

The History of Ayscoughfee Hall

Ayscoughfee Hall is an impressive red brick mansion which stands on the side of the River Welland in Spalding just a few hundred yards from the town centre. It was begun in the 1430s by Richard Alwyn a rich wool merchant. The first part of the Hall to be built was the north wing which has a cellar, used possibly as a wool store, and a decorative tower. Richard Alwyn would have had his wool brought up the Welland by boat and his land would probably have run down to the river, where he would have had his own personal quay. The steps leading up from the cellar may have led to this. As his wealth grew so Richard Alwyn made additions to his house. He enlarged it considerably with the addition of a large main hall built at right angles to the first building. It had a fine carved wooden roof which is still extant, above the late 18th century plaster work ceiling. This new main hall would have been used by Richard Alwyn for business as well as eating and entertaining and it would certainly have made an impression on his clients and visitors. It would probably have been open to the rafters with a central fire, as was the custom of the time, and evidence of a louvre was found when the building was re-roofed. It may have been decorated with hanging painted cloths or tapestries round the walls with a dais at the north end which would have had a table and chairs on it. Here Richard Alwyn would have sat with his family and guests to eat or to conduct business. The earth floor would have been strewn with fresh rushes. Later, the present south wing was added. It has been speculated that it was a separate house built at the same time as the Hall which may have been acquired by Richard Alwyn to create the single "H" shaped house we see today.

The Alwyn Family

Richard Alwyn gave many gifts to the Parish Church as did his son and heir Sir Nicholas Alwyn who inherited the house from his father. Sir Nicholas Alwyn had a chapel built in the house which was consecrated by Bishop John Russell in 1486. This was, according to E. H. Gooch, '*on the site of the present billiard room.*' Sir Nicholas became a very powerful man in early Tudor London where he became Lord Mayor in 1499. As well as owning Ayscoughfee Hall he had a house in Coleman Street in London which was near the Guildhall. In his will, which was proved in 1506 he left money to the poor of Spalding and London and lands and tenements in Southwark and Spalding to his executors, the remainder was left to his son Francis and nephew Nicholas in succession.

"that all my household stuff and emoluments that I have in my great place at Spalding shall be safely kept unto the time that the said Francis Alwyn, my son, shall come to his full age of 21 years, if he shall live so long"

There is no record of either Francis or Nicholas living at Ayscoughfee Hall but this may have been possible. Sir Nicholas Alwyn's nephew Nicholas, also became Lord Mayor of London in 1523. Research has not yet revealed how the Hall was passed from the Alwyns to the next owners.

The 16th Century-The Ayscoughs

During the early part of the 16th century the Hall is reputed to have been owned by the Ayscoughs, a noted Lincolnshire family, coming mainly from the north of the county around Stallingborough where brasses and memorials to several family members can be found in the Parish church. The only indication of their ownership is in the name of the Hall. The word "fee" means a knight's fee which was a territorial grant, made to the man who was knighted, as his property, which should be of a large enough size to maintain him as a knight. In various publications the house is referred to as Ayscough Fee Hall, the words Ayscough and Fee having, over the centuries, been pushed together to create one word. Thus Ayscoughfee Hall is the manor, estate or fee of the Ayscoughs. This term could also refer to the ownership of the land on which the house was built rather than the house itself and this begs the question, did the Ayscoughs live at and own the Hall or is the Fee the manor or land rather than the building? It is reputed that various family members were buried at Spalding Priory. The Ayscoughs also owned land in Lenton in Nottingham. In the 15th century the Ayscoughs had supported the Lancastrian side during the Wars of the Roses and later held posts at the courts of both Henry V and Henry VI. Sir William Ayscough of Stallingborough was knighted in 1513 during the reign of Henry VI, his son, Edward Ayscough, was cup bearer to Henry VI, another son, Sir Francis Ayscough was knighted "*at the winning of Boulogne*" and was Sheriff of Lincoln in 1545, 1549 and 1554. He is buried in St. Mary's Church, South Kelsey, Lincolnshire. The family fell into disfavour after the Lincolnshire Rising against the dissolution of the monasteries.

