

THE LOST COUNTRY HOUSES OF ROSS

Country houses have always been liable to destruction, as their owner's fortunes declined or architectural styles went out of fashion, but it was the first three quarters of the 20th century which saw the heaviest losses. There are no exact figures, but across the whole country at least 1200 country houses were lost and probably nearer 1700.

One cause was fire, especially prevalent in the earlier part of the century when electrical installations were primitive and not properly understood by the staff who had to operate them. But the greatest cause was the social changes of the 20th century, culminating in the years after the Second World War, when the greatest destruction of country houses was seen. Many houses had been despoiled by being requisitioned during the war and materials for repair were hard to come by. There was a Socialist government in power imposing high taxation - the richest paid 19/6 in the pound on their topslice of income - and there was little official interest in what we now call Heritage. Many landowners felt that the day of the country house was over, and there were few planning controls in place to prevent their demolition. The peak year was 1955 when an average of 1 house a week was lost country-wide.

During the last quarter of the century there was a sharp turnaround in attitudes, and it became axiomatic that such buildings had to be preserved, even if it meant conversion to flats or offices and sometimes building in their parks and gardens.

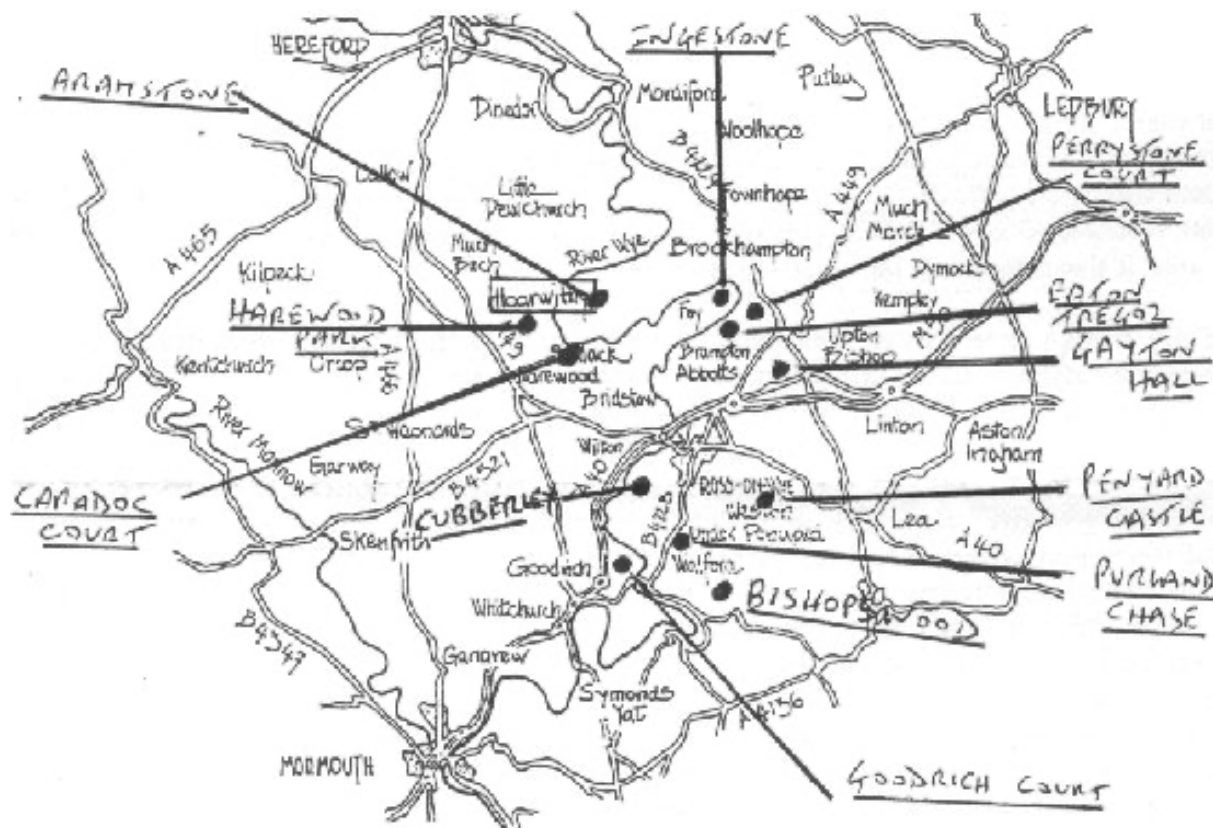
Here is a brief description of some of the lost country houses in the Ross area, starting with some from earlier centuries.

