

EXCURSIONS IN 2018

Smithills Hall, Bolton and Hoghton Tower, Preston, 18 April 2018

After a prolonged period of cold, wet weather, we were extremely fortunate to have an unseasonably warm day for our first full-day excursion of 2018 attended by 26 members and one visitor. We were welcomed on arrival at **Smithills Hall** by Mrs Christine Collins, Historic Halls' Manager from Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council, who introduced our two volunteer guides from the '*Friends of Smithills Hall*' and divided us into two groups.

We learned that Smithills Hall is a Grade 1 Listed Building standing in a 2,200 acre woodland estate on the edge of the West Pennine moors and is one of the oldest and best preserved timber-framed manor houses in the north-west of England. Originally constructed as a medieval hall house in 1335 by William de Radcliffe, the Hall was extended by his great-grandson, Ralph III, in c.1460 who added a Bower at ground floor level with a Solar above at the east end of the Hall to provide privacy for the family. Sir Ralph's only child Johanna married Ralph Barton and the Hall passed to her cousin, Ralph Radcliffe of Tingrave. Ralph Radcliffe died in 1485 leaving the estate to his daughter Cecily who married Johanna's son, John Barton. Their first son, Andrew, was born in 1498 and inherited the Hall. Andrew built the long, east wing comprising the Withdrawing Room and the Chapel in the first quarter of the sixteenth century and his son, Robert, re-built the Great Hall in stone, and the West cross wing in c.1579. In 1622 Grace Barton married the Honourable Henry Belasyse who pre-deceased her and when Grace died in 1652, that brought an end to 317 years of Radcliffe and Barton family association with the Hall. In 1801 father and son, Richard and Peter Ainsworth, purchased Smithills Hall. The Chapel was badly damaged in 1856 by fire and rebuilt within two years. The west wing was remodelled in 1870 by George Devey, a leading architect of the time. In 1936 the Hall was sold to Bolton Corporation for £70,600. Over the last 80 years, the (now) Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council has restored the Great Hall and East Wing, refurbished the Chapel, and more recently the West Wing, and has carried out external repairs and renovation.

The interior of the Hall was a pleasure to experience. The Great Hall comprises four bays with timber collar trusses, one arch-braced with upper king posts; cusped wind braces, and a spere truss at the west end. There are octagonal timber supporting posts with crown capitals and quatrefoil panelling to the spere truss, and a cross passage at the west end of the Great Hall. The Withdrawing Room has deep moulded sixteenth-century timber ceiling beams with infill panels, and the walls are lined with carved oak linenfold panelling from the same period, which reputedly took a Flemish craftsman seven years to complete. The panelling portrays many carved portraits of the Barton family. Most notable is a rebus in three panels: the top and bottom panels respectively depict Andrew Barton's initials 'A' and 'B', and the middle panel has a carved image of a bar crossing a tun (a barrel) representing a pun on his surname – Barton! The first-floor Solar contains two enormous late fifteenth-century oak roof trusses, each carved out of one piece of timber that represent the transition between a crown post supporting a collar purlin and a king post truss supporting a ridge purlin. Off the Solar is an ante-chamber known as the 'dead room' where deceased members of the family were said to have been laid out! We also saw furniture from the period (but not originally from Smithills Hall) such as a 1677 elaborately carved Marriage Chest, a carved Mirror and frame of 1694, a Bible Box dated 1607 and a Tester Bed among many other interesting pieces. The top five stained-glass window panels in the east wall of the Chapel are original and survived the fire in 1856. We are very grateful to Christine Collins for making the arrangements for us to visit the Hall, and to the '*Friends of Smithills Hall*' for providing such excellent guided tours.

