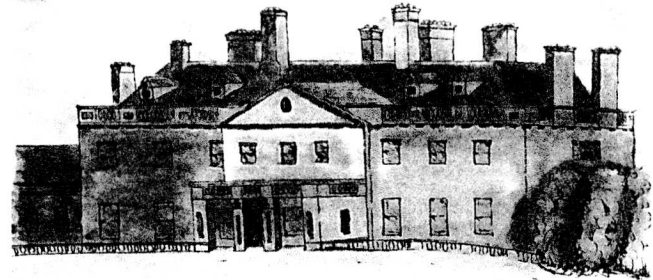


Ghost Houses.



A History of three houses, which
have disappeared in time.

**Bifrons House ♦ Heppington House
& Lee Priory**

Mark Pearson

Bifrons House; Patrixbourne.

"Bifrons is a seat in this Parish situated at a small distance westward from the church"¹.

The Parish in question, being Patrixbourne. The original house was built by John Bargrave, an exact date is not known. One source suggests that the place name Bifrons first occurs in 1551 in title deeds to a house and 54 acres of land². This may refer to a timber framed manor house which is likely to have existed on the site and been replaced by Bargrave's house. It is not known how sufficient wealth was acquired to finance such an enterprise, one author ventures the source may have been an expedient marriage, which gives one date from which to set out the history of Bifrons.

John Bargrave's family were from the neighbouring village of Bridge, his father Robert was a tanner and, according to archaeological texts³, is buried in the chancel at St.Peter's Church, Bridge. No stone or commemorative plaque dedicated to Robert Bargrave exists in the current building, which is of a later construction. John's marriage in 1597 to Jane Crouch, who was co - heir to Giles Crouch of London may, according to B.M.Thomas (1992) have yielded sufficient money to build a house.

The architectural style of the house was James I

¹ Hasted Edmund. 1778 - 99 The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent

² Allen. T. Cross. R. 1990. Bifrons, in: Canterbury's Archaeology. Canterbury Archaeological Trust.

³ Thomas.B.M. 1992. Archiologia Cantiana. Vol. CX. Canterbury Archaeological Trust.

Jacobean, built of brick, with stone quoins and included ornamentation such as cupola topped square towers, gable ends and stone mullioned windows. A painting of the house exists, dated 1705 or 1710, either by John Wooton or Jan Siberechts, held at the Yale Centre for British Art.⁴ Thomas suggests the painting was executed a century after the house was built. Which implies the house was started immediately after the marriage. The name Bifrons means two sides, the house was said to be have the same appearance from the front and rear views. John Bargrave is said to have paid tribute to his wife, by having a Latin inscription on the house; "Diruta edificat uxor bona, oedificate dinist mala".⁵ A translation of this is given by Professor Stephen Bann in his book "Under the Sign" as:

"A good wife builds up what has been devastated, a bad wife devastates what has been built up".⁶

An account of the inscription is also given by Edmund Hasted in the 1770's, however, there is some doubt in the way it is written, whether he was referring to the original building or a later rebuilding of the house. Bann does concede that no visual record exists of the motto being on the original house.

The painting of Bifrons does show the house with extensive, formal gardens. Including walled areas and somewhat regimented tree planting, which included avenues, the remnants of which still survive. A detailed account of the gardens was written by John Harris in 1719⁷; he describes garden walls with striped holly which was grown on one side and trained over to the other side

⁴ Paul Mellon Collection, Center for British Art Yale University U.S.A.
⁵ Hasted
⁶ Bann, S. 1994. Under the Sign. Michigan University Press. p37.
⁷ Harris J. 1719. A History of Kent p233.

and a view of a canal which had two islands at one end of it with a bathing house.⁸ The water for this must have been the Nailbourne, diverted to form the islands. A map dated 1896 shows a distinct widening of the stream, with straight banks and a small island⁹.

