

REPORT

The story of Chicheley Hall

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In acquiring Chicheley Hall and 75 acres of surrounding land, the Royal Society added nearly six centuries of traceable history to its already considerable heritage. In this paper we summarize what is known about a remarkable property and the people who have lived there. It is a story of intricate genealogy, malicious wills, a modicum of debauchery—and stunning architecture.

THE FIRST 633 YEARS

Chicheley was, almost inevitably, mentioned in the 1086 Domesday Book. It was then called Cicelai and comprised three manors, all included in the very extensive domains of William Fitz-Ansculf of Dudley Castle. The Barony of Dudley subsequently passed to Fulk Paynel, the Norman Lord of the Manor and local Sheriff, who founded Tickford Priory about three miles from the present Chicheley Hall in 1140 as an outpost of the Cluniac monastery of Marmoutier at Tours. Fulk's grandson Gervase Paynel inherited the Barony of Dudley, and in 1187 he donated his land at Chicheley to Tickford Priory, 'by the consent and wish of my wife the Countess Isabel'.

And there it stayed for the next three and a half centuries, until, in 1524, Cardinal Wolsey dissolved Tickford Priory and used it to help found his Christ Church College at Oxford. After Wolsey's fall from favour and death in 1530, Tickford Priory and its associated lands, including Chicheley, were granted to the college, now renamed Henry VIII's College, but it reverted to Henry VIII himself in 1545. He promptly sold Chicheley, the adjacent Thickthorns Manor and other Tickford properties for £789 to a London wool merchant, Anthony Cave, who had already acquired some land in the area and needed the additional 800 acres as pasture for his sheep.

In about 1550 Cave built a substantial manor house at Chicheley in the form of a hollow square. He also founded and endowed a grammar school at the adjacent parish of Lathbury, where he owned property. He died in 1558, leaving his wife Elizabeth and four surviving daughters (a son and daughter had died in infancy). He bequeathed to his eldest daughter, Judith (b. 1542), 'my manors of Chicheley and Thickthornes in Bucks, and of Drayton near Daventry in Northants, and my parsonage place and rents in Lathbury Bucks, as they were purchased by the King's letters patent 4th Dec. 37 Hen.VIII, to hold to her and the

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heirs of her body, subject to my wife's interest therein.' His wife therefore continued to live at Chicheley until she died in 1577, having remarried, and been widowed, twice more.

Judith Cave (then aged 16 years) married William Chester in 1558, the year in which her father died. The association of the Chester family with Chicheley dates from this time; it was to remain in their ownership for nearly 400 years. Judith's mother continued to occupy Chicheley in accordance with the will. Judith and William bought a house in Lime Street, Fenchurch, where they mostly lived and which William was to use for more than 40 years.

William (b. *ca.* 1530/35?) was the first of 14 children born to Sir William Chester (b. 1509) and his wife Elizabeth Lovett. Sir William, who became Lord Mayor of London in 1560, was a wool merchant and, like Anthony Cave, a leading member of the Drapers Company. His wife Elizabeth died in 1560, and he remarried in 1567. When his second wife, Joan, died in 1572, Sir William retired to Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he died in 1595.

Judith and her husband, William, were cousins. Judith's mother, Elizabeth Cave *née* Lovett, was the daughter of the fourth Thomas Lovett of Astwell (*ca.* 1495–1523). William's mother, also born Elizabeth Lovett, was the daughter of the third Thomas Lovett of Astwell (1473–1542) by his second wife, and was therefore a half-sister to Judith's grandfather, though more than 20 years younger than him. Such intricate mingling of family lines was then not uncommon.

Judith and William's only child, Anthony Chester, was born in 1566. His mother died in 1570 aged only 28 years, and when his maternal grandmother, Elizabeth, died in 1577 he was able to move into Chicheley with his father, his stepmother Anne Freere, and their two children. Anthony was then 11 years old and his father was, in effect, his legal guardian. In due course Anthony inherited other property from his father and from each of his grandfathers, the two wealthy London wool merchants. He was therefore able gradually to buy up the remainder of Chicheley parish and some of North Crawley parish, thus bringing back into one ownership the original Domesday parish of Cicelai.

Anthony Chester was politically active to the extent of raising a troop of horse at his own expense in 1588 to repel the threatened Spanish invasion, and of accompanying Queen Elizabeth to Tilbury Fort at the head of his troops.

Anthony married his maternal cousin Elizabeth Boteler, daughter of Sir Henry Boteler, in 1589. His father then moved out of Chicheley Manor, giving Anthony all the furniture and 'household stuff to the value of £160'. He also gave him the adjoining estate of Broughton's Manor in Crawley, which his father had bought for him when he married Judith in 1558. William Chester died at Wisbech Castle in 1608 and, in his will, commenting that Anthony already had two estates, he left him just 'my best gilt standing cup, hoping that he will be good to his half-brother and sister'—which he was.

Anthony lived at Chicheley for the rest of his life. He was High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1603, when James VI of Scotland was proclaimed King of England, and met him as he travelled to London. On that occasion the king conferred a knighthood on him. Through the influence of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, whose sister had married his brother-in-law John Boteler, Anthony also acquired a baronetcy, in 1620. For this he had to pay £1095 to the King—a form of vanity tax. His acquisitiveness continued: in 1628 he added the Tilsworth estate to his collection and became Sherriff of Bedfordshire. His wife died in 1629, seven of her twelve children surviving her. Anthony himself died in 1635 and was buried at Chicheley Church next to Elizabeth (see figure 1).

