

## **MINUTES OF THE 69<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 25<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2014**

Present: - Peter Cole - Secretary. There were apologies from Rupert Clark due to work commitments

### **1. Chairman and Treasurer's Report**

In Rupert's absence Peter reported that Middleton Cheney is holding a photographic exhibition on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July from 2pm to 4.30pm in All Saints Church, entitled "The Village – Then and Now". There will be about 50 photos of Middleton Cheney taken between 1900 and 1930, accompanied by photos of the same view taken today.

### **2. Royal Mistresses**

**Roger Powell**

The talk covers the period from 1509 to the present day, and concentrates on people who were royal mistresses for at least ten years. Indeed one was a mistress for 36 years. In many cases from a psychological point of view she was not just an object of desire but she more or less became a second wife, and sometimes even a mother to the king.

The origin of the role in the early days of the Middle Ages derives from the many loveless royal marriages, as for kings the main reason for a marriage was to secure or maintain an alliance to build his empire or strengthen his position against enemies. Once a queen had given the king one or two heirs, he would forget or even abandon her and take a mistress.

In England a royal mistress did not become a feature of court society until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In France they had been around in the mid-1600s, but it took a while before England followed suit.

Henry VIII had two established mistresses, the first Elizabeth Blount, and the other was Mary Boleyn, sister of Anne, but they only lasted a few years.

Mistresses tended to either be unmarried and then marry after they had parted from the king, or to be married first, and then they could bring up any children the king had fathered as their own married family.

The first really prominent mistress was Barbara Villiers. She married Robert Palmer, but they soon separated. Painted by Sir Lely she became the mistress of Charles II. She had five children by him, plus a couple of others, whose fathers are uncertain. Having lived in relative poverty most of her life, she decided she was going to be a career girl, and make her own way in life under her own merits as a beautiful woman. This she did, and Charles soon made her husband Earl of Castlemaine, so she became Lady Castlemaine. Later on she was made Duchess of Cleveland in her own right.

Barbara had her rivals. One was a 13 year old girl, with whom Charles was completely besotted. She was Frances Stuart, but despite her young age she refused to become his mistress. He pursued her for several years. In the end there were rumours that he was going to divorce his wife, who had been unable to give him any live male children, and force Frances to marry him. By then Frances, now 17, had fallen in love with the Duke of Richmond. On the very evening that Richmond had planned to propose to her, Barbara Villiers got wind of what was to happen, and she arranged for the King to burst into her apartment and cause mayhem. Frances became the only person ever to stand up to the King. She shouted back at him that he was a despicable person who had ruined the chance of a good marriage both for himself and for her. The King was so taken aback that he strode out of her apartment. She and Richmond immediately eloped, probably to Scotland, and got married there.

Barbara Villiers' main rival as royal mistress was Nell Gwyn, also painted by Lely, who was his mistress for 15 years and gave him two sons. Again she had no wealth or background, but she always made Charles laugh.

Another was Louise de Kerouaille (Duchess of Portsmouth), a French lady, who brought a very refined etiquette to Charles' court. She was quite different to all the others, and never argued or stamped her feet. If she wanted something, all she would do was to burst into tears. Nell Gwyn once called her "the Weeping Widow". She bore him a son. She had no money, but unlike the others she did have ancestry. Not only did she have ancestry, but from our point of view today, direct descendants of hers are Princess Diana Spencer, Duchess of Cornwall Camilla Parker-Bowles and Sarah Ferguson Duchess of York!

The last royal mistress of Charles II was Hortense Mancini (Duchess of Mazarin). She had married one of the richest men in France, but he was a wife-beater, and eventually she left him and their four children, and came to England. At the age of 36 she was still an incredibly beautiful woman. Charles fell for her, but it only lasted a few months, since she was quite promiscuous. She took a lover much younger than the King, so he ended the relationship, although they remained friends until his death in 1685. Her daughter, her grand-daughter and her three great grand-daughters all later became royal mistresses to French Kings.

