



The Chase Hotel History
&
The History and
Development of
Ross-on-Wye

The History of The Chase Hotel

The Chase is named after the hill, which were the hunting grounds of the Bishop of Hereford in Medieval times.

The present mansion house is a hotel with grounds extending to 11 acres. Shaded pools are the only remains of Chest's or Chase Mill dating from at least the 17th century. This was one of the three mill sites in Ross, the others were the Town Mill in Brookend and the One Mill at the end of the RopeWalk.

From the 17th century a list of occupiers have been established, and the development of the site maybe traced from a farm and mill to a mansion house which became the present day hotel.

The Chase Hotel and Chest or Chase Mill Occupiers

- 1693 Chest's Mill – John Griffiths
- 1754 Chase Mill
- 1794 Chest's Mill – John Powels
- 1813 Chase Mill House and Garden – John Powels
- 1818 Old Chase Rebuilt by John Cooke
- 1818 Mill became disused
- 1830 Chase House – John Cooke
- 1840 The Chase – Dr George Strong
(Cooke's son-in-law)
- 1842 Chase House John Cooke purchased another 24
acres
- 1878 The Chase with 28 acres went up for sale

- 1879 General Sir James William Fitzmayer at The
Chase
- 1895 Colonel Oswald Robert Middleton at The Chase
- 1937 John Brawn had converted the mansion in to a
Hotel between 1927-1937
- 1940 400 School Girls Evacuated to The Chase Hotel
John Brawn
- 1950 The Chase Hotel with 14 acres and 60 bedrooms
- 1991 Hotel bought by local business man out of
receivership through the company Price
Waterhouse – Mr Alan Porter
- 1991 The Chase Hotel Re Opens 36 Bedrooms,
Conference and Banqueting Facilities
-Mr Alan Porter

However, the town has not always enjoyed its elevated position, rising above the horse-shoe bend of the river, amongst terraces of gardens and river meadows - indeed some historians think that originally the town was based at the level of Brookend, the town being divided at the kink where Broad Street joins Brookend Street, with the main cluster of the town being around the millpond. Certainly, the Brookend area was much busier and more prosperous than it is today and the town mill at Brookend warranted a reference in the Doomsday Book, together with the church, so it is possible that the main town itself, developed between the two points, as it is today, but there is no conclusive evidence either way. Also, the town was originally much further from the river which is gradually creeping closer to the town. A vivid marker of this is a mature oak tree on the Oak Meadow.

Until 1931, Ross-on-Wye was known simply as 'Ross' but, following the growth of tourism in the Wye Valley, the suffix 'on-Wye' was added for its evocative image of rolling hills, countryside and a river valley, in addition to differentiating Ross from other UK towns of the same name - i.e. Ross in Scotland!

As Ross became an important town on many coaching routes, the number of coaching inns increased accordingly to meet the new demand. Many of these remain today - such as The King's Head in High Street.

Ross-on-Wye began its growth at a tourism centre in the 18th century, capitalising upon its unique position and role of 'Gateway to the Wye Valley", promoting the beauty of the River Wye and its attractive surrounding countryside. The advent and growth in popularity of the Wye Tour, the convenience of the Wye Valley Railway and passenger excursions operated by Wye Valley Motors which ran from Swan Garage, ensured Ross was firmly placed on the tourism map of the UK - where it remains firmly established today.

The Romans had many workings within the region and the Forest of Dean became one of the most important iron ore deposits in the UK. Iron ore was brought to Ariconium for smelting in furnaces to produce military equipment, tools, lamps and other domestic goods. Finds have revealed vaulted chambers, bronze statuettes, pottery coins, mosaic pavements and the remains of statues. Timber was brought from the Forest of Dean as a supply of charcoal. The town was *probably* laid out like other Roman towns with streets forming a grid pattern and having a bath house on the outskirts.

Chase Hill fort is 2km south of Ross-on-Wye, about 19 acres and occupies a commanding viewpoint of 200m height, with panoramic views in most directions. Excavations have revealed Neolithic flints and late Iron Age pottery while further pre-roman pottery was found slightly the west of the fort. Following the departure of the Romans in the 5th century AD enabled the Welsh to take command of the west of Herefordshire up to the River Wye which formed a boundary. Even today, many towns to the west of the Wye have retained their welsh names, such as Llangarron. In marked contrast, there are very few, if any Welsh-names towns or villages on the eastern bank.

King Offa 757-796 made Herefordshire into an English county and emphasised the boundary between the two countries by digging a great earthen ditch, Offa's Dyke, whilst the Wye formed parts of the border south of Monmouth.

Thomas Hopkins Merrick (of Bollitree Castle) razed the site of Ariconium in 1785 which, until then, was a mass of scrub, weeds, briars and a few remaining walls. Today there is little to see other than the area being marked by broken tiles, stones and ancient iron slag.

A Herefordshire County surveyor staged the first excavation in 1922 and found a selection of coins and pottery. Later, in 1963, the Archenfield Archaeological Group excavated a site nearby and discovered several smelting pits set deep into rock.

