

Northleach Historical Society: What's On

The Northleach Historical Society reconvenes after the summer break to hear a talk on 3 September by Ray Wilson on the Industrial Heritage of the Cotswolds, the start of our autumn programme.

Members of the Society went back rather further than the Industrial Revolution for their July summer outing to Madresfield Court, near Malvern: it has been the ancestral home of the Lygon family for the past thousand years! The Lygons bore the title Earls of Beauchamp until 1979, when the eighth and last Earl died without an heir. The moated house, part medieval, part Tudor and part Victorian Gothic, remains the Lygon family home however and can be visited by arrangement.

Madresfield was also the inspiration behind Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. Waugh had been at Oxford with Hugh Lygon, second son of the seventh Earl Beauchamp, who was forced into exile in a homosexual scandal in the 1930s. The novelist was a frequent guest at Madresfield, becoming close to Hugh's sisters Sebilla, Dorothy and especially Mary: in *Brideshead* Hugh becomes Sebastian Flyte and Mary Julia, while Earl Beauchamp provides the model for the exiled Lord Marchmain.

Highlights of the tour included the reconstructed Great Hall, the Long Gallery with views over the park, the 8000-book library designed by CR Ashbee and above all the Arts and Crafts High Anglican chapel, which features members of the Lygon family in devotional poses and is described by Waugh in the novel in almost exact detail. Also much admired were the magnificent collections at Madresfield of furniture, porcelain and paintings and portraits, many of the latter displayed to great effect in the dramatic, three-domed Staircase Hall – in effect “a picture gallery” as one member remarked.

After a walk in the gardens and sandwiches and drinks at a nearby pub, the Swan, we walked to St Leonards, the frescoed Arts and Crafts church of the Beauchamp community, currently celebrating its 150th anniversary, and the adjoining alms houses, with tea and cake to round off a fascinating day in warm summer weather.

No meeting in August, but we hope visitors and new members will join us on 3 September. Talks are held on the first Wednesday of every month at 7.30pm at the Westwoods Centre. Information: 01451 860687.