

# ARTHUR JOSEPH MUNBY & THE 'GREY OLD GABLED' WHEELER'S FARM AT PYRFORD

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In 1877/8 Arthur Joseph Mumby came to stay in Pyrford, a place he had become familiar with over the years as a place of refuge from modern life. He had studied at Cambridge and became a Barrister, but he was also a writer and poet, and extremely interested in the plight of workers, in particular working women. He secretly married his housemaid, Hannah Cullwick, in 1873, but nobody in Pyrford knew of this until after he died, and other aspects of his strange relationships (which have been studied and written about by numerous historians and psycho-analysts) need not concern us here.

His diaries record that he came to this area as early as May 1863, staying with an artist friend, Alfred Lane, at Ripley and walking the Wey valley, noting places such as Ockham Mill, the old Anchor Inn at Pyrford Lock, St Nicholas' Church and the ruins of Newark Abbey (as he persisted in calling it).

He returned the following spring lodging with the Carter family at Wheeler's Farm, the 'grey old gabled farm with quaint little garden in front' that still stands in Warren Lane. Mrs Carter he described as 'a gentle and almost ladylike women' and the whole family as 'a simple, graceful, God-fearing family of women: not ashamed to cook and clean & wait on me, yet cultivated, artlessly refined, in taste, in dress: knowing nothing of the world and its ways, yet loving its best things – music & books & flowers'. One of the family was 'fair Sarah' a young lady in her early twenties ' who sat in the broad old window seat, with the morning light playing in her curly clustered amber hair & on her sober pearl-grey gown'. In a later diary he recorded that she had 'long shapely hands, but

