

Mannington Hall Excursion Wednesday 16th September 2015

Mannington Hall is about 20 miles north of Norwich, signposted near Saxthorpe on the B1149 towards Holt on the way to Matlask. On a rather wet Wednesday afternoon, 15 NNAS members under the leadership of Alistair Graham Kerr, were given a guided tour of the Hall by Lady Walpole.

This 15th century moated house is rectangular in shape, roughly 80 feet x 40 feet, with walls of alternating courses of knapped and iron-stained flint with ashlar dressings and pieces of red brick. The main entrance to the three-storey Hall is on the west elevation, reached via a small wooden drawbridge with a wrought Iron Balustrade either side. This frontage presents a rather muddled appearance with a Norfolk pantile roof, topped with crenulations or battlements beneath which are gargoyle grotesques. The roof has Elizabethan or Jacobean chimneys from another property. These were put up mid-nineteenth century along with some yellow brick chimneys from the Costessey brickworks. The west front has a number of windows of different shapes and sizes most with mullions and revels carved from local carrstone, including a large four-section window where the original entrance would have been. These features clearly demonstrate that many changes have taken place over the centuries. At the southern end of the house there are two polygonal angled towers; the south west is larger than the south east corner which contains a staircase linking the three storeys. The eastern elevation incorporates the main body of the hall via a link building and running north there is a range of two-storey brick and flint domestic and utility buildings which border a courtyard. The north elevation faces this courtyard which is accessed via a Grade II listed bridge. Several walls and large hedges border the lawns with their statues, gravel gardens and roses



Western entrance to the Hall with iron railing bridge going over the moat



The southern end of the Hall with towers.



The John Brend bell 1654

On the left of the entrance is a Guardhouse and a walled garden in which sits a large green-blue church bell made by John Brend in 1654. At the corner is a seventeenth century Venetian lead cistern. Terracota and stone plaques on the front west wall bearing the Fastoff arms, are said to have come from the old house at Blickling. The inscription written over the door is 'Morituro satis' roughly meaning "*This house is sufficient for one who has not long to live*". Lady Walpole explained that the latin inscriptions either side of the present entrance are very uncomplimentary to women and were put there by the 4th Earl of Orford who was not only an eccentric but a misogynist.

On one side:

'Trust your bark to the winds, do not trust your heart to girls. For the wave is safer than a woman's faith. There is no good woman, and if one attains to any good I know not how an ill-made thing become good'

On the other side:

'A tigress is worse than a snake, What is worse than a tigress? A Demon. What is worse than a demon? A woman. What is worse than a woman? Nothing is worse than a woman',

We entered through the main door into a narrow screens passage or hallway having wood panelling with acorn frieze to the left and a more modern string wooden staircase in front going up to the two floors above. This passage probably led to the kitchen and other service buildings at the rear of the house. To the left the north wing contains two small rooms (previously the buttery and pantry with private chambers above) known as the little parlours one of which was used for tea drinking in the 18th century. It has a fireplace lined with Dutch tiles and has 3 coats of arms: one effaced, one of the Ironmongers company, the other a merchant's mark.

Turning immediately right one enters what was the great hall, although you would not think it considering the present small size, not much larger than an ordinary living room. The great hall traversed from the west back to the east wall but opinions differ about whether it opened up right to the roof with a galleried passage at first floor level running along the east wall, or was open just or two storeys with a ceiling and rooms above. Outlines of windows still visible on the west front support the latter assessment. It is thought that the first floor was added in the 16th century leaving the Hall as the main ground floor room with its present ceiling height. A huge beam runs west-east across the centre of the white ceiling, ending directly above the large fire-place seemingly blocking the chimney flue. The fireplace is lined with decorative Dutch tiles and has three carved figure-head brackets in wood panelling above. The walls are covered with dark oak wood panelling purchased from the Bacon Family at Erlingham. These panels end about a foot from the ceiling with a top frieze of ornately carved animal figures. The room contains several pieces of old furniture (including an elegant table which looks like it might have been a cover for a font), numerous oil paintings of previous owners, water colour pictures and photos of the buildings plus ornaments.

Lady Walpole gave us a short history of the Hall and its owners starting in 1460 when built by William Lumner whose descendants sold it in 1585 to the Potts, a well-established Manninton Family [the history of the Manor and saga of the Potts ownership is thoroughly documented in '*See You In Court The Potts Family of Mannington Norfolk 1584-1737*' by William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis 2009]. She pointed out a small painting of John Potts (1592-1673) on the right-hand wall plus a much larger painting of Horatio Walpole and one of his elder brother Robert, 1st Earl of Orford, which [hang on the left-hand side wall panelling](#). There is also a half-length portrait of Dorothy, Lady Townshend, sister of Sir Robert. Water-colour pictures of the Hall on a table show that by the 1830s most of the service rooms had been demolished leaving just the kitchen, larder and scullery. Another Horatio, the 4th Earl of Orford inherited in 1858 and