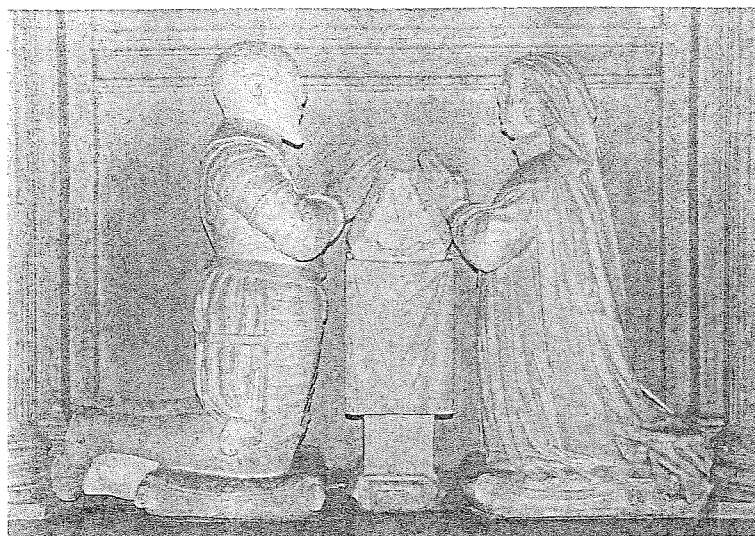


Figure 1. Statue of Sir Anthony Chester and his wife, Dame Elizabeth, at the Church of St Lawrence, Chicheley. A plaque below the statue describes Elizabeth Chester as someone 'by whose virtue and wisdom that family is much advanced'. (Online version in colour.)

Anthony Chester's eldest son, also called Anthony (b. 1593), married Elizabeth Peyton in 1623. His father seems to have disapproved and effectively disinherited him, but in 1628 he relented to the extent of settling Chicheley on him in tail.¹ In a deathbed will, however, he left the bulk of his properties (of which Chicheley was but a modest part) to his third son, Henry (b. 1598). All the other surviving children disputed the will; it was upheld, but Henry promptly gave the smaller estates to two of his brothers, and Anthony as the firstborn son inherited the baronetcy.

Anthony, second baronet, proved to be a less astute politician than his younger brother. Henry did his best to remain on good terms with both sides in the Civil War and to help family members who got into trouble with one side or the other. However, his elder brother Sir Anthony fought at Naseby in 1645 in the Royalist cause and then had to flee to Holland, selling most of his property to Henry to pay off debts and leaving Henry to look after his wife and children. The Parliamentary garrison at Newport Pagnell took revenge by bombarding Chicheley Manor, leaving it in ruins.

Sir Anthony Chester returned to England in 1650 but died within two years. His wife lived a further 40 years without remarrying. He was succeeded as baronet by his son, another Anthony (b. 1633). This Anthony, the third baronet, was the fourth of thirteen children and the first son to survive to adulthood. He married the daughter of Henry Chester's second wife (that is, his uncle's step-daughter), Mary Cranmer (b. 1635), in 1657. She brought considerable wealth with her. They lived at Chicheley and had sixteen children there.

When Henry Chester died in 1666, with no surviving direct descendants, he bequeathed his very considerable wealth to Anthony, his nephew, although it was not until 1692 that Anthony had full access to it because several relatives were bequeathed the rents from individual estates during their lifetimes. The set of properties accumulated by the first baronet was thus reunited.

Anthony Chester, third baronet, died at Chicheley in 1698. He was succeeded by his eighth child and eldest surviving son, John (b. 1666). An earlier son—the fourth Anthony—had died in 1685 at the age of 21 years. John Chester, fourth baronet, married Anne Wollaston in 1686, and she brought with her a dowry of £10 000. They lived with her parents at Shenton Hall in Leicestershire, 60 miles north of Chicheley, and all their eleven children were born there. Anne died in 1704 but John and the children continued living at Shenton with Anne's then widowed mother. They finally had to move to Chicheley in 1714, 16 years after John had inherited it, when John remarried, his second wife being the already twice-widowed Frances Skrimshire. Apparently, staying at Shenton saved John a good deal of expense and provided him with better hunting.

THE BUILDING OF CHICHELEY HALL, 1719–23

During those final 16 years at Shenton, however, John Chester was busy with projects to improve Chicheley. Early steps were to dig an ornamental lake, known locally as the canal, in the park in 1699, adding a boat-house in the following year. He also employed George London to lay out a new garden enclosed with brick walls, and installed new approaches with avenues of lime. Thousands of trees were planted around the grounds between 1698 and 1717. John rebuilt the chancel of Chicheley church in a classical style in 1708 and commissioned a peal of six new bells from Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester for the church in 1718. In the park, he built the dovecote in 1717 and, over a never-failing spring, he built a three-storey tower with 'a curious mechanical contrivance for raising a constant supply of water to the upper floors of the mansion'. Henry Beighton FRS wrote a detailed report on the tower and its machinery in 1726. He found it 'of admirable use to raise water where the springs are too small to turn waterwheels... its parts curiously contrived... not seeming to want any repair in many years.' It worked for 150 years until the brickwork of the tower gave way.

