

A Personal Memory of The Earl of Leicester

My wife, Margaret, and I were invited by Clovis and Lizzie Meath-Bakers to stay at Walsingham Abbey in Norfolk in 2010. They were hosting a fundraising drinks party to raise funds for the North Norfolk Churches Trust. The weekend was to be spent visiting various country houses throughout Norfolk that were not normally open to the public, such as Raynham Hall, Elsing Hall and East Barsham. Visitors had to register to avoid the properties being 'cased' in case one of our number had more nefarious intentions towards the buildings and their contents than merely admiring their beauty.

As you can imagine, being a once in a lifetime opportunity, it was a rush to see as many houses as possible. Margaret and I set off rather late like the tortoise but hoped to finish the day more like the hare.

Our last visit was to the Model Farm belonging to the Holkham Hall Estate, which had recently been converted by Lord Leicester following his handing over of the Estate to his son. It was late in the day and we were the last to arrive. We were looking around and admiring the wonderful conversion when Lord Leicester returned from showing some visitors his garden and was asking for his tea. As we also were in the kitchen, we were kindly invited to share tea with him and the rest of his family. They had just finished helping him chaperone people around the Estate.

We tried to excuse ourselves from intruding and imposing on them at the end of what must have been a very hectic day that had started at 10 in the morning and had continued up to the early evening. We were very touched by his and his wife's kindness and generosity; by contrast, if the roles had been reversed, being rather curmudgeonly I would have welcomed the sight of the backs of the last visitors.

Feeling the need to 'sing for my tea' we started talking about the AMS, of which he had been a long-time supporter. It occurred to me that he would be an ideal successor to Ron Brunskill. Following further consultation with Matthew and my fellow Trustees, I wrote to ask him to become our future President. Despite his wife's sensible wishes for him to wind his activities down, he still very kindly agreed to help.

I am delighted to say he was an enthusiastic and conscientious President, actively engaging in some of our Casework and Trustee meetings. As can be seen by his revival of the Holkham Estate, which had become somewhat moribund, he was a 'doer' and despite all his roles, he was never a man to collect sinecures.

He will be sadly missed by myself, the Trustees and the AMS.

GILES QUARME, R.I.B.A.
CHAIRMAN