

MINUTES OF THE 95th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 29th March 2017

Present: - Rupert Clark – Chairman
Peter Cole – Secretary

1) The remarkable story of Stowe House by Paul Carter (a House guide)

Stowe House Preservation Trust owns the mansion and rents it to Stowe School. The National Trust owns the Gardens.

Sir Thomas Temple and family moved to the then manor house at Stowe in 1600. At the time, King James I was strapped for cash so started to sell titles; in 1611 Thomas bought himself the title of baronet.

Sir Richard, the 3rd Baronet, decided to replace the manor with the first of many phases of what has become the mansion we see today. Between 1678 and 1683 the core was built and set in gardens of the French style.

Richard had soldiered from a young age and worked his way up to Field Marshall. He was given his own regiment and was made a Viscount. Unfortunately he fell out with Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, who took away his regiment. Viscount Cobham (as he had become) was very peeved so he built the garden with features which derided the Prime Minister, such as a statue without a head.

Cobham built the New Inn to cater for the many visitors who came to see the house and grounds, a first visitor centre just as it is 300 years later. There were plenty of trees in the garden, and a feature was the British Worthies, a row of 16 statues of just about everybody who had contributed to Britain's Glory unlike Walpole. There were follies such as the Temples of Concord and Victory.

The next owner was nephew, Richard Grenville–Temple. He was very rich and did much to enlarge the house including the world's longest enfilade, 150 yards in length. Followed by George Temple–Grenville, the first Marquess of Buckingham the marble saloon, the state music room, the large library and the Egyptian hall were completed. Part of the family fortune came from him holding a Government post which paid a salary set at 1% of all national military and naval expenditure. Perfect when Britain spent enormous sums fighting Napoleon.

For about 27 years the Grenville-Temples were related in various ways to the four Prime Ministers and many of the cabinet ministers; Stowe House was very close to the centre of Government.

The garden was designed with Charles Bridgeman doing much of the initial work. Lancelot Brown worked here for ten years. Sir John Vanbrugh was the architect who designed much of the House and some of the temples in the gardens. William Kemp added the stunning north hall ceiling and further work in the house and gardens. Sir John Soane also contributed to the interior. Money was no object.

The regular income of the first Marquess ceased on his death. His son, the 1st Duke of Buckingham and Chandos had no income but he was one of the greatest spenders Britain has ever seen. There is a story that he went down to London just to buy a hat, he couldn't make up his mind which one he liked best, so he bought all 84 in the shop and had them all altered to fit. At the

age of 20 he married 16 year old Lady Ann Brydges, and immediately started to spend her fortune. She was worried that there would soon be no money left, so she persuaded him to go on the Grand Tour. As it was soon after Napoleonic wars he bought a large ship to do this, and was accompanied by a platoon of marines. Bringing back more European treasures the attempt to save money spectacularly failed.

Their son turned out to be no thrifter. He mortgaged and remortgaged the house and spent vast sums. When his credit line eventually ran out, he was the biggest debtor in the world. He owed £1.5m, about £150 million today. Within three years the bailiffs came in and the wonders of Stowe were up for sale. Thousands came to wonder and buy the huge 1848 sale catalogue. The house became derelict for many years. After several unsuccessful attempts to sell the house, the governors of Stowe School bought the property in 1922.

The School opened in May 1923. Originally it was a boys' school, but in 1974 girls started in the sixth form, and in 2007 Stowe became fully co-ed. David Niven, Leonard Cheshire and Richard Branson are famous old boys.

In 1989 the National Trust took over the gardens, and in 1997 the ownership of the house passed to the Stowe House Preservation Trust. From that point restoration of both has been continuous. The roof has over two years been completely renovated. The house was fed from water tanks that were in the roof above the saloon. Each held thousands of gallons, and if any had sprung a leak it would have completely ruined the marble saloon below, these have been removed. Each major room has been cleaned and reinstated to its former glory. The state room, music hall and the library are all magnificent. There is a program to find the original treasures and bring as many as possible of them home. The two lead lions have returned from Blackpool in exchange for fibreglass replacements. Most of this work is paid for by unanimous donation.

2) Forthcoming Meetings

Wednesday 26th April – The History of Royal Woodstock