

residence, an extensive and perfectly kept park, abounding in deer and other game, a library of great size and value, liveried servants, fine horses and coaches, with everything that could make life desirable.

The picturesque park that has seen so many successive generations come and go, as we rambled amongst its beautiful and ancient trees, was as silent as any scene in our own native forests. The servants had mown the extensive lawns, the hot-house gardeners had set out the Italian portico with newly flowered plants, covering the pots with lycopodiums and mosses, and the attendants had all disappeared before breakfast was announced; every sound was stilled and the place was all one's own.

The deer silently wandered amongst the ferns half as tall as themselves; the librarian, himself a learned man and an author of merit, was at his post to hand the guests any book they required.

One felt assured on passing the great entrance hall beneath a funeral hatchment of the late proprietor, that he was not entering the house of consistent Quakers, for one of the first objects was a pair of brass cannon, taken by Admiral Penn in his Dutch wars, elegantly mounted and polished; and near by, opening on the left, was a fine billiard room. Family prayers were not neglected; the numerous servants were regularly assembled, as is the usual custom in England; the service of the day is reverently read, and all, from the head of the house to the humblest individual, on their knees to give thanks for mercies received.

The house was not wanting in memorials to Pennsylvania, a large portion of the Treaty Tree, sent by some members of the Historical Society, with a silver label on it, ornamenting the grand drawing room of the second storey which was reached by a long, and rather fatiguing marble staircase. The birds of Pennsylvania too were represented in elegant glass cases, together with Indian relics, and a finely preserved beaver which animal was once the annual tribute of the Penns to the Crown.

In spite of the money granted to John Penn after the losses of their American estates, by the time Granville John inherited Stoke Park he could not afford to maintain it, and he moved to West End House, the former home of Thomas Gray. At

least he was able to enlarge it and, when he had done so, renamed it Stoke Court. Stoke Park itself was offered for rent and then, in 1848, sold to Henry Labouchere, a Cabinet minister later created Baron Taunton.

Nevertheless, Granville John's financial woes continued and, in 1851, he not only sold Stoke Court but also, in a six-day sale at Sotheby's, sold off half the Stoke Park library assembled by John Penn. In the following month, he sold a large number of the family's paintings, including West's historic picture of William Penn's treaty with the Indians. Furthermore, a number of Thomas Gray's items, including his manuscripts and editions of his books with his own notations, were also sold. And again in 1854 more Gray manuscripts were sold.

In 1867, Granville John Penn, in straitened circumstances, died. He was survived by his brother, the Reverend Thomas Penn, but he had been declared insane and his affairs placed in the hands of his cousins. He died in 1869. A sad end to a family that had contributed so much.

CHAPTER FIVE

WEALTHY VICTORIANS

LABBY

EDWARD COLEMAN

SIR EDWIN LANDSEER

SIR WILBERFORCE BRYANT

LABBY

Henry Labouchere, 'Labby' to his friends, was a remarkable politician – a Whig Member of Parliament who became President of the Board of Trade and was eventually elevated to become Lord Taunton. In an era when Britain was building its Empire, he was almost a lone voice denouncing the idolising of, and the granting of pensions to, those who were building that Empire. During the Zulu War, he told the House of Commons:

We are without exception the greatest robbers and marauders that ever existed on the face of the globe. We are worse than other countries because we are hypocrites also, for we plunder and always pretend we do so for the other people's good.

He hated war. He told the House:

During the last 150 years, we have been at war with Austria, Russia, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Holland and France – with France four times – but in

no one instance had we gone to war because England was directly or indirectly attacked.

In most cases we went to war for that mirage, the European equilibrium, and we have wasted hundred of millions in these wars.

He opposed the granting of large pensions to admirals and generals. For example, when Lord Wolseley was voted £30,000 (£3.3 million today), he asked:

Why is a soldier to receive a pension and a statesman not? Literary men for instance receive nothing from the country. If a literary man spent years and years in works of benefit to his country, and his wife and family were without means, they were lucky to get £100 per annum doled out as charity.

(Obviously a sound man, this Labby!)