The Hall Family

The next owner Reginald Hall, son of Simon Hall of Burton Pedwardine, inherited Ayscoughfee Hall on the death of his mother in February 1556 (7). She was Julian, daughter of Richard Roberts of Donington. It is probable that the Hall came to her through her husband's family. Simon Hall's father was William Hall of the County of Nottinghamshire and his mother was the daughter of Reginald Gayton of Spalding. Reginald was descended from Reginald and Isabella Gayton who, according to Gooch, were living at Gayton House (next door to Ayscoughfee Hall) in 1481. Reginald Hall married three times. With his second wife Anne, he had seven children,

three sons and four daughters. His third son Reginald became Mayor of Boston in 1648. It was his first son Robert who sold Ayscoughfee Hall, named in the deed of sale as "*Manorium de Aiscugh*", to Thomas Wimberley in 1602. From this deed it appears that Ayscoughfee Hall came into the hands of the Hall family with the daughter and heiress of Reginald Gayton. It would seem that both Robert and Reginald moved from Spalding to Boston.

The 17th Century-The Wimberleys

Thomas Wimberley was a farmer from Bitchfield near Bourne in Lincolnshire. Thomas died in 1616 leaving the house to his son Beville. When he died an inventory was taken of the contents of the house room by room and this still exists in the Lincolnshire Archives Offices and is reproduced in a gallery at the Hall.

Rooms listed are:

"Hall, Dynynge Parlour, Little Hall, Clofet, new parlour, candle howfe, larder, brewehowfe, kitchen, deyry, cheefe chamber, corne chamber, hall chamber, Buttry, Lodgyng chamber, clofett, gallery, parlour chamber, little chamber, high chamber, servinge men chamber, garrett chamber."

and outdoors:

"yard, stable and marfhfeild"

The contents of the inventory reveal that Thomas Wimberley was a very wealthy man and it was during this family's time at Ayscoughfee Hall that the layout of the ground floor was altered. It is thought that they were responsible for the internal divisions in the Hall and the insertion of floors in the North and South wings and a service wing.

Beville Wimberley lived at Ayscoughfee Hall until 1621 when he exchanged properties with his brother-in-law, Nicholas Evington and went to live in Pinchbeck.

The Evingtons & Walpoles

Nicholas Evington died in 1630 and in a long and unusual will left the house with the following instructions:-

"I give to my wife (if she remain for long unmarried)... my messuage wherein I now dwell in Spalding...with all my other lands tenements and hereditaments in Spalding and Gosberkirke. After her decease or marriage I give (my

property) to my loving brother Moriss Evington... after his decease to the use of John Evington my youngest son. To have....with all the proffitts thereof...until he shall have beyond the sum of Five Hundred pounds....then my will is and I do bequeath the same lands to the use of my son Moriss Evington and to the heirs of his body...and for want of such issue to the use of my said son John again."

In October 1631 Elizabeth married Dymoke Walpole of Pinchbeck at St Margaret's, Westminster and so forfeited ownership. Records show that in 1639, John Evington (the second son) sold the house to his stepfather Dymoke Walpole. Dymoke's first marriage had been to Jane Ogle and they had nine sons and five daughters. His elder son and heir, John, who was baptised at Pinchbeck on 15th July 1612, entered Gray's Inn on 11th May 1630. During the Civil War he was a Cornet of the King's Troup and Standard Bearer to both Charles I and Charles II. He was knighted in 1645 and this is recorded in "The Complete Military Diary" of Richard Symonds with the following entry:

'Thursday, July 31st, in the Castle of Cardiffe the King knighted his cornet, Sir John Walpole.'

According to Maddison's 'Lincolnshire Pedigrees' he was '*compounded for his estates under the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell by paying £450.*'

Sir John Walpole sold '*Ayscoughfee Hall and five acres of land*' to Mr. John Johnson of Pinchbeck for £400 according to a conveyance dated 8th September 1658. Another document of the same date refers to '*Sir John Walpole of Dunston in the County of Lincoln, Kt Bond in the sum of £800 to be paid to said John Johnson.*'

In 1672 John Walpole is recorded as living in a house in St Martin's Lane, Middlesex. His will was dated at this address on 15th August in the same year and he was buried at Windsor Castle two days later on 17th August.

John Johnson of Pinchbeck was married to the eldest daughter of Sir Robert Ogle of Pinchbeck. The Hall passed to their son Francis who had three children, John, Jane and Isabella. Both John and Isabella (wife of Col. Adrian Gamlyn) died leaving Jane sole heiress of her father's estate. In 1683 Jane married Maurice Johnson of Spalding and at the death of her father in 1685, they inherited the Hall and Maurice Johnson became the first of six Maurice Johnsons to live at the Hall in direct succession.

The Eighteenth Century

The first Maurice Johnson was a *'Barrister at Law and Captain of Holland Foot and Royal South Lincs Militia.'* His wife Jane died in 1703 and there is a memorial to her in the Parish Church with a poetic lament to her loss. Maurice Johnson married twice more, his second wife was Elizabeth (nee Oldfield), widow of Andrew Philips, barrister at Law. Elizabeth died in 1724 and two years later he married Ann Wood of Boston. Ann died in 1742 and Maurice died in 1747 at Spalding.

