



# Dalmore House

## *A History*

### It All Started Before You Were Born

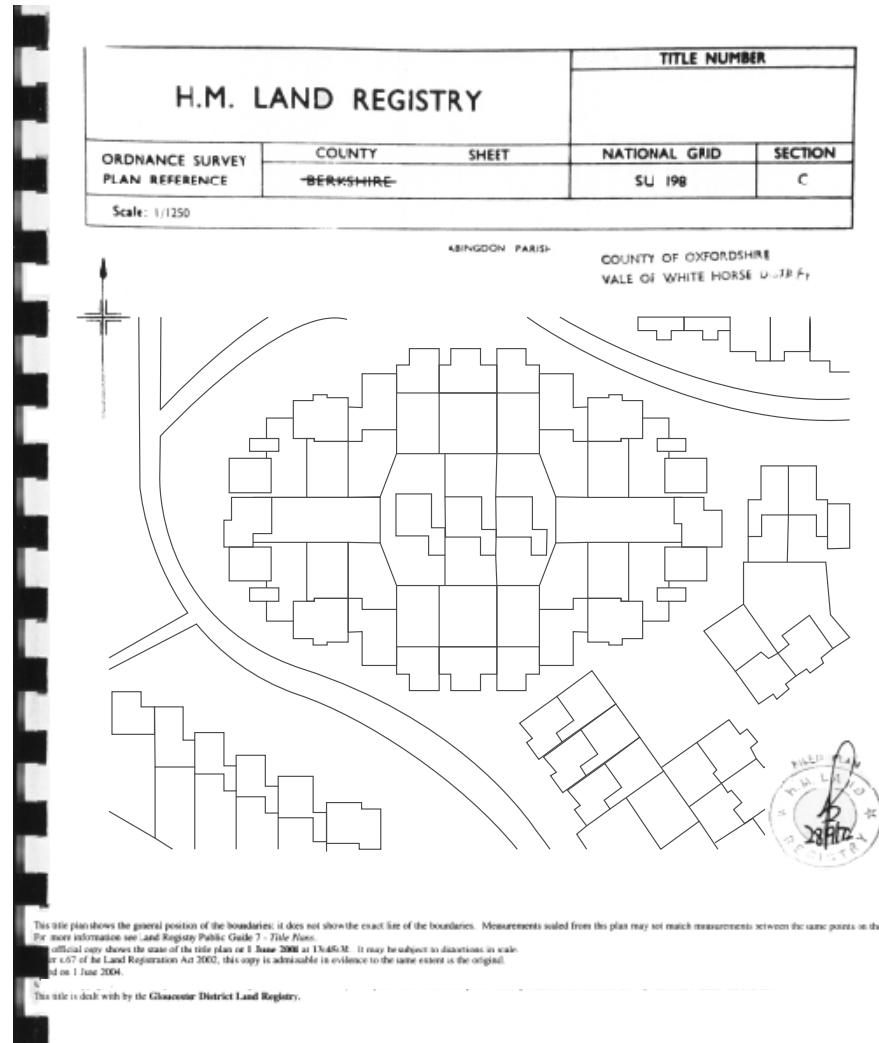
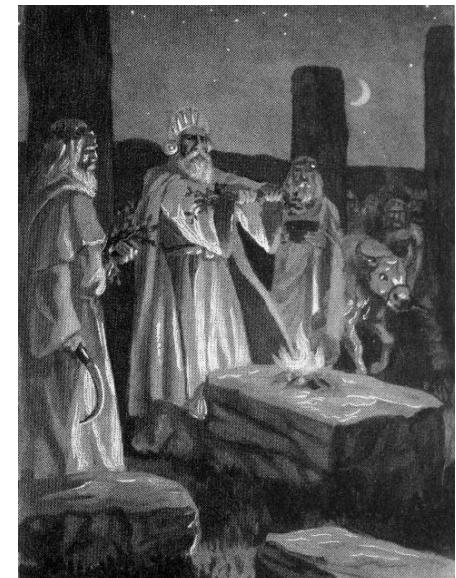
**F**ive hundred years before the birth of Christ, the four wisest druids of the Catuvellauni tribe converged on an unassuming patch of heath land north east of the Ock fort. The spot was a mystical intersection, crisscrossed by ley lines and close to an out-of-town sacrifice centre.

The men stood at the four points of the compass, surrounding a bush growing at the exact centre of their

quest. They shivered as the dawn sun crept slowly over a misty horizon. Pagan muscles tensed. As one, they pulled their ceremonial sickles from their belts. Blades flashed, cleaving a bough of sacred mistletoe which was held triumphantly aloft in four craggy hands.

