

JAMES BOND IN BEDFORDSHIRE

LUTON - LUTON HOO



[Side terrace and gardens at Luton Hoo]

This country house on the outskirts of Luton is a Grade I listed building. Luton Hoo is not mentioned in the Domesday book, but a family called de Hoo occupied a manor house on the site for four centuries, until the death of Lord Thomas Hoo in 1455. Successive houses on the site seem to have changed hands several times until in 1762 the then owner, Francis Hearne, sold the estate for £94,700 to John Stuart, the 3rd Earl of Bute. Following an unhappy period as Prime Minister from 1762 to 1763, Bute decided to concentrate his energies on his Bedfordshire estate at Luton Hoo.

Stuart employed the neoclassical architect Robert Adam to design and build a magnificent house. However, this plan was never fully executed and much of the work was a remodelling of the older house. Dr. Samuel Johnson, who visited in 1781, is quoted as saying, ‘This is one of the places I do not regret coming to see ... in the house magnificence is not sacrificed to convenience, nor convenience to magnificence’. While Adam was working on the mansion the landscape gardener Capability Brown was enlarging and redesigning the park, some 1,200 acres. Brown dammed the River Lea to form two lakes, one of which is 60 acres in size. In turn Adam’s completed mansion was transformed by the architect Robert Smirke in around 1830, following the occupation of Stuart’s grandson, the 2nd Marquis of Bute, to its present form today, complete with a massive

portico. Luton Hoo is neither Gothic nor strictly Greek revival style, but an unusual example of a classical style for domestic use.

In 1843 a devastating fire occurred and much of the house and its contents were destroyed. The burnt shell was sold in 1848 to John Leigh, a Liverpool solicitor and property speculator. He rebuilt the house in the style and manner of Smirke, with his family living there until 1903, when the estate was sold to the diamond magnate, Sir Julius Wernher. (In 1863, during Leigh's residence, excavations on the estate uncovered nearly a thousand Roman coins from the third century AD.) Wernher had the interior remodelled by Charles Mewes and Arthur Davis, the architects of the Ritz Hotel in London. It was done in the *belle époque* style resulting in a magnificent backdrop for Wernher's acclaimed art collection. The marble-walled dining room was designed to display Beauvais tapestries, while the newly installed curved marble staircase surrounded Bergonzoli's statue *The Love of Angels*. At the centre of the house the massive Blue Hall displayed further tapestries, King Louis XV furniture, and Sèvres porcelain. Wernher's great art collection, equal to that of his neighbours in nearby Buckinghamshire, the Rothschilds, was later further enhanced by the marriage of Julius Wernher's son Harold Augustus Wernher to Anastasia Romanov, a member of the former Russian Imperial family, generally known as Lady Zia. She brought to the collection an incomparable assembly of renaissance enamels and Russian artefacts, including works by the Russian Imperial court jeweller Peter Carl Fabergé. For many years the collection and house were open to the public. However, many of the Fabergé items were stolen in the 1990s.

Following Lady Zia's death in 1977, the estate passed to her grandson Nicholas Harold Phillips, whose untimely death in 1991 caused its sale. The priceless collection is now on permanent display at Ranger's House in London. On 1st October 2007 the house entered a new era when it opened as a one hundred and forty-four bedroom luxury hotel, spa and golf course. Luton Hoo has appeared in many films including *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), *Wilde* (1997) and *Enigma* (2001). For the James Bond fan it has made two appearances. In *Never Say Never Again* it became Shrublands health farm, the outside being clearly recognisable as Bond arrives by car. More recently in 1999 the interior was filmed to double for Elektra King's residence in Baku in *The World Is Not Enough*. Although the staircase and hall are again clearly recognisable, the bedroom scenes were in fact a studio set.



MILLBROOK - MILLBROOK PROVING GROUND



[The hills of Montenegro are actually here at Millbrook near Luton]

Millbrook takes its name from the nearby village where, in the early 19th century, a flourishing community of mills nestled around a picturesque brook. By the late 1800s the population exceeded six hundred but with the last of the mills being demolished by 1940 it rapidly declined to around one hundred and forty inhabitants today.

