



Land & Buildings Holt

THE COURTS

The Courts probably gained its name from the fact that Anthony Rogers is recorded as holding manorial court there in 1545. It is now the property of the National Trust.

The site was a prosperous cloth mill in the early nineteenth century but it has a considerable history predating this. The original house was bought in 1703 by a cloth worker called John Phelps. By the 1730's Phelps was established as a clothier and there was a dye house on the site, linked to the house by a bridge. The property changed hands a number of times between then and 1797, when it was owned by John Davis who is likely to have erected the factory there.

John Davis and Thomas Hughes Lloyd, presumably his partner and both clothiers, were petitioned for bankruptcy in 1812 by Freeman, Moule and Moule, Melksham bankers. The factory was advertised for sale in 1813 comprising two buildings which housed the carding and spinning machines plus a small dye house and picking, press and shear shops. Power was supplied by a water wheel. The Davis family continued to occupy the factory, so the result of the bankruptcy petition is unclear. More land was added in 1826 by John Davis's son, John Edward Davis. In 1834 children as young as 9 were employed, working for 11 hours. The cloth that was produced was a fine west of England broadcloth, reputed to be so fine that it could be pulled through a wedding ring. By 1875 the heavily mortgaged factory was sold to Joseph Gordon Jones, who traded until 1885. Although put up for sale the buildings remained unsold and were demolished by 1890. The stone was used to build Bridge Terrace, Coffee Tavern and extensions to the main house.

The house, whose 5 bay façade Pevsner considered "wildly overdone", has square rooms either side of the main central entrance. It is set against the north west edge and is approached by a walk beneath old pollarded poplars. The cloth mill was connected to the house by a bridge and the end wall has blank windows. At the back of the house are two projecting gables which may be part of the early sixteenth century house. The house is not open to the public.

The garden was started in 1900 by the architect Sir George Hastings. He planted many hedges as a backdrop for stone ornaments which were brought from Ranelagh House in London and also added the temple and the conservatory. It was in the 1920's that the design for the garden really became established under the stewardship of Major Thomas Clarence Edward and Lady Cecilie Goff who had purchased the house in 1921.

Major Goff (28th May 1867 – 12th March 1949, died South of France) was the grandson of Lord Augustus Fitzclarence, illegitimate son of Mrs. Dorothy Jordan and King William IV. He was educated at Eton and Christchurch College, Oxford. He received his commission as Second Lieutenant in the 3rd (Militia) Battalion, Royal Scots, in 1887. He became a Captain in 1899 and served in the Boer War. He was awarded the Queen's South Africa medal with two clasps. An unsuccessful Conservative candidate in the 1906 general election, he was elected to the London County Council in 1907 representing Chelsea and then in 1910 representing Paddington North. He served until 1913. He was granted the temporary rank of Major whilst serving as the Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General on the lines of communication in France and Egypt. He returned to represent Paddington North on the L.C.C. in 1922, finally retiring in 1931. He married Lady Cecilie Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughby, 4th daughter of the Earl of Ancaster in 1896. They had one son and one daughter.

Lady Goff, in particular, promoted the idea of garden rooms, the lily pond and the terrace. Flagstone paths were created from stone taken from the demolition of Devizes jail. Eight stone pillars, which used to have chains hung between them for drying cloth were removed in 1941 for the war effort. The main vista from the house has at its focal point a pair of ornamental wrought iron gates, bought in Venice by Major Goff for his home in Ireland.

After Major Goff's death in March 1949, his daughter Moyra became the life tenant of the house, which had been presented to the National Trust in 1943, until her death in 1990. She was responsible for planting the arboretum in 1952, along with Ralph Gibbins, the head gardener who worked at the Courts for 26 years.