

Visits to National Trust heritage sites



Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: From top to bottom; Sudbury Hall, Little Morton Hall, Baddesley Clinton, Kinver Holy Austin rock houses and Lower Brockhampton gatehouse.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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Introduction

My wife and I were members of the National Trust from 2006 to 2010. The 1st year was courtesy of a Christmas gift from my wife's eldest son and wife. During this time, we had the pleasure of visiting numerous places of historical interest, particularly those within a day's travel from home.

Changing fortunes of many stately home owners toward the end of the 19th century to around the time of World War II and the introduction of inheritance tax caused many owners, unable to afford the estate and taxes, to give ownership to the National Trust. The National Trust was incorporated in 1895 as an association not for profit under the Companies Act 1862-90 and later 6 National Trust Acts. The National Trust of England and Wales (2%) are the 2nd biggest landowners in the UK after the Forestry Commission (8.5%). At first, the aim of the National Trust of England was to acquire and protect the countryside today it appears to be more a guardian of stately homes (Shrubsole, 2019).

In the United Kingdom (UK) a listed building is one of special architectural or historic interest. A listed building may not be demolished, extended or altered without special permission from the local planning authority in consultation with the relevant central government agency. The building must be man-made and at least approaching its original state. Keeping this in mind, all buildings built before 1700 are listed and most up to 1840. It becomes much more difficult for more recent buildings to be listed, particularly after 1945. At least 30 years old and have to be exceptional to be listed. Structures such as bridges, monuments, sculptures, war memorials, milestones and mileposts may also be listed. Ancient structures, such as Stonehenge, are usually classified as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The listing in descending order of importance is Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II. Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest. Grade II* groups particularly important buildings of more than special interest. While Grade II lists buildings that are of special interest, usually private residential buildings and consist of about 92% of listings. There was a non-statutory Grade III until 1970 (British Listed Buildings). All Grade listings in the text were obtained from British Listing Buildings.

Nomenclature is to use centuries when referring to the age of buildings. For example, 17th century refers to buildings built in the 1600s.

Baddesley Clinton (Grade I)

All told, we made three visits to Baddesley Clinton with friends and my niece from New Zealand, later Australia. The first visit was on the 30th March 2006, then the 12th November of the same year and the 7th March 2009.

Baddesley Clinton is located in Knowle, Warwickshire. It is an old house dating from about 1634, during the time of Queen Elizabeth I. It was the home of the Ferrers family since 1517. It was sold to the National Trust in 1980. The house, more like a mansion or castle, has remained mostly unaltered during the last 500 years.



Baddesley Clinton showing part of the moat and the main entrance on the left.

Baddesley Clinton, has been restored to look as it did at the time when it was built. It is complete with 3 priest holes. These are hideaways cleverly hidden in the building in open spaces between walls inside the house and basement so that catholic priests could hide away from the authorities. England having returned to being a protestant country under Queen Elizabeth I.

England first broke away from the Catholic faith during the reign of Henry the 8th, Elizabeth's father. However, Bloody Mary (also Henry's daughter), the queen between Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, brought a return to the Catholic faith, during which many

Protestants were burnt at the stake. Elizabeth changed it all back to the protestant faith and now it was the turn of Catholics to hide, although they were not (often) burnt at the stake if caught. There was a much more tolerant attitude, but if they did not convert, life was still made difficult for them. There were still a lot of Catholics who refused to change faith and still practised. Therefore, they used to hide the priests when they travelled from Catholic community to community.

One is not allowed to take photographs inside. We were told that National Trust does not allow photographs to be taken inside their stately homes, because they have valuable collections and do not want to enlighten potential burglars. However, they want you to buy their pictures and souvenir brochures, so one could find out anyway.



Baddesley Clinton courtyard.

The main building is surrounded by a moat, more for decoration than defence. During our first visit there was restoration work being done to the moat at the time so it had been drained. One crosses the bridge and goes under the archway to a courtyard with a pretty and protected garden. Entry to the house is through the door at the far end of the courtyard. The courtyard has wisteria and laurel covered walls that frame carefully sculpted yews. Inside, the rooms are interesting period representations, restored as accurately as possible. The great hall with an impressive chimney and the kitchen, were particularly interesting. In the Library, there

is a blood stain on the floor thought to be from the time when Nicholas Broome murdered the local priest in the 15th century, so we were told during a guided tour.

Nicholas Broome, the Lord of Baddesley Clinton, killed the priest in a fit of rage when he caught him chucking (touching in a friendly way) his wife under the chin, or an intimate embrace. He also killed John Herthill in a fight. Herthill had previously killed Broome's father. He was pardoned by King Henry VII and the pope, subject to a fine and penance to renovate the local

church. The church where, as added penance, he had to be buried upright beneath the doorway so that people could walk on his head. By the way, the floor stains were found to date from a later time (Our Warwickshire (a) and (b)).



The Grade II listed stables.

In addition to the usual barn, stables and coach house, the gardens include shrubbery, stew ponds, lake, wild flower meadow and nut grove. Dating back to the mid 1400s, a stew pond is a man-made pond used to keep fish. A source of fresh food. Another necessity is the vegetables and herb garden, as well as a walled garden. This was a private garden sheltered from wind for the pleasure of the occupants. Apart from providing privacy and security, the surrounding heat absorbed by the walls can create a warmer environment within and prevent or limit frost allowing plants to be grow that would otherwise not survive.

