

## **'The Field' magazine, 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1986**

This article was no 71 as part of a series 'Family Seats',  
With thanks, to the British Newspaper Archive.

### **Quorn, the Farnhams and a tangled tale**

The Quorn Hunt, noted for its formative influence on the voice and vocabulary of Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia, was founded in the 18th century by the great foxhunter Hugo Meynell of Quorn Hall at Quorndon in Leicestershire. At the time of Meynell's purchase, Quorn Hall was rented by the ill-tempered 4th Earl Ferrers (hanged, with a silken rope, in 1760 for murdering his steward); but until the late 17th century it had belonged to the Farnham family whose association with Quorndon goes back to medieval times. Today Quorn Hall is owned by Leicestershire County Council, though George Farnham, himself a former chairman of the County Council, is still seated at Quorn House.



*Above: Mr and Mrs George Farnham.*



*Above: the south front, originally the entrance.*

In his useful collection of Quorndon Records the present squire's late great uncle, the antiquary G.F. Farnham, cited documents that 'conclusively prove that the family of Farnham was seated in Quorndon at least as early as the reign of Henry III; and he added: 'the family has remained there in varying degrees of prosperity and adversity ever since'.

Formerly owned by the Arundels, the Quorn lands apparently came into the possession of the Farnhams in the 13th century. In the 1280's a Robert de Farnham served in France with the 'Crouchback' Earl of Leicester and Lancaster (Edward I's brother), and in the 14th century another Robert is recorded as MP

for Leicestershire and steward to the powerful Henry, Lord Beaumont, at Loughborough.

The steward's son, also Robert, was implicated in a scandalous robbery of Elena de Rous but managed to redeem himself by his gallantry at Crécy and the siege of Calais. A chantry was founded in the chapel at Quorn by Robert's son in 1392.

In the 15th century the Quorn estate was divided between Thomas Farnham of Nether Hall (as Quorn Hall was then called) and Robert Farnham of Over Hall (pulled down in the 18th century and subsequently replaced by the present Quorn House nearby). This division appears to have led to family arguments, even litigation, which dragged on for hundreds of years.

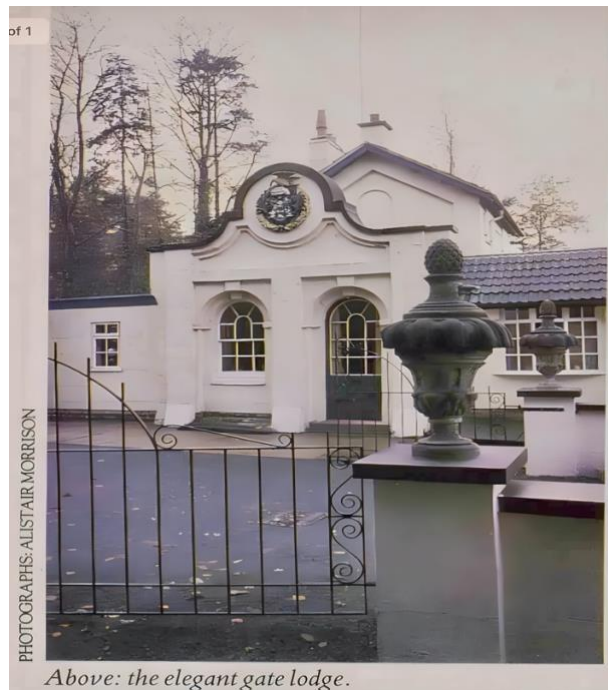
Of the Nether Hall branch, John Farnham was a career courtier, serving as Gentleman Pensioner to Queen Elizabeth I, and his brother Thomas, MP for Leicester, was Teller of the Exchequer to Edward VI and Bloody Mary. In the 17th century Henry Farnham overreached himself in making alterations to Nether Hall (later, of course, further extended by Hugo Meynell) and the property finally had to be sold by trustees in 1686. Henry's son, Benjamin, shrewdly made up for this loss by marrying one of the co-heiresses of the Over Hall branch, thus eventually reuniting the Farnham family though not without further recourse to the law.

Among the earlier squires of Over Hall Adrian Farnham incurred a fine of £15 for refusing to attend Charles I's Coronation and a further £40 penalty for failing to take up the knighthood to which his income entitled him. Notwithstanding such irritations, often the cause of Parliamentary disaffection, Adrian's son, Edward, was an active Royalist supporter in the Civil War, spending six months in prison and having his estate confiscated for his pains.

The Cavalier Edward later recovered the Over Hall estate at the cost of heavy fines. The Farnham estates were not finally cleared of debt until the time of Benjamin Farnham's son, another Edward Farnham who died in 1775.

Meanwhile, the increasingly derelict Over Hall had been pulled down in 1747. Following the deaths of his two bachelor brothers, one a clergyman, the other a naval captain, yet another "Edward Farnham, who married a daughter of George III's chaplain, succeeded to the state at the end of the 18th century and decided to build a suitable new seat, Quorndon House (the name later changed to Quorn House) was built in the late Georgian style in about 1820 with two satisfying bows on the west front overlooking the gardens and lake. Edward, who filled the

traditional county posts of Deputy Lieutenant, Justice of the Peace and High Sheriff, was also responsible for the elegant lodge.

