



CATTON

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There has been a settlement at Catton for well over 1000 years, according to the Domesday Book, consisting at one time of a Manor House and a village which boasted two Ale Houses in the Main Street. The only features remaining on the landscape today are several ancient and venerable oak trees, the oldest being known as the Walton Oak. It measures 25ft. in girth and stands in a field to the north of the Hall.

Although we have a copy of an inventory of the contents of the house which stood here in 1625, we do not know what it looked like or its exact position. All that remains is one very old stone pillar, which must have been one of a pair at the original front gates. If this pillar could talk, it could tell us of the men, women and children who lived at Catton, passing in and out on their travels over the centuries to the farthest corners of the world.

Catton was taken from its Saxon owner, Siward, by William the Conqueror who gave it to a Norman for services rendered in the conquest of Britain in 1066. It was held by the descendants of Nigel D'Albini until 1405, when it was sold to the Horton family whose descendants have owned and occupied Catton to the present day.

There have been changes of name caused by inheritance passing through the female line. According to legend, a curse was put on Catton in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, whereby no son would inherit from his Father until the Chapel, which had been destroyed, was rebuilt. The only remains of previous Chapels are the Norman Font, which is still in use, some remains of mullioned windows, which were dredged out of the River Trent, and an old chapel bell, which is now housed in the clock tower in the stable yard. It bears the mark of Newcombes; bell Founders in Leicester in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

The curse appears to have operated for some 200 years. It was Henry Anson-Horton's parents who built the present Chapel in 1892, and his eldest son, George, who inherited Catton from Henry in 1925.

The Horton's were solid, reliable people who looked after their Estate and developed it peacefully, interrupted only by the Civil War of 1642. Being staunch Royalists, they lost favour with Oliver Cromwell who sacked Walter Horton from the office of High Sheriff of Derbyshire because of his allegiance to King Charles I.

Walter Horton's portrait hangs in the Drawing Room. It is one of the earliest of the family portraits in the Catton Collection which contains several

portraits of the Royal Family of the House of Stewart – Charles I, his wife and children, Charles II, James II and Prince Rupert – who look down from the walls together with their friends and enemies.

There is a portrait of James Edward (the pretender) as a boy, who, with his son Bonnie Prince Charlie, invaded England in the rebellions of 1715 and 1745. At the time of the “45” rebellion, one of the daughters of Catton received a letter from a friend in the Army telling her not to go too far from home as the Scots were approaching Derby. He told her that all was well as he and his regiment were on their way to Lichfield, where they would be stationed to protect the locals from the rebels.

Other paintings of interest include portraits of Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, King Charles’ mistress, and of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher who was a friend of the Davenport family. Phoebe Davenport married Eusebius Horton in 1778, and they were custodians of Catton until the early 1820s. Their portraits hang in the Library. There are also Dutch and Italian paintings dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The original Architect of the present house was the celebrated James Gibbs who designed many well-known buildings, including Derby Cathedral and St. Martins in the Fields. However, the work was completed by Smith of Warwick in 1745 at a cost of approximately £7000. Originally, the carriages drew up at the South Terrace and the present Dining Room was the Entrance Hall. Certain changes have been made over the years, including the additions of the present Front Door in the late 1820s, a second staircase, and the New Wing on the east side of the house which was added in 1907.

The builder of the present house, Christopher Horton, was followed by his son, also Christopher, who married a very beautiful young lady from Dunster Castle in Somerset by the name of Anne Luttrell. Walpole, when writing about her, described her as having “the most amorous eyes in the world” (her portraits hang over the fireplace in the Drawing Room and at the foot of the Main Staircase). Her husband and infant son died at the same time, and the beautiful Anne left Catton for London after Catton Wood had been cut down to pay off her gambling debts. She set up house in Hertford Street where she met and married secretly Frederick, Duke Of Cumberland, brother of George III. The King was furious, partly because Anne was a commoner but mainly because the marriage was bigamous, his brother having a wife living at the time. This caused the King to have all the records of the marriage destroyed, and to bring in the present Royal Marriage Laws, which forbid any member of the Royal Family who is in direct line to the Throne to marry without the Sovereign’s consent.

Catton passed from Christopher's brother to his niece, Anne-Beatrix, who was married to a Robert Wilmot from Osmaston, Derby. Anne and Robert acknowledged her Father's wishes in 1823 becoming the Wilmot-Hortons on their inheritance of Catton. Early on in their marriage, Robert introduced his wife to his cousin, Lord Byron the poet, who, after meeting her at a Ball wearing a black dress covered in silver sequins, wrote his well-known poem: -

“ She walks in beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes.”

A copy of the manuscript in Byron's own hand and a portrait of Anne-Beatrix are still at Catton, together with the many sketch books painted by her during her travels, particularly to and from Ceylon where her husband was Governor during the 1830s. One port of call for sailing ships going to the East was the Island of St. Helena, where Napoleon had been imprisoned by the British after his defeat at Waterloo. There is a sketch of him on board H.M.S. Bellerophon where his final surrender was accepted, and a chair, which he used in St. Helena and upon the arms of which he cuts notches as the days of captivity passed by. Robert Wilmot-Horton worked for the colonial office for many years before and after his Governorship in Ceylon, and was passionate in his commitment to the abolition of slavery. He received a knighthood in his own right in 1831, as well as acceding to the Wilmot of Osmaston baronetcy on his Father's death.

After her husband died, Anne-Beatrix continued to live at Catton for some 30 years. During these years, she devoted her life to the well being of the district and, as well as many other good works, she endowed the Church and School at Coton-in-the-Elms.

After Anne Beatrix's death in 1871, Catton was looked after briefly by her two surviving sons and then by her granddaughter, Augusta Theresa, married to the Reverend Arthur Henry Anson who built the present Chapel. It was their son, Henry Anson-Horton, who inherited Catton at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He returned from serving in the Colonial Office in Fiji with his wife, Katie, and their family, and lived at Catton until 1925 when their eldest son, George, the first son to inherit directly from his father for some 200 years, took over. George looked after Catton from 1925 until 1957. In 1956, having no son and due to ill health, he sent for his nephew, David Neilson, who returned with his family from New Zealand to take on the estate.

The house used to be cared for by sixteen resident staff, and six full-time gardeners. However modern times have caught up with Catton, and the house is now managed by a smaller number of helpers. The land, lying within The National Forest, is farmed by the Neilson family on a commercial scale and the estate has developed many other leisure and recreational activities. Shooting, fishing and equestrianism are all available, and the grounds are used for large public events as well as caravan rallies. The House is also used on a limited basis by corporate and private groups, occasionally with accommodation.

The community spirit of Catton lives on, and all connected with it hope to see it thrive during the 21st century.