DEATH OF THE EARL OF LATHOM

FORMER LOCAL LANDOWNER

THE PASSING OF AN ANCIENT NAME

The death occurred on Thursday evening last, at his residence, 24, Queen’s-road, St. John’s Wood, London, of the Earl of Lathom. He was in his 35th year, having been born on May 16th, 1895, in London. Lord Lathom had been in a failing state of health for some time, despite treatment in Switzerland, Colorado, and the Black Forest.

Edward William Bootle-Wilbraham was the third (and last) Earl of Lathom, the peerage now being extinct, being the only son of the second Earl of Lathom, who died at sea on March 15th, 1910, and grandson of the first Earl, who died on November 19th, 1898. As Lord Skelmersdale he went to Eton, to a Mr. C.M. Well’s house in 1907. In 1910 he succeeded his father in the earldom, and in 1913 he left Eton and went up to Christ Church, Oxford. The war broke out in the following year, and he served as captain in the Lancashire Hussar Yeomanry in France. He was for some time an extra A.D.C. to the Governor of Bombay (Lord Willingdon). Lord Lathom attained his majority whilst in the trenches, and in consequence there were no birthday celebrations on the Lathom Estate, the tenants however sending him a congratulatory message.

When war broke out Lord Lathom was a minor, but with his consent, the trustees, Lord Derby and Sir Guy Stephenson proffered Lathom Park (with Lathom House) to the War Office as an army remount depot, and as our readers know this became the largest of its kind in the world, hundreds of thousands of horses being trained there.

After the war, Lord Lathom never lived at Lathom House, but for two or three years he took up his residence at Blythe Hall, after restoring and renovating it, regardless of expense, at a cost of close on £60,000.

Lord Lathom, with inherited a love of the stage, now became interested in theatrical work and life, and many of the leading lights in the dramatic world were amongst his guests at Blythe Hall. Subsequently he blossomed out as a playwright. His first work was “Ostriches,” which was given in 1925 at New York. His second work “The Way You Look At It,” was produced at the Queen’s Theatre, London, in 1926, and attracted attention by the frankness with which it handled sex problems. His next play “Wet Paint,” proved to be too frank. When produced privately in London, it shocked the critics, and a proposal to put it on the public stage was met with an absolute veto by the Lord Chamberlain. “Wet Paint,” was then taken to the United States, but after its first performance the censor insisted on its being toned down. The Earl of Lathom afterwards produced two other plays “Tupence Coloured,” and “Fear,” in the second of which he dropped sex themes in favour of psychological ones. As a whole his plays did not enjoy long runs, but they showed that he possessed a gift for stage craft.
Meanwhile the late Earl’s visits to Lathom became very rare, and about 1922, the break-up of his Lordship’s estates first commenced, when his farms at Melling were sold by private treaty, to be followed shortly by similar sales at Clayton, near Chorley, Dalton and Lathom (chiefly south of the canal), mainly to the sitting tenants, the whole comprising some 4,000 acres.

SALE OF THE LATHOM ESTATE

Naturally this disintegration of the estate came as a great shock to the tenantry, but this was accentuated when it became known (sic) that all the remainder of the Lathom Estate, including Lathom House, had been sold to a Mr. A.E. Debenham, on behalf of a London syndicate. Various amounts were stated to have been paid for the property, but it is probable that the price was in the vicinity of £200,000. One of the conditions of the sale was that Lathom House should be completely demolished, and the final act in this drama took place on October 30th, 1925, when the last chimney stack of that once famous pile was razed to the ground.

On January 9th and 10th, 1924, the new purchasers offered the Lathom Estates, comprising 4,000 acres, and having a rent roll of nearly £10,000 per annum, for sale by public auction at the Drill Hall, Ormskirk, and this was a forerunner of the end of the Lathom Estates as such. Many of the tenants purchased their holdings, but others did not, and had to seek fresh homes. Our readers, and perhaps more particularly Lathom readers, will know what afterwards transpired, with the consequent changes of tenancies and habitations.

Lord Lathom was of a very generous disposition, and as a theatrical writer has said of him, “He spent his money on his friends, and at the end was befriended by people who loved him.” It is said that he spent £65,000 on the theatre, and he died a poor man.

