

SUMMER OUTINGS

Visit to Higham Park House and Gardens

by Joyce Cockerill

WHAT A PLEASURE IT WAS to join friends from the Dover Society for our visit to Higham House in May.

The elegant Palladian mansion, formerly known as Highland Court, sits comfortably in twenty-five acres of the Kent countryside at Bridge, three miles from Canterbury, and was an impressive sight as we pulled into the car park. We were soon to discover how much work had gone into the restoration of both house and garden. The two lady owners had thoughtfully supplied 'before' and 'after' photographs taken while

restoration work was in progress and we marvelled at their enterprise in undertaking such a formidable task.

The history of the house can be traced back to Edward II and, in the past, illustrious visitors such as Mozart, Jane Austen and, more recently, Charles de Gaulle, enjoyed its charms. Years of neglect and some careless ownership had robbed it of much of its splendour and it was a crumbling ruin that first caught the eyes of Patricia Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans. However, after many and protracted negotiations, Highland Court had found its rescuers and work began.

Today work continues. What a thrill it was to enter the beautifully-proportioned entrance hall with its marble pillars and fine furniture. Exquisite chandeliers grace the dining room where once hung ugly strip lighting and a dining table of gargantuan proportions, set for dinner, gave a glimpse of a more opulent age.

The gardens are a delight with many fine specimen trees and boasts one of England's largest yew-lined, sunken Italian water gardens. For a memento of the visit the plant stall near the entrance is well worth a visit.

We enjoyed a delightful lunch in the Tea Room, chatting with new friends and all firmly resolved to 'come again'. Altogether it was a memorable day and, we hope, the first of many visits to Higham Park and gardens.

The house and gardens are open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. (excluding Fridays and Saturdays). Tours of the house start at 12.30 and 2.30 p.m. and also at 4.00 p.m. subject to numbers. Wheelchairs may be booked. Telephone 01227 830830.



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