

The Fitzwilliam title died out in 1979 upon the death of the 10th Earl Fitzwilliam, a cousin of Lady Juliet's. She then inherited part of the Fitzwilliam collection of fine paintings, antique furniture and objects d'art.

Lady Juliet de Chair's husband, Somerset de Chair already had a considerable collection of his own. When combined, these proved too large for their Essex home, St. Osyth's Priory, so Bourne Park was acquired both as their new home and to house some of the enlarged collection.

Somerset de Chair

A flamboyant author, Tory MP and war hero, Somerset de Chair was also a shrewd collector of art and antiques. His father, Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, was Governor of New South Wales, Australia, where part of his son's education took place. As a young man he was a keen traveller, adventurer and horseman. In 1931, aged only 20, and while still an undergraduate at Balliol College, Oxford, he published his first book 'The Impending Storm', which predicted the Second World War before Hitler's rise to power. He went on to be a prodigious author of more than thirty volumes of contemporary history, poetry, autobiography and biography, and of several historical novels, including in 1973 the authorised biography of the multimillionaire Paul Getty, who invited him to write it. He was also a specialist in Napoleon, and translated and edited his Memoirs.

During the 1930's de Chair was regarded as 'one of the brightest of the bright young things' travelling between Oxford and London in his own open-topped Rolls Royce. In 1935 at the height of the abdication crisis, and then aged 24, he became Conservative MP for South West Norfolk for ten years. In 1938 he was commissioned into the Royal Horse Guards, and in 1941 served in the campaign to relieve Habbamiya in Iraq, and was one of the first British officers to capture Baghdad, where he helped draft the armistice. After being wounded at Palmyra the following year he was invalided out of the army and returned to politics. He was briefly MP for Paddington South from 1950 to 1951.

Somerset de Chair lived in a succession of stately homes, including Necton Hall in Norfolk, Chilham Castle in Kent, which he acquired in 1944 and sold in 1953 to Viscount

Massereene and Ferrard, and finally St. Osyth's Priory in Essex, which is still in the family. He also owned a farm in New York State. Somerset de Chair married Lady Juliet in 1974. He died in 1995 aged 83.

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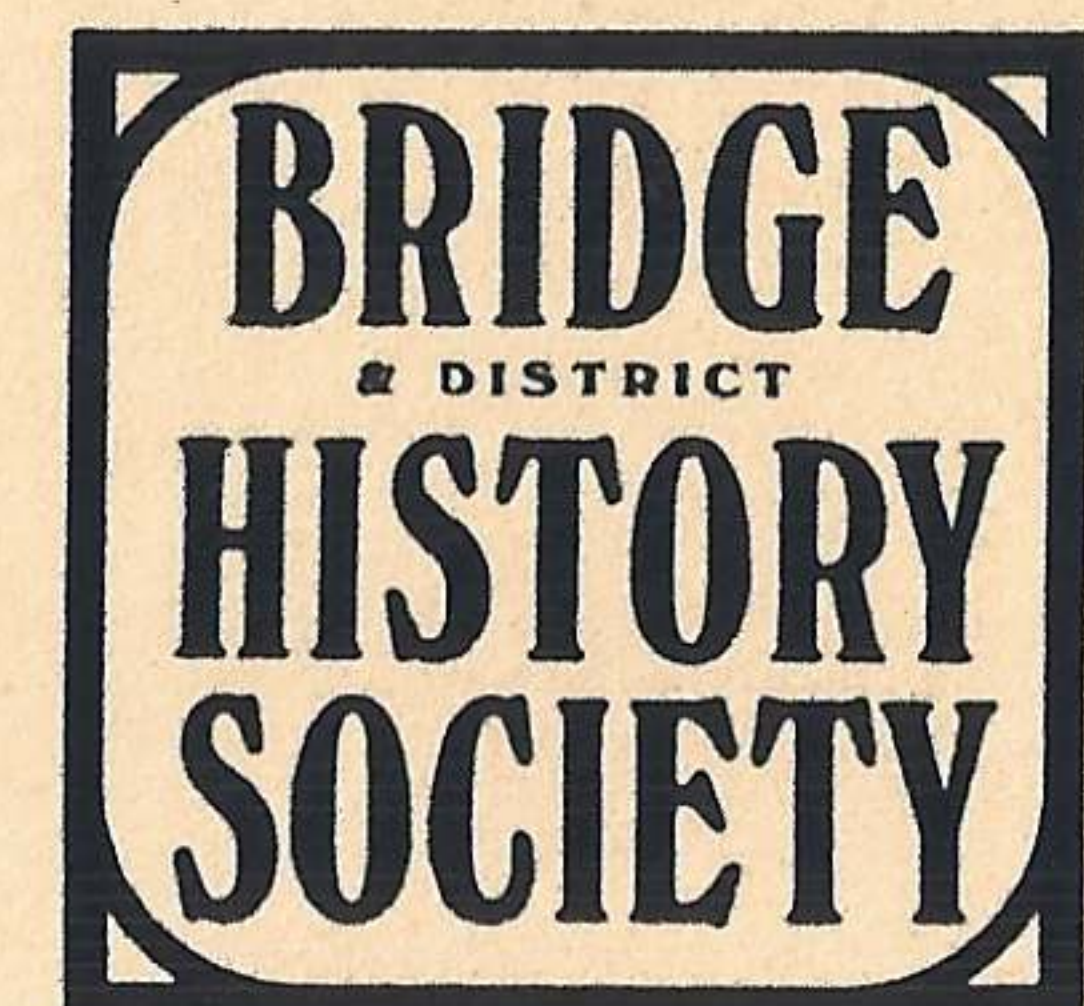
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Visit to BOURNE PARK

Sunday 13th October



A History of the Bourne Park Estate
and its owners



BOURNE PARK

Every home reflects the tastes and aspirations of its owners, and Bourne Park is no exception. Both Lady Juliet de Chair, the present owner, and her husband the late Mr. Somerset de Chair were previously connected with important houses of historical interest, and with maintaining fine collections of important paintings, antique furniture and objects d'art, parts of which are housed in the perfect setting of Bourne Park. But the house has not always been fortunate enough to enjoy an owner so devoted to it.

