

## Thornborough & Thornton WI report July 2015

Frank Pearce, who has volunteered there for 8 years, gave a very interesting talk about Claydon House and the Verney family who lived there over the centuries. The history is very involved and I apologise if I misquote any dates and facts.

Before moving to Claydon the family lived at Pendley Manor near Tring. Sir Francis Verney (1584 – 1616) was a colourful character who became a pirate and converted to Islam because their mother made sure that half-brother Edmund inherited meaning Francis didn't receive much money.



The first Verney to live at Claydon was Edmund in 1620. He died in 1642 at Edgehill carrying the King's Standard. His son Ralph, who was a member of Cromwell's parliament, fled England after Edgehill. Ralph aged 15 had an arranged marriage to 13 year old land heiress Mary Blacknell but they did fall in love. She sadly died at only 32 and he lived to 82. The Verney men tended to marry heiresses.

In 1752 Sir Ralph 2<sup>nd</sup> inherited and between 1757 & 71 the new house was designed and built. Ralph married Mary Herrin, daughter of head of the Bank of England. Ralph had many debts but was not sued due to being an MP. He ran away to France and died in 1791 leaving no children and an incomplete derelict house to a niece. The niece was Mary Baroness Fermanagh. She had demolished the left and middle house sections leaving the right section that remains today known as the Reception Wing.

Mary's sister Catherine Calvert married a vicar named Wright; they changed their name to Verney but had no children so left the house to Sir Harry Calvert who also changed to Verney. Harry married Partenhope Nightingale, elder sister of Florence, who spent much time at Claydon.

Harry & Partenhope had a son Edmund Hope Verney whose son was Sir Harry Calvert Williams Verney. Many of the Verneys have been in parliament but never held high positions.

Inside the house the wood carvings are by Luke Lightfoot. He did the Chinese room including the tea party carving which looks very British rather than Chinese in terms of crockery. There are papier mache ceilings in the saloon & library. The staircase combines carver and plasterer work plus wrought iron. Luke Lightfoot and Sir Thomas Robinson clashed over the work. The lake is man-made but looks like a river.

The film *Far From The Madding Crowd* was filmed at Claydon. The National Trust owns the West Wing with the Verneys still living in the other part.

Visitors to the house come from all over the world and often include nurses due to the Florence Nightingale connection.

Betty Bunce was a guest at the July meeting and mentioned to me that she grew up on the Claydon Estate and found Frank's talk very interesting. Tina Minchin gave the vote of thanks.

*Tracy Sapwell*