

HALL GROVE

BAGSHOT

SURREY

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A

HISTORY

by

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IN THE TIME of Henry II, who ruled in England between 1154 and 1189, the site of Hall Grove was owned by one Ralph. By 1214 it had passed to Robert of London. Circa 1327 Edward III gave the estate to his uncle, Edmund of Woodstock, Earl of Kent, who in 1331 was beheaded by the intrigue of Mortimer [himself beheaded shortly afterwards]. It subsequently passed back to Edmund's daughter, Joan [1328-1385], called 'the Fair Maid of Kent'. At her death it reverted to the Crown. In 1621 James I granted it to Sir Edward Zouch.

Until the onset of the 18th century, the only houses of note hereabouts were Hall Grove and the Lodge, in Bagshot Park. According to the late David Graham, headmaster of Hall Grove School during restoration work in 1957, at that date some half-timbering was uncovered which may have formed part of the original Hall Grove. Manning & Bray's *History and Antiquities of Surrey* [vol iii p.162] states that the mansion was owned in the late 17th century by a family named Attfield, who sold on circa 1690 to a Mr. Montague. A decade or so later, Montague sold to Charles Rackett [whose name is spelled 'Racout' in a list of Surrey freeholders dated 1701]. Rackett, the son of a City of London merchant named Michael Rackett [d.1697], married Magdalen, the half-sister of the poet and satirist, Alexander Pope [1688-1744]. We know from his letters that Pope frequently visited his sister and brother-in-law at Hall Grove.

The Racketts, who were staunch Roman Catholics, continued to reside at Hall Grove until Charles's death in 1728. By then the estate was encumbered with debt and for much of her widowhood Magdalen lived elsewhere, probably with her brother Pope at Binfield in Berkshire. Meanwhile, Hall Grove was let to a Mr. Butler, possibly James Butler, who is thought to have been a relative of the Earl of Arran who was then living at Bagshot Park. In 1731 the landholding was let to a local farmer. The house was standing empty.

According to the *Correspondence of Alexander Pope* [vol iii p.223] it was hoped that 'a certain Duke' would rent it, although nothing seems to have come of this. In 1739 Pope wrote to Charles Rackett's eldest son and heir, Michael, in very gloomy tones stating that as a consequence of the laws against Papists: 'the moment my Sister Dyes [the authorities] will inevitably Enter on the Estate and Receive the Rents in your Stead till all the Debts be paid ... The House will every year be worth less and less [being in a Decaying State] and the Whole Land without it is let but at £55 a year ...'

Pope advised Rackett to sell Hall Grove to a Protestant after his mother's death. In that way, said Pope, he might expect to receive 'some hundreds of pounds soon'. However, Pope relates that the estate was still unsold towards the end of 1739.

According to Martyn Gregory's *Georgian Houses Rediscovered* - whose source was an inscription on the back of a gouache portrait of Hall Grove - during the 1770s the mansion was the home of John Williams Esquire, who may have owned the house or been the tenant of Ralph Leycester, of whom more hereafter. We know from an entry in the *Gentleman's Magazine* that John Williams was a prosperous East India merchant. This was an era when the *world* anticipated making a financial killing in Asia - from the Court of Directors of the East India Company sitting in their ornate offices in Leadenhall Street, to the company's network of military and civil servants out East. One might add to this every member of the army [regardless of rank] the numerous independent merchants living in the three British Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay - and the whole array of native Indian rulers ranging from Moslem sultans and Hindu rajas, to hordes of freebooters scouring the villages.

'John Company' had long-established trading stations in India. It served as the agent of British Administration there, despite the unfitness for political power of a company formed for trade. It used its private army to police the area and to enforce its edicts. This force, which exceeded those of most sovereign states, was afterwards incorporated into the British army. The East India Company was a national institution with ornate offices in Leadenhall Street. It had grown from a loose association of Elizabethan merchants into 'the Grandest Society in the Universe'. As a commercial enterprise it came to control half the world's trade and as a political entity it administered an embryonic empire. A tenth of the country's revenue derived from duty on East India Company imports. Without it there would have been no British India and no British Empire.

The next owner of Hall Grove, Ralph Leycester, rebuilt the house more or less along the lines you see today, probably about 1780. It originally had a mansard roof, which was still *in situ* as late as 1832. About 1809 Leycester, who followed no occupation other than that of landowner, removed to Toft in Cheshire. On 16 August of that year the following advertisement appeared in *The Times*. It is the earliest reference to the property so far found in newspapers. It reads:

Surry [sic] – Capital Freehold Residence, Lands, Pleasure-grounds &c on the Great Western Road 26 miles from London - By Mr. Farebrother at Garraway's [coffee-house] on Wednesday August 16 at twelve, unless an acceptable offer is previously made by Private Contract.