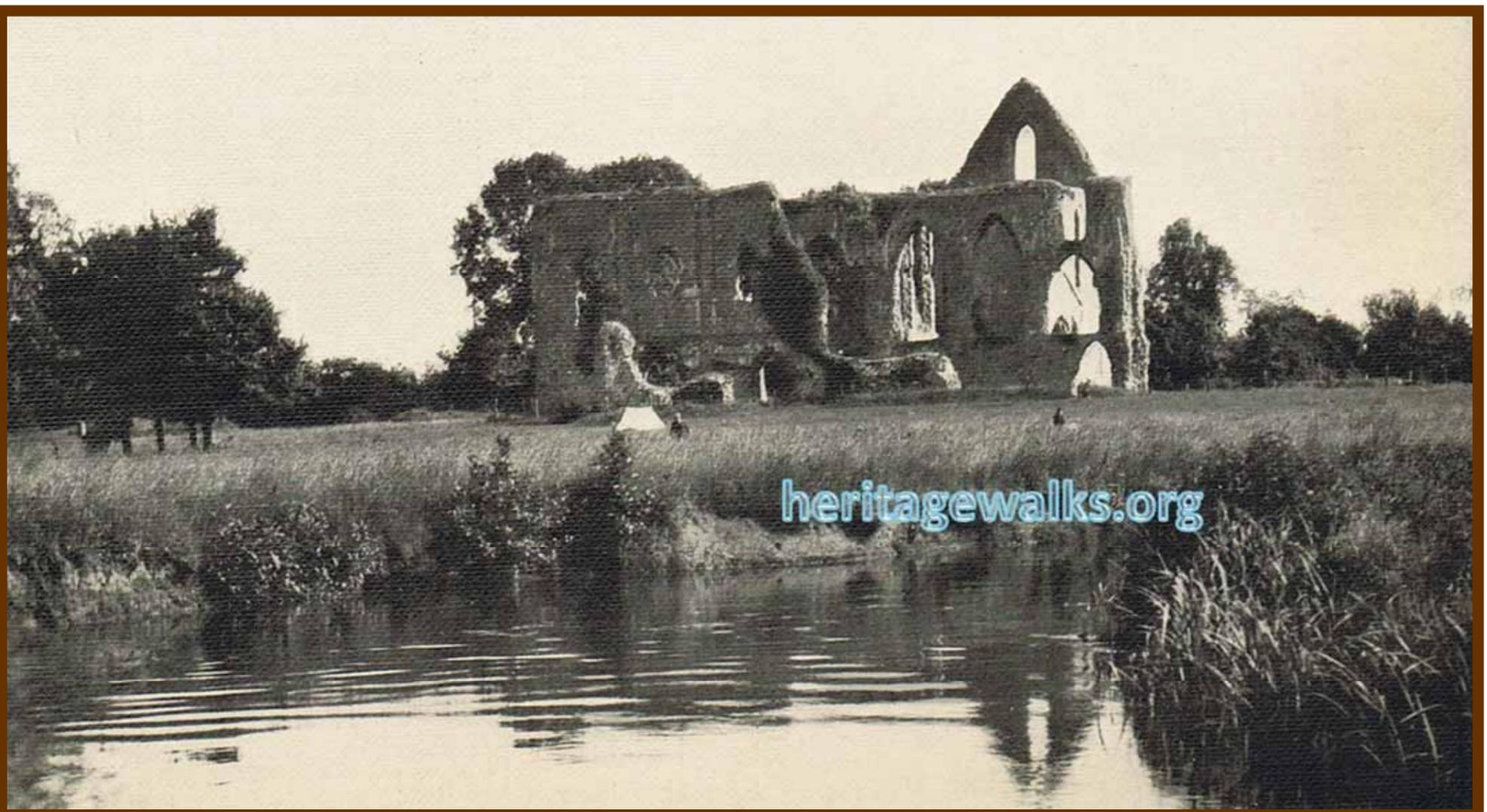


thicker and larger than a lady's; with russet-apple texture and a warm apricot hue which were well seen as they moved on the white piano keys', but as I say we should perhaps not get too bogged down by Mumby's odd (but possibly innocent) behaviour!

Unfortunately there was a period when Pyrford was not so much a refuge from the world, after 'fair Sarah' had apparently misread Mumby's intentions (she obviously knew nothing of Hannah), but later, when the Carter's had

moved on (and Sarah had emigrated to America), Vernon Lushington (one of Mumby's aristocratic friends) leased Wheeler's Farm as a country retreat allowing Mumby to once more discover this area's charm.

The diaries once again record the walk from Woking Station, 'by the mossy old barn, along White Rose Lane, under the sandstone cliff where the martins build, to Hoebridge Farm; and thence up the shady lane out on to the high terrace of Breakheart Field'.



When in 1877 the Lushington's too decided to give up the sub-tenancy of Wheeler's Farm it became obvious the Munby should take the place on himself. Back in May 1863 he had noted that he had 'spent such a pleasant time, it almost seemed as if in some such nook one might work out the long sad problem, how to live with Hannah and do justice to her love and my own', but fourteen years later the situation was different, and his wife was never destined to visit Pyrford, let alone stay there.

Munby's life might seem strange, and his diary entries going into great detail of the looks and plight of working women are undoubtedly odd, but for me they are a wonderful record of local life in the Victorian age – a record of how ordinary people looked and worked and lived; a record that cannot be found anywhere other than a personal diary.

Many authors have judged Arthur James Munby harshly – I, for one, think he should be celebrated and it is a shame that there is not a plaque on the wall of Wheeler's Farm to mark his life there.



## THE PURCHASE OF LAND AT ST JOHNS BY THE CREMATION SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN IN 1878

**T**here is a great amount of dispute amongst places in the Midlands for the site of the centre of the country (or further north for the centre of the UK), but it has long been joked that the 'dead centre' of Britain is in fact in Woking!

