



THE 'NEXT GEN'S' 2015 GET TOGETHER: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, RICCARDO TORDERA RICCHI & MARIA-TERESA AGOSTINI; ANNE McCABE & CHARLOTTE MORE NISBETT; JAMES HALDANE, HEIR TO GLENEAGLES; LETTING OFF STATELY STEAM; PR EXPERT MICHAEL FARRANT GIVES A LECTURE ON HOW TO MANAGE FAMILY REPUTATIONS; WILLIAM CARTWRIGHT-HIGNETT IN FRONT OF AYNHOE PARK



# THE YOUNG HEIRS' CLUB

Are you going to inherit a castle? Are you plagued by nightmares about sagging roofs and empty tearooms? Worry no more! The solutions to all your problems can be found at an unexpectedly wild conference for Europe's foremost heirs and heiresses. **Matthew Bell joins the party**

*Photographed by MUIR VIDLER*

**I**t's a terrifying scenario. You think you've got your life in order, then... Bam! You inherit a stately. Your days of frolicking are over. You have roofs to fix and baths to heat. What are you supposed to do with all those rooms? And, crucially, how are you going to make it pay? Because, contrary to what some assume, being lord of the manor isn't all footmen and fancy-dress parties. It's a lot of hard work, worrying about damp and drains, and finding increasingly innovative ways to support the estate. Henry Lytton Cobbold, master of Knebworth House, ruefully told *Tatler* last year that over £5m had been spent on a vast restoration plan in his time – 'simply designed to keep the house from falling down' – but another £3.6m was needed. 'The only way to solve the situation is to find a golden egg!'

There was a time when houses came with plenty of land, which generated money to pay for the upkeep. But farming is not nearly as lucrative as it once was, unless you're doing it on a really big scale. Look no further than the toils of Lord Cardigan and his estate. When times were tough in previous generations, someone sold off the majority of the prime Wiltshire land (nearly 44,500 acres of it) to keep the house, which is the worst thing you can do. Land will always make money, whereas a big leaky Grade I? Not so much. The acrimony, a major falling out with his heir, the trustees, and the eventual sale, last year, of Tottenham House, which had been in the family for 200 years.

But panic not. Help is at hand. In the shape of the Young Successors or, to give them their official name, the Next Generation Group of the Historic Houses Association. The Next Generation meet up once a year to attend seminars and lectures and to help each other by sharing their experiences of dedicating their lives to saving vast mountains of rubble standing. Take Viscount Raynham, chairman of the HHA Next Generation committee. He was only 32 when his grandfather, the 7th Marquess of Townshend, died in 2010 and he actively put him in charge of the 4,000-acre estate, bypassing his father. He had to buy out the rest of his family to secure ownership of the estate. 'That was very painful,' he says. 'But I got there.' He granted his father, the 8th Marquess, a 10-year lease to live in the house. When he moved in, he's got 10 years to live there, but he wants to, and on the 10th anniversary, he'll sell it. 'It may sound brutal, but running a large estate is a business, not a hobby. The next generation, whereby Lord Raynham rents the estate but his father lives there, will save the family millions in inheritance tax. 'It took a long time to negotiate,' says Raynham, who is also head of agricultural investment at Knight Frank. 'Having your father as a successor isn't always straightforward.'

This year's gathering of young heirs and heiresses took place over a weekend in March at Aynhoe Park, the Oxfordshire home of music producer James Perkins, 46. Perkins is a young successor, in that he didn't end up at Aynhoe through inheritance. He made a fortune from organising raves and has actually been allowed to live in his Grade I-listed 17th-century manor, which he bought in 2004.

And, importantly for this crowd, he knows how to make a stately work. He has spent thousands turning Aynhoe into a party venue, which he charges out for up to £30,000 per weekend. There's a disco-ready orangery, a games room and bar, not to mention a basement nightclub for the after-party. He also likes taxidermy: every room is perked up with a stuffed polar bear or giraffe.

In a curious twist, Aynhoe is actually the family seat of the weekend's organiser, William Cartwright-Hignett, 32. It was his ancestor, John Cartwright, who bought the estate in the early 17th century, and built the house in 1615. Cartwright-Hignett's grandfather and uncle were killed in a car crash, and in 1959 the family was forced to sell the house

to pay death duties. It was bought by the Country Houses Association, which ran it as a retirement home for members of the gentry before James got his hands on it. 'My family home is very lucky to have James as its owner,' says Cartwright-Hignett. 'No country house could hope for a better custodian.'

'It's the location that makes it work,' Perkins tells a packed room during a session titled: 'Making It Pay: Diversification for the "Modern" Country House'. 'We're only an hour from London or Birmingham, and minutes from the M40. So it's really easy to get here, but we're in the middle of the countryside. It wouldn't work as a party venue if we were in North Wales or hours from anywhere, and that's something to bear in mind if you're thinking of doing anything similar.'

