

# DOWN MEMORY LANE

## Medieval Stewkley

### The Manor of Stewkley Grange

The medieval and early archaeological record for Stewkley parish 'proper' (that is without Littlecote) is very thin and sparse indeed. In buildings, only the Romanesque parish church from about AD 1150 is extant. The other evidence is represented by two prominent earthworks. The first is a medieval moated site set in the slope of Nuneham Hill Field, now in the grounds of modern-day Tythe House, and is a National Heritage List Scheduled Monument.

The second earthworks, consisting of a raised mound site with two moats, is associated with Stewkley Grange to the west of Mursley Road. This site



passed down from the bishop of Coutances in Normandy and one Miles Crispin, immediately after the Norman Conquest, and was eventually given in the 13th-century to the Cistercian abbey at Woburn (founded in 1145). It became known as the manor of Stewkley Grange, with a substantial moated house and parkland at the northern end of Stewkley parish.

The priory of Kenilworth also held a minor manorial holding in the parish which had come down from the Coutances estate. This was associated with the new parish church, given to the priory in 1170 by the younger Geoffrey de Clinton, Lord Chamberlain to Henry II. The prior of Kenilworth held the advowsons or patronages to both ecclesiastical livings.

Between the Domesday Book in 1086 and the tax assignments at the time of the Hundred Rolls in 1279, the acreage of cultivated arable land in Stewkley is thought to have increased from 1,300 to 2,650 acres with the population doubling from about 180 to 360 inhabitants. The main village area was growing relatively rapidly.

At some time in the late 12th to 13th-century, the two moated sites were created. They were prestigious symbols of wealth rather than for defence. The Woburn Abbey or Stewkley Grange totalled 610 acres of which 460 acres were to the north of Dean Road and west of Mursley Road (the balance lying within the main village fields). A huge 170 acres accommodated the moated manor house, fishponds, orchards and parkland which is still apparent on the ground with curving lines of hedges and trees to the south and east of the medieval estate.

As a significant aid to understanding of the distribution of wealth and status in the medieval English countryside, its Monument Scheduling appears to have been an oversight by Historic England.

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