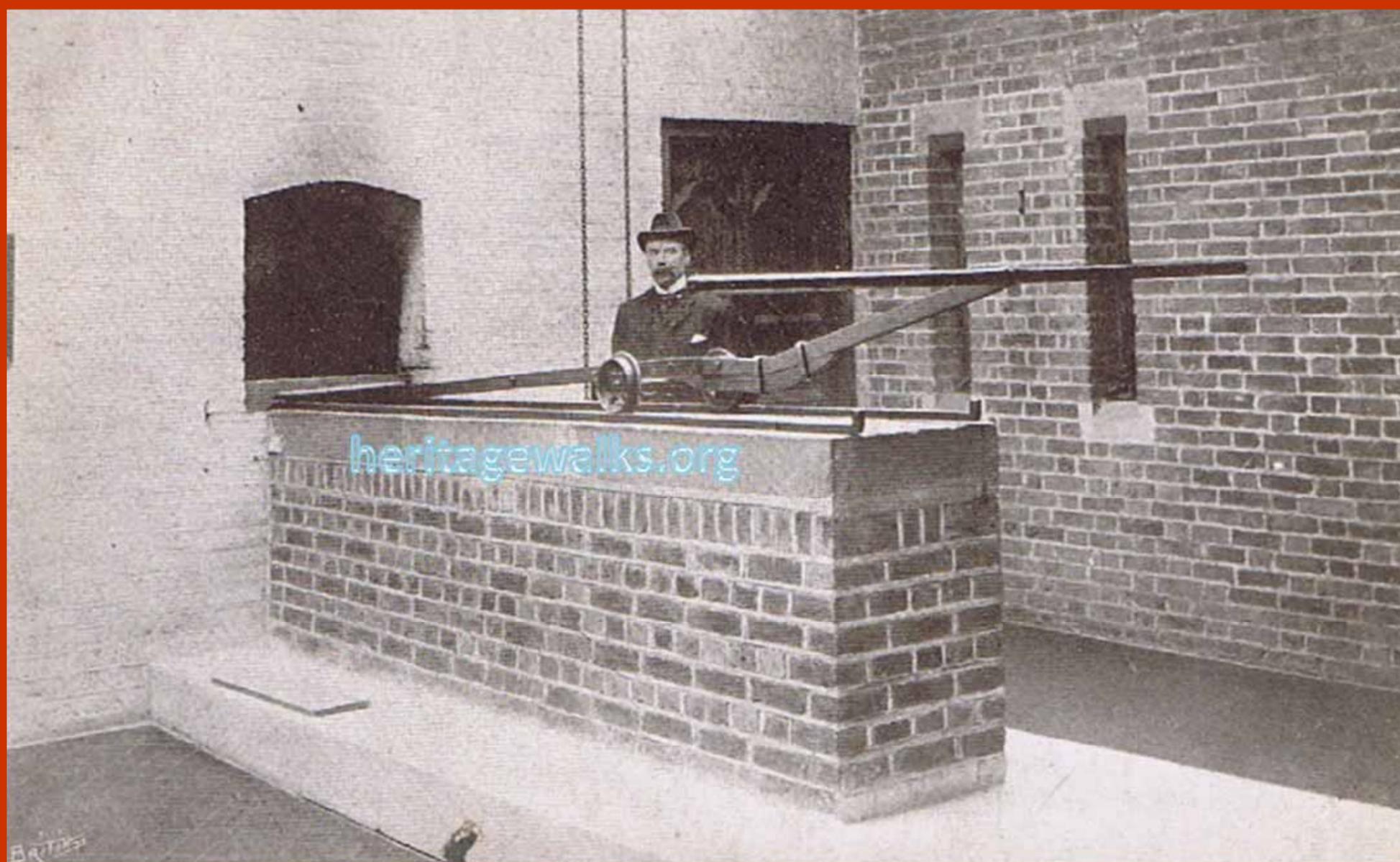
Not geographically, of course, but literally, with Brookwood Necropolis (city of the dead) - the largest cemetery in the country and St Johns, the site of the Britain's first crematorium.

By the 1870's the interest in cremation as a means of disposing of bodies had increased to such an extent that in 1874 Sir Henry Thompson, Physician to Queen Victoria, set up the Cremation Society to look into the best method of cremating a body 'provided that the act was not contrary to Law'.

That was the hard part, because having bought an acre of land from the Necropolis Company in 1878, they then had to wait many years for the

act of cremation to be proved legal before their experimental crematorium could be properly used.

We will get to that story in a few weeks time – but in 1878 the horrified inhabitants of Woking were doing all they could to prevent it from happening. Meetings were held and letters sent to the press, and although no physical protests took place outside the gates, feelings were obviously running high.