The original 1550 manor building by Anthony Cave did not meet the requirements of 150 years later and was anyway in very poor condition, despite Henry Chester's efforts to make good the damage of the Civil War. But John's mother, Mary Chester, had continued to live at Chicheley after her husband's death, so before he could rebuild he had to build an alternative house for her. This he did about a mile away, in the early 1700s. Mary moved there but died shortly afterwards, in 1710.²

John Chester commissioned Francis Smith of Warwick, architect, master-builder and also skilful mason and bricklayer, to rebuild Chicheley Hall from scratch in 1719, on higher ground to the north of the old site. Smith recycled some material from the old building—so that, for example, a carved inscription from Anthony Cave's time can be found on a beam over the fireplace in one of the second floor rooms—but nevertheless he had to commission the making of 955 550 new bricks, 85 000 of them for garden walls. The new hall was finished in 1723 (figure 2).

What John Chester and Francis Smith created was an outstanding example of early Georgian house architecture, early eighteenth-century landscape design and Palladian influence. It was also a rare example of English Baroque and contains some of the finest woodcarving, joinery and plasterwork of the period. The design was influenced by drawings sent from Italy by John Chester's protégé William Kent and by the ideas of leading architects of Baroque Rome. Kent himself painted the hall ceiling. Other

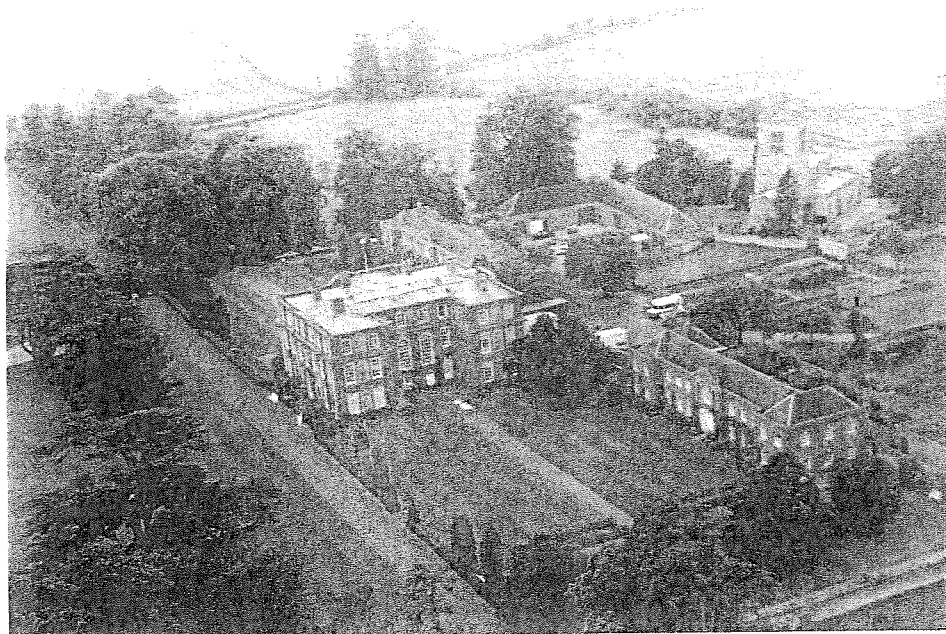


Figure 2. Aerial view of Chicheley, ca. 1975. (Online version in colour.)

outstanding craftsmen involved in the project included Francis Baxter and Thomas Eborall, joiners; Edward Poynton, stone carver; and Richard and Thomas Walker, masons.

THE CHESTERS AT CHICHELEY HALL, 1723–1823

John Chester died at the age of 60 years, three years after his new hall was completed. He was succeeded by his eldest son, William Chester (b. 1687), who became the fifth baronet. This was a second example of a falling out between owner and heir apparent. When John remarried and moved with most of his children to Chicheley in 1714, William had stayed behind at Shenton and had gradually been supplanted in his father's affections by the third son, John (b. 1693), who got on particularly well with his new stepmother. John Chester's will duly bequeathed Chicheley to William, but only with enough land to generate £800 a year; more valuable lands at Tilsforth and elsewhere were left to his son John.

This would have posed major problems for the upkeep of Chicheley. William, however, died just 32 days after his father. Chicheley then reverted to his brother John by the terms of his father's will (which stipulated that only William's sons could inherit; in the event William died having had six daughters but no sons), and the baronetcy, too, passed to his brother, making him the sixth baronet. This at least had the consequence that the owner of Chicheley again had considerable estates to go with the building. The insistence on inheritance down the male line had to do in part with maintaining the Chester family name.

John Chester, sixth baronet, married Frances Bagot—his stepmother's goddaughter—at Blithfield³ in Staffordshire in 1719, and had two sons and a daughter by her. He died in

1748. His eldest son, Charles Bagot Chester (b. 1724), inherited Chicheley, where he had been brought up, and became the seventh baronet.