came to live at Mannington Hall which he thought would make a better family home than the grand and formal house at Wolterton. His interest in antiquity and in gothic architecture led him to try and recreate a medieval Hall so he added lots of architectural features from other Walpole properties, altered rooms and windows, chimneys, etc, added the wood panelling and antique furniture. which accounts for much of the strange exterior view and interior layout. The house and estate passed to the 5th and last Earl of Orford who lived at Mannington from 1895 until 1905. In 1931 the estates were left to Robert Walpole the 7th Baron In 1952 the Hall was designated a Grade 1 listed building and since 1969 there has been a program of re-organisation, conservation and research into the history of the Hall and park.

On with the tour and into the next room, the Great Parlour, which isn't much larger than the hall but more modern with comfortable armchairs and a lighter décor. The heraldic stained glass windows contain coats of arms of four heiresses married by different Earls. The doors are of solid American walnut taken from Wolterton Hall, and to their left are two small Japanese cupboards. The large fireplace has a mantelpiece carved with the arms of Lumner, again lined with Dutch tiles with two valuable copies of Chinese vases in the fireplace and a brass of a cat pinching some buns. A painting of Walpole hangs over the fireplace. There is a table with a glass top, containing many curious snuff-boxes, and family relics. On the far right south wall is a display case containing old crockery. Next to it hangs a full length portrait of the Ambassador Horace Walpole which was part of a much larger family picture. This parlour was once the Library. A door in the right hand corner of the turret hides the remains of the extensive library most of which was sold at auction in the nineteenth century. Lady Walpole mentioned the story of the ghost seen by Dr. Augustus Jessop when he was working in the Library on 10th October 1879 – an apparition of a large man with red-brown hair and dressed in ecclesiastical habit.

At the far right end is a passageway with old family pictures and sketches faded with age on the left side. Here is a narrow winding staircase which we climbed up into the main bedroom, the so called Grey Chamber. Since the house is still lived in this room contained modern bed, carpets, ornaments, pictures and small tapestries, plus glazed pottery displayed beneath the west window, and an on-suite bathroom. However, the bed's large headboard is an old, ornately carved wooden panel which Lady Walpole said came from Twaite's Hall although possibly had its origin in the Bishop's Parlour. We exited through a door in the south corner to the left of the bed and came out into a landing full of family pictures, pottery, maps and books. This took us past a staircase going up onto the third story with the garret rooms (now family bedrooms and bathrooms) which we didn't visit. We proceeded down to the landing or gallery above the entrance – one can look straight down over the rail onto the floor below – and on our right was a fine old tapestry with elaborate designs, the greater part of which was given by Cardinal Fleury to the Ambassador Walpole (much of it recently restored by English Heritage).

Descending the main staircase back to the hallway- passage we entered the present Dining Room constructed in 1864 behind the Great Parlour. This has a decorative plaster ceiling with a relatively modern, low hanging wooden chandelier purchased at auction There is a large dining table and chairs with another painting of Robert Walpole on the far wall. The marble fireplace has a monogram HWW (Horatio Walpole, 4th Earl of Orford). Stained glass with family crests was inserted into the tops of the windows by the 5th Earl and restored in 1979 by Paul Quayle. Lady Walpole pointed out that some of heraldry was invented for an American wife. A Conservatory was built onto the back of this room in 1864 and then turned into a Billiard and Smoking Room 1900 (pictures are in an album on the table) but demolished 1969. We walked out through patio doors onto the lawn where this once stood, admired a swan floating on the moat and looked up at

the huge liriodendron or tulip tree reaching the top of the second storey, and then round the south side towards the front of the Hall.



The Dining Room with stained glass windows and patio door exit into garden and moat



Eastern view of back of the Hall with kitchen area, Brewhouse and the moat

Unfortunately, the rain meant walking any of the trails was a bit out of the question although some of us had a look round the walled herbaceous borders, the Heritage and Modern Rose Gardens and the moat. Mannington Hall has a wide variety of plants, many unusual trees and shrubs in different settings. Nearby is a knot garden with scented plants and on the South Lawn is a classical temple and a recently planted Sensory Garden with plants selected for touch, taste, smell and colour. There is a wood walk, a 20th Century Garden, a stump garden with ferns, a shady area with water features and a vegetable garden, plus a lake, a Chapel with its own garden and a number of Victorian follies surrounding the old Saxon church. So much more to see and do on another trip in sunny weather.

Everyone retired to the old Coach House which is now the Rose Tea Room where we had a slice of chocolate or sponge cake and a cup of tea/coffee before leaving via the shop to the car park. Alistair thanked Lady Walpole for an interesting guided tour and off we went into the pouring rain.

Edmund Perry
Hon. Secretary
20.09.2015