

## Grimston Hall in 2018



*"It would have given me great pleasure to have met you at Grimston Hall. I was very sure that no light cause prevented your coming to me...." Letter from Mr. George Nassau, 7<sup>th</sup> Nov 1812*

Over the years, I have often walked along footpaths adjacent to Grimston Hall. With its own drive and at some distance from the end of the lane, it has an air of reserve and detachment. It's by no means unfriendly, but has enough dignity to discourage the idle by-passer from venturing too close. There can't be many Trimley residents who are unaware it was the home of Thomas Cavendish, second circumnavigator of the world, last known whereabouts somewhere on an ocean circa 1592. After all, you would be hard pushed to miss St. Martin's exuberant village sign of Tom Cavendish, Privateer of this parish, boldly looking down at all those who pass by the entrance to St. Martin's Green and Old Kirton Road. While successive Lords of the Manor may be documented, it's less clear who occupied Grimston Hall after him, if indeed he did occupy it for any substantial period of time. Did later Lords of the Manor live there partially, permanently or did they let it to tenants? It's a trickier question than you might first suppose. Certainly, several people can remember who occupied the Hall during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but before that, things are a little hazy and prior to 1783 exactly who occupied the property is even less obvious. In the spirit of non-invasive discovery and completely devoid of any profiteering motives, one of my self-selected, ongoing missions as St. Martin's Recorder, is to document the owners and residents of Grimston Hall. Or if you prefer, to create a house history of one of our village's oldest building. In the first instance, I am researching Mr. George Nassau who was Lord of the Manor from 1763 to 1823 for he was the person responsible for the Trimley St. Martin Enclosure Act of 1807, the most significant land change since 1066. He is supposed to have lived in the Hall for a short period during the 18<sup>th</sup> century before setting permanently in Charles Street, Berkeley Square in London. If this is the case, then he was the last Lord of the Manor to occupy it. All inhabitants of the Hall from about 1783 onwards appear to be tenants, not owners.

I wanted to begin my investigations by visiting and viewing the Hall and in an unabashed move which appears to have become my new hallmark, decided the most obvious route was to contact Mr. Tim Collins, the Trimley Estate Manager at Bidwells, explaining my research aims. His reply was positive, affirmative and extremely helpful. We agreed a date and time and towards the end of August 2018 we met in Tim's office at Searsons Farm prior to the visit. He has worked for Bidwells for 30 years or more, always finding the work varied and interesting. Yes, it has many challenges, as you may well suppose but because the focus of our meeting was upon Grimston Hall we didn't discuss any contemporary, contentious issues. Tim proved to be a generous host and guide and began by explaining the changes in estate operations in recent years. When Trinity College originally acquired the Estate in 1933 there were hundreds of cottages and the land was then parcelled off in small farming units. Such small-scale farming is more or less defunct in the Twenty First century due to the rise of agribusinesses during the latter half of the Twentieth. This approach is not confined to the Trinity Estate; it is the general modus operandi across much of the southern United Kingdom. The result was a move from regulated tenancies and means Bidwells now manage one large land unit on behalf of Trinity. Farm houses, as Grimston Hall might latterly be described, had previously been let to tenants together with land. It was the responsibility of the Tenants to maintain the fabric of their leased buildings, not the Landowner and this was also true when they were leased out by the many Lords of the Manor. These houses now appear like islands in the fields, no longer an integral part of a specific farm but recalling the time not so long ago, when they were frequently the heart of agricultural life. Grimston Hall, a Grade Two listed building, is in this position and now devoid of tenants; responsible custodianship now rests solely with Trinity.

When Tim completed his explanation of the intricacies of the situation, we left his office and headed towards the Hall. We stood outside, wary of the grey skies above us, debating on the advisability of umbrellas and ultimately deciding to chance the impending rain. A skip, visible in the photograph above, stood outside holding the discarded furnishings. Tim unlocked the porch door and immediately we stepped into a different time. Stripped of all goods and chattels and with various patches on the walls indicating explorations into the structure and fabric, the house was naked. It presented itself denuded of all artifice, patiently seeking attention. Nothing about its external appearance had prepared me for weight of centuries which pressed themselves upon us. We stepped through time as Tim guided the way through a house where every room is unique, bearing the honourable scars of many inhabitants.



*Looking out of the front door of Grimston Hall, August 2018*

The front of the house we can see from the end of Grimston Lane is supposedly 18<sup>th</sup> century. Whether there has been any rearrangement of internal walls or partitions is difficult to determine. Downstairs we moved from the hall into an adjacent room and then into the kitchen where a selection of 20<sup>th</sup> century white goods and cupboards are still in situ. However, the whole room is dominated by a kitchen hearth of broad proportions and earlier domestic attributes, comprising a bread oven and copper. Beyond that we moved into a room looking as though it should have game hanging from its ceiling. An elderly looking ladder reached upwards and under cautious advisement I was allowed to look through the space into an upper room. I was astonished by the substance of the room with its beams and windows. My gaze took in intimations of a much earlier period, moving around a room whose age easily predated the front of the house. What had been its function?



