

# Murrills House is set to become the new permanent home for the International Institute of Marine Surveying

**We would like your help to secure this extraordinary opportunity to acquire an old manor boasting an illustrious history going back 500 years.**



In a strange turn of events, Murrills House in Portchester, UK, is set to become the new Head Quarters of the IIMS. But wait a minute I hear you say. IIMS is already headquartered in Murrills House isn't it? Yes we are.

IIMS has been renting these offices for the past decade. But with the end of the lease looming, IIMS entered into talks with our landlord late last year with a view to the Institute acquiring the freehold of the property and adjacent land. The outright purchase of suitable office accommodation rather than renting one was something that the membership voted in favour of at the 2018 AGM.

It became clear from our initial discussions that this was a deal that would work for both parties. IIMS diligently explored the financial opportunities of obtaining a business mortgage and assessed the likelihood of getting the deposit together, both of which reached a successful conclusion. If all progresses as expected, IIMS will conditionally exchange contracts early and will complete the purchase of Murrills House in Q1 2020.

Mike Schwarz, Chief Executive Officer, said, "I am delighted to be in a position to acquire Murrills for the long-term benefit of the Institute and its members. I believe it represents excellent value for money and underpins the very future of the organisation itself." He added, "This is a unique opportunity to purchase a building of significant local historical interest and knowing we will be helping to preserve it for future generations is indeed a privilege."

IIMS has been on a long term property search going back over the past 18 months. Nothing suitable to purchase in the area has been identified. So, the opportunity to acquire Murrills House is an exciting prospect and it meets the needs of the

business. Sure it has a few faults, but what building that is centruies old doesn't? There is some maintenance work to do, but one gets that with any property, no matter how old it is. It also works perfectly for the existing team and there is no cost to relocate the business and the upheaval this undoubtable would create.

IIMS would like your help. We are reaching out to the members and supporters of the Institute to invite you to make a financial donation towards the property purchase. Any financial donation will not simply go to the bottom line of the business and get lost. Rather, we plan to invest it in paying for the stamp duty on the purchase with any balance left being put towards some of the maintenance work we will need to do, which includes replacing some windows. All those who choose to make a donation (unless anonymously) will be recognised with a special, individual Founders Plaque for each person making a donation being displayed in the offices for ever more. And rest assured that any donation, no matter how small, will be very gratefully received. We have made it simple to do by setting up an online 'Just Giving' page, which can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/2VU4Qnr>.





Murrills House is a Grade II listed. A Grade II listed is defined as a UK building or structure that is "of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve it". The special listing status means that we have to work closely with the local planning authorities to ensure any maintenance we do is in keeping with the building and its age. For example, we now know that some of the glass in the windows is centuries old. We also know that the original chimney builder inscribed his initials in the mortar before it set centuries ago.

IIMS is proud that we are in a position to acquire Murrills House, a property so rich in history, and to become the next guardians of a building believed to have its origins in the 1500s. Murrills House is set on a half acre plot, has parkings for 20 cars and a large garden area. We are close to Portchester village and railway station and the nearest motorway junctions are handy too.

There are many old and original features remaining in the property since it has been transformed into office accommodation in more recent years from the 7 bedroom



manor house it once. There is a rather spooky basement too where sightings of a friendly lady ghost – the *Grey Lady* - have been made over the years. The original flint retaining wall is still well preserved in places and is little changed for more than a century and a half.

Since owning Murrills House became a possibiity, Mike Schwarz has been on something of a mission to find out as much as possible about its rich history. What you are about to read in the coming pages are shortened extracts from a much longer 12 page feature article that can be read in the June Report magazine at <https://bit.ly/2ztbJkE>.

In brief, what we do know is that Murrills House started life as a tenant farm, part of a much larger estate in the area. Its origins can be traced back centuries and the oldest part, (beneath the current Accounts Office), is believed to date from the 1500s when cattle routinely lived in the house. Murrills House owned in the region of 200 acres with land running down to the water. Looking around at the urban sprawl today, that seems almost impossible to imagine. Censues have been viewed going back to the early 1800s, not long after the census first began in the UK in 1801.

