

# SUMMER OUTING TO NEVILL HOLT

## 8TH JUNE 2011



by David Johnson

**A**round 45 members and guests braved a chilly June evening for a fascinating tour of Nevill Holt, ably led by Roz Willetts. The society last visited the house in 2000 when large-scale alterations were in train, and it was interesting to see the changes that had taken place since then.

For 700 years Nevill Holt has enjoyed a stunning position at the furthest point of a promontory overlooking the Welland valley, opposite Rockingham Castle on the other side. We learnt that although the site was an obvious place for defensive fortifications, there was no evidence of this ever being the case. In the 13th century it was in the possession of the Bishop of Ely, but in 1474 it became the family home of the Nevills for nearly 400 years, before being bought by the Cunard shipping family in 1876 and then becoming a boys preparatory school in 1919. With a diminishing roll the school closed in 1998, and the property was purchased in 2000 by David Ross, co-founder of the Carphone Warehouse. Ross, heir to the frozen foods company in Grimsby, was a former pupil of the school and went on to complete his education at Uppingham and Nottingham University.

The present house is an eccentric assortment of buildings and styles, with castellations, cloisters, even a turret, which has grown exponentially over time. At one time it was even larger than it is now. The church is attached to the house, with one of the rooms in the house located over the vaults containing the mortal remains of several generations of Nevills!



In 2000 the property was in a poor state of repair, while the demands of the school had hidden many original features. Roz estimated that some £11 million pounds has since been spent on putting the house in order, and creating a modern, comfortable family home. The roof was reslated with Collyweston tiles, while the outer walls have been recovered with hair lime plaster and coloured to match the original. The stone floor of the hall was relaid and the roof timbers examined and strengthened. Inside doorways and fireplaces, once hidden, have now been opened up to create important features, and second-hand wood panelling which looked dirty and gloomy looked now after proper cleaning attractive and rather fine. Passageways seemingly dark and miserable in 2000 now were light and attractive. Roz explained that one of the advantages of turning the building back into a family residence after its use as a school was that you were not obstructed by several generations of family clutter. Rather the house was now an attractive series of spaces, boasting an impressive collection of modern art works and paintings.



Outside the house we learnt of the promenade at the bottom of the main garden hiding the road – taking the place of the usual ha-ha, and of the kitchen garden which had occupied the same site for at least 400 years. The stable block which originally included servants' quarters, and was used by the school as a gymnasium, now hides inside a temporary 300-seat theatre used each year for an opera festival.

The evening concluded appropriately with a convivial meal at the Nevill Arms in Medbourne. Roz Willatts was thanked for her expert guidance on-site, and Garry Davies for organizing the finance and meal arrangements.

LAMPORNT HALL