

The

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Newsletter



The newsletter of the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke House • May 2013 • Issue 21

Letter from the Chairman

Dear Friends,

We had a splendid talk at our Annual Dinner in February from former teacher at Hinchingsbrooke, Roger Mitchell. A longer article about this is to be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our next event will be the Annual General Meeting on Sunday July 7th at 6.30 p.m. (drinks and nibbles) for a 7 p.m. start in the Library.

After a short AGM to meet the formal requirements of the Charity, we will have a talk from Dr. Jane Sills about Ramsey Abbey. There are many connections between Ramsey Abbey and Hinchingsbrooke. Dr. Sills will be talking specifically about the restoration of the Walled Kitchen Garden there. For those of us interested in the gardens of historic houses, this will be of particular interest, but I am told by members who have heard Dr. Sills talk that this will be an evening of interest to everybody.

After this, there may be time to look round the new 'Tree Trail' that Ann Colbert has been devising as an additional feature of visiting Hinchingsbrooke. That will depend on the weather so after the erratic weather pattern we have been having so far this year, who knows?

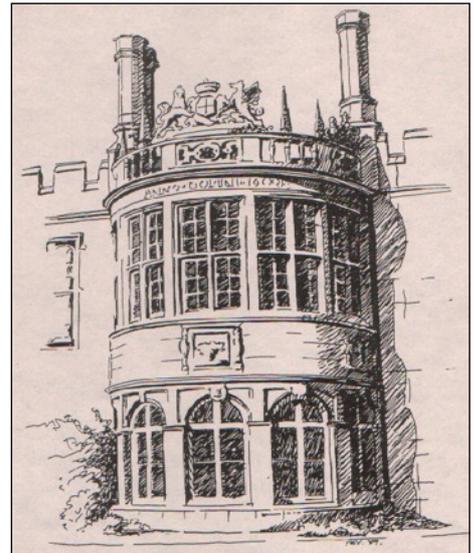
Following last year's AGM many of you signed up to receive copies of this Friends newsletter by e-mail rather than by post. This is very helpful as it reduces our postage costs and leaves more money for us to spend on projects to improve the House and grounds. If you have not yet got round to signing up for an e-version, please get in touch direct with the Newsletter editors, Geoff and Ann Gardner, by sending an e-mail to ann.gardner3@ntlworld.com.

Since we last met there has been some redecoration inside Hinchingsbrooke House and there are other plans for outside restoration which I will be able to tell you about at the AGM. I look forward to seeing you on July 7th.

With all good wishes,

Peter Downes

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Distribution: Peter Downes*



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Hinchingsbrooke House Tours and Teas

Open on Sundays 2pm-5pm (last tour at 4.00)

**9th June - 18th August and
Bank Holiday Monday 26th
August 2013**

**Closed 23rd June & 4th
August**

A historical tour of the ancestral home of the Cromwell and Sandwich families, followed by tea and cakes served in the Old Dining Room or on the terrace overlooking the croquet lawn.

HINCHINGBROOKE GARDENS

A FAMILY CONNECTION

When I first seriously started to research my family tree for my daughter Bethany, as she began her school life at Hinchingsbrooke, little did I realise I would be completing a circle that began 85 years previously.

One of my great uncles was Leonard Haynes. "Len" as



he was known, was born in Ellington in 1904 and married Gladys Read. His daughter Daphne recalls:

"In 1927 my father brought his bride to live at the Lodge, Hinchingsbrooke. He was a gardener on the estate of the 9th Earl of Sandwich

who lived with his wife, the Countess, in the Castle as it was then known.

I was born in the Lodge in 1929 and sister Eileen followed. We had the joy of growing up on the beautiful estate, with wild mushrooms to pick in the early morning when in season and violets and primroses in abundance. There were cowslips for wine and sweet chestnuts, holly and walnuts for Christmas.



The milkman was the late Percy Mason who arrived daily in his pony and trap complete with his milk churns and measures. If

we had been good we were allowed to ride on the trap to deliver milk to the Bothy (single person's accommodation), the Head Gardener's bungalow, the Castle and estate workers' homes.

Every Christmas a party was held in the Castle for all the staff, both indoor and outdoor. The party was usually held in the Great Hall and in the corner was a Christmas tree cut from the local wood, some 15 feet tall. Each member of staff and their family received a present, one of which was a leather writing case, not an insubstantial present for the daughter of the gardener.



In 1938 we moved a few yards along the road to the Red Lodge. It was from there we watched the Grammar School being built and played on the fields that now house the Police HQ, the hospital and the Forensic Labs."



