

TAS Chester – Suffolk Trip, June 2018

Report from Fiona Neame, Programme Secretary



Lavenham



Willy Lott's Cottage

It was an excellent tour, well thought out locations to visit each day a varied programme and comfortable hotel with good food and friendly, if slightly chaotic, staff.

Our driver Dave, from Hattons was always punctual and in the right place and, as Hattons are from St Helens, we would like to give them more business in future. Blue Badge Guide Ian Balham was very informative, humorous and always available, for an impromptu guided tour or to answer questions.

Stately homes visited were Audley End and Ickworth. At Audley End, with its fine Adam state rooms, quirky coal gallery and newly refurbished nursery, Victorian costumed characters were on hand to explain the domestic workings of the house and a Victorian Fair and equine stunt riding display in the Capability Brown parkland were added attractions. Ickworth House is set up for a house visit in 1938, when Theodora, a wealthy American married into the Hervey family and restored the Rotunda to a fine residence. Today's visitors enter through the extensive basement servants' quarters, newly restored by the National Trust. The Italianate garden revealed plenty of pathways and vistas to explore, as well as some prettily planted areas. Both homes also had an assortment of fine artworks, furniture, silk wall hangings, books and treasures from the Grand Tour.

With no major roads, Suffolk and North Essex retain many of their pretty villages and once wealthy towns in pristine condition, whilst other towns such as Ipswich and Bury St Edmonds have seen the march of progress, the latter has kept its historic centre. Lavenham, Dedham and East Bergholt were all worthy of a walk through, half-timbered thatched cottages, pargeted painted plasterwork and Georgian frontages abounded, with cottage gardens in full

flower. The seaside town of Aldeburgh was enjoyed in sunshine, having passed by Snape Maltings, home to the festival and Maggi Hambling's Conch Shell memorial sculpture to Benjamin Britten on the beach. Only Bruce took the opportunity to visit the Moot House Museum, the rest of the tour enjoyed ice creams, bookshops, art galleries and relished the gusty, sea air.

Our visit to Flatford Mill, Bridge Cottage and Willy Lott's Cottage showed Constable country in full leaf, blue sky with scudding clouds overhead and a slow-moving river flowing through – no hay wain, but everything else was in place to evoke the scene.

Gainsborough's House did not disappoint, an excellent guide introduced us to his working life and painting style, with fine examples in a collection of his work. Run by a trust the house is a gem and warranted an additional donation from TASC, as did Christchurch Mansion a fine Tudor private home, now owned and managed by Ipswich Council. Christchurch has rooms that have been lined with linenfold panelling and artefacts rescued from historic houses demolished in the 1960s, a gallery containing paintings and sketches by Gainsborough and Constable and collections of glass and porcelain.

The group viewed two magnificent Cathedrals at Bury St Edmonds and Ely. St Edmondsbury is notable for the size of the Abbey that once surrounded and dwarfed it. Remnants include the Norman Tower and parts of the frontage. A major extension to the Cathedral was started in the 1960s and completed by the addition of a tower as recently as 2007. Ely's octagonal tower, completed in 1342, by contrast is one of the wonders of the Medieval world. Both Cathedrals had gloriously colourful painted ceilings in the Nave and wonderful stained glass.

A visit to East Anglia would not be complete without a look at Anglo-Saxon history through the discovery of the burial ships and mounds at Sutton Hoo, set on the sandy heathland above the Deben estuary and the historic town of Woodbridge. The interpretation centre set the scene and there was plenty of time to explore.