Mosley Old Hall (Grade II*)



Mosley Old Hall.

During July 2006 we did a day trip to Moseley which is not too far to the north-west of where we live, about 40 minutes on the road to Shrewsbury, to see the Elizabethan Moseley Old Hall. (Fedden and Joekes, 1982, National Trust Handbook 2011).

The house underwent various alterations in the 19th century. The original 17th century half-timbered exterior of the house was encased in brick. The garden includes a 17th century style garden, including a knot garden was a pattern of aromatic herbs or shrubs within a rectangular frame with low hedges.



Part of the knot garden at Mosley Old Hall.

Its claim to fame is that it was where the then Prince Charles (later King Charles II) hid disguised as a woodcutter after his defeat by Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester (also not far from where we live) in 1651. We did the tour inside and saw the bed he slept and the ingenious secret hiding places behind panelled walls, designed for Catholic priests where he hid when soldiers came searching for him.

They have a copy of an oil painting

supposedly of his later wife. To me it looked very much like a painting I had seen of his long-time mistress Barbara Palmer, nee Villiers. Villiers is the English version of the Huguenot de Villiers family who fled France to England instead of taking the route to Holland and then South Africa.

Barbara Palmer, nee Villiers, born in 1641, was the daughter of William Villiers, Viscount Grandison, who fought on the side of King Charles I at Edgehill and died of his war wounds in 1643. Barbara became Charles II's mistress when she accompanied her husband, Roger Palmer, to Holland to offer the exiled king financial support for his campaign to get his throne back. The future king took more than Roger's money. She outlasted numerous other mistresses. She is alleged to have had five illegitimate children by the king. However, she had so many affairs it can't be said with certainty that they were all his, as she claimed. She died in 1709 at the age of fifty-nine.

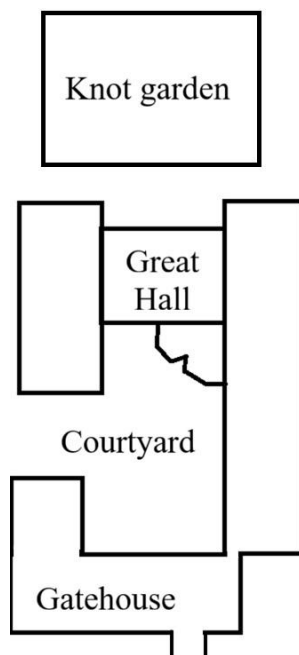
Little Moreton Hall (Grade I)



Little Moreton Hall Gatehouse south range.

Before they closed for the winter from the end of November to the beginning of March, on the spur the spur of the moment, we decided to visit Little Moreton Hall on the 19th November 2006.

Little Morton Hall is not far north of Stoke-on-Trent with Manchester somewhat further to the north. During its 500 years of existence, Little Moreton Hall has never been sold, remaining in the Moreton family until it was presented to the National Trust in 1938 ((Fedden and Joeke, 1982. Little Moreton Hall, 2006).



Basic plan

It is a beautiful Tudor timber-framed building, or rather collection of joined buildings built over a period from 1504 to 1610. Much bigger than one first realises. It consists of a so called Gatehouse (or south range, a house on its own) facing south with the Great Hall to the north beyond an open courtyard with a knot garden beyond the great hall. The buildings contained (among the usual), chapel, separate prayer room, withdrawing room, exhibition room, brew-house and corn store.

At first sight it looks like a badly built building with walls and floors at varying angles and levels. This is due to the swampy ground on which it is built and not having proper foundations, but rather a stone base, causing it to sink and sag to a varying degree. It does demonstrate the resilience and flexibility of a timber frame. The timbers are oak. As such they need to breathe for centuries in order to dry properly. The natural colour being a grey shade. However, in their wisdom during the Victorian era, they were painted with pitch to preserve the wood, which gives most of the beams the black colour. But this is slowly flaking off, or being rejected by the Oak,

because it has still not properly dried. The grey timbers that one sees are those that have more recently been replaced during restoration. The eventual digging of a moat around the buildings helped to drain water away from it and create a more solid and stable base. The moat surrounds the house and the only way to get in is over the bridge seen on the right of the above photograph. The place was built with the latest plumbing in the form of a long- drop toilet, quaintly called a garderobe. One simply sat on the loo and it all dropped into the moat. It can be seen in the protruding square shape to the left of the entrance in the above photograph.

The south range with the main gateway was built during 1560 to 1562. The south range and the brew-house chamber was a very late addition in 1610. One would have thought this would have been built first. The Gatehouse was built between 1560 and 1562. This part was built later than the Great Hall and is of lighter construction. The gallery (top left of the above photograph) that runs the length of the upper floor with its heavy gritstone slate roof is far too heavy for the structure. It has gradually settled over the centuries. To the extent that a metal cage was built around the gallery in the 1970's so that the weight could be spread to the surrounding walls and stop further settling. The work has been very cleverly done and concealed in the structure so that nothing can be seen of it apart from three metal braces.



In the courtyard looking north at the Great Hall with the bay windows on the right.

The northern Great Hall and the northern half of the east range are the oldest parts, built about 1504 to 1508. The east range extension to the south in 1508. The north-west wing was added in 1546 and the bay windows in 1559. The tops of the bay windows have the inscriptions "Richard Dale carpenter made these windows by the grace of God" and "God is in all things"

and "These leaded windows were made by William Moreton in the year of our Lord 1559." Prior to the windows being installed, at great expense at the time, there were simply small openings that were shuttered or covered by cloth, or hides. Windows were so valuable then that if the owner was going away for any length of time they would be removed and taken with them.