Long lost houses

Eaton Tregoz was an important medieval estate in Foy parish on the east bank of the Wye upstream from Ross. The site of the castle or mansion was generally held to be at Hill of Eaton farm, but more recently a location nearer the river at Hole-in-the-Wall has been suggested. The house fell into ruins probably by the 17th century when the then owners of the estate, the Abrahalls, built a new home on the other side of the river. Part of the parkland of Eaton Tregoz is still marked as 'Eaton Park' on modern OS maps.

Ingestone was the new 17th century house built by the Abrahalls on the west bank of the Wye. It survived until the 19th century, near the site of the present farmhouse.

Penyard Castle was probably a hunting lodge rather than a true castle, built high up on Penyard Hill. It would be used for viewing the hunt and banqueting. It survived until the late 17th century.



Lost Country Houses

Twentieth Century Losses

Aramstone House was built about 1730. The architect was probably Francis Smith of Warwick, an important designer of country houses at this period throughout the West Midlands. He certainly worked nearby at the Mynde in Little Dewchurch parish, which still survives. The site at Kings Caple was a fine one, overlooking the Wye. Old photographs show that excellent examples of original features such as staircases and chimneypieces survived to the 20th century, and its demolition in 1959 was the subject of much protest. Aramstone Racing Stables stands on the site today.

Bishopswood was built for John Partridge, a Dean iron-master in about 1825. His architect was Jeffry Wyatt, who later styled himself Jeffry Wyattville and is best known for his enhancements to Windsor Castle, giving it its romantic mock-medieval outline familiar to us today. Bishopswood was also a romantically crenellated house with Tudor-style gables and stood in a picturesque wooded park. The house burnt down in 1873, was rebuilt but was demolished after another fire in 1918. Some estate buildings survive, including the keepers house with its gothic tower, which was for sale last year for £375,000. The present Bishopswood House is on a different site and was originally a secondary house on the estate.

Gayton Hall was a Regency style villa in Upton Bishop parish of about 1820. Only three bays long and five bays deep, with a handsome entrance portico and a verandah to the

side, it seems the sort of building that should still be a comfortable residence for someone today, but it was alas demolished in 1955.

Goodrich Court was the fantasy house built for Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick, antiquarian and expert on armour, in 1828-31. Newsletter No. 72 carried an account of Meyrick and his house. Suffice it to say here that the surviving gatehouse on the main road at Pencraig gives some idea of the style of this romantic creation. Although modified by subsequent owners, it is perhaps not surprising that this pile did not survive, and after being occupied by Felsted School during the war it was demolished in 1950.

Harewood Park was the seat of the Hoskyns family and has been the subject of a Pink Publication by Heather Hurley. The large house, nine bays long, was a result of 18th and early 19th century building, but there had been an earlier mansion house on the site. Having been sold by the Hoskyns towards the end of the 19th century, it went through other hands and was used as a hospital during the Second World War. It was eventually blown up by the Royal Monmouth Engineers in 1959. The estate is now part of the Duchy of Cornwall lands, and the stable block, walled garden and Victorian chapel survive.

Purland Chase [[photos](#)] was built in 1866 in Walford parish was a "house in the country" rather than a true country house with a landed estate. It was a large four-square house with double-height oriel windows in a vaguely Tudor style. It survived a serious fire in 1923 but was demolished in 1965.

Fortunately not all is doom and gloom. Some fine local country houses survive, such as Hill Court, Fawley Court, How Caple Court and Brockhampton Court, albeit not all as private houses. At Perrystone Court, although the largely Victorian house burnt down in 1959, the Clive family built a new, more modern house on the site, while at Caradoc Court the present owner is apparently doing much to restore the house devastated by fire in 1986. Finally there is the case of Cubberley, Walford, where an aggrandized farmhouse stood. This was pulled down by its new owner Lord Greville, who then had a new Regency-style mansion built on the spot in 1971, designed by a leading country house architect of the time, Claud Phillimore, thus giving us Herefordshire's latest country house.

This is one of the surprising number of some 200 new country houses built since the Second World War. Indeed it now seems that the Duchy of Cornwall may build a new mansion on the Harewood estate. So, as a type, the country house has survived quite well, and perhaps the key statistic is, not that one-sixth of England's country houses were lost in the 20th century, but that in spite of the great upheavals of the last century, five-sixths remain.