Visit to Camden Place

On Wednesday 8th November we visited Camden Place, now the home of Chislehurst Golf Club. The beautiful house is set in grounds, but due to the wet weather we were not able to take advantage of this.

We entered the house through the wood panelled Jacobean entrance hall which dates to the 1600s. It is possible that the panels had been in the original house built in 1609 by William Camden. This house had been built on a different part of the estate to where the current house stands and was demolished in 1717. William Camden was an Antiquarian known for his books, including Britania and The Annales ( which is an historical account of the reign of Elizabeth I). William wanted to be buried at Camden Place but on his death he was buried at Westminster Abbey in ‘Poet’s Corner).

The next owner of the property Robert Weston, having demolished the original building, built himself a new L shaped home which he called Camden House. This part of the building remains today, as does the avenue of lime trees he had planted to form an grand entrance.

Charles Pratt was the next owner of the property. He developed the House into a substantial three story Georgian Mansion together with a folly in the grounds. In 1776 he was given an Earldom. He chose the title of Lord Camden of Camden Place, and the house named changed. Through his wife he owned further land which became Camden Town.

In 1805 Thompson Bonar and his wife Anne moved into the property. They added a dining room (now a snooker room), moves the stairs and a creates a beautiful oval shaped study. Sadly, on 31st May 1813 the Bonar’s were bludgeoned to death in their beds by their footman. The footman was sent to get medical help but on the way home stopped for a drink in a pub where he was heard to say that ‘the deed was done’. He was hanged for the offence but it was believed that he was acting in the pay of the sons who were keen to get their hands on their inheritance. The sons never moved into the house and it was rented out for a number of years.

The next owner was Nathaniel Strode in 1860. He set about creating a French Chateau. He added gates from the Paris Exhibition and a dinning room wing with panelling from the Grand Cabinet at the Chateau de Bercy. The murals in the oval room were also added.

Following his defeat and surrender at Sedan in 1870, the family of Napoleon III fled to England and Strode made the house available to them. The Empress Eugenie and her son the Prince Imperial lived there with Napoleon joining them in 1871. They also set up court here In 1893, Napoleon died and laid in state at Camden House. His son was killed in 1879 during the Zulu war, having been stabbed eighteen times. His body was returned to Camden. Eugenie tried to buy some land locally to build a family mausoleum. When she was unsuccessful, she moved away. The house was sold on the death of Strode in 1894 and the Golf Club was established in May of that year.

Following our visit we were able to enjoy the catering facilities, and admire the grounds through the window.