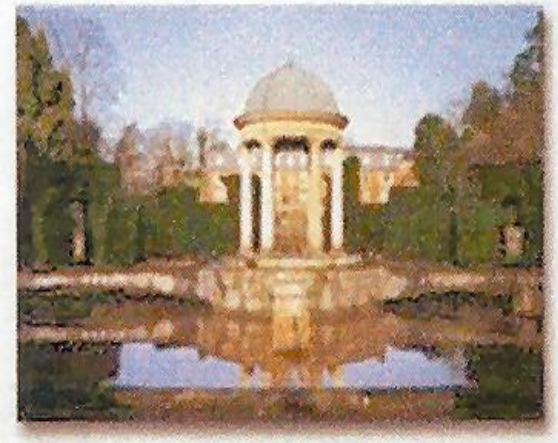


The Burning Buddha of Bishopsteignton



Judy Chard looks at the history of one of Devon's oldest manors.

Lindridge Park near Bishopsteignton was one of those stately homes of England about which Noel Coward sang - sadly this one no longer stands, as the legend turned to tragedy.

The house at Lindridge Park had its share of happiness, sadness and calamity. Here a butler danced with a princess, a queen - perhaps a king too - sat down to dinner within its walls, a boy of 10 fell in love with his future wife whilst playing in the magnificent grounds,

an entire family of children died in infancy and film stars walked in its Italian Gardens and swam in its heated pool. But when the final tragedy struck, its balustrades and terraces were hidden beneath brambles and nettles and the house became a heap of smoke-blackened ruins.

Now all that has changed. Lindridge Park has become one of the most beautiful and prestigious estates in Devon. In its modern 4 bathroomed houses - houses with 4 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms - mostly professional people or the retired live in great luxury. The houses are surrounded by rolling grass lawns dotted with trees, and the gardens and gazebo have all been lovingly restored to their former glory. The view from the windows of the main living room in the house which I visited showed the Devon countryside at its best, with not another building in sight. I would add that this is a very private place and I was only allowed in by invitation.

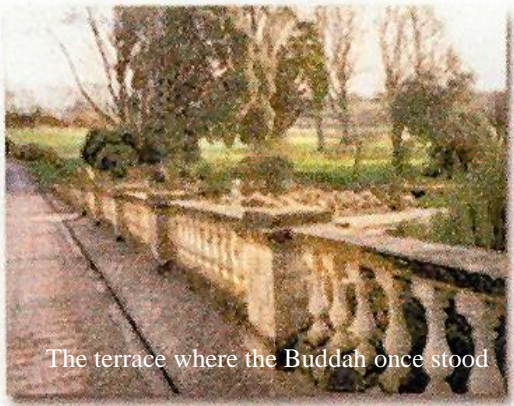


However, here we are interested in the past. I first visited Lindridge in the early 1980s when I was writing my book "Tales of the Unexplained in Devon." Then the stables still stood, sheltering within their walls the Buddha which was said to be the cause of the tragedy. This had been brought to the estate by a member of the Templer family who had connections in the far east. Legend had it that if it was moved from its place below the terrace, the mansion would be destroyed by fire.

Lindridge was one of Devon's oldest manors, dating back to 1044. The first owner was Leofric, Bishop of Exeter, and Bishops held it for 505 years as part of Tainton or Bishopsteignton. In 1549 Sir Andrew Dudley, one of the Grooms of the Royal Bedchamber, was given the tenure, but he only held it for a short time when it was bought by Richard, Duke of London and Otterton. He never actually visited his property and in 1572 it reverted to Crown Property, first of all to Queen Elizabeth I and then to James I. It is thought more than likely that the Queen dined and slept here, undoubtedly walking in the beautiful gardens, as it was well known that she enjoyed travelling round her kingdom.

In 1614 it was bought by Richard Martin of Middle Temple and remained in that family for many years. Three years from the date of his purchase he decided to make it into a proper home, building a new house which covered an acre of ground, the old Tudor building being incorporated in the new

one. Richard was an associate of Shakespeare and Ben Johnson, both of whom were said to have visited him here.



Sadly he died in 1618 before his plans for the house were completed. His brother Thomas, Mayor of Exeter, lived in the house for two years until it passed to his son William. William married Agnes Cove of Bishopsteignton and at last the house really came into its own and became the hub of the social life of the area. One can imagine the parties, the balls, the music and sound of laughter which must have echoed from the tall windows of the house across the park.

William was a great Royalist and eventually joined his neighbour Hugh Clifford of Ugbrooke, who commanded a regiment of foot soldiers, marching north with him to fight for the king against the Scots. Wounded, he returned home to die in March 1640. Because of the friendship of these two families, Thomas Clifford, Hugh's 10 year old son, often went to play in the gardens at Lindridge, and it was there he met Elizabeth Martin, whom he later married.