Hall Grove, the residence of Ralph Leycester, removing into Cheshire; consisting of a capital Family Residence, with complete domestic offices of every description, seated on a genteel eminence, in the centre of an estate of 100 acres of land, disposed in lawn, pleasure-ground, walled garden, fully cropped, sheet of water, shaded walk of nearly two miles in extent, enclosed by a beautiful treillage, a farmhouse and suitable buildings; together with sundry enclosures of rich, arable meadow, and pasture land, well fenced and divided, possessing very valuable and

extensive common rights. This estate commands most extensive views over the surrounding country, complete with picturesque views of hill, dale, wood and water, and is situate 14 miles from Farnham, 12 from Guildford, 8 from Egham, 10 from Windsor, and 26 from London. To be viewed; particulars held at the principal Inns at the places before mentioned; at Garraway's; of John Birek Esq., Solicitor, Chancery-lane; and of Mr. Farebrother, 7 Beaufort-buildings, Strand.

We know that after moving to Cheshire Ralph Leycester retained a London town-house, there being references in his will to 'my London linen' and to 'my London plate' etc. He was at a meeting of the committee for the Aid of Distressed Seamen at London's King's Head Tavern on 6 February 1818; and attended another at the Thatched House Tavern on Saturday 30 May of the same year held by 'the proprietors of and subscribers to' the Opera House [now the Royal Opera House] Covent Garden, at which he was one of fourteen members selected to form the committee.

Judging from his will, which was proved 31 July 1835, Ralph Leycester was a thoroughly amiable family man. He refers to his 'dear wife', whom he granted an income of a thousand pounds a year for life, and to 'dear Emma' and 'dear Charlotte', his daughters, who each received the interest on £5,000 invested in 'the three percents' [i.e. 3 percent consols]. Another daughter, who had died, is referred to as 'poor dear Laura'. Her legacy from 'her Uncle George' was distributed among her sisters.

At the time of his death, Ralph Leycester held shares in a number of companies including the Birmingham and Liverpool Railway and the Manchester Waterworks. He left instructions that 'my funeral expenses [should] be as small as decently can be' and that 'neither pulpit nor pew nor any part of [the] church be put in mourning'. His hearse was to be 'attended by four tenants on horseback'. Provided it was not inconvenient, his 'Steward, Butler, Gardner, Gamekeeper and Livery Servants' were to be put 'in mourning'. To each of the maids employed at Toft he left five guineas, the equivalent in modern money of perhaps £300. It may be that he suspected his son and heir, Ralph Gerrard Leycester, of extravagant tendencies because he added a caveat to his will that 'if in early life he over spends within a thousand pounds a year of his income he will inevitably be distressed as he advances [i.e. in years] and his family increases'.

At the sale of 1809 or subsequently the Hall Grove Estate was purchased by William Dumbleton. However, for most of the 1820s it was occupied by Richard and Elizabeth Birt, probably as the tenants of the Dumbletons to whom they may have been related by marriage.

The will of Richard Birt was proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 24 September 1822. It is short and to the point, leaving all 'my Real and personal

property to my dearly beloved wife ...’ On Saturday 7 December 1822 the following advertisement appeared in the *London Morning Chronicle*:

‘Choice and Curious Wines:- By Mr. Christie at his Great Room, Pall Mall, on Tuesday the 17th instant at One precisely, by order of the Executrix, a small Cellar of Choice and Curious Wines, the genuine property of Richard Birt Esquire, deceased, now lying at his late Country Residence, Hall Grove near Bagshot, Surrey, from whence they will be delivered to the purchasers. They consist of about 40 dozens of very superior Port, 40 dozen of curious East India sherry, 10 dozen of Bucelas¹, six of old Malmsey ...’

Elizabeth Birt was still living here in her widowhood in 1829; but the occupant at the taking of the 1851 census was William Dumbleton’s widow, Augusta [1785-1854], who described herself as ‘landed proprietor of 120 acres employing seven labourers’. When she died in 1854 her son and heir, William Dumbleton, sub-let the house and estate to Charles Hulse, a prosperous barrister-at-law who was also a director of the British Candle Company [‘capital £200,000’ or about £10m in modern money]. This company which had a large works at Bow in east London, supplied candles to Queen Victoria at Buckingham and Kensington Palaces, and at Windsor Castle. In 1855 it exported candles in excess of five million pounds in weight.

