

# STAUNTON HAROLD

John Fox

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## FOREWORD

by The Rt. Hon. Earl Ferrers P.C.

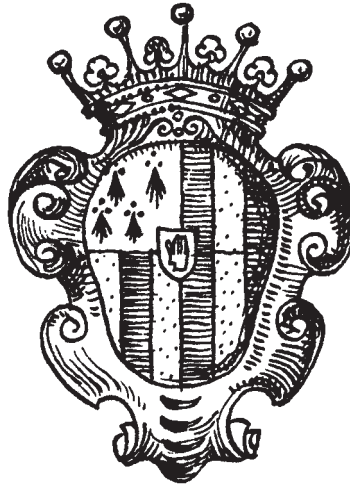
**T**his booklet, in a few pages, covers the history of a family over 900 years and its house.

It is written with style and elegance, and each page compels you to move on to the next. The research and attention to detail has been remarkable, and it records so accurately the different facets of the Shirley family over many centuries.

Recording a family's history can all too easily produce a boring narrative. Not so this book. So well written is it that anyone who starts it will not feel satisfied until he or she comes to the last pages.

It will be a fine addition to the history of the Shirley family and of Staunton Harold, of which the author can be justly proud.

Ferrers  
July 2001



# INTRODUCTION

Staunton Harold is one of the most beautiful and interesting places in England. But it is also one of England's least known treasures. It is hoped that this little book will help to make visitors to Staunton Harold more aware of the fascinating story of Staunton Harold during the past millennium, of the people who have lived in Staunton Harold Hall during that period and of those who built and worshipped in the Chapel.

In his volume on Leicestershire in the Penguin 'Buildings of England' series, Nikolaus Pevsner said of Staunton Harold: "for position, Staunton Harold, the house and its chapel, are unsurpassed in the country – certainly as far as Englishness is concerned". It is the natural beauty of the place, combined with the mineral wealth to be found under the surface and the obvious advantages of its central position close to the meeting point of three counties, which made Staunton Harold an attractive place in which Saxons and Normans settled. In more recent times, residents in a Cheshire Home for over 30 years and then those in a Sue Ryder Palliative Care Home have appreciated many of the same advantages.

Although it is nearly half a century since the Ferrers family lived at Staunton Harold, members of that family retain a strong interest in their ancestral home, which the author greatly appreciates. The present Earl graciously gave permission for any of his family portraits and other archive materials to be used in this publication.

"The Story of Staunton Harold" was written in 1965 by H.J.Wain and published by the Workers' Educational Association (W.E.A.). Mr Wain's excellent little booklet is unique, for it was written from the perspective of one who was brought up on the Staunton Harold Estate and therefore reflects life on the estate

in the early part of the 20th century, when Staunton Harold Hall was still the home of the Ferrers family. Mr Wain's booklet has long been out of print, but his family and the W.E.A. have given their kind permission for some of his material to be used in this book.

Another fascinating glimpse into the past is given in "The Cheshire Home at Staunton Harold", compiled in 1967 by Mrs Drucella Starkey. Some of the material in that booklet has also been used here, particularly *Down Memory Lane*, contributed by the Dowager Countess Ferrers. This is reproduced with the kind permission of the Cheshire Home which is now at Newlands House, Netherseal.

The story of the Staunton Harold estate has been helpfully brought up to date in this volume by the chapter written by Mr John Blunt, whose father bought most of the estate land from Earl Ferrers in 1954. Mr Blunt's memories of Staunton Harold in the second part of the 20th century complement those of Mr Wain in the first half of the century and his work is setting the pattern for it in the future, through the farms and woodland and through the popular Ferrers Craft Centre which he has established in the former stable block.

Especial thanks are due to Mrs Dorothy Watson, who has lived at Staunton for nearly 50 years and who has made available some of the invaluable material which she has collected relating to the Ferrers family and the property before and during that period. Since 1954, when Dorothy and her late husband Stanley purchased the walled gardens at Staunton and set up a garden nursery in them, Mr and Mrs Watson have made a unique contribution to the new community which has developed at Staunton, and through her

talks on Staunton Mrs Watson has made many people more aware of the story of the Hall and those who have lived there. Many of the illustrations in this booklet come from Mrs Watson's collection.

One of the joys of being involved with Staunton Harold has always been the friendship and help of the staff and volunteers who are committed to the Hall and to those who live there. Ken Brydson, then Chairman of the House Committee of the Ryder-Cheshire Mission, earned the author's gratitude by initially inviting him to become involved with Staunton Harold. At that time David Arnold, Margaret Duffy, Anne Laws and Julie Langdale made the arrangement of an historic exhibition a pleasure, never a chore. Since then, many of the staff of the Sue Ryder Home – fund-raisers like Julie and Lorraine, Helen and Fiona; Denise, Sally, other members of the nursing staff and Nigel Lees the administrative officer to name but a few – have given a great deal of help and support. John Bowker and Eric Desborough took many of the photographs used in this publication: both have given a great deal of time and effort to Staunton Harold over the years. The author also thanks all the writers and

organisations listed in the bibliography, without whose work this book would not have been possible.

