



Betchingley Conservation and Historical Society

A Betchingley Wedding 1906

Not a quiet country wedding at our local Church as may have been expected but an extravaganza like no other in the village. The reporter for the Surrey Mirror could hardly contain himself: a “Brilliant Society Wedding” took place in 1906 when Miss Hyacinthe Mary Bell of Pendell Court (now The Hawthorns School) married Lieutenant Viscount Kelburne, eldest son of the Earl and Countess of Glasgow. Miss Bell’s father, William, also just happened to be a founding partner in the Denver and Rio Grande Railway which was helping to open up the Mid-West of America – money was no object for a youngest daughter’s wedding.

The news report opened with

“One would have to go far back into the long history of Betchingley to find a parallel to the scene which the picturesque old village presented on Tuesday afternoon [when the wedding took place]. The village was en fete, flags being displayed from the great majority of the houses while the broad main street was spanned with numerous festoons of gay-coloured streamers. The weather, which in the earlier part of the day had given rise to no little anxiety, turned out gloriously fine, and for some time before the hour fixed for the ceremony the entrance to the church was besieged by a large crowd of villagers and others from various parts of the district.

“A special train from London arrived at Redhill Station about a quarter to two o’clock, bringing nearly 300 guests, and these were conveyed in some 50 or 60 vehicles to Betchingley through the three miles of lovely Surrey scenery, the variety of the equipages, the handsome dresses of the ladies, and the abundance of wedding favours worn, making in the brilliant sunshine a most animating and striking picture.

“At Betchingley from the street extended an awning beneath which the wedding guests proceeded along the red carpeted path to the Church where they were greeted by Mr HP Woosnam of Pendell Court Farm who had charge of all the general arrangements. The interior of the building had been tastefully and chastely decorated under the direction of Mr Arthur Underwood, florist of Redhill. At 2.30, Miss Bell, leaning on the arm of her father entered the Church”.

The dresses of the main participants are described in great detail, including the four (presumably quite young) page boys who all wore “white duck sailor suits”. The seven bridesmaids wore “cream net over pink silk trimmed with lace and silver with cream crinoline hats trimmed with pink roses”.

On leaving the Church, “the happy pair had a most enthusiastic reception, driving off to Pendell Court amid the loud cheers of a large crowd and merry pealing of the church bells. The numerous carriages were again requisitioned and the guests followed to the reception and garden party at the

fine old Elizabethan mansion which with its magnificent lawns and creeper-clad walls was looking at its best in the brilliant sunshine”.

Among the invited guests (who are all listed in the newspaper article along with the presents they gave) was one Frank Shackleton. He was the brother of Ernest (Antarctic explorer) and cousin of the bride. Local guests included the Bell’s neighbour, Jarvis Kenrick and his wife, and also Uvedale Lambert, our village historian.

Frank Shackleton also kindly lent his “delightful bijou residence” in Torquay for the happy couple’s honeymoon. As a matter of interest Frank was, within a year, implicated in the theft of the Irish Crown Jewels; he eventually ended up going to prison, with hard labour, for another, unrelated, incident.

Viscount Kelburn eventually inherited the family title and became the 8th Earl of Glasgow. He continued his naval career, serving during World War One, and during the inter-war years he became noted for his far-right political views – it’s believed that he provided funding to Oswald Moseley and the British Union of Fascists. He died in 1963, fourteen years before Hyacinth. They had five children.

A memoir by Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, great nephew to the couple, recalls Hyacinth (to him at the time, very aged) as “wavery, anxious, her skin, no doubt under the influence of her name, a pale blue”.

As a post-note: this article shows the difficulty that people sometimes have in tracing individuals: both Hyacinth and Kelburn have been recorded in various places with an “e” on the end of one or both names (which may or not be right!).

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