Henry Dumbleton, who may have been William’s son, took the house back into his own occupation about 1868. In 1871 he and his wife, Clara, were living here with their seven children ranging in ages from five to twenty-two. There were nine resident domestics: a governess, a lady’s-maid, a cook, a parlour-maid, two housemaids, a nursemaid, a kitchen-maid and a page, Alfred Harris 15 who, when not making a leg for visitors and conducting them to the drawing-room, probably acted as the boots-boy and resident tease to the housemaids. Other servants such as gardeners and laundry-maids, lived nearby.

At some date after 1871 Hall Grove was sub-let to Thomas Sellar [1820-1885], a prosperous merchant who made his fortune trading with America and who may have been related by marriage to the Dumbletons. Sellar is believed to have been the son of Patrick Sellar [1780-1851] who, as the chief agent of the Scottish clearances became one of the most reviled characters in the history of that country. As such, something should be said of him here.

The only son of an Elgin solicitor named Thomas Sellar [1754-1817] by his wife, Jean Plenderleath, a daughter of the minister of College Church, Edinburgh, Patrick Sellar was trained up for the law, entering the family business of Sellar and Young in 1803. Six years later this firm began to advise Elizabeth Leveson-Gower, Lady Stafford, who had already embarked on ambitious plans to ‘improve’ her vast Highland estate in Sutherland. In 1810 Sellar and Young was appointed to manage

¹ A white wine, very popular in the late Georgian era and sometimes called ‘Portuguese hock’.

the estate. Patrick Sellar was responsible for rent collection and evictions. Like many a landowner, Lady Stafford considered agricultural farming unprofitable. In consequence, many small tenants were evicted, their houses pulled down and their farms given over to pasture for sheep farming. Sellar himself became a sheep farmer on a large scale.

A man of utter ruthlessness, his tactics ultimately led to him being tried at Inverness in April 1816 accused of acts of 'gross inhumanity', including culpable homicide. In the course of the 1814 clearances he was alleged to have caused the deaths of several tenants including a hundred-year-old woman, by setting fire to their houses. The tale goes that the woman's sister, a witch, placed a curse on the Sellar family which decreed that within three generations the male line would die out. [It didn't, but it was a close run thing, only a single great great grandson surviving to carry forward the family name.]

Patrick Sellar, who would almost certainly have had no truck with such superstitious nonsense, 'routed his accusers' and was 'completely exonerated' - by a jury of fellow landowners - although many considered the verdict 'a job' and the controversy 'did not abate'. The firm of Sellar and Young, who regarded Patrick as 'undiplomatic and harsh', soon 'eased him out of the Sutherland management'. He was highly regarded as an 'agricultural adviser and expert on sheep'. Nevertheless, the old charges would not go away and 'to the continuing fury of his family' his 'reputation and memory were repeatedly sullied, especially by recurrent claims that he had been guilty of the charges levelled against him in 1816'. His case was not helped by the fact that he had substantially enriched himself through his activities as Lady Stafford's agent. Between 1838 and 1844 he purchased the estates of Ardtornish and Acharn in Morvern, Argyll, paying £29,850 for 21,575 acres, a knock-down price. He evicted two hundred and thirty people, pulled down their homes and stocked the land with Cheviot sheep from Sutherland. His family played host at Morvern to Francis Palgrave, Alfred Tennyson, Herbert Spencer, Benjamin Jowett and George Eliot.

By nature 'argumentative and combative', Sellar soon quarrelled with his new neighbours. He came to personify all that was odious about the Highland clearances. He was always 'severely critical of the old Highland ways' and thought that it would be best for everybody's sake if all Highlanders emigrated to America or Australia. He advocated the suppression of Gaelic and the compulsory teaching of English. He had 'an exceptionally sharp turn of phrase and a caustic intelligence.' He lies buried in the churchyard of Elgin Cathedral. Curiously, given his controversial life and character, his death passed unnoticed by *The Times*. He left a net personalty of £11,596 15s 6d., the equivalent in modern money to perhaps £700,000.

In 1819 Sellar married Anne, a daughter of Thomas Craig of Barmuckty, Elgin. They had nine children. As Sellar's notice in the *Dictionary of National Biography* records: 'members of this large family were 'successful in several fields of Victorian

society, and they conducted business in England, Australia and the United States'. The latter reference is almost certainly to Thomas Sellar of Hall Grove, an America merchant. One of his brothers, William Young Sellar, was Professor of Latin at Edinburgh University, and another, Alexander Craig Sellar, was a Scottish politician and a luminary of the Scottish bar.

