

THRINGS MEETS...

William Tyrwhitt-Drake, owner of the Bereleigh Estate



Rachel Brooks from Thrings speaks with William Tyrwhitt-Drake

SET within the stunning South Downs National Park, the 2,500-acre Bereleigh Estate has been home to the Tyrwhitt-Drake family for more than half a century. Owner William Tyrwhitt-Drake explains to Rachel Brooks from Thrings why the estate is the preferred location for so many lovers of country sports and leisure activities.

Bereleigh is well known for hosting shooting events. When did you learn to shoot?

I started shooting when I was 12. I was allowed out with my 410-gauge hammer gun on the shoot in Amersham with an old keeper who used to keep an eye on me. I went to the West London Shooting School while living at Amersham which was only a few miles up the road. I rebelled against sitting on an uncomfortable pony and going fox hunting, which is what my family probably wanted me to do.

What are the major challenges facing the estate?

Driven game shooting has never been more popular. There seems to be a growing number of individuals, groups

and businesses – including many from the City – who want to spend money on a day's shooting. This is great, but the challenge is meeting this demand. The game farmers are producing ten per cent more game to shoot every year as a result.



How has the business changed over the years?

Well, we have diversified by hosting special events. Last year's beer festival, for example, was a big success and on 30 June this year we have an Evening in the Garden with Jack Savoretti. We are always coming up with

new ideas, but the main part of what we do is still game shooting, farming and managing our properties. There are 20 houses on the estate, 11 of which are let. We're also aiming to maintain our corporate and charity clay days in the future.

What do you do when you're not on the estate?

The whole family plays golf, but most of them are better than me. I probably go racing about a dozen times a year, including trips to Goodwood, Ascot and Aintree for the Grand National. I used to have a couple of horses who ran in my colours (crimson with a black cap). They won five races in all - to see your horse first past the post is extraordinarily exciting. I can understand how people get the racing bug.

Is it true you're a descendent of Sir Francis Drake?

That's been suggested but it's actually not true. He was a pirate and at that time my ancestors were aristocratic gentlemen from Devon who had been well established for 200 years. But Sir Francis was godfather to my ancestor, Richard Drake, who was an equerry to the court of Queen Elizabeth in the late sixteenth century. This suggests they were very good friends during the whole Elizabethan era. In fact, Richard Drake hosted the Spanish Admiral and his crew, who had been captured by Sir Francis Drake during the Armada campaign, at his large property in Esher until the King of Spain got his cheque book out and paid the ransom, which we understand took three years.

Is this how your family came to own the famous 'Armada Portrait' of Elizabeth I which you sold to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich last year?

We don't really know how we got it, although it's likely to have come through Richard Drake. It might have belonged to Sir Francis who gave it to his godson - it certainly came from that era. But those family records are rather sketchy. Having moved from one part of the country to the other in the last 60 years, some of these things have been left behind.