

# A HISTORY OF LILIES

by

PETER EATON



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**Lord Nugent**

## **LILIES**

*A Country Seat at Weedon, near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire*

### **The Environs**

'Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire was a town in the time of the Saxons. William the Conqueror gave several yard-lands here, on condition that the owner should find litter or straw for his bed whenever he came that way. William of Aylesbury held this charter with the addition that he should likewise straw the King's chamber and provide him three eels, if he came in the winter; but if in summer, besides straw for the bed, he was to provide two green geese. This he was to repeat three times a year if the King came so often that way.'

**AYLESBURY** has a long history as a settlement with some strategic significance. In 571 its near-impregnable fortress was captured by the Saxons. King John, in 1204, gave the town to the Earl of Essex and later it was held by Thomas Bullen, the father of Anne Bullen (Boleyn). Her presence led to frequent visits by Henry VIII, who is thought to have stayed at the Manor House or at the King's Head, a public house dating from the fifteenth century, which is still one of the sights of the town despite being obscured from the Market Square by an ugly modern building.

In 1554 Queen Mary granted the town its Charter of Incorporation (later revoked) entitling it to return two members of Parliament and it became the County Town. During the Civil War Aylesbury, staunchly Parliamentary, was besieged by Prince Rupert's Oxford-based troops who were repelled in a battle on the Winslow Road, now known as the Battle of Holman's Bridge. Some historians mention it as a mere skirmish, while others say it took place in the grounds of Lilies, with 10,000 men taking part. A subsequent owner of the Manor of Aylesbury was the Marquis of Buckingham (later to become the Duke of Buckingham), who held it until 1848. He was the brother of Lord George Grenville, Baron Nugent, owner of Lilies for many years.

### **WEEDON**

**WEEDON** is a hamlet three miles from Aylesbury on the Buckingham Road, it has only a few houses, one public house, and a single shop. It is a hamlet rather than a village since it has only a Methodist Chapel, the parish Church being situated in Hardwick one mile away.

Harold Godwinson was Lord of the Manor before the Norman Conquest, and the hamlet is mentioned in the Westminster Abbey Muniment book in an entry for 1065. In 1066 Weedon was given to the Abbot of Westminster.

In 1302 Ralph de Weedon was Lord of the Manor. Between that time and 1516 there were six various owners including William of Wykeham, who obtained the Manor from King Edward III in 1386. The Manor of Weedon was also in the Baronial family of Moels, who probably inherited it from that of Newmarch, and was afterwards in the Cobham family. Sir John Cobham gave the Manor of Weedon-Hill in Chesham, and Weedon in the Vale to the crown, in the reign of Edward III. Subsequently it was granted to the Breckhocks or Lees.

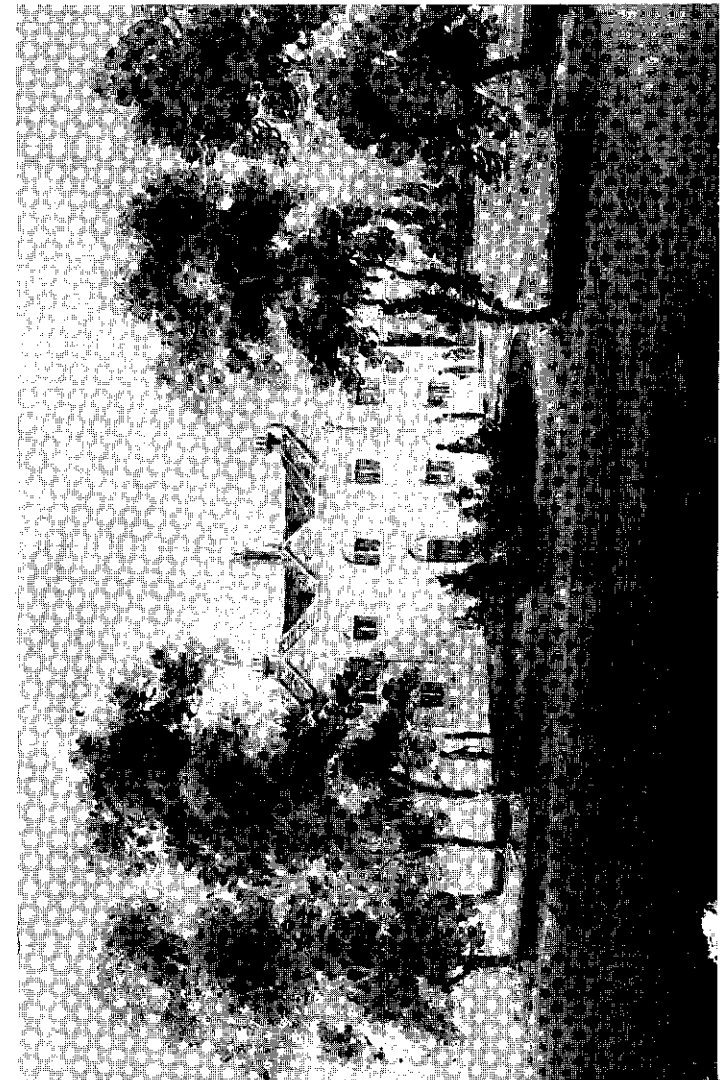
The later history of Weedon illustrates the proposition that the majority of villages and hamlets in England obtain whatever distinction they may have from their famous inhabitants. There have been two residents deserving of special mention; John Bonnycastle (1750-1831) and Nubar Gulbenkian (1896-1972). The former was Professor of Mathematics at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. He was a friend of Leigh Hunt the essayist, theatre critic and radical, and also of Fuseli the famous artist. Bonnycastle wrote books on mathematics for which William Blake provided the illustrations, and lived in a farm house belonging to Lilies. leased to him by the Earl of Lichfield.

Gulbenkian, the oil millionaire, lived in a small cottage in the hamlet for the duration of the Second World War. He says in his autobiography *Pantarexia* that his fear that the War was looming led him to take a "very small workman's cottage at Weedon". He did not leave the hamlet until 1948 because, as he claimed, of the shortage of petrol. For years he drove a pony and cart the three miles to and from Aylesbury Railway Station.