After the war Len continued to work hard in the gardens until he was promoted to Head Gardener. It was during this period that he put his hard earned knowledge to good use by setting up his own landscape gardening business.

Amongst his work are the areas around the Technical College, Huntingdon swimming pool and Longsands School. He combined this with his duties as a Special Constable, rising through the ranks to Inspector. A very busy man indeed!

I have for several years entered Anglia in Bloom's "Best front garden" competition and have been lucky enough to win it. As a result I was contacted by the committee and asked if I would join other volunteers in tidying the area behind the rose garden at Hinchingsbrooke House this past summer. I was very pleased to help out and it proved to be an emotional experience, working the very ground my great uncle had worked so many years before. The circle had been completed.

Andrew Williams, Hinchingsbrooke Park

The Annual Dinner, February 2013

This year's guest speaker was Roger Mitchell who, together with his wife Glendon, has been a Friend of Hinchingsbrooke House ever since this group was created. Roger and Glendon were teachers at Hinchingsbrooke until 1983. As Roger was a history teacher, he has always taken a particular interest in the House.

He chose as his topic '*Dark Days for the Country House 1945 – 1960*'. Roger talked about the problems faced by the owners of country houses and estates at the end of the 2nd world war. Saddled with large estates

and buildings expensive to maintain, and crippled by high rates of income tax and death duties, the landed gentry were faced with stark choices: gift their estate to the National Trust, demolish the house (over 1,000 suffered this fate); open it to the public to raise income; rent it out; sell it as a school or training institution.

Roger drew on the diaries of James Lees-Milne, the Secretary of the National Trust Historic Buildings Committee, who travelled the length and breadth of the country reporting on the plight of country estates.



During the 2nd world war, many country houses found a use in the national interest by being taken over by the military or, as in the case of Hinchingsbrooke, being used as a convalescent home for soldiers or a recuperative home for bombed-out families from London. Lord and Lady Sandwich moved out to the Cottage (now the Fire HQ). During the war over 5,000 people spent time at Hinchingsbrooke and indeed one member of the audience confirmed that his father had stayed there for a while.

Viscount Hinchingsbrooke, fondly known as 'Hinch', father of the present Earl, our President John Sandwich, made several valiant attempts to save the House. He had part of it pulled down to reduce running costs; his attempts to raise money through opening it to the public did not succeed; various organisations rented it for short periods; part of it was let out to families, including the Stuart family (many will have read Mary's account of that time in her book '*Houseful at Hinchingsbrooke*').



The Cottage

Eventually, bowing to the inevitable, the family sold the estate to the County Council in 1962 and, a few years later, this enabled the Council to convert it into Hinchingsbrooke School as the grammar school era came to an end.

Since then, many generations of young people have had the privilege of spending their Sixth Form years in this former country house and have happy memories of their time in what the Times described as 'the most beautiful comprehensive school in England'.

Roger illustrated his talk with photographs and extracts from the Lees-Milne's diaries with an expertise we have come to expect of him. We are very grateful to him for giving us such a memorable, informative and entertaining evening.

Peter Downes

The Rose Garden

We have continued our efforts to maintain the rose garden and herbaceous border but the very inclement weather and the increasing decrepitude of the small band of volunteers has made it difficult to report major progress this year.



Early in 2013 we replaced seven roses. Our scheme for naming roses in memory of a loved one has been taken up by several people. A £30 donation provides a standard rose, a stake, a rabbit guard (yes, the rabbits are still active!) and a small plaque naming the person in whose memory the rose has been donated.

The area of the border cleared last year to be used as a gardening project by some of the current pupils has been abandoned. However, we are in touch with the ground staff and Senior Site Officer so that our occasional efforts match with their overall plans for the area. The idea is to widen the paths so that there is less bed to maintain. We are also paying for the restoration of the gates and the school will replace the missing ball and repair the support columns. This will tidy up the entrance to the border area considerably. All we need to do then is plant it and keep it tidy.

We still have working parties in the garden area and anybody who would like to help with this, on an occasional basis, should contact Peter Downes on 01480 398082.

Friends of Hinchingsbrooke House

Annual General Meeting

Sunday 7th July 2013

6.30p.m. in the Library for drinks & nibbles

7.00 p.m. Short A.G.M. Followed by a talk by

Dr Jane Sills

The Restoration of Ramsey Abbey Walled Kitchen Garden



Weather permitting you may like to follow the new tree trail in the grounds