The widened area narrows abruptly, the stream may have been dammed to produce a suitable depth of water for swimming. It is known a cascade existed in Bifrons Park, with sea shells embedded into it's structure, this may have been the dam. To day all this would be difficult to imagine, as the Nailbourne is an intermittent stream. However there is evidence to suggest that at one time it was a substantial river.¹⁰ The formal gardens were later cleared in favour of parkland under the influence of Capability Brown.

Thomas' account of the house states that entrance was through a porch to the great hall. He goes on to suggest the proportions of the hall and its passages would have been of great size, giving the measurements; 65 ft. long with a ceiling height of 25 ft. In later years the hall was reduced in size to that of a vestibule. To the east of the house was a large stable block, with staff accommodation on the first floor, above the horses.

The house remained in the Bargrave family until 1662 when John Bargrave's grandson sold it to Sir Arthur

⁸ Ibid. Evidence of this survives, the water would have been from the Nailbourne. The Islands now form part of the gardens of a cottage.
⁹ 1896 Ordnance Survey 25" map, a copy of which is held at Canterbury Library. The feature referred to in the text also appears on the 1906 6" : 1 mile map.
¹⁰ "Gazetteer" 1960 Kentish Gazette. The author states that the Nailbourne "was once a considerable river according to historians." 'Gazetteer' goes on to cite a battle fought during the Roman Invasion at a ford in Charlton Park.

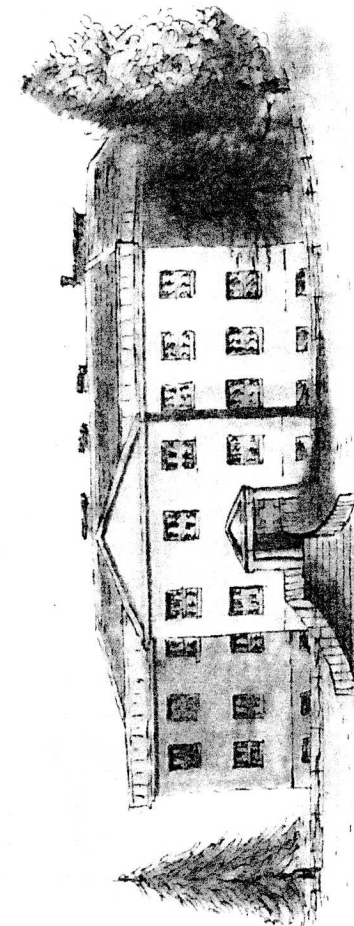
Slingsby. Sir Arthur originally came from Yorkshire, was a Knight and created Baronet of Brussels. His son, Sir Charles alienated¹¹ Bifrons to Mr. Thomas Baker in 1677. On his death it passed to Mr. William Wooton who in 1680 passed it away to Mr. Thomas Adrian Esq. who, in 1694 alienated it to John Taylor Esq. The first of three generations of Taylor's to own and eventually re build Bifrons. In 1704 he also bought Bridge Place from the Braem family, who had been impoverished by the building of such a large, and over ambitious house. John Taylor had most of it demolished, leaving one wing as a more suitably sized house for a country gentleman. Bridge Place was then probably rented out.

John Taylor Died in 1729 and the estate was inherited by his eldest son Brook Taylor, later Dr. Brook Taylor LLD. FRS. who among his achievements wrote a treatise on perspective; Taylor's Theorem. he died in 1729, without male heir, and the house was inherited by his brother Reverend Herbert Taylor. He was succeeded on his death in 1763 by his eldest son, also Herbert. He died unmarried and was succeeded in 1767 by his brother Rev. Edward Taylor. Land Tax records dated 1780 confirm Edward Taylor as landlord. It was Edward who rebuilt Bifrons House, and it is here the other connection with the motto lies. Hasted writes that Bifrons was rebuilt;

"nearly on the same site this seat of Bifrons so called from it's double front, and the builder of it in commendation of his wife placed this motto on the fore front; Diruta edificat uxor bona, oedificate dinist mala."