As Ariconium decayed, it is probable that the town of Ross began to develop just a few miles away

Also of interest within the Hotel grounds is the route of two roads that were diverted during the 19th Century. One was the continuation of the old Gloucester road, which formed the main route to London. After George IV was delayed by an obstructed road in 1821, the road was altered around 1825. The Old Chase Lane ran alongside the house before being moved in quarter sessions in 1878 to form the present Chase Lane.

The Water Mill was known as Chest's Mill, but the only reference to this name appears in 1605 of a John Chest occupying a house in the Market Place.

By 1693 John Griffiths was at the Mill described as "all that water Grist Mill called Chest's Mill situate lying and being in the Parish of Rosse..... With all Barnes, Buildings, Orchards, Waters, Watercourses, Wares, Banks, Stanks, Dams, Millponds, Floodgates and Streams of Water....."

In 1794 John Powles was recorded at Chest's Mill, which by 1813 was called Chase Mill with Malt House Gardens, House and Gardens and Chase Mill Meadow.

In the early 19th Century John Cooke, Attorney, had acquired the property, and from that time the Mill became out of use. Cooke added another pool, which together with the mill pond became ornamental pools where a water wheel was erected to pump "pure spring water" up to the house and all over the grounds.

The Chase Mansion has been enlarged and extended since John Cooke rebuilt the old Chase in 1818. He was an Attorney in Ross with his office, stables and gig house in

Lower Church Lane (Church Street) he remained at The Chase until his death in 1867. His Daughter Charlotte married George Strong, a Physician in the town, and they also lived at The Chase. Strong took a keen interest in the past and wrote "The Heraldry of Herefordshire" in 1848, and "The Handbook to Ross and Archenfield" published in 1863. Two of his Daughters died in 1857 and 1860 and were buried in Ross Graveyard, where a 20 foot cross designed by Sir Guilbert Scott was erected to their memory.

After this sad event Dr Strong continued to live at The Chase serving as a Magistrate and helping at the Ross Dispensary, but by 1876 he had left The Chase and was living at Ashfield. His wife died in 1892 but his death is not recorded on the family monument.

The Chase was auctioned in 1878, and the sale particulars described the property as a "Residential estate with valuable lands, building sites etc."

It appears that The Chase was purchased by General Sir James William Fitzmayer before passing to Colonel Oswald Robert Middleton in 1895. Middleton retired from active service and made his home at The Chase for 32 Years. Until his death in 1927 he played a prominent part in life in Ross.

After 1927 The Chase was acquired by John Brawn who converted the property in to a hotel. Whilst under Brawn's management during the Second World War, 400

Schoolgirls were evacuated to The Chase. During this period a 500lb Bomb fell in to the grounds. Luckily it did not explode and is preserved at the Market House Heritage Centre in Town.

In 1950 John Brawn could accommodate his guests in 60 bedrooms with grounds of 14 acres.

Since then The Chase has remained as a Hotel with various alterations made to meet the requirements of present day guests. Now with 11 Acres of grounds, 36 Bedrooms, 5 Conference Rooms with Banqueting up to 300.

ROSS-ON-WYE

Standing proud, high on a sandstone cliff, is the attractive, historic, country market town of Ross-on-Wye. 'Ross', itself, is the Celtic word for 'promontory' or headland - thus describing the town's elevated position today.

The most attractive approach into Ross-on-Wye is over Wilton Bridge, following the course of the river Wye as it twists to the left, leading the way into town. Looking up towards the elevated townscape, St Mary's Church dominates the view with the tall spire of the church framed against a backdrop of the wooded hills of Penyard Park while the white building of the Royal Hotel reflects elegantly into the waters of the Wye, being especially attractive when illuminated at night. This entrance route to Ross passes the mock mediaeval battlements - the sandstone town wall and gazebo tower built in 1833 to match Wilton Castle and Market Hall.

The first reference to Ross-on-Wye was in 1016 on a document presented to the Bishop of Hereford. It was later referred to on the Domesday Book of 1086. The town grew steadily with a recorded 100 houses and population of 500 in 1285 then grew more rapidly, encouraged by the profitable iron working trade so that Ross had 160 houses and a population of 800 in 1650. In 1841 there were 468 houses and a population of 2,523 which grew to 3,505 houses at the time of the last Census in 1991 giving a recorded population of 8,692. By the 14th century the town had grown sufficiently in size and importance to be able to send two MPs to Parliament - a very long trek in those days and the right was later forfeited.

In 1597, Parliament referred to Ross as "an ancient and great market town" and emphasised its important role in standing on a major thoroughfare from London to Hereford, Monmouth, Brecon, Pembroke and Carmarthen.

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ROSS-ON-WYE

The earliest traced reference to the Roman Town of Ariconium is in 150AD by a road surveyor. In the third century the 'Antonine Itinerary' was compiled which listed distances between towns and quoted a distance of 15 miles between Glevum (ie Gloucester) and Ariconium. The

ROSS, HEREFORDSHIRE

PARTICULARS

Of a desirable freehold

RESIDENTIAL ESTATE

Known as

“The Chase”

With valuable lands, building sites &c.