Charles Bagot Chester was a gambler, a drunkard and the keeper of two mistresses, with each of whom he had children; but he never married. He did, though, dissipate a fair portion of the Chester wealth, to the detriment of the upkeep of the house. In 1755, in a fit of drink-induced delirium tremens, he threw himself out of a second-floor window at his London lodgings. He rallied briefly, and then died, aged 30 years. However, the respite gave him a chance to rewrite his will, and he bequeathed the whole of the Chester estates in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, including Chicheley, together with the plate, pictures and family relics, to his mother's nephew Charles Bagot (b. 1730)—not a blood relative but a friend from school and university who had subsequently become a wine merchant. The only condition was that he adopt the name Chester.

Meanwhile the eighth baronetcy went to Charles Bagot Chester's uncle Francis Chester (b. 1694), younger brother of the sixth baronet, John Chester. He was a 60-year-old widower and a confirmed invalid when he succeeded to the title. He had lost his mind when his wife died in 1743. He lived out his days at a lunatic asylum in Chelsea and died in 1766. His son and heir, also Francis Chester (b. 1724), had died nearly nine years before him, in 1757. So in 1766 the baronetcy passed to his cousin Anthony Chester (b. 1706) (the fourth baronet of that name), a clergyman in the Church of England. He died three years later, the last male descendant of the Chester family, and the Chester baronetcy thereupon became extinct after nine iterations.

Despite the inauspicious way in which he acquired the property in 1755, Charles Chester *né* Bagot did his best to restore the reputation and fortunes of Chicheley. He was a good landlord and made the best use he could of his inheritances and his earnings. He married his cousin Catharine Legge in 1765 and had twelve children by her. He died in 1793, and his death was mentioned 'with respect and regret' by the poet William Cowper, whom he had known at Westminster School. Cowper lived nearby at Olney and was a frequent visitor to Chicheley.

All this good work, however, was then undone. Chicheley passed to Charles's 22-year-old son, also called Charles (b. 1771). This son was a member of the Prince Regent's court, addicted to gambling and an expensive lifestyle. The genealogist Edmond Chester Waters commented in reference to him that 'a man of fashion who is fond of horse-racing and cards seldom contrives to retain the whole of his inheritance'; and young Charles duly had to sell off one of his estates, Tilsworth, in 1804 to pay his debts.⁴ He spent little time at Chicheley, preferring the bright lights of London and Brighton, and he let out the hall to Charles Pinfold and his wife Maria, the daughter of the first Marquess of Bute. They had been living at Walton Hall (now the headquarters of the Open University), which they owned; she wanted something more grand, and they rented Chicheley for 20 years until she died and her husband moved back to Walton Hall, which he then rebuilt.

When the reprobate Charles Chester died, unmarried, in 1838, Chicheley and what remained of the patrimony passed to his nephew, the Rev. Anthony Chester, who then moved into Chicheley Hall for the next 20 years. He died of a heart attack in 1858 while shooting in front of the hall, leaving a daughter but no son. Under the male entail, Chicheley passed to Anthony's cousin, Charles Montague Chester (b. 1813). He was then in the army, but settled at Chicheley and was able to run it in something like the intended style. He was married to Maria, daughter of Major Charles Sandham of the Royal Artillery, whose battery is thought to have fired the first shot at the battle of Waterloo. The Sandhams were an established army family and lived at Rowdell, near Washington in Sussex.

Charles Montague and Maria had ten children. He died in 1879, leaving annuities for each of his children that took up most of the income from the various properties. His eldest son, Charles Anthony (b. 1846), who inherited Chicheley itself, therefore had very little income with which to maintain it. After her husband's death, Maria moved back to Sussex, where her friends were, and she died at Rowdell in 1895. The children, including Charles Anthony, went with her. Charles Anthony stayed in Sussex for the rest of his life, dying unmarried in 1910.

CHICHELEY HALL LET OUT, 1883-1954

From about 1883 Chicheley Hall, with the immediately surrounding 75 acres, was therefore let out to tenants, and it was never again the primary residence of the Chester family although it remained in their ownership for a further 70 years. The rest of the Chicheley estate, which since 1620 had totalled about 2300 acres (originally five farms), was let out to tenant farmers and remains in the possession of the Chester family to this day.

The identity of the first tenant of Chicheley Hall after the Chesters moved to Sussex is no longer known. The second tenant was a single lady, Miss Solari, who occupied the house on her own and was very popular in the village. She died in 1899, just after renewing the lease. She was followed by the dashing Sir George Farrar (b. 1859), a mining engineer who had been brought up in Bedford.

By then, Farrar had made two fortunes in South Africa, first in diamonds in Kimberley and then in gold on the East Rand.⁵ He returned to England and marriage to Ella Mabel Waylen (b. 1869) in 1893. He wanted to invest his money by buying Chicheley, but was prevented by the entail. Instead, from 1899, Charles Anthony Chester let it to him at a modest rent on condition that he carry out overdue repairs and modernize the facilities. This he did—including installing central heating, to the detriment of the wooden panelling and furniture. The house was let partly furnished, so that major items belonging to the Chester family, such as big pictures and mirrors, stayed in the house.

At the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, Farrar returned to South Africa and took an active part, both militarily and politically. He was knighted in 1902 and made a baronet in 1911. Back at Chicheley he started a shoot, took a lease on one of the farms, helped the pub and generally supported village life to the full. He also had six daughters between 1894 and 1911. He returned to South Africa at the outbreak of war in 1914 and was killed in a railway accident in German Southwest Africa (now Namibia) in 1915.

