

Living History

Yarpole Group Parish
2000



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Living History.

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2007.

The evening of Friday 20th July saw the worst flooding in Yarpole in living memory:

We intend to compile a dossier on the event and would welcome any photographs of, and comments on, the damage/inconvenience caused by the flood which you may have experienced.



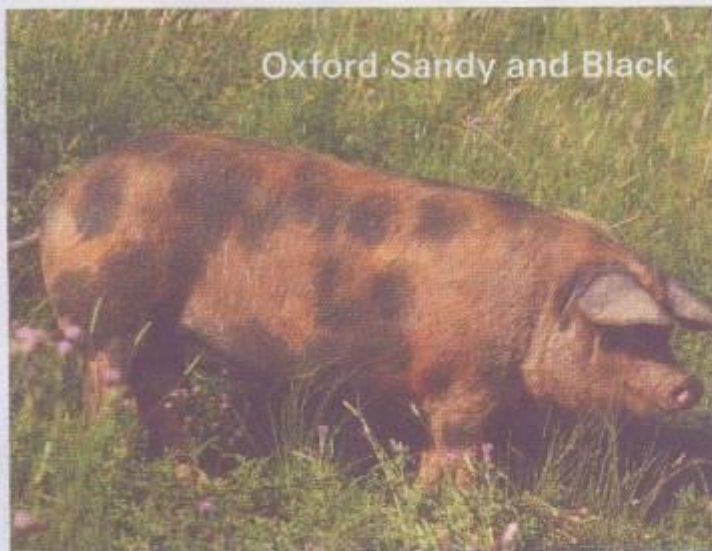
The Old Gatehouse: Contact has been made directly with the Conservation Officer and with the estate's solicitors through Vi Jones. The building is to be made 'wind and weather proof'; we will continue to monitor the damage.

Church /Shop Project: We have offered to act as the Historical Recorder for this project. Initially this will require the collection of photos, minutes of meetings, newspaper articles etc.

If you have passed the entrance to Middleton's Farm, Upper Green Lane, and wondered what Oxford Sandy and Black Pigs look like?

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**OXFORD SANDY
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Well, now you know!



The Fete, which was held in the Church because of the inclement weather, was a great success for the Group with 3 new members recruited. It is considered that the displays on the pews encouraged more interest and public participation, and so we will look at the possibility of prefabricating some sort of similar but portable upright display for use at the Fete in 2008.

The Community Access Point (CAP) is now up and running and we have agreed that the AGM and our regular meetings should, in future, be held in the Parish Hall and that we should try to use the CAP equipment at these meetings.

Did you ever wonder what happened at Croft Castle during the period 1746-1923, when the Croft family did not own the estate? Well, the first instalment, 1746-1800, of that history is attached as is another Article in our 'Oral History' series – an Interview with May Talbot.

A copy of *A History of Lucton* by Richard and Catherine Botzum, published privately in the 1980s, has been loaned to us; it would appear to have been well researched and we are looking into the possibility of publishing it as a series of three or four Articles.

*The next meeting will be our Annual General Meeting
and will be held on*

THURSDAY 25th OCTOBER at 8 p.m
in the C'tee Room of the Village Hall.

If you wish to raise anything, make a suggestion, contribute an Article or submit an idea for a future Article, you can speak to Ron on 780770.