Maurice Johnson - The Antiquary

Maurice and Jane had seven children only two of whom lived to adulthood. The eldest, also Maurice, was born in 1688 and was educated at Spalding Grammar School. He was admitted to the Inner Temple on 26th May 1705 and was called to the Bar on 26th January, 1710. He divided his time between London and Spalding where he was made Steward to the Manor of Spalding for the Duke of Buccleuch and Steward of the Manor of Kirton for the Earl of Exeter. He returned to Spalding to live in 1710 and missing the cultural life of London and the various literary and scientific societies, he decided to form a learned society in Spalding. He formed a Gentlemen's Club which met at a Younger's Coffee House in the Abbey Yard. Here members met, to talk and drink the newly fashionable drink of coffee and to read the latest editions of *The Tatler* and other weekly newspapers which arrived in Spalding by stage coach from London.

The first proposals for Statutes of the Spalding Society were for *'establishing a Society for Gentlemen for the supporting mutual benevolence, and their improvement in the liberal sciences and polite learning'* and that they *'meet every Monday at Mr. Younger's Coffee House in Spalding, at two in the afternoon, from September to May, and in other months at four, unless detained by business of moment or indisposition.'*

Spalding, at the start of the eighteenth century, was home to many well-educated people who relished the idea of such a club. Drainage engineers, physicians and the clergy as well as other gentlemen became members and the group flourished and became the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, which still exists today. Many influential men of the day became members including Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Joseph Banks and William Stukeley of Holbeach, who was a great friend of Maurice Johnson. The two men have been called Antiquaries and certainly they were both interested in the local, ancient and natural history of the area. They shared an interest in medicinal plants and often went to the local woods to search for specimens. Some were

dried, others planted in the Society's Physick Garden, which was across Love Lane from Ayscoughfee Hall, opposite the churchyard. They also shared an interest in stained glass and Maurice Johnson apparently had a collection of which some is believed to have been placed in the bay window of the main hall and some of which still remains in the Gentlemen's Society Museum. Johnson and Stukeley were also associated with the revival of the Society of Antiquaries and Maurice Johnson was Honorary Librarian.

The earliest representation of the gardens at the Hall was printed in Maurice Johnson's time. It can be seen in a map of 1732, the original of which was given by the cartographer, John Grundy, senior, to the Gentlemen's Society. This map shows the garden to be the same size as today but more formal in layout. There is a lake, square flower beds in the Dutch style, a kitchen garden and orchard are depicted. The plan of the garden is attributed to the architect William Sands and he may have been responsible for the planting of the famous yew walks which are at least 250 years old. Recent tree ring dating indicated a date of around 1725.

Maurice Johnson married Elizabeth Ambler, daughter and heiress of Mary and William Ambler of Spalding. She lived next door to Maurice at Gayton House, later known as Fairfax House and later still as Holyrood House. The couple had twenty six children about twelve of whom reached maturity. It is nice to think of Ayscoughfee Hall at this time as a lively, busy erudite household echoing with the noise of children and with visitors, perhaps members of the Gentlemen's Society and their ladies walking in the gardens and discussing the issues of the day.

Maurice Johnson was secretary of the Gentlemen's Society for thirty five years and he kept detailed minutes (some of which have been published in facsimile form) of their activities. These were illustrated by his daughter Ann Alethea. Maurice Johnson was also a Justice of the Peace, Chairman of South Holland Quarter Sessions and Deputy Recorder for Stamford. In later life he suffered from a very debilitating disease which caused an imbalance of the ear drum (perhaps Menieres Disease) which caused him much distress, as did the loss of his father in 1747 and his wife Elizabeth, in 1754. Maurice Johnson survived her by only a year, dying in 1755. Unfortunately there is no memorial to him in Spalding Parish Church. The 'Gentlemen's Magazine' of 1755 records his death as follows '*Jan 19 Maurice Johnson, Esq, of Spalding, Lincolnshire, councillor at law and one of the founders of the Antiquarian Society.*'

Colonel Maurice Johnson

The eldest son of Maurice Johnson the Antiquary and his wife Elizabeth was Colonel Maurice Johnson. He was born in 1714 and eventually became a Lieutenant serving in the Duke of Cumberland's regiment of Foot Guards. He served this regiment in Flanders in 1746/7 and later became its Colonel. He was married twice, first to Elizabeth Bellamy, daughter of Sir Edward Bellamy of Frinton and Stanway Halls, Essex. Elizabeth died in 1752 and in 1755 he married Mary Baker. The couple lived at Stanway and their children were born there, their eldest son Maurice was born in 1755. Mary Johnson died in 1773 and Colonel Maurice returned to live permanently at Ayscoughfee Hall until his death in 1793.

