

By TED O'NEILL

news@lincolnshireecho.co.uk

A LETHAL love-triangle, a shotgun wedding and a famous 19th Century beauty will set the scene for a talk by the Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology next Wednesday.

The historical talk: "Henry Chaplin MP: Scandal and a Derby Winner" will be presented by Mark Acton, on Wednesday, May 24 at 7.30pm.

The young Viscount Henry Chaplin wouldn't have been a bad catch as the heir to Blankney Hall, which had been recorded in the Domesday book of 1086 and was one of the grandest houses in Lincolnshire.

Unfortunately, Henry loved the delightful and diminutive Lady Florence Paget, known as "The Pocket Venus" and so did another Henry, the Marquess Harry of Hastings.

Henry Chaplin fought to get Florence down the aisle. Then a few days before the wedding Florence and the two Henrys all visited the Covent Garden together to watch the opera "Faust."

The following morning there was a scandalous turn of events at a department store in Oxford Street, which the Pocket Venus visited to put the final touches to her wedding costume, but did she 'say yes to the dress'?

Florence was married on July 16, 1864 but there were further shenanigans over a horse in the Epsom Derby and by 1868, one member of the love triangle would be dead.

All will be revealed by Mark Acton at the talk next week. Mark said: "Henry was an interesting example of a now extinct species of squire-politician who was loved across all classes, inspired a certain amount of deference and had friends across the political divide."

Perhaps the luckiest day in Chaplin's life was the day in June 1865 when, at a horse sale, the Lincolnshire Lord purchased a yearling colt for a thousand guineas, which he named Hermit.

That horse would go on to define Chaplin's life at the races, but his lucky streak would not go on forever.

On the death of his uncle in 1859 Chaplin became squire of Blankney, a title which he valued highly.

Blankney Hall, 10 miles south of Lincoln, close to Metheringham Station, was a grand Palladian House which witnessed country house life

Chaplin's Pocket Venus, scandalous love triangle and lucky horse Hermit

HISTORICAL TALK WILL REVEAL ALL



Viscount Henry Chaplin



Florence Paget



Harry Hastings

and entertainment on a large scale in Victorian and Edwardian times.

The estate at Blankney had been confiscated from its previous owners twice: firstly in 1487 by Henry VII after the Battle of Stoke Field and again in 1716 when the owner William Widderington made the mistake of supporting the Jacobites and the Old Pretender James Edward Stuart and was convicted of High Treason.

The Hall as Henry Chaplin knew it had been built in the 1790s and he added to and remodelled it.

The grounds at Blankney contained the graves of numerous horses, hounds and dogs and there

were stables designed by E.J.Wilson in 1831.

In his earlier days, if not throughout life, Chaplin's primary interests were hunting and racing and he cultivated the image as a grand country squire. Politics, though important, were secondary.

Hunting was more than a pastime to the Viscount, it was a study of absorbing scientific interest.

However his magnificent hospitality and the cost of his stables and kennels ate into his fortune early in his career.

His wife's uncle by marriage, the first Duke of Westminster, was quoted as saying: "When our Harry

is broke, which is only a matter of time, all the crowned heads of Europe ought to give him a hundred thousand a year in order that he may show them how to spend their money."

Eventually, the estate at Blankney was mortgaged to pay Henry Chaplin's debts.

In 1897, it passed into the hands of Lord Londesborough, whose father had been one of the chief mortgagees.

Chaplin moved to Stafford House, the London residence of his brother-in-law, the Duke of Sutherland, then after the duke's death in 1913, he lived in a flat in Charles Street, until

October 1922, when his son-in-law, the Marquess of Londonderry, gave him a suite of rooms in Londonderry House.

Henry, Viscount Chaplin died in Londonderry House on May 29, 1923 aged 83 and was buried at Blankney.

Blankney Hall was requisitioned in the second world war and from 1940 until 1945 functioned as the Digby Sector Operations Room.

In 1945 Blankney was closed by the Ministry of War, only to re-open the same September and was renamed Lincolnshire Sector HQ in November of that year.

But the Lincolnshire Sector HQ closed in March 1946 and that year the house was seriously damaged by fire.

Much of the great Blankney Hall was demolished in 1960 and the demolition was completed over subsequent years. The last part of the service wing was demolished in 1995.

The nineteenth century gates to Blankney Hall and the stable block are both Grade II listed.

The historical talk: 'Henry Chaplin MP - Scandal and a Derby Winner' by Mark Acton, chair of local history at the SLHA will be held on Zoom on Wednesday, May 24 at 7.30.

■ To book your ticket for a small donation, visit: bit.ly/chaplinhastingsvenus

Blankney Hall during its demolition



Mark Acton