



# Friends News

The Cobham Hall Heritage Trust is reg. charity no.292332

DECEMBER 2021

Dear Members,

**We're back post-Covid and hoping that our programme of events during Winter 2021/2 will be able to go ahead as planned!**

**Thank you for your contributions to our regular newsletters. They have been very popular - please do keep them coming and send to:**  
lynn\_ellis@btinternet.com

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## Cobham Remembers ...

Cobham Parish Council organized a moving re-enactment of the 1921 dedication of the war memorial at Cobham a century ago.

The ceremony of re-enactment and re-dedication was directed by Rosemary Dymond on behalf of CPC and used the same order of service as on the original day.

It opened with a reading by Hon. Harriet Bligh, granddaughter of Ivo Bligh, 8th Earl of Darnley who had do-

nated the patch of land by the corner of Halfpence Lane and The Street. The Rev. Angela Walker lead the prayers and Mrs Wendy Barratt, Headmistress of Cobham Hall read

the 1921 reading.

The Royal British Legion contingent added to the occasion with their bugler as they stood to attention in their uniforms. But the last- ing memory for most of us

attending will be the poignancy of watching children from Cobham Primary School, dressed in 19th century fashion, in turn laying a wreath of holly and lavender as each name of the fallen of our small village

was read aloud.



Cobham Primary School children about to lay their wreaths at the War Memorial designed by Sir Herbert Baker of Owletts, Cobham



Whose house was this?(See page 3)

## We're Back on Track!

After the Covid lockdown, we're pleased to be able to resume our Calendar of Events *(subject to gov. recommendations)*

Friday, 10th December: Cameo Opera Festive Evening  
Friday, 28th January: Talk: Sir Cloudsley Shovell  
Friday, 11th February: Talk: The Order of St John  
Friday, 11th March: Choral Concert: Rainham Ladies

Sunday, 17th April (Easter Day): Daffodil Tea in the Gilt Hall, tours of house and grounds

# The Darnleys of Cobham Hall

**The first Earl of Darnley**, John Bligh, moved into Cobham Hall, the estate inherited by his wife, Theodosia, in 1725.

**The second Earl**, Edward, (born 1715) was Lord of the Bedchamber to Frederic, Prince of Wales. He was also hereditary High Steward of The Corporation of Gravesend and a Fellow of the Royal Institute. He died in 1747 unmarried and the estates passed to his brother.

**The third Earl**, John, born in 1719, was a progressive Whig nobleman and went on the Grand Tour to Europe. He brought back a large collection of pictures, including pictures by Van Dyck, Gainsborough, Rubens, Titian, Reynolds and Holbein as well as books and porcelain. He employed James Wyatt to modernise and beautify his home and the elder Sir Richard Westmacott to sculpt new fireplaces. The Earl converted the banqueting hall into the Gilt Hall and installed a Snetzler organ. He married a rich Irish heiress, Mary Stoyte and they had seven children. The Third Earl died in 1781. His funeral lasted three days and cost £1,000. As the family vault in Westminster Cathedral was full he instructed in his will that a mausoleum be constructed on the estate for his remains and those of future generations to be interred there.

**The fourth Earl** (born 1767) also John, again employed James Wyatt to design and build the mausoleum similar to the one that he had seen on his Grand Tour. Work began in 1783 and was completed by 1790 at a cost of £9,000. However, due to a dispute with the Bishop of Rochester, it was never consecrated and remained unused. There are several possible reasons why the bishop refused to proceed with the consecration. The Darnleys were an Anglo/Irish family and although they were Protestant, they were notoriously bad at paying their dues to the church. The Mausoleum itself has a pyramid roof whereas most Christian ones have domes. The symbolism on the Mausoleum is both pagan and Masonic. But, legend has it that having had lunch at the Hall, the Bishop and the Earl were walking towards the Mausoleum when there was a thunderstorm and the top was struck by lightning. The Bishop took this as a sign from on high and walked away. Nobody really knows the truth of this matter. The Mausoleum stood in isolated splendour on top of William's Hill, the highest point of the estate, not consecrated. It was looked after by a gamekeeper who lived in a nearby cottage. So the third Earl, who had been temporarily buried in Cobham Church pending completion of the Mausoleum, remains there to this day (together with the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Earls). The fourth Earl also went on a Grand Tour and brought back further artefacts to swell the collection. He married Elizabeth Brownlow, another Irish heiress. It was a true love match. He bought her an Ionic temple which still stands in the grounds today. He made various alterations to the Hall under the guidance of James Wyatt, including adding a third storey to the central part of the Hall to house the expanding collections. When King

George IV visited the house he said that the Gilt Hall was the most glorious hall in the whole of England. Humphry Repton was employed to renovate the grounds and create the newly fashionable naturalistic landscape.

