

Bushy House and the National Physical Laboratory, Teddington

Bushy House

The early history of Bushy House is obscure as there were several lodges in Bushy Park with no particular names. Bushy Park, at the time of Charles I, was divided into three parts – Bushy Park consisted of 350 acres, Middle Park with 370 acres and the Harewarren



with 380 acres. Some sources state that Bushy House was built on the site of Upper Lodge, but maps show both houses – Old Lodge and New Lodge in c1680, Upper Lodge and Lower Lodge in c1750. It is possible that the confusion arose because the same person had owned both properties at some time. Upper Lodge was the residence of the Keeper of Bushy Park and Bushy Lodge used for the Keeper of Middle Park and Harewarren. A lodge in Middle Park was first built in 1611 and was possibly rebuilt nine years later. A new Keeper's Lodge was built within the next twenty years.

Edward Proger built Bushy Lodge - near or on the site of the previous lodge - in 1663 by order of Charles II. Proger was a Groom of the King's Bedchamber, an M.P. and Lord of the Manor of West Stow in Suffolk and was made Keeper of the Middle Park and Harewarren in 1665. After the death of Charles II in 1685, Proger retired to Busky Lodge. It had cost £4000 to build and Proger was never reimbursed except for two payments of £4000 which he received in the two years before his death in 1713 aged 96 at Bushy House 'through the pain of cutting new teeth'. He was buried in Hampton Church and had been Keeper for 48 years.

Further rebuilding followed in the reign of George II by Charles Montague, Earl of Halifax who had been Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1694-97. He was made Keeper of Bushy Park as well as the reversion of the keepership of Middle Park and Harewarren in 1709 when Proger was still at Bushy Lodge. Halifax applied to rebuild Upper Lodge which was in a bad state of repair as it had been uninhabited for a number of years. On Proger's death, Halifax was given the rights to Bushy Lodge.

The next three Keepers of Bushy Park were all related in some way to Charles Montagu. Halifax died in May 1715 and, as he was childless, the title became extinct. In June 1715, his nephew, George Montagu, was became Earl of Halifax of the second creation and also

inherited his uncle's Keepership. George took a considerable interest in local affairs: besides acting as a Trustee of Hampton Grammar School, he gave money towards the enlarging of the parish church of St. Mary's. He also preferred to live at Bushy Lodge and it was during his time there that the name was changed to Bushy House.

George Montagu died in 1739 and was succeeded as the 2nd Earl and Ranger of Bushy Park by his son, George Montague Dunk [1716-1771]. At various periods during his life, Dunk was First Lord of the Admiralty and Head of the Board of Trade. On his death in 1771 the post of Ranger (as the Keeper was then called) reverted to the monarch. George III wished to appoint his Prime Minister, Lord North, but was unable to do so owing to the law which prohibited an M.P. and serving minister from holding an office of profit under the Crown. So North was granted the Rangership in his wife's name. Frederick North [1732-1792] became the 2nd Earl of Guilford after his father's death in 1790 and his maternal grandfather had been George Montagu and his cousin was George Montagu Dunk. When he died in 1792, his widow continued to live at Bushy House until her death in 1797.

The next Ranger was the Duke of Clarence – later William IV. His mistress – the actress Mrs Dorothy Jordan – lived at Bushy House with him from 1797 to 1811 and seven of their ten children were born there. William was asleep at the house in 1830 when he received the news that his brother George IV had died and he had now become king. He made his Queen, Adelaide, whom he married in 1818, Ranger when he became king and he also by ordering 'free admission of the public to Bushy Palace and to the Park'. Adelaide was granted the house after he died in 1837 and used it as one of her official residences. She was involved in local causes including schools and churches and eight hundred families in the area received gifts of bread and beef at Christmas until her death in 1849. Bushy House remained empty except for a skeleton staff until 1865 when it was lent by Queen Victoria to Louis, Duc de Nemours – 2nd son of Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orleans, the exiled King of France – who lived there intermittently until his death in 1896. He was a devout Roman Catholic and established a chapel at the house which was restored in the 1960s.

In 1900 the Government, with Queen Victoria's approval, allotted the site for the purposes of the new National Physical Laboratory which was opened in March 1902 by the Prince and Princess of Wales. A portion of Bushy House – the upper floor -then became the residence of the Director of the NPL, the first one being Sir Richard Glazebrook, FRS.

The National Physical Laboratory

The Royal Society were looking for a home for its proposed National Standards Laboratory which was originally intended to be housed at the Royal Observatory at Kew, but the premises were not suitable. It was the first Government-funded laboratory in Britain.

The purposes for which the NPL was originally established were threefold:

- to carry out research – particularly research into the accurate determination of physical constants
- to establish and maintain precise standards of measurement
- to make tests of instruments and materials.

With the exception of the section of Bushy House allotted to administrative offices and the Director's residence, the rest of the main central block and the four wings were converted into laboratories. The basement and ground floor became the physics laboratory, other laboratories being devoted to electricity and magnetism, thermometric work, metallurgy and chemistry. Further buildings were added as needed as well as land

Until 1918 the NPL was controlled by the Royal Society. After that date it became incorporated into the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. The earliest experiments into radar were carried out on the sports field. The wind tunnel was used in the development of the Spitfire. Some of the NPL's most important work was done during the 2nd World War. Barnes Wallis, the inventor of the 'Dambusters' bomb which breached the Mohne and Eder dams in 1943, carried out essential tests in the ship tanks. The Mulberry floating harbour, used in the D-Day landings in June 1944, and PLUTO, the pipeline which maintained fuel supplies across the Channel were also developed at NPL. Its growth and development since those early years reflects the rapid progress which science and technology made during the 20th century.

Further reading

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