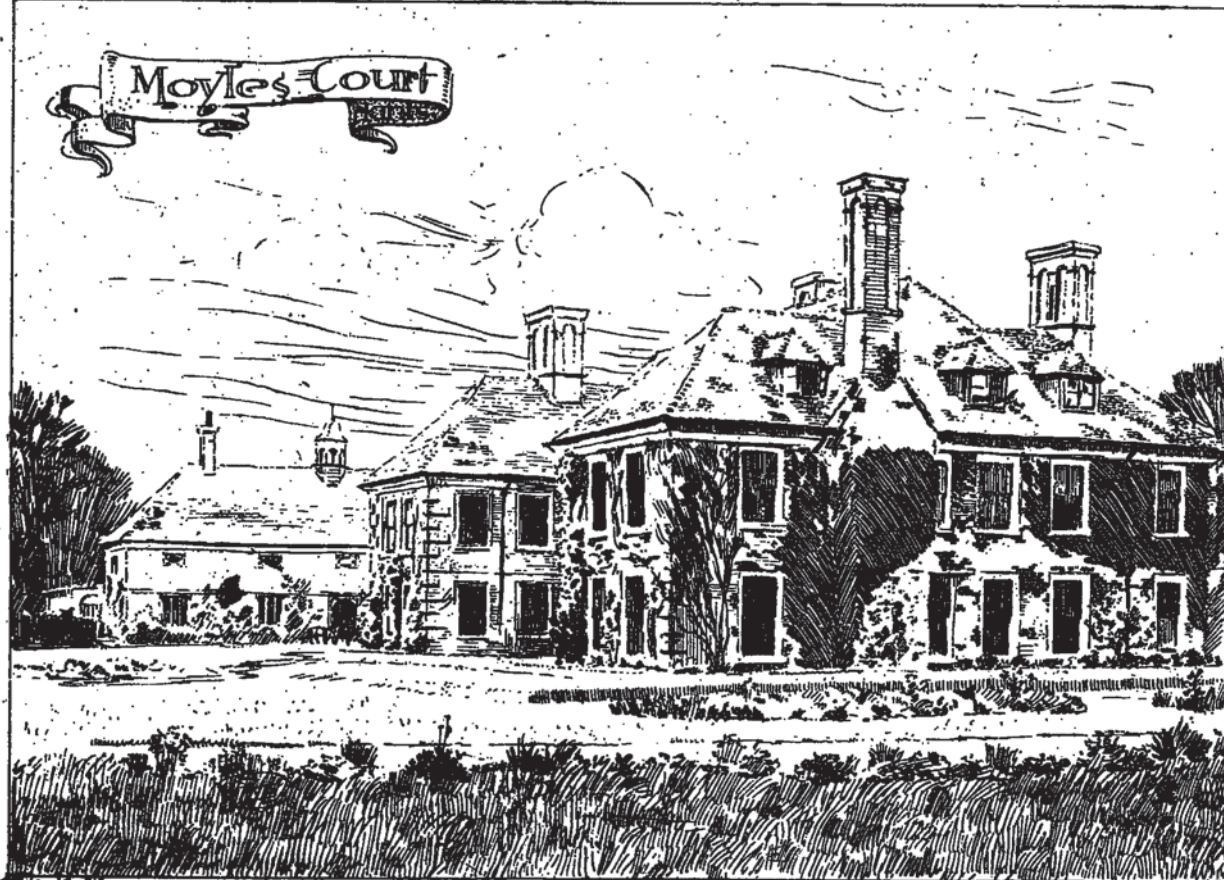


Hants Field Club... 1889

Moyles Court



Wilde del.

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MOYLES COURT AND DAME ALICIA LISLE.¹

BY F. FANE.

To anyone descending from the plateau of the New Forest to the valley of the Avon, by the cart track from Bratley Wood to the parish of Ellingham, on the banks of that river, Moyles Court² appears at the end of a long vista through the woods, a dark coloured brick mansion with high pitched roof.

The house, formerly very much larger than it now is, was probably surrounded with moats, traces of which still exist on its two sides, and a brawling Forest brook, which gave an ample supply of water for defensive purposes, runs near the house.

Lying in a very secluded position Moyles Court must have been a locality well situated for intrigues and adventures, such as are graphically described in the well-known novel "Smugglers and Foresters," by Rosa Kettle, 1875, the scene of which is laid in the New Forest.

