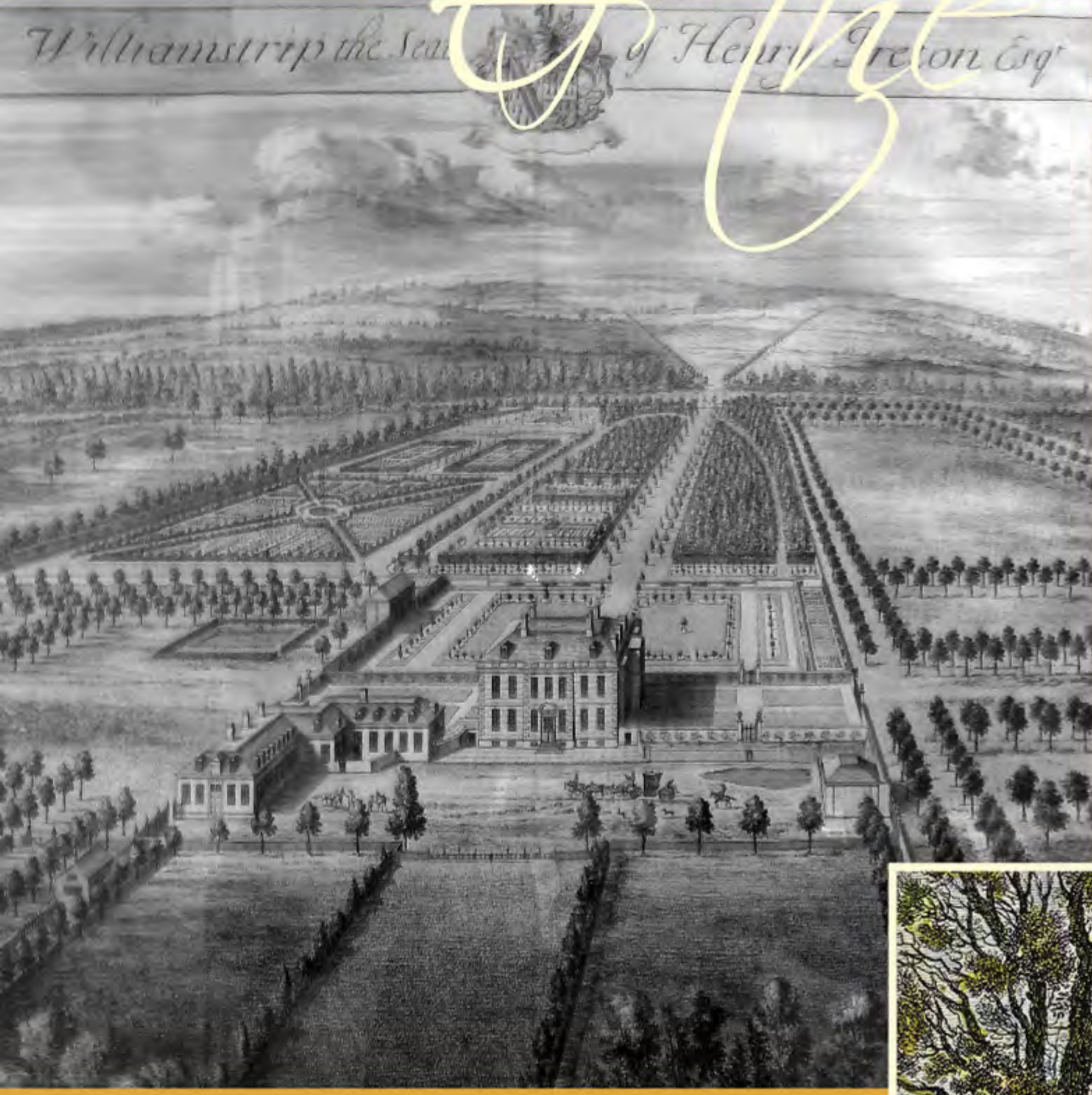


WILLIAMSTRIP PARK

The Hicks Beach family



Williamstrip, situated to the north east of Coln St Aldwyns, is thought to have derived its name from William Devereux who held land next to Hatherop in 1086. However, the first record of a manor house comes in the late 15th century when John Lingen was recorded as owning an estate there. In the early 17th century Williamstrip was bought by Henry Powle who built the original square house of two storeys on the site of the old manor.

