thomas Shrawley Vernon's youngest son **Rev John Vernon (1802-75)** took up the curacy in Shrawley in 1826 and became rector but resigned in 1863 and the position was taken up by his nephew (son of his brother Rev William Vernon) **William Foley (1827 -1910)** who remained in Shrawley until his death in 1910.

Thomas Tayler Vernon married Jessie Anna Laetitia Foley in 1831 and they had two children, **Thomas Bowater (1832-59)** and **Harry Foley (1834-1920)** but sadly for the family, once again, in 1835 Thomas Tayler Vernon died leaving them as infants. Jessie remained at Hanbury Hall, remarried but then died in 1840. Hanbury Hall was mothballed and remained empty of family until 1853.

Thomas Bowater and Harry Foley went to live with their uncle George Vernon (1794-1856) at the Mount in Bromsgrove. **Thomas Bowater** spent two years at Oxford, left without a degree and took up residence at Hanbury Hall in 1853 and divided his time between there and an active social life in London. He died, probably of bowel cancer, in September 1859. **Harry Foley Vernon** at the age of 25 inherited the Vernon estates from his brother.

Harry Foley Vernon (1834-1920) took up residence in Hanbury Hall, was appointed Deputy Lieutenant for Worcestershire and then in 1861 married Lady Georgina youngest daughter of the Earl of Haddington. By December of 1861 he had been elected Liberal MP for East Worcestershire. Harry Foley and Georgina had four children but one died in infancy, however the other three Auda, Bowater George Hamilton and Hubert Edward prospered. In 1868 Harry Foley Vernon stood down as an MP seemingly struggling to reconcile his conscience with the more radical views of his party. Harry Foley continued to add to the Vernon estates buying land in various parts of Worcestershire including Shrawley Court estate in 1877 and in 1885 he was made a Baronet. In 1902 his elder son Hubert died playing polo. His heir was now his second son **Bowater George Vernon (1865-1940)**.



Bowater George Vernon (1865-1940)

Bowater George was a maverick. He dropped out of Oxford after a term and a half and headed to Mexico. He returned to Hanbury but soon found life at Hanbury stifling and left again this time for Argentina and for a time bred ponies used for cattle ranching. In 1900 he was in South Africa and joined the company of Rimmington's Guides to fight in Boer War. Less than a year later he was declared medically unfit and returned to Argentina for a short time before reappearing at Hanbury in 1902. Then, significantly for Shrawley, in 1904 James Hugh and Clara Allan with their daughters Doris and Hilda moved into the Wood House. Harry Foley had begun to have money issues and was fortunate to get financial support from James Allan. Then even more significantly Doris married Bowater George Vernon, Harry Foley's second son in 1905. Harry Foley died in 1920 at the age of 85 leaving the Mount to his widow and daughter Auda, Hanbury Hall to Bowater George but a life interest in it to his daughter in law Doris and the rest of his estate to Bowater George outright. Bowater George also inherited the baronetcy and from then on was known as **Sir George**.



Lady Doris Vernon (1883-1962)

Sir George and Lady Doris lived in Hanbury Hall, whilst his mother and sister took up residence at the Mount. Sir George's marriage was already strained at this time. And the marriage had produced no children. In 1925 Ruth Powick from Shrawley arrived in service at Hanbury Hall. Several of the Powicks had previously worked on the Vernon family estates. Sir George grew fond of Ruth and she became his secretary and companion. In 1929 Lady Doris left Hanbury and returned to her parents' home at the Wood House, Shrawley. She lived there or in a house, Cheyne Place, Chelsea, London throughout George's life. Sir George and Ruth travelled widely and in 1938 Ruth's name was changed by deed poll from Powick to Vernon.

Landed estates suffered during the 1920s, their value eroded by mortgage interest, tithes, land tax and income tax. In 1928 agricultural depression deepened, forcing rents down as tithes and taxes stayed high. Sir George, who had never been a religious man, deeply resented paying tithes to a rector increasingly better off than he. Sir George led a campaign against tithes and became Chair of Worcestershire Tithe Payers Association. In 1936 the argument against fixed tithes appeared to have been won when an Act in 1936 abolished the tithe rent charge and compensation was paid by government stock. This all took a toll on Sir George' health although he continued to take his duties as a magistrate very seriously and had long waged war against dangerous motorists imposing stiff fines. However in 1938 he stepped down from the bench and despite being in ill health in 1939 sailed alone to Jamaica and was away for six months. On 14 June 1940 at the age of 75, whilst Ruth was out, Sir George shot himself in his bedroom at Hanbury Hall leaving a note saying "I take the short cut."

Sir George left detailed instructions about his burial which he wished to be in non-consecrated grounds in Shrawley Wood, at a spot he had marked out near the summer house. It is said that Cyril Powick took his body in a dung cart from Hanbury to Shrawley wood and lined his tomb with honeysuckle and a non-religious ceremony was held. His tomb stands there today as he wished. He had also expressed a wish that after his death Hanbury Hall should be passed to the National Trust.



Tomb near remains of Summer House chimney



Further pictures of Sir George's tomb

His widow, Lady Doris Vernon, moved quickly back to Hanbury Hall as she was entitled to under the terms of Harry Foley Vernon's will and her mother accompanied her. This freed up the Wood House in Shrawley and Ruth Vernon moved here. Hanbury Hall was left to **Ruth Vernon (1910-80)** to transfer to the National Trust and in 1953 with the consent of Lady Doris Vernon the property was transferred to the National Trust although Lady Doris continued to live at the Hall until her death in 1962.

Ruth Vernon married **Frederick Horton** in 1946 and they spent their married life at the Wood House. They were very generous to the village in very many ways and many present villagers remember with fondness the celebrations, fetes and parties they enjoyed hosting at the Wood House and in its parklands. There was much sadness when Ruth died in 1980 from complications following a fall. Ricky (Frederick) Horton lived for a further 10 years until his death

in 1990 at the Wood House and is greatly missed They have a memorial stone in Hanbury churchyard.



RUTH ANNIE
HORTON
1910 - 1980

FREDERICK HORTON
1905 - 1990