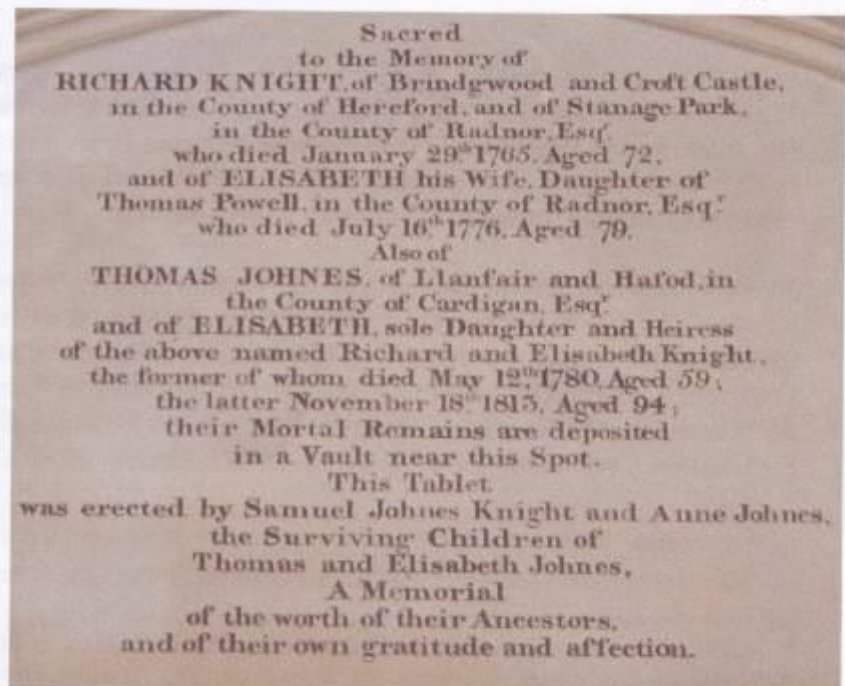
The History of Croft – 1746-1800.

The Croft family held Croft from the 11th century until the mid-18th century, seven centuries of continuous public service with several members gaining national prominence. Their illustrious history is comprehensively and meticulously chronicled in *The Crofts of Croft Castle*, by O.G.S. Croft, published in 1949; but the history of the Castle has had to be revised in the light of the archaeological excavations carried out over the past four years; the full report is expected early in 2008.

The Civil War (1642 – 1651) almost ruined the Crofts financially; Herefordshire was a Royalist stronghold and Sir William Croft who was one of the leaders of the King's party was killed. The Castle was dismantled to prevent it being used as a fortress by the Parliamentarians and following the War it was poorly restored.

In 1746 the already mortgaged property was surrendered by Sir Archer Croft M.P. (having lost money in the 'South Sea Bubble' of 1720), to Richard Knight III of Downton whose family had been iron-masters; his grandfather, Richard Knight of Madely in Worcestershire, having been engaged in the iron trade at the time of the Commonwealth (1649-1660) had built up a considerable fortune. His son and namesake derived immense wealth from the business and settled at Downton, where he lived until his death in 1745 when his large fortune was divided between his four sons; the eldest being the Richard Knight III who acquired the Croft Estate in 1746, having already acquired parts of the estate and all of the Lucton Estate.

In the same year his only daughter, and sole heiress, Elisabeth, married Thomas Johnes, (pronounced 'Jons') who was one of the largest land-owners in West Wales and described as "a man of public importance". In 1748 their first son, Thomas Johnes II, was born.



Memorial wall plaque in Croft church

Thomas II had two distinguished cousins; Thomas Andrew Knight and his elder brother, Richard Payne Knight;

Thomas Andrew Knight (1759-1838) was a renowned horticulturist and established the scientific basis of fruit-breeding – specialising in the breeding of new varieties of apple. In 1804 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society and held the post of President of the Royal Horticultural Society for 27 years.

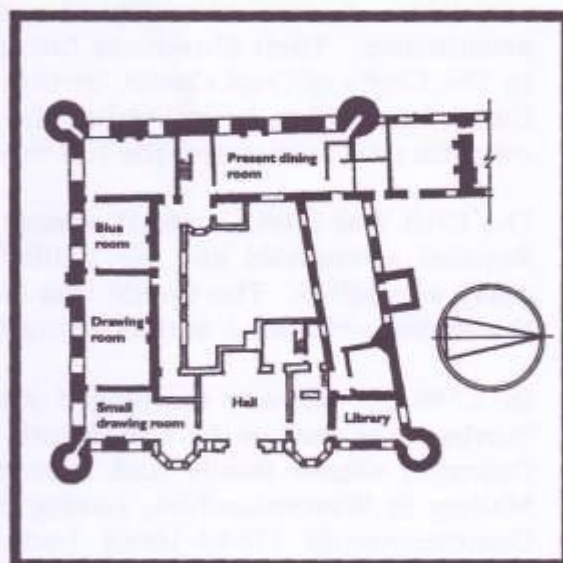
Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824) was a classical scholar and connoisseur best known for his philosophical theories on the 'Picturesque Style' of landscape design, as expressed in his poem *The Landscape*; he was to be a close friend of Thomas Johnes II and together with Uvedale Price, the leading practical advocate of the 'Picturesque Style' as expressed in his essay *On the Picturesque* (1794), was to be a major influence on the later work at Hafod**.

