MINUTES OF THE 57th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 24th APRIL 2013

Present: - Rupert Clark - Chairman & Treasurer Peter Cole - Secretary.

1. Chairman and Treasurer's Report

Rupert Clark

Rupert welcomed members of the Gardening Club, who had joined us for this meeting.

He said that we had done very well this year with donations. Firstly Dawn's three books, plus one from Andrew Mills on his Falklands War Experiences. Then there had been a donation of the piece of pottery bearing the name Cartwright Arms Brewery, and finally Patrick Seccull had given us £20 following his tour of our village, where his ancestors had lived and worked.

There will be a Quaker Clock Exhibition at The Institute, Adderbury on the 8th and 9th June, with over 60 clocks on show, twenty of them made locally this will be a very rare opportunity to visit such a collection.

2. Secretary's Report

Peter Cole

Peter said that he had taken Patrick Seccull and his son and daughter around Aynho on Tuesday 9th April. Their tour of the village had included the Church, where they had seen memorials inside and outside to the young Seccull killed in World War One, and the grave of the last Seccull, Eli, to live in Aynho. They had gone in the garden and photographed the house where he used to live. In particular they were absolutely amazed by the vast extent of the stone walls all around the village, which they just don't have in Australia.

Peter produced a copy of a 1783 estate map "with alterations and improvements" from the Cartwright Archive and also the signed invoice from Humphrey Repton's "Red Book" of garden designs.

3. "Humphry Repton – Understand his impact on the Ashridge and Aynho Estate Landscape " Mr Mick Thompson, Ashridge Gardens Manager

Mr Thompson demonstrated the impact of both Capability Brown and later Humphrey Repton on the estate at Ashridge near Berkhampstead to illustrate their impact at Aynho.

The Ashridge Estate was established about 1283, when a monastery was erected on the site. A house was built in front of this, which became a royal home, and for a time was owned by the young Princess Elizabeth. In 1554 she was arrested there by order of her half-sister, Mary, but once she became Queen she never set foot in the place again.

The house was then owned by Thomas Egerton, Elizabeth's Lord Chancellor. His son, John, became the first Earl of Bridgewater. The fourth Earl became the first Duke of Bridgewater, and it was his second son, Francis, the 3rd Duke, who became famous as the person who initiated the building of canals in England. Having made a substantial fortune from the canals, he died in 1803, just as the old buildings were being replaced a new house, designed by James Wyatt, this house remains to this day. Unlike Aynho, the village is about two miles away from the house.

The Estate eventually passed to Viscount Alford, which became the Brownlow family, In 1759. Lancelot "Canability" Brown had worked in the gardens for Francis, particular

In 1759, Lancelot "Capability" Brown had worked in the gardens for Francis, particularly landscaping the Golden Valley, and planting to the east and north of the house. He had a bit of a reputation as a wrecker, as he often threw out groups and lines of trees, but at both Aynho and Ashridge he left lime avenues, which still exist today.

Humphrey Repton was the first person to describe himself as a landscape gardener. Whenever he planned work, it was always presented to the client in a red leather bound book, the now famous "Red Book". He always charged 5 guineas per day for his advice, which was a very high rate in those days. He visited Ashridge in 1813, and planned a series of small more formal gardens close to the house. As he was suffering from bad health, this was his last big project. Two ash trees, which appeared on Repton's map, were part of the original ash ridge, which gave the Estate its name.

The Flower Garden recreates the style of gardening from the 19th century. It had a Flower Store (a lean-to greenhouse), and a statue of Bacchus, which was placed there in 2008.

The Rosary was a circular garden of triangular rose beds, all pointing to a central fountain approached through a pergola.

The Italian Garden is heart-shaped, but with two semi-circular beds coming from the bottom segments, and a path running through it north to south. Lady Marian Alford played a big part in designing this garden. It had been levelled during the last war, and later replanted with 12,000 box plants, but these had to be replaced recently, as they didn't work.

Other gardens added were the Skating Pond, which is now a labyrinth.

The Monks' Garden consisted of four rectangular beds, each with further rectangles within containing coats of arms of the families who owned Ashridge, and a central tall buttressed holy "well".

The Herb Garden is similar to the Rosary, but with the triangular beds each having a more rounded top, all surrounded by grass rather than gravel paths, and with an armillary sphere as a focal point.

Mr Thompson showed pictures of other gardens: -

The Lazelle Garden is partly lawn, with some mature trees, heathers and a rock garden.

The Fernery Garden is planted twice yearly with spring and summer bedding plants.

The Dry Garden has a variety of drought-resistant plants.

The Arboretum contains many specimen trees, including chestnut trees of both sorts, Cedars of Lebanon, beech, holm oak and cypresses.

The Bible Circle consists of incense cedars. There is also an Avenue of Wellingtonia trees and a Rhododendron Walk.

Repton's Arbour represents the rustic nature of garden buildings, which were popular in the early 19th century.

The renovation of the Ashridge garden concentrates not on any particular period but tries to reestablish the best example of each of part of the estate's landscape.

While Brown took a hands on approach to the works carried out at Ashridge, Blenheim and Aynho, Repton presented his designs and left the client to realise the plans using their own workers. We can certainly see evidence of Brown, the avenues and ha-ha but we are less sure of which of Repton's idea were implemented. The inclusions of parkland thickets and planting alongside the avenues to soften them is typical of Repton. There is little evidence that any of the formal gardens, which would be expected, were ever constructed. Perhaps the cost of the house redevelopment prohibited the building of Repton's garden. There is more research to be done!

At Ashridge, there are plans in preparation for celebrating the tri-centenary of Brown's birth in three years time. Two years later is the bicentenary of Repton's death. Both house and garden are open to visitors.

Tea & coffee was kindly provided by Gardening Club members.

4. Forthcoming meetings

May 29th "Sex, Drink and Death in the 17th Century"

Mr Tim Healey

June 26th "What Archaeology is all about"

Mr David Jennings

July 31st History and Tour of Friars Well. Members only, or by prior arrangement. Mr and Mrs R Sermon