

THE HISTORY OF



by Penny Chorlton





We know from the Domesday Book, (William the Conqueror's survey of England), that there was a farmhouse at Lucknam in 1199.

Lucknam was farmed by unknown families for half a century until 1688, when the estate was left to nine cousins who promptly sold up.





The Wallis family made their fortune in cloth and owned two cargo trading ships.

In 1680 James Wallis imported 7,000 pounds of tobacco from Virginia making a huge fortune. He spent £500 of it buying Lucknam together with its 100 acres, and it was he who turned the central section of the house into a grand mansion.

When James died in 1708 his 14-year old son Ezekiel inherited Lucknam, and continued the building using stone from a local quarry mined from the estate.

It's probably around this time that the outer walls of the estate were built - some of which can still be seen today behind the woods.

Ezekiel Wallis

In 1728 he married Cecilia Selfe and served as Sheriff of Wiltshire, but unfortunately died seven years later in 1735.

Cecilia remarried and survived her second husband as well but neither marriage produced any children, so the estate then passed to her nephew Paul Methuen.

Like the Wallis's, the Methuens made their fortune as clothiers.



EMBLEMS COLLECTION



Paul Methuen was born in 1672 and had mastered French, Italian and Spanish by the age of 15. He joined the diplomatic service when he was 20.

When his father John died, he succeeded him as Ambassador to Portugal in 1706, and later Ambassador to both Spain and Morocco.

He became an MP, then Lord Commissioner of both the Admiralty and the Treasury, a Privy Councillor and Principal Secretary of State.

He travelled extensively but never married, and like the previous owners of Lucknam didn't have any children. Was there some sort of a curse on the estate?

Paul Methuen

When Sir Paul (knighted in 1725) died in 1757 he left everything to his cousin, godchild and namesake, Paul Methuen. His son, Paul Cobb Methuen (Paul Methuen III as the Americans would say) was even more fortunate being given Lucknam as a wedding present in 1776.

20 years later Paul Cobb Methuen also inherited nearby Corsham Court, the family home, making him one of the wealthiest non-aristocratic landowners in the county.

Lucknam Park was by now surplus to his needs, so once again it was put up for sale.



The new owner was naval officer William Norris Tonge who bought it for £7,750.

However he only lived here for eight years before instructing his agent to find a buyer perhaps because the family also owned the manor of Highway near Caine.

Not as distinguished and influential as the Methuens, William Tonge was nevertheless an important person, being deputy lieutenant of both Gloucestershire and Wiltshire as well as being a JP. Tonge had six sons (three of whom died young) - the youngest Louis followed his father into the navy becoming a distinguished naval gunnery officer at the end of the era of wooden ships.

In 1827 Lucknam Park came into the ownership of the Dutch aristocratic Boode family. Like the estate's owners before him, Andreas Christian Boode's father made the family fortune from the colonies. On five coffee plantations in South America's Dutch Guyana, they employed over 2000 slaves.

Andreas Boode moved to England and married the daughter of the rector of Liverpool, and it was on her death that he bought Lucknam Park and moved there with his two children - Phebe and John. It was Boode who built the grand pillared portico as well as the two bowed wings to the house. He also acquired more land.

His son John Boode did the Grand Tour of Italy, Russia, Palestine, Egypt and Turkey before marrying Clementina Bayntun in 1834 - poignantly the year slavery was abolished.

Clementina came from another great sea-faring family. Her father was Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Bayntun KCB. Sir Henry fought at The Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, as Commander of The Leviathan which was fifth in line from Nelson's flagship The Victory. He was awarded the gold Trafalgar Medal and a Sword of Honour.



EMBLEMS COLLECTION

John and Clementina's marriage was celebrated with a huge feast at Lucknam entertaining 800 guests. An artist's impression of the occasion can be seen in reception showing the guests seated at tables outside at the side of the house. The newlyweds travelled to Italy spending a year in Florence. They had four daughters, two of whom died in infancy. It must have been a stormy relationship for - most unusually for the time - Clementina left John and they later divorced.

