

Chairman's Report

Towards the end of 2003 members received a reproduction in four sheets of Bryant's Map of Hertfordshire, first published in 1822. This was our first venture into map production and it has been perhaps our greatest public success. The map was featured, often at length, in most of the newspapers published in the county. Sue Flood our editor was interviewed about it on Three Counties Radio. Orders from non-members flooded in and several members bought a second copy. Our first print run of 500 was soon exhausted, and another 500 was quickly ordered from the printer; this is also selling well. There have been bulk orders, for example HALS has recently one for 23 copies. In addition the interest created has prompted new members to join, and in the months since the map appeared has seen a significant rise in our membership.

The success of our first map venture has prompted us to start at once on preparing for publication Dury and Andrew's Map of Hertfordshire 1766. This map is much larger than Bryant's and so it has been decided to produce it in two versions - one in sheets in a folder (like Bryant's map), and the other in book form. We feel there will be demand for both. The definition will be far superior to the book version published in 1980, which has long out of print. Sue Flood, Richard Busby, David Dean and I will be working on it over the coming months, and hope to bring it to a successful conclusion by early 2005.

Delays in publishing Volume XVIII (Two Nineteenth-Century Hertfordshire Diaries) prevented its appearance until 2004. We must apologise for this. In the past the Society has managed to produce a book each year, more or less within the year. This arrangement slipped for reasons beyond our control but members can be assured that the sequence of an annual volume will continue even if a particular book appears somewhat late, but with the addition of a map in some years. Volume XIX ('This Little Commonwealth': Layston Parish Memorandum Book 1607-1647 and 1704-c.1747) is also late but the text is complete. We await completion of the material which goes with it. Dr Kate Thompson is busy working towards getting the very different Volume XX (Julian Grenfell's Letters) to you at the earliest possible date.

Members may be interested to know that we have produced two entirely new and glossy membership

leaflets. These are being distributed as widely as possible to create and sustain interest in our Society. Please let any of the officers know if you would like some copies for personal distribution.

Alan Ruston

Volume XX

Julian Grenfell letters, c 1892 - 1915

Our twentieth volume is edited by Dr Kate Thompson, former County Archivist of Hertfordshire

Members will no doubt remember the fund-raising campaign in 1993-1995 to save the Panshanger Archive for Hertfordshire. It is arguably the most important estate collection in the care of HALS, and its loss would have been irreparable. Among the many treasures is the material relating to the Grenfell (Desborough) family, whose principal seat was Taplow Court near Maidenhead. Willy and Ettie Desborough married in 1887 at St George's Hanover Square; the Prince of Wales was one of their witnesses. They had five children: Julian, Billy, Monica (later Lady Salmond), Ivo and Imogen. Like so many families in the early years of the 20th century, the family was decimated in the first world war, with the deaths of Julian and Billy, and Ivo died after a car accident in 1926. In 1913 Ettie Desborough inherited Panshanger, just outside Hertford, from her aunt Katie Cowper, and the bulk of the family archive was deposited in Hertfordshire, rather than Buckinghamshire. (There is only a very small amount of material in the Buckinghamshire Record Office, but it does include *Pages from a family journal 1888-1915* by Ettie Desborough, privately printed in 1916, in which she transcribed many of her children's letters and Julian's poems.)

When Julian talked about becoming a writer his family were unenthusiastic, but his poems appear to have been well regarded at the time. His most famous poem, 'Into Battle', was published in the *Times* on 27 May 1915, ironically on the same day that his death (on the previous day) was announced. He had been wounded in the head by a splinter shell; at first it was not thought to be serious, but once he had been x-rayed it became clear that the splinter was embedded in his brain. He had two operations, but died after 11 days, and is buried in the military cemetery at Boulogne. His family were with him in his last days and his mother's diary records their initial hopes for his survival and the ultimate end of those hopes. Billy

Grenfell was killed just over two months later, very close to where Julian was wounded.

Julian loved war, something that is seen as shocking today, and he appeared not to fear death. He was a career soldier, joining the 1st Royal Dragoons straight from Oxford, and served in both India and South Africa, before his regiment was sent to the Western Front. He loved India but was less happy in South Africa, although he enjoyed himself more in Potchefstroom, near Johannesburg, than Roberts Heights. He seriously considered leaving the army and standing for Parliament, but the war scotched that plan.

