

CHILHAM CASTLE, KENT
THE JACOBEAN MANSION & ITS PARK
DIGGES 1607–1724



SIR DUDLEY DIGGES 1583 – 1638

Of Kentish stock, Digges was a daring (& not entirely honourable) merchant adventurer & politician &, latterly, Master of the Rolls to King Charles I (paying £10,000 to secure this remunerative appointment). He acquired Chilham through the inheritance of his wife, Mary Kempe of Olantigh, & by purchasing the shares of his three sisters-in-law.

1639	THOMAS DIGGES	SON
1687	LEONARD DIGGES	SON
1717	JOHN DIGGES	SON
1720	THOMAS DIGGES	BROTHER

COLEBROOKE

1724 – 1774



JAMES COLEBROOKE

BOUGHT CHILHAM 1722 – 4



ROBERT COLEBROOKE

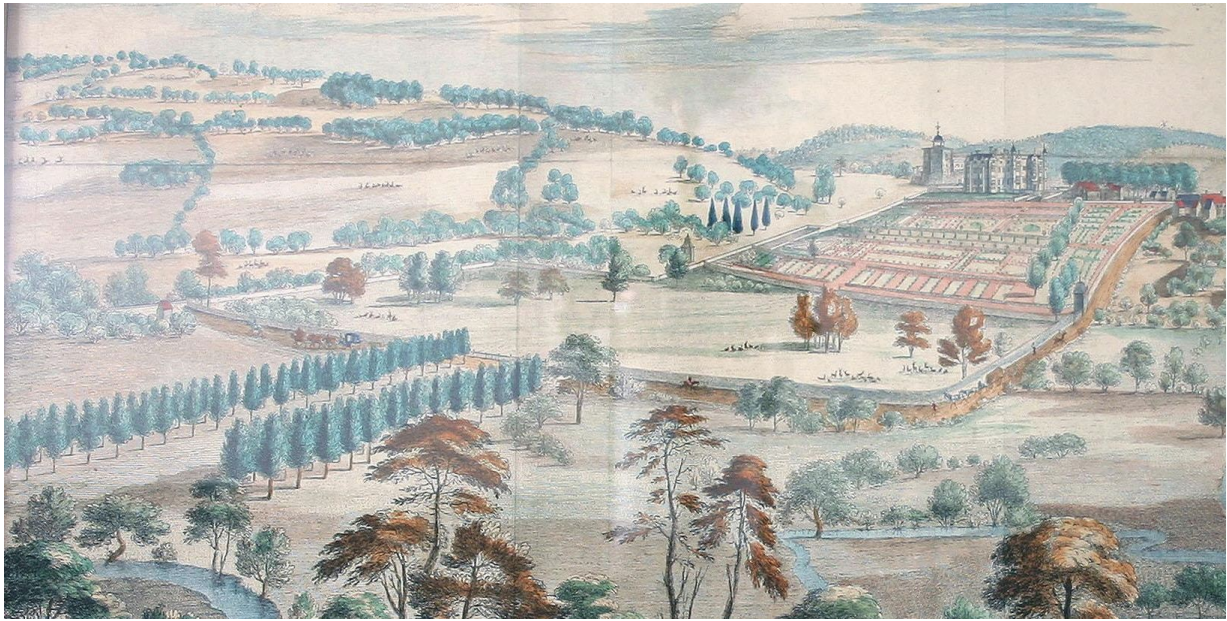
LIFE TENANT FROM 1752

Prospering through the South Sea Bubble, James Colebrooke, a canny banker, made huge loans to Thomas Digges & then acquired Chilham from him. In their half-century here, the family's principal accomplishment was James Colebrooke's grand landscape vista. Though the park was much enlarged, they seem to have made little change to the house. The estate was lost by the profligacy of the banker's son.

CHILHAM IN 1741

SAMUEL & NATHANIEL BUCK

(DETAIL)



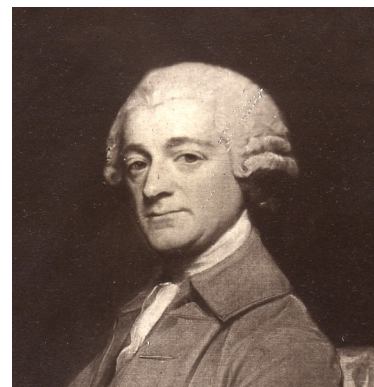
JAMES COLEBROOKE'S GRAND VISTA ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE DOWN TO THE RIVER IS NOW LARGELY FORGOTTEN

At the top it centred upon a hexagonal corner buttress made of white stone on the south wing of the house (an elegant decorative feature, swept away by Charles Hardy). At the foot of the hill, the road round the park perimeter was realigned, bisecting the vista into 2 parts, both of them 80 perches long. In a remarkable innovation for that time, a lay-by was provided for passing carriages &, across the road, a claire-voie of railings 80 yards wide was set in the adjacent park wall. This enabled those inside & outside the park to admire the view in both directions – up to the castle or down across the water meadows along an avenue of trees covering 800 square perches. Overall, the vista was some 880 yards long with an overall area of about 80 roods. Bankers are often fascinated by numbers - in Asia, the numeral 8 is regarded as lucky. If Colebrooke hoped by this scheme to bring good fortune to his family at Chilham, he was disappointed.

