



The Smyth-Pigotts

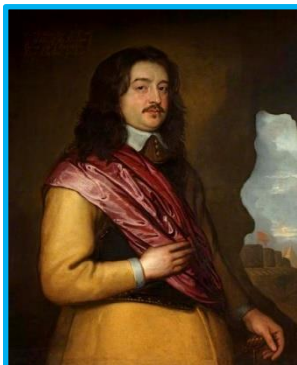
The Smyth-Pigotts were Lords of the Manor of Weston for nearly 250 years. At one time it was said they could walk from Bristol to Weston without leaving their land. A collection of family portraits was presented to the town in 1947, several of which can be seen in the gallery.

The Pigotts first arrived in England from Normandy, taking part in the invasion of 1066. According to a later family member, "The name, originally Picot...means either Pikeman or a nickname for a fellow with a big nose. All Pigotts you come across in England...possess this nose!"

The Pigotts inter-married several times with the Smyths of Ashton Court, near Bristol. They became the Smyth-Pigotts in 1815. A large part of Weston is built on land formerly owned by the family.

Thomas Pigott

The link between Weston and the Pigotts began with Thomas Pigott. He stopped in Bristol in 1646 on his way home to Ireland. During his stay he met Florence, the wealthy widow of Thomas Smyth of Ashton Court. The couple were married in 1647, the first of three marriages between the Pigotts and Smyths. The Pigotts stayed in North Somerset, buying the manor of Brockley which became the main family home.



Colonel Thomas Pigott © Weston Museum

Thomas died in 1674, Florence in 1676. Their son, John Pigott, added the manor of Weston to the family estates in 1696. The existing owner needed to sell the land to pay huge gambling debts.

Reverend Wadham Pigott

The Reverend Wadham Pigott (1750 – 1823) was the first member of the family to live permanently in the village of Weston. He acted on behalf of his elder brother John, who was the lord of the manor or "squire". Wadham Pigott became squire himself after John's death in 1816.

His house, The Grove, may have been built on the site of the original Anglo-Saxon settlement. A small private park was created after 1810 and terraced gardens surrounded the house.



Weston Parish Church before it was rebuilt in 1824 © Weston Museum

During the early 1800s Weston began to increase in size, and became a fashionable resort. The existing medieval parish church of St John the Baptist was now too small and in a poor state of repair. Shortly before his death in 1823, Reverend Pigott donated the large sum of £1000 towards the church's rebuilding.

The Smyth-Pigotts

In 1815 John Hugh Smyth of Ashton Court married Wadham Pigott's niece, who was heiress to the family estates. The Smyths became the Smyth-Pigotts. John Hugh Smyth-Pigott became squire in 1823, and continued to live at The Grove.

During the 1830s, John Hugh ordered the planting of coniferous woodland along the western ridge of Worlebury hill. He planned to create a private game reserve on what had been open grassland. Once the trees had matured, however, the woods were opened to the public in the 1850s. The conifers were cut down for timber during the First World War. Trees such as oaks and beeches grew naturally in their place, creating the Weston Woods we know today.

John Hugh Wadham Smyth-Pigott (1819 – 1892)

John Hugh Smyth-Pigott was succeeded in 1853 by his eldest son John Hugh Wadham. The new squire often came into conflict with the Town Commissioners, who governed Weston after the arrival of the railway in 1841. He was described in a local paper as “a useless member of the community.” The squire in turn called his critics “squatters on my manor” and “not worthy to clean my servant’s boots.”

The estate was in financial difficulties by the mid-1850s, partly due to the squire’s love of gambling. The Grove was rented out for a time, and the family moved to a house overlooking Birnbeck. Land was sold for development, allowing Weston to expand beyond the original village boundaries. New estates of large stone houses called villas were built. These included Grove Estate, east of the manor house, and Grove Town on the hillside above the Boulevard. The Boulevard itself was laid out in 1860, the design inspired by the squire’s visits to Paris.



John Hugh Wadham Smyth-Pigott © Weston Museum

There was scandal in 1860 when John Hugh Wadham’s wife gave birth to a son and heir. It was rumoured that the squire was not the boy’s father. The Smyth-Pigotts became victims of a tradition known as a “skimmity ride.” A crowd of locals noisily paraded past their house, showing their disapproval and causing great embarrassment.

John Hugh Wadham’s son, Cecil Hugh Smyth-Pigott, became lord of the manor in the early 1880s. He also faced a drop in income, and decided to focus on his estate at Brockley. In 1889 Cecil Hugh planned to sell The Grove and surrounding land for development. After public protests, however, the grounds were given to the town in return for an annual rent of £300. Grove Park was created and opened in June 1891. The manor house was taken over in 1893, becoming first a library and then a cafe.



The Grove, 1828 © Weston Museum

The Smyth-Pigotts in the 1900s

Cecil Hugh’s eldest son, John Hugh, became squire after his father’s early death from drowning. Land sales continued during the 1900s. In 1936, 300 acres of Weston Woods were purchased from the estate to preserve them from development.

The family’s former home in Grove Park was badly damaged during an air raid in 1941. It was later demolished, leaving only the 1830s coach house. This is now used by Weston Town Council as a Mayor’s Parlour for civic events. A portrait of the Reverend Wadham Pigott was added to the museum’s collection in 1994. It was painted by Thomas Gainsborough, an important British artist of the late 1700s.

John Hugh died in 1941, and was the last Smyth-Pigott lord of the manor. The family continues today, but their link with Weston has been lost. The title of Lord of the Manor of Weston was offered for sale in 1984.

