

THE RESTORATION OF THE HALL, GOADBY MARWOOD

In the last year of the Millennium, the Hall changed hands. Miss Monica Sheriffe, who had lived there for most of her life, died in March 1999 aged 96 and, having no immediate family, bequeathed the house and land to her favourite godchild.

Captain Sheriffe and his wife had bought the house in 1920 from the Duke of Rutland's estate (the whole village of Goadby Marwood was sold at that time) and it was to be the family home with their two daughters, Monica and Joan.

Joan was married to Toby Greenall of the brewing family and she tragically died in 1926 in a hunting accident whilst carrying her first child. The graves of them all can be seen in the churchyard.

Monica Sheriffe was a well-known figure in local society and was a keen horse-woman with interests in racing as well as being an active member of the Belvoir Hunt. She never married although she had many admirers.

On the 16th March 1999 on a beautiful Spring day and following her funeral in Grantham, a thanksgiving service was held in St. Deny's Parish Church, Goadby Marwood. It co-incided with the first day of the Cheltenham race meeting and sadly many of her horse-racing friends could not attend. The Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, Lord and Lady Manton, Lady Sarah McCorquodale (sister to Diana, Princess of Wales) were among those attending. The Duke of Devonshire, who first met Miss Sheriffe at Cheltenham, gave a stirring address.

Following a reception in the Salon of the Hall, the will was read to the family members. There was to be great change.

In "The Buildings of England" by Nikolaus Pevsner published in 1960, the description of the Hall is as follows :

"Rainwater head 1750. Seven-bay front of two storeys, the centre three bays raised to two and a half and endowed with a pediment. Giant angle pilasters. Big good doorway with Tuscan columns, Metope frieze and pediment. Two-storyed entrance hall with arched access to the staircase, which has elegantly turned balusters and curved tread-ends. The ceilings of both these rooms are restrainedly decorated in plaster."

The Hall itself had not been touched since 1929. There were major works to be done to the fabric of the building, not least to the roof which was badly in need of repair. The gardens and parkland, which contains a network of 4 ornamental fishponds, also had been neglected for years and that was where the work commenced.

In July 1999 the machinery moved in to remove the years of built-up silt in the first 3 lakes. It was a huge undertaking involving two 360° JCB diggers and 4 hydraulic dump trucks working from dawn till dusk for 3 months. The lakes firstly had to be drained of much of their water before the diggers could begin to dredge. It is estimated that 6000 truck-loads of silt were removed from the lakes. These were taken in turn to a field nearby and left to dry out prior to landscaping.

Whilst the work was being carried out to the lakes, 3 human skeletons were discovered by the first lake and work stopped for a day whilst it was established that they were anything between 300 and 1000 years old. Roman coins were also found.

The lakes have been restored to their original design and make a magnificent backdrop to the house itself. The fourth lake remains untouched at the present time.

Whilst work was progressing on the lakes, planning permission was being sought to re-configure some of the rooms within the Hall. Being Grade II* listed, all proposed changes had to meet the approval of English Heritage as well as Melton Borough Council.

Work began on the house itself in October 1999, the scaffolding was erected and the roof started to be overhauled. It had been leaking badly and had to be reinstated with Collyweston slating and lead panels. The external walls had to be redressed and Ashlar ironstone replaced where necessary.

The 64 sash windows all had to be repaired and carefully restored to their original condition. This included replacing all the sash cords which amounted to 300 metres of cord.

The chimneys had not been well maintained over the years and the 33 flues had to be swept producing an amazing 105 sacks of soot!

The internal wooden floors were miraculously still in perfect condition. They were originally laid on 3rd August 1750 by James Brooks of Melton who signed the boards "Joyner and Organ Builder".

The existing piping for the plumbing and heating was mostly intact although additional bathrooms were installed as there were only three. The kitchen was moved from its original location to a more convenient position within the house. It was re-located to the billiard room which had been created in 1920.

The whole house had to be re-wired and the central heating, designed by William Freer of Leicester in 1910, updated with some additional radiators heated by one very powerful boiler.

The house and grounds are by no means finished and work continues on a daily basis. The people of Goadby Marwood are very appreciative that the Hall is to remain as a family home and welcome the new owners to their village of which they are justly proud.

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