It is not recorded what happened next, or what they did with the mistletoe. There may have been kissing. We don't like to think about it. One outcome was never in doubt - Dalmoria had been found.

Even today, we can see traces of the ancient lines of power in the landscape. It is a little known fact that the building plots surrounding Dalmore House are arranged in the shape of an eye. Observe them from higher up and the fences & boundaries of Abingdon form the chilling face of Tony Blackburn.





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### Dunroman

In 43AD, the Roman legions came to Britain. Unswayed by stories of fearsomely haired warriors and warm ales they drove unstoppably across the country. It was supreme commander Aulus Plautius himself who uncovered the mysterious Dalmoria. Tired after a day spent slaughtering weirdo foreigners, he sat down on the nearest dead pict and uncapped a cold jug of Nastro Azzuro.

As Plutus surveyed the conquered lands, his eyes fell upon a surprising structure, dramatically

lit by the setting sun. Plutus had seen pagan standing stones before, but this was something else - Hundreds of stones piled up to form a complete structure.

Coming from a sophisticated Roman culture helped Plutus see Dalmoria in quite a different light to the Britons. To them, it was a sacred place of worship, a way to reinforce their kinship with the spirits of nature. He, on the other hand, saw a spacious detached residence in authentic local stone, with room to extend and ample chariot parking. He took it.

*All that remains of Dalmoria today is the magnificent frontage.*

*It is currently in the possession of an anonymous American collector who thought that he was buying Stonehenge.*

*Sucker.*

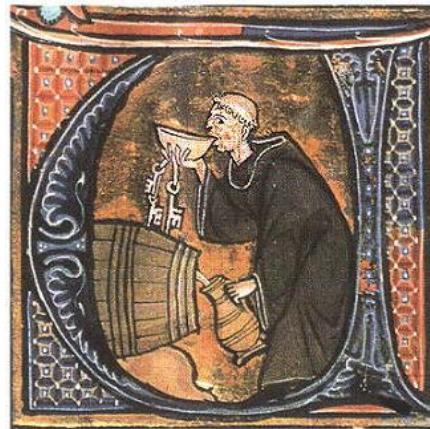
Plautius's descendants were not to enjoy Dalmoria forever. In 678 AD, Aulus Ornothingus, an inveterate gambler and wastrel, defaulted on his mortgage and was evicted. The house fell into the ownership of the local Abbey, which sent two of its youngest brothers to investigate. The monks were instantly transfixed and suggested to the Abbot that the house be used as a place for monks to go for a day off - somewhere they could relax out of the direct gaze of God. The Abbot was sceptical, it was surely God's will that they toil all the hours that He sends. One visit to Dalmoria changed that.

The effects were remarkable. In a survey conducted in 724 AD, Abingdon monks were the most devout and productive of any abbey in the country. Their holyometer readings were off the scale. The presence of Dalmoria in their lives was seen as the greatest blessing any man could receive.

What kinds of activities went on in the house? The emphasis was on secular pastimes, including a number of games whose rules are sadly lost to the passage of history. Their evocative names such as 'Polish the Pope' and 'Serving Girl Sandwich' give us a clue to the wholesome activities

these holy men indulged in. The house was also seen as friendly 'neutral' ground and female members of the community were encouraged to visit and work out their marital problems in comfort.

There seems to be only one blot on the history of Dalmoria during this period, an unfortunate incident in 1347 when brother Godfrey's flea circus caused the house to be redubbed 'Dalmorte'.



*A monk enjoys a drink whilst relaxing chez Dalmoria.*

*All beer was brewed purely for religious purposes and the monks took no pleasure in their spiritual duty of drinking seven pints followed by a venison kebab.*





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### Double Zero - House Wins

The monks' number was up. Normally this would have meant big winnings and the adoration of numerous females. In this case it meant Henry VIII and his plan to dissolve the monasteries.

Monks ran screaming as super-strong acid was poured from a giant bottle onto Abingdon Abbey. Almost two hundred took refuge in

Dalmoria, hoping that the thick stone walls would save them. Henry was having none of this - the house was demolished and the stones were used to make a spectacular rockery at Hampton Court Palace.

The site was given to Sir Terence Torrance, inventor of the tongue twister and a firm believer in the redistribution of Catholic wealth



*Dalmore House,  
photographed as it was in  
1928.*

*Note the elaborate stable garage located on the left side. This was to have a noble destiny beyond straw and horse muck.*

into the pockets of Protestant businessmen. He planned to build a fabulous new mansion on the site, to be called Dalmore House. Plans were drawn up and work commenced - thanks in part to a large loan from the King himself.