A house, much older than any portion of the present buildings, existed upon the same spot. Fragments of stonework, and arched doorways of an early date, with rude carvings, may be seen in the cellar and other parts of the premises, of the time of Henry VII, if not earlier. William de Solariis, the founder of the Priory, appears to have been lord of the manor about a century after the Conqueror. The next possessor is Robert de Punchardon, whose family

¹ The substance of a paper read on the occasion of a visit by the Hants Field Club, Aug. 25, 1888.

² The word "Court" is applied to many of the Manor houses in this part of England, the Court Baron in many cases having been held there. The name "Moyle," still very common among the humbler denizens of the district, is derived from the family of Meoles or de Molis who held the Manor early in the 13th century.

from the time of Richard I, for several centuries, held the manor. In the 3rd Edward II, 1310, John de Meoles held Ellingham, and another of the same name in 2nd Edward III, 1328. The next owner recorded is Florence de Punchardon, 19th Edward III, 1345. Several of that name held the manor in quick succession till the middle of the 15th century, when we meet with the name of Moyles Court and "Ellingham Manor called Meoles" was held by Wm. Botreaux. There appears to have been an inter-marriage between the Punchardon and Botreaux families, and the manor passed from one to another of these families.

In the sixteenth century Moyles Court was possessed by a family named White.¹ A daughter (Alice) of that family having married William, a son of Sir W. Beconsaw, of Ibbesley, that parish and Ellingham would appear to have become one estate, and passed, by the marriage of Sir White Beconsaw's daughter and co-heiress, Alice, to John Lisle, who occupies a somewhat prominent position in the history of the Commonwealth. Colonel Lisle, as he is often called, although regarded as a regicide, does not appear to have been one of the signatories to the death warrant of Charles I, but was one of Cromwell's Privy Council, and as such is also styled "Lord Lisle" in Burnet's History. A tract printed in 1660, entitled "The mystery of the good old cause, briefly unfolded," contains "A catalogue of such members of the late Long Parliament, that hold places, both civil and military, contrary to the self-denying ordinance of April 3, 1645," and John Lisle is described as "Barrister of the Temple, Master of St. Crosses (St. Cross Hospital, near Winchester) in Dr. Lewis's place, being a place for a divine, worth £800 per annum; one of the Lords Commissioners of the Great Seal, worth £1,500 per annum; one of the King's judges; afterwards became a Cromwellian, and swore Oliver at his first

¹ For much of the above relating to the descent of the property we are indebted to Mr. T. W. Shore, F.G.S. The Moyles Court branch of this family ended with William White, whose daughter Alice took the estate to her husband, William Beconsaw. Of this marriage there were three children—Catherine, wife of William Jenkins, of Avon; Dorothy, wife to David Budden; and White Beconsaw (knighted 1627). At the death of Sir White Beconsaw the Moyles Court property was divided between his daughters Elizabeth, wife of Sir John Tipping, and Alicia, wife to John Lisle.

installing, Chief Magistrate. He was President of the High Court of Justice (so-called), which tried Sir Henry Slingsbey, Dr. Hewit, &c., for treason against the Protector, and passed sentence of death against them."

At the Restoration, the spirit of revenge, which caused the exhumation of Ireton and others who had been prominent in the affairs of the Commonwealth, caused the proclamation of Parliament, "That the Council of State, do forthwith take order, for stopping all the ports, to the end, that none of those, who are ordered to be apprehended, as having sat in judgment, upon the late King's majesty, may make his escape, beyond the seas."¹ Among these persons occur the names of John Bradshaw, John Lisle, and sixty-five others.

²Burnet tells us that "Lisle went at the time of the Restoration, beyond sea, and lived at Lausanne; where three desperate Irishmen, hoping by such a service, to make their fortunes, killed him, as he was going to Church, and the assassins being well mounted, and ill pursued, got into France: His lady was known to be much affected, with the King's death, and not easily reconciled, to her husband, for the share, he had, in it."

We do not know the exact date of this assassination,³ but Moyles Court again comes into notice when Alice Lisle, the widow of Colonel Lisle, was residing with her family on her estate there, at the time of the Duke of Monmouth's ill-starred attempt to ensure the Protestant succession by landing on the Dorset coast.