In the knot garden toward the Great Hall.

Our tour started in the Courtyard. It was a very cold day. The guide was warmly dressed, complete with mittens and scarf, so she was in no hurry and even began her

lecture again for late arrivals. My wife was not so well dressed and she was freezing. At one stage she thought of giving up and going inside.

Charlecote Park (Grade I)

March 2007 all the National Trust places were open again, so we started our visits. Charlecote Park was the first place we visited on the 2nd of the month. Lovely place it is too. We liked it so much we visited again in October the same year. We came to know it quite well. September 2013 we were back again to do a footpath walk through adjacent farmland and Charlecote village, although we did not enter the Charlecote property. On this occasion we travelled by bus. Takes a lot longer. However, seated upstairs one gets a very good view of the scenery and do not have to concentrate on all the infinite road signs and speed limit changes while driving. The bus drivers are always very good.

Situated six kilometres east of Stratford-upon-Avon, ten kilometres (~6 miles south of Warwick), Charlecote Park was in the Lucy family from the 13th Century until 1945 when it was donated to the National Trust (Fedden and Joekes, 1982. Charlecote Park, 2006).



Fallow Deer at Charlecote Park.

The main building and the gatehouse face east while the laundry and brewhouse and stables and coach house building are immediately to the south of the main buildings. They are all Grade I listed buildings. Nearly everything else on the deer park estate is Grade II or II* listed (British Listed Buildings).



The gatehouse with the main building in the background and the long walk or carriage ride to the main building

The gatehouse and the great hall, with its two wings, were built in 1558. The wings of the main building have been internally greatly modified. The room that Queen Elizabeth I stayed in 1572, is now the drawing room. The dining room and library were added to the west of the great hall during 1833 to 1837. The service wing (kitchen, scullery, servants' quarters, etc.), was added on the southern side about 1829 and early 1830's, as well as the separate coach house, laundry and brew-house. (Can't drink the water you know). There is also a meadow where King Charles I and his army camped in 1642 before the Edgehill battle. Stained glass windows abound around the main building.

The gatehouse is the most unaltered structure dating from 1558. The brick has faded to a rosy pink colour. Above the large entrance arch that one could drive a carriage through, is the coat of arms of Sir Thomas Lucy III who inherited the estate in 1605. The building now contains a museum in the upstairs room that was used as a banqueting room. A side room contains a collection of stuffed birds, mainly from the South Atlantic with Rockhopper and King penguins. The clock on the upper left tower, was added in 1824.



The coach house and stables.



The wagonette.

The coach house and outbuildings are located separately to the right and slightly in front of the main building in a L shape. Contained therein are the laundry, brew-house, tack room (for maintaining saddle and riding equipment, including carriage equipment) and of course, stables and carriages. A lot of the original beer and ale making equipment remains in the brew-house, including huge copper vats and wooden casks. Apparently, in 1845, 4,000 gallons were found in cellars under the house. Carriages included a breaking cart for training horses, a wagonette omnibus could carry inside four on each of the two seats, four on top and one or two next to the coachman (poor horses pulling that lot) and a Spider Phaeton, the owner-driven modern day sports car equivalent with groom sitting behind.

A summer (or play) house was built in 1829 by Mary Elizabeth Lucy for her grandchildren. Next to it is an Orangery to house exotic plants. It is now a restaurant where you ask if they take debit cards, because you have no cash. Answer yes. When you get to the checkout, they tell you they can't take it because the bill is less than £5.



The summer or play house.

The River Avon flows past the mansion on the western side. A tributary, the Dene, flows into the Avon to the south of the buildings. One can walk in an extensive parkland area of gardens and lawn around the main building with the odd statue. In a field, were Jacob Sheep brought to the park in 1756 from Portugal. They were the first flock of spotted sheep in England. Elsewhere, we saw fallow deer and apparently, there are Devon Red Poll cattle that we did not see.

Legend has it that in 1583 a young William Shakespeare was caught poaching deer in the park and brought before Sir Thomas Lucy. Shakespeare is supposed to have taken his revenge by basing the fussy Justice Shallow in “The merry wives of Windsor” on Sir Thomas. It is a very tenuous legend.

Kinwarton Dovecote (Grade I) and the Fleece Inn barn (Grade II)

25th March 2007, we did a day trip to the Kinwarton Dovecote, Warwickshire and the Fleece Inn. Dovecotes were used to provide fresh meat in winter. The Romans first realised that pigeons always returned to the same place to roost. So, by providing a roosting place a permanent source of meat was available. Meanwhile, pigeon feathers could be used for bedding. The droppings were valuable as fertilizer for hop cultivation. It was also used to remove hair from animal skins. In the middle ages it was an important source of saltpetre in the manufacture of gunpowder.

In the centuries after the Norman Conquest pigeon houses became widespread. Due to their popularity, they became so widespread that a limit was placed on the number. One per manor was allowed. However, the Lord of the Manor was not limited to the size of the Dovecote. Consequently, some very big buildings appeared that had one to two thousand nesting boxes. This was a source of friction between the Lord of the Manor and tenant farmers. Their nearby crops were a handy source of food for the pigeons. One nesting pair could eat about a bushel of grain per year.



