

Appeal for Knowledge

Bestwood Lodge and the family of the 10th Duke of St. Albans (1864-1943)

I am writing a book about the family of William Beauclerk, 10th Duke of St. Albans (1840-1898), in part to explore why it fell apart so dramatically after his early death. I am particularly interested in the fate of his three sons, who grew up during the heyday of Bestwood Lodge in the 1870s and 1880s: Charles, 11th Duke of St. Albans (1870-1934); Osborne, 12th Duke (1874-1964); and Lord William Beauclerk (1883-1954). The 10th Duke had eight children in all, three by his first marriage and five by his second. Tragically, both the 11th Duke (known as 'Burford') and Lord William Beauclerk (known as 'Huddy') were committed to asylums for the best part of their lives: the former was at Ticehurst House in Sussex from 1898 to 1934, while the latter was an inmate of the Priory, Roehampton for over half a century, dying there on Xmas Day, 1954. Of the three sons only Osborne married; none had children.

While the 11th Duke lived, Bestwood was managed by a combination of his Committees of the Estate (the equivalent of receivers) and the trustees of the 10th Duke's will. It was leased out first to the lace manufacturer Sir Thomas Isaac Birkin and then from 1915 to 1940 to the Bowden family, owners of the Raleigh cycle company. Parts of the Bestwood estate were already being sold off to the Nottingham Corporation in the 1920s (some by compulsory purchase) and this continued throughout the 1930s until the entire estate was put on the market in June 1940. It was not until 1943, however, that the house itself and the heart of the estate finally left the Beauclerk family. The house and grounds were requisitioned for the war effort in 1940 and remained in the hands of the army until 1979, when the property was acquired by Gedling Borough Council.

If anyone has any information on the history of the estate, please do get in touch with me. Much about Bestwood is still shrouded in mystery and recovery of the full story could provide precious insights for the future. It would also be wonderful to hear from people who worked on the Bestwood estate or whose families did, as valuable memories can be handed down by word of mouth. And if anyone has any cuttings or photographs that relate to the family

of the 10th Duke or the Bestwood estate, particularly from 1864 to 1943, and would be willing to share them, that would be hugely appreciated.

Any information or suggestions for further research - however trivial-seeming - will be most gratefully received.

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