

GLEMSFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

A large audience enjoyed the first talk of 2018 given by National Trust volunteer Patrick O'Mahony and entitled ' Ickworth House: Aristocratic Grandeur and More'. We were taken on a fascinating journey through the history of the Hervey family who in their heyday owned 37,000 acres of land countrywide including the present Ickworth estate. .A very old aristocratic family, it was not until the early 18th century, following his support of the Hanoverian succession, that John Hervey was made the 1st Earl. As the father of some 19 children, omens for creating a dynasty were promising, although the gallery of heirs who went on to inherit the title was truly eclectic, a mix of Johns, Georges and Fredericks; some womanisers, others gamblers, many involved in government, some confirmed bachelors, one gay earl and one (Augustus) a very brave, successful Vice-Admiral.

In the late 18th century, the 4th Earl became Bishop of Derry, supplementing his income with money from the diocese to the tune of £10,000 a year. A great lover and collector of art, living mostly in Italy it was this earl-bishop who commissioned an Italian architect to design and build the house as we know it today resplendent with central rotunda and the two long wings designed to hold works of art. The house was finally completed in 1840 by which time the title of Marquis of Bristol had been conferred upon the family. However, the real turning point for the survival of Ickworth was when the 4th Marquis married Theodora, a multi-millionaire heiress, and it was she who really loved the house, lavishing huge amounts of money on it and arranging for it to be given to the National Trust in 1956. She seems to have had a sense of foreboding regarding the very likely possibility of future heirs losing the entire estate and fortune! As many can remember, history proved her right; thus it is her foresight we must thank for our present enjoyment of the heritage of Ickworth House.