

## Holkham Hall – June 2017

Twenty six of our walking group were gathered at the Co-op car park in Thrapston for the start of our annual Away Day. The weather was threatening rain as the thirty seater Coach arrived at 8.30am.

After filling up with diesel, we progressed rapidly on this early Sunday morning to our destination, Wells Next The Sea. After a comfort stop halfway, we disembarked at the Beach Café car park at the end of the long promenade from the town to the Life Boat station.

The sun shone brightly between fluffy cotton wool clouds as we began our walk, led by Stuart, along this short stretch of the Norfolk Coast called Peddars Way. Largely man-made by the reclamation of saltmarsh during the seventeenth and nineteenth century, Holkham National Nature Reserve, through which it passes, is a rare and precious habitat of salt marsh, sand dunes, pine woods and grazing marsh. Our route was dry and easy walking and some were soon straining at the leash to be away. Hauling them back to the pack gave those of a more perambulatory nature a chance to catch up.



There were few encounters with bell tinkling cyclists or joggers that day, so progress was soon made to Holkham gap. Here, those wanting to dip their toes in the briny and see the sea turned along the boardwalk to the right. The sea goes out a fair way on this part of the coast, so binoculars might be needed even with the help of a high advantage point to see it. The others made the long haul along the linear road, which is Lady Ann's Drive, to the coast road where a small number seeking the highlights of Wells Next The Sea departed on the Coast Hopper bus. The others, resisting the smell of the hop and the temptation of retail therapy, forged onward through the entrance gate into Holkham Hall Park.

Stands of sweet smelling Lime trees mixed with ancient Beeches, and the specialty of the area the evergreen Holme Oak tantalized our senses. Reassuringly our coach was parked up in its designated space, and after raiding it for our packed lunches and change of footwear, and having a refreshing tea in the Courtyard Café, we were ready for anything.

The time was our own until 4.30pm. Red and Roe deer are both numerous in the park, though their numbers may soon be overtaken by the growing broods of Canada Geese gathered around the lake. Some of us took off to explore the park, whilst those with tired legs opted for a tour of the house. Holkham Hall was built by the first Earl of Leicester, Thomas Coke, between 1734 and 1764 in the Palladian style. Influenced by his appreciation of classical art and his collections from a six year long Grand Tour of Europe, Thomas had built and furnished in a unique style with collections fitting of this period of history.





The second Earl in the 1850's installed central heating and plate glass windows. The third Earl installed electricity driven by a generator and modernized and updated many of the rooms in a less than desirable way. It took the seventh Earl to reverse many of these unsympathetic changes and reinstate the state rooms to their original 18th century design.

Two golf buggies were available to convey those with a horticultural leaning to the Hall's extensive walled vegetable and flower gardens which were half a mile away. On entering, a quick peek into the garden 'bothy' revealed a multitude of forks and spades, hanging as if to attention on the back wall. They were no doubt waiting to be used by what must have been an army of gardeners to tend row upon row of Brassicas, fruit trees and Legumes of every kind. Flower borders fragrant with Jasmine and Rose adorned the walls around to the extensive hot houses built for the cultivation of cucumber, peppers and peaches and exotic fruits.

With a final tea or coffee inside us we returned to the coach and the return journey. In spite of a road accident just outside Peterborough and a subsequent diversion deftly found by our driver, we arrived safely back at the Co-op in good time. The day had been a great success and all agreed that the coordination and effort put in by our Committee and, in particular, our Secretary, Ruth, had paid off well.

