

GUNTON PARK Excursion Wednesday 23rd July 2014



On a hot, sunny morning twenty NNAS members assembled at the Park, just off the A140 going towards Cromer, near the oldest surviving water-powered mill in the country. We were met by Kit Martin who gave us a fascinating tour of the lake and the interior workings. Built in the 1820s by William Hase of Saxthorpe, the mill has two breastshot waterwheels driven by a fall of water from an ornamental lake. A flywheel and crank operate a set of vertical saw blades. The horizontal carriage, capable of holding a tree trunk one metre in diameter and six metres long, is advanced by inching wheel mechanism. In the gallery is a Ransome & Simms corn mill dating from 1868. The Norfolk Windmills Trust owns the site; the Manpower Services Commission refurbished the building; Farman of North Walsham created the splendid thatched roof; John Lawn rebuilt the reciprocating saw. The

machinery is operated by volunteers from the Norfolk Industrial Archaeology Society.

We drove to Kit's farmhouse home for coffee and biscuits supplied by his wife Sally. He gave us an illustrated talk on the history of the Hall under the Harbord Family and the long process of renovation. Along with his neighbour, Ivor Braka, Kit helped rescue the derelict mansion house (designed by Matthew Brettingham in 1742). It and the estate buildings have been converted into 20 residences. Together with Charles Harbord-Harbord, they are restoring the historic parkland, with Keith Ward planting new trees in grassland kept short by red and fallow deer and numerous sheep. The end result is both attractive and economically viable.



Afterwards we went to see St. Andrew's (designed by Robert Adam in 1767 to replace the ruined mediaeval parish church). It is a fine example of an 18th century estate church, declared redundant in 1976, now owned by The Churches Conservation Trust which has carried out substantial repairs supervised by Neil Birdsall, an architect from Hingham. It remains a consecrated building and is still used for occasional services and other events including burials (about thirty headstones in the churchyard). Having thanked Kit for an interesting and enjoyable tour, several members made their way to the Gunton Arms public house for a much needed drink and some lunch.