The Kinwarton dovecote.

The Kinwarton Dovecote is about 3 kilometres north-east of Alcester. It is not in its original condition. Fairly modern paint has been applied to the outer wall, the lantern and the two dormer windows. The ogee arch doorway places it as having been built in the 14th century prior to the Black Death. The walls are about 1 metre 9 cm thick and it has 500 nest-holes. Inside is what is called a potence, from the French meaning gallows. It consists of a tall central beam that is pivoted at the top and the bottom. From this, projects horizontal beams at the top and the bottom that reach almost to the circular inner wall. At the end of these beams is attached a

ladder. By swivelling the central beam, the nests can be reached from the ladder and birds caught for the pot.

On the return trip we called at The Fleece Inn, at Bretforton near Evesham, Worcestershire, for a pub meal. Built in the early 15th century, is a half-timbered medieval barn close to the Inn that originally sheltered a farmer and his stock. It has been restored and is now used for social functions. It remained in the same family until 1977 when one of the last descendants bequeathed the pub to the National Trust.



The interior of the barn next to the Fleece Inn.

Croft Castle (Grade I)

During April 2007 we made the trip to the Welsh border to Croft Castle on the 22nd and nearby Berrington Hall on the 24th. Both north of Leominster and south of Ludlow.

Croft Castle was known as a Marcher castle. March comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *mearc*, meaning boundary. While there were some Norman settlers in the area bordering Wales before the conquest of 1066, it was only afterward that William the Conqueror needed to create a buffer zone to contain the Welsh to the west. He created a boundary area of almost independent loyal Marcher Lordships, or petty kingdoms, accountable only to the king with freedom to rule as they saw fit. The region came to be known as the Welsh Marches.

The Crofts family, or de Croft, probably arrived from Normandy before 1066 and all that. A Croft married the daughter of Owain Glyndwr, the local Welsh terrorist, or freedom fighter depending on your point of view. Anyway, they were important people from the Middle Ages until the 18th century (Fedden and Joekes, 1982). Then their fortune declined and shortly before 1750 they had to sell their ancient castle. Well really it is a big mansion.



Croft Castle and the Church of St. Michael.

It was covered with scaffolding when we were there because they were doing the roof and it looked terrible in photographs. In 1923 Lord Croft had enough notes with the queen's head on them to be able to buy the place back. So it is a romantic story and Lord Croft and family now live in one part of the castle (representing one of the oldest

territorial links in the country) and the National Trust is allowed to let the peasants traipse through the other part after handing over notes with said queen's head on them.

To me, it is not such a wonderful place. Probably called at a bad time and I was not invited. However, apparently it does have a Gothic staircase with delightful plasterwork, a remarkable rococo detailed ceiling and gold painting on the panels in the Blue Room. The grounds have amazing oak trees with diameters of around of forty feet. One is reputed to be about 1000 years old. Leading toward the castle is a half a kilometre avenue of about 350 years old Spanish sweet chestnuts along what was the original approach to the Castle. Some of them did not look too healthy to me. Victorian additions have been Wellingtonias (a very tall redwood coniferous tree), Deodar cedars, other redwoods and Monterey pines. There is also a well laid out, large and very peaceful enclosed garden, complete with the gardener's house.

Next to it is the Grade I listed Croft Church of St Michael. Constructed of rough local stone it dates from the mid-14th century, and improved in 1515. However, it does show signs of numerous repairs and alterations through the centuries with features and fittings from 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. It has a distinctive bell turret, a rare survivor. It has a mid-nineteenth century barrel organ. That is pins on a slowly rotating cylinder (hand cranked or clockwork driven) lift levers that allow air to flow through pipes or reeds, creating sound. The air is provided by bellows also either hand operated or clockwork driven. It had two barrels each playing 12 hymn tunes.



Church of St Michael and stained-glass window.

Berrington Hall (Grade I)

The Berrington Hall estate, in Herefordshire, was acquired by Thomas Harley (of Harley Street fame in London) in 1775. The hall was built between 1778 and 1781. No quick 3 month builds in those days. Estimated cost £14,500. Apparently, he later killed himself after Princess Charlotte died after childbirth, the baby being stillborn. The baby was sideways apparently and it is amazing they got it out and no wonder the mother died. These days it would have required a caesarean operation. He was accused of being at fault.

The building is rather plain outside apart from a large four column portico across most of the front to roof top. Very ornate inside. Overlooking an artificial lake, the front drawing room gets the afternoon sun. Inside there are elaborately decorated rooms with the stucco work and



Berrington Hall.

think they just want you to buy the souvenir book, at £4.50 a shot and/or the postcards. We have plenty of souvenirs already, thank you.

painted panels reputedly done by Biagio Rebecca who was obviously the main man then. The building has most ornate ceilings. In one room very clever use of shadow painting makes the faces on the ceiling appear in relief (Fedden and Joeke, 1982). That is, look as if they have been carved and moulded. The stairs are beautiful with an elaborately ornate glass dome above that lets in lots of light. Unfortunately, as with all National Trust places, one is not allowed to take pictures inside. They said it is to protect the valuable items from flashlight and to stop potential thieves from getting pictures. I still

Sudbury Hall and attached stables (Grade I)



Sudbury Hall. Notice the unusual brick cross hatch pattern.