In 1765 Richard Knight III died and Thomas Johnes I and Elisabeth inherited the Croft Estate. Although Richard Knight III, during the nine years of his occupation of Croft, had made some improvements to the property, it was Thomas Johnes I who carried out the main alterations and redecoration schemes that we see today.

The architect, Thomas Farnolls Pritchard, of Shrewsbury, was commissioned and this plan shows the extent of the work.

The heavier lines denote the old fabric and the lighter ones show how the east side of the courtyard was filled in to form the front entrance hall. Pritchard retained the four Norman Towers and embodied many of the original walls and doorways and in the grounds, constructed gateways, archways and drives.

A full account of how Pritchard "created a domestic house within an ancient structure" can be found in *Thomas Farnolls Pritchard*, by Julia Ionides.



In 1780, on the death of his father, Thomas Johnes II inherited all their estates in Wales, including Hafod* which he was to redevelop in the 'Picturesque Style' and in his later years he was to be renowned for his translation of Froissart's Chronicles.***

A full account of his young life at Croft and his involvement at Hafod is given in *Peacocks in Paradise* by Elisabeth Inglis-Jones.

Elisabeth, now to be called the Dowager Mrs Johnes, remained in possession of the Croft Estate but rather than live at the Castle, decided to move with her two younger children, Samuel and Anne, to London and let the Castle. And so it was "Occupied by strangers" until the turn of the century when the Estate was sold to Somerset Davies of Wigmore whose direct descendents then held Croft till 1923 when the Trustees of Sir James Croft decided to buy back the Estate after a gap of 170 years.

* 'Picturesque Style' - in the manner of Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight who rebelled against the stereotyped landscapes of 'Capability' Brown, preferring to reflect 'the bold roughness of nature' and 'all that the painter admires'.

** Hafod, 12 miles south-east of Aberystwyth, is recognised as one of the finest examples in Europe of a Picturesque landscape. Its most celebrated owner, Thomas Johnes (1748-1816), built a new house in this remote location and laid out its grounds in a manner suited to displaying its natural beauties in sympathy with the 'Picturesque principles' fashionable at the time, with circuit walks allowing the visitor to enjoy a succession of views and experiences. Johnes also used the land for farming, forestry, and gardening, in each case trying out new ideas and experimental methods. Hafod became an essential destination for the early tourist in Wales.

Today the Hafod estate occupies some 200 hectares of the Ystwyth valley and surrounding hills. Most is owned by the Forestry Commission who, in partnership with the Hafod Trust, is managing a conservation and restoration project with public and private funding.

*** Jean Froissart (1333 - 1400), French poet and historian, whose Chronicles of the 14th century remain the most important and detailed documents of feudal times; he served both English and French royalty; the main subject of his Chronicles was the 'honourable adventures and feats of arms of the Hundred Years War (1337 - 1453)' and he urged his readers to aspire to the ideals of chivalry.

Interview with May Talbot.

May was born and lived, until the Second World War, in the village of Crawford, near Wigan, in Lancashire. Her father was the manager in charge of the sand extraction from the 'fields' round the village for glass making at Pilkingtons.

She had started work at a trouser factory in Wigan and at the outbreak of war was called up, first to do stirrup pump training for putting out fires but later to the Land Army, which is how she came to be in Herefordshire.

