

BERWICKSHIRE NATURALISTS' CLUB

FIELD VISIT

22 August 2022

Gosford House, Longniddry, East Lothian



The morning visit of the Club was to Gosford House. The Vice President and fifteen Club members formed the group for a private tour of the house.

The magnificent house is set in 5,000 acres of coast and parkland in East Lothian on the south side of the Firth of Forth. Constructed for the 7th Earl of Wemyss, the building was completed in 1800, eight years after the death of its architect, Robert Adam. The house was substantially altered a few years later and then again to a design by William Young in 1890. It sits in extensive grounds with views over the Firth of Forth towards Edinburgh.

The group, led by the excellent guide Angela, entered the house through the hall and was led into the magnificent marble hall which rises to a height of three storeys, with a magnificent double staircase leading to a surrounding picture gallery. The elaborate fireplace, alabaster colonnades, polished Caen stone and ornate plasterwork reflect the strong Italianate taste of the tenth Earl of Wemyss, while the Palladian screen of Venetian windows are reminiscent of Adam's original designs.

The tour included the Library and Morning Room, both frequently used by the present Lord Wemyss and his family when they visit the house. The Library

contains a fascinating collection of books, including Chippendale's catalogue *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Directory*. Hanging over the fireplace is a fine nineteenth century painting *The Melton Breakfast* by Sir Francis Grant. It portrays the "Hunting Earl".

The tour continued around the picture gallery and other rooms. The house contains many fine paintings by a vast number of artists, including Michelangelo, Raphael, Botticelli, Cuyp, Ramsay, Allan, Raeburn and Sargent, and handsome furniture, including several fine pieces by Chippendale, and a number of clocks. Many works of art have not yet been properly catalogued but others are regularly lent to galleries.

Part of the house had previously been damaged by fire while occupied by the Royal Artillery during the Second World War. Fortunately, all the art collection which had been stored in the south wing was saved from the fire. It was to be seven years before the house was de-requisitioned, by which time the north wing had been badly affected by dry rot which resulted in the roof being removed.

Some members took the opportunity to walk round the outside of the house and through the extensive pleasure grounds which include a boating lake and curling pond. Others expressed the hope that it might be possible to arrange a further tour which might be tailored to a specific interest, such as paintings or furniture.

The tour ended with the Vice President extending his thanks to Angela on behalf of the members for such a thorough and informative tour.

Dirleton Village



Dirleton Parish Church

The afternoon visit of the Club was to the village of Dirleton, a few miles along the East Lothian coast. This visit had been made possible by the Gullane and Dirleton History Society. Mr Bill Nimmo, a resident of the village for over thirty years, was the guide. Eighteen members were present.

Regrettably, the interesting Castle was closed for Health and Safety reasons and, while some members took the opportunity to visit the attractive Castle gardens, the tour concentrated on the village itself, commencing from "The Piper's stone".

Mr Nimmo explained how archaeological research had discovered round houses towards the east end of the present village dating to the first century B.C. and a fort at the quarry to the west end of the village dating to the first century A.D. Unfortunately, much of that fort had been lost to quarrying. King David 1 had created the Barony of Dirleton before the castle was constructed in 1240.

Research had shown that the line of the road had been altered over the years partly to redirect traffic away from the vicinity of Archerfield House, the seat of the wealthy Nisbet family, during the 18th century and that the route of the present Edinburgh road leading out of the village is believed to be over the remains of medieval houses.

Alongside the extensive village green, there was evidence of the improvements to village buildings, including the Castle Inn and the former manse (which dates from 1635), which had been carried out by Mrs Mary Hamilton Nisbet Ferguson (1777-1855), the Laird of Dirleton. Previously, as Countess of Elgin and Kincardine, she had accompanied her first husband to Greece when the Parthenon marbles were removed. The Red House, which sits back from the road and adjacent to the former manse, had been built as a tenement building to house six estate workers and their families.

Proceeding north past the Archerfield East Lodge members reached the former school, with intact school bell, and school house to one side of the gate leading to the kirk, while on the other side are situated the session meeting room and mortuary. The path leads through the peaceful graveyard to the kirk which was built in 1615 following an Act of Parliament which authorised the removal of the church from Gullane to Dirleton. The stated reason for the relocation was that the existing church *"is sa incommodiouslie situat beside the sea sand that the same, with the kirk yard thereof, is continewallie overblawin with sand, that nather the kirk servis commodiouslie for the convening of the parichiners, nor yet the kirk yard for their burial"*.

Dominating the south front of the church is the Archerfield Aisle. This was built to house the grave of James Maxwell, 1st Earl of Dirleton, who died in 1650. The aisle was not quite completed when Maxwell's grandson James, Earl of Salisbury, sold the estate to Sir John Nisbet in 1663. The Nisbets built Archerfield House as their family residence and are likely to have completed the aisle in 1664: it is an early, and fine, example of neo-classical architecture in Scotland. The roof of the aisle is of stone.

While the kirk tower was part of the original design, it was modified by Mrs Hamilton Nisbet Ferguson when she paid for a new manse to be built to the east

of the church and adjacent to the former glebe, which has recently been developed for housing.

The kirk has a large and bright interior, with a gallery at the west end. The pulpit is to be found to the west of the organ and immediately opposite the Archerfield Aisle. An amusing detail within arm's length of the minister in the pulpit is the "sermon timer", in effect a large egg timer! The organ is a two manual and pedal instrument typical of its type and built in 1900 by Ingram.

The church has magnificent stained glass windows. The window in the south end of the Archerfield Aisle was gifted in 1935 by Mr Jackson Russell of Archerfield in memory of his wife who sadly drowned in North Berwick harbour as a result of a motor car accident. It depicts Saint Francis surrounded by many different animals and birds.

The afternoon tour was completed by the Club members expressing their thanks to Mr Nimmo and the Vice-President handed him a Club paperweight.



The Interior of Dirleton Parish Church, looking east



Dirleton Parish Church, east window