After Smithills Hall we departed for **Hoghton Tower** where we were met by our two guides and split into two groups. Hoghton Tower is a large manor house with the appearance of a small castle built on top of a 130 metre (425 feet) high escarpment with splendid views of Lancashire, the Lake District and Snowdonia. The name – de Hoghton – stems from the Saxon word 'Hocton' meaning high wooded hill. The estate is entered through a fortified gatehouse and the house is approached by a steadily rising half-mile long driveway. The de Hoghton family are descended from Harvey de Walter, one of the companions to William the Conqueror, and through the female line from Lady Godiva of Coventry, wife of Leofric, Earl of Mercia. The Right Worshipful Thomas Hoghton built the present Elizabethan house between 1559 and 1580, replacing an earlier house on or near the same site. The house was damaged during the Civil War in 1642

and subsequently became derelict but was rebuilt and extended between 1862 and 1901 by Paley and Austin. The house is Grade I Listed, as is the Great Barn, which is dated 1692.

The guided tour of the house started (for the group I was in) with a visit to the basement and the old Well House where we saw the 37-metre deep (120 feet) early Tudor well with the huge wooden wheel and pumping mechanism which is still working. The dark and dank underground passages provide links to all parts of the Inner Courtyard and the Muniments Room. We visited the Guinea Room which was the former estate accounts room depicted by golden guineas painted on the four corners of each wall panel. The Buckingham Room, named after the Duke who, as First Minister, accompanied King James I on his three-day visit to Hoghton Tower in 1617 was next. The seventeenth-century oak wall panelling and the Hepplethwaite four-poster bed were very interesting to see as was the ante-room, formerly used as a toilet. The State Bedroom is a very large room containing the State Bed made in Salmsbury in c. 1560–5. This led us to the Oratory and the Ball Room with fine and decorative late Victorian doors and panelling by Gillows of Lancaster. The King's Ante-Chamber at the top of the King's staircase took us to the last room at the top of the house reputed to be the King's Bedchamber and from there downstairs to the King's Hall and Chapel, where the floors are covered in black and white marble squares with George V and Queen Mary's Royal Coat of Arms to commemorate their visit in 1913. We finally passed into the large Banqueting Hall, the principal room of the Inner Courtyard, with its original decorated ceiling and vast array of windows said to contain 4,000 panes of Flemish stained glass. There is a Minstrels' Gallery, Buttery hatch and an upper chamber window looking down from the ladies' Withdrawing Room. It was in the Banqueting Hall in 1617 that the first baronet, Sir Richard Hoghton, entertained King James I who knighted the loin of beef 'Sir Loin' – beef was a very scarce and new commodity which at that time was only fit for a king! Our final visit was to the former north bedroom housing an amazing collection of dolls' houses.

Hoghton Tower is a fascinating journey through English history from the need for secrecy during the Catholic period, through the turbulent Royalist period in Jacobean times, the Protestant and Parliamentary period during the long eighteenth century through to the modern era. We are most grateful to the Hoghton Tower Preservation Trust who provided the guides for a very interesting and enjoyable tour. As we were embarking on the coach, Sir Bernard de Hoghton came over to us and asked if we had had an agreeable visit, which was a splendid finale to our day.

Michael Haslam

Tunstall Church, 7 July 2018, led by Mike Winstanley

It was a hot summer afternoon when 23 members of the Society arrived at St John the Baptist Church on Church Lane in Tunstall. It is a small church with extensive grounds looking out to fields, woods and hills. It was a contemplative scene befitting St Joseph's House of Prayer '...a quite place for prayer and reflection...' that has been established in the neighboring building, once the village school.

A church on this site was mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086) and, until the Lancaster to Richmond turnpike road was built (c.1751) and the Sedbergh turnpike to Kirkby Lonsdale, the site of the church was near a crossroads of routes to the surrounding hamlets. Later developments in Tunstall village have gravitated towards what is now the A683 road between Lancaster and Kirkby Lonsdale.

The present church – it is Grade 1 listed – is at its core a fifteenth-century building (perhaps 1415) that incorporates some fine, late-medieval windows in the south aisle. The 1907 restoration by Paley and Austin replaced the roof, removed the plaster from the interior walls, added new pews and the screen and provided a new vestry in the north-east corner.

