

News Shopper

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Old spoon could hold the key

WHAT links the Queen Mother, the tomb of the Unknown Warrior and Charles Wesley, the founder of Methodism? Answer: the Blendon Hall Estate.

It was the country seat of various titled families for hundreds of years and was also home for a small army of domestic staff. At the time of its sale in 1929, it was an estate of 85 acres, situated west of Bexley.

Blendon probably got its name from Henry and Eadwin of Bladindon who were prominent tenants of the Bexley Manor before King John signed the Magna Carta in 1215. The location is referred to as "Bladindon Court".

In the Civil War, it was clearly a Royalist location. In 1739, Thomas Delamotte JP, the occupant, invited the Wesleys and George Whitefield to stay at the Hall. Whitefield preached in the courtyard of the Hall to 300 people because the incumbent priest at Bexley Church would not allow him to preach there.

Roger Mayo, who is an expert on the Hall and used to live in the area, said: "We have recovered a few artefacts from this early period and there is an old mulberry tree, which is still flourishing and we believe dates from Elizabethan times."

Lady Mary Scott built a "neat mansion" (Hasted) on the site of the original building in 1762. It was this building which survived to 1934 and is pictured. In the early 19th century, Humphrey Repton landscaped the grounds, planting the plane trees, cedars and chestnuts which survive to this day.

It was in 1853 that Claude Bowes-Lyon married Frances Dora Smith - daughter of Oswald Smith, the owner of the estate. She was the Queen Mother's grandmother.

At the end of the First World War, Warrior, a horse which had served in the war in France, helped tow the hearse of the Unknown Warrior and was then given to the estate, where he was able to spend his last years.

When Jim Bowyer's father bought the estate in 1929, the plan was to develop the land around the Hall and the lakes. No buyer could be found for the Hall however, and in 1934 it was demolished. It is now a housing estate.

Mr Mayo said: "It's very sad. If it had been further out from London or sold at a different time, it may have survived but, if so, many of us would not now be living here."

Mr Mayo, Geoff Holland and Jim Bowyer - whose father bought the estate in 1929 for just £29,000 - recently spoke about the history of the Hall and the Estate to more than 200 residents in a packed St James Church in Blendon.

Mr Mayo added: "We expected some local interest but the response was fantastic and very rewarding."

"We want to hear from anyone who has memories of the estate, especially pre-war, or who had a relative who worked or lived there. Photographs, artefacts or items sold at the auction in 1929 are especially welcome.

"We know there is a lot to be retrieved on the estate and we have railings, bricks and even original grass to check out!"

The talk was so popular that Roger is thinking of writing a book on his findings and is planning an updated talk later in the year.

By that time, the British Museum may well have given its opinion on the brass spoon which was found in the 1930s on the site of the lake bed. The Curator of Bexley Museum has dated it as 15th or early 16th century and will be taking the spoon personally to the British Museum to be evaluated.