There is a wonderful description of the Hall and of the elderly Colonel Maurice Johnson in the diaries of the Hon. John Byng later 5th Viscount Torrington. By the time John Byng was writing his *'Tour in the Midlands:1790'* Colonel Maurice was apparently 'losing his memory and suffering from a painful disorder' Torrington writes:-

'As I enter'd the town, I had observ'd a very ancient house of bay windows, surrounded by yew hedge gardens; I now desired an admission and was receive'd by the Master Col. J(ohnson) a very old, worn out man, who led me into his parlour; and began with saying "That he had served in the 1st Regiment of Foot Guards and had a company therein" "And I also had one therein"; but this, even, did not rouse him, being apparently in pain, and having lost his memory: griev'd was I to see him, and vex'd not to have a servant to attend me.

This good parlour was cover'd with portraits, some seemingly very good; but it was heated by a fire, as was also his bedroom, in which were several excellent cabinet pictures, that I had not time to admire; for I expected the old gentleman to drop down dead from his horrible grunts and groans. I mentioned my father's name to him but all was forgotten! He spake of his family to me, and that one of his sons was the minister of this town; and he carried me into a room, where his daughters had been drying roses.

The very old hall was properly furnishe'd with armoury, buff coats and many curiosities of ancient warfare; but I had not permission for quiet observation, as I could have wish'd.

There are many good pictures of esteem'd masters; but all in disorder and decay; like to owner.'

It is very lucky that there survive two drawings of Ayscoughfee Hall at this time. They can be found in the Banks Collection in the Lincoln Library. In 1791 Sir Joseph Banks engaged the artist, Nattes, to make topographical records of Lincolnshire and he drew Ayscoughfee Hall from the West and East sides. These show the original house, as it was before the death of Colonel Maurice Johnson and the subsequent 'modernisation'. The thatch roof had been replaced by 'slates' in 1772 but in the Nattes drawings we can see evidence of the bay (from the illustration it looks more like an oriel window) at the front of the Hall exactly matching that of the back (which still exists). We can also see the off-centre front door.

Late 18th and Early 19th Century Architectural Changes

A later drawing dating from some time between 1800 and 1830 shows a renovated West front where these Tudor features have been replaced by symmetrical Gothic style windows in wood and a central front door.

Inside the Hall was altered by the addition of a plaster ceiling and a curved main staircase leading to a gallery or balcony on all four sides of the hall which is 'supported' by six classical pillars. A new paneled front door was added and the East bay window enclosed (now open again). Whilst work was being done as part of the refurbishment of the Hall in 1984-86 the following inscription was found on the inside of one of the front door panels:-

'Nius Pavey Carpenter Joiner an apprentice to Timothy East Spalding in the year 1794.....in the critical year of George the Third'

It is interesting to wonder what this comment may have meant. Was Nius (Nicholas) Pavey referring to the political happenings of the year or to the precarious health of the King? Certainly by 1794 the French wars were capturing the 'headlines'. On 1st June Admiral Howe had led the British fleet to victory at Ushant, British forces had taken Port au Prince in the West Indies but had lost the island of Guadeloupe and Captain Horatio Nelson had bombarded the island of Corsica. Perhaps Nius was referring to more to changes in England where conditions, especially in agricultural areas, had worsened because of the war.

The Later Johnsons

All these alterations were carried out for the Reverend Maurice Johnson, son of Colonel Maurice who inherited the house on his father's death. The Revd. Maurice was incumbent of Spalding Parish Church from 1782 to 1825, Vicar of Moulton from 1780 until 1834 and prebend of Lincoln. He married Ann Elizabeth Buckworth, daughter of Theophilus Buckworth, Esq of Cley Hall, Spalding and they had three children, Maurice, Theophilus and

Ann. Their eldest son Maurice followed in his father's footsteps and after attending St. John's College, Cambridge he became curate of Moulton. He married Frances Post of Hayle Place, Kent but unfortunately she died in 1815 after the birth of their only child, a son called Maurice. Her husband died five years later in 1820. The Reverend Maurice of Spalding died in 1834. His daughter Ann married the Reverend William Moore who succeeded his father-in-law as Incumbent of Spalding Parish Church. His grandson Maurice lived at the Hall when his grandfather died and it was he who initiated the further alterations to the West front of the Hall.