It's for inspiration like this that people have travelled hundreds of miles. This is a Europe-wide organisation with some 1,500 members, some of whom have come this weekend from Belgium, Switzerland, France, Italy and Norway. They have paid £200 per head for outings to local country houses on Friday, lectures and seminars – followed by a black-tie ball – on Saturday, plus further outings on Sunday. Last year's event – the first ever – was in Lisbon, and next year they're off to Paris. They are a Euro crowd, ranging in age from late 20s to early 50s: the tweed is smart and shiny, the gilets are black and puffy. Many of them have never met before, but they all have one thing in common: back home, there's a monster eating up their income, and they want to know what to do about it.

Like the Frenchwoman who can't help interjecting during Perkins's talk about the importance of location. 'But my chateau is six hours from Paris!' she wails. 'What am I supposed to do? I can't move it!' Indeed not. But nobody here is pretending that being a successor is easy.

Earlier that day, Clarissa Vallat, an expert adviser on tax and heritage from Sotheby's, had stressed the importance of families discussing succession as early as possible. 'Talk about it. Be brave,' she counselled. 'The alternative can be so much worse. Nobody wants a dispute. Nobody wants it all to go on lawyers' fees.'

Cue laughter as she gave the floor to Patricia Sykes, a partner at the ancient family law firm Hunters, which has acted for some of Britain's grandest families. She recalled the days before the automatic tax exemption of spouses, when a woman who loved her

husband and her home could lose both in close succession. She advised those with an estate to choose carefully which child to leave it to. 'It's not necessarily the eldest,' she warned. 'Identify who loves the asset most.'

She told how one client had offered his estates in the North-East and Sussex to his 17-year-old son, but the son wasn't interested and turned them down. Later in life, the son regretted his decision. The moral of the story was to keep conversations about inheritance open, as a teenager may feel differently when he grows up. 'My response is, always, for God's sake, talk to each other.'

### STATELY STATISTICS\*

**1,600**  
The number of privately owned stately homes in Britain

**80%**  
Of those have been in the same family for over 100 years

**500**  
The number of country houses open to the public

**£66,000**  
The average amount spent per year on upkeep

**£130,000**  
The amount that they say they actually need to spend every year

**£1 MILLION**  
The annual cost of maintaining a mega-stately like Blenheim

**THE BIGGEST PRIVATELY OWNED ESTATE**  
Chatsworth, Derbyshire

**The smallest**  
Markenfield, North Yorkshire

\* Figures courtesy of the Historic Houses Association



BACK ROW, LUCY WILLIAMS, FIONA PRENTICE, LUCY HAWKES, MARIANNE EDWARDS, WILLIAM CARTWRIGHT-HIGNETT, JAMES PERKINS, SOPHIE TAYLOR, PAUL ROUS, SOPHIE EDMONDS, HANNAH CLARK, EDWARD SANGUINETTI, BRIDGET EVANS. FRONT ROW, JESSICA FULFORD DOBSON, JAMES DEL NEVO, NATALIE STONEHAM, VISCOUNT RAYNHAM, JACK HARVARD TAYLOR, JAMES HALDANE

Another tip she offered was to involve your heir in running the estate sooner rather than later. She told the story of the client who was loved by his estate workers, but whose son had never been involved. The day after his funeral, they turned their backs on the son, leaving him in an impossible situation.

One estate held up as a model of success is Goodwood in West Sussex, where tradition dictates that the next generation takes over when the son reaches 40. This is what happened with the current Earl of March and Kinrara, who was able to enjoy a relatively carefree youth before settling down to business. It also allows his father, the Duke of Richmond, to continue living at Goodwood but to enjoy old age without having to worry about it.

Perhaps the best point Sykes made was that making a fortune should not be a one-off occasion. 'Preferably, the next generation should go out and make a lot of money,' she said. 'That's what someone did a long time before you. It didn't all just come from nowhere. Every generation needs a fresh injection of money, otherwise you end up with an estate that has been nibbled away at.'

James Hervey-Bathurst, vice-president of the European Historic Houses Association, agrees. 'You have to have a job,' he says. 'Even the richest dukes have to make their estates work.' His own home, Eastnor Castle in Herefordshire, is a model of the diversified estate. Among the many

business ventures based in the park is a Land Rover off-road testing facility, and the house has been used as the set of several films. His top tip is that gardens make for better tourist traps than houses. 'Gardens are now big attractions,' he said. 'They change every season, so you get repeat returns. Whereas a house, after you've seen it once, you don't go back.'

It's a good point. But the most popular take-home message is this: that young successors can make a real and valuable contribution. 'We should be recognised for the jobs we create and for the taxes and VAT we pay,' says Hervey-Bathurst.

There are rounds of applause and head-nodding at this, and a sense that it's all worth it to keep the leaky roof over your head. They are fighters, not quitters, these people – a tiny and privileged elite determined to keep their palaces in order. And once the hard work of note-taking and listening is over, it is time to do what Aynhoe Park is built for – party. There is dancing and drinking and just a little bit of snogging.

The next day it's off to Oxford, to nurse hangovers with a tour of the Ashmolean Museum, and then home, back to the stateries of Europe. Personally, I'm already sleeping a lot sounder, safe in the knowledge that if anyone tries to dump a castle on me, I know who to call. □