All the Desboroughs were prolific writers and there are over 800 letters from Julian in the archive, the bulk of them (712) to his mother. They begin when he was about four, written from Taplow Court to his parents when they were away. In the summer of 1898 he went to a prep school, Summer Fields, near Oxford, where he was a good scholar and a keen sportsman. He gained a reputation of being able to look after himself; the school inculcated a spirit of competitiveness into which Julian entered eagerly. He usually won the end-of-term prizes for English, French or Latin. He began to like drawing and asked for crayons and paints. He apparently had some sort of religious experience during his last term at Summer Fields, and maintained his faith; shortly before he died he took communion in his hospital bed.

He took the ordinary entrance exam for Eton and did so well that he was put straight into the form usually reserved for scholars, in 1901. According to the wife of one of the masters he was a very beautiful boy! He appears to have been happy there; he became head of his house and a member of Pop, and was one of two editors of the school magazine. Towards the end of his time at Eton he began to have battles with his mother, that were to continue on and off for the rest of his life. He didn't like socialising and was much happier outdoors; he was keen on cricket, rowing and boxing.

In autumn 1906 he went to Balliol College Oxford, originally to take Greats, but towards the end of his time there had some sort of nervous breakdown; he was unable to do anything for two months in 1909/10, and only took a pass degree; this was enough, however, to get him a commission in the army, which had long been his ambition. In the spring of 1909 he began to write a collection of essays that was to be his true challenge to Ettie, described by his biographer as his attempt to sort out for himself and for others what he thought about his mother's social world of guilt, pretence and imposition, and to suggest what individuals might do about it before it carried a larger world towards perdition. The book consists of seven essays and there is a manuscript copy in the

archive. Ettie hated it, seeing it as an attack on her whole way of life, and most of his contemporaries at Oxford also disliked it.

The letters Julian wrote from school and university give details about his academic achievements, his prowess at various sports, his love of the outdoor life and his growing interest in literature. The principal interest, of course, lies in those written after he joined the army, especially the few months he served in France. He paints a vivid picture of life for an officer on the Western Front in the first year of the war, and his mother sent some of his letters to the *Times*. Interest in the 1st world war seems to increase, rather than diminish, as time goes on and it is clear that demand for this volume will extend far beyond Hertfordshire.

Only the letters Julian wrote during his army service will be printed conventionally but they will all be available on a fully-searchable CD-Rom. Two appendices will give information on material held elsewhere, and on those who wrote letters of condolence to his parents after he died; these include some very famous names, such as Winston Churchill and Lord Kitchener. As well as the letters, the volume will include other relevant documents, such as Julian's diary covering his service in the war, and his mother's diary during the last few days of his life. The letters are in good condition on the whole, although Julian's last letter to his mother is blood-stained! Unusually the archive contains some artefacts, such as a pocket chess set and a purse. There will be some illustrations, including photographs of Julian, some of the documents and his grave.

For more information on Julian's life, see Nicholas Mosley, *Julian Grenfell* (Persephone Books, 1999).

Kate Thompson

A Brief History of Taplow Court: venue for our forthcoming AGM

The Taplow estate has been the site of substantial human activity since at least the Iron Age (900-1 ODBC), when a great hillfort dominated the site, overlooking the important highway of the river Thames. Archaeologists have discovered that the fort's defensive ramparts were attacked and burned.

The burial mound of an Anglo-Saxon chieftain can still be seen, just to the south of the house, dating from c. 620 AD. The mound was excavated in 1883 and the finds can be seen in the British Museum. Replicas are on display in the History Room at Taplow Court.

Local tradition says that Birinus, Bishop of Dorchester-on-Thames, baptised Christian converts in the nearby Bapsey Pond c. 635 AD. A small church was established around the 8th century, near the pagan burial mound, and was superseded by a larger medieval church in about the 13th century.

Taplow manor was recorded in Domesday Book (1086). After the Norman Conquest, King William gave the estate to his half-brother, Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, who sub-let to Roger de Beaumont, who passed it on to his relatives, the de Turville family.

