



ESHER | PLACE
Training and Conference Centre

A History

EARLY HISTORY.

The history of the estate upon which Esher Place now stands provides a fascinating prelude to the history of the current house.

The monks of the Abbey of St. Leutfred's Cross, in Normandy, erected the first house on the banks of the River Mole on land given to them by William the Conqueror. Early in the 13th century it was acquired by Peter de Roches, Bishop of Winchester and was held with the Bishopric for over 300 years. In 1331 the old house was enlarged and in the middle of the 15th Century, William of Waynflete, Bishop from 1447 – 1486, completely demolished it and built a stately new residence of red brick, the tower gatehouse of which still stands today.



Cardinal Wolsey's first introduction to the estate was in 1519 when the aged Bishop Foxe loaned it to him. After having ousted Foxe and adding the Bishopric to his other preferment, he gave orders in 1528 for the repair and rebuilding of part of the house, which he intended to make his chief residence. The next year however saw Wolsey's fall. He was forced to surrender the Great Seal to Henry VIII who banished Wolsey to Esher where he was held under house arrest. After about four months he obtained permission to move to Richmond and the following year, whilst on his way to York, he died at Leicester Abbey.

In 1538, the estate was acquired by Henry VIII and added to his forest, the 'Chase' of Hampton Court. The park was stocked with deer and other game, and Henry was often seen indulging in his favourite sport of Stag hunting. He had stayed at Esher on at least two previous occasions, once as a guest of Bishop Foxe and later in 1537 when he came to escape from the Great Plague.



In the reign of Edward VI, a survey of the estate was made. It stated that besides the 'sumptuously built mansion-house', there was an orchard, a garden with a park stocked with deer. Mary Tudor restored the land to the Bishop of Winchester, but in 1582 the Crown bought back the lease and granted it to Charles, Lord Howard of Effingham, who soon afterwards sold it to Richard Drake, an equerry to Queen Elizabeth. Richard Drake was the brother of Sir Francis Drake with whom he sailed with on at least one occasion. After the defeat of the Armada in 1588, three Spanish admirals, captured by Sir Francis, were lodged at Esher with their retinue for nearly five years. Richard Drake died in 1603 and the estate was passed to his son.

Between 1634 and 1680 the estate had passed through at least five hands until it was acquired by Sir Thomas Lynch, one of the first colonists of Jamaica. He was knighted in 1670 on appointment as Lieutenant Governor of the island and was promoted to Governor in 1681. After Lynch's death in 1684, his daughter planted a tree in memory of her father. The great Tulip tree, that still stands today, is reputed to be the oldest and largest specimen in Great Britain. Soon after she sold the manor to John Latton who held a remarkable number of royal offices during the reign of William III. These included: Master of the Harriers, Master of Game at Hampton Court, Master of the Lodge at Richmond Park, Steward of the Manor of Richmond, Keeper of Windsor House Park and Head Customer of Plymouth.

In 1716 the manor was separated from the estate, which was sold to Thomas Holles Pelham, Duke of Newcastle. The manor was sold to Peter Delaperte, one of the directors of the South Sea Company. After that bubble burst in 1721, Parliament authorised that the assets of the promoters were to be seized and appropriated to the relief of their victims. Esher Place manor and estate was sold to Dennis Bond who resold it in 1729 to the Right Honourable Henry Pelham, brother of the Duke of Newcastle.



Newcastle and Pelham were, in the first half of the 18th Century, the most influential political personalities in the whole country. Their supremacy in court and Parliament was chiefly maintained by an elaborate system of jobbery and corruption. The patronage they controlled was on an unprecedented scale. They controlled the entrance to Parliament and the numerous 18th Century minor offices of the Crown to such a degree that they made and destroyed governments. Pelham himself was Prime Minister from 1748 until his death in 1754 and Newcastle from 1754 to 1756 and again from 1757 to 1762.

After Pelham had acquired Esher place he commissioned William Kent, the celebrated architect and landscape gardener, to make considerable alterations. Kent pulled down the majority of the Tudor mansion leaving just Waynflete's Tower. He added a wing on both sides and a porch to the front and probably altered the windows and roof in a style, which was supposed to correspond with the original. He also refashioned the gardens. However, Horace Walpole remarked that it '*showed how little he conceived either the principles or graces of Gothic architecture*'. Pelham died on March 6th 1754 and the estate was willed to his eldest daughter, Francis. Friends of Pelham commissioned a great urn as a memorial and positioned it near to the existing building where it can be seen today. After Francis Pelham's death the estate became the property of her nephew, Lewis Thomas, Lord Sondes.