Victorian Additions

This included replacing the wooden Gothic style windows with the present ornate stone ones and the addition of the porch or balcony and coat of arms. The tower was altered and heightened by the addition of the pierced gothic parapet. Alterations also took place within the house. These included the building of a new service wing on the north side of the hall with a kitchen and a nineteenth century cast iron kitchen range marked "*Bratleys Spalding: Excelsior*" still survives (at present behind museum displays). Old brick was used to create a sympathetic union between the older parts of the house and the new wing. The 17th century style Dutch gable and old dated stone add to the impression of a much earlier building style, but the stone quoins and decorative stone features date from 1845. Proof of its later addition lies in the fact that it does not appear in Nattes drawing of 1791.

On the South side of the house the original staircase was blocked off and a new steep winding stair was added. The South wing was already divided into three rooms, a drawing room, paneled library and small room at the rear. A further extension was added at the south east corner of the south wing (now the Veterans' recreation room).

Gas light was probably added to the Hall sometime after the introduction of Town Gas to Spalding in 1832. The oven type boiler in the East bat window is all that remains of a system installed to heat the main hall and the passages. The pipes were set under the 17th century flag floor but were removed during the refurbishment of 1984/86.

The gardens, although the area and layout were still similar, would have been altered since the drawing of the map of 1732. The Rev. Maurice had, during his alterations, cut down the yew trees which fronted the Hall presumably to give more light. In the parish of Spalding rate book the entry for 19th February 1847 lists as well as the Hall, a garden, lawn, paddock, tower and dog kennels. The tower was known as the Owl Tower and stood at the end of the lake where the War Memorial is now. It had a smoke room and staircase leading to the owl chamber. Although it is not listed, the ice

house which still stands at the south end of the garden would probably have been there and it is an interesting survival of this type of building. It is made of brick and partly sunk into the ground and covered with a thick layer of earth which acted as insulation. Many 17th and 18th century country houses had ice houses where ice was stored, being gathered from the lake in the winter months and used during the summer.

The Johnsons leave Ayscoughfee Hall

Maurice Johnson married twice, first in 1841 to Elizabeth Mills, daughter of the Reverend Thomas Mills. They had one daughter Elizabeth Ann who was born in 1842, her mother Elizabeth died in 1843. Maurice married again in 1848 this time to Isabella Mary Swan, daughter of Robert Swan, Registrar of the County of Lincoln. They had two daughters whilst they lived at the Hall, Mary Isabella and Frances Alethea. The death of Frances in 1850 made the family decide to leave the Spalding area which they did in 1851.

Before they left Ayscoughfee Hall their presence was recorded in the Census, taken in March 1851, and this entry shows their undoubted wealth and gentility. Maurice Johnson is listed as a 'Landed Proprietor' and for himself, his wife and young daughter there were ten servants - a footman, a coachman, a gardener, a page, a nurse, a cook, two housemaids, a kitchen maid and a lady's maid. Their third daughter Edith Millicent was born at Hotham Hall, Yorkshire and their fourth, Frances Maude was born at Redgrave Hall in Suffolk. The family settled at Blundeston Lodge in Suffolk where Maurice, the last of the six, died in 1864.

The Hall was let to various tenants during the next few years. In 1852 a Mr. Wright was recorded as tenant, in 1856 a Mr. Samuel Parke, in 1865 a Mr. Henry Hawkes and in the early 1870s a Captain Rayner.

An advertisement appeared in The Times of June 1868:

'AYSCOUGHFFEE HALL, Spalding - To be LET on LEASE, all that picturesque FAMILY MANSION known as Ayscoughfee Hall, Spalding, containing dining, drawing, breakfast and billiard rooms, library, six bedrooms, five dressing rooms, five servants' bed rooms, together with the pleasure grounds, gardens, greenhouses, forcing house, pits, ice house, stables, coach houses and suitable offices. The house is partially furnished and is in excellent condition. The entrance hall and passages are heated by hot water. 1,600 acres of open shooting will be let with the house. Rent £80 per anum. The house may be viewed on obtaining a written order from J and R Swann and Bourne Solicitors, Lincoln.'

It is not known exactly where the 1,600 acres of open shooting were but according to the 1856 Whites directory of Lincolnshire, the Johnsons held lands in Weston, Moulton and Pinchbeck and were Lords of the Manors of Weston and Pinchbeck.