The interior of the church is full of fascinating features. The best known today is the large painting of the Lamentation of Christ, which featured in the BBC's *Fake or Fortune* programme. Their question was 'who painted it?' After cleaning, repair and much research, the painting has been attributed to Francesco Montemezzano, a sixteenth-century Italian painter of sacred subjects, from the school of Veronese. The painting now hangs on a wall near the south porch but was formerly by the altar, below the east window. The question of who brought it to this north Lancashire church is less clear cut but it probably arrived here in the early nineteenth century, almost certainly given by Richard Toulmin North, the church's patron, who also undertook extensive improvements to the church and bought the stained glass.

Several other windows are also notable: Jane Gray's work (1979) in the south aisle is rich in colour and symbolism; the west lancet windows (c.1810) display purple, English painted glass perhaps made by Jacob Wright of Leeds and showing St John the Baptist and St George; the east window contains fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European Renaissance glass now the subject of research by Mike Winstanley as to its origins and themes. There are plaques on the walls commemorating local family members from Burrow Hall and Thurland Castle and in the chapel there are a piscina, an effigy of a knight and, near these, an ancient parish chest. In the north aisle is a stone, perhaps from the Burrow area, that has part of a Latin inscription to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and to his daughter Hygieia, the goddess of cleanliness and sanitation. There are bronze busts of St John and St Michael at the east end sculpted by Josephina de Vasconcellos in 1972.

The church is regularly open to the public and is well worth a visit. The Society extends its warmest thanks to the churchwarden, Sue Hunter, who hosted our visit and provided excellent tea and scones, and to Mike Winstanley for leading the tour of the church.

Gordon Clark

Excursion to Wreay and Solway Aviation Museum on 29 September 2018

Our two destinations in the Carlisle area could not be more different – an early Victorian church and an aviation museum. Yet, they both delighted and enthralled the 26 members of the Society who came on the excursion on 29 September 2018. Both sites are outstanding.

Wreay is a hamlet just south of Carlisle that is noted for its church. Built in 1840–2 under the direction of local landowner Sarah Losh, it is one of the most remarkable churches in the UK despite its small size. Simon Jenkins called the church somewhere that 'the Arts and Crafts Movement took half a century to catch up with'. Round-headed arches and windows recall the Romanesque style. The prominent apse is wonderfully un-British. The stone and wood carvings – created by local masons and by Losh herself – are generous in quantity and symbolism. Arrows, pinecones, plants, fruit, birds and animals (real and fantastical) adorn the inside and the exterior. The styles in the church are unique, eclectic, delightful and drawn from other churches across Europe where Sarah Losh had travelled. Its Grade II* listing is well deserved. Do visit Wreay Church, the Heritage Centre and this lovely hamlet if you can: you will not be disappointed.

The group then moved on to Solway Aviation Museum, which is between Carlisle and Brampton on the A689. Formerly an RAF base in World War II, it has recently been taken over by the Stobart Group, renamed Carlisle Lake District Airport and it is intended that it will open early in 2019 for freight and passenger operations. On the north side of the airport the Solway Aviation Museum – wholly run by volunteers – has steadily developed the best collection of aviation materials in North West England. The Avro Vulcan is the star attraction along with a Canberra and six other planes outside. There is a restoration workshop where planes are revived; and a main museum containing a huge range of flying-related materials – engines, helmets, uniforms, radio and navigation equipment, photographs, guns, ammunition and ejector seats. A section of the museum is devoted to the history of nearby Spadeadam where the UK's post-war developments in rocketry were tested. There is currently an exhibition commemorating 100 years of the RAF. This friendly museum is a must for all those interested in flying; others may become converts to aviation history.

We would like to thank Mike Winstanley for suggesting the visit to Wreay and Stephanie Lawton and Lynn Wilman for organising the tour of the Solway Aviation Museum.

Gordon Clark