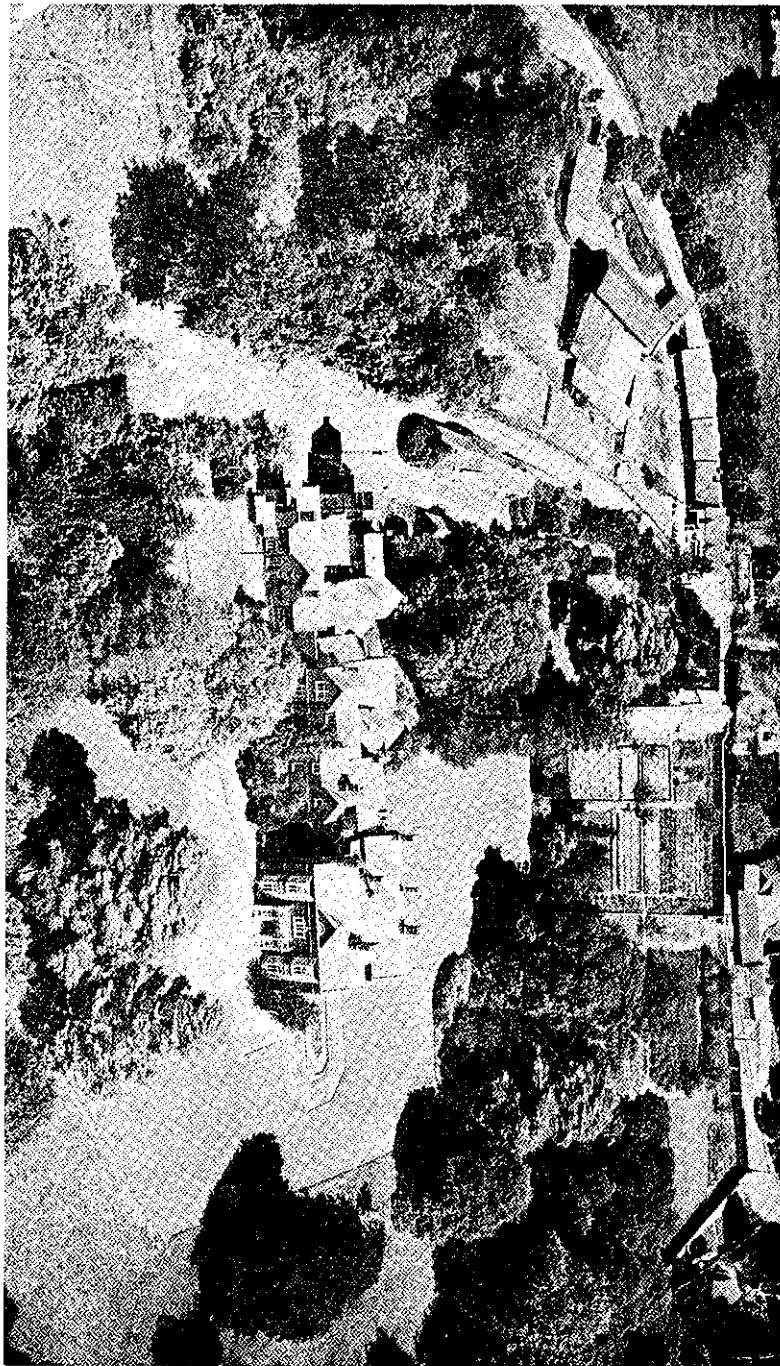
### LILIES

It is perhaps significant that the house and grounds, which occupied an extensive area, are marked on a seventeenth century Morden map but not the hamlet. Like the hamlet, the site of the house is of considerable antiquity and was the scene of numerous historical dramas.

According to a former owner, Lord Nugent, the site of Lilies was first occupied in the twelfth century by a French



Lilies Circa 1830



Monastery, called 'Lelius', supposedly after the lily, the emblem of France. The monks' burial place near the kitchen garden is reputed to be haunted (see appendix 2).

During the Middle Ages the House was owned by a number of important people, although many of them did not actually live there. It came into its own, however, during the reign of Elizabeth I, when it is said it came into the hands of the Drake Family of Amersham. They acquired it through the marriage of Francis Drake of Esher to Joan, eldest daughter of William Tothill, a lawyer and son of Richard Tothill one of the most prosperous and important of Tudor publishers, whose fortune was largely founded on his possession of the Royal patent for printing legal books.

By 1523, the ownership of the Manor of Weedon and Hardwicke, including the mansion of Lilies, had passed to the Lee family and remained with them for over two hundred years. The most important member of this family was Sir Henry Lee, K.G. (1530-1610). In 1545 he was a page to Henry VIII and was later Master of the Armoury and Queen Elizabeth's Champion. According to John Aubrey, Lee was a great builder and sheep farmer, a forest ranger and also a minor poet, not to mention being a half-brother of Queen Elizabeth. For this reason, Lee each year made a vow to maintain the honour of Queen Elizabeth against all-comers and in the annual accession tilts (the Olympiads of the time) he challenged Sir Philip Sidney.

Sir 'Harry' Lee ordered that all his family should be christened 'Harry'. He kept a woman to read to him in bed, one being the parson's wife at Wotton.\* Sir Henry in his will, gave his mansion at Lilies to his mistress Anne Vavasour (alias Finch) who had been a Maid of Honour to Queen Elizabeth. He had effigies of her made for his marble tomb, much to the disgust of the then Bishop! Sir Henry wanted to be buried at Lilies, but was instead buried in the chancel of Quarrendon Church along with his father and mother.\*\*

\* Wotton House had gardens landscaped by Capability Brown and was built on the plan of the Buckingham town house, now Buckingham Palace. In the 1770s the two houses looked much the same. Most of the family connected with the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos are buried at Wotton, including the last Duke.

\*\* His sarcophagus was very costly, with a statue in gilt armour decorated with the insignia of the Garter. Close by was a fine altar tomb with the recumbent figures of his father and mother upon it. These figures attracted the admiration of Sir Francis Chantrey, the sculptor, who told Lord Nugent that his first idea for the exquisite sleeping sisters sculpture in Lichfield Cathedral was borrowed from them. "His lordship would willingly have removed the Quarrendon monuments to his adjacent seat, the Lilies, but it was not to be. Dr Lee also offered to convey them to Hartwell, for their preservation in the Chapel of that mansion. The obstacle to both these overtures proved to be the archdeacon's blind opposition; and the consequence was the total destruction of the objects in dispute".

Shortly thereafter, the statue of Sir Henry Lee with his wife and mistress was destroyed, and a few centuries later more of the Lee family statues were destroyed at their burial place at Quarrendon. Sir Henry's father, Sir Anthony Lee, must at some time have lived at Lilies, because there was a move to erect a statue of him there.

In the seventeenth century Lady Elizabeth Lindsey (née Pope) resided at Lilies. She was the daughter and heiress of the Earl of Downe, first married to Sir F.H. Lee and later to the Earl of Lindsey. (The latter was a godson of Elizabeth I, a general in Charles I's army and an Admiral of the Fleet. The first Earl of Lindsey died of wounds received at the Battle of Edgehill in 1642). Lady Elizabeth made Lilies an important estate, and her son by her first marriage was created Earl of Lichfield.

Lilies was then briefly occupied by Sir Thomas Saunders, previously of Dinton. He was Sheriff of the county in 1649. During the Civil War his younger brother, Francis Saunders, was imprisoned at Ely House, Aylesbury, for delinquency and was only released on the payment by his brother of one thousand pounds, a gigantic sum in those days.

Lady Charlotte Lee lived at Lilies in the eighteenth century. She was the great-grand-daughter of Charles II and Barbara Villiers. Her brother, George, third Earl of Lichfield, married Dinah Frankland, a renowned beauty and, according to Thomas Hearn, a woman of 'great sense'. She was the great-great-grand-daughter of Oliver Cromwell, and thus fourth in descent from him, while her husband, according to the *Complete Peerage* by G.E. Cockayne, was fourth in descent from Charles I.

