

GOODERSTONE WATER GARDENS AND OXBURGH HALL

Within seven miles to the Southwest of Swaffham are the two little tourist and visitor Norfolk gems of Gooderstone Water Gardens and Oxburgh Hall and on Friday October 6th we visited both of them.

We set off, first to Gooderstone Water Gardens, arriving there about 10.30. The facilities had been opened up earlier than usual ready for our arrival so the first visit was to the café for morning coffee, The Water Gardens were created in 6.5 acres of land that had become too wet for grazing cattle. In 1970 the farmer at the time, Billy Knights aged seventy, was discussing with his family what the area could be used for. A throwaway line from one of his sons suggesting the creation of a water garden was quickly drawn up on old wallpaper and work began. When Billy died aged ninety-three, the gardens had been open for twenty years. In April 2002 Billy's daughter Coral began the restoration after the gardens had been closed for five years and had become derelict, and they re-opened again to the public in June 2003. Although this information is published on several websites some of us were given this information first hand by Coral herself as we met her while walking around the site.



The gardens today are a peaceful haven of ponds, waterways, nature trails, a bird hide, wildlife, linked together by footpaths and bridges. After walking the site it was back to the café for a light lunch before boarding the coach and travelling the two miles to Oxburgh Hall.

Despite its moated and fortified creation Oxburgh Hall was completed in 1482 as a family home for Sir Edmund Bedingfield and the family have lived here continuously ever since. It has survived civil war, several periods of near dereliction and threatened demolition in the 20th century, before finally passing into National trust ownership in 1952.



The Bedingfields suffered many highs and lows over the years from their links with Royalty to Catholic persecution. The family history is told through portraits and artefacts throughout the house. There is still evidence of the priest hole and the Oxburgh hangings. These are the needlework creations of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Bess of Hardwick while Mary was imprisoned in the custody of the Earl of Shrewsbury.

Outside the grounds of the two-hundred-acre estate contain formal gardens, productive walled gardens, display glasshouses and a French parterre. Away from the property there are woods, parkland, and chalk-stream habitats.

Recently a £6m restoration has been completed, including the roof and gatehouse. The manor house has had 14,000 new roof tiles, twenty-seven chimneys and fourteen dormer windows replaced after an investigation as a result of the collapse of a dormer window in 2016.

Our visit completed, we left Oxburgh at 16.00 hrs and arrived back in Wymondham just before five o' clock. An excellent day out visiting two local tourist attractions.

So, if you are in the Swaffham area, or just fancy a pleasant local day out, both of these places are well worth a visit in their own right.