

THE BRAMHAM PARK FIRE: 1828

DESTRUCTIVE CONFLAGRATION

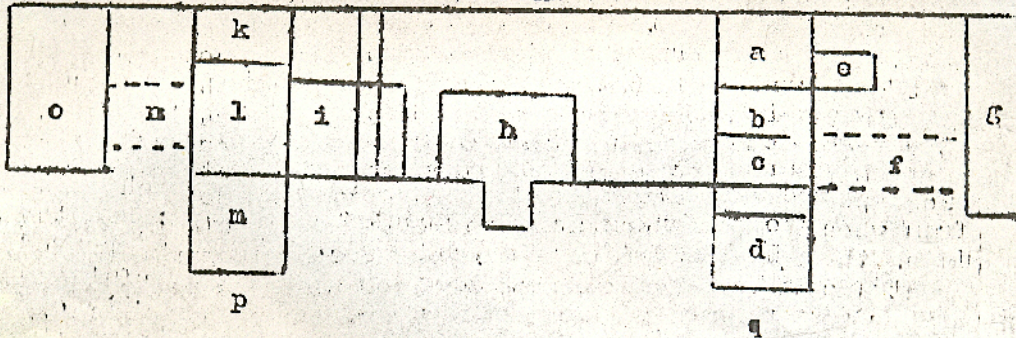
We are informed, that last night, a dreadful fire broke out at Bramham Park, the seat of Geo. Lane Fox, Esq. which has laid that handsome mansion in ruins. We are unable to ascertain particulars, but the report at Tadcaster, this morning was, that all had become a prey to the devouring element, with the exception of the kitchen and stables. How the fire originated we have not heard.

York Courant 29 July 1828

DESTRUCTIVE FIRE AT BRAMHAM PARK

The ancient and beautiful mansion, called Bramham Park House, the seat of George Lane Fox, Esq. 16 miles from York, and 10 from Leeds, was destroyed by fire on Tuesday last. We present our readers with an outline of the ground plan of the house, by which, together with the references, a tolerably correct idea may be formed of the extent of the damage done, and the situation of the inmates at the moment the flames were discovered.

GROUND PLAN



Explanation of the References

(a) Steward's Room (b) Butler's Inner Pantry - (c) Butler's Outer Pantry (d) Footman's Lodging Room, with the passage adjoining. The Bright Room, Ladies' Lodging Rooms, and the room in which the housemaid slept are over a, b, c, and d (e) Evidence Room (f) Open Colonnade with a roof extending from b, c, to g (g) Laundry, and other detached premises (h) Grand Entrance Hall (i) Dog Room. The parallel lines passing through this room, show the extent to which the roof has fallen in, calculating from the outside line of the North West wing (k) Pitt Drawing Room (l) Dining Room (m) Library, appurtenances (p) South East wing (q) North West wing. The parts surrounding the Entrance Hall are not here divided into their respective apartments. They comprise several rooms, out of which the furniture was taken before the fire reached them

The main front of the house faces the North East, with a wing at either end, looking towards the North West and South East. Between twelve and one o'clock on Tuesday morning, a fire was discovered in the North West wing (see ground plan q) by the footman who slept in a room on the ground floor (d). He was first alarmed by hearing several cracks, which to him appeared to proceed from his bed-room door being ajar. He got up to shut it, and on opening it a little, to push it close to, a volume of smoke rushed into the room, which gave him the first intelligible intimation that the house was on fire. He then stepped into the passage adjoining (d), where he was nearly suffocated, and he fell down in a state of insensibility, where he remained a short time. On recovering, he found the butler's inner and outer pantries (b, c) and the steward's room (a) in flames, when he alarmed the housekeeper and the servants. His next object was to secure the young ladies, who were sleeping over the butler's pantries. He dragged Miss Fox, a young lady 12 years of age, out of bed, and wrapping her up in a blanket, ran with her into the garden-house adjoining, and then released Miss Frederica Fox, six years old, and convoyed her to the same place. He also alarmed Miss Atkinson, the governess, who immediately made her escape down

