

## Wealden House East Grinstead Sussex By Roy Lewis

Wealden House, a splendid example of a Victorian property, built around 1870, was originally named Cuttens. It was a home built for the aristocracy providing terrace cottages to house servants, ground staff and Cuttens stables. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was owned by the Cayzer family, founders of the Cayzer, Irvine and Company



Limited, the vast steam shipping line in the early 1900s. The plot on which these buildings were erected was surrounded by woodland and once completed with formal garden terraces; enjoyed a panoramic view of the Medway valley. To ease water supply in and around Sussex the valley was flooded in the early 1950's to form the Weir Wood reservoir we see today.



We know the house was owned and occupied by Lady Mable Cayzer from the early 1930's until the outbreak of WW2 in 1939. This is verified by the account of Kathleen Towns, now aged 83, who worked at Cuttens, from 1936 to 1939 when it was occupied by Lady Mabel Cayzer and her two daughters.

Aged only 14, and one of 14 staff, Kathleen worked under the family's nanny, took care of the silver in the dining room and helped out during the many dinner parties that Lady Cayzer held reminiscent of the TV show 'Upstairs and Downstairs', the other staff included: parlour maid, cook, kitchen maid, tweeny who worked both in the kitchen and the house,

house maid, under house maid, chauffeur, gardener, second gardener, under gardener and boot boy. All the staff except for the last two lived in.



She returned to have a look around the house which is currently being totally renovated to restore it to the magnificent state it was in when she worked there. She said "Lady Cayzer, who the staff had to address as 'My Lady', was a lovely caring employer and the staff were like a second family to me. There was real family feeling here," she remembers while sitting in what the family called their drawing room (currently housing the Wealden House art exhibition). "I must say it feels funny being allowed to sit down in the drawing room!"

Without more research it is assumed that Lady Mabel Cayzer was a daughter-in-law of Sir Charles Cayzer, the owner and founder of Cayzer, Irvine & Company, She and her daughters left Cuttens in 1939 at the outbreak of war.

Around 1942 it was initially occupied by troops of the Canadian Army and thereafter served as an overflow hospital for children evacuated from London suffering from scarlet fever or other contagious diseases. After the war ended it was a nursery school until 1952 when the house and grounds were sold to the Central Electricity Authority as the location for the Thames South Grid Control centre.

This chosen location had many advantages as it needed to relocate the Control Centre to a rural site a safe distance from London because of the perceived threat of nuclear war. The site was approximately 1.5 miles south from East Grinstead with a rail link to London. It also afforded easy access to the main London to Eastbourne road (A22), but this did not compromise the 'secrecy' of the site with the extensive gardens surrounded by woodland providing anonymity to passing traffic.

It was at this point where it is believed the stables and tied cottages were demolished to make space for the new Control Centre which was built to standards designed to withstand an atomic blast on London. Fortunately this was never put to the test. The thick reinforced wall and roof, some 3 to 4 feet thick however proved to be a major obstacle when a second control room (Area) was added in the late 60's early 70's

The house itself remained unaltered and used by day planning and administration staff and connected to the new building by a simply bridge. It remained in use until the late 1980's when due to reorganisation and privatisation the Centre was vacated by the CEGB and handed over to Southern Electric.

Around 1990 the House, now renamed Wealden House, was separated from the Control complex by blocking off access via the bridge and sold to a private developer. It was refurbished to its former glory to provide accommodation for professional and commercial tenants with private housing (two blocks of flats) built on the one time kitchen garden. The



Control Room complex now under the ownership of EDF is being vacated and its future is undisclosed.

Researched and written by Roy Lewis: - System Operation HQ and National Control

Reference East Grinstead Courier 2004

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