**The fifth Earl**, Edward, took the title on the death of his father in 1831. But in February 1835 he was walking around the estate with some friends when he came upon some estate workers who were cutting down a tree. The Earl attempted to show how this should be done when the axe he was wielding bounced off a root and severed two of his toes. He subsequently contracted lock jaw (tetanus) and, with no antibiotics at this time, suffered a slow and painful death. His son (yet another John) was eight years old and could clearly not run the estate. Edward's wife, Emma Panell, did so for 10 years, despite being told it was not women's work and that she should sell the estate. She had erected a monument (the Toe monument) to the accident!! It's now a ruin in the woodland.

**The sixth Earl** lived until 1896. He was Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, Hereditary High Steward of Gravesend and Lieutenant Commandant of The West Kent Yeomanry. In addition to Cobham Hall he owned a house, 46 Berkley Square, London and Clifton Lodge, Athboy, County Meath, Ireland. He married Lady Harriet in 1850 and was a great friend of Charles Dickens. Dickens would walk from his house at Gads Hill, Higham to Cobham Hall and he and the Earl would walk to Cobham village to the Leather Bottle pub for a drink. When Dickens died the Earl purchased Dickens Swiss Chalet and this then stood in the grounds of Cobham Hall until 1957 when it was transferred to the Eastgate Museum in Rochester.

Cobham Hall was at its zenith during the sixth Earl's tenure. The estate in Kent was 9,309 acres producing an annual income of £20,000 (£2.5 million today). The estate in Ireland was 25,463 acres producing an income of £17,349pa. As a comparison, when the Darnleys were earning £37,000 plus per annum, the average estate worker was paid £30 per year. In 1891 the census for the Hall showed Earl John living with his wife Lady Harriet, their 4 daughters and their sons Edward and Ivo. In addition there was a butler, a valet, an under butler, 2 footmen, a hall usher (whose job it was to announce the arrival of important visitors), a school governess, a housekeeper, scullery maid, still room maid (where jam was made), a dairy maid, a school room maid, 2 nursery maids and a nurse. In the outbuildings there were 2 coachmen, one groom, one plumber and 2 gardeners.

Trouble was brewing for the Darnleys following the Irish Land Act that forced absentee landlords to sell their holdings to their tenants. Although the Darnleys were regular visitors to their Irish estates, they had to sell their holdings for 10 shillings (50p) an acre. Even worse was to follow - death duties had been introduced in 1894. John died in 1896 and the estate faced death duties of £100,000 (approx. £13 million today).

**The seventh Earl**, Edward, was very eccentric and known for having bonfires to burn many historical documents. He died unexpectedly of a chill contracted in Ireland in 1900 and the estate faced a second set of death duties. The Hall's furniture was left to his only daughter, Elizabeth, who removed and sold it all, and the empty property was passed to Edward's brother, Ivo.

**The eighth Earl**, Ivo, captained the English Cricket team in Australia in 1882/83 and won "The Ashes", which he brought back to Cobham Hall and where they stayed until 1927. One of the three Australian ladies that presented him with the Ashes urn was Florence Morphy who became Ivo's wife during that trip. When Ivo told his father about the impending wedding, his father's reply was that he could not afford a wedding! It is believed that Florence paid for the occasion.

Ivo didn't like Cobham Hall, probably because it was empty, and he rented a house in Pettistree in Suffolk (it is now a country house hotel). Subsequently he built a house at Puckle Hill (this was part-funded by the sale of pictures in 1925 by Christies and raised £70,000 (£4.5 million today). While the Hall was empty Ivo rented it out to an American heiress who lived there alone. In 1909 Ivo sold Clifton Lodge in Ireland and their London house (which is now Annabelle's nightclub).

Following the outbreak of World War I, Ivo and Florence opened the Hall as a hospital for injured Australian soldiers. Over 2,000 were treated. Florence was awarded an MBE for her services. She was a gifted painter (one of her pictures hangs in the Hall today). She loved to entertain and visitors to the Hall included Dame Nellie Melba, Rudyard Kipling and Ivor Novello.

Ivo died in 1927 and the estate began a further steep decline leading to the disposal of property on the French Riviera.

**The ninth Earl**, Esme was a gifted painter and actor. He had 3 wives, the first Daphne Mulholland, the second was Nancy Kidstone and the third, Rosemary Potter. His passion was gardening and he planted thousands of daffodils in the grounds to sell to help finance the house. Many are still there today and make a splendid show in the spring. He also built a cafe, Laughing Water, on the A2 as a very early service area. This is still there now called The Inn on the Lake.

During WW2 the house was used initially for children evacuated from Chatham because of fear that Chatham Dockyard would be bombed. This was soon realised to be a mistake as the Hall is only 7 miles from the dockyard and presents a fair size target itself from the air. Subsequently the Hall became the officers' mess for RAF Gravesend. The Earl retreated to the South Wing. He entered into long correspondence with the War Office regarding the damage caused by the officers. They remained there until

1944. The Hall only sustained minor damage at the hands of the RAF officers!

The ninth Earl tried a range of ideas to sustain the estate house: market gardening, sale of timber from the estate, opening the house to visitors, even coal mining, without any great success.