The last tenant, Spalding solicitor Mr. Charles Foster Bonner, lived at the hall from 1874 until his death in 1896. He is recorded in the 1891 Census as aged 77, a retired solicitor living on his own means. Also resident were his wife Elizabeth, daughter Ada and son Edgar plus two housemaids, a man servant and a nurse.

In 1897 the Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press dated 16th February had the following item:

"Ayscoughfee Hall, Spalding, which was for many years occupied by the late C. F. Bonner, Esq is advertised as to let from the 6th April next. Ayscoughfee Hall and its magnificent gardens constitute one of the features of the district."

Civic Pride - Recreation for the people of Spalding

Isabella Johnson sold the Hall to a committee of Spalding Citizens, the prime instigator of whom was Samuel Kingston, Esq., J.P. Chairman of the Spalding Urban District Council. After a public subscription £1,000 was raised, the residue of £1,100 was borrowed from a number of generous Spalding residents.

On April 5th 1898 the Lincolnshire, Boston and Spalding Free Press reported that:

'The long delay in the transfer of this property is practically at an end and the Committee, who have undertaken to provide the balance of the purchase money, beyond what has been raised by subscription, are to have possession now, at once. The formal opening of the Pleasure Gardens will not take place until May, but a band concert is arranged for Easter Monday, which, should the weather be fine, will doubtless attract a large number of visitors. The gardens are, we hear, in fine order.'

Over the next few years the Committee held various fetes and fund raising events to pay off the debt, in time to present the property to the Spalding Urban District Council, as representatives of the town, to celebrate the Coronation of King Edward VII in 1902.

In 1904 an attempt to turn the Hall into a Free Library with help from the Carnegie Trust was voted against by the local rate payers. It was hoped that

the building could become a Museum and Art Gallery and with this in mind many people gave objects for the project. A guide to the Hall of 1912 lists thirty paintings having been presented by local artist Mr. Edward Gentle and two portraits were donated by Mrs. Isabella Johnson of herself and her husband Maurice Johnson. These portraits have recently been repaired and restored and now take pride of place in the displays in the Hall.

Also listed in the guide was the scale of fees for room hire at the Hall:

One large room with the Entrance Hall, from 6-9 or 7-10 o'clock p.m. from 7s & 6d to 10s & 6d.

For both large rooms with Hall and library from 6 - 12 o'clock p.m. from £1 to £1.10s

For both large rooms with Hall and library and one upper room as dressing or ladies' cloak room, from 6 o'clock p.m. as long as required, or to early morning from £1 10s to £2. 2s.

At the time of this guide book Mr. & Mrs. Stannard were custodians.

The War Memorial

In 1921 the Owl Tower was demolished to make way for the war memorial. It was the idea of the widow of the Hon, Francis McClaren, Member of Parliament for the Spalding division at the time of his death whilst flying off the Scottish coast. It commemorates the 250 Spalding people who lost their lives during the Great War and was designed, as were many town memorials of the time, by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Various sites were discussed but the lake side at Ayscoughfee was thought to be the most suitable and was endorsed by the designer himself, after a personal visit. The proposed demolition of the Owl Tower caused much heated argument in the newspapers of the time as many people, although fully accepting and supporting the need for a memorial were upset to lose the Owl Tower which had for so long been a feature of their garden. When the Owl Tower was demolished Mr. Tero found two young owls in it. He placed these in a box on the lawn where they were fed by the parent birds until they all moved to a new home in an old chimney at the back of the paddock. The memorial was built and it was unveiled by General Sir Ian Hamilton and dedicated by the Rev. A. C. Jarvis, Assistant Chaplain General, on Thursday June 8th 1922. Lieutenant Colonel Barrell of Spalding read out the names of those commemorated.

The Gardens and Mr. Tero

In a guide book of 1912 various trees are mentioned including the Magnolia Grandiflora which still grows on the South side of the House and a Magnolia Glauca which stood in the oval bed at the front of the house - this was replaced by the present Magnolia Soulangeana in the 1950s. Both trees are frequently admired by spring and summer visitors to the Hall and gardens.