A question arises; was Hasted referring to the original building or did Taylor, on re building the house honour his wife in this way? Alternatively, the motto may

¹¹ To Alienate in legal terms, meant the transfer of property, as by conveyance or will, into the ownership of another. Collins Eng. Dict.



BIFRONS HOUSE CIRCA 1794

Bifrons House circa 1794

have been on the first house and copied on the second. The reason I believe doubt exists is because no mention is made of the motto during the account of the building of the original Bifrons. The question, in the absence of other evidence, remains unresolved. Edward and his wife Margaret, daughter of Thomas Paylor of Ileden, had four sons and three daughters. The eldest son - also Edward, inherited Bifrons on his father's death in 1798. This is confirmed in Land Tax records of that year. He married Louisa Beckingham, only child of Reverend Charles Beckingham of Bourne Park. In 1807 rev. Beckingham died, The Taylors moved to Bourne park and let Bifrons. A further link to the Paylor family is shown in the Land Tax records, in 1811 one William Paylor paid £1. 10s.

The first tenant at Bifrons was the 2nd Marquis of Ely, who held it for two years, 1811 records show him as occupant of Bifrons. A notable tenant from 1828 was Lady Byron, estranged wife of the poet. This is also verified by land tax returns. The house was sold by the Taylors in 1830. Here there is some discrepancy in the texts as to who bought the house. One suggestion is that it was sold to King George IV.¹² Other texts suggest the house was sold directly to the 1st Marquis of Conyngham. Available records dated 1831 show the Marquis Conyngham himself occupying Bifrons. The King's possession of Bifrons may not have been recorded in Land Tax records. Certainly a scurrilous tale is attached to the Conyngham's acquisition of Bifrons. The marchioness was well known to the King, and the Marquis was also at Court, holding many positions, including; Lord Steward of the Household and Constable of Windsor Castle.¹³ Lady

¹² Greenwood 1839. "In 1798 the Rev. Mr Taylor was succeeded by his eldest son...of whom we believe it was purchased by the late King." p.394 An Epitome of County History vol. VI. County of Kent.

¹³ Gibbs et al Editors. The complete Peerage Vol 1. entries 411 & 412.

Conyngham was a great favourite of the King as Greville¹⁴ writes; "In her husband's lifetime, had been notorious as mistress of George IV". In footnotes he adds; "It is said she had received jewels worth £80,000." (from the King). Greville, in his memoirs of 1821 wrote;

"she comports herself entirely as the Mistress of the Household". In 1829; "the wealth Lady C. must have accumulated by savings and presents must be enormous; the King continues to heap all kinds of presents upon her, and she lives at his expense. They [i.e. the Marquise and herself] do not possess a servant; all [such] have situations in the service of the King's household from which they receive their pay"

This gives a clear indication of the position the Conyngams enjoyed in the King's favours, it does not seem improbable that Bifrons was another gift which passed to them at or after their marriage. What ever occurred, the arrival of the Conyngham family was the start of a new phase in Bifrons History.

The first marquis, Henry died in 1832, his wife, now Dowager Marchioness of Conyngham succeeded. Tithe maps of Bridge and Patribourne confirm the Marchioness as landowner. Interestingly, the apportionment map shows the drive to the house leading to the lower lodge only. This could mean the upper lodge was of a later date, other maps show the drive connecting with a lane into Bridge, then known as Laundry Lane, (now Conyngham Lane). The census of 1851 records Elizabeth, Dowager Marchioness as head of household, which in this entry consisted of; the Honourable Augusta Devison, a governess and nine servants. The 1861 census records the existence of the Bifrons Day School, the governess being

¹⁴ Ibid. citing Greville from his memoirs.

one Emma Collison aged 28. The school was actually housed in the Lower Lodge. The main household consisted of The Marchioness, now aged ninety, her granddaughter Lady Elizabeth Bryson and eight servants. Later that year the Marchioness died. The 2nd Marquis had major alterations carried out on the house, extending it sideways with further conservatories at the east end. 1876 the 2nd was succeeded by the 3rd Marquis - George Francis, who in 1878 commissioned one David Brandon to carry out further work on Bifrons House, adding a stable block and coach house.

