

May 2023 Baronets Diary

Those of us in historic houses are always looking for ways to improve our carbon footprint and recently I attended a seminar in London where other owners outlined their efforts to green their estates. Ewan Frost Pennington from Muncaster in Cumbria outlined his arrays of solar panels that he had installed on the former bear pit. Apparently his great Grandfather had brought two bears over from Europe to join his menagerie but the idea failed and the bear pit was filled in. Now providing over 50% of the Castle's electric the eccentric forebear has provided a 21st century use. Another owner from Suffolk, Hugh Crossley of Somerleyton revealed that his great Grandmother had a pool dug for a pet seal in the 1850s! Bizarre. The pool has been incorporated into Hugh's resort on Fritton Lakes and provides recreation for the surrounding lodge-based visitors. Sadly none of my ancestors had the foresight to build homes for stray vertebrates and I am unable to continue the theme.

After a two year interregnum we are delighted to announce that our vacancy for the Peak Five parishes has been filled and the Rev Nicola McNally joins us on a five year contract to look after our rural communities. Nicola will reside at the Ashbourne based Rectory and combine her job with community and youth work in the town. We are thrilled that Nicola can join us and look forward to her extolling pastoral care and, of course, taking part in our Well Dressing Celebrations.

One of my annual duties is to chair the AGM of the Derby and Derbyshire Members' Association of the National Trust. As the group's President I take the chair and conduct the agenda as effectively and efficiently as possible as the officers are elected to their relevant positions. Then follows presentations from local National Trust properties. This March we were shown the transformation of Sudbury Hall into 'The Children's Country House at Sudbury' as the Trust attempt to garner more diverse audiences as well as excite the younger visitor. Then Craig Barks the Property Manager at Ilam Hall in the White Peak regaled us with the 'visitor engagement process' at Dovedale, a site that welcomes over half a million visitors a year and was abused and disrespected by visitors during the pandemic. Happily the site is better resourced and respected now. I reflected afterwards though that in my President's role over the last 25 years I had welcomed six property managers from Sudbury and seven at Ilam during that period. Plus ca change.

One of my strongest criticisms of forestry management in this country is that it takes far too long to get the statutory permissions to fell woodlands that are getting to the end of their useful life. It has been two years since our last major felling on the Estate but in March our contractors embarked on the latest round of serious woodland management. In Sir William's tenure from 1934 to 1964 the woods were referred to as 'palaces' and I am keen to get back to that position. However the rigmarole and extensive paperwork makes the process exceedingly cumbersome. Visitors to the village may not see our handiwork (since it is not in the core of the Estate) but all walkers and cyclists using the Tissington Trail this Summer will see the work of the National Park with the removal of practically every ash tree from Ashbourne to Alsop. As I write, although the work is essential, the immediate aftermath presents a violent slashing of nature. I gather that the railway border will be allowed to regenerate naturally. However, in the woodland I am managing we are furiously planting several thousand saplings.

As Chairman of Marketing Peak District and Derbyshire I get to visit many fascinating places in the County for Photocalls. In late March I took a trip to Bamford to meet High Peak MP Robert Langan and others to promote English Tourism Week. Settling down to a breakfast bap and coffee we

discussed business with landlord John Illingworth as well as observing all the Dambusters' memorabilia in the pub , the RAF Squadron having practised their low level flights at the nearby Ladybower Reservoir during World War II. Interestingly Robert is keen to promote local pubs and has launched the Best High Peak Pub competition. Vote for your favourite through his website.

Sir Richard FitzHerbert