

# SOCIETY OUTINGS 2016

## Organised and Reported by Society Members

### Moor Park Mansion - 19 May, 16 June

Society members made two visits to the Mansion, where on both occasions they assembled in the bright and airy orangery for coffee/tea. Both visits followed a similar format but, for the May visit, the Arnhem room was in use and could not be explored.

Before going inside, our NADFAS guides spent time in front of the building explaining a little of the history and structure of the building. The original building was built of brick for the Duchess of Buccleuch around 1678. In the 1720s, it was purchased by Benjamin Styles, a merchant who had made a fortune in the South Sea Bubble, and underwent a major transformation to the stone faced building we see today. It was even grander than we see now as it had two symmetrical wings on either side. Part of the left hand wing still survives but the right hand wing has completely disappeared. Although pictures exist showing the right hand wing, the failure to find foundations led to doubts as to whether it had ever been built. However a recently found description of the Mansion in a contemporary letter clearly describes a right hand wing.

We entered the Mansion through a magnificent galleried entrance hall, one of the best examples of a galleried hall in the country. Decorating the walls are four enormous paintings illustrating the story of Jupiter and Io, a story not known to many today, but which would be familiar to the educated classes of the eighteenth century. Above we could see a domed roof, but on close examination, one could see it was actually a painting with a very clever representation of perspective. The paintings decorating the gallery upstairs were of lower quality and the misspellings and incorrect punctuation clearly indicated the poor level of literacy of the artists.

A doorway from the main hall led to the Thornhill room. It is thought that this room remains much as it was from the original house when it would have been the room in which the Duchess of Buccleuch entertained guests. The Arnhem room above it was the Duchess's room and it is surmised that a hidden staircase would have joined the two.

During the war, the Mansion had been commissioned by army, and mock-ups of the terrain of the Arnhem landings had been created in this room. Unfortunately these mock-ups used so much sand that the weight had caused the floor to sag and damage the beautiful painted ceiling of the Thornhill room below, which has since been carefully restored.

Paintings on the walls of the Thornhill room represented the four seasons.

The entrance to the original brick house was on the left hand side of the building where the remodelled staircase is found. When the frescos were recently removed from the walls of the staircase the original brickwork was exposed together with evidence of the alterations to the original building.

To the left of the main hall is the main dining room. This has a spectacular ceiling and three splendid chandeliers. It is in a totally different style from the rest of the building. Not surprisingly, it is a popular venue for weddings and other celebratory meals.

After the tour finished we were free to wander around outside. Some members visited the stables. Sadly all the horses were requisitioned during the First World War and none returned.

Our visit revealed to us a splendid example of a stately home, right on our doorstep. Discoveries continue to be made at the Mansion. Just recently an ice house was found, but it is not yet accessible to visitors. So maybe a return visit will show us more.

A short history of the Mansion, Moor Park can be found on page 13 of the March 1973 *RNELHS Bulletin*. The 1973 Bulletin can be retrieved for perusal from the Journals section of our website.

Robert Trease

### Mottisfont - 18 June

We left Ruislip at 9am by coach, bound for the National Trust property of Mottisfont near Romsey, Hampshire. Our arrival at 11am gave us plenty of time to explore the house and grounds. There were free walks and talks about the property, and we enjoyed the crystal clear stream meandering through the grounds with its quota of swans, ducks etc.

Mottisfont began as a medieval priory, with a few remains still to be seen today. It later became an 18th century home, and later still, in the 1930s became a 'dream of creativity'. Artists came there to relax and create works, some of which are still to be seen in the historic rooms. The National Trust continues these artistic traditions with major exhibitions in the top floor gallery. This summer there has been a Beatrix Potter exhibition, with the house continuing to be open during the winter months.

Mottisfont takes pride in 'housing' the National Collection of Old-fashioned Roses (usually flowering in June) which is much appreciated by visitors from

far and wide. In addition to the spectacular rose gardens, there is plenty to appreciate in the grounds, such as carpets of spring bulbs, rich autumn leaves, and a colourful winter garden. It is possible to explore the wider estate on foot or by bicycle. Dogs are permitted on short leads in the gardens and grounds.

We left for home at 4.30pm with our various purchases and mementos, and our route took us via lovely Hampshire countryside and a former Roman road, which made an interesting finish to our day out.

Anne Lamb

### **Brentham Garden Suburb - 3 August**

It was a beautiful day as we individually made our way to the Brentham Club in the Ealing suburb where we were greeted in the charming Arts and Crafts style room. After refreshments, our two tour guides introduced themselves and gave us some background to the area.

The suburb was the brainchild of Henry Harvey Vivian. He was a Victorian Idealist, a Liberal MP, and a strong believer in the co-operative movement. In 1901 he became chairman of Ealing Tenants Ltd., the first ever co-partnership society. The vision was to create a pleasing environment for workers that avoided the miserable cramped estates of the time. The Brentham Institute built in 1911, now the Brentham Club building, was to be the centre for the cultural and sporting life of the estate. It catered for sporting facilities such as football, cricket, bowls, tennis, billiards and included a library and associated intellectual activities such as a debating society. Most of the estate was built before 1915. Vivian died in 1930 but by then enthusiasm for co-partnership was waning and houses were being sold to private purchasers. Alcohol did not feature in the Institute until 1936. To preserve the character of the estate the normal permitted development planning laws are not applied to the estate - all development has to be in keeping with the estate. Because the houses were originally designed for the working class, they tended to be quite small. Some measure of Vivian's success in creating a pleasant environment is that despite their small size, to use estate agent's spiel, property on the estate is much sought after today and houses hold their price well.

After the introductory talk we assembled outside in a small open space which had a plaque dedicated to Vivian containing a statement that succinctly summarised his ideals - 'I want each of us to say not that this house is mine but this estate is ours'.

We then began our guided tour of the estate. It was apparent that there were several quite distinctive styles of house matching the different periods of development, but all retaining an Arts and Crafts style look. Although many houses were in terraces, the underlying philosophy of avoiding dismal regimented rows of identical boxes was avoided by breaking up the rows with differing roof lines and making the houses different whilst maintaining symmetry. At road junctions, side walls were rigorously avoided by building the houses at the end of each road at an angle to the junction so that they looked across the junction to the house at the end of the opposite road. In some cases the external attractiveness of the building was carried to such an extreme that it was in conflict with internal practicality. For example, a house may have had walls that were not at ninety degree angles so whilst it looked really unusual and interesting, the occupier may have suffered problems in fitting in normally shaped furniture.

The only building that was not really in keeping with the estate ideals was the church. It was an interesting building in itself but it was of the wrong architectural style and dimensions. It was constructed in 1916 after most of the estate had been built.

Because the houses are generally small, owners were allowed to extend but extensions had to be in keeping. For example, if one owner built a dormer window in a roof then their neighbour would, when they wanted to build in their roof, be obliged to construct a matching dormer window. Unfortunately these more severe planning rules did not come into force until after some undesirable changes had been implemented. For example, one house we saw had ugly grey aluminium windows that failed to harmonise with their neighbouring houses and which would no longer be allowed.

To retain the historic appeal, street name signs that had been truncated during the Second World War, to confuse alien paratroopers, had been left with their names truncated.

After we finished the tour we returned to the Brentham Club where we could explore the building including the billiards room and the tower, which gave a good view over the area. Also an enjoyable buffet lunch awaited us there which nicely rounded off what had proved to be a most enjoyable and informative outing.

Robert Trease