

Thrings meets...

Esther Fernandez-Llorente of Pittleworth Manor Farm



Pittleworth Manor is a Grade II* listed house in Hampshire's Test Valley. Owner Esther Fernandez-Llorente talks to Rachel Brooks of Thrings about running the estate and her family's involvement with early aviation.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE ESTATE?

Apparently there's been a house here since the time of Edward the Confessor but this house is partly medieval and partly Queen Anne. What really makes it special are the Tudor murals that were found hidden under panelling in 1926 in what is now the dining room. One wall shows stylised pomegranates, the other a marvellously detailed depiction of the Dives and Lazarus story from the Bible. The house was part of the Hildon estate, which my grandfather, Sir Richard Fairey, bought to add to the Bossington estate after the Second World War. The estate was split in 2011 and we became Pittleworth Manor Farm.



SIR RICHARD FAIREY AS IN FAIREY AVIATION?

Yes. He got his start making model aeroplanes and founded the Fairey Aviation

Company in 1915 making planes for the Admiralty. The company was a major player in the aviation industry for the next forty years; it's probably best remembered for the Fairey Swordfish, the aeroplane that took on and crippled the German battleship Bismark in 1941, and the Fairey Delta 2, a model for Concorde which broke the world air speed record (over 1,000mph) in 1956 a few months before my grandfather died.

BUT YOUR GRANDFATHER'S ACHIEVEMENTS DIDN'T STOP THERE?

He was the head for the British Air Commission in Washington during the Second World War, buying aeroplanes which, of course, Britain was desperately short of then. It's a fascinating story and very much on my mind because his biography, *The Man Who Built the Swordfish*, is being published this month. It was written by Adrian Smith, a history professor at the University of Southampton, and with the Fairey Aviation Company being partly based at Hamble, there are lots of Hampshire connections. My grandfather said the Test Valley was 'the loveliest place on Earth'. As a family we must all agree on that because we don't seem to move far.

RUNNING THE ESTATE MUST KEEP YOU VERY BUSY?

We have tenanted properties, a herd of South Devon cattle, fishing, arable, renewables and woodland. My husband

Francisco and I work as a team, and it's not a nine-to-five role. It's everything from filling in cattle passports, to tax planning, to sorting out a tenant's central heating. We have three children under four so it's busy but it's such a privilege. I always knew this would be a wonderful environment for children to grow up in.

DID YOU ALWAYS INTEND TO MANAGE THE ESTATE?

I had to make a decision about the farm in my early twenties. It was put up or shut up and I've never been much good at the latter. It was always going to be a huge challenge, but I was determined to make a success of it. You have to think very long-term in landownership. You're never too young to think ahead.

LASTLY, I UNDERSTAND YOU WRITE A BLOG?

I got my PhD in Victorian literature from the University of Southampton and read history at Oxford. I love writing, and the blog (www.thecountryreader.co.uk) is effectively an outlet. Farming, children and managing an estate seemed good topics to write about. The next Archers? More like the Forsyte Saga with tractors! ♦

