

## ABBOTS LEIGH HERITAGE GROUP

### Note of Meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016

#### The Leigh Court Estates (with visit to Leigh Court and gardens)

1. **Present:** Margaret Bell, Sabina Bowler-Reed, Donna Butcher, John Butler, Liz Crowne, Sally Easton, Norman Ferguson, Kamala Grice, Joy McFeat, Marlene Neville, Andrew Nicholls, Jenny Ratcliffe, Jan Sayer, Peggy Stembridge, Di Stewart, Murray Stewart, Andrew Stinchcombe, Nicola Stichcombe.

The evening started in the Village Hall. Maps and pages from Humphry Repton's Red Book for Leigh Court showing his proposed lay out of the grounds were shown on-screen. Peggy Stembridge gave a short history of Repton's background and life and how he became an eminent landscape gardener.

Few of Repton's proposals, however, were acceptable to the new owner of Leigh Court Sir Philip Miles. One addition was The Gateway on the Bristol Road – a new formal entrance to a driveway down through Oak Wood and round to Leigh Court. Sally Easton, owner of East Gateway, and Liz Crowne (West Gateway) talked about the history of The Gateway and a little about living there. Sally had bought East Gateway from the Wills Estate in the 1990s before which Rosemary Hunt (nee Meech) had been a Wills tenant, her family having worked for the Wills Estate for many years. In West Gateway Sidney and Phyllis Mattock had lived for almost sixty years. The property was in a very poor state and had been empty for about two years. The principal side of the house faced the garden away from the main road. Sally said she and Liz owned the arch and that one of her boys had climbed up onto an arch and then climbed down inside one side of it, the arch being hollow. There was reputed to have been a tunnel between the two sides of the arch but Sally thought it had been filled in. The front doors of both sides face onto the inside of the arch and until wrought iron gates had been put up, people had passed through the arch and their rear gardens. Originally access to Leigh Court had been through the arch but later access was made at the side which today gives access to Coronation Avenue

The group then moved down to Leigh Court to what was denoted as 'The Lily Pond' and 'The Bowling Green' in the Leigh Court Sale Particulars of 1915 – both lying within the garden of what is now The Orchard. The bowling green was probably constructed by Miles but the rectangular 'lily pond' had been a feature of the Old Court House, a sixteenth century Tudor mansion built by Sir George Norton but demolished when the new Leigh Court was built in 1815. Also in the grounds of the old Tudor mansion had been a gazebo – still visible as a badly patched up and now damaged, ivy covered tower<sup>1</sup>.

Chris Loughlin joined the group and guided it down through the orchard to the Walled Garden. Possibly making use of the stone from the then demolished Old Court House to build its walls, the Walled Garden probably dates from soon after 1815. There were signs that glasshouses had been attached to the south facing wall. The group then went through to the outside of the walled garden and found what they thought were the remains of the Head Gardener's House (as shown in the Sale Particulars of 1915). There were signs on the garden wall that there had been a structure attached to it and a small store building could have been part of the original house. There were signs of three boiler houses which

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<sup>1</sup> See Kim Watkins, Archaeological Consultants; Report on proposed development. April 2016.

used to heat the wall to bring on fruit the other (south facing) side. There were the remains of a pineapple pit in this smaller walled area but it was now so overgrown that it couldn't be seen. Margaret Bell (brought up in the neighbouring Myrtle Cottage) remembered that the walled garden was used to produce fruit and vegetables for Leigh Court when it was occupied by the Burden Institute in the decades after 1915. The girls there used to come and work in the garden.

Some of the group then entered the woodland (the Woodland Garden for Leigh Court) to the left of the track which is now used by the Forest School. In this area there are the foundations of a summer house, known as Rose Cottage, where someone lived for a while. There is also a goldfish pond. There are also signs of a 'white' carriage drive which led from Leigh Court to the walled garden via the Bowling Green, and Lily Pond. The Ice House is located in Freeways Car Park. The water supply for Leigh Court was reputed to come from a spring in Abbots Leigh – which was housed in a brick Victorian Spring House.