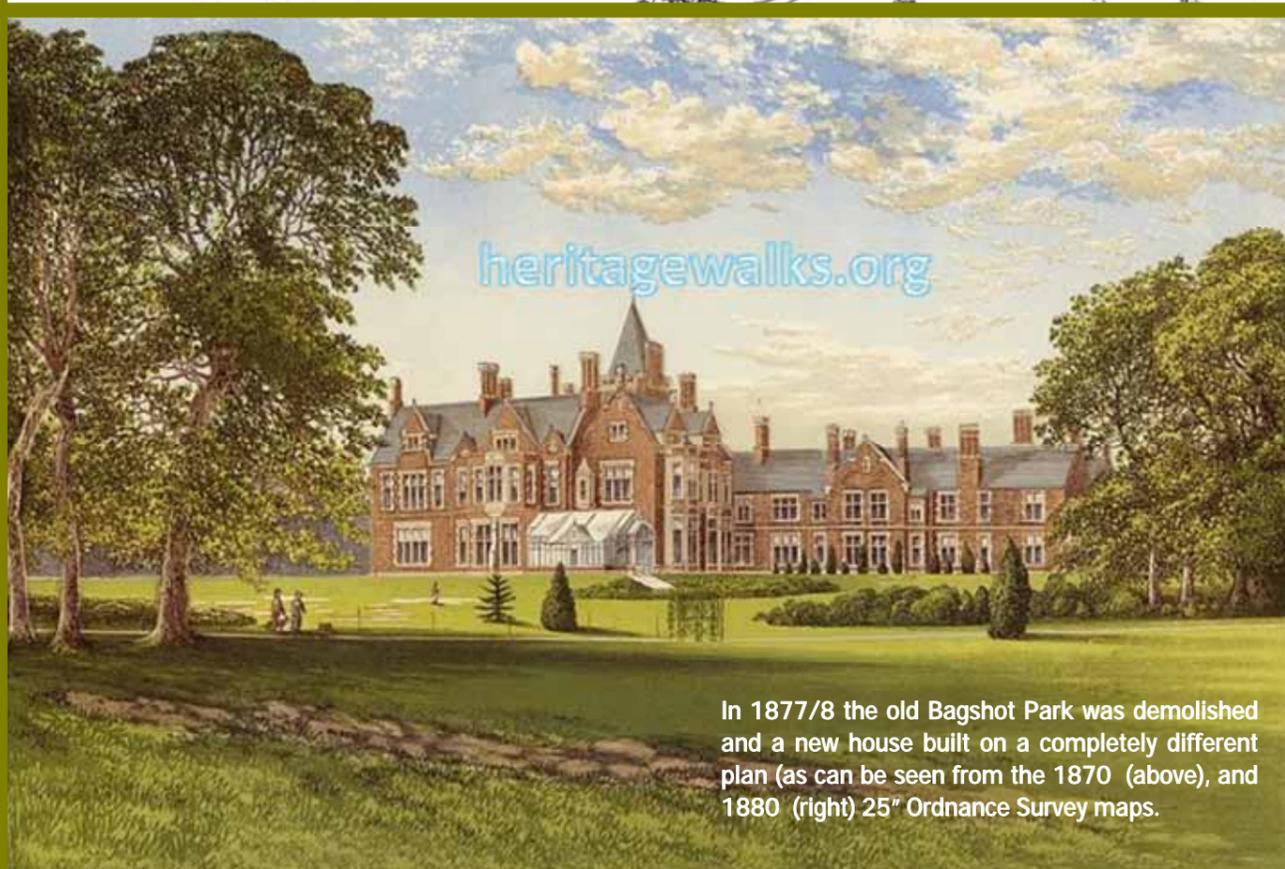
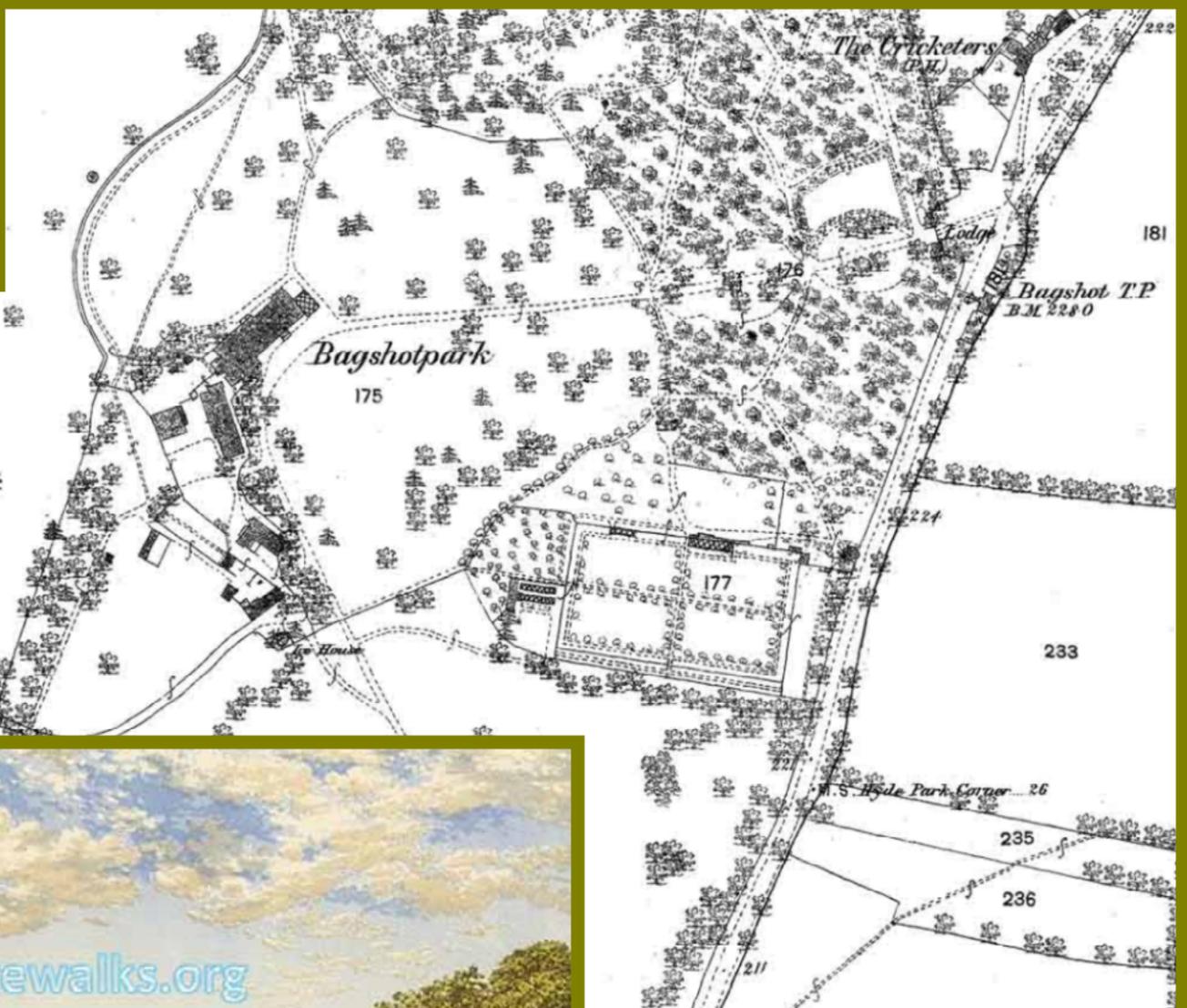
# THE BUILDING, REPAIRING, DEMOLITION, REBUILDING & RENOVATION OF BAGSHOT PARK