In 1923, the General Motors Technical Committee, under the chairmanship of Alfred P. Sloan Jr, decided, following a rather less than satisfactory brake test on public roads, that a road test surface should be built for future testing of vehicles. As a result work started on the General Motors Proving Ground at Milford, Michigan the following year. By 1963 the site comprised level sections, hills of various gradients and a high-speed banked oval track some 4.5 miles in circumference.

Meanwhile over in Britain in the mid 1960s, Vauxhall and Bedford decided that, whilst the new and almost deserted M1 motorway close to Luton presented some very interesting testing opportunities, a better policy for future vehicle development was to learn from the American experience and build a dedicated proving ground. The site chosen was Millbrook, which was to replicate many of the most successful features at Milford.

Construction began in April 1968 with over two and a half million cubic yards of earth being moved to sculpt the necessary track features into the existing landscape. At the height of the earth-moving work over fifty machines were employed, with three and a half thousand tons of hand-laid granite blocks forming the almost mile-long Belgian Pavé circuit, while seventy-three thousand tons of aggregate and nine thousand tons of cement went into the five lane high-speed circuit. The circular steering pad required six thousand cubic yards of hardcore, one thousand three hundred tons of cement and six thousand tons of aggregate. In addition over two hundred thousand trees were planted, both conifers and indigenous deciduous varieties, helping nature to return to an area that for many years had been notably lacking in natural beauty.

Initially only Vauxhall cars, Bedford trucks, buses and military vehicles used the site, but in 1988 Millbrook Proving Ground Limited became a subsidiary of Group Lotus. This was not to last as in 1993 Millbrook was separated from Group Lotus by transferring its shares to GM Holdings UK Limited. The company continued to flourish as an independently managed business, focussing investment on increasingly high technology areas of vehicle design, such as crash mitigation, emissions control and component durability. The core track-based whole vehicle durability business was also supported with new facilities and steady, profitable growth ensued. Today Millbrook has a worldwide client base and is one of Europe's leading locations for the development and demonstration of every type of land vehicle, from motorcycles and passenger cars to heavy commercial, military and off-road vehicles. The custom-built facility provides virtually every test and validation needed in today's demanding programmes, complemented by a worldwide reputation for confidentiality, service and competitiveness. In addition Millbrook engineer, develop and build low-volume service vehicles, trial and evaluate vehicle capability, investigate in-service failures and provide specialist driver training.

The *Casino Royale* production crew (over one hundred and fifty persons) visited Millbrook for five nights of location work, filming the dramatic car chase sequence in which Bond has to swerve in order not to hit Vesper Lynd, who has been bound and laid in the middle of the road by Le Chiffre. As a result Bond's Aston Martin flips in mid-air and rolls over no less than seven-and-three-quarter turns, a stunt that was entered into the 2006 edition of the *Guinness World Records*.

In fact stunt co-ordinator Gary Powell used three cars for the sequence. The Aston Martin used was the DBS model (not yet available to the public) which has an engine capacity of 5935cc and a top speed of nearly two hundred miles an hour. It was designed to be midway between the DB9

James Bond in Bedfordshire

road car and DBR9 race car, and as a consequence has a deeper front spoiler, an extra-wide intake and a larger rear spoiler than the road car. These racing specifications meant that a standard ramp would not be sufficient to roll the car and as a result an air-powered cannon just behind the driver's seat had to be installed. This, when activated, pushes a metal cylinder into the road in order to flip the vehicle, and indeed if you look closely at the sequence you can see the cylinder on the underside as the car rolls. Adam Kirley was the person at the wheel for this spectacular stunt, which needed to be performed at eighty miles an hour.



[One of the Aston Martin DBS cars used for filming *Casino Royale*]

Please note that the Millbrook Proving Ground is a high security private commercial site not open to the public.