if to en  
Bridges

later - see ground  
plan - the  
mess, who  
d. name

the staircase, like the Miss Fox's, without a vestige of wearing apparel except that of her night gown. After witnessing the progress of the flames, which presently enveloped the rooms which the ladies and their governess had so recently quitted, she contrived to borrow a pair of shoes, and went to the garden-house, where all three remained till six o'clock in the morning, when they were removed in a carriage to Wm Fox's, Esq. of Bramham Biggin. There were seven women servants in the opposite end of the house (o) and another (the house maid) was sleeping in the north west wing, above the footman's room, who had been entirely forgotten by everyone. Fortunately she was awoken by the smoke coming into her room, just in time to rush through the flames before they had destroyed the staircase down which she had to pass. She had a very narrow escape. The flames proceeded with great avidity along the main body of the building towards the south-east wing (p) taking in their course the rooms in the whole breadth of the house from the ground floor upwards. When the fire reached the great entrance hall, the flames were most terrific, and they continued their progress as far as the dog room (l) when they were arrested. The dining room (l) library (n) and the Pitt drawing room (k) (the 3 rooms on the ground floor forming the south-eastern extremity of the main front) were preserved from the devouring element, as was a great part of the furniture in the other rooms, except those in the north-west wing in which the fire commenced but the furniture suffered considerably from the necessary haste in which it was removed. Two fire engines which were upon the premises were put into operation with as much speed as possible and messengers were despatched to Tadcaster, from whence two others arrived about two o'clock; and the Norwich Union, the Leeds and Yorkshire, and the Sun Engines arrived from Leeds about four. The engines from Leeds being more powerful and perhaps in better working order than the others, were played with considerable effect and the flames were got under about six o'clock; but they continued to burn until eleven o'clock in the forenoon and the fire was not extinguished till towards evening. The principal parts of the pictures were got out of the rooms without further injury than what was done by the smoke. Amongst these are, a fine valuable painting of Christ healing the sick, a portrait of the late Lord Rivers (Mr Fox's uncle whose funeral he was attending on the very day the fire took place), Miss Fox the late lady of the Hon. Sir Edward Marmaduke Vavasour, Bart. and some other family pictures. The preservation of Miss Fox's portrait is to be attributed to Sir Edward Vavasour who, when the flames were at their height in the room where the picture was hung and when no one else dared to venture, rushed in and brought out the picture of his late amiable wife, with comparatively little injury. A large picture which stood in the entrance hall opposite the front door representing a favourite horse of Mr Fox's called Old Jack, was destroyed. Mr Fox rode Old Jack from Doncaster races to Bramham Park, a distance of 28 miles in an hour and twenty minutes; he was laid up for three days afterwards and would never allow Mr Fox to mount him again. This was the most valuable picture that was burnt. On each side of the doorway beneath this painting, were two fine statues, one of William Pitt, first Earl of Chatham and another of the Right Hon. William Pitt, both destroyed. A marble bust of Bonaparte, was much scorched and partially broken. Above the steward's room which is at the west corner of the house, was the best lodging room, called the Bright Room, containing a superb bed and other furniture; which together with all the rooms on the same floor, and the attics above, with their contents, were completely consumed - In the butler's inner pantry were deposited five large oaken chests of plate, heavily bound with strong broad iron bars. The boxes were destroyed and part of the massive services of plate were melted and bent in a variety of forms. In these boxes were eight gold cups, the most of which had suffered slightly from the heat; the edges of two of them were partially melted, and the cover of another has not been found. The plate is said to be worth from £4000 to £5000; but as nearly the whole of it has been recovered, the loss upon the plate will not be considerable. Although

obtained pictures  
their dogs & cups etc.

also to Leeds, Aberford  
other villages (Yorkshire)  
were belonged to the  
companies - if you  
could a member, they  
the Sun engine came  
in 40 mins.

