

ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY

MINUTES OF MEETING 13th JUNE 2018

MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

Those Present:

Ray Franklin Chairman	Paul Salvidge	David Verlander
Heather Salvidge	Mike Rea	Chris Bush
Diane Bush	Margaret Rea	Tim Snow
Roger Clark	Phyllis Clark	Tricia Holyomes
Jean Beeston	Ian Beeston	Anne Player
Christine Hall	Valerie Austin	Brian Tulley
Jean Platt	Tony Bailey	Jackie Bailey
Tony White	Anne White	Helen Mudge
Jill French	Vic Dowsett	Margaret Shaw
Ray Gaubert	Nina Gaubert	Sue Beeston
Roger Kendrick	Teri Williams	

Apologies:

Sue Johnson	Peter Johnson	Keith Merrifield
Pam Merrifield	Ian Jackson	Moyra Jackson
Colin Smith	Peter Clear	

It is with considerable sadness that we announce that Avril Braidwood has passed away. A friend personally as well as to the village and our society, she will be sorely missed. A tribute from our Chairman was read at the meeting followed by a one minute silence. The tribute is attached as an addendum to these minutes.

We welcome Roger Kendrick as a new member and also Jill French and Helen Mudge as returning members.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present and Mr Richard Priestley, our guest speaker for the evening.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting 13th March 2018

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Guest Speaker Mr Richard Priestley

The Chairman welcomed back Mr Richard Priestley who presented his talk for the evening on "Wimpole Hall". He started his talk by saying he had been retired for twelve years and for eleven of those he had been volunteering at the hall.

Wimpole Hall was originally owned by the Chicheley family and at the time was a moated mediaeval style manor house. In 1640, Thomas Chicheley started to build a new house to replace the original but abandoned building to join King Charles I at Oxford to fight the first English Civil war. He returned to complete the building by 1650 but by 1686 he was bankrupt and sold the house to Sir John Cutler. Sir John gave the house as a marriage settlement to his daughter Elizabeth and her husband Charles Robartes, second Earl of Radnor. On Elizabeth's death in 1697 the estate passed to Edmund Boulter and by 1710 it was owned by John Holles, 1st Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne who left it to his daughter Lady Henrietta upon his death the following year. When Henrietta married in 1713 it became the property of Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer.

Edward was a great collector and had a library of some 50,000 books. The house as it stood was too small for his purposes so he commissioned James Gibbs the architect to extend it. On the Western end of the house he added the South Drawing Room and the Red Room together with the Long Gallery and the Book Room, the latter known as the ante-Library and used as a reading room. At the Eastern end of the house Gibbs created a beautiful Chapel decorated with trompe-l'oeil illustrations of the saints.

All this however, took a great deal of money and by 1739 Edward too was bankrupt so in 1740 he sold the house to Philip Yorke, the 1st Earl of Hardwicke whereupon it was destined, over the next 150 years to remain the property of the Earls of Hardwicke until the fifth Earl was declared bankrupt. On taking possession of the house, Philip had the outside dressed in red brick and Portland stone to give the façade we know today. The second Earl inherited the house in 1764 and engaged Lancelot "Capability" Brown to landscape the grounds. The 3rd Earl succeeded in 1790 who wanted to improve the "public" areas of the house so he engaged his friend Sir John Soanes to build the Grand Dining Room. He did this by demolishing three of the downstairs rooms and four upstairs to create a huge area lit by a glazed domed roof. He remodelled the North end of the Library and created the Great Barn and Home Farm that is still in use today.

The fourth Earl who was one of Queen Victoria's Lords-in-Waiting succeeded in 1834. He added a Victorian conservatory to the West end of the house and a Kitchen and Brewery to the eastern end. These Victorian additions were later demolished by the last owner in the 1950s. The fourth Earl also added a stable block that still survives.

As an aside, Her Majesty stayed at the Hall in October 1843 but was not thought to have enjoyed the experience!

In 1873 the fifth Earl succeeded, he was great friends with the Prince of Wales later King Edward VII and gained the nickname "Champagne Charlie" for his lavish lifestyle. An inveterate gambler, the fifth Earl racked up huge debts with his bank and was obliged to put the Wimpole Hall Estate up for sale in 1891. When it failed to raise the reserve price Lord Robartes, as Chairman of Agar-Robartes Bank, accepted the estate in settlement of the debt.