J Arthur Gibbs commented in 'A Cotswold Village' (1898) that Williamstrip "has always seemed to us to be the beau-ideal of an English country home. A medium sized comfortable square house of the time of George I, surrounded by some splendid old trees, in a park not too large, a couple of miles or so of excellent trout fishing, very fair shooting and good hunting would seem to be a combination of sporting advantages that few country places enjoy".



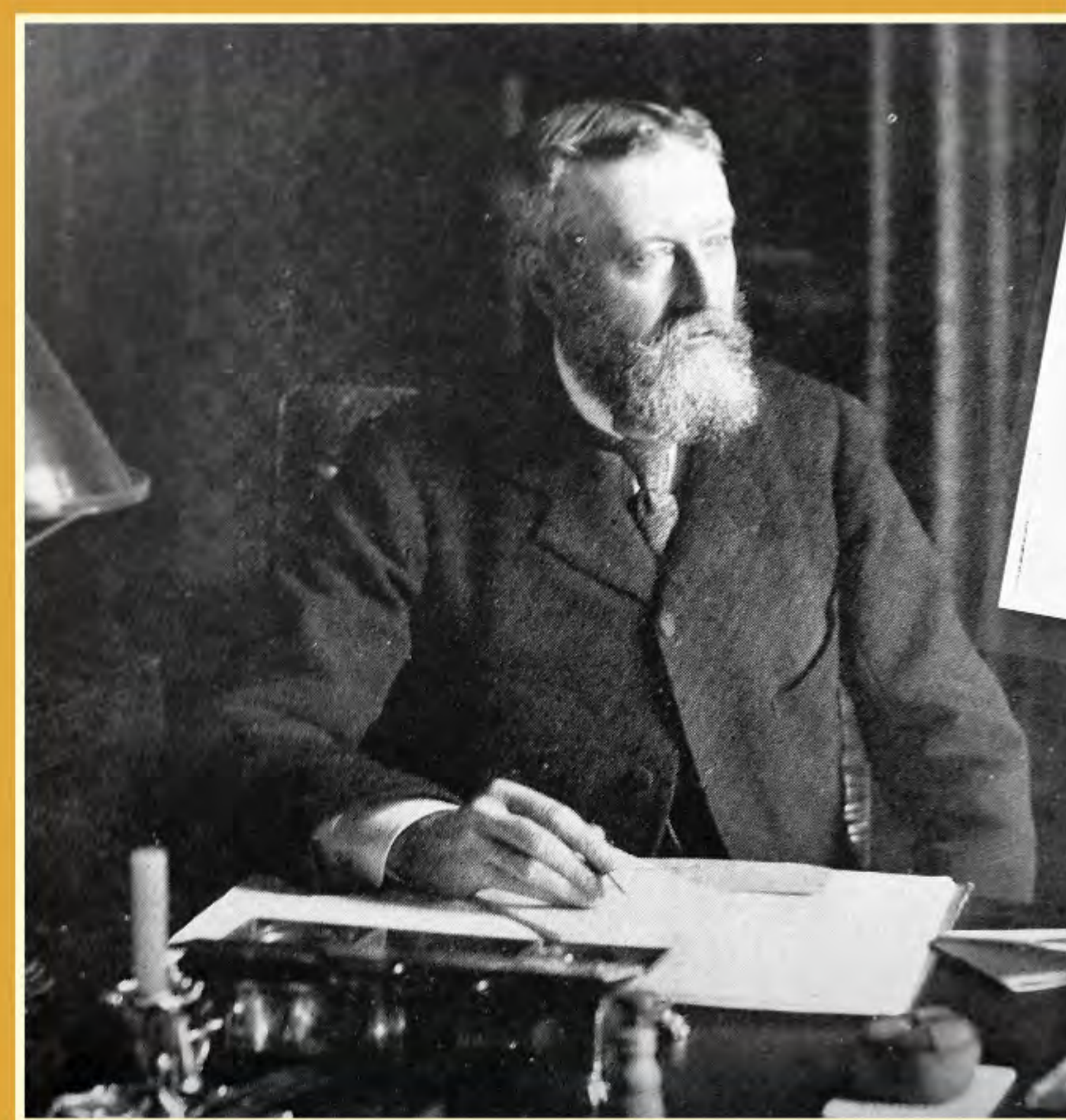
Henry Powle's grand-daughter, Catherine, married Henry Ireton who was reputed to be the son of Ireton the Regicide who fought under Cromwell in the Civil War. It was Catherine and Henry Ireton who transformed Williamstrip into a classical country house by adding seven bay fronts to the east and west wings, with projecting