Above all, thanks are due to my wife Mary, who has been immensely helpful and patient as I have done the research and compiled this volume about Staunton Harold, a place which has many happy memories for both of us.

But this Introduction has to have a postscript – or perhaps it should be read as a Prologue for the next stage in the life of Staunton Harold. This booklet was being prepared for publication when news came of the impending sale of the Hall by the Ryder-Cheshire Mission and the possible closure of the Sue Ryder Care Home which has been using the premises since 1989. At the time of writing the future is not clear and no-one knows how the Hall will be used in future. But it has served the community well for many generations, it has a special place in the affections and memories of all who have been associated with it, and there is no doubt that whatever purpose it serves in future, those who live and work in it will quickly come to love Staunton Harold as much as those who have been associated with it in the past.

## STAUNTON HAROLD HALL

As described by Tom Gair, one of the earliest residents in the Cheshire Home.

Down in the valley, away from all  
The bustle and hustle, stands the Hall,  
Framed by trees, surrounded by lakes,  
A beautiful majestic picture it makes.

As I sit on the lawn, bathed in the sun,  
And I see what the wonders of nature have done,  
I think what a fortunate person am I,  
And heave a deep and grateful sigh.

I remember I came here, not long ago,  
Surrounded by people I did not know,  
Yet here I sit, with friends all around,  
A more pleasant company I never found.

I listen enraptured to the songs of the birds,  
And realise how futile are my words.  
The language of humans cannot say  
How delightful they sound on such a day.

I look at the lake with its swans and geese,  
And waterlilies which seem to increase  
With each day, and to me it seems  
Nature has exceeded my wildest dreams.

In the middle, and overlooking it all,  
Stands the Church, which seems to call  
Us all, "Come inside and thank the Lord",  
Which we gladly do with one accord.

Whilst I adore these material things,  
There's something deeper to which my soul clings,  
It's the loving kindness shown to us all  
By these God-sent souls inside the Hall.

To most people who come to this place,  
It is one of the beauty spots on this country's face,  
They take a look, then onward they roam,  
But to me it is more, it's become "My Home".





## CHAPTER ONE

# *IN THE BEGINNING...*

**I**t is not known when the first settlement took place at Staunton Harold. As “STAUNTON” means a stony place, it may seem a strange place in which to establish a community. But as the stone in the ground at Staunton includes sandstone and limestone, coal and iron, copper and lead, the land has been highly valued for many centuries.

After his success at Hastings in 1066, William of Normandy divided England between his followers. One of the most prominent of those supporters was Henry de Ferraris, whose loyalty was rewarded with no less than 210 “lordships”. But William knew that if any one Norman had a great concentration of estates, he could develop a power-base and may rival the King himself. Henry’s holdings were therefore scattered throughout 14 counties, from Hampshire to Lincolnshire. With 114 of them in Derbyshire and 35 in Leicestershire, his strength was clearly greatest in the East Midlands, but descendants of Henry are to be found throughout England: e.g. Baddesley Clinton, a moated manor house in Warwickshire, is now maintained by the National Trust but was for centuries the home of another branch of the Ferrers family, whose arms are to be seen everywhere: in the church at Baddesley Clinton there is a slab to the memory of twelve generations of Ferrers.

Obviously Henry could neither farm nor supervise all these properties and he had to lease them to feudal underlings. Staunton was “enfeoffed” (leased) to Harold de Lecha, whose ancestors are unknown though he appears to have been a Saxon and his name tells us that he came from that part of Nottinghamshire which is still known as Leake (East

and West). Harold went to live at the manor of Staunton and eventually adopted the name Staunton instead of that of his former place of residence, Leake: Staunton itself becomes known as Staunton Harold to distinguish it from other Stauntons or “Stony Towns”, of which there are several in the East Midlands and elsewhere in England.

Around 1105 Robert Ferraris, having inherited the lands of his grandfather Henry, granted land at Shirley in Derbyshire to Fulcher (Shirley), son of Sewalis or Saswalo, who may also have been a Saxon. Arthur Mee said of this family: “The Shirleys have as long a continuous history as any family in England”. Saswalo himself held a number of lordships, including Ettington (sometimes spelt Eatington) in Warwickshire, which is still owned by the family: there is a carving in the 19th century Hall at Ettington which reads:

*When good St Edward wore the crown  
Saswalo here was thane:  
His male stem still this manor own  
Now in Victoria’s reign.*

Thus by 1105 there were three great families associated with Staunton Harold, the Ferraris (more recently known as Ferrers) from Normandy and Stauntons/Leakes and Shirleys from Saxon England. It is these three families whose story is constantly interwoven and which together make the family history of Staunton Harold over the last 1000 years.

Throughout the Middle Ages all these families served their King and Country loyally, going on Crusades and achieving many distinctions. Several