

# Chelmsford & District NT Supporter Group



in support of **National  
Trust**

**Autumn 2025**

**No 101**

## **Newsletter**

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### **Dates for your diary:**

#### **2025**

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> October – Evening meeting

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October – Coach outing

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October – 50<sup>th</sup> Celebration tea party

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November – Evening meeting

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> November – London River Cruise with F&C supper

Saturday 6<sup>nd</sup> December – Chelmsford Cathedral Christmas Market

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December – Evening meeting

#### **2026**

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January – Evening meeting

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February – Evening meeting

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March – AGM and Evening meeting

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> April – Evening meeting

**See details on page 2**

**Chelmsford Cathedral Christmas Market on**

**Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2025**

**with two tables**

**Please come and support the event**

**Mostly knitted goods**

**Keep an eye on our website!**

## Programme from October 2025 to April 2026

**2025**

**WEDNESDAY 8<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 7:45pm**

***Capital Ring* by Tony Tuckwell**

An illustrated guide along London's Capital Ring Walk, 78 miles from Woolwich including a palace, stately homes, Crystal Palace, Olympic Stadiums, magnificent scenery with rivers & canals, world-beating Victorian engineering & interesting urban architecture".

**SATURDAY 18<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER – outing to Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire**

**WEDNESDAY 29<sup>th</sup> October 50yr celebration tea party**

I'll be ready and waiting for your £10 Donation, with your ticket, for Wednesday 29th October! It looks as if it will be a really friendly time of Celebration for our 50 years! I'll be checking to ask if you have any allergies etc ("Greed" is not acceptable!) That's a joke in case you haven't yet met me! Love, Jackie

**WEDNESDAY 12<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 7:45pm**

***The Gunpowder Plot***

**by Richard Pusey**

The background to the famous 1605 plot to blow up the House of Lords and assassinate King James I will be outlined. The details of where the plot was hatched and how it was to be carried out will be described. The talk then describes how the plot was discovered ...The talk will end with the gruesome details of the fate of the remaining plotters. ... And lots more!!

**SATURDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER**

**Coach outing to London – with City & Village Tours** to Greenwich then pleasure boat cruise up River to Westminster. From Westminster coach trip 'Christmas London by Night' to Fulham for a Fish and Chip supper (alternatives to fish available). Information on last page of this NL.

**SATURDAY 6<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

**C&D NT SG Stall at the Cathedral Christmas Market. 10am to 2:30pm**

**WEDNESDAY 10<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 7:45pm**

***The Harp* by Lynn Creasey**

Entertaining active presentation about the history and workings of the Harp together with introduction to repertoire to be played.

**2026**

**WEDNESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 7:45pm**

***An Introduction to Beatrix Potter***

talk by Andrew Wiltshire

Andrew is a renowned speaker, author and publisher. [Beatrix Potter was a benefactor to the early NT]

**WEDNESDAY 11<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 7:45pm**

***The Life and Music of Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Holst and other composers"***

Talk by Terry Hiscocks

**WEDNESDAY 11<sup>th</sup> MARCH 7:45pm**

**AGM and 'Princes to Paupers' - the Hatfield Forest Visitors' Book 1892-1923.** By David Simmonds

**WEDNESDAY 8<sup>th</sup> APRIL 7:45pm**

***"Assembly Rooms in Essex and the activities within them during mostly the 18th and some of the 19th centuries"*** Talk by Thelma Wilson and Olive Baldwin

***The Venue for our meetings is at Trinity Methodist Church, 46, Rainsford Road, CM1 2XB (opposite the County Hotel). The Meetings start at the usual time of 7.45pm***

## **Chairman's Report – [Chairman@chelmsfordNTgroup.co.uk](mailto:Chairman@chelmsfordNTgroup.co.uk)**

Welcome to Newsletter 101 and its contents will provide detailed reports of our past and future activities and therefore I will just give you an outline. Three successful meetings between February and April with the AGM in March were held. This was followed by coach visits to Claydon & Waddesdon in June, Greys Court and Stonor Park in July and the first week in September 30 members travelled by Kings Coaches to Harrogate and visited a range of interesting properties.

I thank Paul Chaplin for conducting research in order to produce a suite of Policy Documents to go with the letter of affiliation which was sent to the National Trust by email. This has been acknowledged by the Trust.

