

STANTON HOUSE HISTORY

FROM THE BEGINNING



When the Stanton House Trust was established in 1978, the house had already been standing for nearly a century.

It was built in 1879/80 by John Thompson, owner of an Oxford bank, to provide a home for his three unmarried sisters and their domestic staff, at the time that he purchased Woodperry House from the local landowners, New College, Oxford, to be his family home. His chosen location for the new house, Stanton St John, was an ancient village to the north-east of Oxford, with records dating back to the Domesday Book. *(The Saxon name 'Stanton' means 'homestead on stony ground', and John St. John was the first Lord of the Manor.)*

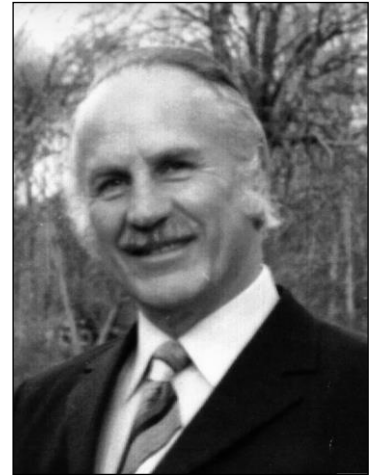
The site for Stanton House was well chosen, within easy walking distance of Woodperry House, on the edge of a hill with open views over the woods and fields of the Vale of Aylesbury to the Chiltern Hills in the distance. The fields around house were developed as a pleasant landscaped estate, with terracing to provide walks and lawns, extensive planting of fine trees, and the transformation of the small stream into a series of small pools, divided by several stone cascades. A cluster of cottages on the opposite side of the stream formed part of the estate, providing stabling and a coach-house, a laundry, and a gardener's cottage with a walled kitchen garden.

John Thompson's son, Guy, moved into Stanton House in the early 1900's following the deaths of the three sisters. However, when his father died in 1922, Guy chose to move to Woodperry House.

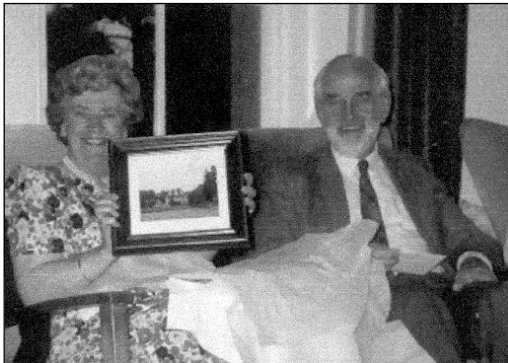
Stanton House, together with the estate, was then let to Colonel Weatherby, where he lived with his family and a small domestic staff. The Colonel subsequently purchased the house and estate in 1938, and continued to live there until his death in 1963. His family then decided to put them on the market, and in the following year sold the house and estate to Geoffrey Gould.

THE VISION

Geoffrey had a vision for the house to be used as a place of intercession and a power house of prayer; subsequently he enlarged that vision, and had plans drawn up for additional buildings in the grounds so it could become a Conference Centre with outreach to young people. However, in spite of his high-profile involvement in Christian work, personal circumstances prevented him from fulfilling this vision as he would have wished. Consequently the house was rarely in use and, already in poor repair, it suffered further from vandalism, squatting and no regular maintenance. In the end it lay semi-derelict, with the leadwork stripped from the bay roofs, extensive dry rot in the timbers, plaster falling from several walls and ceilings, and many of the internal fittings damaged or removed.



Geoffrey remarried in 1976. His second wife Marjorie encouraged him in his vision and worked with him to find ways to fulfil it. They were introduced in 1977 to James and Joan Haig-Ferguson, for whom the meeting was the culmination of years of prayerful searching. They had a vision to set up Christian fellowship offering a welcome to missionaries on home leave and space for other Christian people under pressure to seek renewal. Geoffrey saw their vision as complementing his own, so together they started to plan work on the house, and also worked towards setting up a charitable trust, with an arrangement by which this trust would be given the house and all of the estate except the cottages.



No-one could have foreseen the dramatic way this would be fulfilled. On Thursday 16th February 1978 Geoffrey signed the documents conveying the property to the newly formed Stanton House Trust. Three days later, on

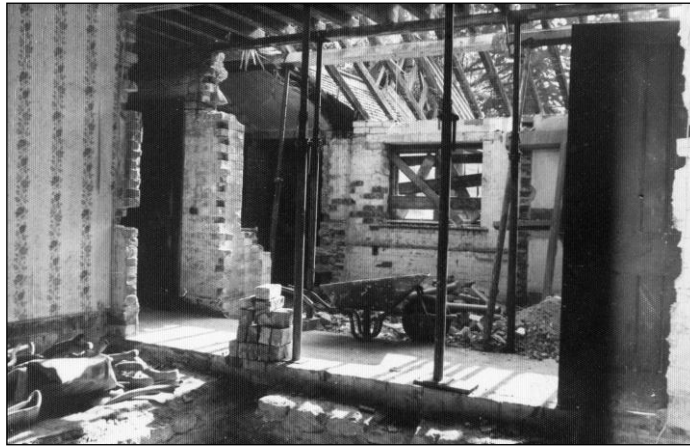
arrival at the parish church for the Sunday service, Geoffrey collapsed with a heart attack. Before reaching hospital he was already dead. James and Joan Haig-Ferguson were thus left to take up the baton and bring vision to reality.