A website called 'Local Heritage Services in Moray Scotland', gives the date of birth of Patrick Sellar's son, Thomas, the occupant of Hall Grove, as 12 January 1820. The same source states that he died 22 October 1885 at Villa Laureol, Cannes, where he was probably vacationing or perhaps convalescing. [It may be coincidental that his son's father-in-law, James Brown Selkirk, also had a villa at Cannes.] His obituary notice gives his permanent English address at the time of his death as 'Hallgrove, Bagshot'. He also owned a London townhouse, No.3 Rutland Gate, Kensington, where he was residing as a 61-year-old widower on census night 1881 with three unmarried daughters: Azemia 27, Emma 26 and Isabella 24. All three girls had been born in Lancashire. In 1881 their father was following no occupation other than that of an [unpaid] Justice of the Peace.

The announcement of his death, 'in his sixty-sixth year' was published in *The Times* 24 October 1885. Three months before his passing, 24 July 1885, he attended a banquet at the Westminster Palace Hotel, London. As this banquet for over two hundred people was given to honour Lord Spencer, we can assume that Sellar was a Liberal in politics. He is thought to have left several children in addition to those shown on the 1881 census. He fails to appear on the 1851 and 1871 censuses perhaps because he was on business in America. He died eleven months to the day before his eldest son, Patrick John Arthur Sellar [1858-1886] and was therefore spared all knowledge of that young man's tragic end.

Patrick disliked his first name - probably because of its negative associations with his grandfather - and chose to be known as Arthur. He may have used the money he inherited on the death of his father to seek a new life in Colorado with his bride, Ella Burn [1866-1888] *nee* Brown, the daughter of a prosperous woollen manufacturer named James Brown of Selkirk, Scotland, better known as the 'Border Poet', James Brown Selkirk [1832-1904] who was greatly admired by other writers including Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

Arthur and Ella had married in the parish church at Selkirk on 17 May 1887. It was about this time that the infamous gambler, Doc Holliday, the consumptive survivor of the gunfight at the OK Corral, was riding into Glenwood Springs, Colorado, some three thousand miles away. On Arthur's twenty-eighth birthday, 22 June 1887, the bride and groom set out for America. They may have been persuaded to this course by the fact that Arthur's father had made his money trading with America; and it is possible that Arthur had spent at least some part of his early life in that country and was therefore familiar with it.

They arrived safely in the emerging spa town of Defiance and took rooms adjacent to those of Doc Holliday at the Hotel Glenwood. The view from the window would have been a panorama of tents, saloons and brothels with an increasing number of cabins and lodging establishments. The town was largely populated by the expected crowd of gamblers, gunslingers and prostitutes, masquerading as saloon-bar entertainers. The town's founder, Isaac Cooper, persuaded the elders to change the name to Glenwood Springs after Glenwood, Iowa, the beloved home town of his wife, Sara, who was having difficulty in adjusting to frontier life.

Arthur found a job in a bank and started buying up land in anticipation of Glenwood becoming a boom spa resort. He paid sixteen thousand dollars for almost ninety plots of land, money which may have formed part of his patrimony. Arthur, however, was accident-prone. He survived being hit by a mine truck loaded with silver ore, and was merely 'bruised up' when the stagecoach in which he was travelling either uncoupled or overturned. Finally - third time unlucky - after drinking contaminated water he contracted typhoid fever and died in his bed at the Hotel Glenwood at 11.30 a.m. on the morning of 22 September 1887. He was buried in the local cemetery. He was twenty-eight and had been married for four months.

Shortly after Arthur's death, Doc Holliday lapsed into a coma which lasted about six weeks. It is said that he 'had escaped the noose four times and been shot five times'. At 10 a.m. on 8 November 1887 he woke, drank a tumbler of whisky, muttered 'That's funny' and died. He was thirty-six. He was buried close to Arthur Sellar in the town's Linwood Cemetery, known as Boot Hill, at Jasper Mountain.

The following spring, Ella gave birth to a son, Thomas. This poor little creature soon died. Three months later, 30 June 1888, Ella died of causes unknown and followed her husband and son to the grave, her money almost entirely exhausted. Arthur had left just £777 and Ella had spent most of this on room rent and frugal living. The plots of land for which Arthur had paid sixteen thousand dollars were subsequently sold to a speculator named Hervey Lyle for just ten dollars. Lyle, who lies buried close to the Sellars at Boot Hill, made a large profit from the transaction doing exactly what Arthur had proposed to do - selling the plots to new settlers who had come West to fulfil their dreams. It is now one of the most affluent regions of Colorado, defined by the valley of the Roaring Fork River and its tributaries. It includes the communities of Aspen and Glenwood Springs.

The marble cross which once surmounted Arthur and Ella's grave at Boot Hill is broken. It 'toppled years ago and lies awkwardly in the dust, where it fell', a silent testament to the broken dreams of a now all but forgotten couple.