One of the sons of "Dame Alice Lisle," as she was by courtesy styled, was serving in the king's army at the battle of Sedgmoor, which destroyed at once all hopes of Monmouth's success, whose followers dispersed, and fled in all directions, while he himself, probably endeavouring to reach Southampton, and so to get beyond the seas, was taken not many days after the battle, in a miserable plight, in the parish

¹ Parl. Hist., 12th Charles II, 1660.

² Burnet's History of his Own Time.

³ August, 1664, Woodward and Wilks History of Hants, iii, 156. He was the younger son of Sir William Lisle, and sat for Winchester in Parliament 1640. Ibid.

of Cranborne, at no great distance from Moyles Court. The Battle of Sedgemoor took place on the 6th July, 1685, and on or about the 5th of that month, a messenger from Warminster, named Dunn, arrived at Moyles Court, to ask Dame Alice if she would receive and shelter one Hickes, whom she believed, as declared on her trial, only to have been amenable to the law for preaching as a Nonconformist.

Whatever may have been Alice Lisle's answer to this request, Hickes, of Keinsham, near Bath, and another fugitive from the army, named Nelthorpe, accompanied by the messenger Dunn, appear to have made their way across from Warminster to Martin, on the borders of Wiltshire, where they were entertained by a Mr. Fane.

It would appear that Dunn had arranged with Colonel Penruddock, on the part of the authorities, to waylay and arrest the party at some point on the road, but for some reason, possibly with the design to implicate Dame Lisle, he deferred any interference, until they were safely housed at Moyles Court, one Barter acting as guide.

They crossed the Avon, at Fordingbridge, and reached their destination about ten o'clock at night, on the 28th July, and, having turned their horses loose at the gate, they were taken into the house by the steward of Dame Alice. It appears, however, that they had but a very short interview with the owner of the mansion, in an upstairs room, where they supped. According to Burnet,¹ "she knew Hickes, and "treated him civilly, not asking from whence they came, but "Hickes told what brought them thither, for they had been "with the Duke of Monmouth, upon which, she went out of "the room immediately, and ordered her chief servant to send "an information concerning them to the next justice of the "peace, and, in the meanwhile, to suffer them to make their "escape." During the night, however, Moyles Court was surrounded by Colonel Penruddock and his soldiers. Hickes and Nelthorpe were found secreted, the one in the Malthouse, the other in one of the chambers near that in which they had supped, and, being taken, both were subsequently hung at Glastonbury. John Hickes is styled clerk, but he was probably a dissenting minister. Nelthorpe was a lawyer, who had been concerned in the Rye House Plot.

¹ Burnet's History of his Own Time.

For this matter, Alice Lisle was at once conveyed to Winchester, on a pillion behind a trooper, and when the writer came to Moyles Court (about 1872), the old people at Gorely, a short distance on the road towards Winchester, used to tell how that their ancestors had handed down that the horse having cast a shoe at that place, there, at the forge, Alice Lisle, being surrounded by her sorrowing retainers, had said, "Weep not, good folks, I shall soon return to you," at which the soldier grumbled out, "Yes, you will, but with your head off."

The infamous George Lord Jefferies had just arrived at Winchester, to open his commission called the "bloody assize," and, among other cases, presided at the trial of Lady Lisle. From the commencement it was evident that nothing would satisfy the judge but the conviction of the prisoner, whatever the evidence might be. Burnet says, "that he was resolved to make a sacrifice of her, and obtained of the King a promise, that he would not pardon her, which the King owned to the Earl of Feversham, when he, upon the offer of one thousand pounds if he could obtain her pardon, went and begged it." Instead of leaving the examination of the witnesses to the counsel for the King, Jefferies took an independent position, and examined the witnesses himself, and so worried and browbeat them, that they contradicted themselves in any way the Chief Justice wished. Some idea of his cruelty and impudent blasphemy may be gathered from his treatment of the witness Dunn, who was so bewildered by the torrent of abuse from the mouth of the Lord Chief Justice, that at last, in despair, he bursts out, "My Lord, I am so baulked, I do not know what I say myself; tell me what thou would have me to say, for I am cluttered¹ out of my senses."

Dame Alice Lisle called no witnesses, but made defence as follows :—

THE DEFENCE OF ALICE LISLE.

"My Lord, That which I have to say is this: I knew of nobody's, coming to my house, but Mr. Hickes, and for him,

¹ CLUTTER, a bustle, confusion. *Halliwel's Dictionary*.

