

REMS VISIT TO PAINSHILL PARK 14 April 2011

Painshill Park is an 18th Century (Grade 1) Landscape Park with follies created by Charles Hamilton from the 1730s. Most of the buildings have been restored but unfortunately the house was sold for apartments when the money ran out.

We were very privileged to have Jan Clark as our morning guide as she is very knowledgeable and had lots of prints of the 18th century garden. We went along the path that 18th century visitors would have taken which went from one folly/statue/vista to another with new vistas opening each time. The Grotto is world famous with its running water and pendants of calcite crystals. Unfortunately, some of the interior still needs restoring but all the structure is ready. They are hoping for Lottery Heritage money to complete this and to rebuild a bridge over the lake. They also hope to rebuild the Temple of Bacchus which fell down after the supporting pillars were removed. The pediment was papier-mache. Their statue of Bacchus is at a NT property and as they cannot have it outside, Painshill is hoping to have it back in the new building. The water wheel and pump for lifting water from the River Mole to the lake is still there and in working order but it was not running during our visit. The tour took 2½ hours and we did not have time for everything, notably the tower and hermitage.

We saw some baby Grebes on the lake hitching a lift on their mother's back. Regrettably the photographs do not show them, just a bump under the wings. The vineyard, similar to the one in the 18th century, produces wine which is on sale in the cafe. I liked their rosé.

After a good lunch in their cafe, we were shown the walled garden with its American collection of plants by Cath Clark and Karen Bridgeman, again volunteers and very knowledgeable. In the Georgian Period a few plant importers had arrangements with collectors abroad to send seeds and plants for their English customers. One was a farmer in Philadelphia called John Bartram. They arrived in boxes which were sent onto the customers so they were never certain what would be in them. The seeds were wrapped in oiled cloth and the plants were in separate compartments. There are replica boxes in the garden; about 2 ft cube. They had trouble with the Venus fly traps as they all died until they cut holes in a standard barrel and 1/3 filled it with peat in which the plants were placed. There was great correspondence about the insectivorous plants. Most of the summer flowering plants are American in origin.

George Freeman

Pictures

Group at the Turkish Tent (Photo by John Temple)

Grotto 4

Grotto 8 showing the structure

Pump 1 – gears

Ruined Abbey

Temple

View from the Temple