

# Thursday 2 July

## Tapeley Park, Instow, North Devon

Tapeley Park is a neoclassical mansion set in a commanding position above the Torridge estuary looking towards Bideford and Westward Ho!

Hector Christie warmly welcomed us to his home with an introduction to family history with letters from the Light Brigade in the Crimean War (1853–56). Archibald Cleveland (1833–54) of the 17th Lancers, aged 21, survived the charge only to die a month later at the Battle of Inkerman. Hector was also keen to reassure us that the painting with a young black boy in a silver slave collar was a purchase and the family had no connections with the slave trade.

The cellars are all that remain from Tapelia, the house of the Tappleghs mentioned in the Domesday Book. Through subsequent changes of ownership, by 1702 Tapeley was a seven-bayed stucco farmhouse, which caught the eye of William Cleveland. In 1855 his descendent Agnes Cleveland, Archibald's sister, married William Christie and they set about giving Tapeley a Victorian facelift. His heir, Augustus Langham Christie, married Lady Rosamond Wallop and, together with architect John Belcher, subsequently set about 'neo-classicising' the house inside and out, laying out Italian gardens and choosing many of the furnishings in the house between 1884 and 1916.

Lady Rosamond purchased an eclectic mix of furniture and artworks, French, Italian and English, in many periods and styles, from sales in London, reputedly with housekeeping money. An archive of purchases awaits study. The large neo-classical chimneypiece with black marble embellishment reputedly came from 'Hamilton', probably Hamilton Palace, Scotland. The inlaid black marble clock in the centre, a separate purchase, was identified as belonging to the fireplace. A portrait of Napoleon and Lord Nelson grace the same room.

Two charming black marble fronted chests of drawers inlaid with plants are in the hall with an inlaid Dutch-style coffer, reputedly by Morris & Co. A variety of gilded satinwood furniture in the French style feature in the drawing room, as do yellow silk damask curtains in pomegranate design by Morris.

The Sea Room is where Lady Rosamund's friendship with William Morris is most in evidence. He visited the family frequently. Here are two matching cabinets on stands with drop down desk fronts, c. 1905, made by George W. Jack for Morris & Co. The mahogany carcass is decorated with sycamore and other wood inlays, the design is inspired by a late mediaeval tradition of curving tendrils supporting leaves and flowers. Thistles and leaves feature

round the top of each stand. The cabinet fronts feature intertwining tendrils with oak and rowan leaves one with ivy and one without. The tall display cabinet or cupboard, in the same technique, has a decorated bow front with straight glazed cupboards at each side is also very fine. See illustration in the V&A Museum on-line. These Arts & Crafts works show very sophisticated restraint and the highest quality craftsmanship. It is a great privilege to visit a historical house especially since it remains the private home of Hector Christie.

With appreciation and thanks.

*Crissie White*