

## **Cotswolds September 2019**

Sue Denney and Pennie Harrison are to be congratulated on what turned out to be a very enjoyable cultural and social few days – excellent hotel, great food, extremely comfortable coach, and good humoured, skilful [and patient!] driver.

Twenty-two of us set off on the morning of Thursday 26th September. Weather forecasts – especially after the glorious sunny warmth of the preceding weekend – were not altogether promising, but we were all looking forward to an interesting few days.

On our way to Wroxton House Hotel in Oxfordshire, we visited Hidcote. This late in the year, the garden was not at its best, but there was still lots to appreciate and admire.

Friday 27th September saw us at Compton Verney, a beautiful Georgian House, now an Art Gallery, set in sweeping parkland. We could only sample a fraction of the collections on display, but I think some of us will definitely plan another visit.

The afternoon visit to Snowhill Manor saw us experiencing the worst of England's Autumnal weather! Wind, and rain of Biblical proportions, landed on us as we were tackling the steep uphill 15 minute walk from car park to house; paths turned into rushing streams, and the carpark became a lake, but extreme wetness did not deter us from walking round this amazing place, with the biggest and most varied collection of anything and everything, packed from floor to rafters in every room and corridor that I for one had ever seen!

Stratford-on-Avon on Saturday 28th was experienced mainly in sunshine however, and the backstage tour of the Royal Shakespeare and Swan theatres was fascinating. There was also time to stroll around part of this famous town before moving on to Charlcoate Park to tour the house and vast grounds.

Sunday was for exploring Wroxton Village or for just 'chilling!' Wroxton Abbey is a Grade 1 Jacobean mansion owned by Trinity College, Cambridge, currently let to an American University College. The public can explore the grounds/garden however, and it was a privilege to walk through the magnificent mature woodland expanse, with lakes, the odd waterfall and lots of squirrels, before setting off to view Broughton Castle in the afternoon.

Broughton Castle was a delight, a real highlight of our trip, and happily the rain waited until we were inside, and we emerged later into a bit of welcome sunshine. This atmospheric castle has been used in many films and tv productions, including 'Shakespeare in Love,' the Morecambe and Wise Christmas Show, 'The Madness of King George' and 'Wolf Hall.' The explorer Sir Randolph Fiennes and actors Ralph Fiennes and Joseph Fiennes are direct descendants of the aristocratic family who have been the owners since the 14th century.

Our final day was spent at Upton House, full of amazing paintings and porcelain to view, and a vertiginous garden to explore. Once again, we beat the odds with the weather, the rain holding off until we were boarding the coach for our journey home, tired but happy!

With thanks to Kay Coope, who provided this report and the pictures.