There are many connections between the estate and the Lee family, and several members of the family are buried at Hardwick Church,\* the parish church of Hardwick-cum-Weedon. They include Sir Robert Lee (died 1616), who had eight sons and six daughters. From him, it is said, were descended early colonists of America, including Robert E. Lee commander of the Confederate

\* This church had Thomas Wood, the celebrated lawyer, as its rector from 1704 until his death in 1722. He was the nephew of Anthony A. Wood.

forces during the American Civil War. Also in the eighteenth century the house was inhabited by the eleventh and twelfth Viscounts Dillon. One of the sons of the eleventh Viscount Dillon became a general in the French service, fought in the American War of Independence, became Governor of various West Indian islands under French suzerainty and was guillotined during the purges of the French Revolution. A daughter of the same Viscount married General Bertrand, who accompanied Napoleon in his exiles both at Elba and at St. Helena. In 1801, the twelfth Viscount Dillon, acting as representative of the Lee family, sold the manor of Hardwick-cum-Weedon to the Marquis of Buckingham.

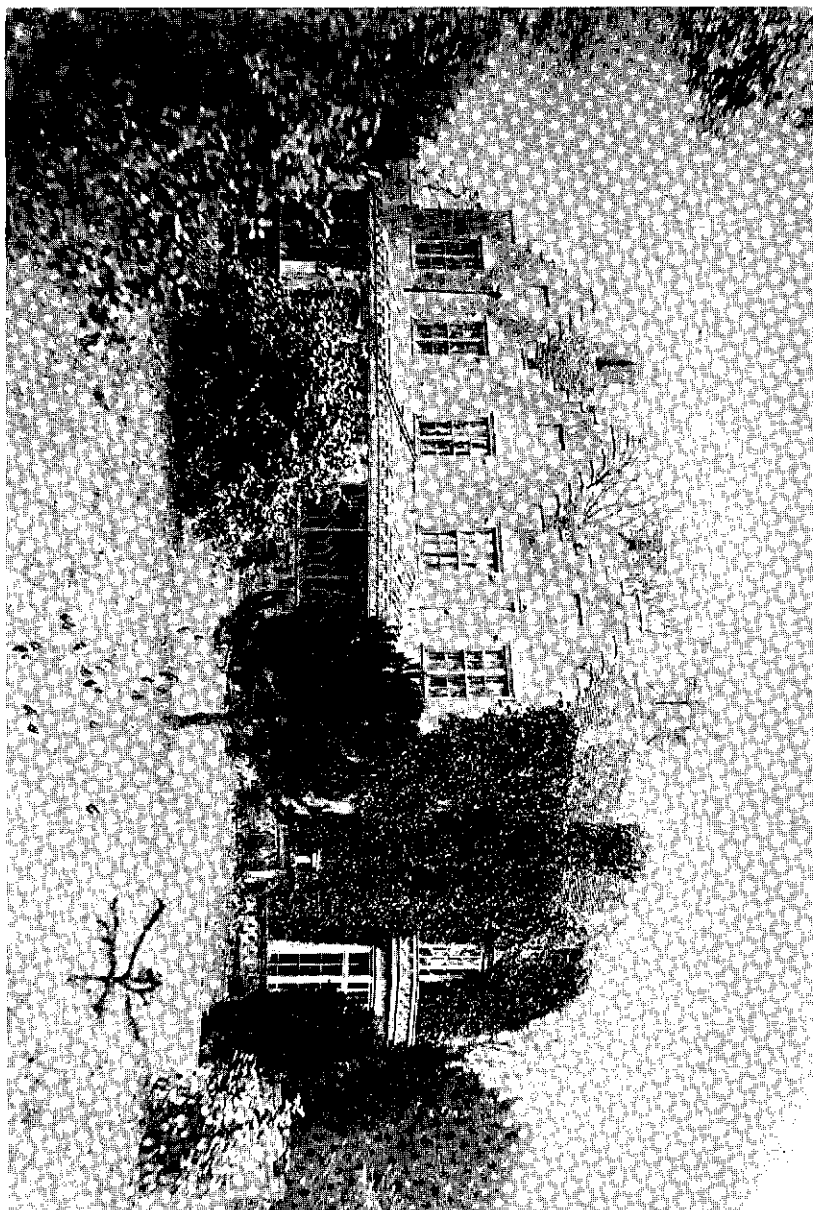
In more recent times, undoubtedly the most distinguished owner and resident was Lord George Nugent, born at Stowe in 1788, the younger son of Lord George Grenville, first Marquis of Buckingham.\* His title was inherited from his mother, Baroness Nugent of Carlanstown, Ireland who died in 1812 at Buckingham House, now Buckingham Palace. Lord Nugent was given the estate of Lilies by his brother, the first Duke of Buckingham, whose full title was 'Richard Plantagenet Campbell Temple Nugent Brydges Chandos Grenville, Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, Earl Temple, Viscount and Baron Cobham, Earl Nugent and Earl Kynloss' and who was the only person elevated to ducal rank by King George IV.\*\*

Lady Maria Nugent, whose husband was a Field Marshall and who later became M.P. for Aylesbury, wrote in her diary for September 28th 1805 of breaking her journey from London to Stowe at Lilies; 'There are now five generations in this house, Colonel Nugent, his mother, and grandmother, his daughter, all eating, drinking, and talking, and the old folks enjoying themselves, quite as much as the young ones.'

\* Lord Nugent's father, the Marquis of Buckingham was all for taxing America. Horace Walpole said he had 'disgusting qualities'. His father before him (Lord Nugent's grandfather) had been responsible for the Stamp Act, which, with the desire for a permanent force of 10,000 troops in America, had led to the break from America and the revolution there.

\*\* Lord George's brother married an heiress, the daughter of the Duke of Chandos, descended from the younger sister of Henry VIII. Their sister, Lady Mary Anne Grenville, was married in 1811 in Buckingham Palace, to the tenth Baron Arundell of Wardour.

Lilies 1862



Lilies was conveniently placed as a halfway house between London and Stowe, where the Duke of Buckingham had many distinguished visitors including both Wellington and Nelson. It seems likely that the house, during this period, played some small part in English history.