In 1659 the Martin connection with Lindridge ended and it became the property of Sir Peter Lear. Peter had made his fortune in Barbados but returned to England when his health failed, longing for his native Devon. He bought Lindridge and married Susanna Rolls. They had 9 children, but tragically they all died as babies between the years 1664 and 1680. When Peter himself died aged 60, his 11 year old nephew Thomas Lear inherited the estate. At the age of 18 he married Isabella, daughter of Sir William Courtenay of Powderham. Sadly both he and his wife died in their early 30's in 1708 in the same year. They had no children. Now the property passed to Thomas' brother John who had no business acumen and was continually involved in law suits, so the estate passed to his daughter Mary who promptly sold it.

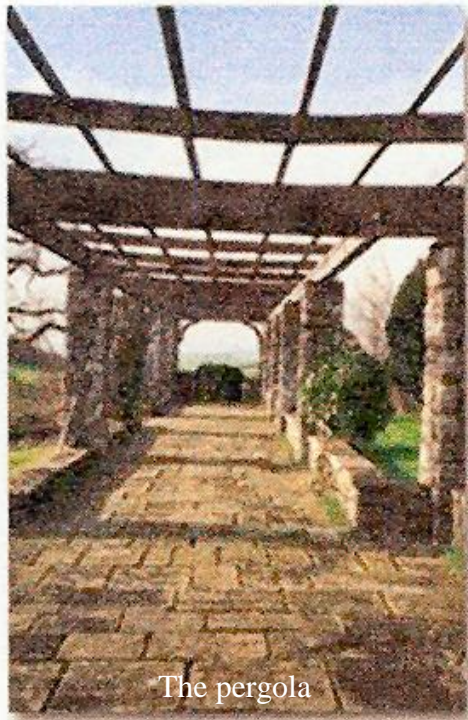


In 1747 John Baring, forefather of the famous Barings, bought Lindridge hoping to enjoy a quiet country life, but he too died only a year later. His son sold to John Line, a partner of James Templer of Stover, who managed to survive for 12 years in what was starting to be considered an ill-fated house. He too had no children and it reverted to his godson, Henry Line Templer, his widow having married the Reverend John Templer.

Henry lived here for the longest time of anyone – 54 years. He was a keen sportsman and had the first pack of hounds in the district. He left all his property to a little boy of 3, having led many of his relatives up the garden path in the belief that they were going to be beneficiaries!

When the godson - James George John Templer - was old enough, he took over Lindridge and once again it became the centre of local interest and activity. James' eldest son, Captain John George Edmond Templer, inherited the estate on James' death in 1883, and was the first person in the district to drive a motor car!

During the First World War, Lindridge was used as a Red Cross Hospital for Officers.



Lord Cable bought the house in 1920, his only son had been killed in 1915. He had two daughters, the elder of whom married Michael, son of General Buller, after having divorced her first husband, a disgrace for which her father never forgave her. Eventually Lindridge passed to the younger girl, Ruth. During this time the heated outdoor swimming pool was installed and her husband built a theatre in the stable block. He was a governor of the BBC and his son a TV producer, so during the 1960s many film stars such as Katherine Hepburn came to stay at the house. In 1962 the property was bought by Mr and Mrs Bray who restored the house and the Italian and Water Gardens to their original beauty. But they made one terrible mistake - they moved the Buddha from its place on the terrace where it had stood for many years at the direction of the member of the Templer family who had brought it from the far-east and had said that if it were moved, tragedy would overtake Lindridge.

On the very night before it was to be opened to the public on 25th April 1963 the house caught fire and was burnt to a shell -the worst fire in Devon for over a decade. Despite minute investigations no logical reason could be found for the fire The pergola starting - sadly at some time during the later alterations, when the Buddha had been restored to its rightful place on the terrace, it was stolen and has never been found. One wonders what terrible fate overcame the thief for this sacrilege!

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My apologies for the poor quality of the photographs but these were scanned from a poor photocopy

P.S.

I know what happened to the Buddha, it was before the posh houses were built that are there presently, it was a building site, (the water tower & the pool were in excellent condition and the gardens were still maintained). Probably in the early nineties, I was a security guard there, and saw the Buddha with my own eyes. After leaving the security job, a friend of mine showed me a picture of a Buddha that he bought from a builder, he paid £50 for it...a few months later someone saw it in his garden and offered him £200 for it, being curious he had it valued at about £1000, so he sent it to auction with Sotherbys, well £1000 was way under priced, it sold for £25000, apparently it was one of a pair, bought by a gentleman from the far east as it happens. - Ed Cumming