She was initially at Blakemere, south of Hereford, where this photograph was taken; May is fourth from the right in the back row.



Then at Redhill in Hereford, where they would be taken out to many different farms. She liked being based in Hereford because you could go to the pictures – The Ritz and another one in the middle of the town. There was a Dance Hall at the hostel, dinners were provided, and she relates that as the canteen was also used by factory workers, you could go back a second time in civilian clothes and get another dinner!

The work was hard often working on thrashing for weeks on end; barley was particularly unpleasant as it stuck to your clothes and wouldn't come out. When they got to the bottom of the pile of grain in the barn there would be hundreds of rats running out which dogs were sent in to kill. They soon learnt to put baler twine round the bottom of their dungarees.

Other work included fruit picking, field work and picking potatoes on Bircher Common. Occasionally she drove a tractor (although in this photograph, May is not the driver but standing by the tractor beside an Italian prisoner-of-war); and at one time they tried out a machine for sugar beet.

She was at Bircher Hall from 1944 to June 1947, but the entertainment here was rather basic. They would go 'down the pub' (The Bell), which was then very small with two oak settles and a black leaded grate.



There was a spittoon and the men would warm their beer with a poker. There was no bar, Daisy Cross had to fetch the beer from the back.

They sometimes ventured to Ludlow to the 'pictures', and on one occasion recalls walking in the snow because the bus didn't come. They would go into Leominster to the Central Café which was then "a proper café – not serve yourself", to be served baked beans on toast by "a little old lady in black with a white apron." They were reasonably well fed in the Land Army with an extra cheese ration, but when they went home rationing was more of a problem so they tried to take rabbits when they could.

Whilst at Bircher Hall she met her future husband, Bill Talbot and she recalls one day Bill had put her on the handlebars of the bike but they got caught by the policeman who told them it was against the law, but as soon as he was out of sight she got back on. The policeman lived at the end of the lane (the old road) from the blacksmiths in Leys Lane to Orleton. They would walk across there to the Boot Inn and knew it as "Dirty Lane" because it was always muddy

They were married in 1948. Bill was born in Wales but had moved to Yarpole at the age of 14 when his mother came as housekeeper to a Mr. Hooker who lived at 'The Bungalow' (now Stoneybrook). Bill's mother later married Mr Hooker. (Mr. Hooker was the great-great-grandson of Sir William J. Hooker, a renowned botanist, founder member of Kew Gardens, who had sailed on the Beagle: see previous Article on 'Stoneybrook').

. When she was first married they lived with Bill's mother and step-father at 'The Bungalow' in Yarpole, with a short spell at 'Graylands' at Bicton, but in 1952 they were lucky enough to get one of the council houses in James Close, which had been expressly built in 1946 with big gardens for the men coming home from the War to grow their own vegetables. Her husband used to dig the lot including what is now lawn and patio and they "never bought a veg."

There used to be a pump in the kitchen to fill the water tank (in the attic) which took all day but you had to fill it to do the washing if you didn't have a soft water tank. There were three taps, one from the well which was in one of the other gardens and had to be pumped from there, the others were also pumped*. There was no electricity, which she had been used to having before she left home and there was also no inside toilet until she had the pantry converted into a toilet.

Another memory is of the man from the chapel coming to the Close every Sunday afternoon to preach in the Close whether anyone was listening or not.

Her children attended Cockgate School, then Kingsland and Wigmore once that was built.

Interviewed by Pat Bloomer – transcribed by Rhianon Turrell (2007).

* Explanatory note on the plumbing of the houses in James Close:- In the kitchen there were three taps over the sink and a pump handle at the side; the pump drew water from one communal well at the top of the Close; the water was pumped up into a tank in the roof space until the tank was full – indicated by water from the over-flow falling outside the window above the sink. There was a boiler behind the fire which supplied hot water from one tap, another supplied cold water from the tank in the roof and the third tap supplied water pumped directly from the well. Soft water was collected from the roof and stored in a large tank in the back garden. 'Main's water' came to the Close in the mid 1960s.