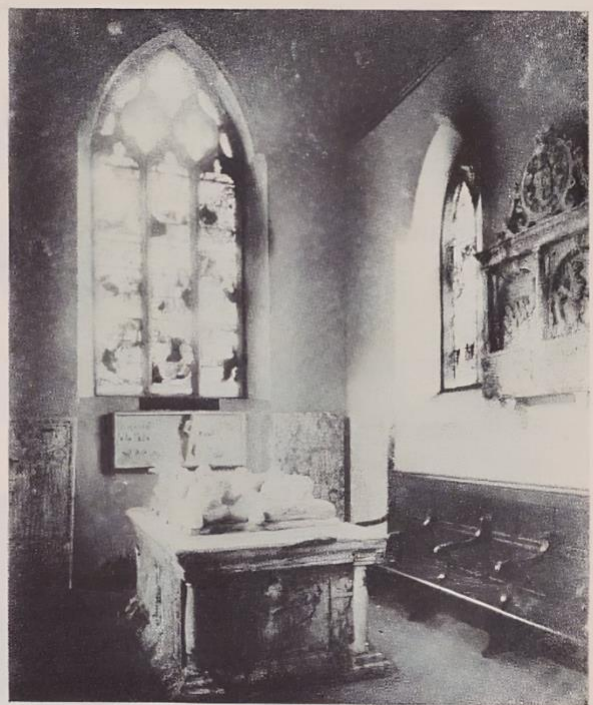


*Above: the elegant gate lodge.*

Instead of leaving well alone, the next squire, Edward Basil Farnham, MP for North Leicestershire, who married a Cradock-Hartopp, embarked on various Victorian improvements such as switching the entrance from the south to the east and erecting a vast service wing to the north. Further elaborate, and for the most part unsightly, additions were made at the end of the 19th century by his son, William (known in the Farnham family as 'Silly Willy'), a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. These included a ballroom, a room in celebration of India (in which country Willy appears to have suffered a touch of the sun), new stables and other extravagances. In 1887 he enjoyed the distinction of being the last High Sheriff of Leicestershire to be escorted by his own outriders and postillions. Silly Willy was declared bankrupt a few years later when most of the then 2,000 acre estate had to be sold. His wife, Catherine (or 'Pussy'), a Scott from Great Barr Hall in Staffordshire, went down to Surrey to look after the old courtier Lord Edward Pelham-Clinton in his declining years. Lord Edward whose remarkable collection of royal memorabilia formed the basis for Barry St John Nevill's recent illustrated volume, 'Life at the Court of Queen Victoria' was an uncle by marriage of Willy through the Cradock-Hartopps. Pussy lived on until 1937, returning to Quorn in 1933 following the death of her bachelor brother-in-law, G.F., the antiquary and local historian.



*Above: the staircase Hall about 1880.*

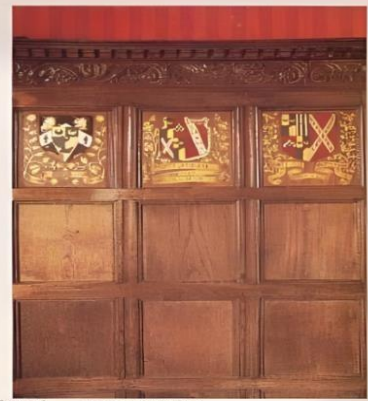


*Above: the Farnham chapel in Quorndon Church.*



*Above: the west front in about the 1880s, showing the original entrance to the south.*

A convalescent home in the Second World War, Quorn House has been comprehensively renovated in recent years by Silly Willy's and Pussy's grandson, George and his wife, Barbara, née Mathers, also from Leicestershire. A memorable day in Quorn's modern history was when the Duke of Edinburgh attended a garden party there in Silver Jubilee Year. George Farnham was born in 1927, educated at Harrow (where he compiled a monograph on the local Lepidoptera) and did his National Service with the Gordon Highlanders before studying textiles at the Leicester College of Technology. He then ran his own hosiery factory for some 30 years.



Above: three examples of the late-19th-century 'Tudorbethan' panelling in the dining-room, which is 'a glorious feast of . . . ancestor worship'.



Above: the present entrance hall.



Above: part of the library.



Above: the staircase rising from the Staircase Hall.

He is a talented amateur artist, whose works include a romantic landscape mural rather in the Rex Whistler manner at Quorn; the brilliantly ingenious 'Diorama' of the Battle of Bosworth at the Battlefield Interpretive Centre (which he did much to set up when he was chairing the County Council); and a charming, illustrated account of Quorn and its surroundings. The exterior of the house has been sympathetically tidied up, with additions such as the old service wing being nipped off. Inside, most of the Victorian clutter evident from old photographs has also been cleared away. The dramatic Staircase Hall has been decorated in a Georgian shade of green, though the dining-room remains a glorious feast of late 19th-century 'Tudorbethan' panelling, heraldry and ancestor worship.

The lake and fishpond have also been restored so as to provide fly-fishing for members of the public visiting Quorn. Other attractions on the estate for visitors include the Mill Shop, a garden centre, the Woodland Tea-room and archery lessons. The Farnham's youngest son, Matthew, won the Silver Arrow at Harrow and is an enthusiastic compound bowman. They have two other sons, John and Charles, both in the textile industry, and a daughter, Georgina Ryder, who is married to a Dorset squire.

In addition to his distinguished service to the County Council, George Farnham has also chaired the county branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England and became a Deputy Lieutenant in 1984. In April he will be installed as High Sheriff, the sixth member of his family to hold this office. He will not, however, be employing outriders or postillions.



*Above: the west front of Quorn House from the lake.*

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*Quorn House, Quorndon, Leicestershire is not open to the public, though the Mill Centre on the estate is open regularly.*