The Marquis was one of the Vice Presidents of the Kent Archaeological Society, this interest being rewarded with the discovery of a major find on the Bifrons estate. A large scale archaeological dig was carried out by the society, and it is in their records dated 1880 that a record of the dig was published.¹⁵

"During the year 1866 some workmen of the Marquis Conyngham, while digging for a plantation in that outlying part of Bifrons Park known as Patribourne Hill, disturbed a few Saxon graves, from which they secured some small items of no great importance"¹⁶.

The Marquis granted permission for further investigations to commence on October 21 1887. The dig was carried out by the noted local antiquarian Thomas Godfrey Faussett of Heppington House, Nackington.¹⁷ A total of one hundred Saxon graves were found. Most of the graves were lying north - south, a few east - west; which

¹⁵ Faussett. T. "The Saxon Cemetery at Bifrons" in *Archologia Cantiana* Vol X pp298 - 315.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Heppington house is the subject of further study in a later chapter of this book.

Faussett speculated may have contained the bodies of early Christians. The graves lying north - south contained many artefacts, those lying east - west did not, another indication that they were Christian burials. Among the artefacts found were weapons and items of jewellery such as pairs of broaches which were circular or hammer shaped, a frequent find was a perforated spoon and crystal ball, usually found lying on the thigh bone. Among the weapons were decorated fittings, including one which bore zigzag and Aryan swastika patterns. Apparently these were not uncommon among Teutonic and Scandinavian races, but were unique among the Jutes of Kent.¹⁸ A further surprise was that several graves contained skeletons of over six foot in length - one measuring six feet, three inches. Others contained fragments of wood suggesting coffins were used with some individuals.

The dig was so extensive that the Marquis diverted his gamekeeper from his normal duties to open graves on his behalf. This one suspects was did not meet with Fausset's approval;

"(the gamekeeper) doing his work his work with great care and attention, and getting together a very pretty collection now at Bifrons. Being however an uneducated man, he was unable to preserve notes of the contents of each grave, and of the positions and circumstances in which the relics were found; and this diminishes the value and historical usefulness of Lord Conyngham's collection."¹⁹

The collection at Bifrons was well served by the gamekeeper's efforts, but not it seems antiquarian scholarship.

¹⁸ Ibid footnote 13 above.

¹⁹ Ibid 13.

The third Marquis Conyngham was the last to live at Bifrons. Census returns from 1881 have no entry for Bifrons House, only one house on the estate being occupied. The house was once again let to tenants.

The house was occupied by several tenants,²⁰ namely; Edward Weinholt; an entry in the 1891 census shows Bifrons being occupied by Ellen Weinholt,²¹ occupation given as wife, who was "Living on her own means", which must have been quite substantial as she had fourteen servants. She also shared the house with three sons and three daughters. Included in the entry was a visitor; Carl Deisenhause, Professor of Music. The whereabouts of her husband or why she was living by her own means is open to speculation. Other tenants followed the Weinholt family, Mr. O.A. Miller; Frank Penn of Upper Harde and Colonel The Honourable Miles Talbot, younger son of 4th Lord Talbot of Malahide. The Colonel died in 1932, his widow remained in the house with servants until 1939.

Over the period of these tenancies, various improvements were made; such as improved drainage in 1893. Particularly interesting was the installation of electric light in 1913. In an agreement with Frank Penn, the estate installed a dynamo and batteries, possibly in part of the stable block. The curious thing is that there is evidence that Patixbourne was served by a local gas works. The Census of 1891 shows one Samuel Thomson living at Gas House, whose occupation was Gas Works

²⁰ Thomas. B.M. 1992 A History of Bifrons House in: Archiologia Cantiana. Vol. CX.