His widow, Lady Farrar, continued living at Chicheley until 1923 (figure 3), when she injured herself moving furniture and died a week later. Her daughters maintained the lease until World War II, gradually moving out as they got married. One of them, Marjorie, never married but stayed on at Chicheley, active in village life and becoming Master of the Oakley Hunt.

When Charles Anthony died in 1910, ownership of Chicheley passed to his brother, the Rev. John Greville Chester (b. 1852). He had been appointed Rector of Gilling West near Richmond, Yorkshire, in 1899 and continued in that role for the rest of his life. He married Amy Hughes, daughter of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Arthur Hughes (1832-1915), in 1883. They had five sons and two daughters; the eldest and youngest son were killed in World War I.

Amy died in 1915 and John Greville in 1923. Their first son, Greville Arthur Bagot Chester, had been killed in action in 1914, so in 1923 Chicheley passed to their second son, Anthony James Bagot Chester, known as A.J.B. A.J.B. was born in 1892. He served

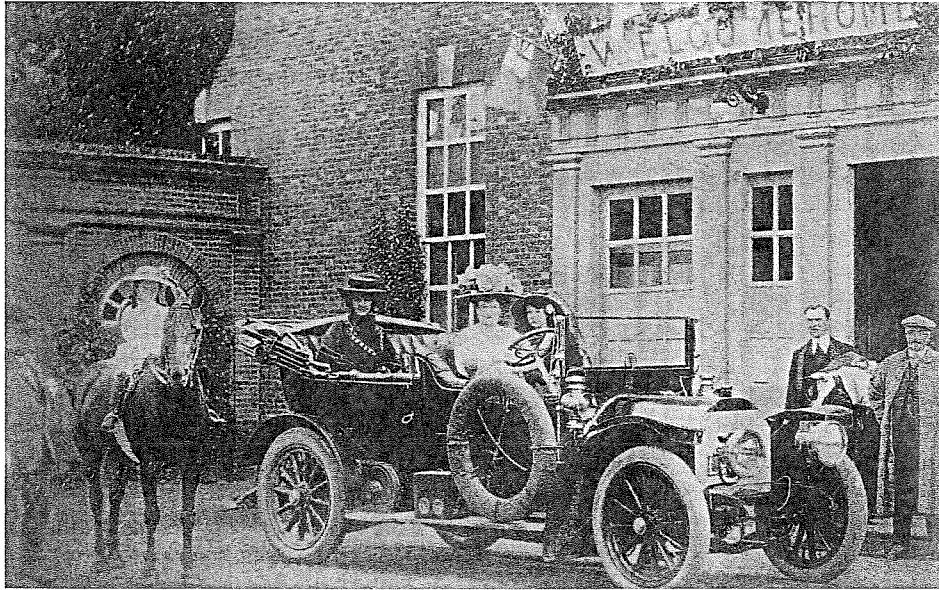


Figure 3. Lady Farrar on return from South Africa after Sir George Farrar's death in 1915. On the right is Mr George Salmons of Tickford works, later Aston Martin. (Online version in colour.)

with the Gurkhas in World War I, being awarded the MC, and with the Pioneer Corps in World War II. He married Gladys Mabel Stamer (1892–1974) in 1924. They had one son, John Greville Bagot Chester (known as Greville), born in 1925. In 1933 AJB and Gladys bought the Old Rectory, North Crawley, so that the family could keep in close touch with the Chicheley estate and its tenants.

During World War II Chicheley Hall was requisitioned, at 10 days' notice, for use by the Special Operations Executive (SOE). All the panelling was covered in linoleum, so anything that happened would not damage the panelling. But the pictures, mirrors, and so on, went into store. The smaller items were stored in the concealed library on the top floor and locked up. At the end of the war, when it was derequisitioned, these items were all intact.

The Barnes Wallis bouncing bomb is said to have been tested during this time on the lake at Chicheley, on a very small scale. The SOE stayed at Chicheley until the Normandy landings in 1944, after which they no longer needed it. It was then used as a depot for the FANYs, the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. They were raised for the South African war for nursing, but they changed their role in the World War I and again in the World War II and they were a slightly unofficial part of the Army, doing a great deal for the SOE.

The hall was derequisitioned in 1945. It was then let to a school, with the linoleum being kept on the walls on the assumption that schoolchildren were likely to be at least as destructive as the SOE.

THE BRATTYS AT CHICHELEY HALL, 1954–2009

AJB died in November 1952, and Greville Chester inherited Chicheley. Greville had not intended to sell it, and indeed was hoping that the school would remain and prosper, but

he was approached by the 2nd Earl Beatty (b. 1905), son of the famous World War I admiral, who was very keen to buy it. He had been introduced to the house by Sir Sacheverell Sitwell. Beatty first bought a Victorian house called Whittlebury, on the other side of Stony Stratford, so that the school occupying Chicheley could move there. The house could then be sold, with the agreement of the family and the strong support of the trustees—because of present death duties as much as future costs. The sale was completed in 1954.

What Greville Chester sold to Earl Beatty was Chicheley Hall itself and the immediate 75 acres. To Beatty's disappointment Greville kept the rest of the estate, which then comprised Home Farm (1000 acres), Grange Farm (originally Balney Manor, 600 acres) and Thickthorne Farm (400 acres), and when the tenant of Home Farm retired in the mid 1960s Greville started working the farm himself. He also sold Beatty some of the larger contents, including pictures and mirrors.