near prime minister

probably racing cups

the fire had reached the ovidence room(e) yet the title deeds were preserved from destruction. A roof runs above the open collonade(f) to the laundry(g) and the fire had passed along the roof but was fortunately prevented from communicating with the laundry. Preparations were also making to intercept the communication(n) between the wing(p) on the opposite end of the building and the kitchen(o) for had it reached that part of the building it would have carried the devastation along the whole line of stabling adjoining the kitchen. Miss Atkinson's gold watch was found while digging out rubbish on Tuesday, much injured. Mr Fox was expected to return home on Wednesday night. A labouring man Edm Bramham, of the name of Dobbs, fell from one of the windows by which he received a serious injury to the spinal bone and is not yet pronounced out of danger. The damage done is estimated at from 40 to £50000. Part of the property is insured with the Sun fire office but not to any large amount. This noble residence was built during the reign of Queen Anne by Lord Bingley who employed for that purpose an Italian artist. It was on a scale of much grandeur, and consisted of a large centre, in which were the grand apartments and wings for domestic offices, connected by corridors of the Doric order. It was once visited by Queen Anne and also by his present Majesty. *Page 4*

Of the cause of the fire it is impossible to speak with any accuracy, though the matter has become the subject of magisterial investigation. It appears that Brewster was in the Butler's pantry about half past eight or nine o'clock on Monday night along with another of the man servants and that they had been amusing themselves by playing on the flute. On quitting the room it is probable that a candle was left burning and that a spark, or the embers of the unsnuffed wick had communicated to the tow, oil or spirits of wine, which were all deposited there, and that in this way the fire originated, which has destroyed at least three-fourths of one of the noblest mansions in the north of England and rendered the remainder wholly uninhabitable.

York Courant 5 Aug. 1828

FIRE AT BRAMHAM PARK

Some particulars have been communicated to us, connected with this unfortunate affair, in addition to those given in our last, which we deem worthy of public notice. A letter having been dispatched to Mr Fox, in London, by his brother-in-law, Sir Edward Vavasour, which met him on Wednesday week, on his return from the funeral of Lord Rivers his uncle, he set off immediately, along with Ruthven, the London police-officer, and on his journey received full particulars at Doncaster. He was also accompanied by his son from Eton and they arrived at the melancholy scene on the Thursday evening. Ruthven, desired the man last in the butlers pantry, to be again examined: and they were so, before the Rev James Landon, of Aberford and W. Prost Esq. of Scarthingwell, on Saturday last: but nothing transpired on that occasion, to warrant a comittal. Some suspicion is however attached to Brewster, the under butler, owing to his contradictory statements, but Mr Kell, the steward, has by his conduct, commanded praise. On Sunday at Bramham Church before a large congregation, Mr Fox and family returned thanks to the Almighty, for the signal deliverance of the children; and afterwards a sermon was preached by the Rev Thos. Radcliffe. *A servant?*

The fire seems to have been attended with a very remarkable coincidence of unfortunate circumstances, on the same day - they were as follows:- 2 ladies of distinction, stopped their carriage near the inn at Bramham, to inquire after the safety of Mr Fox's family. The postilion, of course dismounted, and foolishly left the horses without any one to take care of them. They consequently set off, full gallop, with the carriage and ladies, and proceeded 2 miles before they were stopped. Little damage had been effected, but the ladies were almost frightened to death. The same day Henry Hall of the firm of Hall and Sons of York, being in the neighbourhood, drove down to the house, to see the progress of the flames. On his return, however, through the Park, his horse unexpectedly fell, as if dead on the spot. He was thrown from the gig, a

matter - steward absent - Butler? attended. He lived Bramham.

with commended Mr. Kell's Intelligence & the plate.

report said  
man was  
killed.

considerable distance, but fortunately received no serious injury except being stunned by the fall, and his rig much broken. Also on the Thursday morning, as the York fire engine left the Park it being drawn by 4 horses the traces gave way and the driver also broke his reins. Having thus lost control over the horses, they ran down the hill with the greatest velocity; and on reaching the bottom upset against a house. No life was lost, as has been stated, but all the firemen, nearly 30 in number, were thrown to the ground. 5 of them escaped unhurt; but all the remainder were more or less injured but no limbs were broken

9 August 1828 York Herald and General Advertiser

Leeds Intelligencer claimed it happened in

hotter & demanded enquiry into the speed & claimed 2 engines.

