

Howick House and Gardens. 28th April 2022

On a beautiful bright and dry day about 20 members attended this Field Trip in Northumberland. Included in the group were some new faces, though for some of our members Howick was a regular visit and they had visited the gardens in all seasons.

Our party was divided into two groups and we were led by volunteers Margaret Murray and Peter Burrows for an informative wander rounds the grounds and the ground floor of the house. There was a well illustrated and amusing information board in the Hall showing the scope of the estate, the walks and the wildlife.

Howick was the home of the Grey family from 1319 to 1963 when on the death of of the 5th Earl Grey the estate passed to his daughter and from there to her son, the 2nd Lord Howick of Glendale, the grandson of the 5th Earl Grey. The family of Lord Howick live in one wing of the house and the gardens do feel as if they are used by a family.

The 2nd Earl Grey is probably the most distinguished member as a politician, leader of the Whig party and Prime Minister from 1830 to 1834. He was also the blender of the tea we know.

Our guides led us through part of the vast arboretum. It was astonishing to learn that all the specimen trees have been grown from seed collected in the wild from all round the world. In all there are now 11,000 trees growing within the grounds in designated areas specific to their home countries. So trees can be seen from China and the Himalayas, East Asia, India and Pakistan, North America, Europe, and the Southern Hemisphere as you move from one area to another. In all there were 65 acres to explore.

There is an imaginative sensory garden with perfumed and tactile plants and flowing water.

We passed the small Victorian church in the grounds which holds services with two other local churches.

Many of us intend to revisit and explore more of the walks which are well labelled but not all are suitable for those with walking difficulties. However the routes we took were easy walking and we all stopped to identify familiar plants on the way.

Howick had a big fire in 1926 which destroyed a lot of the building because there were problems getting fire-engines to the property. Following the fire the insurance company insisted that water was made available beside the house to quench another fire. Consequently there is a large decorative pond outside the main entrance to the house.

Our tour ended with thanks to our hosts and lunch in the Earl Grey Tea Room. After lunch many people took the delightful Long Walk, which follows the Howick Burn to the coast.

Copies of our new Grave Slabs book were available for members to buy and several copies were sold or collected for friends.

Lesley Gray