Situate in the Parish of

Ross, In the County of Hereford

On the high road leading from Gloucester to Ross, Hereford and Monmouth; within easy reach of Liverpool, Manchester and London, from Ross station of the Great Western Railway Company, which adjoins a portion of the property.

Symond’s Yat, Goodrich Castle, Great and Little Doward Hills, Penyard Wood, and other places of interest, are with in a short drive of the estate.

The substantial Modern Stone-Built Mansion

Is approached by a very pretty Private Drive through Noble Entrance Gates and is of good elevation, with handsome carriage Portico Entrance. It Contains –

town was then situated on what was the main road from Gloucester to the west and, since Ariconium is stated to have been a major town, there were probably several additional roads running in other directions - indeed the Antonine Itinerary also includes the distance from Ariconium to Blestium (i.e. Monmouth) at 11 miles.

Prior to the arrival of the Roman Legions, the land was occupied by Celtic tribes such as the Silures who protected their area, which extended to the River Severn, welsh mountains, Hereford and the iron mines of the Forest of Dean. A series of hill-forts were built above steep hillsides with extensive views overlooking the surrounding countryside surrounded by ditches and ramparts to provide isolation and defences to guard their territory, the sites of many local forts remain - e.g. Chase Woods hill fort, which was laid out like a small hill town. Eventually these were conquered by the Romans and Roman-town Ariconium, originally named Eryng around 50AD developed. Later, the Saxons renamed the ex-Eryng part of Ariconium as Archenfield - a name that still exists today on the southern side of town.

Prior to the Roman invasion there was much strife in this area witnessed by the many old hill-forts - Capler Camp, Chase Woods Hill fort, Dinedor Hill and Herefordshire Beacon on the Malvern Hills.

The town probably grew over 300 - 400 AD and developed into an important smelting centre for iron and possibly also became an administration centre.

Taken from Sale Details of The Chase in 1878

On the Ground floor –Entrance Hall, Justices' Room,
Library, Double Drawing
Room (44ft. 2in. by 17ft. 3in); Dining Room (27ft. 3in. by
19ft. 8in., 13ft 4in high); Breakfast Room, and the usual
Domestic Offices.

The Bed Rooms (12 in Number) are approached by
principal and secondary stone
Staircases, and are large and lofty, and there are also
Dressing and Bath Rooms, Box Rooms and Closets.

The windows of the chief rooms on the ground floors
open on to the lawns, which are exquisitely laid out and
studded with ornamental and beautiful shrubs and
conifers; the magnolia and arbutus, grow there in
luxuriance. At convenient distance, and prettily hidden
from the mansion by trees and shrubs, stands the

Stabling for 5 Horses, Coach House, Cottages, Barn,
Farm Buildings, with Bailiff's Residence, Cow Houses,
Cart House, Fowl House, Piggeries, Stable and Folds,

All bountifully supplied with pure Spring Water, which is
forced up to the top of the Mansion and all over the
grounds by a self-acting Water Wheel.

Colonel Oswald Robert Middleton 1840 – 1927

Did not make his home at Ross until after he retired in the
Army, but for 32 years he was prominent in his life of the
town and he was chairman of Ross Urban Council for a
longer time than any other man had been.

Middleton Avenue is named after him, the oak door and
furnishings of the North Porch of the Parish Church were
provided to his memory.

He was born in London, a descendent of an old Scottish
family one of his ancestors being the Earl of Middleton,
who went with James II to France and forfeited the family
property in doing so.

Colonel Middleton fought in the Zulu war of 1879 and on
his retirement in 1805 he bought The Chase, being its last
private resident before it became a hotel.

He was a Member of Ross Urban Council for 20 Years
and retied a year before his death. He was Chairman in
1908 – 09 1911 – 13 and 1914 – 22.

On the formation of the Territorial Army in 1908 he
became Chairman of the Herefordshire Territorial Forces
Association, and took a keen interest in putting the TA on
a sound footing before the outbreak of war in 1914. In the
early years of the war he addresses many recruiting
meetings and when compulsory service was introduced
he became a representative upon the Ross Urban Tribunal
which dealt with applicants for service to be deferred.

He was Deputy Lieutenant for Herefordshire and a Justice
of the Peace, being Chairman of Ross Bench for about 10
years from 1916.

Apart from his work on the Urban Council, he was also a
member of Ross Rural Council and the Board of
Guardians.

He was The Chairman of Governors of Ross Grammar School, when it school opened in 1912. The School met with some opposition particularly in the rural district, but he guided it through its formative years and held the chairmanship until his death. He was also Chairman of the managers of Ross Council Schools, and a governor of the Walter Scott School.

He was a man of definite religious convictions and was a representative of the parish on the Diocesan Conference. He also represented the diocese at the Church Assembly.

He was also a Staunch Conservative and was president of the Ross Conservative Club. Among many other activities, he was president of the Ross District Boy Scouts Association, Chairman of the Ross Social Welfare Association, and the President of Ross Cottage Hospital.

His Widow died in 1948 only a few months short of her One-Hundredth Birthday.



Spanish Bar



Crystal Dining Room