Burgage Manor House

Dr. Falkner and son.

Built for £500 in 1801-2 the original part of this handsome house was designed by local architect Richard Ingleman for Evelyn Richard Sutton Falkner (1772-1837) son of a wealthy local surgeon and apothecary - Thomas Falkner. Falkner senior’s fortune may have been partly inherited but his professional fees are impressive - as seen below. These remedies may have improved the patient’s wellbeing but they certainly improved the health of the good doctor’s bank balance.

*Extract of Dr Falkner’s fees for services in 1767 to Mr Smith of King St, Southwell.*

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Fees</th>
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<tr>
<td>14 January</td>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>2s6d</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Box of pills</td>
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<td>The Drops</td>
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<td>Blister ointment</td>
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<td>18th January</td>
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Dr. Falkner, who had purchased and refurbished South Muskham prebend as a family home, also bought several cottage plots on the north side of the Burgage Green. Some of these were sold to enlarge the old House of Correction in 1787 and others were later demolished to make way for the new Manor House and garden by his son, Evelyn.

Evelyn Falkner may have intended using the house as a boys’ boarding school but financial constraints appear to have obliged him to raise a mortgage on the house and let it for rent soon after its completion.
Enter Lord Byron

From 1803 to 1809 it was home to Catherine Gordon Byron and her son George, 6th Baron Byron of Rochdale who was at the time a scholar at Harrow and later at Trinity College Cambridge. It was during his time at Southwell, encouraged by his friends, John and Elizabeth Pigot who lived close by on the Burgage, that the young Byron published his first collections of poems in the nearby town of Newark-on-Trent.

*Sketch by Elizabeth Pigot c. 1806 of the Burgage Manor House*

Sport, amateur dramatics and the pursuit of local beauties appear to have kept the young man occupied. Julia Leacroft of Burgage House was the cause of some gossip in the town and there was an exchange of unpleasant correspondence in early 1807 between her brother Captain John Leacroft and Byron.

**Boarding School**

In 1809 Evelyn Falkner, who was still struggling to make a success of his boarding school, put the house up for rent. It was leased by a lawyer, Mr Elgie, whose wife is recorded in 1813 as headmistress of a boarding school for girls which closed about 10 years later.

In 1823 the house was extended by Mr Falkner to accommodate more boarders for his school. Evidently Evelyn Falkner was no business man for within a few years the school closed and he was declared bankrupt in 1830.

**Family Home**

From 1832 the Manor House was home to Miss Caroline Fowler, a wealthy spinster who lived there ministered to by a staff of servants until her death in 1855. She changed her name to Miss Caroline Berdmore-Fowler in memory of her great uncle Thomas Berdmore from whom she had inherited a sizeable legacy. Thomas Berdmore was dental surgeon to George III. He died in 1785 without children and is buried in St. Mary’s church, Nottingham where his memorial plaque records that ‘he acquired a liberal and ample fortune by the profession of dentist’

*Memorial plaque to Thomas Berdmore, St. Mary’s Church, Nottingham.*
From the 1850s until 1881 the Monckton family occupied the Manor House. The Honourable Edmund Gambier Monckton was the fourth son of the 5th Viscount Galway. He had gained the rank of Captain in the Rifle Brigade and later was a Colonel in the Yorkshire militia. He moved into the Manor House when in his 40s and with wife Arabella raised seven children. He died in 1872 at the age of 62 but his widow continued to live in the house until her death in July 1880. The house was put up for sale the following year. (The present holder of the title Viscount Galway lives in Canada and is a great grandson of Edmund Monckton).

*Sale catalogue of 1881 - plan of Manor House with 25 acres of gardens and closes*

The house was bought by Richard Huskinson Warwick, the son of a successful Newark brewer. His father (also Richard) had taken over the old Sketchley Town Wharf brewery and then relocated to Northgate where in partnership with Joseph Richardson had built up the business into the largest brewery in the district. Generations of Warwicks continued in the business taking over several other smaller breweries before being themselves bought up by John Smiths in 1962. Richard H. Warwick died in 1909 and the Manor House was placed on the market.
The old Warwick and Richardson’s brewery now converted into apartments.

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Guest House

The Manor House became a guest house ran by a Mrs A. Brown and for a while counted amongst its clients one Kenneth Tweedale Meaby.