If we peer back through the mists of time, we can perhaps see disaster lurking, bumping into cupboards and generally wondering where the sugar had been put back. A sudden lull in the word games market was enough to send Torrance into despair as he could not afford his loan repayments.

Fortunately, Torrance was a canny operator and had no need to ring Ocean Finance. He noticed that



*Henry VIII and his fourth cast-off Anne of Cleves.*

*Henry remains a misunderstood figure and was not the serial womaniser of legend. In fact he had been confused by an early version of Pokemon and believed that only by collecting seven wives could he win the game. Sadly he expired after the sixth and was denied his limited edition Pikachu figurine.*

the King was unable to execute all of the wives he was casting off, but this left some unfortunate questions regarding succession to the throne. Torrance suggested to the King that he set up a 'Home for the Royally Incompetent' and locate it at Dalmore house. The home would care for those who had some claim to the throne, but were politically or socially unable to take up the post. The King was delighted and despatched Anne of Cleves into Torrance's care soon after the house was finished.

Many illustrious figures graced the house over the coming centuries, including Charles I, King George III and the little known pirate regent Prince Grogswiller.





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### Pretender To The Throne

**B**y the twentieth century, Dalmore House no longer held the cachet it once had and incompetent royals wishing to stay there had become thin on the ground. Indeed, when Edward VII had the keys dangled under his nose, he scarpered to the South of France.

The last occupant of the ageing Tudor pile was not royal at all,

outside of the confines of her own head. Mad Messy 'Queen' Bessy (born Ethel Scroggins) had been a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother). Bessy was entranced by the life of a monarch, and saw her chance to try it when the Queen was away. Using a combination of lies and blackmail, Bessy persuaded the palace staff to wait upon her. For six weeks, she bathed in melted

cheese and threw black truffles at visiting ambassadors. Her deception was eventually uncovered when she got into bed with King George and demanded her marriage privileges.

Queen Elizabeth remained fond of Bessy and was unhappy with the idea of executing her - even though she had tried to jump in the sack with her old man. Instead she sent her to Dalmore under the pretence of an extended holiday.

Bessy lasted three weeks before she burnt the house to the ground. Her habit of celebrating her birthday every day (with fifty two candles) was perhaps ill advisable in a timber framed house, as was her liking for spit-roasting suckling pig on the bathroom floor. In the end it was an over-toasted marshmallow that was to prove fatal to Bessy and four hundred years of architectural history.



(Left) The interior of Dalmore house as Bessy makes toast. Shortly after the photographer left, the house was toast too. (Right)





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### What Did You Do In The War, Dalmore?

Dalmore House blended into the landscape much more comfortably as a smoking ruin than it ever had as a Tudor house. The grounds had long since been sold off for industrial usage, and most of the site was now a cement works. By 1939, a single half timbered garage stood alone in a dreary grey moonscape.

War came, and with it yet another twist in the amazing history of this site. The MG car factory in Abingdon was pressed into service making aeroplane parts, but the Ministry of Information was keen to ensure that the Germans did not learn of its new purpose. An outlandish scheme was devised, whereby a brand new MG would be driven from the gates of the factory every two hours - thus convincing any spies that business was continuing as usual. In actual fact, it was the same car being driven endlessly around.

The plan worked like this: The MG left the factory and drove a mile or so towards Oxford. It then turned

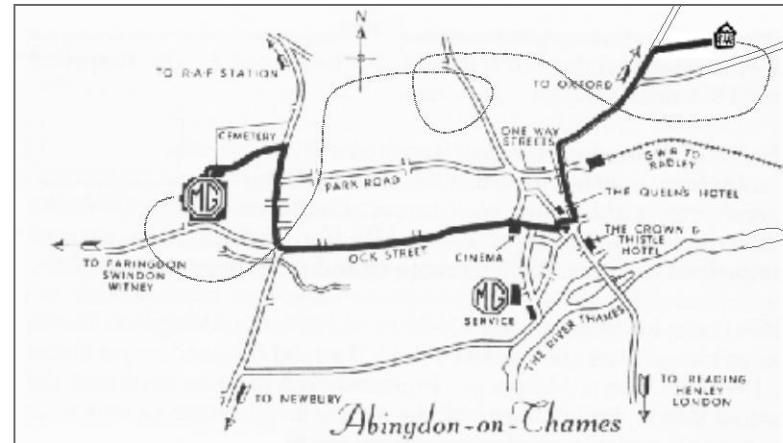
down a hidden track and parked inside Dalmore House garage. A series of pulleys lowered the false floor of the garage into an underground tunnel network dug within the cement quarry. From there, the car would be driven back underground to the MG works.

