

NOTES FROM THORNHAM

Swatts Hall is a local mystery, the house was on an ancient moated site, just up from the campsite, in Gislingham parish but close to the border with Thornham Magna. I thought there was no record of its appearance until recently I



I came across this photo, probably taken in 1864 by Cleer Alger of Diss who recorded the Thornham Estate to mark the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh. The house is tricky to research as name variations include Swatchfield, Swatts and Swattisfield and because the same name was used for it as a pre-Conquest manor through to the 1920s, or as the estate, farm or the Hall itself.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the land was owned by the Bedingfields

who filled in most of the old moat and built this attractive house with its back to Thornham Hall lands and views from the front of its Gislingham acres. You may know the grand monument in Gislingham church with a Latin inscription of the kneeling Anthony Bedingfield who died in 1651.

In about 1820 the Swatts estate was sold to Lord Henniker and became a tenanted farm. From 1849 the house was cut off from its fields by the railway embankment, and was also close to and downwind of the new Estate brickworks. By the time of the photo it looks run down and overgrown. It was a separate farm until 1880 when its farm buildings were demolished and by 1900 it was uninhabited.

In the 20th century the ruinous house was a useful source of recycled materials for the Thornham Estate builders and carpenters. The staircase and front door went to Yaxley Hall, also then owned by the Thornham Estate, following their major fire in 1922. What was left of the house was finally cleared by Estate workers led by Terry Lummis, the manager, one winter around 1970.



Swatts Hall, probably 1864, by Cleer Alger, kind permission of Stephen Gowler. Yaxley Hall staircase 2020, photo Dominic Richards.

✳ You can read all my Notes from Thornham on www.thornhams.org. Keep well and please let me know about your research. Stephen Schwarz