ADDITIONAL COMMENT

or helped out

- A few years earlier, L-f had rescued the Walsour children, then living at the Biggin, during a fire.

Brewster had been employed by Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle when it was burnt down.

They were only insured for £6000, of which £1000 was on the stables.

Bought Bowcliffe to live in - also lived for a while in Chestnut Grove, B.Spa, now demolished.

At one time, joined to Harewood Estate - Ecuyp Reservoir took 70 acres. Major Lipscombe rode to Adel & sold the golf courses to Leeds when he was agent.

THE RESTORATION OF BRAMHAM PARK MANSION.

Extracted from the diaries of the late  
Right Honourable the Lord Bingley

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1907.

January:

- 4th. Went over vaults of old house with Abbott - Blow's Surveyor.
- 5th. Blow & DeBillery arrived at night to talk over plans. They will stay with Duffield.
- 6th. Blow & De Billery spend afternoon with Agnes and me in the old house, and report over plans completed.
- 7th. Another interview with Blow & De Billery - they leave this afternoon.
- 23rd. Up to the old house and take measurements in the cold.
- 24th. Blow arrived with 2 Surveyors who will put up with Duffield.
- 25th. )  
Friday. ) Go up with Blow, meet surveyors. Discuss whole problem of house; this really seems like business. Discuss dressing room and bedroom.
- 26th. Agnes and I breakfast early with Blow and go over to meet surveyors again, and also Ted Harrison (Agent). They tell us all building materials can be provided from the old college, and depart after settling plans.
- February
1. Busy with Blow and architects all day. Lord Halifax comes over and completely changes our minds by valuable criticism of the plans of the new house.
4. )  
Spend another day with architects new plan. Gives me fine dressing room but very poor sitting room to Agnes - propose to alter this. Great difficulties arise.
8. Spent busy day with architects and plans.
9. Discussing plans of house.
21. Go up to Park with Agnes; building operations have started in earnest - the windows of the Hall and door are opened out - scaffolding is ready. At last we are starting.
22. Spend most of day attending to plans which have been rather carelessly drawn, and which do not show what we want. Blow is rather a casual person to deal with.

(No entries, March 30th to Friday the 7th of June when he left London for Paris.)

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- Sat. Spend long afternoon with Blow. New house progressing slowly. Scaffolding  
June 29th. down at last in the Hall. Decide to make a staircase down into basement  
from.....ouse.

- July. 1. Interview telephone man arranging for telephone to come to Park.  
 20. Spent busy morning with Abbott - finding progress rather slow at new house.  
 26. Busy delightful morning with Agnes, going over our new house & garden.
- Aug. 10. Go up to garden with Agnes; meet De-Billery, and plan out possible new garden in Sundial Garden.  
 18. Tip coachman Dalby £5, Williams £5 and stablemen 10/- on final departure from Hope Hall. Hoping to return to Park for good.  
 28. Whilst staying at Pitlochray, long discussion with Lady Bathurst, who is most kind in helping us with our proposed new rose garden.
- Sept. 7 7. Go home in morning, meeting Agnes in York and motoring home to Bramham Park which has not been lived in by my family since 1828. Agnes has furnished two basement rooms very cleverly; rest not being ready. Great and wonderful day.  
 8. Wake up as if in a dream to find ourselves still in the old house. Church early with Agnes. Stroll round the garden after breakfast. In afternoon give all the family tea. Great family rejoicing.
- Oct. 10. 10. Expecting Blow & De Billery; the latter arrived and we spent a rather wasted day; but at last evolved a plan for the garden by the servants' wing. Blow never turned up.  
 12. Spent useful afternoon with Blow who stays the night.  
 13. Blow comes down to early Church; gets a very good mark from Agnes in consequence.  
 22. Babies arrive, and for the first time since 1828 the top rooms in the house are inhabited- great day indeed.

Diary for 1907 ceases here.

1908 only a few entries - not connected with restoration.