

Danehill Parish Historical Society Aladdin at Sheffield Park

When I was researching about Fletching, Tony Turk kindly gave me an original programme from 1993 of a concert held at Oak Hall Manor, Fletching, of a Gilbert and Sullivan concert.

Oak Hall Manor as it is now known, was built by the third Earl of Sheffield as a riding school in 1891 on the foundations of an earlier building that stood on the site in 1771.

The theatricals for which Fletching were famed had been given annually by Lord Sheffield and Miss Attenborough and previously they had been held in the Fletching National School, but a more spacious building was essential for a successful interpretation of Aladdin.



Oak Hall, now the National Trust tearoom, home of good scones.

In January 1898, under the direction of Miss Attenborough, an enchanting performance of Aladdin was performed for the Earl's tenants, servants and schoolchildren. This extravaganza took place in the riding school which had been luxuriously fitted out as an up-to-date theatre. A gallery was added so that those watching at the rear of the room could view the lovely scenery etc. The gallery was also to accommodate elderly people whom the Earl thought might have a job to see downstairs in the Hall. Stalls were provided and the gallery was draped with crimson cloth and the walls were adorned with festoons of evergreens and hung with Chinese lanterns.

The evening performance was seen by about 300 spectators. Miss Attenborough who was the life and soul of the whole piece naturally assumed the leading character and her portrayal of Aladdin looked most charming.

Miss Attenborough's brother, Lieutenant Attenborough - displayed considerable ability in his character as Widow Twankey which caused much merriment and his songs were warmly received.

A children's ballet took place in the Sultan's Palace and the little ones were all differently attired in muslin, chiffon and silk, garlanded with roses and waving fairy wands of silver and gold.

Lord Sheffield presented to Miss Attenborough a splendid bouquet of orchids and lilies of the valley amid hearty cheers.

At the conclusion of the performance Lord Sheffield gave a dinner party at the house to a large number of friends.

The riding school was later to have another heyday when it was the setting for Melvyn Tarran's Gilbert and Sullivan Museum.

Jill Rolfe.