Information on the tenants was derived by this author from 1882 voters lists.

²¹ Census 1891 Public Records Office. Microfilm Copy, Canterbury Library.

Manager²². A small gas works had been in existence in 1896²³, this was situated adjacent to the playing fields of the old Bridge and Patricbourne Primary School in Patricbourne Road. Certainly houses were still lit by gas in the 1940's.²⁴ Why the occupants of Bifrons did not use gas for light can only be speculated upon. Gas did not give the same bright light as electricity and relied on fragile 'mantles' which were fiddley to change, gas was also noisy - hissing and popping. The generator also gave the house a self sufficient method of lighting.

The full extent of the Bifrons Estate can be appreciated when one considers that in 1921 some outlying parts of the estate were sold by auction. A total of 68 lots were offered, with the tenants being offered first priority; up to half the price could be raised by mortgage. Farms, cottages and land being sold through an area from Chislet, Marshside, through Sarre and Gore Street, East and West Stourmouth, Westmarsh to Monkton. The geography reflecting one of the Conyngham family titles; Baron Minster.²⁵ Twenty lots were withdrawn from auction as they had been bought by the tenants.

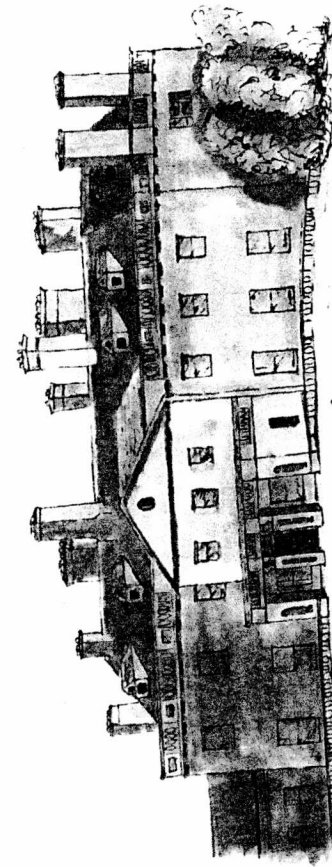
Bifrons House was emptied at beginning of World War II and taken over for military purposes. Local people recall it being used for the convalescence of wounded officers. At the end of the war it was used as a hostel for Free Polish soldiers during demobilisation. In 1945 Lord Conyngham engaged Sir Edwin Saville to manage his affairs in Kent. The Conyngham family had

²² Ibid. Schedule no. 29.

²³ Ordnance Survey 1896 25" map.

²⁴ The author's Mother lived in Patricbourne as a child and recalls the use of gas light.

²⁵ Kentish gazette and Canterbury Press. May 28 1921.



BIFRONS HOUSE. C. 1890. LATE 19TH CENTURY.

Bifrons Late 19th Century

moved to Slane Castle in Ireland. By now Bifrons House was in a dilapidated state, was demolished in 1950²⁶ and the materials auctioned. The farmland was rented to S.W. Mount and the stable block converted to house farm workers.

To - day the stable block remains as private homes. The land is still farmed by S.W. Mount and Savills continue to act on behalf of the Conyngham family. In 1988 Canterbury Archaeological Trust was commissioned to carry out an archaeological excavation. This was done from September to October of that year and between February and May 1989. What was revealed was the buried remains of the West wing of the house. Since then nature has gradually taken over the site and re-growth of trees and other plants obscure what remains; the slumbering foundations of two houses and later modifications. Once the centre of a tiny village, a major farming estate, a home and source of employment for generations of people.

²⁶ Archiologia Cantiana 1951. Report for 1950 p xiiiv. referring to Bifrons "having been allowed to fall into a state of dilapidation since army occupation. has been pulled down."