Thanks to Keith Otter for managing the web site and now off the press new members will now be able to join on line. To visit our website go to [ChelmsfordNTgroup.org.uk](http://ChelmsfordNTgroup.org.uk) I encourage you to suggest family and friends who are NT Members to join C&D NT SG. See joining form on page 17 of this Newsletter or go on line! Members should have received their copy of the Autumn edition of the NT Magazine by now and I would like to direct you to P23 of the Magazine which gives information about the National Trust AGM on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2025 and how to vote.

Members of the committee are looking forward to welcoming members to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Tea Party of our group at the Link on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October between 2pm and 4pm.

Thank you as ever for the various contributions from the committee and other members including those who have contributed to the Newsletter and Maurice Austin for collating and managing the 'wish list'.

*Chris Bellamy - Chairman*

## **Reports of evening meetings from February to April 2025** **by Shirley Deering**

### **Meeting report for 12<sup>th</sup> February**

On the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup> February members were delighted to welcome old friend Yvonne Lawrence as their speaker. A local historian, Yvonne has given several talks on the history of Chelmsford to the Group. On this occasion her talk was entitled "The Show must go on" and looked at the history of entertainment in Chelmsford, from the Middle Ages onward.

Yvonne looked first at the general history of entertainment throughout the County. The earliest plays were put on in churches, called "Mystery Plays". They dealt with the story of the incarnation and birth of Christ. The next development was itinerant groups of players who would act out plays based on Bible stories. These companies were often well equipped and travelled with costumes, make-up and sound effects, packed in wagons, some even had their own demountable stage. Failing this, they would hitch several wagons together to form a stage. There are records of several visits to Chelmsford by such strolling players. They would set up their stage on a large, flat area of ground, such as King's Head Meadows. In 1576 the first playhouse opened in London; followed by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in 1599.

In the next century the English Civil War and the reign of Cromwell saw the Puritans close all theatres. They were seen as immoral, actors were classed as rogues and vagabonds, the few actresses as prostitutes. It was not until the more relaxed moral attitude of the late seventeenth century that plays, of a secular nature, and players became acceptable. Even so, plays had to be within certain moral boundaries, as sanctioned by the Lord Chamberland's Office, a law which still applied till 1968.

Chelmsford had no purpose built theatre, but, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries several large buildings, such as the Corn Exchange, were constructed with large, flat spaces, which could accommodate public performances of plays, concerts and variety shows. It is recorded that prestigious theatrical companies, such as Sadlers Wells, put on plays in Chelmsford. As the twentieth century neared several theatres were built, the Odeon, Pavillion, Select and the very plush Regent with it's opulent interior. However, cinemas soon became the favoured entertainment and the theatres quickly adapted to showing films. Today they have all been demolished or converted to other uses.

In the 1950's the newly built Civic Centre incorporated the Civic Theatre. Following it's recent refurbishment we now hear that the Civic will continue to provide a venue for theatre-goers for many generations to come.



### Meeting Report for 12<sup>th</sup> March

The meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> March was a topsy turvy affair, beginning with the presentation, by Celia Richardson – Director of communications and fundraising at the National Trust of awards to Pat Tate and Beryl Furley to mark thirty years of voluntary service. Normally this would have been followed by the AGM but, as the



speaker, who would usually speak afterwards, had to leave early to catch a train

Celia's theme was the Past, Present and Future of the National Trust. Most people immediately think of Stately Homes when hearing the words "National Trust", but Celia explained that, at it's foundation in the nineteenth century, it was an organisation campaigning for free access to the countryside. At that time landowners jealously guarded their rights to enjoy privacy, but the NT successfully campaigned for everyone to be able to enjoy the countryside. Only a few properties were acquired in the early years.

The majority of the NT's portfolio of stately homes and historic properties was acquired during the inter-war period. After the first World War many property owners found themselves facing crippling death-duties. Sometimes the only direct heir had died in the carnage of the trenches and families were in serious financial difficulties. Property developers were taking advantage of this, offering an enticing price for the estate. If accepted they would demolish the houses and build a residential estate on the land. The NT offered an alternative, one which still meant the family would lose their ancestral home, but at least it would be preserved, contents intact, for the enjoyment of the public.

Policy changed again after the Second World War, with the emphasis once again being on caring for the countryside and also coastal regions. Properties acquired in recent years have been those of special historical or architectural importance or have housed collections, art, ceramics, silverware and so on, which would have been broken up and dispersed if the

property were sold privately. Celia now saw the future of the NT as one of education and preserving traditional skills. There are now apprenticeships for working on conservation projects, using traditional materials, open to young people.

