On July 25th 2009 an exhibition was held in the Park by the Ampthill & District Archaeological & Local History Society to coincide with the end of the first Ampthill Castle excavation. It also supported "Aragon Day" where the Townspeople of Ampthill celebrate Queen Catherine's stay at the Castle during her divorce from Henry VIII. The following is the script for the walk leaders, slightly adapted for this website. You are invited to run a copy off and try the walk for yourself

Ampthill Park Walk 25/07/09

There are three basic periods that we can trace in the landscape.

1/ The castle (or palace) and its surrounds, built circa 1420.
(site of current excavations)

2/ The formal gardens to the Great Lodge laid out after 1613 by the Lord Thomas Brookes Family.

3/ When Lord Ashburnham extended the Great Lodge and gardens in 1690, he adopted the typical English landscape style of Capability Brown.

In addition there are other significant signs of human intervention over the years.

1. Meet in the West Car Park..



A Georgian Lodge, part of the Capability Brown layout was at the entrance to the west car park until it was pulled down by the Ampthill Urban Council.



2. Move to Katherine's Cross following a drive created by Capability Brown. from the Woburn Road taking a circular route to Park House. It was designed to give the impression of space to the visitor including an "Italianate view" of the house across the lake before disappearing into a grove of trees. The lodge gate by the Woburn Road was destroyed in the 1970's.

The Earl of Ossory decided to commemorate Katherine of Aragon in 1773 by building a gothic style cross on the site of the castle.

A family friend, Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford wrote what the Earl described as a "Pretty verse" and it can be seen on the cross today.

"IN DAYS OF OLD, HERE AMPTHILL`S TOWERS WERE SEEN,
THE MOURNFUL REFUGE OF AN INJURED QUEEN.
HERE FLOWED HER PURE BUT UNAVAILING TEARS
HERE BLINDED ZEAL SUSTAINED HER SINKING YEARS.
YET FREEDOM HENCE HER RADIANT BANNER WAVED
AND LOVE AVENGED A REALM BY PRIESTS ENSLAVED.
FROM CATHERINE'S WRONGS A NATIONS BLISS WAS SPREAD AND
LUTHER'S LIGHT FROM HENRYS LAWLESS BED".

Behind the cross look for pottery shards & oyster shells.

Looking around square blocks of birch trees can be seen, and still worse conifers that sit very uncomfortably in the landscape. They were planted in a hurry as nursery trees by the Urban District Council, before the Council was disbanded, and were neglected for many years by the new Town Council. Wrong trees in the wrong place, fortunately they have been thinned out in recent years improving the appearance to a degree.

3. Walk along the top of the ridge passing where **the ice house** was amongst the bushes above the "Reservoir" the source of the ice. It is many years since enough ice has formed to perform such a procedure or practice. The ice house

was filled with rubbish by the troops in WWI.



Evidence of WWI rubbish in the Ice House, revealed some years ago when the park was suffering from erosion.

4. **Now go to the Russett (or Little) lodge**, which was re fronted in the 1750's. A classic temple design much in vogue at that time.

5. Turn round and make for the gate into the "*Darkenings*"*, apart from some specimen trees this area was cleared in WW1 by the Canadian Foresters to send to France for trenches and tunnels. Walk through the wood to the end of the path, in the field spot **the pill box**, and the associated ditches which allowed the troops to move about without being seen on the skyline, on the other side of the Bedford road trenches are still visible. There were no trees there in 1939- evidence from aerial photographs.



Home Guard trench opposite side of the road to the WWII type 22 pill box

6. Turn left into Lime Walk

The family of Lord Thomas Bruce planted the lime walk in 1667, when they remodelled the Great Lodge and gardens. In 1957 the Urban District Council was given the land containing the walk and decided the trees were dangerous and cut the trees down. Typically the job was only half done. At the suggestion of the late Professor Richardson, the trees were replaced by Norwegian maples. The old stumps were not grubbed up and the new trees were not looked after. The result is here to be seen; the original limes have regenerated on rotting roots which were not ideal and the maples have disappeared. Thanks to an enlightened approach over the past few years however the regenerated shoots have been pruned and we have an avenue, still on the original rootstock with a potential of another 350 years of life. What a super project it is at a time when we are all conservation conscious. The only worry is that a few of the trees have fallen due to the rotten foundation but it is believed the rest will survive.

