



MANOR BY THE LAKE



History



HISTORY

ABOUT THE HOUSE

Arle Court was built between 1856-1858 by Thomas Packer Walter Butt on Grovefield, a 74 acre estate which was part of the small Manor of Redgrove. The architect's name – Thomas Penson of Chester and the date 1857, is on one of the stone shields on the tower –as are those of Thomas Packer Walter Butt and his wife, Eliza Lutener Butt and the symbols from their respective Coats of Arms.

Although Arle Court is only 150 year's old, no early documentation i.e.: architectural plans of building accounts have been found to date. Even more regrettable, there is no disclosure of the identity of the craftsmen responsible for the opulent interior. Penson, the architect had a drawing of Arle Court hung at the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1857, but despite considerable research, this has not come to light.

The builder was Alderman George Parsonage, a native of Market Drayton, but five times Mayor of Cheltenham, who was a master builder of some repute. Sad to say, he does not seem to have received the recognition he deserves. It is only thanks to a report in the Cheltenham Examiner on the 4th February 1857 regarding a dinner provided by Thomas Packer Walter Butt for the builder and the 150 workers, on account of the building being roofed in, that we learn that the building work had already been in progress for eighteen months. This meal was held at the Beehive Inn, Montpellier and was one of several treats that had been enjoyed on several occasions. It was calculated that the house would be completed and ready to occupy after twelve months:

“When it will be a credit to all parties concerned. The new Mansion at Arle Court is a splendid specimen of the highly ornamented Elizabethan style and, when finished, it will be one of the largest and most attractive family residences in this part of the country.”





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THE GROVEFIELD ESTATE

Arle Court was the fourth dwelling on the site; the earliest recorded is a farmstead in 1737, followed by a more permanent farmhouse called Redgrove in the late 18th century, and a mansion called Grovefield in 1826-1830. The latter is believed to have been built by a Captain James Pritchit, who owned the estate from 1826. This house was up for auction in May of 1832 when it was described as 'newly built', but it did not attract a buyer and was on the market again in 1834 when Pritchit was described as an Insolvent Debtor.

It is interesting to note, that the dimensions of the reception rooms in Arle Court today are almost exactly the same as those in the sale particulars of Grovefield House, as are the numbers of bedrooms. These, together with other similarities suggest that Grovefield House, built less than thirty years earlier, may not have been completely demolished to make way for Arle Court.

Grovefield House had several owners from 1834, and it was also advertised to be let furnished at on stage, until in 1841 it was purchased by Richard Roy, a London Businessman (and friend and associate of Pearce Thompson) and owner of a large amount of property in Cheltenham. However, in 1847 he decided he did not wish to make Cheltenham his home and sold the house and estate for the sum of £6000.00 to William Packer Coulston Butt, who was given the option of taking the furniture at valuation.

William Packer Coulston Butt was the son and heir of Thomas Packer Butt, a wealthy clothier from Chalford, who, when the cloth industry was running down, had in 1795, purchased the old Arle Court Estate. Sadly William Packer Coulston Butt died the following year of tuberculosis at the age of 25, and Grovefield House and estate, together with other property and a considerable fortune, passed into the hands of Thomas Packer Walter Butt, his younger brother.





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BUTT AND LUTENER FAMILY

In 1848 Thomas Packer Walter Butt married Anna Maria, the second daughter of Dr William Lutener, surgeon of Dolerw, Newtown, Montgomeryshire (now Powys). The newlyweds began their married life in Grovefield House where their first son Walter William Arthur was born. Walter was soon followed by Francis Lutener Butt in 1851, however Anna died giving birth to him and Thomas Packer Walter Butt was obliged to describe himself as a widower when filling in the 1851 census.

With two boys to care for, Anna's elder sister Eliza moved into Grovefield House. When some years later Thomas Packer Walter Butt and Eliza attempted to marry, no minister of any denomination could be persuaded to perform the ceremony – it being illegal at that time to wed your late wife's sister. It is said that they even travelled to Gretna Green and to the continent without success, and further sadness befell them when Eliza gave birth to a stillborn son in 1854.

It seems after this event a decision was made to build Arle Court and by the time of the 1861 census, all trace of Grovefield House had disappeared and the Butts were living at Arle Court.

Eliza Lutener, otherwise Butt, died in 1868 and her younger sister Sophie moved into Arle Court and died there in 1899. Thomas Packer Walter Butt died on the 27th of April 1900 aged 76 years; he requested his funeral to be as simple as possible and to be buried in Badgeworth churchyard with 'my two wives' and Sophie Lutener. The Reverend Walter William Arthur Butt, who at the time was the Vicar of Minety, inherited Arle Court but he had come down from Oxford with socialistic views on inherited wealth. In 1904 Arle Court and its contents went under the hammer in a two day sale conducted by Bruton Knowles when a very valuable collection of china, porcelain and furniture attracted a large number of buyers. The Reverend Walter Butt became the Vicar of Kempford.





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ARLE COURT IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Herbert Unwin, a Derbyshire born, Yorkshire businessman who had been living in Dowdeswell Court, purchased the house and estate in 1904. He maintained it in a grand style and was particularly considerate to his staff. As a lover of hunting and a great supporter of the Cotswold Hunt, changes were made to the grounds – stable and kennels were added, as were glass houses and conservatories, and obviously some changes occurred inside the house and his initials can still be seen above the first floor landing. He was also responsible for adding the billiard room for that use. He died in 1925 but his widow and family continued to live there until 1934.

In 1935 Sir George, then Mr Dowty, was able to acquire the house and estate for £6000.00 – exactly the same sum that had been paid for it in 1847! His expanding business and the war brought about inevitable changes; the house was converted into offices for the directors, and the part which had been home for Sir George and his family became a visiting suite for VIPs. The house and gardens continued to be maintained to the highest standard.

With the ‘take over’ of the Dowty Group by TI, Arle Court itself was for sale once again. It stood empty for some years until David Bill fell in love with it and decided it would make a wonderful spot for a Film Studios and Weddings and Conference Venue. He has spent much time and expense on bringing the house and gardens back to their former glory and he’s only just started on what he would like to accomplish here.

A charming Manor House with highly ornate carved wooden panels, intricate brass-work, grand marble fireplaces and a distinctly unique character, surrounded by 40 acres of formal gardens, natural woodland and rolling lawns. Surprisingly, (it’s easy to forget once you are here!) this peaceful haven is situated just minutes from the A40, providing easy access from both the Motorway and Cheltenham Town Centre. Boasting 3 individual ceremony rooms, a genuinely friendly atmosphere and helpful, highly experienced caterers.



With thanks to Phyllis White’s extensive research over the years