

THE MARKET HARBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUMMER OUTING 2010 TO LAMPORT HALL

"IN THINGS TRANSITORY RESTETH NO GLORY"

Rosalind M Willatts



This motto is writ large in stone on the grand long front of Lamport Hall. The small classical 5 bay house of the 1650s by John Webb (pupil and nephew of Inigo Jones) was, eighty years later, symmetrically elongated to 13 bays by the Smiths of Warwick. Lamport Hall was the venue for Market Harborough Historical Society's 2010 summer visit on 9th June, enjoyed by some three dozen members. The high summer with the lime trees in flower and newly shorn sheep in the park was tempered by very heavy showers of rain which impaired a proper appreciation of the gardens.

Historical Society members were divided into two groups for a tour of the house, some having visited the Church and the gardens before being driven inside by the torrential downpour. Our well informed guides outlined the history of the hall and its occupants. Lamport encapsulates the historical, social and physical structure of Rural England. The trio of Church, Hall (with park, gardens and estate buildings), and Rectory all in close juxtaposition were dominated by the Isham family for 450 years from 1560 when a younger son, a wool-merchant, acquired the estate. Over the next three centuries emerged the great house and estate of today. The swan crest appears everywhere; on the gates, the hall chairs, china, a leather bottle, fireplaces and on the memorials in the church as well as giving the name to the inn where we enjoyed a meal together afterwards.

Lamport Hall has none of the distracting accoutrements usually accompanying country houses open to the public; all is very discreet. One enters from the side of the house by the large stable quadrangle which is in excellent condition. The front entrance from the Northampton Road, with a great iron screen and gate piers with elegant swans is never used. Between it and the Hall is rough grassed parkland for a variety of sheep. The gardens too are discreet. The road is sunk so that the church appears to grow out of the lawn. A hidden herbaceous border with gazebo backs onto the main lawn with great cedars and surprisingly a curious circular stone structure which was a cockpit. The renowned rockery of 1847 was also oddly positioned, uncomfortably close to the house which it faced. It was into this rockery that Charles, the 10th baronet, introduced hundreds of small terracotta figures in the 19th century, such as were used by German miners as talismen. These were the very first garden gnomes, but only one now remains kept in a glass case indoors.



Contrary to the family motto of *Ostendo non Ostento*, the size and length of Lamport Hall and the monuments in the church boast of the status of the Ishams. Many of them might have preferred the stone-inscribed motto *In respect of things eternal life is vayne and mortal which is much in evidence in the church.* Nevertheless Lamport forms a quietly magnificent gem of social history in the Northamptonshire countryside.

After the visit most of the group enjoyed an excellent meal close by at the appropriately named pub, The Swan.



SOME OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MEMBERS ENJOYING THE VISIT TO
LAMPORT HALL