It was a brilliantly effective scheme - no Luftwaffe bombs hit the factory and Mr Norman Foxhill was able to buy a surprisingly cheap MG sports car after the war, albeit one with a staggeringly high mileage.

Colin 'Nobby' Bobbins was a key member of the MG deception team. Here he remembers one especially eventful day.

*"Oh yeah, yeah I 'member some days when the ack ack were going and the bombs was falling - fair shook the ground it did. That car would come back wi' so much earth on it, and it were my job to get it clean again. Like new, see?"*

*"Then one day we had a biggun come down and it all caved in. Trapped the car it did, couldn't go forward, couldn't go back. So's my boss, 'ee goes frantic - it's three o'clock and no car to be made. So young Terrance, 'ees not so young now, mind, in fact 'ees been dead nigh on ten year, 'ee were young*



*then though and 'ee sees this Jerry spotter plane comin' over. So's we all panic. I has to jump in the gaffer's Landrover and drive it out the gates and up the road. Only, I'm not so good at drivin', see? I 'ad a licence but you could get one o' those in wartime just by sittin' at the wheel an' moving it a bit. So's the Landrover's really 'eavy an before I knows it I'm in the duck pond. Right up to my neck in swan's what-have-you. 'Orrible.*

*Anyways, I reckon that Landrover's still down there. Like an ancient relic or someat. I saw them pull that Lancaster bomber out a Loch Ness, why not this 'un? I tell all this to that nice lady at the war museum. She never phones back, mind."*

*This recently declassified map shows the route taken by the decoy car.*

*Note the dotted line which indicates the path of the remarkable underground tunnels.*



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### Redemption Through Music

With the war ended, the need for an elaborate series of car disguising tunnels was sadly reduced. The last remains of the majestic Dalmore House became a shed for storing shovels and brickies' dirty underwear.

Rescue came in the late 50s from the unlikely figure of Phil Spector. After falling down a hole whilst drunk, gun toting loon Phil was surprised to discover himself in a huge underground cavern. The amazing acoustics inspired him to create his seminal Wall of Sound production technique. Dalmore Studios was born.

As rock music grew louder and more expansive in the 60s and 70s, so did Dalmore - Phil spent millions of pounds widening the catacombs to keep pace with the sound of the times. Despite the warnings of structural engineers, Phil kept tunnelling, often spending night after night naked except for a miner's helmet, his hands on a powerful rock drill. "Dalmore is

made of Rock" the slogans proclaimed, and the stars flocked to fill it with primeval clamour.

The end of the dream came in fine, mythic, style on a wet Wednesday in March 1971. An administrative error had caused both Black Sabbath and Deep Purple to be booked on the same day. For an hour, the two bands traded insults in the car park, instruments raised above shoulder height. It seemed that the entire history of rock might be reduced to a muddy fistfight in an Abingdon quarry. Thankfully, Phil was on hand to break the tension, pointing a loaded Kalashnikov at the bickering bands and ordering them to settle their differences through music.

Mere words cannot describe the impossible, guttural rumblings that shook Abingdon that day. As far afield as Newbury, prized china figurines jumped from welsh dressers and committed hara-kiri on hard stone floors. Meanwhile, in the very bowels of the Earth, Deep

Purple unleashed their work in progress 'Machine Head' while Black Sabbath blasted out the dirty sludge that was 'Paranoid'. Riff met riff. Drums smashed headlong into drums. Ozzy Screamed. Blackmore Soloed. Dalmore Studios collapsed.

It took three days, but Phil dug his way out of the rubble with a sharpened Stratocaster. The site was levelled. He took one look back, then headed for the airport and the first gun shop after JFK immigration control.



*The four Beatles take a break from recording their final album 'Abbey Meadows' at Dalmore Studios to pose for the cover shot. The River Thames was frozen by James Bond special effects guru John Stears at a cost of fifty thousand pounds. John Lennon subsequently declared himself dissatisfied with both the recordings and the photographs. The band decamped to London for what eventually became 'Abbey Road'*

*Notice the figure lying on the ice, this is of course Paul McCartney, a juicy fact that would have been pounced upon by the legions of 'Paul is Dead' conspiracy theorists had the photos been released at the time.*