



The Times

Quite apart from its architectural merit or its beautiful situation above the River Lea in an undulating park, Broom's Barn is unique in being the only house in England where two Prime Ministers have lived and died

Brocket

by Lord Brocket

IN the earliest days the estate belonged to a family of FitzSymon, from whom Symondshyde Wood derives its name. In the 15th century a FitzSymon heiress married a Brocket and the old house built by this family was called Brocket Hall.

The most famous of the Brocket family was Sir John, who married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Rowland Lytton of Knebworth. He was High Sheriff of Hertfordshire in 1553, and the portraits of Sir John and Lady Brocket painted by Sir Antonio Mor in 1566 are in my possession. Most of the Brocket family are buried in the Brocket Chapel at Wheathampstead Church.

Mary, daughter and co-heir of Sir

John Brocket, married Sir Thomas Reade in 1597. He was High Sheriff of Berkshire in 1606, of Oxfordshire in 1613, and of Hertfordshire in 1618. Their fourth son, John, born in 1616, inherited the Brocket estate and was created a baronet in 1641 by King Charles I, and again by Cromwell in 1658. The Reades are buried in the Brocket Chapel in Hatfield Church.

INTERESTING LINK BETWEEN FAMILIES

The baronetcy became extinct on the death, unmarried, of their grandson, Sir John Reade, third baronet, when the estate devolved upon his two sisters, one of whom, by name Love, married Thomas Winnington and sold the estate to Sir Matthew

Lamb in 1746. The elder sister married Sir James Dashwood, and from her the present Lady Brocket is descended, thus creating an interesting link between the peerage of Brocket and the original family, whose surname it was.

Sir Matthew Lamb was a prosperous solicitor, fortunate enough to inherit property from various relations who died childless, and, in addition, married the daughter of one of his best clients, a Mr. Coke, of Melbourne Hall, Derby. He began the building of the present Hall, employing James Paine as architect. His picture, by Hudson, is in the overmantel of my study at Brocket. James Paine also designed the stone bridge over

the Lea in the park, and, among others, those at Richmond and Chat-smith. He was also the original architect of Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, but the completion of this house was undertaken by the brothers Adam.

Sir Matthew Lamb died before the completion of Bocket Hall, and the building was finished by his son, Peniston, and his wife, who also widened the river into a lake. By 1775 the work was completed.

RETURN OF FAMOUS PICTURE AWAITED

Peniston was created Lord Melbourne and married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke, and they frequently entertained the Prince Regent, afterwards King George IV, at Bocket. At that time the annual races were held in the park, and the site of the old racecourse still exists.

The equestrian picture of the Prince of Wales by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A., exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784, and presented by the Prince to Lady Melbourne, hung in the saloon until the occupation of Bocket Hall as a maternity hospital in 1939, and it is hoped it will soon return there.

The final decoration of the house was undertaken by Lady Melbourne, and Bocket is one of the finest examples of James Paine's work. The saloon, a double cube, 60 ft. x 30 ft. and 30 ft. high, with a painted ceiling by Mortimer and Wheatley, is one of the finest rooms of its kind. It has been the scene of many notable events, including in recent years the County Ball, and in 1925 the presentation of a coat of arms to the County Council.

UNSURPASSED SITUATION

The ceilings and decorations of Bocket Hall by James Paine are in the style which was afterwards known as that of the Adam brothers. No style is happier to live with, and the situation of Bocket, standing high above the River Lea (widened at this point into a lake), is unsurpassed.

Returning to the history of Bocket, Lord Melbourne, afterwards created a Viscount, had four children. Peniston, the eldest, died before succeeding to the peerage. William, the second son, entered politics, and was

Prime Minister in 1837, at the accession of Queen Victoria. The third, Lord Beauvale, was ambassador in Vienna. Lord and Lady Melbourne's only daughter, Emily, married Earl Cooper, from neighbouring Panshanger, and after his death became the wife of the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, who died in 1885. After Lady Palmerston's death Bocket remarried with her descendants until my father's time, and it is interesting that, through their mother, my children are descended from the original family, who sold the property to Sir Matthew Lamb in 1746, and who gave their name to it at the end of the 15th century.

THE GARDENS AND GROUNDS

The Bocket estate comprises the north-west corner of the parish of Hatfield, and adjoins the Hatfield estate, where lived Queen Victoria's other great Prime Minister, the Marquess of Salisbury, whose statue stands outside the gates of Hatfield House. No other parish in England can boast such a record.

The gardens at Bocket extend for half a mile along the north bank of the Lea, and are famous not only for the collection of over 50 deciduous cypresses, the largest in the county, but also for Queen Elizabeth's Oak. The kitchen garden is surrounded by an ancient red brick wall and slopes gently towards the south. The glass-houses suffered great damage from a land mine falling nearby, but I am glad to say that they are at last being repaired.

During the war I have ploughed up the park at Bocket and reclaimed a quantity of land from bushes and elder, and have grown good crops of wheat, oats, potatoes and roots. The Ayrshire cows, too, have produced well over 100 gallons of milk a day.

A HOSPITAL SINCE 1939

Bocket Hall has, since September 3, 1939, been used as a hospital, and it is there that the City of London Maternity Hospital, which was damaged during the raids, carries out its work. The total number of births there since 1939 is within the region of 6,000.

When the rebuilding of the City of London Hospital in City Road will

take place no one can say, but Lady Bocket, our children and myself look forward with longing to the day when we can return home to the beautiful house in the park, which we hope may remain for ever an oasis in the increasing urbanisation of the Hertfordshire countryside.

The Hertfordshire Show

THE 1947 Hertfordshire Show is to be held at North Mymms Park on July 24, in accordance with one of the principles laid down at the time of the amalgamation of the Tring Agricultural Society and the Watford and District Agricultural Society with the Hertfordshire Agricultural Society. (It was in November, 1945, that supporters of all three societies decided to undertake this merger to benefit agriculture in Hertfordshire, and to attract the maximum interest it was agreed that the annual county Show should be a migratory one, with a different venue each year.)

Last year, in Cassiobury Park, Watford, records were broken in the entries of all classes and some of the finest stock in England was on view. The high standard of the exhibits was a tribute to the breeders, after the rigours of war-time—including severe cuts in feeding-stuffs.

The staging of a show of this nature, which has to cater for some 1,500 head of stock, to say nothing of poultry, rabbits and dogs in hundreds, presents many problems. The first is the site of the Show. Nowadays with the maximum amount of land ploughed up there are few places in the county which can provide an area of some 50 acres for the show-ground and additional space for a car park; for stock vehicles to be hidden away and for all the administrative units.

This year the Society has the use of North Mymms Park, thanks to the generous offer of one of its vice-presidents, Major W. A. G. Burns, D.S.O., M.C. It should provide a beautiful and magnificent setting.

The Committee have to make a close study of the entries received at the previous year's Show to assess the popularity of the classes in the prize schedule. This year there will be an increased number of classes in both the light horse and the cattle sections which should attract a large number of exhibitors.

The Hunts in Hertfordshire have been most generous in the support they are giving to a new venture. This will take the form of competitions (restricted to the county) for the best root and grain crops and for the most attractive milk recorded herd. The county will be divided into areas and in each area prizes for the first three exhibitors will be £3, £2 and £1. It is thought appropriate that a Society of this nature should encourage agriculture in all its forms beyond the limitations of a one-day Show.

Already applications from trade-stand exhibitors have far exceeded the space available and it is hoped that the implements and machinery sections will cover a very comprehensive range.