

MARLOW SOCIETY HISTORY GROUP.

Members of the Marlow Society made visits to three local places of historic interest during 2017. The June visit to Basing Castle introduced us to the ruins of the largest private house in Tudor England, a Royalist house destroyed after a siege in which Oliver Cromwell deployed his heavy artillery to breach the walls. Bricks from the demolished house were recycled and can now be seen in the walls of nearby houses. In contrast the Tudor Great Barn is a staggering fully preserved structure which, in former times, provided storage for the estate's grain in winter. Try to book a guided walk: ours brought the place to life.



The Great Barn



The Kitchens

In July we went to Frogmore Paper Mill. This is located close to Hemel Hempstead. In it is the world's oldest mechanised paper mill. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Fourdrinier brothers acquired a French patent for a mechanised mill, but this did not become viable until its design had been significantly developed into the first useable machine in 1802. Powered by a water wheel, now restored, and with access to the Grand Union Canal, the paper making industry flourished, no doubt in part due to the introduction of the Penny Post in 1840. The business later became part of the John Dickinson Company, then the British Paper Company, and continued in production until 2009. We were shown how to make a sheet of paper by hand and produced our own example. We then saw a Fourdrinier machine in action, turning a "porridge" of recycled paper pulp and water into a roll of paper in four minutes. The mill currently produces specialist paper and is run by one man and his apprentice. In earlier days paper was made from rags that had been boiled and mashed down to break them into fibres. Today the source material is processed wood pulp and offcuts.

In addition to the industrial heritage there is a museum. The guided tour took two very enjoyable hours, and appealed to us all.



From pulp to paper in four minutes.



The mighty Fourdrinier Mill

After a most enjoyable lunch alongside the canal at the Three Horseshoes in Winkwell we visited Berkhamsted Castle. Led by an excellent guide from the Berkhamsted History Society we learnt the history of the castle, which dates from the eleventh century. It was here that William the Conqueror received the submission of the English on 25 December 1066. Designed to dominate the western approach to

London, the castle has a classic Motte and Bailey layout. The motte is very dominant and to our surprise the deep double moat still provides a strong deterrent against access. The castle grew in stature when owned by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, who was the brother of Henry III. During the fourteenth century it was occupied by Edward, the Black Prince, and subsequently owned by Elizabeth I. It fell into decay in the sixteenth century, with much of the masonry later taken and incorporated into new dwellings and the parish church.

During the nineteenth century it was proposed to run the London and Birmingham Railway through the site. As a result, in 1833 the castle became the first building in England to be protected from demolition by parliament. The railway was rerouted and touched only the outer fortifications on the south west, although even that involved the destruction of the gate-house. In 1930 the castle passed from the Duchy of Cornwall to government control, and is now run by Historic England with the active assistance of Berkhamsted History Society. It is said to be “one of the best surviving motte and bailey castles” in England.



A reconstruction drawing showing how Berkhamsted Castle may have looked in about 1190. The south gateway of the castle led towards the town

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