

Cromer Study Tour 21 – 25 September 2019

The History Group Study Tour to Norfolk proved to be extremely interesting and covered a diverse range of interests and experiences.

Day 1: On the journey from Kidderminster to Cromer there was a Comfort Stop at **King's Lynn**, an English seaport and market town. This Hanseatic town was one of England's most important ports from as early as the 12th century and this maritime past is still very much in evidence today. Fine old merchants' houses stretch down to the river between cobbled lanes and the elegant Custom House overlooks the harbour. The town's heritage is reflected in an amazing array of historic buildings and at two magnificent market places: Saturday Market Place, where St Margaret's Church lies, designated as a Minster Church in 2011 by the Bishop of Norwich, surrounded by splendid buildings, and Tuesday Market Place, quite possibly one of England's grandest squares. Pilgrims passed through Lynn on their way to the Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham in medieval times.

We arrived at the 'Hotel de Paris' (a Leisureplex Hotel) – later to be dubbed by some as 'Alfa Towers', a nod to 'Fawlty Towers', and the appalling management issues that occurred before being sorted during the week. This elegant hotel on the sea-front had beautiful views over the promenade and pier. Bracing winds did not deter members of the group from taking a first walk round this charming seaside town, with many interesting and attractive old buildings.



View of the Hotel de Paris from Cromer Pier.

Day 2: The coach took the group to **Blakeney**, a coastal village lying within the Norfolk Coast AONB and the North Norfolk Heritage Coast. The North Norfolk Coastal Path travels along its quayside. The charming coastal village of Blakeney was once a medieval commercial port transporting spices and oriental cloths. The estuary today is an amazing landscape of marshes, sand hills and mud banks. Among the local wildlife found in this area are seals and migratory birds. The village itself has pretty flint cottages, once homes to local fisherman.

From Blakeney, you can take a boat trip to Blakeney Point, to visit the seal colonies in this National Nature Reserve, managed by the National Trust. Blakeney Point is a perfect breeding site for grey seals and their pups, born during November to early January, and is the largest seal colony in England with over 2,000 seal pups born annually.

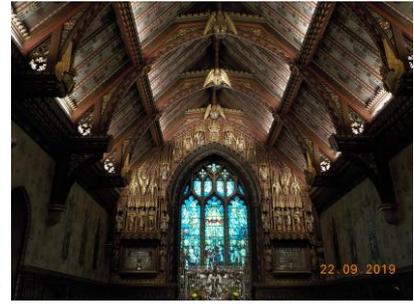


Views of Blakeney

From Blakeney the journey continued to **Sandringham House**, the much-loved country retreat of Her Majesty The Queen, which has been the private home of four generations of British monarchs since 1862. It was once described as 'the most comfortable house in England'.



Sandringham House and Church interior



The main ground floor rooms, regularly used by the Royal Family, are open to the public and the decor and contents remain very much as they were in Edwardian times. Both Queen Alexandra and later Queen Mary were great collectors of objets d'art, which are displayed in a domestic setting throughout the ground floor. The walls are hung with family portraits by leading contemporary court painters: Heinrich von Angeli, Sir Luke Fildes, Franz Winterhalter and Edward Hughes. An important collection of oriental arms and armour is housed at Sandringham House, brought back from the Far East and India in 1876. Each room had knowledgeable guides who were happy to answer our questions, and an interactive audio guide enhanced the Visitor Experience.

Housed in the former coach houses and stable block, Sandringham Exhibition & Transport Museum housed a varied collection of items, including a 1939 Merryweather fire engine. Over the years the building has had many uses and in the past has been used as a police post, fire station, Carving School and Royal garages.

The Gardens were a delight to explore, still full of carefully planned colour, and the Church, familiar to many from Christmas newsreels, is in itself a beautiful and interesting building, well worth visiting.

Day 3: A full day was spent on two principle methods of transport: The Bure Valley Railway and a Norfolk Broads boat trip. **The Bure Valley Railway** is a 15" minimum gauge heritage railway in Norfolk, within The Broads National Park. The railway runs from **Aylsham** to Wroxham and is Norfolk's longest railway of less than standard gauge. It uses both steam and diesel locomotives. A footpath and cycle path runs alongside the entire nine mile length of the railway.



Bure Valley Railway

Wroxham, the capital of the Norfolk Broads boasts 'the world's largest village store'! This village was the starting point for the group to discover the **Norfolk Broads by boat**. A full commentary explaining the origins of the Broads, identifying points of interest along the way and showing the abundance of local water birds as they came into view enhanced the trip. Within the beautiful scenery all around us, we saw greylag geese, a kingfisher, a grey heron; reed-thatched houses; George Formby's house; a bittern; a marsh harrier; a cormorant; coots and a great crested grebe. The boat trip was beautiful, relaxing, peaceful and timeless and very interesting.



Reed-thatched house



Reedbeds on Norfolk Broads

Day 4: On our final full day there was a visit to **Norwich**. Many of the group chose to do the Cathedral guided tour which proved very interesting. The most complete Norman Cathedral in England and one of the finest examples of Romanesque architecture in Europe, Norwich Cathedral is one of England's finest Cathedrals, containing impressive cloisters, magnificent roof bosses, a soaring spire and a modern refectory. The Cathedral contains over 1,000 roof bosses, which is the greatest collection of any church in the world. Sitting high from the vaults of the Cathedral Nave and Cloister, the colourful Nave bosses share some of the best-loved Bible stories and are a testimony to the interest and importance of the art of storytelling in the late Middle Ages. One of the most complete features from the Middle Ages in England, The Cloisters at Norwich Cathedral are the biggest of their kind in the country.



Lierne Vaulting and Norman Arches in Norwich Cathedral

Among the famous people connected with the Cathedral is Edith Cavell, the Great War nurse who was executed by the Germans for helping Belgian and French Resistance to escape to neutral Holland, despite the fact that she nursed soldiers from both sides of the conflict. On the night before her death her last words were: "Standing as I do in view of God and eternity, I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone." She is buried in the Cathedral grounds.

The City of Norwich also proved to be a fascinating place to explore, while some of the group remained in Cromer, to enjoy a relaxing day by the sea and in the town. Altogether, the Study Tour was considered to be a great success.

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