three-bay centres. A new door was added on the west side and was henceforth regarded as the main entrance, which it still is today. A third storey was added in the 18th century by Samuel Blackwell. Blackwell died in 1785 and the estate was sold to Michael and Henrietta Hicks Beach.



The Hicks Beaches moved into Williamstrip Park in 1788 living in some state. In 1791, they engaged Sir John Soane to unify the appearance of the house which had suffered over the years from many piecemeal alterations. The Hicks Beaches entertained in style, not least because Michael had ambitions to be in politics, serving as MP for Cirencester from 1794-1818. The house was at the pinnacle of its aesthetic and social merit at this time and was a fitting home for an ambitious young couple.

In the late 19th century, the Hicks Beaches moved into Coln Manor in the village and Williamstrip was tenanted for the next 56 years.



Sir Michael Hicks Beach at his desk in Downing Street in 1902



Sir Michael Edward Hicks Beach, Michael and Henrietta's great-grandson, was to inherit Williamstrip Park in 1854 when he was 17 years old. He was to be the most famous Hicks Beach of them all. Nick-named 'Black Michael' he served as Chief Secretary to Ireland and then as Chancellor of the Exchequer twice from 1885-6 and 1895-1902. He was described as "a gruff but handsome figure, dutiful and austere, intimidating to those who did not know him (and occasionally to those who did), and with a high sense of public service, perhaps a little self-righteous, but with a genuine modesty and kindness."



Lady Lucy, 1886

There was a fine herd of deer in the park and venison was often donated by the Earl for village parties and dinners. However, in the severe winter of 1947 the snow piled up in the ha-has and the deer escaped.

In 1964 there were 20 people on the staff payroll for Williamstrip House alone, not including gardeners.

As Chancellor he was deemed have been neither very good nor very bad, but decent and reliable. He was made Viscount St Aldwyn in 1906 and Earl St Aldwyn in 1915, making his son Viscount Quenington. He and his wife, known as Lady Lucy, were held in much affection by the village.

Tragedy was to strike the family in 1916. The Earl's son, Viscount Quenington, had been evacuated from Gallipoli and then posted to Cairo where he was joined by his wife. She died of typhoid in March and one month later Quenington was killed in the battle of Karia. The Earl never knew that his son had died. In early April he had been taken ill in London and his fragile health meant that his wife did not dare to tell him the news. In less than two months, three members of the Hicks Beach family were dead. Michael John Hicks Beach was three years old when he became the 2nd Earl St Aldwyn on the death of his grandfather on 30th April 1916.



Michael, 1916



Viscount Quenington



The topography of Williamstrip and the surrounding parkland changed dramatically when Dutch Elm disease took rapid hold during the early to mid-1970s, leading to the death of all the English elms by the early 1980s.



For most of World War II, American officers were billeted at Williamstrip Park. Lady Margaret Watson, the tenant at the time, was made of old school stock and stayed on at Williamstrip in spite of the invasion of soldiers, keeping a full complement of staff including a butler, ladies maid, cook and at least two parlour maids.

In 1946 Earl St Aldwyn reclaimed Williamstrip and removed Soane's large north wing. The stone from these was used by him to build the Memorial Cottages in Coln St Aldwyns village.

Williamstrip Park was sold in 2008 and extensive renovations to the house and grounds have been carried out by the new owners.

