

Ranmoor Society News

October 2013

Wentworth Woodhouse

Why is our next meeting on October 15th focusing on Wentworth Woodhouse (see engraving below) and the Fitzwilliam family?



Because it is considered to be one of the finest and grandest Georgian houses in England and it is four miles from Rotherham at Wentworth. It is Grade I listed and not only boasts the longest façade (185 metres) of any country house in Europe but with over 200 rooms it is certainly the largest private house in the United Kingdom. It also is surrounded by a 180-acre park and an estate of 5000 acres (now separately owned). Quite a place!

It was inherited in the 18th century by the Earls Fitzwilliam who generated huge wealth from the great quantities of coal that lay beneath the estate. The current building incorporates the original Jacobean house built by the first Marquis of Rockingham (1693–1750). It was his son the 2nd Marquis, twice the country's Prime Minister, who established Wentworth Woodhouse as an important Whig powerhouse.

The later Palladian building is thought to have been constructed as the result of rivalry between Thomas Wentworth and a nephew Thomas Watson. The former inherited the minor title "Earl of Strafford" but not the estates as he had wished. These went to the latter, who thereupon added "Wentworth" to his surname. Thomas Wentworth, a career soldier who negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht in 1715, reacted by secretly purchasing land nearby at Stainborough, near Barnsley in 1708

and commissioning two architects from the Berlin Court to design Wentworth Castle as his own baroque "rural palace". It is visible from Wentworth!

Over the following years a number of political shenanigans ensued as a result of this Fitzwilliam family rift and we may find out more about these when Melvyn Jones presents this subject at our next meeting on October 15th.

The house has been in private hands since 1979 when the Fitzwilliam line died out. However in an intriguing postscript to the family history in 1972 the 10th and last Earl Fitzwilliam ordered his employees to burn all of Wentworth's twentieth century records in what seems to have been a deliberate attempt to destroy the private papers of the 7th, 8th and 9th Earls and records of their employees. Why was it thought necessary to keep these lives so secret?

Visits to parts of the house and its gardens are now possible, and if there is sufficient interest we might arrange a group visit for the Ranmoor Society in 2014. Costs seem to range from between £10 and £25 per head according to the length of the visit.

Gifts for Budding Historians

At most Society meetings we usually give a book, related to the theme of the talk, to the lucky winner of a free raffle. Here is a selection from this year's books to inspire you to buy as a gift for yourself or another.

'Charlotte Bronte: A Passionate Life' by Lyndall Gordon, £12.99

This unconventional biography dismantles the insistent image of Charlotte Bronte as a modest Victorian lady, revealing instead a strong and fiery woman who shaped her own life and transformed it into art.

'Loxley Valley and Beyond Through Time' by Malcolm Nunn, £12.99

Reproduced in full colour, this is an exciting examination of Loxley, the famous streets and the famous faces, and what they meant to the people of this village throughout the 19th and into the 20th Century. Through the author's factual captions for every picture the reader can achieve a reliable view of this village's history.

More overleaf

'Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield's History' by David Price, £14.99

George III described Sheffield as a 'damned bad place' at a time when the town was notorious for radical agitation. This book traces this radical tradition right up to the 1980s, when David Blunkett's Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire fought Mrs Thatcher. It tells of dramatic events -- the burning of the vicar's Broomhall residence, Samuel Holberry's attempted Chartist uprising, John Ruskin's Communist experiment in Topley, the Sheffield mass trespass, and the raising of the red flag over the town hall in 1981.

'A History of Sheffield' by David Hey, £16.99

The city of Sheffield has long been synonymous with cutlery and steel, and most previous books have understandably concentrated on the momentous changes which industrialisation brought to the area over the last two hundred years. Yet the city's history goes back way beyond this. Occupying a commanding position on Wincobank, high above the River Don, are the substantial remains of an Iron Age hill-fort, built to defend the local population. Celts, Vikings and Anglo-Saxons came and left a legacy recalled in many local names. By the twelfth century William de Lovetot had built a castle at the confluence of the Don and the Sheaf, and it is likely that it was he who founded the town of Sheffield alongside his residence. A century later can be found the first reference to a Sheffield cutler, so industry in the area can be said to be at least 700 years old, and no doubt stretches back even further.

www.ranmoorsociety.com

Few societies these days are without their own website and the Ranmoor Society is no exception. To date our treasurer, Gill Battye has single-handedly not only designed it but has regularly maintained and updated it.

Many of you may have explored it whilst searching for current and back issues of our newsletter or to find details of your committee members, dates of our meetings etc.

Our current site has been up and running for a few years now but it has to be continually adjusted as new material becomes available. For various technical reasons we decided that it had become necessary to create a new version of the website in order to develop it further and make it more interactive.

This work is now being done, thanks to David Barber and Gill, and will be completed shortly.

However, fear not, if you have got used to the existing version you should have no difficulty with the new one which will still be found at www.ranmoorsociety.org. The main changes will be noticeable in the content. So keep logging on as we hope eventually to make more and more archive material available on the site. And do let us know what you think of it!

Even if you don't use the site regularly the following item may convince you of its potential value and wide geographical coverage.

In our April 2012 edition we included an item entitled "A Fulwood Road Family Business", which described the story behind the plumbing business founded by Edgar Bond in the 1890s and based at 360 Fulwood Road. This was one of the original shops in Ranmoor and some will recall that the business was still there until the late seventies. Our information source was Alan Bond, Edgar Bond's grandson who now lives in Wantage. Thanks to him and his family memories we were able to write our article.

Imagine our surprise and curiosity when last month we received the following email from someone in Canada who had read our newsletter on the website:

I just came across your newsletter of April 2012 and noticed the article on Mr Bond.

I wonder if you might forward my email address to the writer as I have Bond ancestors who came to Canada from Yorkshire way back in the 1830's, and I believe they might have had a connection to Edgar Bond's family. His name and address were in a family address book owned by my great Uncle and we have always wondered about the connection.

Best wishes, Peter Stevenson

Through our auspices Peter Stevenson and Alan Bond are now in touch and at some stage we hope to be able to report on any discoveries they have made about their respective family connections.

Future Meeting Reminders

15th Oct	Wentworth Woodhouse and the Fitzwilliam Family	Melvyn Jones
19th Nov	The Sheffield Town Trust	George Connell

Ranmoor Society Committee 2013

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