Earl Beatty carried out an extensive programme of restoration and modernization on the house itself, which by then was not in good condition. This included adding a bathroom to nearly every bedroom. He also opened up the avenue, which had not been used before, and turned it into the main access route.

Beatty's third wife, Adelle, who had been keen to acquire Chicheley, left him in 1958 and he married Diane Kirk (b. 1941) in 1959. He died in 1972, leaving the house to their young son but enabling Diane as beneficiary to continue living at Chicheley, which she was to do for a total of 50 years. Diane married the barrister John Nutting in 1973; his great-great-uncle, Lord Rayleigh, had been President of the Royal Society from 1905 to 1908.

Because there was now effectively no farmland to generate income, Diane and John Nutting experimented with opening the house itself to the public. More profitably, Chicheley became one of the first private country houses to provide residential conferences, initially for Rank Xerox, which was based in Newport Pagnell and wanted an unusual venue. In later years the Nuttings also embarked on four major restoration projects: restoring the 1717 dovecote, repairing the roof of the south wing, re-leading the roof of the main house, and draining and cleaning the lake (figure 4).

CHICHELEY HALL SOLD TO THE ROYAL SOCIETY AND REFURBISHED, 2009

The Beatty family sold Chicheley Hall, with its 75 acres and some contents, to the Royal Society in 2009. Planning permission and listed building consent had already been secured for the intended alterations. The Society then carried out a major programme of repair and refurbishment to turn the hall into a high-quality venue for residential conferences, the Kavli Royal Society International Centre for the Advancement of Science.

It was a considerable challenge. The estate comprised:

- the main house (listed Grade I);
- two service wings, namely the north wing (listed Grade II*) linked to the main house by a quadrant corridor and the south wing (listed Grade II*) housing the original Georgian stables;
- a coach house (listed Grade II);
- a dovecote (listed Grade II*);
- a barn and various outbuildings set in formal gardens (listed Grade II*); and
- 75 acres of parkland, woodland and farmland.

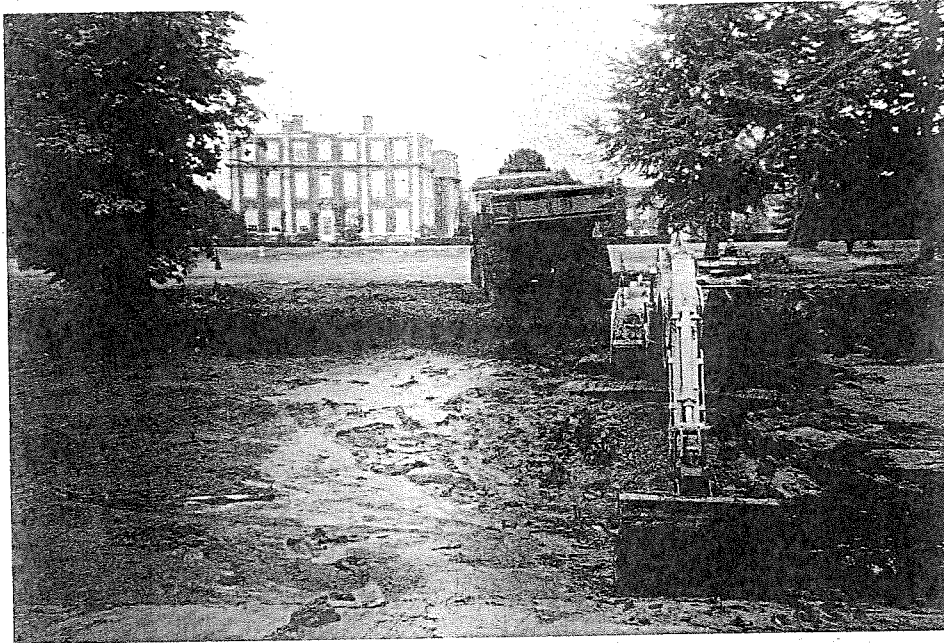


Figure 4. Draining the lake. (Online version in colour.)

Within this space, with all its legal, aesthetic and practical constraints and the need to preserve the original character of the 1719/23 Hall while meeting modern requirements, the refurbishment delivered:

- two lecture theatres, seating 103 and 81, respectively, one with fixed tier seating and the other with flexible seating;
- a glazed enclosure;
- four meeting rooms for 15–25 people, depending on layout;
- 48 bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms/shower rooms;
- all associated catering and communications facilities;
- sitting rooms;
- dining rooms;
- reception areas;
- bar area;
- an apartment for use by the Director of the Centre;
- an energy centre designed for biofuels; and
- parking for 50 vehicles (figure 5).