He was certainly not intimidated by reputation. This is what he said in the House just three weeks after former Prime



Henry Labouchere, or 'Labby' as he was known, bought Stoke Park in 1848. He became President of the Board of Trade, was elevated to the peerage as Lord Taunton, and became a rival to the Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone. He was a great collector of art and made a number of alterations to the Mansion at Stoke Park to house his collection. The west gardens were enlarged and paths created to display his collection of sculpture.

Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, later Lord Beaconsfield, died:

Lord Beaconsfield possessed rare and splendid gifts but rare and splendid gifts in themselves are a danger rather than an advantage to the state when the possessor of them does not use them for what is considered by the majority of his fellow-countrymen to be to the public advantage. A statue is granted by a national vote to a politician because his country is grateful to him. I do not consider that the country has reason to be grateful for anything that Lord Beaconsfield did.

Afterwards, groups of MPs assembled in the lobbies, corridors and smoking rooms of the House of Commons, and used such phrases as:

Shocking! Scandalous! Beastly bad taste, what? Not fit for decent society! Of course, he's a Froggie! Utter outsider!

He was, on the whole, a great admirer of Disraeli's opponent, the Liberal leader, Gladstone. However, this did not prevent him from remarking:

I don't object to Gladstone always having the ace up his sleeve but merely to his belief that God Almighty put it there.

Labouchere (1798–1869) made alterations to the Mansion and the gardens at Stoke Park. He owned a vast collection of art and needed to create rooms capable of displaying it. He possessed a number of sculptures, and enlarged the west garden and altered paths in order to display them to advantage. He was also responsible for building the balustrade around the house with its urns, a project completed in 1850. Very

little of his art or sculptures remain at Stoke Park, but there are some reliefs, created by the Danish artist Bertell Thorwaldsen, in the Great Hall.

EDWARD COLEMAN

Edward Coleman, born in 1834, bought Stoke Park in 1863 from Lord Taunton. He was a coal mine-owner and also a broker on the London Stock Exchange. He retired at the time he bought Stoke Park, for which he paid £95,000 (around £10 million in today's money). A staunch Tory, he became a magistrate for Buckinghamshire county in 1870 and High Sheriff in 1879, and according to the local newspaper, financed the successful election of two Tory candidates, Colonel Howard-Vyse and a Mr Vansittart, in the Windsor Borough Parliamentary Election.

Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli was a close friend and supported Coleman's application for membership of the Carlton Club in St James's, to which all prominent Tories belonged (David Cameron, current leader of the Conservative Party, is a member). So close was Coleman to the Tory hierarchy that he was invited to the banquet given by members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords

for Disraeli and the Marquis of Salisbury when they brought back 'peace with honour' from the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

Coleman lived well at Stoke Park and carried out extensive improvements, including the installation of miles of iron fencing and the planting of more than a thousand trees. He also bought the most up-to-date equipment for the farm. At the same time, he restocked the park with red deer and purchased more fallow deer. He reputedly spent more than £200,000 (£22 million today) on the estate.

Inside the mansion itself, he acquired a large collection of furniture, art, sculpture and tapestries, patronising the artist Sir Edwin Landseer and providing him with a studio in the house.

SIR EDWIN LANDSEER

Landseer was a household name in Victorian England. He was a precocious youth and by the age of sixteen was already an active exhibitor at the Royal Academy. Though from a modest background, his charm enabled him to move in the highest aristocratic circles. From a very early age he developed an emotional attachment to animals, and his earliest drawings

are of woolly sheep, huge hogs, mastiffs, mongrels, depressed cob horses, rugged bulls, lions and tigers. (Nine of the drawings that he created at the age of five are in the Victoria and Albert Museum.) He studied under B.R. Haydon, known as the prophet of 'high art', and in 1816 was formally admitted to the Royal Academy School. Very soon his paintings were being bought by the leading collectors of the day.

In 1824 Landseer went to Scotland for the first time, visiting Sir Walter Scott and falling in love with the Highlands.

The influence of Scott on Landseer was long-lasting. Landseer stayed with him for ten days, and Scott wrote to a friend:

While I am writing to you Mr Landseer, who has drawn every dog in the house but myself, is at work on me under all the disadvantages which my employment puts him to.