An interesting fact is that almost all English royal mistresses over the years are descended from just two families – the Villiers and the Howards.

Arabella Churchill, sister of the first Duke of Marlborough, was the mistress of James II for ten years and bore him four children. She was not a great beauty, but she was witty and intelligent. She was succeeded by Catherine Sedley. She again was a rather plain but witty and charming lady. She seems to have been bewildered at having been chosen by James. "It cannot be my beauty for he must see I have none," she remarked incredulously, "and it cannot be my wit, for he has not enough to know that I have any".

William III married his cousin Mary, and within three years took Elizabeth Villiers, a cousin of Barbara Villiers, as his mistress. Mary was very attractive, but she had few mental qualities. Elizabeth was both intelligent and witty, and she gave him the intellectual companionship that he needed. She later married and became Countess of Orkney.

George I was married and had two children, but after that there were no more, so the couple became estranged and George took Melusine von der Schulenburg, Duchess of Kendal as his mistress for 40 years. They had three children, and she acted the part of the second wife, and became the unofficial Queen of England.

George II's main mistress was Henrietta Howard, Countess of Suffolk. She was another who had escaped from a miserable marriage only to find she had gone out of the frying pan into the fire. Despite staying with George for 16 years, he only gave her £12,000, a fraction of what many royal mistresses received.

The Prince who later became George IV felt that he was unloved by both his father and mother. From an early age he became quite dissolute, and took several mistresses, all of them much older women than himself. It was as if he was seeking a mother figure.

In 1783, when he was 21, George met Maria Fitzherbert, and fell in love with her. Despite the fact that she was a commoner, twice-widowed and a catholic he was determined to marry her. This was illegal on all three points, but they went through a secret marriage ceremony. Later the young Prince was forced to declare the marriage void, but she remained one of his mistresses on and off for the rest of his life.

The first of the others, Lady Hertford, was age 48, and was his mistress for about ten years. Another was Lady Jersey, already a mother of ten children who was with George for 20 years until his death.

William IV had just one mistress, Dorothea Jordan, a famous actress with a magical laugh. She was with him for 20 years, and they had 10 children together.

Edward VII, son of Queen Victoria, had many liaisons. A long-time mistress of his was Daisy Greville, Countess of Warwick. Famed for her 19 inch waist, she married Francis Greville, Lord Brooke, but

after one child she went off to have three more all with different fathers. She was rather indiscrete about her affairs, and earned the title of “the Babbling Brooke”. Edward only ended their affair when she again had a child by another man.

Edward’s other most prominent mistress was Alice Keppel, who was with him from 1898 until his death in 1910. She of course was the great-grandmother of Camilla Parker-Bowles, now married to Prince Charles. It is rumoured that when they first met Camilla said to him: “My great-grandmother and your great-grand father were lovers, so how about it?” Charles loved anybody who could make him laugh, so that was the start of their friendship.

Freda Dudley Ward was the royal mistress of Edward VIII when he was Prince of Wales from 1918 until his affair with Wallis Simpson which led to his abdication as King.

Finally there is Camilla Parker-Bowles now Countess of Cornwall and wife of Prince Charles. Charles was more or less persuaded to marry Diana as a suitable person to give him two heirs to the throne. But as we all know there were three people in the marriage, as Camilla was Charles’ mistress.

### **3. Forthcoming meetings**

Wednesday 30th July “Lili of Aynhoe - an artist’s analysis of her life and work”  
Presented by Mr Martin Pye,  
Graduate of the Slade School of  
Fine Art.

Wednesday 27th August - No meeting – summer break

Wednesday 24th September Was Britain ready for The Great War? Northamptonshire's  
preparations in 1913  
Presented by Mr Simon Batten,  
Historian and author.

Wednesday 29th October A History of Ditchley Park  
Presented by Mr Michael Montagu,  
Bursar of Ditchley Park