The estate belonged to Merton Priory from 1196, when it was sold to them by William and Isabel de Turville, until the Priory surrendered to Henry VIII in 1538 as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The lease then passed through the hands of various servants of the Crown.

The Tudor manor house burned down in 1616. It was rebuilt again soon afterwards, probably by Thomas Hampson, whose family held the estate from 1630. This house was damaged by both sides during the Civil War and is the basis of the house we see today, though in a much re-modelled state.

George Hamilton, 1st Earl of Orkney, purchased the house and estate from Sir Dennis Hampson in about 1700. He also bought Cliveden, the property adjacent to Taplow Court. Orkney fought with William III in Ireland, and, as a general under the Duke of Marlborough in the Wars of the Spanish Succession, he was responsible for the capture of large numbers of French officers and soldiers at the Battle of Blenheim, 1704. He became Field Marshall of All His Majesty's Forces in 1736, the year before he died. Three stone garden urns, embellished with military trophies, possibly the work of Thomas Greenaway of Bath. c.1725, are to be seen in the gardens at Taplow Court. A fourth is at Cliveden. The Cedar Walk is thought to have been planted about this time.

In 1695 Orkney had married Elizabeth Villiers, notorious mistress of William III, but described by Jonathan Swift as 'the wisest woman I ever knew'. The marriage produced three daughters, but no sons. Due to the early death of all male children in the next three generations, the Orkney title passed through the female line for the next century. The 2nd and 3rd Countesses of Orkney married their cousins, the O'Brien Earls of Inchiquin. The house was given a Georgian, stuccoed exterior in the mid-18th century. On the death of the 3rd Countess, her husband, Murrough O'Brien, 5th Earl of Inchiquin, married Mary Palmer, niece and heiress of Sir Joshua Reynolds and a painter in her own right. Murrough was created Baron Thomond of Taplow in 1801, erecting, in 1804, a Coadestone statue of George III, the monarch responsible for his

elevation to the English peerage. The statue is now to be seen on the forecourt at Taplow Court.

Thomas John Hamilton finally succeeded his grandmother, the 4th Countess, as Earl of Orkney in 1831. He immediately set about re-modelling the house and created the Norman Hall, architect unknown, which survives at the centre of the present building. The 5th Earl sold Taplow Court in 1852 to Charles Pascoe Grenfell who employed the prolific Scottish country house architect, William Burn, to give the house the appearance we see today. The moulded ceilings, marble fireplaces and wood panelling that still exist, date from this refurbishment.

Charles Pascoe's grandson, William Henry Grenfell (1855-1945), later Lord Desborough, inherited the estate in 1867. An accomplished all-round athlete, he was also dedicated to the ideal of promoting peace between nations through sport. In this respect, he was responsible for organizing the first Olympic Games to take place in this country in 1908.

Willy Grenfell, as he was known, served as Mayor of Maidenhead, 1895-97, and was raised to the peerage for services to sport and local government in 1905. In 1887, he had married Ethel Fane, who became hostess, at Taplow Court, to the 'Souls', a sparkling group of intelligent, witty and artistic men and women. Visitors included the Prince of Wales, Oscar Wilde, H.G. Wells, Henry Irving, Edith Wharton and Vita Sackville-West. Early in the century, trees were planted in an extension of the Cedar Walk by Edward VII, Queen Alexandra, Winston Churchill and others.

Lord and Lady Desborough endured immense personal tragedy when two of their sons were killed in Flanders in 1915. The eldest, Julian, was author of the famous war poem, 'Into Battle'. A memorial to Julian and his brother, Billy, by Sir Bertram Mackennel, 1920, stands on the south terrace. Ivo, the Desboroughs' third son, died after a car accident in 1926. Only their two daughters, Monica and Imogen, outlived their parents.

During the Second World War, Taplow Court housed evacuee schoolgirls from St Stephen's College and in 1946 the lease was taken over by British Telecommunications Research.