Lord Nugent lived at Lilies for more than thirty five years, during which period he was notable both for the radical tone of his politics and his distinguished circle of friends, both political and literary. Because of his radical views however, his brother refused to entertain him at Stowe.\* Many famous people visited Lilies during this period, including Sir Francis Chantrey the sculptor, Sir William Smyth the scientist, and Sir Thomas Lawrence the artist who painted a portrait of Lord Nugent. Lord Nugent married a daughter of General Poulett and one of the stones under a tree at Lilies has the name Poulett carved upon it. Nugent's brother-in-law, Captain Poulett was left a considerable fortune which he gambled away within two years and was then thrown into Aylesbury gaol as a debtor.\*\*

Lord Nugent was a great admirer of Cromwell yet, when Civil Governor of Corfu, his liberal principles led him to forbid the formation of Orange Lodges amongst the troops there. He zealously supported Queen Caroline and in 1812 was elected M.P. for Aylesbury where his contributions included a bill in 1848 to

\* The second Duke, Lord George's nephew, was extremely eccentric even by Victorian standards. He bankrupted himself by trying to acquire sufficient land to enable him to drive from Stowe to the House of Commons, some 60 miles, entirely on his own property. He died in the Great Western Hotel, Paddington. Due to his bankruptcy, there was a forced sale at Stowe at which the contents of the Grenville House took 40 days to sell by auction (A lock of hair from the Queen of France fetched £7.10s). It is quite common even now to find Royal Memorabilia in large country houses. I remember a sale in Cheshire at which a lock of hair from Bonnie Prince Charlie and some of Queen Elizabeth I's stockings were sold!

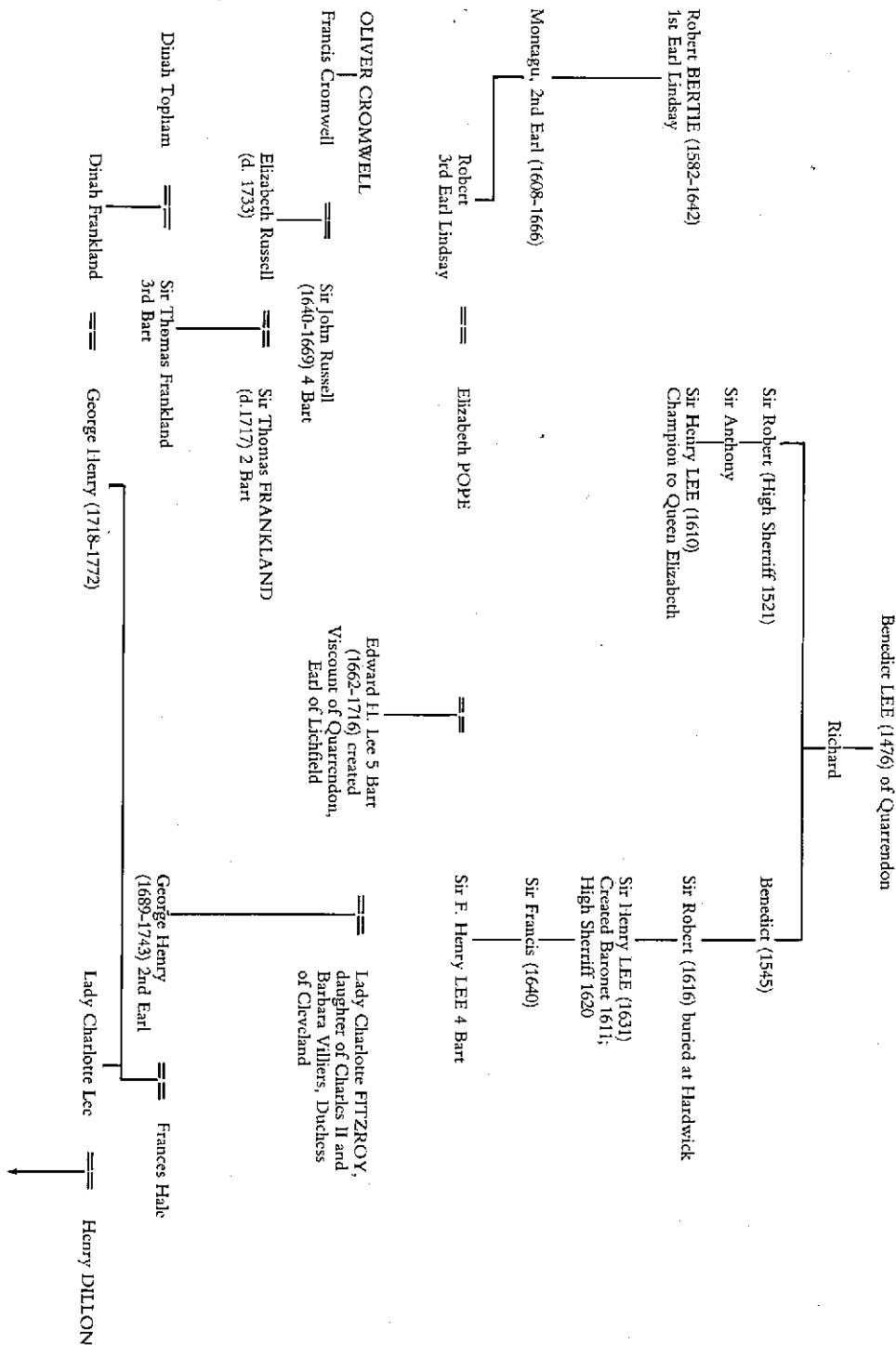
\*\* Aylesbury gaol is an historic prison. It was there that the first woman to be elected to Parliament spent her sentence scrubbing floors. She was an Irish patriot, Countess Constance Markievicz, who was elected to the British Parliament in 1918, although she never took her seat. She was court martialled, and two generals found her guilty of armed rebellion against the British Government, she became convict number 12 and was treated and dressed as a convicted murderess, sentenced to be shot. In 1919, in an article headed 'Break Down The Bastilles!' she expressed her indignation at the social conditions which drove women to crime: "I worked with a gang of murderesses in Aylesbury. Some were bad, but most were foolish working girls who had got into trouble and had killed their little babies because life with them was impossible: because they had no way of earning a living, nowhere to go and nothing to eat".



abolish capital punishment (an idea markedly ahead of its time), and he was a member of a committee concerned with building a new prison in Aylesbury, as well as letting it be known that he was against the idea of a permanent standing army in this country. Robert Gibbs, the historian, described Lord Nugent's character as 'Honourable, full of generosity and meekness.' Nugent was also instrumental, with the Verney family, in bringing the railway to Aylesbury, and was president of the Bucks Anti-Slavery Committee. It was suggested by a member of Lord Tennyson's family that Nugent should have started his own political party. In his own time, Lord Nugent's literary work also received high praise, Lord Lytton wrote that he thought his verses the most beautiful he had ever read, and *Some Memorials of John Hampden, His Party and His Times* (1832) was cited as one of the greatest biographies in the English language. (Nugent was responsible for having a memorial to John Hampden erected on the battlefield where he fell). Lord Macaulay, the eminent historian said that reading the biography gave him a great deal of pleasure, it was generally highly esteemed and went through a number of editions. Nugent also wrote *Lands Classical and Sacred* (1845), encapsulating his experience of the Ionian Islands where he held diplomatic rank. This is now a scarce book and a collectors item. Another less difficult work to find is his two volume set of short stories *Legends of the Library of Lilies* by the Lord and Lady There.