The evening finished with a brief AGM. Officers' reports showed the Group to be in a sound position. All officers and committee members were re-elected.

### **Meeting Report for 9<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

For the last evening meeting of the winter season members enjoyed a talk by fellow member and past President David Simmonds on the life and work of local author, J A Baker. Born in 1926, the only child of his parents, John Arthur Baker lived all his life in Chelmsford, dying in 1987. He attended Trinity Road school and in 1936 or 37 went on to KEGS, the Chelmsford Grammar School for Boys. All his life he suffered sight problems and was classified as unfit for military service, so was not called up for National Service. After leaving school he had a variety of jobs, none very prestigious.

John did not have an easy childhood. His father's behaviour was erratic and unpredictable and could erupt into violence. He would sometimes attack his wife and young John would have to come to the defence of his mother.

Though often regarded as a reticent and humourless loner, at the age of 30 he married a young lady of 22, whose father did not approve of the match. At a time when anyone wishing to get married under the age of 21 needed parental consent, he withheld this sanction until it was no longer needed. The couple never had children. Those who knew John really well spoke of him having a lighter side and had fond memories of times when he showed this.

John developed an interest in bird-watching rather late in life. His first book *The Peregrine*, published in 1967, was based on ten years of recorded notes and observations of this remarkable bird of prey. Although classed as non-fiction the book is known to contain some inaccurate information and disputed observations, and cannot be regarded as a hand-book for bird watchers. Its merit lies in the passion and intensity of its poetic prose. The downside of becoming a successful author is that your publisher demands a second helping and this is not always up to the same standard as the first. John's subsequent books, *The Hill of Summer* and *Silent Spring*, dealt with the effect of airports on bird life and the effect of agricultural pesticides, but the narrative lacked the powerful and majestic style of the *Peregrine*. At the time of writing that initial book John and his wife were living in Stansted Close and a blue plaque on the wall of number 44 now commemorates the author.

David recommends anyone, who has not already done so, to read *The Peregrine*, not for the factual information, but for the glorious beauty of the writing.

### **Summer Outing Reports**

On the 14 June 39 members boarded the coach for the National Trust visit to Claydon House and Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire.

**Claydon House** had been the home of the Verney family since 1620, having been demolished and rebuilt twice in that time. Today only a fragment of the great house is still standing. Over





the generations the house had fallen on hard times but during the Victorian era Claydon was finally restored to a house of repute once more.

One of its most outstanding features were the beautiful carvings throughout the house, particularly the mahogany staircase with its intricate parquetry in the black and white hall, designed by Luke Lightfoot and completed by Joseph Rose who took over the work following Lightfoot's dismissal.

The lobby at the top of the stairs was transformed into a museum to house the many artefacts collected by Sir Harry Verney in South America and his son the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet from Canada, Africa and India. One of the treasures of the Museum is the Javanese half gamelan which was used to accompany religious or ceremonial rituals. The fireplace in the Chinese room created by Luke Lightfoot is considered to be the finest example of Chinoiserie in the UK.



Florence Nightingale was the sister-in-law of Sir Harry Verney who was a staunch supporter of her work. In his political role he helped to push through her healthcare reforms. She was given a suite of rooms at Claydon and spent many summers there visiting her sister. In her sitting room many of her personal effects and travelling communion set were on display, together with her nursing uniform and sash from Scutari Hospital.

Many of rooms had bookcases but the most notable was the Library with some 5000 books and 500 years of personal and political correspondence. The adjoining reading room/family breakfast room now houses a second hand bookshop. The grounds surrounding the house are extensive and the Courtyard now contains many arts and craft units and a café.

After a light lunch we travelled on to **Waddesdon Manor**, a very imposing French Renaissance-style Chateau built by Baron de Rothschild between 1874 and 1899. Following his death his sister Alice took over the running of the Estate, followed by James de Rothschild in 1922. In 1957 James Rothschild bequeathed Waddesdon and part of its collection to the National Trust, although the family still managed the estate through the Rothschild Foundation. In 1990 Jacob took over the running of the Estate and during his tenure oversaw a complete restoration and renaissance of the Manor and its gardens, as well as adding to the 18<sup>th</sup> century magnificent collections including porcelain manufactured by Sèvres, Savonnerie carpets, wall hung tapestries, and paintings from famous 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century artists.



been in Baron Ferdinand's day.