Elizabeth Aucher

The Bourne Park estate had once formed part of the larger Bridge Place estate. The present mansion, considered to be one of the finest Queen Anne houses in Kent, was built at great expense by Elizabeth Aucher in 1705 on the site of a very ancient house originally known as Hautbourne. The striking symmetry of the elegant broad-fronted red brick house is, surprisingly, exactly repeated on the back facade, and the spacious interior has handsome plasterwork and staircase. Elizabeth Aucher was a descendant of Sir Anthony Aucher who had bought Hautbourne in 1545. He had been employed by Henry VIII as Master of the Jewels, and was killed at Calais in 1558 defending the last English struggles in France against the French.

Stephen Beckingham

In 1756 Bourne Park passed to Stephen Beckingham who had married an Aucher daughter. One of their tenants was Sir Horace Mann, a friend of Sir Robert Walpole the first English Prime Minister. Sir Horace organised one of the first cricket matches in Kent on the ground that is still in regular use today. In 1765 Mozart visited the house as his guest, and it was while staying there that the composer made a visit to the nearby Barham Downs racecourse. In 1991 a concert was held in the grounds of Bourne Park to celebrate the 225th anniversary of Mozart's visit.

Matthew Bell

In 1845, it was purchased by Matthew Bell, though he and his family lived at 'Oswalds' in nearby Bishopsbourne. Bell was responsible for much of the landscaping of the grounds, including the creation of the ornamental lake,

and when the Elham Valley railway line was built at the end of the nineteenth century he insisted on it being run through a cut-and-cover tunnel in the section that ran behind the house. Bell also had several cottages built in the grounds in the fashionable Victorian Gothic style of the day with their distinctive iron framed diamond-pane windows. Each building is distinctively marked with a stone plaque showing an intertwined MB motif and the construction date.

Sir John Prestige

After the death of the last of the Bell family in 1927, the house was bought by Sir John Prestige, who owned it until he died in 1962. In the early 1950's Sir John, while a member of Kent County Council, unsuccessfully tried to persuade it to take over the house for use as a museum. By 1957 Bourne Park had been empty for several years, as no tenant could be found for it, and the house had fallen into a poor state of repair.

Sir John then announced his intention to demolish the it, and there followed a public enquiry which culminated in the Government serving a Preservation Order on the house, which was eventually Grade One listed. As a result, generous grants became available for essential repairs and maintenance work which was carried out over a number of years, including extensive treatment for dry rot. It was about this time that the house and its estate of 300 acres was offered by Sir John as a site for the new University of Kent, but this, too, was turned down.

The Years of Uncertainty

Being listed doubtless saved the house from several controversial proposals over the next twenty years, not least ensuring that the route of the Bridge Bypass instead of going through the Bourne Park estate close to the house, as might have happened, was re-routed around the other side of the village.

During these years Bourne Park came on to the market at regular intervals resulting in several changes of ownership. In 1963 the house and its 300 acres was bought on behalf of Mr. R.D. Neame by the trustees of his late uncle Lord Forteviot and annexed to his 800 acre Lower Harges estate. Soon, however, the house and estate were back on the market, though at the much reduced size of only 46

acres.

In 1964 Kent County Council approves a scheme for Bourne Park to become an outpost of the monastic order of St. Augustine based at Minster, near Ramsgate, to serve as a monastery and independent school for 100 boarders. But this scheme came to nothing, and by 1969 it was put up for sale again.

1971 saw a proposal to turn Bourne Park into a residential retirement club for the over 60's; it was sold in 1972; the following year in 1973 it was for sale as 3 housing units; in 1974 it was up for sale as 19 luxury suites; in 1975, with the support of two large private healthcare organisations, there was a proposal to convert the house into a fully equipped private hospital; in 1977 it was considered for use as offices, spacious showrooms and a home; and in 1978 a proposal was put forward to turn it into a luxury hotel. During this period of fluctuating ill-fortune as each scheme came and went the house had undergone some internal alterations. Meanwhile, from time to time parcels of land had been sold off so that by 1982 the size of the estate had been whittled down so that of the original 300 acres, only 7 acres remained.

A New Beginning

Bourne Park's period of uncertainty came to a close when it was purchased in 1983 by Lady Juliet and Mr. Somerset de Chair who were looking for a new home. Mr. de Chair expressed delight that he was once again connected with East Kent after an absence of 30 years.

The de Chairs have undertaken a great deal of restoration work on Bourne Park, while at the same time discretely installing modern facilities such as security and fire precaution systems necessary to protect the house and its contents for future generations.

The New Owners

Lady Juliet de Chair

Lady Juliet is the only daughter of the 8th Earl Fitzwilliam, whose family seat was Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham, South Yorkshire, Britain's largest classical stately home, with a reputed (undisputed) 365 rooms. Wentworth Woodhouse was partly rebuilt, incorporating a much older house, during the early part of the 18th century. The East front, built in the Palladian style, boasts Europe's longest stately home frontage of 606 feet (186m).