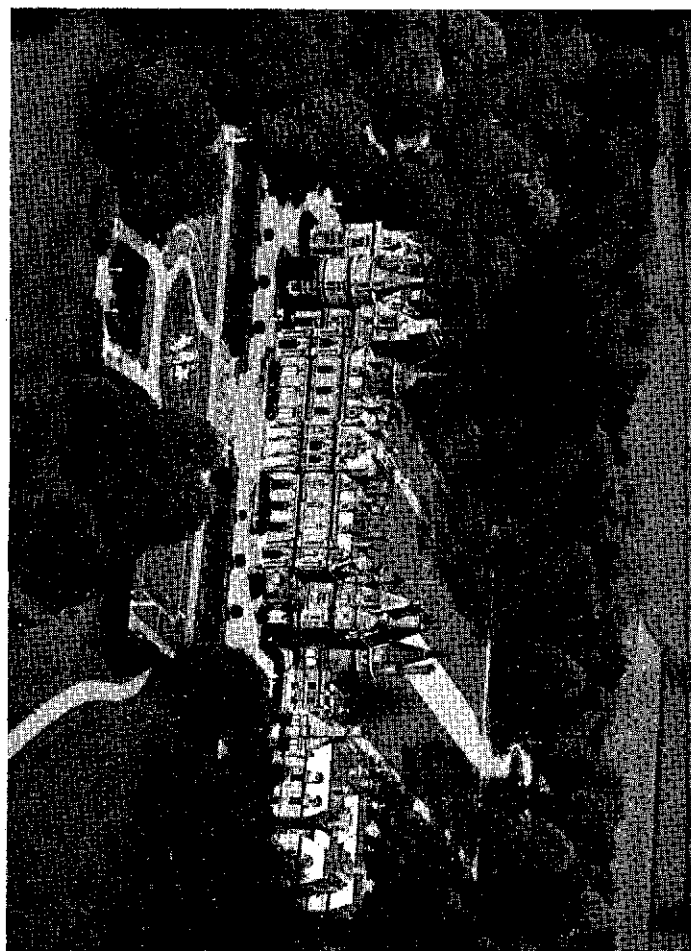
At this time parts of the house still dated from Tudor times, although other parts had been partially rebuilt for a French Prince then living at Hartwell House or Stowe.\* Sheehan's *History of Buckinghamshire* (1861) mentions repairs and improvements being made to the old Lilies house in 1802. After the death of Lord Nugent in 1850 the house was inherited by a relative and occupied by A.J.N. Connell, MD (Mrs Connell being sister of the deceased Lady Nugent). The house burned down in 1860, a new house being immediately planned and completed by 1870.

\* It was at Stowe that the Pretender to the French throne, the count of Paris lived for some time, until his death in 1894. This splendid mansion is 916 feet in length and at one time had ornamental gardens of 500 acres laid out by Capability Brown. These grounds are still a showpiece and attract hundreds of visitors a year. In 1849 the manuscripts from Stowe House were bought by Lord Ashburnham for £8,000, and sold in 1883 to the British Library for £45,000!





Waddesdon, home of the Rothschilds.



The architect for the new house was George Devey, who has been described as being one of the most influential architects in England in the nineteenth century. Devey was the first Victorian architect to devise a method of building derived from the local vernacular, and some of his earlier designs anticipated those of Philip Webb and Norman Shaw, some ten years his junior. He had initially trained as a painter under J.S. Cotman and J.D. Harding, only later coming to architecture. His artistic training was a major influence, and his ideas grew out of the accidental asymmetries of country houses built and altered over long periods of time. Devey wanted his houses to reflect the accidental and rambling nature of their prototypes, Lilies is an excellent example of this organic approach. Devey built more large houses than any of his contemporaries, C.F.A Voysey worked with him and was influenced by him (Devey belonged to the Theistic church founded by Voysey's father); it is also said that Devey influenced William Morris and his group. The neglect of George Devey by architectural historians is shortly to be remedied by a definitive biography by Jill Allibone. The original plans and drawings of Lilies are now in the Royal Institute of British Architects. Many of the original features are still to be seen, including some fine examples of Victorian stained glass.

The speed at which the rebuilding was carried out was reflected in a contemporary article which appeared in the Bucks Herald in October 1870 "The extraordinary progress which has been made is manifest in the nearly completed and beautiful new mansion.... showing the fitness of men and materials which have been engaged there." Many improvements in the domestic arrangements were introduced, lighting was installed within the mansion and along the carriageway, provided by a purpose-built gas works erected on the estate.

Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild was the first tenant to inhabit the present house from where he would ride daily some seven miles to assess the progress of the building of his new mansion at Waddesdon. The Baron's sister was so impressed by Devey's work that she herself had a house designed and built by him close to her brother's home. The area of Bucks in which Lilies is situated is famous for the mansions built by the Rothschilds-(as

late as 1939 two-thirds of Weedon belonged to the Rothschild family). Halton is now occupied by the R.A.F., Mentmore by the Hare Krishna organisation and Waddesdon and Ascott are still owned by the Rothschilds and are open to the public.\*

After the Rothschild tenancy, the house was owned and occupied by Mr Henry Cazenove, a stockbroker who became High Sheriff of Bucks. The Cazenoves were an old Huguenot family whose lineage can be traced back to the fifteenth century. They lived in France until the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, when they escaped to Geneva. One of the family emigrated to America in 1790 and founded the town of New Geneva in the state of New York. Mr Henry Cazenove moved into Lilies with his wife Barbara and their two daughters, Edith and Alice. Hundreds of the aristocracy of Buckinghamshire were invited to his daughter's wedding reception at the house. Those attending included Lord and Lady Rosebery, Tyrwhitt Drake, the Charringtons, Freemantles, Lees, Russells, Gurneys and Barclays. Mr Devey, the architect, gave the couple a silver claret jug. Several of the Cazenove family are buried in the local church (see Appendix III)

Lilies was subsequently purchased by the Brittain family. George Alfred Brittain was born in Buenos Ayres in 1821 and died at Lilies in 1904. He left property in Uruguay and Lilies itself to his son, Vernon. Vernon Brittain was a most colourful and eccentric character. Each morning he rode up the village street on a grey horse, tossing 2/6d to each man who touched his forelock and 2/- to each woman who curtsied to him. He also hunted deer and regularly drilled a troop of soldiers on the lawn. After his death in the 1914 war, Lilies was put on the market. In the advertisement (which appeared in the Times) Lilies was described as having stabling for nineteen horses, as well as motor houses with rooms above.

\* All these houses were built on rising ground and the various cousins would, at a pre-ordained time, signal to each other from their various towers and turrets.

