

A Perspective on Pendley: A History of Pendley Manor

by Bob Little



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About the Author

Bob Little has pursued a number of parallel careers but he is best known as a writer, commentator and publicist. He's also a blogger and broadcaster – and even, at times, a speaker and singer. His work is published in the UK, Continental Europe, the USA, South America and Australia. You can find out more about him by visiting www.boblittlepr.com.

As a boy, Bob saw one of Shakespeare's plays performed at Pendley Manor, as part of the annual Shakespeare Festival. The whole experience that summer's evening long ago, which included seeing the Manor's then owner, Dorian Williams, play a cameo part in the play – on horseback – left a deep, lasting and highly positive impression. As a result, Bob has always had a 'soft spot' for Pendley.

After being given the chance to write a couple of magazine articles about Pendley, Bob was asked to research and then write a history of the Manor and the people associated with it over the centuries. The result is this book.

Researching the book, writing it and bringing the whole project to fruition has been a time-travelling adventure. It has offered intriguing and sometimes enlightening glimpses into various historical periods - along with an idea of the part that Pendley played in influencing those periods. The research has revealed fascinating insights into the characters, now long dead, who have shaped the Manor's history. Hopefully, this book will yield up at least some of these insights to its readers.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks, too, to David Roberts who, when he was the General Manager at Pendley Manor, had the idea for this book in the first place.

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Welcome to Pendley Manor



If you're reading this, then the chances are that you're at Pendley Manor. Alternatively, you're thinking about visiting it or, perhaps, you've visited it and want to be reminded of your time there. All of these are laudable and, potentially, enjoyable situations to be in.

Hopefully – if you're about to come to, or are at, Pendley – this guide will help to put much of what you find in the house and its estate into a helpful context.

The last private individual to own and live at Pendley Manor was Dorian Williams. For many years, he was the BBC's voice of televised show jumping. His last broadcast was in 1985, just a few months before he died, aged 71.

On his death, Pendley's grade II listed country house and its 35 acres of grounds passed into commercial hands.

The Manor House – now patrolled by a number of imperious and self-absorbed peacocks – has become an award winning (including two rosettes for its restaurant), four-star country manor house, with 73 double bedded rooms, a ballroom for up to 200 guests and a spa with swimming pool and snooker room.

It caters for conferences (up to 250 people), banquets, weddings and civil partnership celebrations. From personal experience, it can also offer a delicious afternoon tea.



From personal experience, Pendley can provide a delicious afternoon tea.

The estate's first manor house was built in the 15th century.

The current house dates from the 1870s and is only the second manor house to have been built on the ancient settlement of Pendley – variously spelled, over the years, as Penley, Pendele and Pentlai.

From Ancient Britons to a BBC show jumping commentator, via ambitious mediaeval nobility, and even the ancestors of a famous President of the USA, a great many people have shaped the Pendley we know today. The following pages endeavour to explain...

By Bob Little



Opening a door on Pendley Manor....

The Early Years: Britons and Romans

The village of Pendley is first recorded in the fourth century – bordered, to the south, by Akeman Street (the Roman road which runs from just north of St Albans to Cirencester); with the pre-Roman Icknield Way only half a mile to the north.

As Roman rule in Britain faded – in the fifth century – there is some evidence that a British tribe, under the kingship of Cynwyd, son of Cynfelin who was the youngest son of King Arthwys of the Pennines, moved into the area.

Although the British kingdoms in the north and west of Britain were well established by the turn of the fifth century, the structure of the south and east is much less certain.

Some of the descendants of the northern king, Coel Hen (350 – 420AD), appear to have moved south into this potential vacuum and made their mark on the Midlands of Britain, probably once the Romano-British central administration had collapsed.

Coel Hen – which translates into English as ‘Old King Cole’ – may have been one of the last of the Roman Duces Britanniarum (Dukes of the Britons) who commanded the Roman army.

He is said to have become a King of the Britons following the reign of King Asclepiodotus. Upset with Asclepiodotus's policies and decisions, which brought hardship to many of his people, Coel began a rebellion in the duchy of Caer Colun (thought to be Colchester) – which could be a reason why