19th May 2007, we visited Sudbury Hall with friends. That's right, another National Trust place at Sudbury Village, east of Uttoxeter in Derbyshire. If we thought Berrington Hall was ornate the decoration of Sudbury Hall makes Berrington look like the work of amateurs. It is a lavish and extravagant Charles II Restoration period reaction to the dull and austere Cromwell reign.

Sudbury Hall was built by George Vernon after first moving the village of Sudbury. "Sorry you are in the wrong place at the wrong time." He inherited the estate circa 1660 at the age of 25 and became lord of the

manor and married into money. It took about 20 years to build, but spent the rest of his life developing the building. A large part of the place has survived untouched, in spite of some weird 18th century plans to change the place that fortunately never happened. The exterior walls have a coloured diapered brickwork.

The interior decoration is nothing short of amazing and by today's standards, overdramatic is an understatement, but fascinating nevertheless. Local craftsmen were initially employed and it can be seen as such in some rooms, but then real professionals from London were called in for carving, joinery and stucco work. There is an amazingly ornate handmade plaster ceiling. Amazing how it has stayed up there. There are giltwood chandeliers and gilded wall brackets. Extensive use is made of wainscot walls. Wainscot is a posh word for wood panelled. It provided insulation from the cold stone walls and hid any damp. The top floor is a long gallery, about 45 metres. A must in those days for indoor walking exercise in cold and miserable winters. Although, by the middle 1600's this Elizabethan gallery feature was already out of date (Fedden and Joeke 1982, Sudbury Hall 2004).

Coughton Court (Grade I)



Coughton Court with dissipating contrails above.



The castle like gatehouse.

Sunday 3rd June, with the same friends, we went south to Coughton Court (pronounced coat on). We had a picnic lunch in the grounds before going inside. Situated next to the River Arrow, it is a beautiful estate with formal, walled and vegetable gardens, lakeside and riverside walks.

The impressive 16th century castle like gatehouse, with two octagonal turrets, is unusually included in the main house. It is flanked by 18th century Gothic wings with crenelated edging on the top of the walls. A gatehouse was typically built as a separate entry control point to the manor house estate.

Above the entrance archway are the Royal Arms of Henry VIII and above the 1st floor are the arms of the Throckmorton family. It was in the family from 1409, when the heiress to the property married Sir John Throckmorton, until 1946 when it was presented to the National Trust.



A view from the top of the gatehouse.

The Throckmortons main claim to fame is their tenacious allegiance to Roman Catholicism. This was at a price. They paid frequent fines and imprisonment for recusancy (not attending Anglican services) throughout Elizabeth I's and later reigns. Secret mass services were held by priests often kept in hiding places and chambers. In 1586 the family was involved in the Babington plot to place Mary Queen of Scots on the English throne instead of Elizabeth I.

In 1605, they were involved in the 5th November Gunpowder Plot. When a manservant brought news of its failure, conspirators and wives quickly scattered. Thomas Throckmorton, head of the family whose sister was married to Catesby (one of the conspirators), was absent and survived. Others lost their heads.

During the civil war they were captured by Parliamentary troops in 1643. The estates were confiscated, but later restored. They really were good at backing the losing side. The only way

they managed to survive was through profitable marriages and public service. Although why anyone would want to marry into the family, or trust them in service, I do not know.

The famous Throckmorton coat was made in 1811 as a result of a thousand-guinea wager. A lot of money in those days. On the 25th June, a coat was made between sunrise and sunset from the shearing of the sheep to the finished garment. It started with the shearing of two sheep on the estate and took 13 hours 20 minutes, including dying, drying and about 2 hours 20 minutes for the tailor, Mr Isaac White, to fashion and finish the coat (Fedden and Joekes, 1982).

Middle Littleton Tithe Barn (Grade I)



Middle Littleton Tithe Barn and inside standing near the main entrance.

From Coughton Court we went further south to the Middle Littleton Tithe Barn near Evesham.

Tithe barns were used for storing the tithes received from the tenants of church lands. Documentary evidence says it was built by Abbot Ombersley around 1367 and 1379. Well not really built by him, he being the boss. However, the building style and carbon analysis suggests it is about 100 years older. So maybe he was not the boss. Built to last, the walls are almost a metre thick. Tithe barns were among the biggest buildings of the Middle Ages. This one is about 45 metres long and 10 metres wide. It is now occupied by pigeons. There is a large board fixed to an interior wall showing how it was constructed and the restoration during late 1970s.

The beauty of the building is in its aptly functional design and size. They were usually built of random available stone with ashlar dressings and roofed with stone tiles. The roof was open with most of the weight often borne by two rows of oak posts on stone bases. Large doors admitted carts (Fedden. R. and Joekes. 1982).

Packwood House (Grade I)

About a week later, 12th November 2007, visited Packwood House, close to Baddesley Clinton. The original farmhouse dates from about the 17th century, but was much altered internally during the 19th century. The big barn was converted into a Tudor-style hall, connected to the main house by adding a long gallery in 1931, It created a marked contrast between the 17th century building and the later brick additions.

The original building is Grade I listed. Almost nothing inside is original. However, the family, before and after the 1st World War, tried their best to find the correct period fittings. Whenever



Packwood House.

and wherever they heard of an old place of a similar period being demolished, or there was an auction, they bought material and brought it back to the house.

