

## **Sandygate's links with two Royal Families, Clive of India, Blenheim Palace, Castle Howard and the War-winning aircraft - The Hurricane**

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In 1953, the large 1890's house, number 401 Sandygate Road, was given both a name and a completely new lease of life after its purchase by members of the order of Sisters of Mercy. This was the most suitable property for conversion into a small hospital, where they could continue, and even expand, their care of the sick, which they had first started at Claremont Place, at a much smaller residence (after its 'conversion' for the purpose), in 1921. The name they gave to their first Nursing Home was, automatically transferred to the larger premises and so it became Claremont Hospital. In truth, it was an enforced move out to our 'neck of the woods', brought about by the acquisition of the land upon which the Nursing Home stood, in order that the first-phase of the construction of the Hallamshire Hospital could begin.

However, our concern is not with matters medical, but rather to ascertain when and why the name, Claremont, came into being and so for that purpose much research was necessary, but it was all well worthwhile as we shall see.

### **Named After Claremont Villa**

It is believed that both Claremont Place and Claremont Crescent were in fact named after a substantial and old property, Claremont Villa, which stood not far away in Glossop Road, at which premises it is recorded that, way back in the 1840's, children (fee paying) were educated by two maiden ladies whose surname was Lewis. There was possibly some 'linkage' between the Sisters and the occupants of Claremont Villa, as a result of which they decided to give their Nursing Home the name. The probability is that the two Claremont roads were, likewise, named after the Villa.

Claremont as a name was certainly in use early in the 19th Century and a little 'digging' reveals it was in use both as a street and a house name in many towns up and down the country.

### **Designer of Castle Howard**

Peter Harvey, in his informative book, 'Street names of Sheffield' reckons that this popularity of the name was brought about by the fact that, for a short period, Princess Charlotte resided at a property designed and built by the distinguished English architect and dramatist, Sir John Vanburgh, and located near Esher in Surrey. Sir John (1664-1726) was responsible, too, for the design of North Yorkshire's stately home of the Howard family, Castle Howard, on the site of Henderskelfe Castle, which had been gutted by fire (only ten years after a rebuild) in 1693.

The invitation to produce a set of plans came from no less an authority than the acting Earl Marshall of England, the 1669 born, Charles Howard, the 3rd Earl of Carlisle, and, unbelievably, it was the very first building of any kind which Vanburgh had designed. Work on the house is said to have started in the year, 1709.

### **Vanburgh Builds His Own Home**

The first house to be built on an estate near Esher was that which Vanburgh designed for his own occupation since, now aged 44 and desirous of being near to his ageing mother, who resided but a couple of miles away, at Claygate, Surrey, found the site much to his liking. It was 1708 and the small, square-shaped house with battlements, which stood on level ground, had nearby stables and a seven-acre walled garden. A little later he had built 'White Cottage', a home for his gardener.

His stay at his small house was short since, six years later, he decided to sell the property to a friend by the name of Thomas Pelham, the Earl of Clare, and who was later to become Duke of Newcastle. He had several alterations and additions made to the house including, on ground close-by, a belvedere (or castellated prospect-house) and from the roof of which it was possible to see the dome of St Paul's cathedral and also a section of Windsor Castle. The belvedere was built on a mound. This gave the duke the idea of using that word (Mound) together with one of his titles (CLARE) to create the name ... Claremound and which he altered to that we have been searching for...Claremont!! The Duke of Newcastle died in 1768. Then Claremont was purchased by none other than the 1st Baron Clive (1725-1774) (Clive of India), the seller being of course the Duke's widow and 'tis said she receive about £25,000

### **A New Claremont is Built**

For various reasons Clive decided that, especially as it was becoming subject to damp, to have the house Vanburgh had built for himself, pulled down and a larger property constructed at a higher level. The noted 'Capability Brown' was instructed to carry out the task and his final work provided an excellent example of the Palladian style of architecture.

