

Visit to Royal Commandery and Worcester Infirmary on 17-04-18

The History Group visit began at the Commandery with our Guide giving us a chronological overview of the site and its buildings, beginning in the Bronze Age.



The Commandery, Worcester.

The group then moved on to 'The Painted Chamber', part of the medieval St Godwald's Hospital, and its 'end-of-life' room. The elaborate artwork and symbols in this chamber prepared its inhabitants for the next stage of their 'life journey'.



The Group in the Painted Chamber.

From there we moved to the Victorian Kitchen, originally an C11 chapel, dedicated to St Godwald. We were able to see some of the original remains of the chapel, which was a monastic hospital until it was closed during the Reformation.

The tour continued through this fascinating site, every room portraying a different period of its diverse and colourful history - the Dark Blue Room, depicting the causes of the Civil War; the 'Battle of Worcester Room', where a model of the battle site enabled some to twiddle knobs and pull levers to move the armies and regiments into battle formations.

Walking through a beautifully panelled room, we entered 'The Jefferson Room', a reminder that a President of the United States had once been inspired by the democracy of the time, when he visited. Other uses of the site had been a Tudor family home; a Georgian home; a Victorian school for the blind sons of Gentlemen and a C20 print works.

The final destination of this tour was the magnificent Great Hall, where a 'talking heads' projection on one wall took the viewer on a brief summary of this historically strategic site.

From the Commandery, we moved across town to the Infirmary, again of historical importance.



The Worcester Infirmary (1771 - 2002)

In the Boardroom of this imposing building history was made, when the BMA (British Medical Association) was founded here by Sir Charles Hastings on 18-07-1832. The Boardroom contains many paintings of famous medical people. Another renowned person connected with this hospital was Jenny Lind, 'The Swedish Nightingale', who was a great benefactress. Elgar's father tuned the organ in the Chapel and the first service held in the beautiful chapel was in 1851.

The tour took us out to the nearby Nurses' Home, Mulberry House, the funding being achieved by Mary Herbert who trained under Florence Nightingale. Mulberry House was opened in 1897.



Mulberry House.

During the tour many interesting facts emerged, among them that part of the nurses' pay was in beer, as water was not fit to consume; and that a prison was connected by a tunnel to the hospital and criminals were dissected after death for the purposes of medical research.

The tour finished in an exhibition area, with many interactive displays, old photographs and other exhibits, an early X-ray machine and other memorabilia that took the group 'down Memory Lane'.

The consensus of the visit was that we do indeed owe a debt of gratitude to the foresight and tenacity of a 'local' man who, on this very site, founded an Association which still has influence today.

Heidy Hague.