7. Go down Lime Walk, turn left and follow the footpath through the wood until you re- enter the park, then walk through the wet flushes. The legendry "Old Oak" was sited in adjacent field.

Turn off to the **Leg-o-mutton pond**.
This is a natural spring, nearby manhole covers which have been sealed for safety reasons may be a clue to the source of water to the Park House which tradition says was pumped to the cellars.

8. Walk back to the car park past the reservoir and along the Capability Brown avenue.

HISTORICAL NOTES

Period one

The Castle or as we prefer to call it a Palace or Manor house:
This is the area under excavation at the moment. Historical records say it was built by Sir John Cornwall, hero of Agincourt (1415), who served under the Duke of York on the left flank of the battle. When the Duke was killed Sir John led the forces to victory and returned home to a hero's welcome. He oversaw the occupation and was well rewarded. We know that in 1424 Charles Duke of Orleans, a captive from Agincourt was "held hostage in the castle for six years".
A favourite of the King (Henry 5th), Sir John had married Princess Elizabeth the king's aunt in 1400. Many honours came his way including K.G. in 1409, Baron Millbrook in 1442 and Baron Fanhope in 1433. He died in 1443 and you can see a memorial window to him in the North clerestory of Millbrook church.

A 16th Century writer John Leland described the castle as "Foure or five faire Towers of stone in the Inner Ward, beside the Basse Court." After the death of Sir John, and a number of disputes, Lord Edmond Grey of Wrest, an old adversary of Sir John, bought the castle and estates. The estates prospered and were extended. Unfortunately Lord Edmond's grandson was a "Waster" and gambled the estate away. As a result Henry 7th became the owner in 1508 a year before he died.

He showed little interest in Ampthill but his son Henry 8th. loved the estate and spent a great deal of time here. The Privy Council is recorded as meeting twenty times at the castle in September 1540.
In 1542 Ampthill became a Royal Honour, which means it became the administrative centre for the Royal Estates over a large area surrounding Ampthill. It is

thought that the Westminster pond was stocked with fish to supply the palace and it seems probable that Henry 8th enjoyed fresh carp from those waters. It is certain that Henry's first, and some would say only wife, Katharine of Aragon was imprisoned in the palace and it was here she received the news from Archbishop Cranmer's court, set up in Dunstable in June 1533, that her marriage had been annulled. She was addressed as Princess Dowager of Wales, her title on the death of her first husband, Arthur Prince of Wales, Henry's brother. This prompted her to seize the document and strike out the offending words. Her protest was in vain however for in August 1533 she was moved against her will to Buckden Towers and thence to Kimbolton Castle where she died in 1536 at the age of 51.

Period two.

In 1606 James 1st. considered rebuilding the palace but compromised by employing John Thorpe to enlarge the Stewards house called the GREAT LODGE. In 1613 Lord Edward Bruce was appointed Steward of the Royal Estates but was killed in a duel the same year, the seneschalship passed to his 14-year-old brother Thomas. His family extended the Great Lodge and redesigned the gardens. The main drive to Ampthill was planted with 125 lime trees in about 1687 a good example of early English gardening style. The greater part of this avenue was cut down in 1957 on the orders of the Urban District Council. Those trees nearest to the house are in private hands and still stand but require considerable attention. This is not surprising after 322 years.

Lord Ashburnham bought the house and Great Park in 1690, he extended the Lodge yet again using mainly local labour and materials. The wrought iron gates were designed by John Lumbley but manufactured in Ampthill. Eight acres of formal gardens were created.

Period three.

In 1754 John Fitzpatrick 2nd Earl of Ossory inherited the Lodge which was by then known as PARK HOUSE when he was 13 years old. Brought up on the Estate, he loved the area and changed the whole scene. He engaged Lancelot "Capability" Brown who reformed the gardens and park. A ha-ha was built round the house to give unobstructed views. Lime Walk was abandoned, Russett Lodge was re fronted in "Temple" style. A Georgian lodge was built at the entrance to what is now the West car park, clumps of trees were planted at vantage points to give the impression of space. A belt of limes were planted along the Woburn Road and the Rezzy* was remodelled.

*local name