On entering the house through the front door we turned into the East Gallery which houses the spectacular 1770 mechanical elephant made by clockmaker Hubert Martinet. When played the trunk, tail, ears and eyes come to life whilst it plays musical tunes (the elephant can be seen in action on YouTube). There are 56 clocks in the house, nearly all in working order. From the Breakfast room we entered the Conservatory decorated with exotic plants. In the marble paneled Dining room the table was laid up for 24 guests as it would have

Baron Ferdinand's private sitting room is exactly as it was in the 1890's, crowded but cosy. Many pictures by Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney adorn the walls. Furnishings included a writing table used by Marie-Antoinette and Sevres porcelain vases, together with personal objects and photographs of family and friends.

We continued our tour of the house but the extensive collections and size of the house is hard to describe in brief. All the rooms are beautifully decorated in the French style with no expense spared. The main reception rooms and principal bedrooms at the front of the house all have views of the Parterre, the highlight of the formal garden which was restored in 1994 and considered an exceptional example of Victorian horticulture.



Unfortunately, there was no time to visit the Victorian Aviary which was restored in 2004, home to many exotic birds, or the rest of the extensive grounds. The Stables Courtyard is set in the grounds below the house and is now home to the Coach house Gallery, restaurant and shop. In the Courtyard is a bronze horse by Edgar Boehm, believed to be the Duke of Wellington's charger Copenhagen. A magnificent Estate and well worth another visit.

On 18<sup>th</sup> July members from Chelmsford National Trust visited **Greys Court** Tudor country house in the rolling hills of the Chilterns. The influential de Grey family settled on this site around 1347. Most of the medieval fortifications are now in ruins but the





modest Tudor house which was built in the courtyard is still very much intact. Other buildings from earlier eras include the Great Tower from the 14<sup>th</sup> C and a rare Tudor donkey wheel in use until the early 20<sup>th</sup> C.

Evelyn Fleming lived in Greys Court briefly from 1934 to 1937. Evelyn was the mother of Ian Fleming, the author of the James Bond books and her other son was Peter Fleming the famous travel writer and adventurer.

In 1937 Sir Felix and Lady Elizabeth Brunner bought the Estate. (He was a Liberal party politician and business owner.) His wife was an actress, Elizabeth Irving, and came from a famous theatrical family. They restored the house and rescued the gardens from dereliction and created a comfortable family home for their four boys.

The house has a very pleasant feel, the rooms are not particularly large but the windows let in plenty of light. A large wisteria covers the porch at the front door where we entered the hallway. Against the back wall were two glass cabinets filled with English and Swiss ceramics from the 18<sup>th</sup>C both from Brunner's ancestral collection. On the left we entered the dining room with its splendid plasterwork ceiling, oak gateleg table and Windsor chairs.

On the other side of the hall was the main drawing room, a picture of the family above the 18<sup>th</sup>C marble fireplace, comfortable armchairs and a grand piano. There was a further sitting room at the back of the house latterly used by Lady Brunner as her study.

Upstairs was Sir Felix library/study, his desk laid out as it would have been when he was alive. Books lined the walls ranging from politics to gardening and more well-read popular novels. The simple but elegantly furnished bedrooms looked out on the front of the house and were very light and airy. A portrait of Sir Felix and Lady Brunner in their later years was displayed on the wall of Lady Brunner's bedroom.

Downstairs the kitchen had an old arched fireplace which held an Aga and various working areas for food preparation. A large light pantry with an ancient metal lock adjoined the kitchen. Unfortunately, we did not have time to visit the gardens or surrounding grounds.

Our second visit of the day was to **Stonor Park**, historic country house and private deer park, home to the Stonor family for over 850 years. Lord Wm Stonor and Lady Ailsa became full time custodians in 2016 continuing the family legacy of stewardship. At the front of the house there are the remains of an ancient pagan stone circle, a stone of which was used as a foundation stone in the nearby 14<sup>th</sup> C catholic chapel. Mass has been celebrated here since medieval times.