In a project of this scale and character, there will always be unexpected hazards. With the Chicheley refurbishment there were at least three. The first was the existence of a colony of bats in the coach house. This necessitated a licence from Natural England to enable the building works to proceed; it also necessitated the building of a substantial bat habitat within the roof of the coach house, which had to be accomplished within a very narrow

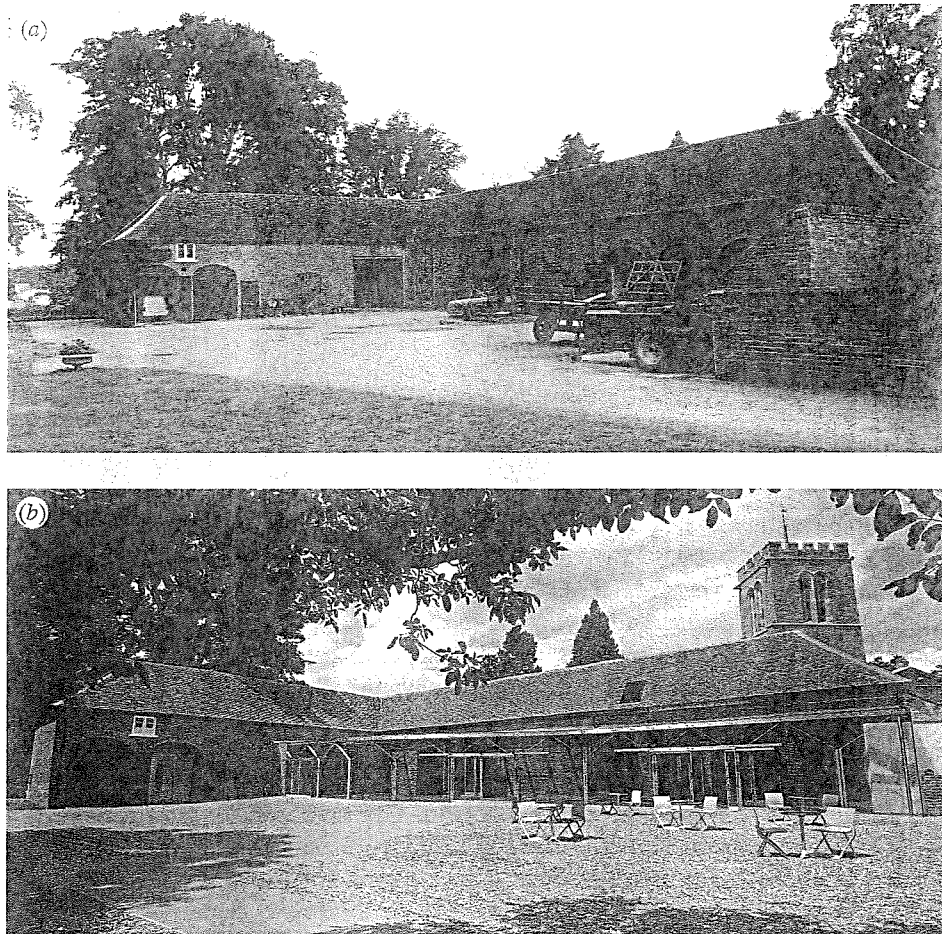


Figure 5. Outbuildings (a) before refurbishment and (b) after refurbishment. (Online version in colour.)

timeframe to fit in with the bats' hibernation. External lighting in the area also had to comply with the terms of the bat licence.

The second hazard was the discovery of human remains dating back to the middle ages in the ground outside the coach house adjacent to Chicheley Church—probably as a result of building on part of the original churchyard. The subsequent reburial in the current churchyard required a licence from the Ministry of Justice. Other archaeological discoveries included a culvert and an unexploded German grenade from World War II.

The third hazard concerned the marble columns and pillars that are such a striking feature of the double-height main entrance hall. The two freestanding columns were showing signs of progressive deterioration, and the panels of faux marble that had been used to clad the colonnade were coming loose from the backing. This turned out to have been caused by the bearings to the timber beams supporting the stair landing above, which had settled and were transferring load onto the columns, which had originally been intended to be purely decorative. Extensive discussions with the Oxford Museum of Natural History,

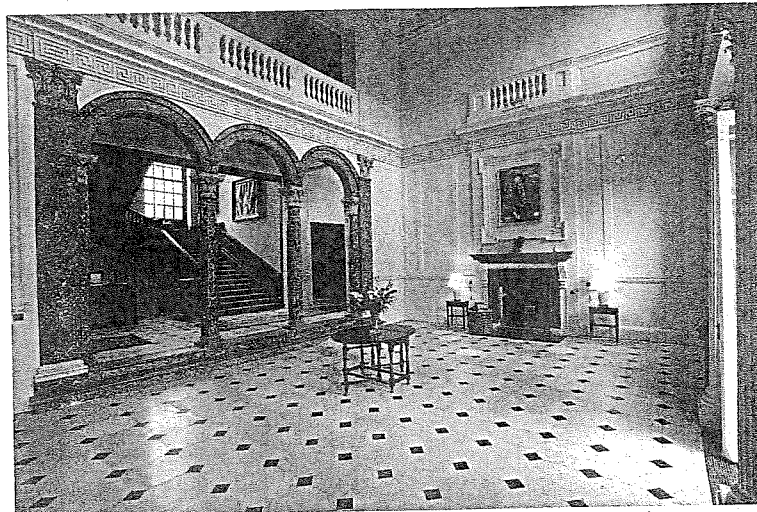


Figure 6. The great hall after the refurbishments, with a picture of Fred Kavli above the fireplace. (Online version in colour.)

Milton Keynes Council and a specialist marble company were needed to produce a solution that would work both structurally and aesthetically: installation of two new columns in the same material (Scagliola) as had been used for the arches between the existing columns and pillars.