RECENT HISTORY

The house that we now know as Esher Place has an equally compelling history as that of the original estate.

In 1805 John Spicer, a London stockbroker, purchased the estate and engaged Lapidge to build a new residence. Lapidge pulled down the manor that William Kent built for Pelham on the banks of the River Mole, leaving only the existing Waynflete's Tower. Spicer erected a new mansion on the



present site, using re-claimed masonry and bricks from the Kent house at a cost of £17,500. After the demise of the Spicer family in 1862, Money Wigram purchased the estate and sold off much of the 560 acres of park and pastureland.

In 1895, Wigram sold Esher Place with its remaining 366 acres to Edgar Vincent D'Abernon. He became financial advisor to the Egyptian government, Governor of the Imperial Ottoman Bank, MP for Exeter between 1899 – 1906 and finally His Majesty's Ambassador to Berlin 1920-26.



Esher Place - The Entrance from.

Lord D'Abernon immediately engaged G.T. Robinson and Duchene to build a new house in the French style that incorporated some of the Lapidge house as the Southwest wing. D'Abernon had what is now the Dining Room built to fit the exquisite wooden panelling he had reclaimed from the Palace of St.Germaine and also copied French designs for a Real Tennis Court building on the Northeast wing. During the

building works, Edward, the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, had a magnificent private theatre, now the Lord Chapple Room, added to the main building as a wedding present to Lady D'Abernon, a patron of the theatre as well as a great Edwardian hostess.

Aside from Prince Edward, other regular guests at Esher Place included Cecil Rhodes, and notably Anna Pavlova, the immortal Russian ballerina. She famously danced in the miniature amphitheatre, the occasion of which was captured by Marian Barker in her 'Esher Memoirs':

'One marvellously fine Sunday a most enthralling sight took place at Esher Place, Pavlova danced like a beautiful sprite on the grass amphitheatre that Lady Helen, with her great taste, had made in the grounds. All the most well known people in society crowded there to see Pavlova fluttering about like a fairy in those beautiful surroundings. I saw Mrs. Asquith, Mrs. Randolph-Churchill, Lord Balfour, Lord Hugh Cecil and many other notable people sitting round the grass on grass



seats entranced as everyone was with such a wonderful sight. I had been quite overwhelmed by the beauty of the dancing of Pavlova and Mordkin in the Ballet at the Opera, but to see Pavlova in such a setting was a sight which will remain pictured in my memory for ever.'



The Greek Theatre

The amphitheatre was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and is still a beautiful feature of the grounds today.

D'Abernon was appointed Ambassador to Berlin a position that he would hold from 1920 – 1926. Events that were to take place in The Library of Esher Place during the early 1920's served to

enhance D'Abernon's role in Anglo-German affairs. He became involved in drafting the Treaty of Locarno with the then Foreign Secretary, Austin Chamberlain and other Allies after long evening meetings the documents were placed into the strong room under the ministers seal, which can still be seen today. Despite D'Abernon's heavy involvement in creating the treaty it was Chamberlain who was ultimately rewarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1925.

The effects of the Great War and the world economic slump of the 1920's saw the demise of many great country estates throughout Britain and to that end Esher Place was no exception. The D'Arbernon's' sought a smaller residence and made an unsuccessful attempt to sell Esher Place. In 1930 D'Arbernon gave the house to The Shaftesbury Society and much of the remaining parkland was sold to Waynflete Holdings Ltd., who developed most of the houses on the private estate.



Princess Helena Victoria opened The Shaftesbury Home for Girls on November 1st, 1930, and some 180 girls were accommodated in the house until 1952. Today, many of the 'old girls' visit from across the world and recount many happy memories of their time here.

After some reorganisation within the Shaftsbury Society, Esher Place with its 8 acres of parkland was sold to the Electrical Trades Union for £23,000. After some initial refurbishment, the house opened its doors in 1953 as the first British trade union to have its own residential college, training thousands of members each year in the skills of unionism.

Today, Amicus is entirely committed to preserving the history and beauty of the Esher Place whilst providing a wide range of training and conference activities for its members and guests.