There are French and Flemish tapestries and embroidery. The furniture includes 17th and 18th century English and mainland Europe origin, as well as a 14th century refectory table and a suite of George I walnut chairs. The garden has been remarkably and beautifully restored. Apparently, it was created during the austere Cromwell period around 1655.



A rear view of Packwood House and the topiary garden.



The converted barn.

Of particular interest is the topiary section of the garden that represents the Sermon on the Mount believed to have been laid around 1655. A reminder of the Oliver Cromwell austerity Puritan Commonwealth period when even a garden had to reflect the mood of the time. It has a single large Master yew tree with a box hedge surround then other smaller yews that represent “the Evangelists and Apostles” then smaller trees representing the listening multitude. The conical shape is maintained by annual summer pruning (Fedden and Joeke, 1982 and WMFWI, 1989).

Kinver Holy Austin Rock Houses (Scheduled Ancient Monument)

The 8th of August 2007 we went to see the Holy Austin Rock Houses at Kinver, a drive of about 40 minutes from home. Fascinating! Apparently now known as Kinver Edge and the Rock Houses. Wokery alive and unwell? Grade listing unknown.

Numerous and detailed wall mounted boards provided the information that follows of life in



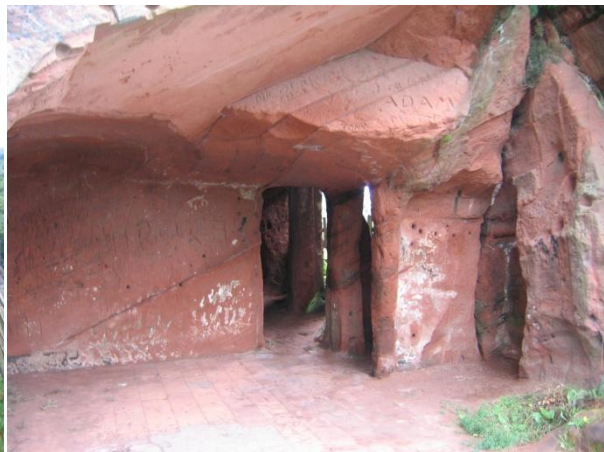
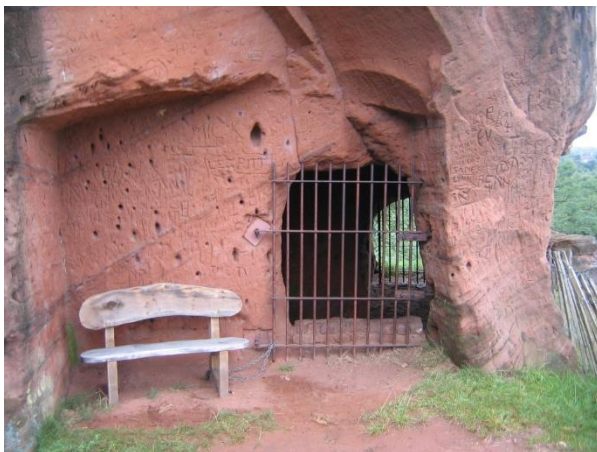
A Kinver rock house.

these carved cave houses and from Bob Clarke (200).

Holy Austin is said to be named after a monk who lived near the site during the 16th century and is the earliest known reference to occupation at Holy Austin Rock. The parish register also records a “Margaret of the fox earth”, who died in June 1617. The first written reference to rock-cut houses is from the book, "The Beauties of Enville" by J. Heely. He describes walking from Hagley to Enville in 1777 when a violent storm broke while he crossed Kinver Edge. He saw smoke

from a chimney, went there to get out of the rain and discovered the rock houses.

Cave dwellings were not uncommon in this area. Other much smaller and neglected remnants of other sites were seen during our drive in the area. At Holy Austin there were three dwelling levels with about 40 residents. The lower level had four houses and the middle level two. The upper level had three stone faced houses and two cave houses. The middle level has fallen apart and has been blocked off, but you can still see where there were houses. Apparently, the children on the middle level enjoyed throwing things down the chimneys of the houses below.



Derelict and eroded remains.

The sandstone was easy to work, so that anyone with a hammer and a chisel could carve out a home. Rooms could be made bigger later, as well as adding extra windows and doors. The homes were as comfortable as other houses of the period and the residents apparently enjoyed living there. The rock meant that homes were cool in summer and warm in winter. However, the dwellings also usually had a fire lit in the front room. The rooms were regularly lime washed and the floors usually had quarry tiles. Windows and doors were painted and paths laid out. Rag rugs were made and the dwellings had the usual comforts of the working class of the time.

Water came from two deep wells, one at the upper level the other at the lower level. When a pumping station was opened in the village in the 1930's, the wells dried up and water was piped to an outside tap. Gas was also installed about this time. There is evidence that the three top faced houses each had a toilet and the deposits were used as compost for the vegetable gardens. As well as vegetable gardens there were fruit trees, goats, chickens and pigs. There were also

wild rabbits to be caught. Flowers such as roses, shrubs and climbing plants were also grown. Being a rocky area, there was not much topsoil, so this had to be brought from elsewhere

All in all, Holy Austin Rock was apparently a healthy place to live, with some of the inhabitants living there into their 80's, which was not common in the 19th century. However, closure of the ironworks in 1881 caused a decline in the community in general and the rock households fell to three. This is also when parts of the rock began to deteriorate and the middle level houses were used for storage and animal shelter. The other dwellings were used until the 1960's.

