

September meeting of Sandbach History Society

The first meeting of the new season of monthly talks at Sandbach History Society was held at Sandbach Library on Tuesday September 1st. At a well-attended meeting, Dave Thomas, a volunteer at Tatton Park Home Farm, returned to the society for the third time to give a talk entitled “The Egertons of Tatton”.

He described how the Egerton family had owned the Tatton estate for 360 years from 1598 until 1958. The first owner was Sir Thomas Egerton (1540-1617) whose legal career led him to becoming Lord Chancellor of England under King James 1. At that time there was an uninhabited medieval Old Hall and the land was agricultural, worked by tenant farmers. However, Thomas Egerton did not live on the estate himself

The Egertons were a wealthy family with many branches. Those who owned and eventually lived at Tatton belonged to a junior branch; in time they became Earls of Bridgewater and eventually Barons Egerton. The first Egerton who actually lived at Tatton was John Egerton (1679 -1724) and he built the first Tatton Hall.

Mr Thomas talked about the various generations of Egertons who owned Tatton and said that by the eighteenth century they had become very wealthy and owned a large number of properties in Manchester and in other parts of England.

Samuel Egerton (1711-1780) played a significant part in improving the estate and replanning the park layout. He had inherited wealth, and an art collection and was also MP for Cheshire. He enlarged the Egerton farm which eventually became the Home Farm that we know today.

When Samuel Egerton died the Tatton estate was inherited by his sister Hester Tatton who already had inherited Wythenshawe estate when her husband William Tatton died. She herself died soon after and both estates passed to her son William. He changed his name to William Tatton Egerton. At that time Tatton Hall was rebuilt in the neoclassical style that we know today.

During the nineteenth century the Tatton estate flourished. Wilbraham Egerton inherited the Tatton estate on the death of his father William, whilst his brother inherited the Wythenshawe estate. Wilbraham's son, William, became the first Baron Egerton and was MP for Cheshire North. His son Wilbraham, the second Baron Egerton was a very wealthy and influential man who entertained royalty. He was instrumental in financing the Manchester Ship Canal.

In the twentieth century Wilbraham's brother, Alan became the third Baron Egerton. When he died the estate was inherited by the fourth and last Baron, Maurice Egerton.

Mr. Thomas said that Maurice was the third son of Alan de Tatton and his wife Lady Anna. He inherited the estate as both his older brothers had died young. Maurice was a very different character from previous flamboyant Egertons being shy, and unassuming.

Despite this he was an adventurer and very keen on flying. A friend of the Wright brothers he obtained his pilot's licence, bought an aeroplane, and had a landing strip built at Tatton. He owned the first car to be registered in Cheshire (registration M1) and was a big-game hunter and fisherman. During World War 11 he offered the use of Tatton Park for parachute training prior to D-Day.

In 1920 he bought land in Kenya near Njoro and subsequently spent a lot of time in the country, becoming a major landowner there. In 1939 he founded Egerton Primary School in Kenya and then subsequently an agricultural college and university. In 2005, Egerton Primary School in Knutsford, also founded by the Egerton family, developed a link partnership with its namesake in Kenya. This has led to mutual visits and other Cheshire primary schools partnering with Kenyan Schools. It is an appropriate legacy to Maurice Egerton. It is said of him that he "did more for the development of agriculture in Kenya than any other".

Finally, Mr Thomas said that when Maurice Egerton died unmarried in 1958, he bequeathed Tatton Hall and Gardens to the National Trust, the parkland being sold to pay death duties.

Today Cheshire East manages and maintains Tatton Park on behalf of the National Trust. National Trust members and their families are still required to pay to visit the Mansion, Gardens and Farm, due to the involvement of the Council.

The next meeting of Sandbach History Society will be in Sandbach Library on Tuesday October 6th at 8pm when Jeremy Nicholls will give a talk entitled, "Britain's Railways and the First World War". Visitors are very welcome; please contact Aileen Thompson on 01270 760810 or by e-mail at aileen.thompson@btinternet.com

Richard Vickery

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