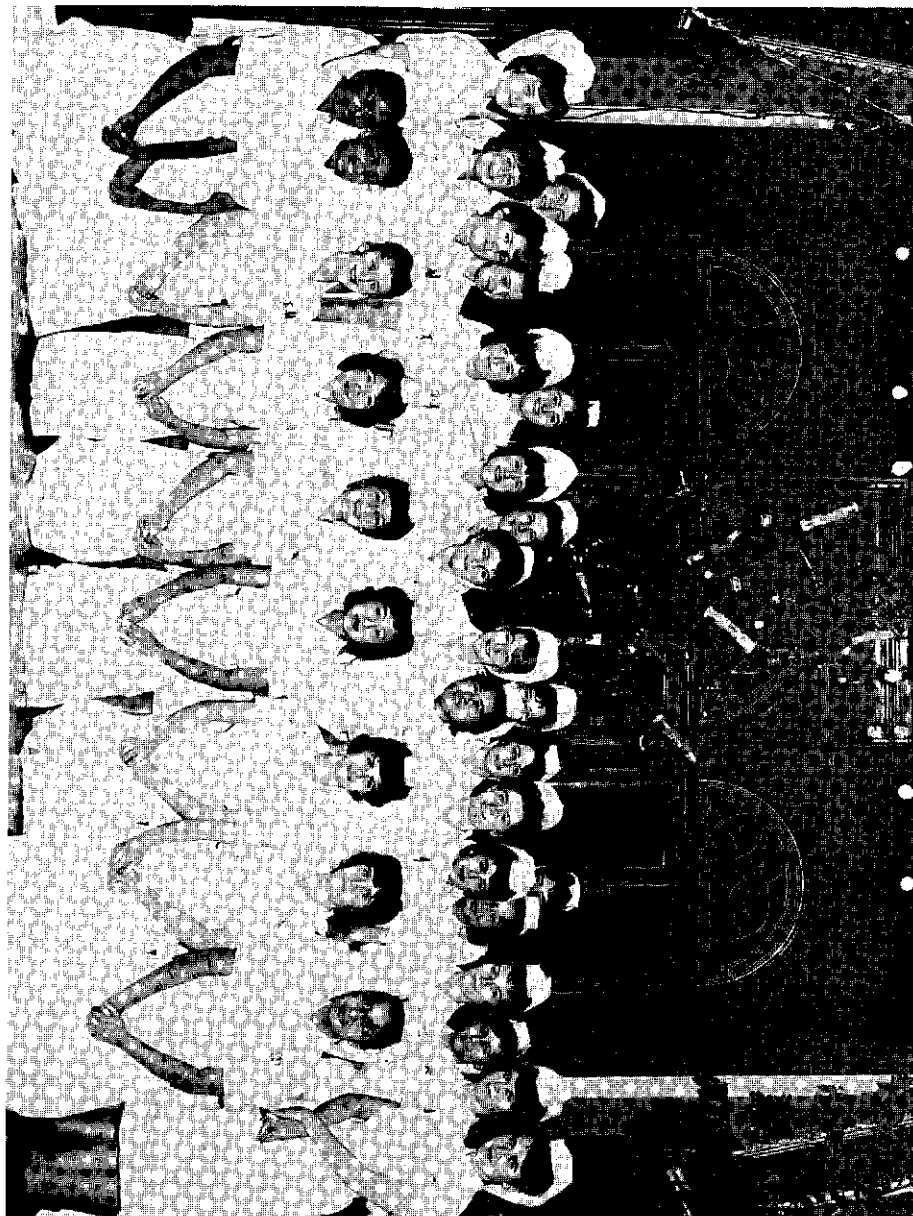
Miss Isabel Heap owned the house between the two world wars. Her family were woollen dyers in Rochdale, Lancashire. Miss Heap kept a huge staff of indoor and outdoor servants and the house was run in typically Edwardian style. Many of the older inhabitants of Weedon were employed there, and tell of the stylish way of life in the house until the death of Isabel in 1939. The house then went into decline, being taken over for use as offices for a firm of distillers during the second war. Later in the war, the billiard room was used by Dr Eduard Benes, exiled President of Czechoslovakia to train some of his resistance fighters. He would make the daily journey to Weedon from his home in the neighbouring village of Aston Abbotts.\* Benes was born at Koslavany, Bohemia in 1884, he became a Bachelor of Law and a Doctor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne and at Dijon University. He was a friend of Professor Masaryk, and succeeded him as President of the Republic in 1935. Benes, as a sincere and devoted friend of democracy, was responsible for Czechoslovakia's straightforward, pro-Western foreign policy. He was compelled to resign the office of President on October 5th 1938, due to German pressure after the Munich Conference. He left Czechoslovakia for London, then lectured at Chicago University until July 1939 before returning to England where he assumed leadership of the new Czechoslovak Liberation Movement with the slogan 'A free Czechoslovakia in a free Europe'.

In 1946 ownership of the Lilies passed to the Royal Bucks Hospital for a number of years, during which time it was used as a training centre for nurses recruited from over 30 different countries. From visits we have received over the years by women who trained there it seems their stay at Lilies improved both the quality of their private and professional lives.

When in 1969, the house was purchased by my wife and myself it was in a dilapidated condition and empty, except for 30 W.Cs in working order, and 20 baths in as many rooms. The roof

\* It was in the house at Aston Abbotts that the Freemantle family, many of whom were admirals and explorers, lived for generations. It was also here that Sir James Ross died in 1831, he was an Admiral, Arctic Explorer and discoverer of the Magnetic Pole.

This photograph illustrates CHRISTMAS AT THE LILIES during the time it was a preliminary training school for nurses. Carols were sung around the tree in the hall in German, Chinese, French, Italian, English, & Persian (Iranian).



had also fallen into total disrepair. During the time we have owned it we have attempted gradually to restore its atmosphere internally and its fabric externally. The stables and services end of the house has recently been converted into separate residences, and much work has gone into restoring the exterior of the house. Internally, we have imported our collection of original art acquired during the 40s and 50s which includes a number of fine Pre-Raphaelite and Victorian paintings.

There are four chalk cartoons by G.F.S. Watts for the oil paintings in St Paul's Cathedral, also original oils and drawings by Simeon Solomon, Ruskin, Rosetti, Lord Leighton, Arthur Hughes, Frederic Sandys, Tom Mostyn, George Romney, Sir James Gunn, A. Lemon, L. Boden, A.E. Russell, Etty etc.etc. Drawings by Peter Scott, Edward Wolff, Hugh Thompson, H.J. Ford, Sir Francis Rose, Richard Doyle etc.etc. In all there are more than eight hundred pictures and posters. (Many of the carpets were originally from the home of Holman Hunt). In addition to collecting pictures, we have also acquired over the years an amazing collection of ephemera and artefacts, many of which are now exhibited in cases scattered about the house, mainly in various of the book rooms (of which there are about 25). These cases contain a multitude of items strange and rare, some of historical significance and others illustrative of everyday life in past times.

There is part of the first gramophone record manufactured, the first television tube, the first manufactured wireless set and about 20 early radios, the first book illustrated photographically, the first newspaper published with an original photograph, the first book on television and the first TV Times. There is ephemera that belonged to Professor Karl Pearson given to me by his secretary. (He examined the actual head of Cromwell and wrote a book of over 100 pages on his researches).