THE PREPARATION

For several years after the establishment of the Stanton House Trust and Geoffrey Gould's death, restoration work on the house and the building of the fellowship went hand in hand.

The task appeared daunting, especially since James Haig-Ferguson still had a responsible full-time job in Slough. However, James and Joan set about the task, living in a caravan in the grounds since the house was uninhabitable, and were joined within a few months by some able and willing helpers:

Gordon Sanders (a foreman carpenter) and Stanley Wall (a former missionary colleague of Joan Haig-Ferguson's), who gave up their jobs for a year to work on the house full time; students from the Missionary Bible School at Wiedenest in Germany; and various Christian friends calling in to give what help they could.



Peter Gilbert Scott, a local Christian architect, provided professional support, and when, after a full year of stripping out and repairing the damage caused by dry rot, the time came at last to begin reconstruction, Alf Dunn (a professional electrician) undertook to rewire the whole house.

As Gordon and Stanley left, others arrived to join the fellowship: First, May Newman, then Betty Bailey (another colleague from Nepal).

A year later, as May left to return to Australia, Betty Bailey introduced Philip and Anne Daley, then in 1981 Philip and Joan Webb arrived making the fellowship up to seven members.



While the work of restoration proceeded slowly, room by room, the life of the fellowship also grew, with regular times of prayer together and a commitment to mutual support. So did the fellowship's ministry of hospitality: They welcomed increasing numbers of guests, and small groups coming for the day, setting the pattern for the years to come.

By 1984, after years of hard physical work, the restoration of the house was substantially complete, and was celebrated with a service

of dedication and thanksgiving in the parish church.

THE FULFILMENT

Culminating in the service of dedication, 1984 saw the vision for the house being fulfilled at last and the priority shifted from repair and construction to hospitality and ministry. The team held a week's retreat the following January, and as they sought God's guidance for the future, the original vision

was confirmed - together with the need to make the house widely known to potential guests. So the ministry grew and developed.

As the original members of the fellowship retired and moved on, in the late 1980s, new members who shared their vision joined the team. Since few of them had independent means, modest living allowances began to be paid. In the earlier years of restoration the majority of the costs had been covered by gifts, but now contributions from guests came to play an increasingly important part in the house's finances.

Several original members of the fellowship had lived outside of the house, so new team members needed new accommodation. A major project during the late 1980s was the conversion of old outbuildings beyond the laundry to provide a small cottage. Additional accommodation was provided in the house for the continuing stream of young foreign helpers.



The House continued to be busy, but missionary use was less. People increasingly began to come for shorter stays of, typically, 2-3 days.

The range of guests extended beyond clergy and church leaders to include other Christian workers and lay people in need of renewal.

This statement, prepared in 1998, sums up the aims of Stanton House:

“Stanton House is to provide a place where guests can come for rest, relaxation, and refreshment, and have the opportunity to draw closer to God in an unstructured atmosphere. For the Team members and helpers it is to be a place where they feel they are growing together spiritually and are serving the Lord in and through community life.”

CELEBRATION

2003 marked a milestone for Stanton House, as the Trust celebrated its Silver Jubilee – 25 years of service to God and his people – with a service of thanksgiving in the parish church followed a celebration in the house and grounds.

The Jubilee provided an opportunity, not only for looking back with thanksgiving to the fulfilment of the vision and to God's goodness and loving provision over the years, but also for taking stock, and for the team and trustees to rededicate themselves and the house for its continuing ministry.

Part of the stock-taking was a recognition that, if the retreat ministry of Christian welcome and hospitality was to be maintained and developed, the house itself needed further renewal. This was because of its facilities no longer complied with current standards or met current needs and expectations. So, in spite of very limited resources, a major programme was launched in faith to upgrade the house and its facilities. The team and trustees are grateful, not only to God for his faithfulness, but to the grant-making trusts and many individual supporters of Stanton House who enabled this work of renewal to be realised.

Many guests who come to Stanton House testify to finding their burdens lifted or to a fresh clarity of direction and, above all, to a sense of peace, of having found space where they were aware afresh of the loving, healing presence of God. So Stanton House continues to serve God and his people; to provide, in the words of the original vision:

'a place for Christian folk who have a need to stand back a little from the pressure of events and seek renewal and adjustment.'

This booklet tells the story of the Stanton House Trust so far. It is not a 'history' since the story, far from finished, is still unfolding, the work is continuing and developing, meeting changing needs and touching new people. By the grace of God, long may it continue to do so.

