

THE 108<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO  
ON WEDNESDAY 26<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018

Present: - Keith McClellan – Chairman  
Peter Cole - Secretary

1) Business

Keith said that Elizabeth Cartwright-Hignett, her son William and his wife Marianne had come to talk about their garden at Iford Manor near Bradford-on-Avon and the long association of the Cartwright family with gardens in general.

Peter said that S.N.C. had contacted him and invited the History Society to join their Well-being Map. This is designed so that people who are lonely, or need to have interests, can join local Societies such as ours. So we are now on their map.

2) The Harold Peto Garden at Iford Manor

Marianne started by listing the various transitions that had taken place in the Aynhoe Park gardens over the years. The first mention of a garden appears on a coloured drawing dated 1696. This shows little more than a plain enclosed lawn. Elizabeth said that she had found Civil War soldiers' bones in the garden.

Next was a drawing dated 1700 showing two formal gardens to the south of the House, the first with a plain lawn with a path around, the second with four rectangular lawn beds each with paths to a circular centre piece. This is thought to be designed by a Frenchman Guillaume Beaumont. The penultimate Aynho picture dated 1758 is of changes made by Lancelot "Capability" Brown, indicating that there may have been a canal at the foot of the garden. The final picture dated 1800 shows the garden easily recognised today. Ted Humphries was a fantastic gardener for many years, winning many national prizes for his flowers. Ted's undergardener, Leon Butler, moved with the family to Iford when they left the Park House.

William then turned to Iford. There was certainly a Roman settlement on the present estate, and Eford is mentioned in the Domesday Book. A cloth factory existed in the 14th century operated by the Horton family. The first mention of a garden is around the 16th century, when a house first existed there. Plants that are quite rare today were sown to cure all sorts of ailments and some poisonous plants were found in a midden, evidence of the mediaeval occupation. The house passed by the mid-17th century to the Chandler family. The Gaisfords owned it from 1773 to 1853, adding the front façade and a fine grassed terrace, and planting up the hanging beech woodland above the house. The Rooke family owned Iford during the Victorian period, creating glasshouses and flower borders until 1899, when it was bought by Harold Peto.

Peto's father had been responsible for a lot of Victorian construction. Following his apprenticeship in architecture in Lowestoft, Harold Peto had worked as Partner to Sir Ernest George for some fifteen years, before he broke the partnership to pursue his own interests. He set off on his travels to see what other cultures could offer, and at the same time collected old statues and other artefacts from European countries. Coming to Iford in his mid-forties, Peto first had to cut down hundreds of trees to let a lot of light in and create space for the garden.

By the time Elizabeth took on Iford in 1965 from Harold Peto's nephew, the gardens had been neglected and were in a poor state. She engaged Lanning Roper, an American landscape gardener to assist in sorting the garden out and making it manageable. This, and subsequent work, required an understanding of Peto's way of working.

Peto had had very clear ideas about what he wanted in his garden. He liked Italian gardens that had a mixture of plants and old statues, trees and pools. While at Iford, he did a lot of work in other gardens, good examples being in Buscot Park, Oxfordshire and Ilnacullin, Ireland. He died in 1933, but unfortunately much of his no doubt extensive collection of papers were, it is thought, burnt during a Baedeker raid on Bath in the second world war.

Elizabeth married John Hignett in 1979. He immediately set about restoring some of the garden's features. Peto appeared not to have been building at Iford for the long term, and had thought less about foundations and more about design. He had therefore, in the most part, just planted them on the ground. Most of them, especially the taller ones had started to lean precariously and John spent many days and weeks planning and building wooden towers around them large enough to enable him to gradually lift them up and support them while sufficient cement could be placed underneath and allowed to set, so that they could be lowered onto the base and cemented in.

Even more worryingly a large part of the Cloisters has recently succumbed to serious subsidence, and is now only kept in place with a large number of scaffolding poles. This is such a large and important building that it may well need a great deal of money to repair.

Another challenge is the question of plants and trees and how they should be managed in a historic context. There have been regular changes over the decades to the herbaceous borders, as one might expect, to keep them fresh. But also some of the larger, longer life plants have disappeared. Should they be replaced with similar ones, or should completely new planting take place as befits the modern day? This question goes to the heart of historic gardening and at Iford, John Hignett has pursued an approach where the structural planting is regarded as historic, but soft borders can be seen as more fluid designs.

Peter had visited Iford with the History Society in 2008 and had taken a lot of photos. He had sent some of them to William and Marianne in case they wished to use them. William had cleverly placed several of them side by side with photos he had taken this year, so that it would be easy for everyone to see exactly how a view had changed over ten years. Some quite big cypress trees had disappeared due to a disease and climate change. Some key plants had been lost through age, and others had flourished to the extent that they were almost obliterating the sight of stone objects. Views along the Great Terrace for instance looked quite different. In some areas of course there was very little change, particularly the more structural elements of the garden.

William and Marianne regularly asked Elizabeth questions, which she answered throughout the discussion.

A new tearoom and visitor centre is planned to safeguard the garden's future. It is hoped that a grant may be available for this which will improve the visit.

They answered several questions from the audience many of which related to Elizabeth's memories as a child growing up at Aynhoe Park.

Then they showed Peter's photos of Elizabeth's private garden, which is not open to the general public. Peter said that this had all been planned and mostly executed by her, and he had been completely bowled over by the displays there. He felt that it deserved a bigger audience.

Keith thanked all the Cartwright-Hignetts for a very interesting talk.

### 3) Forthcoming Meetings: -

Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> October – Hitler's Retirement plans in England after he had occupied Britain by Douglas Ward

Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November - In advance of Armistice Day Andrew Bellamy will be giving information about the Aynho men who gave their lives in the First World War and are remembered on the Church War Memorial.

If there is time afterwards more so far unseen photos of Iford Manor will be shown.