

Southleigh Park

by Sonya Teale

The article below was first published in The Emsworth Echo in November 2003, Issue 34. Southleigh House has again been in the news in 2020/2021 over the controversial plans to fell 100 trees on the estate which is earmarked for housing development. The house is a hidden Emsworth gem which is not visible to the passerby.

Southleigh Park (Map Ref. SU E737 N 080) lies in the extreme north-west border of Emsworth Parish. The mansion is bounded on the North by Barton's Road, to the East by the B2148 and to the West by Eastleigh Road. Today, the house and garden cover a mere 15 acres, but one can glimpse the parkland studded with mature trees from Eastleigh Road.

In 1820, a Mr Charles Short must have realised the potential of a dairy farmhouse that had views to Langstone Harbour and the Isle of Wight. He purchased the house, called it Woodlands and made extensive alterations, constructing a house built of brick, with dressed flint, in castellated style. The house is not visible from any road, as effective screens of shrubs and trees were planted many years ago, but the Lodge on the Horndean Road, at the Barton's Road junction, is an imitation of the large house.

Charles Short was a barrister of considerable repute. His daughter, Emily, was born in 1793 and became the third wife of the Reverend William Norris, Vicar of Warblington. His son, Augustus, who was born on the Feast of St Barnabas in 1802, founded the Cathedral in Adelaide, Australia and was installed as the first Bishop. He remained there for 34 years. He retired in 1881 and died in 1883. In Warblington churchyard, the distinctive pink tomb of Augustus, his wife Millicent, and unmarried daughter, Isabella Emily, nestles in a north-east corner of the outer wall of the church. The tomb bears a Bishop's mitre, a crook and two stars which may indicate the Southern Cross. Next to it lies the slab tomb of Charles Short and his wife, Grace.

At the time of Charles Short's death in 1838 Woodlands was one of the largest estates



The castellated lodge fronting Horndean Road

in the neighbourhood. The next owner was Lancelot Arthur Burton who purchased the property in 1840 and lived there for 10 years. He altered the interior.

In December 1850, Henry Spencer bought it but let the house and lived in Woodlands Cottage. In 1870 the garden contained not only a vinery but also a Camellia House, Banana House and Orchid House. The gardens and surrounding park now amounted to 55 acres, and boasted walks known as Havant Walk and Emsworth Walk. Henry Spencer died in 1875 aged 57, and is also buried in Warblington Cemetery.

Henry Spencer's widow sold the house, set in 312 acres, to a Mr Barkworth in 1889. The latter lived there for only four years but changed the name to Southleigh Park. It was during Mr Barkworth's ownership that the Water Tower was built. His initials were on an ornamental tablet above an inscription: *Nihil Quod tetigit non Ornavit* (He touched nothing without adorning it).

In 1903, or possibly 1905, the house was sold to Sir Woolmer White of Salle Park, Norfolk. Sir Woolmer, first baronet, was the son of Major Timothy White (of Timothy White, a chain of chemist's shops).

Sir Woolmer was Justice of the Peace, High Sheriff of Norfolk, and a County Councillor for Hampshire. He donated £55,000 to the Royal Portsmouth Hospital. The sale notice of 1903 describes the mansion as situated in a good residential neighbourhood in "Capital Hunting and Shooting District. The house has a due South aspect enjoying lovely land and sea views extending to the Isle of Wight". It then had 20 bed and dressing rooms, two bathrooms and several water cisterns. At the time of the sale the estate comprised some 356 acres. The gardens contained 'ornamental water' and a rustic bridge. The Pump house, with its engine connected to a deep well, ensured that the house had its own water supply.

Sir Woolmer was regarded as a stern but fair employer. Kathleen Grant was a maid in service at Southleigh Park, 1926-1930, and she describes Sunday attendance at Warblington Church as mandatory, walking in both directions. On Sunday afternoons she and other staff waited under the clock tower for 4 pm to strike. She then walked home to Bedhampton, returning by the same means to parade again at 7 pm.

Sir Woolmer White's elder son was killed in the First World War, and the choir vestry in St Faith's Church, Havant, was erected in his memory by Sir Rudolph Dymoke White, the second son. Sir Dymoke succeeded his father in 1931 and moved into Southleigh Park in 1934 after a fire and modernisation.

Derek Parker, the last farm manager, told me that the estate comprised some 520 acres in Sir Woolmer White's time, which included Mays Coppice Farm. In 1963, the tenant at Locks Farm surrendered his tenancy and the farm was "taken in hand" making 640 acres of agricultural land in all. In addition there were 500-600 acres of woodland. On certain Sundays in spring some of the woodland was opened to the public to pick bluebells and this was enthusiastically supported.

Sir Dymoke White was generous in an undemonstrative way. He donated to his old school, Cheltenham College, paid for

the restoration of Salle Church in Norfolk, and gave to local charities. Lady White was a keen supporter of the British Red Cross, particularly during the Second World War.

Sir Dymoke was Conservative MP for Fareham 1939-50, High Sheriff of Hampshire, County Alderman and Justice of the Peace. His great passion was for horses, and he used them on the farms up to the Second World War. After an absence from home his first visit was to the stables to inspect the horses. During his time in Westminster he succeeded in getting a Private Member's Bill through on 'The Docking and Nicking of Horses (1949)' to prevent this treatment of horses and the importation of horses so treated. Sir Dymoke was often seen driving his coach and four along the lanes, training for the Coaching Marathons at the Agricultural Shows.

Both Janet Searle and Joan Phillips, in their oral history tapes (available at the Museum) mention the coach with its bay horses parading through Emsworth. In 1962 he won the Coaching Marathon at the Royal Windsor Show for the second year in succession. He collapsed in May 1968 with the reins in his hands as he entered the ring at the Aldershot Show, and died soon after.

After his death his coachman, Arthur Showell, went to the Royal Mews to become Head Coachman to the Queen. Some of Sir Dymoke's carriages went to the Carriage Museum in Maidstone, Kent and others to Arlington Court, a National Trust property in Devon.

Continued overleaf



Southleigh House (Woodlands) in 1884

Southleigh Park contd.

In 1969 there was a large sale of the contents of the mansion and the house was sold to Plessey Electronics. The Museum has a good aerial photograph from that period, showing a helicopter pad in the garden.

Since 1994 it has been owned by Snell and Wilcox, who describe their work as 'the design and manufacture of Image Processing Plant'. This company owns the former mansion and the immediate garden only. The owners of the remaining land are the Trustees of the Southleigh Park Settlement.

The walled gardens, conservatories and water tower have all been demolished. The house and lodge are listed Grade Two by English Heritage.

Sources:

A History of Woodlands. Later known as Southleigh, by J E Bury.

Havant Museum, HAVANT HOUSES: Southleigh House.

Southleigh Park. Anne Wellstead. Hampshire Garden Trust.

Mr Derek Parker. Conversation.