THOMAS HERON 1774 - 1794

After buying Chilham in later life, the lawyer Heron (from Newark) made several changes to the house & the grounds during his two decades of ownership. The multi-skilled Steward of the estate, Christopher Greaves, was dismayed when Heron invited Lancelot "Capability" Brown here in 1777 & 1778. Contrary to persistent & widespread legend, Brown did not create the beautiful landscape in the park.

His prime aim & achievement was destruction of most of the terraces in the picture above.



WILDMAN

1794 – 1861

*This Lancashire family's wealth came from sugar plantations worked by slaves in Jamaica, acquired from the fabulously rich William Beckford. Within the castle grounds little remains of their seven decades here; their memorials lie beyond the gates, thanks to **JAMES BECKFORD WILDMAN**, who inherited the estate in 1816.*



JAMES WILDMAN

OWNER 1794 – 1816

J B Wildman, Member of Parliament a friend of William Wilberforce, emancipated the family's slaves & replaced them by costly machines; the plantations began to fail & the family's fortune drained away.

Determined, nevertheless, to be a benevolent squire, Wildman built a new village school & in 1830 created the by-pass, which has helped to secure the survival of the village centre in its ancient form. Eventually the family's dwindling resources necessitated removal - to rented accommodation near Maidstone. Six years later, they brought Mr Wildman back to Chilham for burial. His grave in the churchyard should be a place of pilgrimage for all who love this place.



THE FAMILY IN 1861 SHORTLY BEFORE THE CASTLE WAS SOLD



Emily Wildman, JBW's daughter, (top right in this photograph) painted many pictures of Chilham during the family's time here - & in the years soon after they left.

HARDY

1861-1918



CHARLES HARDY

OWNER 1861 – 67



CHARLES STEWART HARDY

OWNER 1867 - 1914

Charles Hardy, a Yorkshire iron founder, with his much-maligned architect David Brandon, wrought change on a grand scale (& some improvement) replacing the Georgian alterations with a Victorian version of Jacobean, enlarging the south wing & building a new service wing on the north-west side of the house.

*Charles Stewart Hardy, who inherited Chilham from his father in 1867, devoted most of his attention to the grounds – he created the lake & planted hundreds of trees. Hardy's lake & Hardy's trees (**not** the depredations of “Capability” Brown) have made the beautiful landscape of Chilham park.*

In 1918 Charles Hardy (third in line with that name) sold the estate to Edmund Davis.

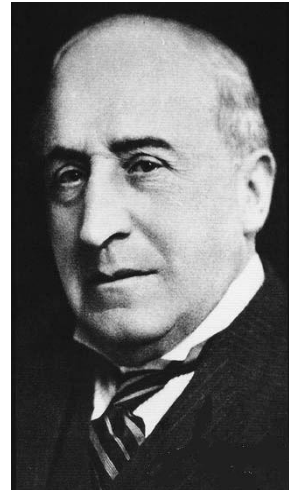


THE LANDSCAPE THAT C S HARDY CREATED

SIR EDMUND DAVIS

**CHILHAM'S POPULAR SQUIRE
BETWEEN THE WARS 1918 – 1939**

*Cosmopolitan benefactor who, during two decades, spent huge sums of money transforming & beautifying Chilham, re-creating the present face of the castle, building new gate lodges & giving to the Square the picturesque appearance it has today.
His principal architect was that notable Kentish Man, Sir Herbert Baker*



SOMERSET DE CHAIR

1944 - 1949

One of its most colourful owners, a politician & prolific author, who didn't stay long.

MASSEREENE & FERRARD

1949 - 1997

**HON. JOHN SKEFFINGTON
VISCOUNT MASSEREENE & FERRARD**

The Honourable John Clotworthy Talbot Foster Whyte-Melville Skeffington from Ireland had long nurtured a dream of owning Chilham, which he first sighted whilst motoring along the Ashford road. In 1956, on the death of his father, Jock Skeffington became 13th Viscount Massereene & Baron of Loughneagh, 6th Viscount Ferrard & Baron Oriel of Collon in Ireland & Baron Oriel of Ferrard in the United Kingdom. After his death in 1992, the Dowager Viscountess remained here for 5 more years before offering the place for sale.

GEORGE PETROU

1997 - 2002

STUART WHEELER

2002 -

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE CASTLE & ITS OWNERS

PLEASE GO TO THE CHILHAM CASTLE WEBSITE

GOOGLE “*CHILHAM CASTLE MICHAEL PETERS*”

& CLICK ON THE BUTTON MARKED “*HISTORY*”