

Newton St Cyres History Group



It was a full house at our October meeting, when a packed club room heard Mary Quicke, helped by John Quicke and Tom Langdon Davies, speak to us on the history of the Quicke family, and the farming and land use on the estate over the centuries.

The Quicke surname is thought to derive from a local Saxon tribe or family of the area, and it seems that they were one of the families who managed to retain land through the Conquest. There is a record of a Reverend Quicke in 1216, but the first member of the family of whom much is known is Andrew Quicke, who died in 1557, and who is 14 generations away from the present family!

During the following 500 plus years, the family estates were added to and also sold off, but the estate and family held together through the Reformation, the Prayer Book Rebellion, the Civil War and the many vicissitudes of time.

In the seventeenth century the Andrew

Quicke of the time was related through marriage (Dorothy Northcote) to the influential Godolphin family and was thus involved in national affairs and politics, with connections to the Duke of Marlborough. This is why the Duke's statue is in the gardens at Sherwood.

In the eighteenth century, John Quicke married a double heiress, Jane Hoblyn, daughter of a Bristol merchant and widow of a wealthy Cornish mine owner, and it was this connection that brought Cornish miners to the village. It also funded a new Palladian mansion, a new vicarage, and (although John Quicke sold Jane's books to raise the money !) newly repaired cottages for the tenants. It was this lady who had the slave, Joe Green, whose portrait we were shown, and who was apparently freed for saving his master after a carriage accident.

Their grandson, John, was at Waterloo, and, it is said in the family, that his father employed nearly 300 soldiers, afterwards, to make the cutting behind Newton House, thus giving them a livelihood, in thanks for his son's survival.

It is not known exactly where Higher Court an earlier residence of the Quicques was sited. The Palladian house burned down in 1906 and the present Newton House was built on the same site.

The prosperous high farming era of the early nineteenth century was followed by a deep depression when the North American markets were opened up by railway and steamship connections. By the end of the 2nd World War, taxes and death duties and low rents, had challenged landowners all over the

country and the Quicke's sold off a number of farms and cottages and took in hand the tenanted farms. Farming became increasingly mechanised and far fewer workers were needed on the land. The challenge for Sir John during the last 50 years, was to maintain the estate and farm revenues, and thus the cheese production was started to use the milk. Now there is a virtuous circle of grass pasture, cows grazing out for 10 months of the year to produce good milk for cheese, and the waste water being returned to the land to grow the grass.

Sir John and his father, Noel Quicke, were also very interested in continuing to plant woodland. Historically, woods were used for the roundwood they produced for building and fuel, also charcoal burning, so much so that hedges were planted to keep animals out of the valuable woods. Here was a link to the local mining industry. There are almost certainly Iron Age iron mines near the village, and lead and manganese were mined later on. The manganese was used to colour the glass, for which the charcoal provided the fuel for the furnaces.

Mary showed us a lovely photograph which

sums up the land use: a ploughed field shows the red soil of the local sandstones and lies next to the green grass of Pathfields, with the cows grazing, a field of oilseed rape (grown and milled historically in the parish) and the woods behind.

In response to a question from Roger Wilkins about the family's aims for the future, Mary considered that climate change and food shortages are likely to shape farming. At present, farmers are paid to protect the archaeology of the land and the environment, by providing wild life corridors and growing food crops, such as greater knapweed, for birds. The aim is to keep the farm stable against whatever shocks the future holds, and to continue to provide food and environmental services in as self sufficient a manner as possible.

The centuries of care for the estate and land, and the strong sense of responsibility felt for the area by the family came over clearly in what was a most rewarding evening. Thanks go to John and Tom, and particularly to Mary for taking the time to share so much history and information.

Meetings are usually on Thursday evenings in the village hall club room and start at 7.30pm.

Everyone is welcome. There is a small charge of £1.50 which includes tea and biscuits.

For further information contact Jean 851337 Isobel 851351

Next meetings

December 13th Christmas Meeting on 'Cloacal Papyrology' – a bit of fun with Ian Maxted who has an extensive collection of toilet papers. Also a display of some Victorian ironwork by Nick Baker, and of bottles by Christopher Southcott.

Small contributions to the Christmas refreshments would be very welcome.

January 17th Mike Patrick Wool Trading through Topsham

February 21st Nick Baker The History of Cowley and Pynes

March 21st David Oates The Colourful Arms of Devon's Colourful Gentry (incl.. Quickes)