

VISIT TO HARTLEBURY CASTLE - 14TH JUNE 2018

Hartlebury Castle has just re-opened after the purchase and restoration of the South wing, former home of the Bishops of Worcester.

After congregating in the magnificent carriage circle in front of the castle, we were taken on a guided tour of the state rooms. We started with the chapel, a beautiful building with vaulted ceilings and wood panelling and were told by our very informative guide that it was designed by a young man of 22 years old! We then progressed to the Bishop's chambers, the Great Hall and the saloon. The Long Gallery above these has a carpet timeline, giving the names and dates of every Bishop of Worcester from 1237 to the present day.

The current displays are based around the family of Henry Pepys, Bishop from 1841 to 1860. This family were related to the famous diarist Samuel Pepys, but pronounced their name "Peppis". From the bedroom of the Bishop's wife Maria, there is a "secret door" in the wardrobe, through which we stepped to find, not Narnia, but another small room decorated as the bedroom of Emily, Pepys' ten year old daughter. Emily's diary was found in the 1950s and the original is displayed here. It gives a fascinating insight into the life of a child in 1844, and it was thrilling to see it in her own (amazingly neat for a ten year old!) handwriting.

For me, the real highlight was the Hurd Library, set up by Bishop Richard Hurd in 1782 to house his huge book collection. Librarian Chris Penney gave us a fascinating talk about this very rare library and the volumes it contains and her colleague Tina showed us some of the precious books and illustrations.

After a delicious lunch in the new restaurant, we were able to visit the state rooms again at our leisure and after that there was the County Museum to explore, with its thousands of exhibits covering Worcestershire's rich history.

We ended our day with the circular walk through the castle grounds, the perfect ending to a great day out.

If you haven't visited Hartlebury Castle recently, do go and see it: it is full of hidden treasures!