

**MINUTES OF THE 60th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT FRIARS WELL,  
AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 26<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2013**

Present: - Rupert Clark - Chairman & Treasurer  
Peter Cole - Secretary.

**1. Chairman and Treasurer's Report** **Rupert Clark**

Please see below

**2. Secretary's Report** **Peter Cole**

It has been confirmed that the full Cartwright Archive Exhibition will be on display at Aynhoe Park on the afternoon of Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September. The ice house will also be open. It would really help if a half dozen members could help run the event from 2 till 5pm. Please let Peter or Rupert know if you can help. Full details will appear in the September Parish Newsletter.

**3. "A History and Tour of Friars Well"** **Mr & Mrs R Sermon**

In 1763 "The Cottage" was built by the Cartwright family. On the 1696 map of Aynho there are buildings shown on this site, presumably a farm.

During the 1890's the estate's agent Matthew Woolnough and his family lived in the house.

The widow of Captain William Grahame-White RN rtd and three daughters Sybil, Enid and one whose name is forgotten moved to Friars Well in 1916. She rented the property from the Cartwrights. Previously the family had owned a summer residence in Swanage, Dorset. That house was run by a housekeeper, so it was always ready for the Grahame-Whites. The summer residence became an extravagance so it was sold, and the housekeeper was relocated to Friars Well along with her daughter. The daughter was Sybil Stevens' mother. The widow remained in the house until her death. By then her daughters Sybil and the other one had married and left Aynho. Sybil Stevens' mother lived in Friars Well until 1928, and it was after Sybil Graham-White that she named her daughter. Eventually sister Enid moved to the bungalow in the Bothy so that the Cartwrights could use Friars Well after they had sold Aynhoe Park, and she stayed there until her death.

In the late 1950's the Honourable Mrs Elspeth Cartwright engaged Raymond Erith to work on Aynhoe Park. He was further employed to make substantial alterations to the newly renamed Friars Well. A second storey was added to the kitchen with attics above. The main staircase was gentrified with fine detail and a copula above.

George Reginald Ward, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Ward of Witley purchased the house from the Cartwrights by private sale. Lady Barbara Ward had previously been married to the Honourable Michael Astor MP but this was ended by a divorce. Alterations were made to the ground floor, which was extended to include a tack room, bathroom and study. Bedrooms and a bathroom were also added above. The design was over seen by John Fowler of Colefax and Fowler, the famous London designers. Nancy Lancaster, co-owner of Colefax and Fowler was a niece of Nancy Astor (Mother of Michael) and was well known as the doyen of country house design, locally she worked on Kelmarsh Hall and Ditchley Park. The convex roof on the dormer windows is classic Fowler. He also decorated the interior and redesigned the gardens. Garden design was a lesser-known aspect of his design legacy. Nancy was similarly adept at garden design.

His garden design included the pleached limes at the front, the hornbeams and box hedging. This rare design has been verified by Nicky Haslam and Sir Roy Strong. The summer house was designed and constructed from a series of open cart sheds. A dovecote was demolished and the

stone used to build the wall around the newly installed swimming pool. The pool was originally larger than the one today. Sadly the wife of Walter Upton, the Friars Well gardener, committed suicide by drowning in the pool. It was Walter who found her.

Fowler also converted the tennis courts into the vegetable garden, on the right of the entrance drive. Opposite, the cottage, garage, store and horse box garage was built in the 1960's. These replaced a series of workshops. Lord Ward brought Mr Silver and his wife to Friars Well to be his butler. They lived in the cottage. Mr Silver had previously worked at Chatsworth house where Lord Ward was a regular visitor of the Duke of Devonshire. Ted Staten used the yard for a chicken run.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's the local Conservative Party Association included the Wards, Countess Birkenhead from Charlton, Eric Boswell (father of Lord Tim) and Bill Land. Lord Ward had held senior posts in the Cabinet and Privy Council. With their Conservative and aristocratic connections there should be no surprise that the Wards entertained John Profumo (MP, Cabinet member and Northamptonshire man) and his "friend" Christine Keeler. Miss Keeler took a rear pew while attending Sunday Service at St Michaels.

Lanning Roper, an American gardener, was engaged to infill plant the Fowler design during the 1960's. Lanning later became a key designer for HRH Prince Charles at Highgrove House. The dense planting to the south was to provide a screen against the mooted by-pass, which would have linked the Deddington and Bicester roads across the bottom of the Souldern/Aynho valley. At the time the B4100 was the A41, a significant linked pre M40 between London and Birmingham. The screening also hid from sight the newly built house, just at the top of Mill Lane

The major trees in the garden and parkland had been planted as part of Capability Brown's design for Aynhoe Park. Although we know that Humphrey Repton was commissioned to produce designs for the park, it is at present unclear if any were implemented.

After Lady Ward's death in 1980 the house was sold by private sale to the Honourable Nigel Turner, a Director of Lazard, the investment bank. It became a family home until the house was put on the open market in 1986 due to Nigel and Annie divorcing.

In 1987 Rosemary and Richard Sermon bought the house. Their first night memorably coincided with the "Great Storm". The interior has been redecorated in "the country house style", totally in keeping with its Fowler/Lancaster design heritage.

#### **4. Forthcoming meetings and events**

August No meeting.

Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> Cartwright Exhibition – Aynhoe Park

Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> Leisure and Entertainment in Victorian and Edwardian Oxford. Ms Liz Woolley

Sept 29<sup>th</sup> Village walk – A walking history of Aynho

Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> A.G.M. and "From Gough to Google", the development of printed maps of Oxfordshire  
John Leighfield

Please note the AGM has been brought forward to accommodate a nationally renowned speaker who will present the November lecture. All will be revealed in September. Other local groups will also be invited to join us for this special evening. It therefore is not appropriate to discuss our society administration in front of so many non-members.