Later Scott would describe Landseer's painted dogs as 'the most magnificent things I ever saw – leaping, bounding and grinning on the canvas'. He also chose him as one of the illustrators of the Waverley edition of his novels.

Landseer also stayed with the Duke of Atholl at Blair Atholl, making studies of the Duke's keepers and red deer in preparation for his 'Death of the Stag in Glen Tilt'. Later in the 1820s, Scottish scenes would be bought by the highest in the land – the Duke of Northumberland bought 'Highlanders Returning from Deerstalking', the Duke of Gordon bought 'Sport in the Highlands' and the Duke of Wellington, 'Highland Whisky'.

Edward Coleman, who bought Stoke Park from Lord Taunton in 1863, commissioned Queen Victoria's favourite artist, Sir Edwin Landseer, to paint the deer in the park. Coleman even converted a house on the estate for Landseer to use as a studio.



Landseer's love of Scotland led to his returning there every autumn to shoot, hunt and sketch. In 1831 he was elected a full Academician and there followed a decade of great success and creativity. As Richard Ormond pointed out in his book on Landseer, he was warmly welcomed into the houses of the rich and powerful:

Landseer became a habitu  of Woburn Abbey and Chatsworth, Goodwood and Badminton, Holland House and Lansdowne House. He was good looking, witty and a noted raconteur. His tastes and attitudes corresponded to those of the great Whig magnates with whom he was especially intimate. Neither politics nor conventional religion meant much to him. He loved the outdoor pursuits of the upper classes, he could hunt, shoot and fish, and he was equally accomplished at indoor games. He enjoyed dancing, possessed a good singing voice, played chess, and often helped to produce amateur theatricals.

He began painting for Queen Victoria and, when the Royal Family leased Balmoral in the late 1840s, their shared admiration for Scotland was a delight to both parties. When Landseer was drawing one of the royal ghillies, John Macdonald, the Queen wrote:

Landseer was much pleased with the simplicity and goodness of the man, who I find particularly gentle, kind and well meaning. It is a pleasure to watch Landseer draw in chalks, and it is wonderful the effect he produces.

By the 1850s Landseer was suffering from various illnesses of the nerves, and he sought solace in old friends and in being invited to houses in the country. One of these was Stoke Park, which, as Ormond pointed out,

... belonged to the rich E.J. Coleman, who commissioned several pictures including 'Man Proposes, God Disposes'. Landseer's extensive surviving correspondence with Coleman reveals a close, reciprocal friendship. When things got too much for the artist in London, Landseer instinctively retired to Stoke Park, often inviting himself for days at a time. Coleman had converted a house on the estate (according to James Manson in his book published in 1902 it was 'the banqueting-room of the old manor house that was at his disposal') for the artist's use as a studio – a gesture that moved Landseer deeply. The favours were not all one way. Landseer brought his friends down to Stoke Park, where Coleman liked to entertain the powerful and wealthy on a princely scale.

According to James Manson,

It was there [the banqueting room in the Manor House] that he drew in red crayon a deerhound going at the top of its speed. Afterwards, in order to justify the dog, he added a quarry in the shape of a stag, and exhibited the picture under the name of 'The Chase' at the Royal Academy in 1866. This also commanded the handsome figure of  5,250 [ 580,000 today] at Christie's in May 1881.

In the local St Giles' church, Coleman had his own stall lit by gas, an innovation at the time. The local hunt met at Stoke Park and, with his wife Gertrude, he used the hunt meeting days to entertain lavishly. Their guests included Edward, Prince of Wales. Coleman also bought the adjoining estate of Duffield, where his parents lived until their death; they were buried in St Giles' church.

After all this expenditure and high living, Coleman's fortunes went sharply downhill when he was hit by a crash on the Stock Exchange and a depression in the coal trade. He was

forced into bankruptcy and had to sell Stoke Park. It may have been small consolation, but Disraeli, who lived nearby at Hughenden Manor, wrote to him: 'I learn with sincere sorrow that you are about to cease to be a Buckinghamshire squire.'