There are also signed photographs of famous scientists, theatre people, authors, artists, and the like, including one of Charlie Pierce, the murderer. Items of musical interest include Rosetti's music stand and part of an Elgar manuscript. There are artefacts from early Egyptian and Cyprian tombs, South

American Aztec remains, ammonites and other early fossils, part of Empress Josephine's wedding dress, some early lace, King George VI's ration book, used during the last war. There is a large carved screen which was exhibited in the Great Exhibition, the first airmail stamp amongst the many other unusual stamps, also an early gramophone and tape recorder. There are old typewriters, fountain pens and early playing cards. There are also early games and a showcase devoted to war relics and anti-war propaganda. These are only a few of the objects which can be seen.

Amongst the books, letters and documents on display are some signed by Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Charles I, Charles II, Queen Victoria and many other members of the Royal Houses of Europe. There is a letter written by Cromwell and a large deed signed by John Hampden, also books signed by authors and artists including Holman Hunt, Turner, Simeon Solomon, F.R. Fowke, S.C. Smith, R. Ginsberg, Roy Campbell, Ronald Clarke, Ralph Miliband, Hubert Parry, Montague Summers, Sir Richard Doll, Jackie Collins, Anna Kavan, Paul Getty, Michael Foot, Michael Holroyd, one belonging to Napoleon's sister and hundreds more.

Apart from its everyday use as a bookstore, Lilies has been the venue for several important medical conferences and it was here that the final details were worked out for the historic implementation of the first use of recombinant DNA technology (Genetic Engineering) by Professor Harry Keen and his team from Guy's Hospital.

It would be impossible to name the number of celebrities who have visited the house. A few film companies have used it in some of their productions; Kubrick spent a day wondering whether he could use it in his production of his film 'Clockwork Orange'.

**THE GROUNDS.** During the 1840s Lord Nugent employed as his gardener one Michael Rochford, later to found the immensely successful firm of Rochford, which had the largest house-plant nursery in the world and it is said there is hardly a house in England that has not a Rochford potted plant in it.

During the period of his employment at Lilies the grounds were amongst the finest in the country, not only because of the efforts of Michael Rochford but also because Lord Nugent was High Commissioner in the Ionian Islands (1832-35) and travelled widely in the Near East bringing back many plants and shrubs never seen in England before. Some of these still thrive in the grounds today.

Among the trees at Lilies may be found oaks, copper beeches, yews, cedars, redwoods (Wellingtonia), a magnificent Cedar of Lebanon, the best example in the country of a fernleaf beech and a fine avenue of limes. Some of these trees were planted by the distinguished friends of Lord Nugent and a stone memorial erected to commemorate the planter. The memorials bear names such as the Duke of Somerset, Lord John Russell (Prime Minister in 1846) and Earl Fortescue.\* Other distinguished tree planters included W.S. Landor, author of *Imaginary Conversations*, Douglas Jerrold editor of *Punch*, W. Harrison Ainsworth, Charles Dickens, Richard Westmacott the sculptor, and Robert Browning. There were at one time about 50 of these stones, not all of which remain today, but it is still possible to see 12 of them. A central stone bears the (Latin) inscription, 'May the trees planted here prosper, they are the work of my friends. We vow that they will afford a harmonious shade to who so ever approaches mindful lest they damage the sacred grave of friendship'. (see appendix II).

There have been many interesting events in the grounds. To mark the anniversary of the peace after the first world war, Miss Heap of Lilies entertained 450 Hardwick and Weedon parishioners to tea after a cricket match. Scores were low, and in the second innings the home team was all out for a mere 13 runs.

More recently, during the Jubilee Celebrations of 9th July 1977, almost the entire village turned out for the carnival procession which made its way through the village to Lilies, where the fête was held.

\* Earl Fortescue, better known as Viscount Ebrington married a daughter of Lord Seymour to whom Louis Napoleon had previously proposed, only to be refused as a penniless Frenchman. Upon her marriage, Napoleon sent her a wedding present of a fan which had belonged to Queen Hortense.

The grounds today are less extensive than in earlier times. In 1915 the house was still set in 100 acres and people could come to fish in the private lake, some three miles distant, or alternatively play a round or two on the private golf course. All that remains today is some 15 acres, but this has proved a very satisfactory nature reserve. There are foxes, a family of badgers, and small deer (probably escaped from the Zoo at Woburn, the Duke of Bedford's estate). There are also hedgehogs, squirrels, bats and other small creatures. We have counted over 60 species of birds - only a small number in comparison with 209 recorded in Buckinghamshire by Dr. Ernst Hartert and F.C.R. Jourdain (with the help of Lord Rothschild) in 1902.

The walls surrounding the house are, in part, Elizabethan. Some of stones, containing large ammonites many millions of years old, are believed to have come from the ruins of Bolbec Castle two miles away. This castle was originally built by Hugh de Bolbec whose father came to the country with William the Conqueror.

Some of the first dinosaur remains to be unearthed in this country were discovered near Lilies. It was also in the grounds of Lilies that Oliver Cromwell planned his last battle for the capture of Oxford.\*

**ASSOCIATIONS.** The closest large historic house to Lilies is Hartwell House. This house was owned by the Lee family, and in 1807 was rented, for the sum of £500 per year, to Louis XVIII King of France who was fleeing from Napoleon. (Louis had first been offered a house in Essex, but preferred Buckinghamshire as being closer to London). In 1808 the Queen of France arrived from Russia with a retinue of some 70 persons - at one time there were over 200 people living in the house and surrounding buildings. Louis had a pension from the British Government, which helped with the rent, but is known to have counted the dishes at meal times because he was so short of money. The Queen died at Hartwell in 1810 and upon his return to France Louis re-created her private garden as the Jardin Anglais at Fontainebleau. They were

\* The two military instructions given by Cromwell to his troops upon entering Oxford were:- to guard the Bodleian Library (he left his classics to Oxford University in his will) and to let Jews out of the ghetto (the first ruler since ancient times to do this).

in residence at Hartwell for several years and it seems likely that they must, on occasions, have visited Lilies.

One of the books on show at Lilies is *The Elements of Geometry*; 1852. This book has an inscription at the foot of the title page which reads 'Aylesbury Mechanic Institute with Dr John Lee FRS respects'. Lee was a former owner of Hartwell, a collector of antiquities and a man of science. He was educated at Cambridge and inherited the estate of Hartwell from the Rev. Sir George Lee. He was a founder member of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1820 (and became President of the Society in 1862). Meetings of his learned friends at Hartwell led to the formation of the Meteorological Society and the Syro-Egyptian Society and in 1830, with the assistance of Vice-Admiral William Henry Smith, he built an observatory in the south portico of Hartwell House. In 1862 he became President of the British Archaeological Association Congress at Leicester and in 1863, at the age of eighty, he was admitted a barrister of Grays Inn. The following year he became a bencher and donated £500 for an annual prize for legal essays. John Lee held opinions well in advance of his time on issues such as Women's Liberation, Pacifism and anti-smoking. There is a tree in the grounds at Lilies planted by Dr Lee FRS.\*

\* In later years the last Lord Lee of Chequers gave his house to the nation, in 1920, as a residence for the Prime Minister. And it seems that Mr A.H. Lee, then Personal Military Secretary to Lloyd George and who was later created Lord Lee, met with Winston Churchill during the Great War in order to start a rumour that the Russians had been spotted arriving at Victoria Station (with snow on their boots) to help their allies .....and the story was believed!