Mr. W. H., Tero was appointed Parks Superintendent in July 1915. He had been apprenticed to Mr. W. H Walker who had been gardener to the last tenant Mr. Charles Foster Bonner. He had begun to work in the gardens in 1898 at the age of 14. People remember Mr. Tero as being very strict but very fair with naughty young visitors whilst others remember Mrs Tero's ice cream, cakes and cucumber sandwiches - served from the Victorian kitchen, the cakes and scones cooked in the oven range mentioned earlier. The original bowling green was laid out in 1908 and there was a new one laid out in 1925 and a lawn tennis court which was laid out in 1920 was replaced by new grass tennis courts in 1925. The old tennis court was turned into an aviary which housed birds and cavies. Some of the birds were given by Lt Commander (later Sir Peter) Scott. Apparently, Ralph the Raven was popular with visitors. Unfortunately some of these birds were killed, when, during the second world war, a bomb fell in the gardens. At this time, Mr. Tero created a model allotment on one of the tennis courts to help gardeners with food production. A guide book of 1923 states that there was also a *'good sized paddock adjoining the gardens which has been utilised as a recreation ground for children and is largely taken advantage of throughout the year'* The book also describes the statues that used to stand in the gardens. *'two of them - a man and a woman - are evidently a pair. Both are partially clad in armour, the man carrying a sword and the woman a weapon resembling a halberd. The other leaden figure has been the cause of much speculation among visitors, some of whom have expressed that it is the representation of Atlas, and that the statue has lost its globe, which has been replaced with the flower bowl he now carries on his shoulders. This figure, which used to be situated in front of the owl-tower at the head of the lake, is remarkable for the fact that the man had two left feet.'* The bandstand which used to stand on the south side of the Hall was erected especially for the Coronation celebrations of 1937 and as part of these celebrations the front of the hall was illuminated by the Spalding Electrical Department, who also used strip lighting for the garden and bandstand. A 35-40ft high fountain was constructed in the lake.

Ayscoughfee School

In 1920 a private school was set up in the Hall. At first it was a kindergarten in one room but later spread to encompass many of the upstairs rooms and some downstairs ones. Its first headmistress was Miss Henry who taught until 1826 when Miss Black took over and taught for twenty three years, retiring at the age of 73 in 1958. Mrs Mary Credland was the next headmistress until 1981 when the school moved to the former National School building on Church Street. Although the school has recently moved to Welland Hall on London Road in Spalding it still retains the name Ayscoughfee from its time at the Hall.

The Hall in Use

Many visitors to the house and gardens remember their time at the school. Others remember dancing classes, wedding receptions and some remember living in flats in the hall. Apparently from 1915 to 1920 the War Office took over Ayscoughfee Hall. Earlier on in the time of the first world war when Belgian refugees were housed at Ayscoughfee Hall, a report and balance sheet for the year ending October 9th 1915 states that *'At the commencement of our work, St Thomas's Hall was the centre for all purposes, but the accommodation there was soon found to be inadequate, and Ayscoughfee Hall and Belgian House were fitted up for sleeping purposes.'* According to the financial report the 'fitting up' and repairing of Ayscoughfee Hall and Belgian House cost £35 13s 0d. At the time of the report it is noted that after the maximum number of 130 people had been reached in December 1914 many had gradually distributed themselves around the country and thirty had returned to Belgium and that Ayscoughfee Hall now houses *'only six self-supporting families who will vacate it when they have found suitable houses.'* One of the families was the Roelants who had six children. One of their daughters married a Spalding man and stayed in the area whilst one of their sons, who had married a Spalding girl and returned to Belgium, moved to Spalding at the start of the 2nd World War. Later on women land workers (later the Land Army) were housed in the Hall. During the 2nd World War when the bomb fell in the gardens most of the windows in the Hall, including the stained glass were broken or damaged.

Public Library

On the evening of Monday 1st November 1937 the new Spalding library was opened by Alderman J. W. Glead in what had been the dining room of the Hall. It was the first public free library formed as a branch of the newly established scheme introduced under the joint control of Holland and Lindsey

authority. Mr. Bates, the librarian, and his assistants were entirely voluntary. An early member can remember that the readers were allowed 3 buff coloured tickets and 3 blue ones. The buffs were for fiction, the blue for non-fiction. The library remained at Ayscoughfee Hall until it moved to its present premises on Victoria Street which was officially opened on Wednesday 8th June 1966. The administration section was left in the Hall and in 1974, at local government reorganisation, the Hall became the District Headquarters for just a year until they moved to the old drill hall on Haverfield Road.

The Bird Museum

In 1951 the Spalding Gentlemen's Society approached the Spalding Urban District Council to request that the section on British Birds of the Ashley Maples Collection be housed in Ayscoughfee Hall as the Museum on Red Lion Street could not cope with the entire collection. Mr. Maples had, since the opening of the Museum in 1934, collected many more exhibits, most of which could not be displayed because of lack of space. A display called '*The Ashley Maples Collection of British Birds*' was opened by the Curator of the City and County Museum on 5th February 1953. This historically significant collection, as far as both specimen collecting and the craft of taxidermy are concerned, has remained at the Hall ever since. It has been refurbished twice since its early days at the Hall and work on the collection is continuous in order that it remain in the good condition it can be seen in today.