Lord Robartes used the house as a weekend retreat as did the son that succeeded him however by 1930 it was becoming expensive to maintain particularly as the family had another retreat in Cornwall. In 1932 the house was leased to Captain George Bambridge and his wife Elsie, daughter of Rudyard Kipling. When Kipling died, George and Elsie used their inheritance to buy Wimpole Hall outright in 1938. The cost for the house and 800 acres was £14,500! When Lord Robartes left, he virtually emptied the house just leaving the library books and the furniture in Soane's Great Room. The Bambridge's used the balance of Elsie's inheritance to restore the house to its former glory. Although George died in 1943, Elsie stayed and for the next thirty-three years until her death in 1976, devoted her life to the restoration. She left the house to the National Trust who were initially reluctant to take it on but were swayed by the Grade One listed view of the Capability Brown landscape.

There was no mains electricity in the house until the 1950s although a small generator had been put in during the 1930s to provide twelve volt lighting to the servant's quarters in the basement. It was probably the lack of electricity that saved the house from being requisitioned by the authorities during the war.

There had always been a large staff over the years to look after the various owners. In the Mediaeval and Tudor periods, the servants would mingle with their masters ready to do their bidding. Later on, up to the early 19th century, servants would remain in discreet earshot behind curtains or screens. In the nineteenth century a system of bells was installed whereby servants would remain in their quarters until summoned. The bell pulls were almost always situated by the fireplace so that visitors would know where to find them. The housekeeper ran the house and had her own office. She was always known as Mrs even though not permitted to marry and would keep the keys to the house on her person at all times. Her status would be a on a par with the Butler.

The last Butler at Wimpole hall was Frank Howard who joined the staff in the 1900s as a gardener. He went off to fight in the First World War and on his return after the end of hostilities was made Butler. He retired in 1949 and Mrs Bambridge gave him a small house and a plot of land together with a small pension.

Good servants were well thought of by their masters and when Frank was taken ill in 1963, Lord Robartes paid for him to go into a nursing home even though he hadn't served the Robartes since 1939.

In the 19th century the house and grounds would have been managed by the Steward and at that time would have had a similar standing to the owner. He hired and fired servants, paid the bills and generally speaking ran the whole estate. By the 20th century, it was normal for the lady of the house to run the house and the Steward's role was relegated to the management of the grounds.

5. Open Forum and Any Other Business

5.1 General Data Protection Regulations 2018

We were required by the terms of the Act to write to every member to let them know that we hold their details on our membership list. It also gave members the right to have their details deleted if they so wished.

Mike Rea apologised for the e-mail glitch that meant that some members received the e-mail twice.

5.2 Visit to Stow Maries WW1 Aerodrome

The visit to Stow Maries has been set for 16th July 2018. Members will make their own way to the airfield to arrive by 1pm where they should report to the shop to pay their £12 admission, this to include a guided tour of the site plus a cream tea before departure. We have twenty-one members and guests signed up for the visit but if anyone else would like to go please let me know. There are a number of spare seats in cars so if any member would like a lift, please let me know also.

5.3 Clavering Art History Day 2018

We have had notice that this year's Art History day at Clavering will be held on 17th November 2018. As yet there are no details of the day but I will pass these on to members as soon as I know them.

5.4 Wallace's Great Big Bake-Off

Heather Salvidge noted that Saffron Walden Museum were holding a fund raising day on 16th July named after the museum mascot, Wallace the lion. Details may be found on the flyers available by the door but participants are invited to bake a cake to donate to the raffle or to be judged and maybe win a prize in the competition. Light refreshments will be available and there will be activities for children in the museum itself.

6. Thank You

Our thanks go to Jean and Ian Beeston for preparing and serving the teas and coffees this evening.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 12th September when Terry Ward will present Station to Station – an illustrated trip along the railway from Bishop's Stortford to Cambridge.

ENDS

Addendum To The Minutes

AVRIL BRAIDWOOD

A Tribute by Ray Franklin, Chairman EVHS

13th June 2018

One of our Members Avril Braidwood sadly passed away yesterday.

I will be delivering a Card of Condolence on behalf of "The Elsenham Village History Society."

Avril was a very active member of our group for many years.

In 2014 she was Editor in Chief of our Publication "For the Duration."
She was justifiably proud of this book. She spent many hours researching and helping to compile its contents.

Her input was always welcome at our History Meetings.

One could always rely on her for assistance where required.

For her help where it was needed.

For her advice when it was sought.

She was a great asset to this Society and indeed to other clubs within Elsenham.

To me she will always be remembered for her friendly smile, her Scottish brogue and her ability to make you want to listen to her advice.

She latterly became a committee member for the history society. She possessed the ability to organise things without upsetting people. Maybe her training as a School Teacher was coming to the fore.

With her passing we lose a helper and a friend.

I am proud to have known Avril.

PLEASE BE UPSTANDING SO WE CAN REMEMBER AND MARK THE PASSING OF A LOVELY LADY.

AVRIL BRAIDWOOD