John Boode remained at Lucknam with his two surviving daughters. He lavished money on the house - the hall was panelled in dark oak with carved beams and coats of arms on the ceiling. He added a large library which is now the Drawing Room, and a conservatory which is now Restaurant Hywel Jones.

The boudoir was heavily furnished with Jacobean panelling and stained glass windows. Soon after John's death in 1870 the estate was sold once more - perhaps because the vast fortunes from the overseas plantations had begun to dry up. Their last project was to build the distinctive water tower which even today still holds 75,000 gallons.





The new owner was Richard Walmsley who played cricket for Cambridge and lived at the house until his death at the age of 76 in 1893. There is a memorial to him in the village of Colerne. Lucknam now passed to his son Johnnie whose only son was killed in the Great War. He was so affected by the loss that he sold Lucknam together with Home Farm to Sir Alfred Read in 1918, who stayed for only 10 years.

The Merry family came to Lucknam from Scotland. James Merry was head of the second largest coal company and the third largest iron company in Scotland, and his great love was horse racing. He owned two Derby winners and in 1873 his horses won The Derby, The Oaks and The St Leger. He was said to attract little affection and to be a heavy gambler.

By now Lucknam had 1100 acres and in 1928, helped no doubt by the family coal fortune, his son Archie Merry bought Lucknam for his only son Eion Merry. Eion and his wife Jean moved in when they married in 1932. In its prime, the estate owned six working farms, houses in the neighbouring villages of Euridge and Thickwood, a Vinery, an ice-house, a brew-house and a 63-foot long Orchard House filled with fruit trees. Apples were stored in the Dovecote.

There was even a two-mile long trout stream along the side of the estate. A spring in the grounds supplied not only the estate but the entire village, until Colerne was connected to the main water supply in 1935. Cars were parked in the courtyard, staff lived in the cottages, and Snowdrop bedroom in the courtyard was the tack room.

At the outbreak of WWII Lucknam sheltered hundreds of evacuees, before becoming HQ for airmen from the neighbouring aerodrome RAF Colerne. The mile-long tree-lined driveway was used to hide spitfires and hurricanes - the huge beech and lime trees making perfect camouflage. During air raids everyone took cover under the billiard table in the dining room. The side cupboards were filled with tinned food, and the windows covered with brown paper to block out light and netting to catch splinters of shattered glass. The entire house was heated by just three fires in the Hall, Library and Drawing Room.



One of the many visitors to Lucknam during the war was the late Queen Mary who was staying at nearby Badminton House - seat of the Dukes of Somerset (and modern setting for the famous Horse Trials).

When Eion Merry died in 1966 aged 63, his widow understandably could not cope with the vast upkeep of the enormous house and its 1,720 acres.

Again Lucknam was offered for sale and bought by Jeff and Babs Stevens who bred racehorses and trained over 200 winners including Raffingora and My Swanee. They built one of the first American-style horse barns in Britain. Babs, a keen horsewoman, suffered a near-fatal riding accident when her daughter's hunter took fright at some pigs, reared and fell over backwards. Her competitive career over and with two children now grown up, in 1987 they decided to downsize.

The estate now changed identity and passed into the hands of investors. Lucknam Park Hotel was conceived, and one year and £3.5 million later a luxury country house hotel was born. The stables in the courtyard were converted into accommodation and the old fittings were eagerly snapped up by Badminton for the Horse Trials, while the greenhouse from the walled garden now stands in the garden of Lambeth Palace.

Although much of the estate had been sold separately at that time, it all came back under one banner in 1994 with new owners acquiring the property, including the stableyard and the 500 acres surrounding the hotel.

A total refurbishment of the hotel and restoration of much of the garden has been completed in the time since - including the creation of an award-winning Spa and the Walled Garden Restaurant - bringing Lucknam to a new level of luxury and comfort.

Whilst Lucknam Park has hundreds of years of fascinating history, the ongoing development ensures that the future looks bright for those who visit and enjoy their stay in these superb surroundings.



LUCKNAM PARK, EMBLEMS COLLECTION, COLERNE, SN14 8AZ

Tel: +44 (0)1225 742777

www.lucknampark.co.uk

Follow us: @lucknam_park