On entering the house our guide directed us into the 17<sup>th</sup> c Gothichall with its ornate fireplace and elaborate stained glass windows. Around the room there was a display of 29 generations of heraldry from 1150 until the present day. The drawing room was pleasantly furnished with many family portraits and a painting of Stonor in the 16<sup>th</sup> c, painter unknown. The blue dining room was decorated with French hand blocked wallpaper made to resemble a tapestry. Portraits of the American side of the family, together with other objects, including a French liqueur box were displayed in the room.

On the way to the Library we visited the Solar, the oldest part of the house above the main hall. The collection of furniture included shell chairs and a gondola bed, elaborately decorated, dating from 1820.

The Library runs from front to back of the house and contains a unique collection of Ecclesiastical and Anglican books mostly smuggled into the country during the reformation. On the desk a document containing a seal which is 700 years old.

In 1581, the Jesuit priests Edmund Campion and Robert Parsons lived and worked at Stonor Park. Campion's 'Decen Rationes' Ten Reasons (why Catholics should be able to practice their faith) was printed on a secret press in the attic and distributed in Oxford. Campion was eventually taken prisoner, held in the Tower, tortured and convicted of high treason. He was hung, drawn and quartered at Tyburn. We visited the long gallery and main bedroom with its four-poster bed, before concluding our tour of the house. The Italianate garden and orchard at the back of the house had lovely views over the house and park below. This concluded our visit to Stonor Park.

## **A Spirited Celebration**

It's lovely when a plea for help is answered, but it may be in an unexpected form.

Emma sighed as she stood at her open bedroom window, gazing at the tranquil summer evening sky. If only her own mind were as calm and peaceful as that sky, but it was in utter turmoil and for the silliest of reasons.

Emma loved her job as catering manager at Willowvale Residential Home, it was such a happy, well-run place. Recently a large extension had been completed, providing extra accommodation and a bigger, and even better equipped, activities room. The Mayor had accepted an invitation to perform the opening ceremony and join residents for lunch afterwards, and there was the reason for Emma's anguish of mind.

She had decided on the main course for lunch immediately - chicken in mushroom sauce. That was always popular with the residents. But what to make for dessert? Emma felt it should be something a bit special, to mark the occasion, but what? Everything she thought of seemed either too ordinary or too elaborate, too stodgy or too airy-fairy. Her colleagues tried to make helpful suggestions, but nothing fitted.

There was a story in Emma's family that a distant ancestor had been a renowned cook and worked for a titled family. The father had been a friend of the Prince Regent's and had once invited him to a dinner in celebration of his birthday. Emma's ancestor had created a special dessert for the occasion which the Prince had enjoyed so much he had asked for three helpings.

"I wish you were here now, great-great-great-great-gr-oh I don't know how many times great grandmother, could give me some inspiration Emma said to the darkening sky. Then she went to bed and immediately fell asleep, but was soon awoken by a growing lightness in the room.

She opened her eyes to see the room filled with a soft glowing light. At the foot of the bed stood a female figure, a canvas apron tied over her plain brown dress, her hair completely covered by a stiffly starched, snowy-white mobcap.

Emma felt no fear or alarm, just curiosity.

"Who are you and how did you get in here she asked?"

"I am Alysson your nine times great grandmother. I am come to give you my recipe for Celebration Pudding".

Emma sat up, seized the notebook and pen she kept on her bedside table and scribbled furiously as her ancestor recited a list of ingredients and the method of combining and cooking them.

"Serve with clotted cream" concluded the apparition and immediately started to fade.

"Good bye, nine-times great grandmother Alysson. Thank you so much for coming to my rescue", cried Emma. The last vestige of the figure vanished, the light faded, and Emma fell asleep.

Her first thought on waking was of the extraordinary dream she had had, then she saw the notebook, pen still between the pages, and knew it had been real. Eagerly she read through her notes, but her heart sank at the odd list of ingredients

Eggs, milk, slices of bread spread with best butter, raw carrot, chopped raw suet, apple slices, currants, sultanas, raisins, squeeze of lemon juice, pinch of spice.

It sounded like a bizarre bread and butter pudding, surely it would never work?

She must try it out first. But then Emma told herself sternly she must do no such thing, it would be most dishonouring to nine-times-great grandma Alysson. The opening ceremony went without a hitch. The Mayor was friendly and genial. His speech paid tribute to the dedication of the staff, expressed admiration for the range of activities and entertainment available for the residents and had just the right trace of humour. Formalities over, he chatted with the staff and residents and charmed everyone with his genuine interest in what they had to say.