Grimston Hall: The upstairs room beyond the kitchen

Returning to the front of the house downstairs, we walked into a flat roofed extension known as the Dining Room, which Tim said was a Victorian extension. (Here's another area I need to investigate, I thought to myself, mentally placing it on my list of Things to Do). Moving upstairs, we viewed the bedrooms above the kitchen with their view of the pond next to the house and then up yet another flight of narrow stairs to the attics at the front of the house. These appear to have nothing but the roof between themselves and the elements. I hazarded whether this was where the servants slept in the stuffy summers and chilly winters. In either season, comfort would be minimal.

By this time, the threatened rain was falling steadily. Waterproofs were found and it was time to view the gardens and Barn. Despite the rain, and the overgrown state of the rear gardens, evidence remained of hard gardening work. I imagine it's a regular sun trap on a bright day, when someone might sit outside, shelling peas in the sunshine. A rushy, overgrown pond sits next to the kitchen

garden, before falling gently down into two lower pools. You can see these if you look online at the pdf map on Historic England's site:

[http://mapservices.historicengland.org.uk/printwebservicehle/StatutoryPrint.svc/224620/HLE\\_A4L\\_Grade|HLE\\_A3L\\_Grade.pdf](http://mapservices.historicengland.org.uk/printwebservicehle/StatutoryPrint.svc/224620/HLE_A4L_Grade|HLE_A3L_Grade.pdf)

Again, I made another mental note to investigate this because the 1807 Enclosure Map shows just two ponds. Where and when had the third one come from?

And finally, The Barn. I didn't expect to see anything of interest because it's now shrouded in plastic and inaccessible. But Tim gave me permission to view certain parts of the building in his presence, whilst cautiously ensuring all the appropriate Health and Safety rules were correctly followed. It *is* hazardous and in a perilous condition. It is also breathtaking. Constructed of brick and timber, with upper and lower floors it appears the most elderly part of the buildings complex. Substantial roof timbers framed the upper storey, with some filled in windows and some glazed ones. Historic England says:

*"This is the only surviving building of the farmstead associated with the Elizabethan Grimston Hall, the home of Thomas Cavendish, which was replaced by the present farmhouse around 1700."*

I can only describe my reaction as slack-jawed astonishment. I was left with yet another task on the growing To Do list: find out more about this building.

The time had come to return to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I can't say how many centuries I had viewed nor how long it had taken Tim to show them to me. His long-term task is to find a way for these buildings to be regenerated in as cost-effective manner as possible whilst deploying all his sensitivity and understanding to ensure the integrity of the house and surroundings. He told me he had visited the Hall on a non-working day so he might walk around it, reflecting upon the best way forward for its future. There has been talk of it becoming a wedding venue or a set of Holiday lets, although Tim indicated the first option probably wasn't viable. The Hall does have a future but what it is remains a mystery for the time being,

There is one other mystery and another piece of research ahead of me I have yet to mention. It continues to preoccupy me. As we had walked through the Hall, we had been surprised by the presence of another person. In the kitchen, one of the workmen who had cleared the house had propped up a photograph. It was the face of a rather beautiful woman, possibly from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her eyes viewed us gravely as we looked around the kitchen, tolerating our intrusion into what may have been her domestic domain. Was she a relative of an earlier occupant or had she lived there herself? There was no way of telling and she certainly gave nothing away. If anyone knows who she might be, I would love to know because it may be her family are missing her.

I drove off into the mizzling rain, exhilarated by everything the buildings and garden had revealed to me and looking forward to seeing what the future holds for them. Grimston Hall has to adapt to the demands and conundrums of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, just as we all do. It's the responsibility of the Trimley Estate but it is also part of our collective legacy and a touchstone to the past. In the meantime, my own research project is creating demands of its own, insisting I try to answer the questions I have posed. I know there is so much more to come. Avanti!



*Portrait of an unknown woman. Did she live in Grimston Hall?*



*The kitchen hearth with the built-in copper on the right and a patchwork of bricks behind.*



*The Bread oven built in to the other side of the kitchen hearth.*



*The room at the Far End of the Hall.*



*A window above the Victorian extension. Beyond the window is The Barn.*



*The upper storey of The Barn at Grimston Hall, August 2018*



*A 6.20 a.m. view of Grimston Hall. The Barn is the separate building on the right.*

My gratitude and thanks to Tim Collins and the Trimley Estate for making my visit possible.

If you have any comments or would like to be part of this Trimley St. Martin project, please contact me at:

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