In trying to save his financial position, Coleman sold a number of his valuable works of art. For example, Christie's sold four Gobelin tapestries to the Draper's Company for a total of 4,600 guineas (about £550,000 in today's money).

In failing health, Coleman moved to the Isle of Wight with his wife, and died there in 1885.

WILBERFORCE BRYANT

When Coleman put Stoke Park on the market in 1882 it did not sell immediately. Indeed, four years passed before it was bought by Wilberforce Bryant.

This was not for the want of trying.

On 2 August 1882, Stoke Park Estate was offered for auction by Chinnock, Galsworthy and Chinnock, Land Agents and Surveyors of 11 Waterloo Place, Pall Mall, London SW, at the Mart, Tokenhouse Yard, London EC. In the magnificent accompanying brochure, the auctioneers described

it as an 'ancient and historical, Freehold Residential Domain' comprising

A PALATIAL MANSION

In the Italian style of architecture seated on a well-chosen spot, in the centre of

a SUPERBLY TIMBERED OLD DEER PARK

Also walled-in Kitchen and Fruit Gardens, Vineries, Orchard Houses

etc.

Capital Stabling and Coach Houses

Conveniently placed Model Farm Buildings, numerous Lodges, Gas

Works etc.

Quaint old Elizabethan Manor House

The venerable Church of Stoke Poges

464 Acres

The whole in Perfect Order.

This auction did not produce a buyer, and, on 13 November 1884, different auctioneers, Messrs Dawes & Sons of 9 Angel Court, Throgmorton Street, London EC, held another auction, again at The Mart, Tokenhouse Yard. Again, a magnificent brochure was produced, but this time the extent was described as '517 Acres'.

Wilberforce Bryant's family business was the Bryant & May of match fame, which began manufacturing matches in 1861. By the 1880s they were exporting to countries all over the world, including the USA and China. It became a limited liability company in 1884. Swan Vestas became their most famous brand. Wilberforce, the eldest of the four sons of William Bryant, who had founded the business with a fellow Quaker, Francis May, became senior partner in the business at the age of 37, on the death of his father in 1874.

While the Bryants owned the estate from 1887 until 1908, they spent many thousands of pounds on improvements both to the house and the gardens. They created the west garden features including the sunken garden, and planted many of the gardens and shrubs which still grace the park today.

The Bryants will have been delighted to read what Edward Rose said in the *Illustrated London News* in 1896:

To reach it, one crosses the green loveliness of an English park, barred halfway to the house by a narrow lake overhung with trees: a lake invented by the famous Capability Brown, and much visited by gleaming swans and ducks in modest blacks and greys. The ancient manor house is a little to the right, by the waterside; great trees stand here and there, shadowy in the hot sun; splendid deer come up, tame and inquisitive, to stare at the visitor. The mansion built in 1789, and largely rebuilt by Wyatt not long after, is in the fashion of its time: 'classic,' with Grecian colonnades and a dome of course anything but Greek. It stands out in the bright sun, dazzlingly white – as white as the marble palaces of ancient Athens. In English woodland, by the old church of Stoke Poges even more than elsewhere, one feels that such a building is exotic; the old Tudor house was more at home here, and one is glad that this classic fashion has passed away in architecture as in other arts. Yet, of its class, the palace of Stoke is among the best. It is not bare, not heavy, certainly not ugly; and there are not so many among its contemporaries for whom the candid friend can say as much.

And on a clear day of summer its whiteness shines out wonderfully against the rich green grass, the deep blue sky we see now and again in England. The house stands rather high, overlooking a little terrace and

A crash on the Stock Exchange at the end of the 1870s meant that Edward Coleman was forced to sell Stoke Park on 13 November 1884.

By Order of the Mortgagees.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE,
About Half an Hour's Ride by Rail from the West End of London.

PARTICULARS, PLAN AND CONDITIONS OF SALE
OF
THE RENOWNED
Freehold Residential Estate,
(LAND TAX REDEEMED AND PRINCIPALLY TITHE FREE).
SITUATED AS
"STOKE PARK,"
Situate in the Parishes of STOKE POGES and FARNHAM ROYAL,
Two Miles from Slough Station on the Great Western Railway, and four from Windsor.