I did hear, that he did abscond, by reason of warrants, that were out against him, for preaching, in private meetings, but I never heard, he was in the army, nor that Nelthorp was to come with him, and for that reason, it was, that I sent for him, to come by night, but for the other man, Nelthorp, I never knew, he was Nelthorp, I could die upon it, nor did not know what name he had till after he came into my house, but as for Mr. Hickes, I did not, in the least, suspect him, that he had been in the army, being a Presbyterian Minister, that used to preach, and not to fight.

My Lord, I abhorred, both the principles, and practices, of the late Rebellion. Besides my Lord, I should have been the most ungrateful person living, should I have been disloyal, or acted, anything, against the present King, considering, how much, I was obliged to him, for my estate.

My Lord, had I been tried in London, I could have had, my lady Abergavenny, and several other persons of quality, that could have testified, how much, I was against this rebellion, and with what detestation, I spoke against it, during the time of it, for I was all that time in London, and staid there till after the Duke of Monmouth, was beheaded, and if I had certainly known, the time of my trial, in the country, I could have had the testimony of those persons of honour, for me. But my Lord, I am told, and so I thought, it would have been that I should not have been tried, as a traitor, for harbouring him, till he was convict, for a traitor. My Lord, I would take my death of it, that I never knew of Nelthorp coming, nor anything of his being Nelthorp: I never asked his name, and if he had told it me, I had then remembered the proclamation. I do assure you, my Lord, for my own part, I did abhor those that were in that horrid plot and conspiracy, against the king's life. I know my duty to my king better, and have always exercised it. I defy anybody in the world that ever knew the contrary, to come and give testimony. As to what they say of my denying Nelthorp to be in the house, I was in great consternation and fear of the soldiers, who were very rude and violent, and could not be restrained by their officers from robbery and plundering

my house. And I beseech your lordship to make that construction of it, and I humbly beg of your lordship to make that construction of it; and I humbly beg of your lordship not to harbour an ill opinion of me, because of those false reports that go about of me, relating to my carriage towards the old king, that I was anyways consenting to the death of King Charles 1st, for my Lord, that is as false as God is true: my lord, I was not out of my chamber all the day in which that king was beheaded, and I believe I shed more tears for him than any woman then living did: And this, the late Countess of Monmouth, and my Lady Marlborough, and my Lord Chancellor Hyde, if they were alive, and twenty persons of the most eminent quality, could bear witness for me. And I do repeat, my lord, as I hope to obtain salvation, I never did know Nelthorp, nor never did see him before in my life, nor did I ever know of anyone's coming but Mr. Hickes, and him I did know to be a nonconformist minister: and there being, as is well known, warrants out, to apprehend all nonconformist ministers, I was willing to give him shelter, from these warrants. I was come down but that week into the country, when this man came to me from Mr. Hickes, to know if he might be received at my house, and I told him, if Mr. Hickes pleased, he might come, upon Tuesday in the evening, and should be welcome; but withal I told him, I must go away, the Monday following, from that place, but while I staid, I would entertain him. And I beseech your Lordship, to believe, I had no intention, to harbour him, but as a nonconformist, and that I knew was no treason: it cannot be imagined, that I would venture the hazard of my own life, and the ruin, both of myself and my children, to conceal one, that I never knew in my life, as I did not know Mr. Nelthorp, but had heard of him, in the proclamation. And for that white headed man that speaks of my denying them, as I said before, he was one of them that rifled and plundered my house, and tore open my trunk; and if I should not be convicted, he, and the rest of them, may be called to account for what they did, for they ought not to have meddled with my goods: besides, my Lord, I have a witness that can testify what Mr. Nelthorp said, when he was examined before. I staid in London, till all the rebellion was passed, and over; and I never uttered a good word, for

the rebels, nor ever harboured, so much as a good wish, for them, in my mind : I know the King is my sovereign, and I know my duty to him, and if I would have ventured my life, for anything, it should have been to serve him, I know it is his due, and I owed, all that I had, in the world to him : but though, I could not fight for him myself, my son did : he was actually in arms on the King's side, in this business ; I instructed him always in loyalty, and sent him thither ; it was I that bred him up to fight for the King."