Early in the 20th century the rock houses became a tourist attraction and the rock residents made extra money by selling teas. By the end of the Second World War one family remained in the three faced upper-level houses and another occupied all the lower caves. The lower level became empty in the 1950's but the cafe lasted until 1967. The upper level was occupied until 1963. When the café closed, vandalism and the weather caused rapid decay. There were rock falls and some people even caused collapse by using a chain saw to take out a pillar. For safety sake, dangerous parts were pulled down as well as some of the faced dwellings. The lower caves were sealed with bricks and were therefore preserved. National Trust volunteers have done all the restoration work (Clarke, 2002). Holy Austin is now a protected site and brings in money from tourists.

Lower Brockhampton Manor House (Grade I)



Lower Brockhampton gatehouse & manor.

On the 26th June 2008, while spending a week in Herefordshire and Brecon in Wales, we visited Lower Brockhampton manor house. First site of the place was a most pleasant surprise. The gatehouse and moated manor house were distinctly different from those that one is used to seeing. Quaint and most picturesque.

A National Trust guide/brochure told us that Brockhampton “means the tun (farm or enclosure) of the dwellers on the brook.” It was built between 1380 and 1400 in a wooded valley in the Welsh Marches for a descendant of the Brockhampton family who

had lived there from before the 12th century. There may well have been an earlier house or settlement at the site.

The manor house using “massive timbers” from trees in the estate. The great hall is open to the rafters with a two-story wing. Mid-18th century a new house was built nearby. Lower Brockhampton became a farmhouse. The 1700 acre estate was bequeathed to the National Trust in 1946 along with the still existing traditional farms and woodland with ancient oak and beech. It was noted that the sheep on the estate are Jacobs, the same as at Charlecote and Ryland. The cattle look like Hereford.

The gatehouse was believed to have been built around 1480. However, tree-ring analysis (dendrochronology) of samples from a ceiling beam and a central roof truss give felling dates of around 1530-1540 with building being completed around 1550. The jettied upper floor, while



Part of the remaining moat on the east.

making it look strange adds to its quaint appearance. It is one of the few “timber gatehouses to have survived and still has its original Studded floor.”

An archaeological survey found that the moat originally surrounded the house it being filled west of the gatehouse when it became a farmhouse. The moat would have provided safety for livestock from predators, fish for fast days, waterfowl and drainage from the clay soil.

Nearby is the ruin of a chapel built about 1180. When the owners moved to their new house, it was used as a barn for the farm before slow deterioration.

Knighthayes Court (Grade I)

On the way south-west on a visit to Devon on Saturday the 14th March 2009, we stopped at Knighthayes Court in National Trust ownership since 1972. It is a Victorian country house at Bolham, near Tiverton in Devon.

Built between 1860 and 1874 during the industrial and agricultural boom years, the place's claim to fame is that the design of the Victorian house was strongly influenced by 13th century Gothic design, complete with gargoyles, gothic style windows and interior design. The architect, William Burges, was devoted to this style. Unusual for Burges to design a country house, because he was a builder of churches and a decorator. Knighthayes was the only complete country house that he designed. His plans for the interior were too lavish for Sir John Heathcoat Amory, who chose John Dibblee Crace to design and complete the interior. Nevertheless, the interior is still a flamboyant and extravagant style, especially the ceilings. Unfortunately, as usual, one is not allowed to take photographs inside National Trust buildings, although the guide book we bought has numerous interior photographs. Obviously, they want one to buy the souvenir/guide booklet.



This is the south view of the house with gargoyles right. Half hidden behind the tree (a Deodar Cedar perhaps) is the “smaller gabled service wing” while on the left is the conservatory built in 1963 and restored after 2004.



At the front entrance inside the porch is a novel idea for a ceiling light fitting. It has the plaster sculptured upper body of a person holding the fitting.



from the house. Also designed by Burges, it has a “Gothic asymmetric façade” with red painted dormer windows. Large enough to be a country house in its own right, it is built with four wings around a courtyard. It included a cleaning and harness room, a hayloft, chaff house (storage of chaff from threshed grain) and a carriage house.

The stables building, some distance to the north beyond a wooded area, is not visible

Hardwick Hall (Grade I)



1st April 2009 and a day trip to Hardwick Hall, not far from Mansfield and Chesterfield. Also known as “Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall,” due to the huge expanse of windows. To get there we passed through Ault Hucknall, described by locals as the smallest village in England, consisting of a church and three houses.

Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall.

Hardwick Hall is worth the visit. Built by Bess of Hardwick (Elizabeth Hardwick, circa 1527-1608, who had a talent for marrying rich husbands) to replace the old hall where she was born, the crumbling remains of

which stand nearby. By the way, the Hardwick Old Hall ruin is also Grade I listed. Numerous other features such as six garden statues, a Conduit House, gazebo and garden walls and cottages to the south-west are Grade II listed while a range of outbuildings and stables are Grade II* listed.

Bess survived 4 spouses and lived into her eighties. No idiot our Bess. Each marriage bringing her increased wealth. She was in her sixties when she set about building the new Hardwick Hall (Hardwick Hall, 2008. Fedden and Joeke, 1982).

