

# Lavenham and the Gayer-Anderson Twins

## Robert and Thomas

Without the Gayer-Anderson twins, Lavenham would arguably be a far less prosperous town than it is today.

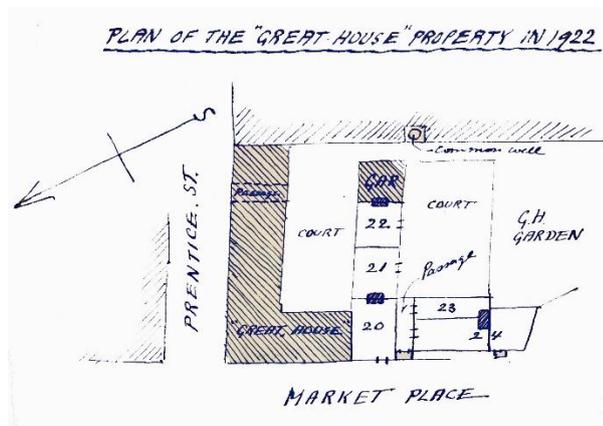
We don't know what made the Gayer-Anderson identical twins choose Lavenham in 1924 for the site of their first – and last – independent English home. There is no obvious reason for their choice: perhaps a chance recommendation from an acquaintance; possibly that the purchase of a house which also provided a small income – from the rent of six adjoining cottages – seemed a shrewd move?



The reasons behind the timing of their decision are clearer : each was embarking on a new stage of his career which would give them longer leave periods and, more significantly, they had decided the time had come to start a new generation of Gayer-Andersons and a child would need a home.

It would not be a conventional family home. Robert's son, John and his mother, Evelyn Wynne, lived in the Great House for eight years, with both father Robert and uncle just visiting. In 1932, the unusual family fell apart, John was sent off to boarding school and Evelyn left Lavenham.

During these year the twins restored the Great House, postponing major work on the adjoining cottages until Thomas retired from active service in 1929.



Gradually they disentangled the two buildings : first restoring The Great House as a comfortable family home; then reconstructing a medieval hall house from the six cottages and reconfiguring the gardens. The work was not totally completed until 1940.

By then the twins had become expert and devoted house restorers. Robert committed most of his energies from 1934 to the Beit el Kretliya, a 17<sup>th</sup> century house in Cairo, which stands today as his major memorial – the Gayer-Anderson Museum. Thomas bought, restored and rented out several cottages in Lavenham, personally working on them right through until he was in his seventies.

But the twins' impact on Lavenham was much wider. As early as 1931 TG was promoting the long-term importance of the look of the town, predicting that tourism would become the major employer. They were both influential in many Lavenham groupings and founder members of the Preservation Committee which raised the money to save the Guildhall and pass it to the National Trust.

Imagine Lavenham without them – and the many others who preserved our past.