He certainly enjoyed his lunch and afterwards asked to be taken to the kitchen to give his personal thanks to the cooks.

"That was an excellent meal" he said. "Really tasty and the chicken was just melt-in-the mouth. As for the dessert, well, I've never tasted anything like it. Light and fluffy, with a hint of lemon and a touch of spice, it was simply out of this world".

And only Emma knew how true that was.

*By Shirley Deering*

## Summertime at Hatfield Forest

Generally fine weather over the summer meant visitors enjoyed their time at Hatfield Forest and kept the staff and volunteers busy. Many visitors simply sat in the Lake Area, while others were more active and went rowing on the Lake or walking further into the Forest. In addition, there was a wide range of events and activities, with the children's games and craft activities at The Hub again proving very popular with families.

A week of tractor and trailer tours allowed people of all ages to see the Forest from an unfamiliar perspective. Around 35 years after our children sat on straw bales in the trailer, we went with our four-year old great nephew, Evan, and sat on the metal seats of the purpose-built trailer (borrowed from Cammas Hall). We were very fortunate to have the spectacle of three Fallow Deer running past. In a few years, we look forward to going boating on the Lake with him! As in most years, the weather was good for the plays at the Forest, which included *Twelfth Night*, *HMS Pinafore* and *Alice in Wonderland*. The weather also helped sales at the café and ice cream parlour, with its delicious Saffron ices. A recently installed water bottle filling station helps visitors stay hydrated.

Butterfly surveys carried out by several volunteers showed numbers at a 17 year high. The increase was helped by careful grassland management, and this good news story made the national press!

Once again, I led guided walks, named *Houblon and Hornbeams* after the family that owned the Forest until 1923 and the tree for which Hatfield is best known. Away from Hatfield, I regularly gave talks about the Forest and the Essex Coast to local groups and societies.

At the start of the year, to coincide with the Trust's 130<sup>th</sup> birthday, a new strategy (running to 2035) was announced under the title *People and Nature Thriving*. Within this, there are three key goals:

- to restore nature – not just on National Trust land, but everywhere;
- to end unequal access to nature, beauty and history;
- to inspire millions more people to care and take action.

Hatfield Forest is especially working to reduce unequal access, and this autumn started a partnership with the Alzheimer's Society to help those living with dementia. I have volunteered to help with this programme. There will be six sessions involving walking, talking and taking photographs, followed by classroom-based workshops, creating art inspired by what they have seen and photographed. I am delighted that the Trust is seeking to assist more people.

The importance of Hatfield Forest was recognised by the decision to make no change to staff numbers in the *Sustainable Future Programme* announced recently. One change is that James Rowland, whom many of you will have met, adds the marketing and visitor experience roles at Rayleigh Mount and Danbury to his work as Property Operations Manager at the Forest. It would be really good if our Group could take a greater interest in these nearby properties.

David Simmonds  
September 2025



## REPORT on NT HOLIDAY in HARROGATE 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Our five-day summer trip to Harrogate comprised a journey break at Nostell Priory (NT), and then daily visits to Harewood House (HH), Allerton Castle (HH), Beningbrough Hall (NT), Harlow Carr Gardens (RHS), Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal (NT) and finally Temple Newsam (EH) on our way home.



All the properties were built to impress and to send out a message about the family's wealth and social standing. The best craftsmen and architects of the day were commissioned so the names of Thomas Chippendale, Capability Brown, Robert Adams, and Turner appeared many times, as well as those of gifted local artisans.

### Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September

Thirty of us gathered punctually on Monday morning cheerfully anticipating the holiday. Kings Coach reversed down Fairfield Road and we were pleased to see the extremely competent and good friend Marc behind the wheel.

The journey towards Harrogate went smoothly, having diverted through Wetherby to avoid traffic problems we enjoyed some lovely countryside and race horses in the fields. We arrived in the early afternoon at the Palladian house **Nostell Priory** set in 300 acres of stunning parkland. Generations of the Winn family created this house to impress and advance their social standing.



Sir Roland Winn (1739-1785) met his wife to be Sabine (1734-1798) in Switzerland while on his Grand Tour and it was a love match. He made his huge wealth through textiles, corn and mining coal from nearby Wakefield. The couple could afford to commission Thomas Chippendale and Robert Adam to redesign the interior of the Priory. Sabine was lonely, with poor health, language difficulties and Roland often absent. Roland sadly died young in a carriage accident. Their only son died young and she fell out with her only daughter when she married the local baker!