The Curtis family were prominent owners of the building from the late 1800s until around the second world war. At that time Murrills was clearly well known as the local manor house of the area. The Curtis family it seemed enjoyed an enviable and halcyon lifestyle.

In 1952, Associated British Combustion Ltd acquired the property as their head office and it became commercial premises. Their two most prestigious contracts, both with a Royal connection, were to provide and install the oil-fired heating system at Windsor Castle and the boilers on board the iconic H.M Royal Yacht "Britannia". How ironic that more than half a century on, IIMS should be set to pick up that nautical mantle once more.



# Our Life at Murrills - an extract from a book by Barbara Curtis, daughter of the owner of Murrills House from the late 1800s

My mother, Daisy, was a town girl from Portsmouth who had absolutely no idea about life in the country. At Murrills we had a cook, a house parlour maid and Kate Cousins. Aunt Dora would take these girls in sometimes having one for a cook and sometimes having one for sewing. Kate was born with what we called in those days 'curvature of the spine'. She had a kind of 'waist coat' that was about eighteen inches high and made of plaster of Paris. It was set quite firm and I recall that she kept it on tied with laces.

There was a boiler in the cellar at Murrills that ran two radiators in the winter - one in the front hall and one in the back hall. They were used to dry the washing on rainy days. Tom Marchant, the gardener, looked after it. Even though he lived ten minutes' walk away, he would come back every night at ten o'clock and go down the perilous steps outside the kitchen window to the cellar to stoke the boiler. It only worked when the cellar was not overflowing with water.

*Thomas Curtis at the door of his home in Portchester, Murrills, arched by yellow roses on the left and an old vine.*



*Barbara Curtis*

In the kitchen at Murrills we cooked on an Eagle Range. It was black and had two ovens on each side and a fire in the middle. There was a flap at the front of the fire that could be lowered to make toast. At the bottom of the grating there was a small platform where you could rest a saucepan.

Lighting at Murrills was by small paraffin lamps with handles, which were left every morning on a large tray on the copper in the scullery. Mother insisted on dealing with the lamps herself. The little lamps were refilled with paraffin and spread about the house on landings and passages and could be picked up to carry upstairs. In the dining room there was a large lamp on a pulley over the dining table. Another lamp was fixed to the wall by the dinner wagon over the large 'butlers' tray and a further lamp was fixed to the wall over the sideboard for carving. Father would carve the meat for us and send it out on plates for the maids.



*Left to right: Mother, Father, Kathleen (sister), Mrs Moore 1937. Father is smoking a clay pipe made by Leigh & Co of Portchester. He kept six clay pipes on the go. They would sit on the fender to cool off.*

Tom Marchant did everything - milked the cows, fed the hens and generally did the vegetables. We kept quite a lot of vegetable garden - of course everybody did then. All through the winter we would have lovely dirty vegetables, full of flavour, such as beetroot, carrots, potatoes and swedes, kept earthed up in a shed, fresh as the day they were dug. We grew masses of fruit that we had to pick in the summer.

*Odd-job man Tom Marchant and the Potato Crop*



There were seven bedrooms at Murrills, including father's dressing room, and just one bathroom with a lavatory. There was also a lavatory out in the yard (used for father's shooting friends), and another round the side of the pig yard that was just a bucket with a hole in the ground for the farm men. We were not supposed to use the outside lavatories. Two maids shared one bedroom where there was a cupboard with a hot water tank heated by the kitchen range.

We had a wonderful garden at Murrills and a tennis court too. There were two summerhouses, one of which was thatched and built in the flint wall. In the summer, tea would invariably be served outside, come rain or shine. The poor maid would stagger across the lawn with trays laden with crockery and cakes. Mother was rather renowned for her triple layer sponge cakes and the Mothers' Union came for a garden party every year because she was the Enrolling member.

