

Baslow Records at Haddon Hall

Those of us interested in Baslow history will be aware that the Duke of Rutland, who was Lord of the Manor until 1920, has possession of records relating to our village in Belvoir Castle. Unfortunately they have not been available for research for decades.

A Recent Book "The Secret Rooms" by Catherine Bailey shows why this has happened, and also throws a fascinating insight into the shenanigans of a troubled aristocratic family. The author was researching the family history when discovered that there were three short gaps in the records

The first gap was in 1894, which coincided with the death of Haddon aged nine, the heir and eldest son of Henry the 8th Duke of Rutland. Looking back it would appear that the cause was a spontaneous surgical problem called volvulus. However the Duchess, at least according to the author, believed that her second son John then aged eight was responsible, and had him banished from the castle to be brought up by her brother in London. This resulting sense of guilt, and the reality of maternal rejection must have had a serious psychological impact on the boy.

The second gap need not concern us.

The third occurred early in the 1st World War. At the time the estate had severe financial problems, and John, as the only son, was the key to its future integrity. John was determined to do his duty and joined up as a regular officer in the local regiment, which involved service in the front line. His mother was equally determined to keep him safe, and secretly pulled strings. This involved letters to John's divisional commander, to Sir John French, the C in C of the British Army in France, and to Lord Kitchener, all of whom she knew socially, and all of whom replied at least sympathetically. The duchess made her daughter become the girl friend of a man she did not like, but who also happened to be a bosom friend of Sir John French (so she could exert influence). Lastly but not least, their family doctor, a senior London physician and consultant to the army provided false medical certificates. John, partly aware of what was happened, kept resisting the advances until eventually he fell in love. He married, and gave in accepting his mothers arrangements. He took a safe staff position until the end of the war.

Financial problems in the estate continued, leading to the forced sale of much of the Rutland property in outlying areas, including the "Baslow Sale" of 1920.

Later John then 9th Duke, developed a conscience. He collected the family records in one place, forbade access, and systematically destroyed all correspondence and records relating to the above three episodes. So great was the "atmosphere" in the family about the records - the family secrets - that after his death the "Muniments Room" was kept locked and access forbidden.

The book describes the author's search for the story of these missing records, and explains why we have not been able to research a significant part of Baslow history. Lets hope that the publication of this book will result in more openness in future.

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