

***Southam & Prestbury*, by Michael Cole with Hilary McDaniel Douglas, published for Prestbury Local History Society by Tatchley Books, Cheltenham, 2020. 204pp. £12.00.**

This book, consisting of around 200 pages with over 50 illustrations, is a lavish publication for what is a relatively small local history society. They are to be congratulated on its production. The volume is the result of detailed research into known and not so well-known sources.

The history of the two villages is intertwined and therefore complex. In a series of chapters, which the author points out are not strictly chronological, the narrative explores the effects of the changing ownership of Southam and Prestbury on the two communities.

A brief account of the site of Prestbury's medieval manor house is followed by the visits of John Leland in the 1540s, and then moves on to the Huddlestons' tenure, then to that of the Baghotts, the Delaberes and through intermarriage to the Baghott Delaberes. Sadly, several marriages failed to produce offspring and caused ownership to move sideways. Three hundred years of relative stability ended in the late 1820s, with the arrival of Lord Ellenborough (born Edward Law).

Purchasing in 1829 what was, in a sense, the lordship of Southam with the estate's farms, cottages, fields and woodland, Ellenborough's 'thoughtful stewardship' preserved and enhanced the original features of Southam House. His radical ideas for reforming the governance of India were never realised as they came into conflict first with the Reform Parliaments of the 1830s and later with the unsettled state of India and the disastrous confrontation with Afghanistan and the Sindh. Political disgrace, compounded by scandal around his pension as Clerk of Chief Justice's Office and his disastrous second marriage, was to follow.

Further chapters explore in detail the history and provenance of the pictures that have been associated with Southam House and the disputed curacy of St Mary's church, Prestbury in the 1870s and early 1880s, when theological differences led to long lasting conflict between the vicar, the Revd John Edwards and the Bishop of Gloucester, Charles Ellicott.

A third phase in the history of Southam House began in the late 1940s with the sale of the contents, the house's later use as the Oriel School for girls, its eventual sale as a private house and now in the 21st century as a prestigious hotel, first known as Southam De La Bere and now as Ellenborough Park Hotel.

A final chapter, A Personal Narrative by Hilary McDaniel Douglas, is devoted to the later history of the Baghott Delabere family in America. Michael Baghott Delabere emigrated to join his brother Cyril in 1892. The account follows the family as they moved between the States and England and includes Michael's experiences as a novice farm hand and as owner of The Sheldon Progress, a newspaper supporting the Republican cause. The story continues through the two World Wars before culminating in the 1990s.

Also included are family trees, appendices on the Capel family, 'Four Horsemen' (devoted to a painting held by The Wilson, Cheltenham, showing members of the Baghott Delabere family), a bibliography and an index. All that is missing, for which there may be good reasons, is a map of the two villages which would aid understanding of the many locations referred to in the book.

Sally Self