**The tenth Earl**, was Peter who, in 1957 gave up the fight to remain at the Hall, where the family had been living the life of aristocratic paupers. He and his Trustees put Cobham Hall and the 190 acres up for sale at £35,000 (£850,000 today). There were no interested parties and the Darnleys left.

So, in less than 70 years the Darnleys had sold three or four properties and over 37,000 acres - so the decline was finished. The Hall could have suffered the fate of 1,000-plus English country houses in the twentieth century and been demolished. However, The Land Fund, a government agency, bought the Hall and undertook substantial repairs. In 1962 they leased it to the Westwood Educational Trust and it became Cobham Hall School.

Peter died in 1980 and he was succeeded by his half brother Adam.

**The eleventh Earl** lived at the Hall as a boy until the property was disposed of. He later moved to Herefordshire. He died in 2018 and was buried at Hereford Cathedral.

**The twelfth Earl** is Ivo, who lives in Herefordshire with his wife Peta and three sons.

## The Darnley Story as told by Cobham Hall Guide Paul Kingman

### The RHS & Gardens Trust's Online Exhibition April 2022

This exhibition will highlight the 12 major gardens that American landscape gardener Loyal Johnson visited and catalogued in his 1928 diary following his 3 month/1500 mile bicycle trip around Britain.

The Kent branch of the Garden Trust are gathering information on Loyal's visit to Cobham Hall, one of the gardens featured.

If you have any information on Loyal Johnson's trip to Kent, please contact  
[rosemary.dymond@btinternet.com](mailto:rosemary.dymond@btinternet.com) or [sallybate@thegardentrust.com](mailto:sallybate@thegardentrust.com)

*Whose House on Page 1?* This was the London home of Ivo Bligh in Berkeley Square. It's now Annabelle's nightclub.

## MEMO

**To:** Family history researchers, local historians, pub quiz buffs and FCHHT  
**From:** Friends News  
**Subject:** The Granddaughter of the 4th Earl of Darnley

*The Sandgate Society, a local history group in the Folkestone area, is appealing for more information about a lady who, over a century ago, was a major benefactor to their community.  
CAN YOU HELP ?*



Name: Elizabeth Mary Bligh (Lilla) (1837 - 1911)

Parents: Sir John Duncan Bligh & Elizabeth Mary Gisborne

Grandfather: John Bligh, 4th Earl of Darnley (1767 - 1831)

Elizabeth's early years could inspire a novelist looking for an eventful start to a heroine's life of privilege, travel and adventure.

She was born in 1837 in Stockholm, Sweden where her father, John Bligh, worked at the Embassy to the Court of Stockholm and she was nicknamed Lilla. Sadly Lilla's mother died, aged 22, just four months after giving birth to Lilla. Her father resigned his post and returned to England soon after.

They lived at a house in Sandgate called Enbrook built on land owned by John Bligh, The 4th Earl of Darnley. (Lilla's father subsequently inherited the house, which he re-built in the 1850's and which on his death in 1872 passed to Lilla.)

The 1861 Census shows Lilla living at Enbrook with her father. It also lists five relatives staying and also eleven members of staff (a housekeeper, 2 ladies maids, an upper housemaid, a kitchen maid, a dairy maid, a housemaid, 2 butlers, a coachman and a footman.)

In 1861, aged 24, Lilla married Walter John Pelham (Lord Pelham and 4th Earl of Chichester) at St George's Church, Hanover Square in London. Lord Pelham held the office of Deputy Lieutenant of Sussex and in 1865 was elected to the House of Commons for Lewes as a Liberal MP.

It seems that the Countess spent a great deal of her time staying at Enbrook involved in charitable and "religious" work. She was widowed in 1902. She had no family of her own but many of the societies she supported aimed to improve the lives of young people and in particular, young women.. After her death in 1911, many of these organisations benefitted from her estate. The Chichester Hall in Sandgate was built as a lasting memorial to Lilla (Elizabeth) with funds raised through public subscriptions by residents who wished her to be remembered for all the support given to Sandgate over the years and it still continues to be regularly used by local groups.

*Christine Bleach of the Archive Team of the Sandgate Society says, "It has been interesting to try to discover more about Lilla, Countess of Chichester. If you have any documents or photos that we can copy/add to our records, please do contact us."*

*Did Lilla make frequent visits to see her family at Cobham Hall? Did her charity work extend to Gravesend and the Medway Towns? If you have any information, please contact Christine via [www.sandgatesociety.com](http://www.sandgatesociety.com) or [lynn\\_ellis@btinternet.com](mailto:lynn_ellis@btinternet.com)*