The Garden Now

In 1951 a new Parks Superintendent, Mr. George Sydney Moore was appointed to supervise Ayscoughfee Gardens and the recreation ground at Lime Court. His foreman was Mr. William Patience who, with his family, lived in a flat upstairs in the Hall. The head gardener at this time and throughout Mr Moore's time as Superintendent, was Mr. William Harvey. The water fountain which used to stand in Hall place was re-sited in the gardens in 1956. In the 1960s the old stable block burned down and the present pavilion was built to replace it. Mr. Moore retired as Parks Superintendent in September 1972, his successor being his son Mr. Peter Moore.

A New Museum for the People of South Holland

In the early eighties the South Holland District Council who in 1974 replaced the Spalding Urban District Council as Trustees decided, after the school had left the building, that the Hall should become a Museum and Mrs Jennifer Vernon was appointed as curator from 1983 to 1984 to begin the long process of establishing a museum. Mrs Vernon did a lot of research into

Fenland Birds, wildfowling and into the History of the Hall itself. In 1984 the decision was made to completely refurbish the building and to turn it into a Local History Museum, indeed a Museum for South Holland which would reflect the way of life of the people of South Holland. The Hall remained closed except for the Tourist Information Centre which had, for some years, been established in the former dining room of the Hall, whilst the refurbishment took place. Local firms including R. G, Sharman, builders and W. J. Mumford & son Ltd., were involved in the work which took over two years to accomplish. The Tourist Information Centre was moved to the main hall and officially opened in 1986. A new Museum Curator, Miss Susanna Davis was appointed.

The first new galleries to opened were in the South wing, being the Drainage, Agriculture and Horticulture Gallery, the refurbished paneled library and a display of Birds of Prey from the Ashley Maples Collection. Also opened at this time was an Art Gallery for temporary exhibitions of local art, photography and craft work. It was sponsored by Geest Industries PLC on the Government's Business Incentive Sponsorship Scheme and since its opening it has been a popular venue for local artists to hold exhibitions and is usually booked up to two years in advance.

Two more galleries were added in 1988. Situated in the Victorian extension on the North side of the Hall they were 'Scenes of Life in South Holland' and 'The Cecil Owen Gallery of The History of Spalding'. The Museum was very lucky to receive a bequest from the administrators of the Estate of Cecil Owen, a Spalding man, which enabled the 'History of Spalding Gallery' and some time later the 'History of Ayscoughfee Hall' galleries to be produced.

The last gallery to be opened on the ground floor of the Hall was a permanent exhibition on the life and voyages of local explorer and navigator, Matthew Flinders, who was born in Donington, 10 miles north of Spalding. In 1992 the first gallery was refurbished and turned into the present 'Drainage and Wildfowling' gallery. In May 1994 a popular new gallery on the upper floor opened on the history of Agriculture and Horticulture in the South Holland region. It was sponsored by a local firm P.A. Moerman and the Business Incentive Sponsorship Scheme and is known as the Moerman Gallery.

The Hall and Gardens are a constant delight to all its many visitors which was surely the dream of those enlightened people who, in 1902, presented the property to the people of Spalding. How happy they would be to see that, thanks to their foresight and the dedication and hard work of many people over the years, their dream had become a reality.

© Rosalyn Pursglove 1994 for the South Holland Museum Service
Published by South Holland District Council, October 1994

Reference Material Used

Ayscoughfee Hall and its History - Free Press Publication 1912

Ayscoughfee Hall and its History - Free Press Publication 1923

Ayscoughfee Hall: the building of a great merchant's house
David L Roberts. Lincolnshire History & Archaeology Vol. 10 1975

Ayscoughfee Hall and its owners over 550 years
Jennifer Vernon, M.A. A.M.A. 1983 (unpublished)

A Tudor Tapestry- Derek Wilson, Heinemann, 1972

History of Spalding- E. H. Gooch 1940

Notices of remarkable events and curious facts with various and interesting scraps, connected with the History and Antiquities of Spalding
Old Robin Harmstone 1846

Memorials of the Family of Wimberley - Captain Douglas Wimberley 1893

Lincolnshire Pedigrees ed. A. R. Maddison, Harleian Society Publications Vols 1-4, London

The Minute Books of The Spalding Gentlemen's Society 1712 - 1755
ed. Dorothy M. Owen, the Lincolnshire Record Society Vol. 73 1981

William Stukeley- Stuart Piggott, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1950