He was Clerk of the Peace and travelled each working day into Nottingham from Southwell station which involved changing trains at Rolleston – such was his influence that the mainline train was held until Mr Meaby was safely aboard (one errant driver who dared to set off without him was ordered to reverse back to Rolleston station).
In World War 1 the Manor House served as a convalescence home for the recuperation of soldiers wounded on the Western Front.

Photographs of soldiers and staff outside the Burgage Manor House.

During World War 2 the Manor House was occupied by the offices of the D’Arcy Exploration Oil Company. The story of Nottinghamshire’s oil field is not well known but it played a vital role in the war when Britain’s transatlantic oil supply was being strangled by the German U-boat campaign. At its height there were over 200 productive wells in Nottinghamshire producing millions of barrels of high grade oil.

Freda Kirkby worked for the oil company at their headquarters and has kindly shared some of her memories.

The Darcy Exploration Company headquarters were at Burgage Manor, whilst the American drillers, about forty in all, were based at Kelham Hall, then an Anglican monastery. They were known as the ‘Roughnecks’. It was all very top secret. It was vital that the Germans
didn’t find out that the Nottinghamshire oilfield was being developed. Fortunately, Sherwood Forest helped to screen most of the workings.

At Burgage Manor, the British managers, led by Richard Southwell, had their offices on the ground floor and the American bosses occupied the top floor. Mr Southwell was later knighted for his war work. My job was to carry out various secretarial tasks. I would also be regularly expected to ring the Saracen’s Head to book a table at lunch for the bosses. Another task, which made me giggle sometimes, was to receive cables from the Americans’ wives, addressed to their husbands. They were always a bit ‘lovey dovey’.

Working with the American bosses was a lot of fun. Donald Walker was responsible for the administration of the American Company and used to say, ‘I have 40 big babies (the ‘Roughnecks’) to look after’. He had an uncanny ability to chew and dictate at the same time. One of his problems was that the ‘Roughnecks’ didn’t have enough food. They worked 12 hours a day for 7 days a week, more than the British drillers who had a greater food allowance.

The ‘Roughnecks’ would travel each day up to Eakring to the Duke’s Wood oilfields, but after their work shift they would often call in at the company headquarters. One clear memory I have is seeing them regularly run up the staircase to talk to their bosses and then sliding down the banisters before coming into our office. Once in the office they would quickly open their pockets and hand out sweets to us young office girls.

The other times we would see the American oil drillers was at the Assembly Room dances. They liked their dancing! Wherever they went they always wore big, white stetson hats, bright shirts and western boots so everyone in town thought they were proper cowboys! One place the Roughnecks would regularly be at was the Fox Inn at Kelham.

I can remember one fatal accident at the Duke’s wood oilfield. An American, Hermann Douthit, was working on a high rig when he fell and received a fatal injury. On the day of Hermann’s funeral I can remember seeing the bosses, all dressed in black suits, leave Burgage Manor to travel to the funeral. Years later, when a group of the ‘Roughnecks’ returned to Nottinghamshire for a reunion, they all visited Hermann’s grave.

**Youth Hostel**

On 22nd July, 1944, Miss Sarah Lamport, representing the American Embassy, opened the Manor House as a Youth Hostel with room for 46 males and 34 female guest. In the Y. H. A. handbook for 1945 there is a stipulation that visitors should wear slippers – no doubt to protect the fine Georgian interior.
The hostel’s first wardens, Mr and Mrs Barnes, greeting Mr and Mrs Leslie Walters who had first met at the hostel.

By kind permission of the Imperial War Museum

Family Home

In the 1960s the house passed back into private ownership. After 20 years as a Youth Hostel it was somewhat run down but has been lovingly restored by its present owners Mr and Mrs Geoffrey Bond

Burgage Manor House today (photo Nick Hugh McCann)
From boarding school to hospital, guest house to offices and youth hostel to family home – this house has seen many changes but it is its connection with Lord Byron that makes the Burgage Manor House a special part of Southwell’s heritage.

Sources


*Southwell: The Town and Its People, volume I.* Southwell, and District Local History Society (1995)

*Southwell. The Town and its People, volume II.* Southwell and District Local History Society, (2006)