At a date unknown, but probably shortly after Thomas Sellar's death in 1885, Hall Grove was acquired by Stephen Soames, a solicitor and director of companies, including a brewery company. However, in 1887 the house is known to have been

the residence of Samuel Laing [1812-1897], the politician, administrator and influential writer on science and religion. On 1 December 1887 Laing wrote from Hall Grove to the editor of *The Daily News* concerning the rights of tenants under an Act of Parliament of 1870.

The son of the travel writer, Samuel Laing [1780-1868], our Samuel Laing [1812-1897] was called to the bar in 1837. He served as Secretary to the Railway Department under successive Presidents of the Board of Trade, becoming an acknowledged authority on the railways and, ironically, an opponent of government interference in matters of railway operation. He was instrumental in the introduction of third-class carriages in which the charge per passenger per mile was restricted to no more than a penny. This saw a rise of third class passengers from 28% in 1844 to 78% in 1875. In 1848 Laing was appointed Chairman and Managing Director of the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway, the London terminus for which was Victoria Station. Under his management passenger traffic almost doubled in five years.

In 1860 Lord Palmerston persuaded Laing to become Financial Minister to the British Crown in India. In 1852, on his retirement from the chairmanship of the London to Brighton line, he entered parliament in the Liberal interest as the member for Wick. He returned to India for a time but in the 1860s re-entered parliament. In 1884 he published a careful and moderate indictment of what would now be called Little Englandism in *England's Foreign Policy*. He achieved considerable fame, past seventy years of age, when in 1885 he published *Modern Science and Modern Thought*, described by his notice in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as ‘very widely read, being, in fact, an admirable popular exposition of the speculations of Darwin, Huxley and Spencer and the incompatibility of the data of modern science and “revealed religion” ’.

Laing died aged eighty-six in 1897 and lies buried in Brighton's extramural cemetery. He was caricatured by ‘Spy’ [Leslie Ward] in *Vanity Fair* in August 1873, when he was forty years of age. A photograph taken towards the end of his life shows him as very stout with the beard of an Old Testament prophet.

In 1901 Stephen Soames was sharing Hall Grove with Julia, his wife of thirty-eight years, a daughter of William Bennett Martin of Worsborough Hall, Barnsley. Soames, who had been called to the bar of Lincoln's Inn in 1851, was one of Her Majesty's Lieutenants for the City of London. The 1911 census shows the house in the care of a solitary servant who attested that it then had thirty-five rooms including the kitchen but excluding any lobbies, landings, closets, bathrooms or sculleries. By this date the owner was Elizabeth Henrietta, Dowager Countess of Clanwilliam, a daughter of Sir Arthur Edward Kennedy G.C.M.G. and the widow of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Richard James Meade [1832-1907], 4th Earl of Clanwilliam, who had died

in 1907 after forty years of marriage. Lady Clanwilliam also owned a London town-house, No.32 Belgrave Square SW1.

Lady Clanwilliam occupied Hall Grove during her widowhood with her two daughters, Lady Katherine and Lady Beatrice Meade, neither of whom ever married. The family was on friendly terms with a number of members of the Royal family and on 4 July 1917 'Princess Patricia of Connaught opened at Hall Grove a baby show, sale of work and a garden fete'. In Lady Clanwilliam's day the telephone number here was *Bagshot 6*. On her death, Hall Grove [sometimes spelled 'Hallgrove' in records] passed to her eldest girl, Lady Katherine Meade, whose home this was for almost fifty years.

With a large income and few interests outside her own very circumscribed circle, Lady Katherine devoted her life to assisting various female members of the Royal family. She served as lady-in-waiting to H.R.H. the Duchess of Albany from 1910 to 1922 and in a similar capacity from 1923 to 1926 to H.R.H. the Duchess of York [subsequently the consort queen of George VI and afterwards Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother]. She also served many years as lady-in-waiting to Princess Alice [1883-1981], the last surviving grandchild of Queen Victoria and the wife of the Earl of Athlone. Princess Alice often stayed with Lady Katherine at Hall Grove. On 17 June 1932 *The Times* recorded that the previous afternoon, Gold Cup day at Ascot, Princess Alice and her husband, accompanied by Lady Katherine Meade had 'come over from Hall Grove, Bagshot'.

Lady Katherine lived on at Hall Grove until her death. On 28 June 1955 her executors advertised a sale of her effects and furniture in *The Times*. The lots which went under the hammer included 'porcelain, silver, pictures, carpets, linen'. The house was also sold. For many years now it has been in the possession of the Graham family and run as a school.