The Earl of Lathom had also a distinct leaning towards artistic decoration, and while still engaged in play-writing, made use of it by starting a business for the improvement of the internal embellishment of English houses. Travelling frequently on the continent and elsewhere, he collected all the best ideas and adapted them to the English home. One of his successful designers was Xenia Merison, a widow, whom he married in 1927.

He is survived by his mother, Lady Wilma Lawson, wife of the second Earl, who married General Lawson for her second husband, and two sisters, Lady Barbara Seymour and Lady Rosemary Wilbraham. His Lordship’s eldest sister Lady Helen Newcombe, died on August 4th last year.

The heir to the barony of Skelmersdale, Lord Lathom’s original title, is Mr. Arthur George Bootle-Wilbraham, a distant relative.

CREMATION IN LONDON

Contrary to expectations, the body of the late Earl was not brought for interment in the family vault at Lathom Chapel, where his two predecessors in the title and other
members of the Wilbraham family lie, but was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium, London on Monday morning.

The Rev. E. St. George Schomberg, Vicar of St. Andrews Ashley-place, officiated and there were present: - Lady Barbara Seymour and Lady Rosemary Bootle-Wilbraham, sisters; Captain Arthur George Bootle-Wilbraham, cousin who succeeds to the barony of Skelmersdale; Lady Bertha Dawkins, and Colonel the Hon. Stuart Pleydell-Bouverie, uncle.

The Countess of Lathom, the widow, is recuperating abroad, and was unable to return to London in time for the funeral.

A memorial service was held at the same time at St. Martins-in-the-Fields, London, when the Vicar, the Rev. Pat McCormick, officiated.

Among those present were: Lady Alexandra Pocklington, the Countess of Radnor, Lady Bridges, Lady Forbes Robertson, Captain the Hon. Inigo Freeman-Thomas, Sir Guy and Lady Stephenson, Lady Jowitt, Lady Joan Peake, Mr. Ronald Fleming, Lady Katharine Howard, Lady Katharine McNeile, Sir Neville Pearson, Lady Crutchley, Captain Giles Sirbright, Mr. Raymond Massey (also representing Captain Arwood), Miss Marie Lohr, Miss Jane Prinsep, Mrs. Arthur Cohen, Miss Kathleen Nesbitt, Mr. Nigel Bruce, Mrs. Henry McLaren, Dr. J.M. Bulloch, Miss Haidee Wright, Mrs. William Lawson, Miss Gertrude Kingston, Mr. A. Onslow, Mrs. McConnell, Mr. Louis Nethersole, Mr. A. Square, Mr. And Mrs. Douglas Ramsay, Miss Stephenson, Mrs. Claude Bootle-Wilbraham, Miss B. Chaplin, Mr. Robert Andrews, Miss M. Andrews, Mrs. L.E. Fraser, Captain Cannan, Mr. Gerald Crutchley, Mr. F.N. Blundell, Mr. And Mrs. Alfred Debenham, Major and Mrs. G. Steele, Captain Petherick, Miss Marie Tempest, Mr. M.A. Charlot, Mr. Vivien Ellis, Miss Ellis, Miss Peggy Wood, Mr. Frank Leverson, , Mr. Alexander Alston, Dr. and Mrs. Pendlebury (formerly of Ormskirk), Miss Vaughan, Mr. Christopher Martin, Mrs. Matheson, Miss May Bateman, Miss Susie Leggatt, Mrs. Lathrop, Miss Goodson, Mrs. Gainsmore, Miss M. Cohen, Mrs. Brighton, Mrs. Walter Campion, Mrs. S. Rice, Mrs. Stamford, Mr. E. Stamford, Mr. O. Dickinson, Mr. And Mrs. Alfred Turner, Mr. Alan Walton, and Mrs. Percival Hardy.

The Vicar of Ormskirk, the Rev. A. du T. Pownall, was the preacher at Lathom Park Chapel on Sunday morning, and mad a touching allusion to the death of the late Earl, and at the close Mr. Thos. Stringfellow (the organist) played the “Dead March,” from Saul.