Impressive for the fit, but something of a challenge for those not so, were the twenty five steep steps which had to be climbed to reach the Portico! Despite the use of bricks and slates, still in good condition and from the original house, the actual cost of merely constructing the 'shell' of the much larger new property amounted to over £15,000. But it was said Clive could well afford such an amount. Why? Because this British soldier and administrator, whose troops had major victories over the French forces at Arcot in 1751, and again six years later over the Na.wab of Bengal at Plassey, and as Governor of Bengal for a couple of periods during the 1750's and 1760's, amassed a considerable amount of wealth. This led to such strong allegations that he abused his powers, causing Clive to suffer mental problems (manic depression) and, coupled with other ailments (including trouble with gallstones), he committed suicide at his London home in Berkeley Square in November, 1774. It is said that a frequent visitor to Claremont during Clive's ownership was none other than the author of 'Pride and Prejudice', 'Emma', and 'Sense and Sensibility', Miss Jane Austin.

Wonder what she thought about the house, which she was doubtless able to explore?

### **DESIGNING OF BLENHEIM PALACE**

It was before building his own home near Esher that Vanbrugh began the planning of Blenheim Palace, a project which was to extend into the early 1720's at an amount of over £300,000, a large proportion of which came from the Treasury.

I suppose the true background to this was the 'well establishment' of John Churchill and his wife, Sarah, being much liked by Queen Anne at the time of her accession in 1702. With much military experience, John Churchill was elected to lead the Allied forces in the 1702 commencing European War and his success came in the decisive victory at Blindheim (or Blenheim).

To show her appreciation in a very tangible way, Queen Anne granted the First Duke of Marlborough the Honour of Woodstock and the Hundreds of Wootton. In this area it was decided to build a mansion to mark this memorable event. For various reasons, the friendship between Queen Anne and the Duchess cooled considerably, but the building of that wondrous Palace went ahead. Nevertheless, 'tis said that even John Vanburgh quarrelled with Sarah. The history of Blenheim is contained within the splendidly produced book, 'Blenheim Palace', (64 pages of script and photographs) which was sent to me courtesy of the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. I recommend you obtain and read. In a hand written note, Grace Cameron, the Estate Secretary expresses the.. "hope that this, together with other sheets will help towards your goal. Thank you, again, for taking the time to write." A lovely and kind response I thought. Mind you, there is one piece of information contained there that will interest you....

Of all the very fine and varied content visitors will see during a tour of the stately home, one small room "just has to be viewed, especially by the ladies. It is a small bedroom, just off the Great Hall, in the former apartments of Dean Jones, the 1st Duke's Chaplain". For it was in here on November 30th, 1874 that Lady Randolph E Churchill, gave birth to Winston Churchill.

Later in life this 'National hero' was to write, "At Blenheim I took two very important decisions; to be born and to marry. I am happily content with the decisions I took on both occasions." Today, Sir Winston Churchill's Birth Room and the Churchill exhibition nearby are a major attraction at the Palace. We skip the rest of the story one supposes all are familiar with. Aren't we just making some connections? And these reach Royal families presently. But, to get there we have to return to Claremont and what happened after Clive died.

### **Princess Charlotte and Prince Leopold**

Twelve years later his widow sold Claremont to Viscount Galway. He, in turn, about a year later, sold the house to Lord Delaval for the use of his daughter and her husband, Lord Tryconnel. Sometime later, for the sum of £55,000, it passed to Charles Rose Ellis, but was tragedy stricken when his wife did not survive the birth of their third child.

On May 2nd, 1816 Princess Charlotte, a daughter of the Prince Regent, married Prince Leopold of Saxe Coburg. Their honeymoon was spent at the Duke of York's home, Oatland Park near Weybridge. It was during a drive from Oatlands that the couple espied Claremont, and the young Princess said she would like to live there, and so, as a gift from the nation, the couple, resulting from the parliamentary purchase of Claremont, along with its 200 acres of parkland, were soon able to take up occupancy of Claremont. Very well educated with a good knowledge of the classics and musical too, she played the piano.