## APPENDIX I

An aspect of the social life of Lilies is revealed in fascinating detail in a letter written by Henrietta Anne Le Mesurier to her sister (quoted by permission of Duke University, North Carolina, U.S.A.).

*Hardwyke, September 26th 1820*

'My Dear Mary Anne,

I received your letter yesterday and acknowledge that I ought to have written to you long ago, but I waited in order that I might give you an account of the Duke of Sussex's visit at Lilies, and since that time, that is for the last week, I have been very busy, however, if your second letter had not arrived to hurry me, I had yet fully intended writing to you today. Mr White was invited to dine at Lilies, and Miss White and ourselves for the evening. Mr White, however, being under the hand of a Surgeon in London, could not go, but we of course accepted the invitation very willingly. We went about half past nine, and about ten His Royal Highness came into the Drawing room; we all rose on his entrance and most people were presented to him, Martha and I had the honour of being the first, and during the evening I assure you, I felt rather flattered at having the Duke admire us to Lady Nugent; he was exceedingly condescending and affable, and made everyone feel at their ease immediately, and I spent a very pleasant evening which I had not expected to do, as I had thought it would very likely be stiff and ceremonious. He is a handsome man, and particularly majestic both in his appearance and manners, I should think six foot three in height and exceedingly upright; he has immense mustachios and a very good humoured countenance; he wore two beautiful stars, and the Garter; after we had all been standing a short time (for etiquette did not allow of our sitting down before he did) he said to Lady Nugent "You must not stand any longer Lady Nugent, come and sit down here, and I will sit by you, and then I hope all the ladies will sit down, for I do not like to see them stand". We had a great deal of singing during the evening. Lord Nugent sings with a deal of taste, and there were a Dr Grenville and his daughter who sung uncommonly well, the latter is now staying at Lilies and is a very nice girl indeed... We have been a great deal at Lilies lately, we drank tea there last

Wednesday and are engaged for today to meet Mr Russel of Chequers, and some relations who live with him and who play on the piano most exquisitely. Mr Russel is a lineal descendant in the female line of Oliver Cromwell, his ancestor Sir Francis Russel having married the lady Frances, Cromwell's daughter. We met at Lilies one day at dinner, Mrs. Charles Kemble the mother of Miss Fanny Kemble; she is a very pleasant woman indeed, and gave us a long history of her daughter, who was a most extraordinary child and quite unmanageable, she is now however quite altered and reformed in disposition.'

## APPENDIX II

If you would place yourself just midway between the three seats which form the boundaries of Southern England, you shall find yourself on a small knoll, covered with antique elm, walnut, and sycamore trees, which rise out of a vale famous in all time for the natural fertility of its soil, and the moral virtues of its people. On this knoll, fitly called by our ancestors 'the heart of South Britain', stood distant about half a mile from each other, two monasteries, known by the flowery appellatives of Lilies and Roses; not unaptly setting forth a promise of all senses. These edifices have, for many centuries, been no more; but, on the site of the first-mentioned of the two standeth a small mansion, of Tudor architecture, bearing still its ancient name. Of the monastery little memorial beyond the name remains; save only that under a small enclosed space, erewhile its cemetery, now a wilderness of flowers, the bones of the monks repose. Two lines of artificial slope to the westward mark the boundaries of the pleasure, where they took their recreation and cultivated their lentils and fruits; and a range of thickly-walled cellar still retains the same destination and office as when it furnished to those holy men their more generous materials of reflection.

*From: Memorials of John Hampden, by Lord Nugent*

To complete this description a brief reference only needs to be added to certain trees scattered over the grounds, each with a stone memorial at its base, bearing the name of the friend who planted it, and the date, which was to keep that event memorable

in the calendar at Lilies; and among the friendly memories thus kept green and fresh in Lord Nugent's country home were those of public and private friends as various as the pursuits and tastes of his life had been, living statesman, exiled patriots and distinguished men of letters. Passing through the grounds not many weeks ago, and observing the care with which every association dear to Lord Nugent is still kept and cherished by their present possessor, I saw among other names attached to goodly trees of various growth, those of the Duke of Sussex, Lord John Russell, Lord Fortescue, Mr Dickens, Lord Denman, Mr Landor, Mr Jerrold, M Argucles, some younger members of the Fortescue family, Mr Ainsworth, Mr Gleed, the public orator at Oxford, and Mr Westcot, the sculptor.

*Taken from a footnote to the above.*

### APPENDIX III

Advertisement appearing in 'The Times', Wednesday, July 4th, 1894: "The Lilies, near Aylesbury, the property of Mr Henry Cazenove, deceased, one and a quarter hours only from London, on three lines of railway, and in the centre of the Rothschild country. To be sold, the above exceedingly choice FREEHOLD RESIDENTIAL ESTATE of about 100 acres (more land can be had if desired) occupying a unique position in the much sought after Vale of Aylesbury. The mansion, which stands in an unusually well-timbered park, was erected by the late owner regardless of expense, is approached from the main road by a picturesque lodge entrance through a very pretty and well kept drive. It contains five well-proportioned reception rooms and conservatory, 19 bed and dressing rooms, two bathrooms, very good and suitable domestic offices and outbuildings. The stabling is first-class and comprises accommodation for 22 horses, coach-houses, men's-quarters & c. Sanitation is of a very high order, and the water supply pure and never failing; gas houses and two retorts. Very convenient home farm buildings, summering boxes, a pretty villa residence, several well-built cottages, hen-houses, and enclosed poultry runs. The gardens and pleasure grounds are very beautiful being planted with a large variety of coniferae and other deciduous trees and shrubs; winter and

summer tennis lawns, and a capital golf ground. Hunting every day in the week with Lord Rothschild's Staghounds and the Whaddon Chase and Bicester Foxhounds. Personally inspected and strongly recommended. Full particular plans, and views of Messrs, Walton and Lee 33, Mount Street, Grosvenor Square, London W. (8,583)".

### APPENDIX IV

From a book by Compton Mackenzie regarding President Benes of Czechoslovakia:- "He was living at Aston Abbots, on the fringe of Buckinghamshire, half-way between Aylesbury and Leighton Buzzard, in one of the agreeable lesser country houses typical of the English countryside. The first thing I noticed was that the croquet hoops on the lawn had all been widened at the base, and, commenting on this to a friend who knew the household, I was told with a smile that the "dear Beneses" could not bear to see the efforts of their guests thwarted by the severely narrow and exclusive apertures of hoops 'de rigueur' for the match play, and I reflected that even croquet hoops by the President's standards had to be democratic.

We usually sat in a pleasant room full of books and maps".



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