

WOODCHESTER PARK CHANGES HANDS

1940

ACQUIRED BY BARNWOOD HOUSE ITS CHEQUERED HISTORY

WOODCHESTER PARK, we understand, has been acquired by Barnwood House, a registered hospital for nervous and mental disorders.

Woodchester Park has a long and interesting history stretching back to very early times, although its present name only dates from about 1850, before which it was known as Spring Park.

Enclosed in rugged wooded slopes the Park lies sheltered in a lovely valley at the bottom of which lie a series of about five picturesque lakes, and apart from its historical associations, which are many, its beauty alone has made the name known far and wide. Of recent years it has been freely thrown open to the public at holiday times, and on each occasion hundreds of visitors enjoyed the attractions to be found in the gorge between the hills which on either side were its natural boundaries.

In earlier times many owners were dispossessed of the property, one of whom was

It was about 1850, or probably about a year or so before, that Lord Ducie removed from Spring Park and sold the estate to the late Mr. William Leigh.

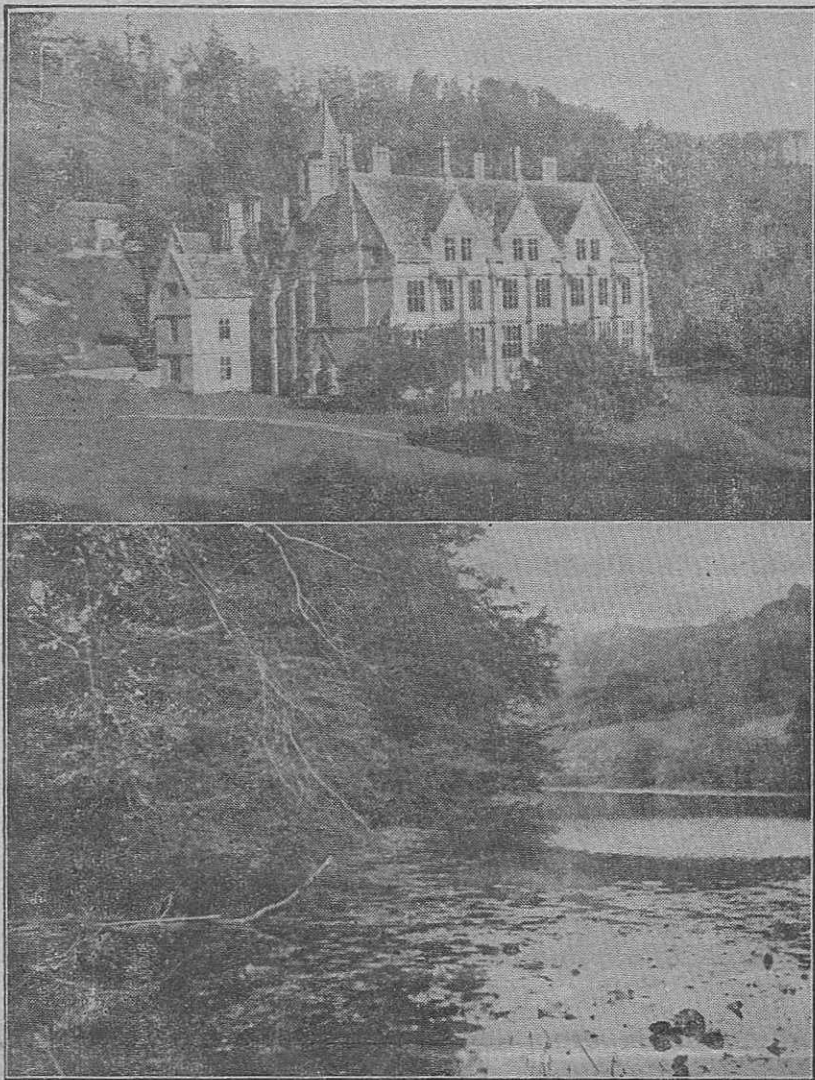
Besides taking a great share in building the Woodchester Roman Catholic Church, the new owner demolished the eighteenth century mansion which had been built by the Ducies and planned a new and ambitious country seat.

NEVER COMPLETED

Unfortunately his schemes were never completed. As a result of the revival of Gothic architecture the house was planned entirely in the Gothic style. Mr. Leigh hoped to make the estate self contained and self supporting, and to build his mansion he engaged the finest workmen, including masons who had been engaged on the Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, while Pugin, a famous French craftsman, was responsible for the exquisite carving in the roof, the gargoles and other decorations. The house, however, was never finished, but remained as an attraction to many visitors who are able to gather from it some of the glories that the owner intended when he embarked upon a scheme that he was never able to complete.

ITS GHOSTS

In an address on the Park given on one occasion on which it has been thrown open in recent years, Mr. Evelyn Waugh also



Thomas Arundel, who lived there at the time of the Reformation, and was executed because he would not renounce his Catholic faith.

A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TRAGEDY

The present estate is, according to Mr. Evelyn Waugh, part of a much larger one acquired in various ways by Sir George Huntley, a seventeenth century lord of the manor, who was killed when he was thrown by his horse as he was opening the gates of the Park on his return home one evening.

As a result of his extravagance Sir George left his family in a state of financial distress, and with their return to their original family seat at Frocester, the Park became the property of Sir Richard Ducie, an ancestor of the Earls of Ducie.

THE DUCIE FAMILY

The Ducie family held the seat until 1850, and their tenure may well be described as the crowning days in the history of the estate. Twice within half-a-century Royalty visited the estate, Frederick, Prince of Wales, with his princess and their daughter visited it in 1750, and in August, 1788, his son, King George III., was also entertained by the Right Hon. Francis Lord Ducie.

referred to the ghostly visitors who are usually associated with estates of its kind. Mr. Waugh said that

“no reference to Woodchester Park would be complete without some stories of the ghosts that are supposed to haunt it. It was said that on certain occasions a headless horseman could be seen galloping round one of the lakes—but the legend did not say whether it was the departed spirit of Sir George Huntley, a former owner of the Park, who was out riding when he met his death. Another apparition that had been seen in the Park was a coach and horses, which was supposed to gallop up the drive every night at midnight. The last person to see that spectral vision was a poacher about 30 years ago, and his descendants still lived to testify to this alarm.”

Now—after nearly ninety years' possession by the Leigh family—the Park again changes hands, and this time loses its association with private families. Its history has witnessed many changes, and it has been placed on record that never has it been held by one family for more than three generations.