In 1877-8 the original Bagshot Park (right) was demolished to make way for a much grander home for Prince William Patrick Albert, the seventh child and third son of Queen Victoria (created the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn in 1874).

Bagshot had long been a royal residence, with Elizabeth I and James I often hunting in the park here. A survey in 1610 found that Sir William Harmon, Keeper of the Park, had recently enlarged and repaired the house, the cost of materials and workmen's wages amounting to £861. He presented an account, however, for £1,042 – the difference he said was for cleaning out the moat and for carriage of materials etc.

After the Civil War (when Bagshot Park appears to have become ruinous) another Keeper of the Park was granted by Charles II £1,200 to be spent 'in and about the building and repairing of our house called Bagshot Lodge', but an enquiry later found that the gentleman concerned (Colonel James Graham) had in the end spent £3,758.9s7d.

In George III's time the property was leased to the Earl of Albemarle (who is said to have spent £50,000) on improvements to the property (all to no avail of course), which possibly puts into perspective the £3.4m spent by the Crown Estate (and the taxpayers) to turn the old Duke of Connaught's house into the home for the Earl and Countess of Wessex!



In 1877/8 the old Bagshot Park was demolished and a new house built on a completely different plan (as can be seen from the 1870 (above), and 1880 (right) 25" Ordnance Survey maps.