CONTAINING
A STATELY MANSION,
Designed in Italian Style by an eminent Architect,
SITUATED IN A
OVERLOOKING ORNAMENTAL WATER,
AS THE CENTER OF
A GRAND DEER PARK,
Commanding magnificent views of Windsor Castle and the surrounding beautifully-wooded country; containing the requisite accommodation for a nobleman's or gentleman's family.
Arranged with every regard to Taste and Convenience, surrounded by
CHARMING PLEASURE GROUNDS,
KITCHEN AND FRUIT GARDENS, VINERIES, &c.
MODERN STABLING,
MODEL FARMERY, SUITED FOR PEDIGREE AND JERSEY CATTLE-REARING, NUMEROUS LODGES, PRIVATE GAS WORKS, &c.

ALSO
The Historic Elizabethan Manor House,
occupying a delightful position in the Park, as also the ORNATE CHURCH of Stoke Poges, erected by the first GRAY in the "ELEGANT" style, and the attractive features in the Park, as also the ORNATE CHURCH erected to the memory of JOHN PERE.

TOGETHER WITH
517 ACRES,
TOGETHER WITH
THE MANOR OF STOKE POGES.



The Old Manor House 1897. Stoke Park was bought in 1857 by Wilberforce Bryant, a son of the founder of the famous Bryant & May match company. He and his wife spent many thousands on both the house and the gardens. The Old Manor House was included in the estate.

then the spreading park; its long colonnade of lofty pillars runs from end to end, flanked by the great wings that jut out from each angle of the central square. A higher storey rises above a little parapet; and higher yet, from a parapeted roof, ascends a small lofty dome, supported by a lantern of light Ionic pillars.

And, if it is handsome without, the great house of Stoke has come, of late years especially to be exceedingly beautiful within. The entrance is as delightful, as fine in proportion and rich in colour, and, above all, as cheery in its comfortable air of welcome, as that of any English home that you shall find. From a little hall, hung with vast antlers of deer of Stoke, you pass under a kind of archway of staircase into a great apartment that is hall, and breakfast room and corridor all in one. The great staircase occupies its left side, and on the right high pillars divide the breakfast-

chamber portion – with its great cheerful fireplace and hospitable table – from the passage-way to the Long Gallery; and there are heavy curtains to enclose it when winter winds are keen; and, behind, the great conservatory backs it with a wealth of flowers.

The part of this pleasant hall that lies beyond the columns was a separate dining-room until the days of the present owner, and the change was nothing less than a stroke of genius. With its entrance-hall, and its magnificent Long Gallery, and the rooms that flank it and make up its southern side, Stoke House, within, need fear no foe in the shining armour of its century.

All along the southern front, behind the colonnade that shades its outlook into the park, there runs the great gallery, 125ft in length. This was of old the library, but is now brighter than any book-room, except only the brilliant one at Blenheim. One looks from end to end through a series of grey pillared archways; the southern light sparkles all down the room on loot from Delhi, pictures by the masters of many schools – from Whistler backwards – flowers and curious things, rare china and fine bronzework, and the tranquil adornment of some paintings by Smirke that have all the air of bas-reliefs. The prevailing colours are grey and a pale terra-cotta, cool and restful; the ceilings are decorated with the refined and graceful work of Adams.

From this gallery there stands out, in the west wing, a drawing-room brilliant with white marble and rich yellows, made lovelier by the mass of gorgeous flowers and deep green leafage in the conservatory, into which it and the entrance-hall look, taking each a side. The room is rich in Japanese ware – notably in Satsuma of the different periods, old, later, new – and hung only with the flower-pictures of Fantin Latour, gleaming in the warm light with their wonderful varied colours, their sombre reds, and eager browns and yellows, and heavy splendid purples.

To balance this, the east wing has a dining-room, the same in size and shape, but deeper in colour – as, indeed, the solemnity of the British dinner requires – and rich with tapestry and the large and strongly painted pictures of beautiful children. From its eastern window is an outlook into a lovely enclosure, the private grounds of the house – smooth grass of the richest green, with dark and splendid trees behind.

Passing up the staircase which fills one end of that hospitable entrance-



The Mansion across the lake in 1897.