The Lord Chief Justice charged to the utmost against her, and three times refused to take the verdict of the jury, in her favour, till they obeyed his mandate of guilty, whereupon he immediately passed sentence, condemning her to be burned the same day. During the passing of this sentence, says Burnet, "the only person not concerned was the lady herself, who was then passed seventy, and was so little moved "at it that she fell asleep." Petitions were at once forwarded to the king, especially by her friends the ladies St. John and Abergavenny. Strong intercession was also made by many of the nobles and others about the Court, but in vain, and the only indulgence shown by James II, was, that in accordance with her own petition, instead of being burnt she should be beheaded, which sentence was carried into effect in the Market Place at Winchester, on Wednesday, the 2nd Sept., 1685.¹

The whole of Dame Alice Lisle's property was at once confiscated as that of an attainted felon, but it is clear that the whole process against her was illegal. The men she took in for the night had never been tried for any offence, and were therefore, according to law, innocent ; that her conduct was not treasonable has been argued by Macaulay at length.²

The property attached to Moyles Court, consisting of the Parishes of Ellingham and Ibbesley, and extending nearly from Ringwood to Fordingbridge, and from the New Forest to the river Avon, continued in the family of the Lisles until the

¹ After the execution the body was brought back to Moyles Court, and interred in the churchyard at Ellingham.

² At the petition of her daughter Tryphena, wife to Richard Lloyd, and Bridget Usher, the sentence was reversed, and the property restored by Act of Parliament, dated 1 William and Mary, 1689.

beginning of this century, when, after the death of Mr. Charles Lisle, in 1810 it was sold to the then owner of the property on the other side of the river, and, with it, passed into the hands of the Earl of Normanton, its present possessor.

When the present occupier, and writer of these notes, came to Moyles Court, seventeen or eighteen years ago, the house had been uninhabited for sixty or seventy years, and the architects called in had given their opinion that nothing could be done with the house but to pull it down. A great part had been already destroyed; the cellars were full of water, the windows boarded up and broken, the whole place a prey to the spoiler. When bricks were wanted a room was pulled down; when a fire was wanted a floor was pulled up or the old panelling torn away. The house was given up to the bats and owls. The latter resented interference vehemently, and long after the house was again inhabited screamed and hooted down the chimneys, till they made night a terror.

With patience and care the house is now restored, as nearly as possible, as may be in the style in which it originally stood. Some carving and panelling said to have been in the Chapel have been restored to the walls. The old ponds and moats have been cleared of mud, and the gardens restored to their legitimate use. The inquisitive seeker may still be gratified by a sight of the hole in which, according to tradition, were found the unfortunate fugitives from the battle of Sedgmoor, and the history and sad fate of Alice Lisle will, it is hoped, be preserved in connection with the old house for many generations.

The following is the Act of Parliament referred to above, repealing the attainder and enjoining the restoration of the property to the family of Lisle:—

On Wednesday, 2 of Sept.

1ST OF WILLIAM AND MARY, ANNO 1689.

Whereas Alicia Lisle, Widow, in the month of August, in the first year of the reign of the late King James the Second, at a Sessions of Oyer and Terminer, and Gaol Delivery, holden for the County of Southampton, in the City of Winchester, in the said County, by an irregular and undue prosecution, was indicted for entertaining, concealing, and comforting John Hicks, clerk, a false Traitor, knowing him to be such; though the said John Hicks was not at the trial of the said Alicia Lisle, attainted or con-

victed of any such crime: and by a verdict injuriously extorted and procured by the menaces and violences and other illegal practices of George Lord Jefferies, Baron of Wem, then Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, and Chief Com^r and Oyer and Terminer, and Gaol Delivery, within the said County, was convicted, attainted, and executed for High Treason: May it therefore please your most excellent Majesties, at the humble petition of Tryphena Lloyd, and Bridget Usher, daughters of the said Alicia Lisle, that it be declared and enacted, by the authority of this present Parliament, and be it enacted, by the King and Queen's most excellent Majesties, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament, assembled, and by the authority of the same, that the said conviction, and judgment, and attainder, of the said Alicia Lisle, be, and are hereby repealed, reversed, made, and declared, null and void, to all intents, constructions, and purposes, whatever, as if no such conviction, judgment, or attainder, had ever been had or made, and that no corruption of blood, or other penalty, or forfeiture, of her own dignities, lands, goods or chattels, be, by the said conviction, or attainder, incurred: any law, usage, or custom, to the contrary, notwithstanding.