Lord Desborough died in 1945, before the end of hostilities, and Lady Desborough in 1952. The house and present estate were acquired by Plessey Electronic in 1963 and were purchased by Soka Gakkai International in 1988, since which time much has been done to restore the house and grounds and make them available to those who are interested.

Bryant in perspective

A map is not an aerial photograph. It is a stylized diagram based upon its own conventions. Its aim is to clearly display certain information. The reader can hopefully translate this into geographical features which exist in the real world. Nobody believes that the London Underground actually looks like its map, but it is perhaps less obvious that small scale maps commonly display roads up to 200 yards wide to emphasise their existence.

From this it may be understood that justifying Bryant as the first really accurate county map of Hertfordshire is both beyond the scope of this note and not necessarily helpful. What is it that we, as historians, expect to get from a map? I expect to get some understanding of the relative position and distances between towns and villages. I also wish to know their names. I want to know not merely the road routes available, but I require their shape, in terms of kinks and bends, to be accurately represented. By this means I wish to be able to recognise my position on the ground and, for example, to compare maps of very different dates to determine exactly how features may have changed, or to what extent remained unaltered. All of this speaks volumes for accuracy.

In addition to accuracy we require detail. The extent to which detail can be clearly shown depends upon scale. A useful small scale county map should range from one to two inches to the mile. Bryant's is slightly over one and a quarter inches. The detail shown includes of course villages, roads and rivers, all at a reasonable level of accuracy. In addition, it includes such further detail as a range of administrative boundaries (the ancient parishes including detached parts), identifies various types of buildings and, importantly, the general disposition of housing, it classifies various types of roads and shows the location of parks and estates. It even provides some notion of ground contours.

If at the time of the Conquest the population of Britain was three million, it increased some threefold to nine million over seven centuries. Not a large increase. By contrast, the population of the 'township' (sic) of St Albans doubled linearly over the next fifty years, from the census of 1801 to 1851. If one projects back on this rate of increase, St Albans would have had no population at all in about 1780. This is a typical example of both population increase and migration to towns which occurred suddenly in non industrial centres circa 1800. The population change did not immediately show itself in a rash of town development. Bryant's map was surveyed over the years 1820 and 1821. It is arguable that it represents a Hertfordshire which differed little from the medieval period. True, some coaching routes had been improved and

water-ways extended, but not on such a scale as to overwhelm a knowledgeable historian. Of even greater interest is the fact that at such a small scale the towns should be so well represented. Most lanes and alleys of marginal significance seem to creep in. On this basis alone one can get a better picture of population concentration where census returns normally covered whole parishes including rural areas.

It is always frustrating to have an interest in a region on the edge of a map. For those readers in the vicinity of Wheathamsted and the Ayots, at the intersection of four sheets, there is a practical solution. I mount some of my maps on hardboard. Paint the hardboard with white matt emulsion first to maintain a good colour. Then, size the board with a good wallpaper paste and allow to dry. Finally, cut away the more distant areas of the map and paste as for wallpaper, butting the edges. On a board of reasonable size your map may extend as far as Hertford (another Hertfordshire town). These will also prove more durable than folded sheets which invariably degrade with time.

David Dean

Review

From *Garden History Society News*, issue 64, Summer 2002

'Book Notes':

Garden Making and the Freman Family: A Memoir of Hamels 1713-1733, ed. Anne Rowe.

This book gives us the details of the making of the eighteen-acre garden at Hamels in Hertfordshire, by Ralph Freman, as recorded in detail by a local vicar, but it is of more than local interest. As Dr Tom Williamson notes in his foreword, this text, combined with the editorial commentary and excellent illustrations makes it a document of some significance to garden historians.

Hamels was contemporary with Moor Park (which it resembles in some aspects) and Tring Park (Gore at Tring Park supplied some beech trees for Hamels). Items such as a walled dry ditch made in 1714 (possibly a very early ha-ha), the specific planting of the southern wilderness, the making of a dry hedge and many other details the significance of which is so ably commented upon by the editor, make this a treasury for anyone interested in garden history. When it comes down to it, this record speaking to us from the past with so little artifice, - 'ash keys sown next to the road April' or 'apple mill room boarded with feather edged elm boards' gives us a real sense of linkage to the landscape and the people who shaped it.