The South Walk in 1903. This photograph became the inspiration for the estate's current restoration programme started in 1989.

room, you find that it represents an Italian courtyard; the colours are the characteristic browns and reds of Italy, and the windows that overlook the staircase are artfully contrived to have the air of turning their hammered ironwork in the railings; and a relief by Thorwaldsen, pleasant and serene like everything that is his.

From an upper morning-room, airy and full of light and colour, one has a noble view of Windsor Castle, across the woodland and the water, a long grey line of varied tower and turret. The distant castle is, indeed, to be reckoned as one of the beauties of Stoke Park; it is seen from many points and one little summer-house has been set of purpose opposite a square peep-hole, cut through branches of the trees, which frames very quaintly and prettily the silhouette of Windsor.

There is no need to say what a view of the park, and all the country round, is to be had from the dome of Stoke House. Close by are great sweeps of smooth grass, with tall trees standing on it, as lonely islands of shade, or here and there clustered in a group, or further off massed in woods; a noble chestnut is one of the finest of the solitary trees. The roofs of villages show, now and again, among the woodland. Gray's church, of course, lies below us, and the church of Farnham Royal – is it not a rival claimant? – rises just beyond the borders of the park. And there are the monuments; for Stoke is a great home of 'storied urn and animated bust.' The cenotaph of Gray himself is a huge stone erection, close beside the church: a very striking portrait-model of Coke looks down upon the park from its height of seventy feet; there is an urn to Lady Georgiana Penn, a little temple called Shakspeare's Seat – quite a collection of classical tributes to those whom Stoke has delighted to honour.

To the modern man, however, the native beauties of the park have a nearer charm than all the art, in stone and stucco, of the eighteenth century: he finds in the guidance, philosophy, and friendship of the landscape-gardener quite too much. 'Capability Brown' and his successors may fairly boast that their lakes, their avenues, their walks of greensward among the shady trees, have made of Stoke Park an extremely lovely place. Near the house, especially, those private grounds of which we had a glimpse from the dining-room window have noble vistas of great trees: Scotch firs, with the pale pinkish-brown of their stems, tall redwood trees from Canada, giant araucarias with their fantastic growth – there is but



The *Illustrated London News* wrote: 'On a clear summer day its whiteness shines out wonderfully against the rich green grass. ... Of its class, the palace of Stoke is among the best and, if it is handsome without, the great house of Stoke has come, of late years especially, to be exceedingly beautiful within.'



The Saloon in 1903, now known as the Fountain Room.

one finer in England, it is said than the largest of these – and a walk of azaleas, blazing with colour in their season.

Nothing in the park is more noticeable than yet another art could not touch, and which yet the care of man has greatly increased. The herd of red and fallow deer contains stags of extraordinary size, whose ancestors have no doubt thriven on the ample commons proved for them, summer and winter, at Stoke, a deer-park through many centuries. There are three hundred of them here, splendid creatures and cautiously tame; and every year fifty or sixty young are born. In the old times 'a stag of ten' was reckoned a stag royal; but now, in the entrance-hall at Stoke, may be seen antlers 'of twenty-one' shed but the other day. A curious story is told of some deer who, only a few years back, fought for days, and had fallen into the water and drowned, with horns interlocked – neither of them mortally wounded in the combat, but both dead-beat, unable to make their way out of the water.

Further afield in the grounds is the Green Drive, a long and mossy path which winds among high firs; great trees, ivy-clad, overspread it with the deepest shade, and by its side, here and there, ancient oaks spread their arms, like gnarled giants yawning at the monotony of their country life. To the right of the drive is an outlook on an open space which was for a little while a racecourse. 'Stoke Park' was its title, and it was heralded as a rival to Kempton; but after two meetings it ceased to exist, to the infinite relief of the neighbourhood.

The beautiful little church is not far away; with its long slope of roof and massive wooden porch, and that ancient tower whence 'the moping owl does to the moon complain'.

When Wilberforce died in 1906, his widow leased the majority of the ground floor, the basement and the grounds to the new Stoke Park Club, founded by one Nick Lane Jackson, known, as we shall see, as 'Pa' Jackson.