The house is incredible with one of Britain's largest collections of Chippendale furniture and quality pieces ranging from the large Georgian dolls' house to Lady Sabine's majestic Chippendale writing desk. Laden with wonderful things Nostell Priory holds six of the N.T.'s listed treasures.

The highlight was an opportunity to see the long case clock which caught all of our imaginations. The clock has an almost completely wooden internal mechanism and was made by John Harrison in 1717. Harrison's father is thought to have been an estate carpenter and John was probably poorly educated but what a brilliant mind he had! John "Longitude" Harrison devoted his life to the problem of finding longitude at sea and successfully created an accurate marine timekeeper.

After quick coffee in the Adam Stable block it was time to set off to the Cairn Hotel in Harrogate which turned out to be perfect for our stay.

## Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September

"Adam" by Jacob Epstein greeted us in **HAREWOOD HOUSE**, in the hall, an impressive 10' statue carved out of Derbyshire alabaster. Bought in the 1960's it shows the Lascelles family's continued patronage of contemporary artists through the centuries. Each room surpassed the one before with its lavish furniture. Chinese wallpaper, hand woven carpets and portraits. Turner was commissioned to paint 11 works and produced 6 watercolours of the Harewood Estate at 10 guineas each. He also painted small intimate interior scenes of people in a country house setting. A video of "The Slave Ship" by Turner, the painting now in Boston U.S.A. explained the shackled limbs and grotesque fish in the foreground of the painting as those of slaves who were jettisoned into the sea to claim insurance for "lost cargo". The Lascelles bought their opulent lifestyle on slave labour and toil. The family are aware of their past legacy and hope to create a better future. The actor David Harewood's ancestors worked on the Lascelles sugar plantations in Barbados. On a happier note, in the Gallery we saw 2 impressive 15' mirrors which had been made in Europe. To safeguard their passage to Harewood wooded made-to-measure crates were made and filled with walnuts. The mirrors were carefully placed on top of the nuts and survived the voyage by gently moving in their crates as the ship was tossed in the rough seas. Ingenious solution!



## Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September

**ALLERTON CASTLE** was another "wow" where money did not seem to be a problem. Dating back to 1100 it was finally bought in 1983 in a state of disrepair and in need of substantial roof and structural repair. Dr Gerald Arthur Rolph, an American, set about restoring and refurbishing the castle in the Gothic- revival style. A catastrophic fire in 2005 destroyed 1/3 of the castle. 9 years and £8 million later the castle was restored again with much of the wood panelling and carving being done by Chinese craftsmen. Dr Rolph now 91, is still an inveterate collector and the house is full of beautiful and quirky objects. My favourites were the automated music boxes of the 1900s and the lovely elephant carved out of rosewood



The drama of the day was the disappearance of our chairman Chris's hat. Staff were sent to search high and low and no explanation was given when it appeared on the coach seat Marc, our driver did protest his innocence a bit too much though!!



**BENINGBROUGH HALL** was so different. Once a thriving and wealthy estate its many rooms



now stood empty or were sparingly furnished. Laura Bacon, a willow sculptress, had woven a large installation depicting a wilderness. It was a huge structure in an upstairs room and was intended eventually to be erected in the revitalised gardens designed by the Chelsea winner Andy Sturgeon. How they were going to get it down the stairs was not explained. Somehow David and I managed to miss out a whole wing of the house which

apparently did have some interesting family pictures and furniture in it. That was our loss.

#### **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September**

**FOUNTAINS ABBEY** and the **WATER GARDENS** were such a lovely change from all the grand houses of the past days. A splendid guide told us briefly of the foundation of the abbey for 13 Cistercian monks who prayed devoutly day and night while the 100 lay brothers laboured and toiled and built the abbey. The abbey became very wealthy through farming, quarrying and tanning. It all came to a close by the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII and the abbey fell into disrepair. About 1750 a neighbour, John Aislabie, started creating a water garden on his estate with follies, statues and water features. In 1767 his son John managed to buy the abbey ruins and joined the 2 estates by picturesque walks creating what we can enjoy today.



Everyone wanted to see the **HARLOW CARR GARDENS** so an impromptu visit was booked for the afternoon. Sadly, the heavens opened, so most people went into Bettys or the gift shop. The gardens were lovely but there is only a certain amount of water that “waterproof” clothing can cope with. Such a pity.