The 11th of February, 1817 was a memorable day for the then village of Esher, where celebrations were held at Claremont to mark Charlotte's birthday with a dinner and culminating musical evening. Apart from functions and festivities, the Royal couple are said to have lived a quiet life. The Princess delighted in managing her household.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, the Princess went into labour with their first child. As was customary, those present at Claremont included the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor and numerous Government Officials. Charlotte had been determined to have her first child 'at home' but what should have been a happy occasion turned out to be a double tragedy. Much of the blame for it had to be shouldered by the Princess who, having faith that all would 'go well', requested the services of her own physician. Complications there were, a plenty, but the doctor simply refused to seek advice from fellow physicians and, because of this stubbornness, the baby - a little boy - was still born. Worse was to follow a few hours later when the Princess herself passed away. Her husband was heartbroken and, as the news slowly passed round the nation, there was a great amount of sympathy, which was to translate itself into the desire for remembrance which took the form, up and down the country, of using the house name Claremont for a great number of properties and the naming of highways. So there you have it, how the name came into being and the very, very sad reason for its use.

I put the same question to no less an authoritative source than the British Library. Their lengthy, but negative response, was that they had no trace of the name originating in England but that it was French and probably brought to this Country by French Huguenot refugees who fled their own country to avoid persecution of a religious nature, and that one of the earliest records is of a Susanne Claremont being christened at St Martin Orgars French Huguenot church....

### **Other items of interest concerning Claremont House**

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In brief, then, following the tragic death of Princess Charlotte and her son, it was recorded that Prince Leopold was allowed to carry on residing at the house indefinitely with a £50,000 yearly allowance! Victoria, a Queen to-be, simply adored the place and spent a great deal of time there right up to her death, eventually 'taking charge' of Claremont. Queen Victoria was a frequent visitor until 1884. Latterly, she made arrangements for the property to become a school and this chance to obtain such a fine premise was seized upon by the Trustees of a Girls' School for daughters of Christian Scientists and begun in London some years previously.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, Claremont was, in effect 'taken over' for essential war work by no less a firm than the Hawker Aircraft Ltd, who moved their highly-skilled engineers and draughtsmen from a London 'suburb' to a hoped-to-be safer area. Here for the following few years, the specialists worked on alterations to improvements for such aircraft as the Hurricane, Typhoon, and the Sea Hawk. Immediately prior to the move to Surrey, the staff and pupils of Claremont, following several unsuccessful efforts, were able to find accommodation in Llandrindod Wells. Here, due to difficulty with travelling, the numbers of girl pupils fell considerably, and it was with considerable 'relief' that the school was able to once again begin a new lease of life in the early 1940's.

During the following five decades a really great amount of work was carried out at Claremont with expansion through new building and extension projects and the numbers of day and boarder pupils slowly, but surely increasing.

A School link-up

A major development was in 1978 when there was a link-up between Claremont and another Christian Science Foundation, "Fan Court" preparatory school for boys and thus was brought into being a co-educational school for 3-18 yr. olds.

Well, there we come to the end of my research, started to simply discover why the name, Claremont, came into being. Achieved, and I am particularly desirous of acknowledging the 'signposting' obtained through a thorough read of the originally published book, 'The Story of Claremont' by Phyllis M. Cooper.

Such help was enormous and my thanks to the school (which, by the way through linking with Fan Court was to become 'Claremont Fan Court School.' And, my thanks, too, to the help provided by the Esher Library. Confirmation of what has been established is provided by the inscription on an obelisk located in the Home Farm Garden, it reads thus

SIR JOHN. VANBURGH, KNIGHT OWNER OF THIS ESTATE 1708  
A DRAMATIST AND ARCHITECT OF CELEBRITY  
HE BUILT THE FIRST MANSION OF WHICH THE GARDENS WERE LAID OUT  
UNDER KENT GARDNER OF HOLLIES, EARL OF CLARE AND DUKE  
OF NEWCASTLE  
PRIME MINISTER UNDER GEORGE 11 AND 111 WHO PURCHASED ESTATE  
AND BESTOWED ON IT THE NAME  
OF CLAREMONT

This research was carried out in my ninetieth year, and the sixty seventh year of compiling local history. How very fortunate I have been! Hope readers find it of interest.

Crosspool, Sheffield.      Joe Castle      March 2016