# Thirty years of Murrills House history from 1952 – an extract from Margaret Bell's memoirs

Associated British Combustion Ltd (ABC) acquired Murrills House and moved in during 1952. ABC was at that time a small but flourishing company that began life in the late 1940's at nearby Meonstoke after the Second World War.



The Company Chairman and Managing Director, Commander R.B. Cooper MBE, BSc, ARCS, who was a retired naval officer, gathered around him a loyal, enthusiastic staff. My husband, Colin Bell, joined them in 1955 and stayed with them until 1983, rising through the ranks to become Technical Director. He thoroughly enjoyed working at Murrills House and loved the surroundings.

For a long time the gardens and tennis courts at Murrills House were proudly maintained in their original state by the gardener who had worked for the previous owner. Commander Cooper threw the house and gardens open for the Portchester Conservative Association to hold the annual garden party throughout the '50s and '60s.

The Transport Manager and Caretaker lived on site at Murrills Cottage. As the business developed a factory, a large drawing office, test rig and canteen were built on the site and the workforce rapidly grew in numbers as the business flourished.

The house also had a residential ghost - a grey lady - and there were some staff members who were not happy to be left on their own at the end of a day's work.

ABC had secured contracts with the admiralty, War Office, Foreign Office, Ministry of Supply, Central Electricity Generating Board, South of Scotland Generating Board, leading shipping companies and leading industrial companies. Their oil fuel burning products were well known nationally and internationally. They had agents in most European countries, Scandinavia, USA, Canada, Jamaica, Australia and Japan.

However, much closer to home they oil fired the heating system at St.Mary's Church Portchester. But without doubt, their two most prestigious contracts, both with a Royal connection, were the oil firing of the heating system at Windsor Castle and providing the boilers on board the iconic H.M Royal Yacht "Britannia".

In the early '70, Margaret Bell recounts that there was quite a local stir when the cashier drew money from the National Westminster Bank in Portchester for the wages of the task force working at Brunswick Wharf London and disappeared with the cash. A very ugly situation developed as the waiting workforce threatened to burn down the site hut and overturn the site caravan. The day was saved by the arrival of further funds - but the erring cashier was never traced, nor heard of ever again.

*- An extract from a document written by Margaret Bell*



# Millennium 'Blue Plaque' awarded to Murrills House Hampshire PR HQ

Reprinted from the Meon Valley News May 2005

## **The Portchester Society nominates 18th century Murrills House for top accolade.**

An 18th century former farmhouse in Portchester is sporting a new blue plaque commemorating its historical importance, thanks to funding from the Millennium "Awards for All" Project.

Murrills House in East Street, which has been the headquarters of Hampshire and Dorset-based PR and marketing agency Hare Carding Communications Group (HCCG) since 1982, was nominated for the accolade by The Portchester Society.

HCCG managing director Neil Fowler was presented with the plaque by John Towse, Chairman, Plaques Committee, of The Portchester Society.

"This is a lovely building that has clearly been cherished through the years," said Neil, "Although it has had to be adapted to meet commercial needs, it retains the elegant entrance and sweeping staircase through which countless generations have passed.

"It now buzzes with creative energy and houses an array of hi-tech equipment - a far cry from the gentle way of life to which it was accustomed in times gone by. We are very aware that we are the custodians of a very special piece of Portchester history." Records show that there had been a farm on the site for at least 500 years before the 1950s. The plaque states that documents from the 16th century show the site as the Manor of Morrels and part of the Southwick Priory Estate. Later it became known as Portchester Farm and was the home of the Curtis family from 1871 to 1951.



Now known as Murrills House, the stylish cream-painted listed building has a large walled garden unchanged for a century or more and is backed by the industrial units of the thriving Murrills Estate.

"We appreciate how lucky we are to work in such a charming building and we're very proud that its importance has been officially recognised in a way that encourages people to understand and appreciate local history."



So, would you like to  
help us secure this  
opportunity?

We have made it simple to do.  
To make your donation go to the 'Just  
Giving' page, which can be accessed at  
[https://www.justgiving.com/  
crowdfunding/iims](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/iims)

*Dedicated to excellence in marine surveying*