#### **Friday 5<sup>th</sup> September**

**TEMPLE NEWSAM** was our final place to visit enroute for home. With a history dating back to 1086, the Knights Templar and the birthplace of Lord Darnley, this Tudor-Jacobean mansion promised a lot. It was however very dark, had heavy panelling on the walls and many portraits which sadly were not identified by name, just referenced to a catalogue number. It was difficult to get a feel for the house or to warm to past occupants. Personally, I felt cold in a couple of rooms, ghosts or just tired after a full fun packed week? An organ clock made in 1765 played a different tune on the hour with an animated scene of ladies dancing and horses





prancing over a bridge in time to the beat. The clock would not have looked out of place in any of the houses we had visited.

There is so much I have missed in this report, but brevity was the request from the Editor. The hotel was comfortable, the food good and the music in the evening even enticed at least one couple on to the dance floor! The holiday was a great success with Paul, Chris and Mark working hard to keep everyone entertained and enlightened.

Thank you for a super week.

*Thanks to Corinne Reader for Monday and Hanna Gillett Tuesday to Friday for their reports*



**National Trust AGM will take place at 10am on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2025.**

**You can join us online or in person at the STEAM Museum in Swindon. If you wish to attend, you'll need to register your interest using your voting link by 11.59pm on 31 October. If you wish to vote or register your interest to attend the AGM by post, you'll need to request a postal vote. The deadline to make this request is 5pm on 10 October.**

**See P23 of the Autumn 2025 NT Magazine**

**If you are not on-line telephone 0333 234 3508**

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For large print copy please contact Paul on  
07711 46 10 33 or [paulchaplin@talktalk.net](mailto:paulchaplin@talktalk.net)

**Please consider e-mailing on this newsletter to people you know who may or not be National Trust members and encourage them to join the National Trust and C&D NT SG. Membership of our group is only £5.00 single and £9.00 for a pair per year. Our Membership Secretary is Colin Jay [ColinJay68@gmail.com](mailto:ColinJay68@gmail.com) and phone no 01245 350955 see below**

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I



## THIS YEAR'S WINTER OUTING

**LONDON – GREENWICH, RIVER TRIP, LONDON CHRISTMAS LIGHTS and FISH & CHIP SUPPER - SATURDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER 2025.**



Meet our top-notch Blue Badge Tour Guide at The Cutty Sark, Greenwich at 3.45pm ready to walk over to the Pier as the sun sets, for a one-hour cruise to Westminster with a fun & informative Cockney skipper's commentary. We pass the Canary Wharf all lit up like a mini-Manhattan. We sail beneath a floodlit Tower Bridge and through the glistening City & West End.

The coach to meet the group at Westminster Pier ready for the tour of Christmas London by night. It's great fun seeing the busy shopping streets from high up in the coach. Our tour is much more than the Christmas Lights though as we'll also show the group some of London's most beautifully illuminated buildings and we go off the beaten track to bring them up to date with what is new in the capital.

We end the day at Kennedys of Fulham - 609-611, Fulham Rd., London SW6 5UA where the group will sit down to a one course fish & chip supper with mushy peas and a hot drink (included). Please let us know if you have any dietary requirements at least one week before the date of the tour. You will be ready to head home straight after supper.

11:30am depart outside Chelmsford Theatres Fairfield Road, CM1 1JG

1:30pm to 3:45pm – time on your own for refreshments and explore

3.45pm Meet The Blue Badge Tour Guide at The Cutty Sark, Greenwich

4.10pm one hour cruise to Westminster

5.15pm Guided London Christmas Lights & Sights Tour on your coach

7.00pm Finish day at Kennedys Fulham for fish & chips mushy peas and a hot drink (included)

(alternative to fish is available)

8.00/30pm Head Home

**If you have not already done so, please email, write or phone Paul Chaplin with your name, address and phone number and he will send you a booking form with payment details for this trip. Mob 07711 461033 or paulchaplin@talktalk.net**

Numbers are limited to a 53seat coach – confirmation issued on a first come basis. If there are less than 30 applications the trip will be cancelled.

The price includes: hire of coach, drivers tip, guide and guides tip, cruise up the river from Greenwich to Westminster, Fish & Chip Supper and will be £70.00 per person