A more foreseeable challenge was that of providing disabled access to and around the house. This was a key issue in discussions with English Heritage and Milton Keynes Council over the proposed change of use. The solution included the provision of suitable reclaimed brick paving and resin-bound gravel across cobbled and gravelled outdoor areas, the provision of ground-floor bedrooms with accessible shower rooms, and the installation of a lift to all floors in the main house.

A further pervasive challenge was to maintain authenticity in all aspects of decoration. For example, the decoration of the double-height great hall was subject to a condition attached to the Listed Building Consent. Historic research by Hare and Humphrey found that it had been painted only three times since 1719. The original paint colour was a pale greyish white, evoking stone. It had then been painted in faux wood and redecorated in grey-green paint in the 1950s when the Beattys acquired Chicheley Hall. The original colour has now been restored as closely as possible (figure 6).

The rooms in the main house have been furnished with a combination of antique furniture in the ownership of the Royal Society from Bushey House and 5–9 Carlton House Terrace, antique furniture acquired from Georgian Antiques in Edinburgh, furniture from British Antique Replicas, and modern folding tables and upholstered stacking chairs for the meeting rooms. Notable pieces included the walnut table, 24 matching chairs and 2 carver chairs for the main dining room, and chairs inlaid with the figure of St Andrew, the patron saint of the Royal Society. Silk curtains were commissioned for the ground-floor panelled reception rooms and library, based on early eighteenth-century fabric in the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection, with the flower motif replaced with the famous Hooke flea.

Throughout the refurbishment, original materials were reused wherever possible—particularly the historic floor finishes in the coach house, the black and terracotta clay pannels from the old boiler house in the north wing, and panelled doors in the north and south wings. Within the buildings, wireless technology was used to the greatest extent possible to minimize impact on historic fabric—including a wireless fire alarm installation, wireless light switches in the main house, and a wireless computer network.

The refurbished bedrooms were named after deceased Nobel Prize winners among the Fellows of the Royal Society, and the meeting rooms in the Main House and the conferencing facilities were named after donors.

The landscape at Chicheley Hall is an outstanding example of English Baroque garden design. It uses similar ideas to those at Hampton Court, Melbourne Hall and Wimpole Hall Gardens, where the designer, George London, had worked previously. The main gardens were preserved in their current good state; the kitchen gardens to the west of the main house were replanted with vegetables and herbs, and additional fruit trees were planted in the orchard.

The Kavli Royal Society International Centre held its first scientific conference on schedule in June 2010 and was formally opened by its lead donor, Fred Kavli, in September 2010. His portrait now hangs in the Great Hall, opposite portraits of two Fellows closely associated with the Chicheley initiative, Sir Kenneth and Noreen Murray.

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This paper is based on interviews with Major Greville Chester on 22 July and 14 September 2010 and with Lady Diane Nutting on 12 October 2010: our warmest thanks to them both for their help with information and with photographs. We have also drawn on other published sources.⁶

NOTES

- 1 'In tail' meant that the inheritor was not allowed to sell off any of the inheritance. This had the merit of preserving the estate in its integrity, but also the consequence that, for example, land could not be sold off to pay for the upkeep of the building. Chicheley was consistently bequeathed in tail until the twentieth century, and, because the associated land did not generate nearly sufficient income, the upkeep of the building was a constant struggle. Moreover, the 'in tail' usually included a restriction to male heirs, which was to be the source of several problems.
- 2 Mary's new house was the building now known as Hill Farm. Edmond Chester Waters confused this building project with the much larger project of building Chicheley Hall, which he therefore dated two decades earlier than the now confirmed date of 1719–23. This is what led Pevsner and others to give the construction dates of Chicheley Hall as 1698–1703 and the architect as Thomas Archer.
- 3 Both Blithfield and Chicheley have libraries in which all the books are concealed within the panelling; it is unclear which copied which. Edmond Chester Waters described the panelling as exquisite but added pointedly, 'Books are the natural ornament of a library.'
- 4 Tilsforth had been part of the Chester patrimony for exactly 200 years; its 1327 acres realized £50 000. The sale was conducted by the newly established auction house of Christies.

- 5 Farrar is said to have gone to South Africa in 1879 with £30 in his pocket. When he died he had £80 000 in England and £8 million in South Africa.
- 6 Robert Edmond Chester Waters, *Genealogical memoirs of the extinct family of Chester of Chicheley* (two volumes) (Robson & Sons, London, 1878). Joan D. Tanner, 'The building of Chicheley Hall', *Records of Bucks* 17, 41-48 (1961). Anon., 'Chicheley Hall, Buckinghamshire, the seat of Sir George Farrar', *Country Life* (29 April 1905), 594-602. Arthur Oswald, 'Chicheley Hall, Buckinghamshire, the residence of the Misses Farrar', *Country Life* (9 May 1936), 482-488; *ibid.* (16 May 1936), 508-514; *ibid.* (23 May 1936), 534-539. Marcus Binney, 'Chicheley Hall, Buckinghamshire', *Country Life* (13 February 1975), 378-381; *ibid.* (20 February 1975), 434-437; *ibid.* (27 February 1975), 498-501. John Cornforth, 'Houses newly open to the public', *Country Life* (15 April 1976), 962-965.