The place is big. The High Great Chamber, reception and entertainment room, is the size of a decent sized five bedroom house. Along the upper length of the south facing hall is the gallery. With large windows along its length was a warm place to be in winter and to get exercise pacing its length in bad weather. The hall is famous for its 16th and 17th century tapestries and “incomparable” collection of embroideries. Most of the finest embroidery being in the form of

table-carpets. At this time carpets were more often to be found on tables than on the floor.



Hardwick Old Hall and two of the statues.

Nearby, on the estate is Stainsby Mill. There has been a watermill on the site since the 13th century. The present mill was reconstructed around 1850 (Stainsby Mill, 2007). We were shown around the place and my wife bought a bag of flour ground in the mill.

Dudmaston Hall (Grade II*)



Dudmaston Hall.

On the 4th May 2009, we went to Dudmaston Hall, near the village of Quatt and south of Bridgenorth. It is a 17th century house and working estate in the care of the National Trust, owned by the same family for over 875 years. The house contains a large collection of modern and contemporary art. We did not go inside. The main attraction for us was the pleasant walk through the large estate with woodland and a small lake, close to the Severn River and for me, close to Hampton Loade station and the Severn Valley Railway. This enabled me to take photographs of passing trains.



Lake and boathouse with Dudmaston Hall in the background and a steam train on the other side of the Severn River.

Hidcote Manor Gardens (Grade II)

The 25th May 2010, we went to Hidcote Manor Gardens (south of Stratford-upon-Avon) for the day. Very pretty it was. Better known for the garden and park-like walks on the estate. I had to take a photograph of the warning sign and an enormous fungus. I sent it to my sister in South Africa and said that although you are more used to signs saying car hijackers, or pickpockets, or muggers, are active in the area, we also have our problems. The sign reads, “beware, bees active in this area.” She found it amusing.

We were exceptionally fortunate while there. We came back to the car to find a piece of paper on the windscreen saying can we go to the office, as someone has handed in a camera case. We knew we had our cameras, but could not find the Tom Tom GPS (global positioning system



Hidcote Manor and the fungus with the bee warning.



Part of the garden.

satellite navigation) and concluded that someone had taken it, but left the case. What we could not understand was that the car was locked and not broken into. My wife went to the office and came back with her Tom Tom in its case. It appears she dropped it outside the car door when we left to go to the gardens. A lady saw it and handed it in. She did not leave her name, or any contact details, so we could not even thank her. The difference between here and South Africa. There one would never see it again.

Bodiam Castle (Grade I)

5th July 2010, while either staying with in-laws, we visited Bodiam Castle in East Sussex. Built in the late 14th century, it is the epitome of the English concept of a beautiful castle, both militarily and as a comfortable place to live. Surrounded by a moat, it is square, with hexagonal towers at each corner, four central postern towers, crenelated walls and towers, drawbridge and portcullis.



Bodiam, a majestic castle.

Nevertheless, an interesting and picturesque place.

Rufford Old Hall (Grade I)



The older Great Hall on the right. The lantern tower was added in 1825. The newer 1662 brick building on the left.

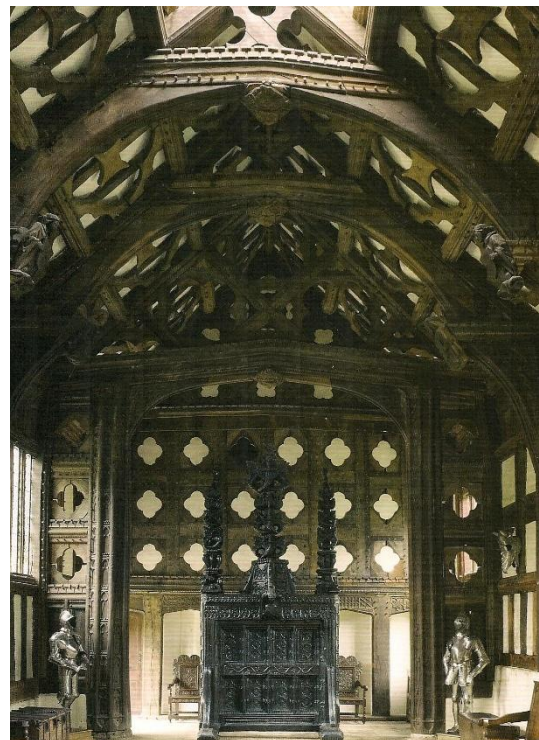
The Great Hall dates from 1530-1550. It is regarded as a “rare and important” survivor of a timber-framed building. The later brick structure dates from 1662. It is almost certain William Shakespeare trod the boards there in his early touring actor days (Dean, 2007).

During the guided tour, we learnt that dried used tea leaves were used to keep the place clean. The housekeeper would sprinkle them on the carpets and if she found any later, she would know that the room had not been properly swept by the housemaids.

However, by the time it was built England was peaceful. A strong fortress was not the highest priority, rather have a comfortable home.

The fortifications were symbols of power, more than anything else. Some examples: there is a strong main gate and drawbridge, but there is a rear entrance, which had a wooden bridge across the moat, the battlements are small and thin, the gun-loops are poorly positioned and the moat can be easily drained. Everything says it was designed for show and domestic comfort.

After a touring holiday in Lancashire, Monday the 13th September 2010, we finally headed home in a roundabout way. First, we went to the National Trust Rufford Old Hall, where we had a guided tour.



The interior of the hall with its circa 1530-40 exceptionally large fire screen, used to keep sparks from escaping into the room.

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