

The first of our 2017 summer visits took place on one of the few wet days in May when twenty one undeterred members visited Kelham Hall, the massive mansion near Newark built mostly by Gilbert Scott in what Simon Jenkins in "England's Thousand Best Houses" described as his "St Pancras Style".

The house was originally built for Sir John Manners-Sutton, the local M.P. Money ran out and it was sold to the Society of the Sacred Mission for a theological college. The monks built the huge chapel with its great dome, 21m.high. During W.W.2 amid great secrecy, it housed american oilmen brought in to drill for vital oil in Duke's Wood near Eakring. They found their billet spartan and the wartime rations inadequate but the story has it the local public house became the saviour for the "Roughnecks".

The college closed in 1972, and from then until recently, the Hall has been the Headquarters of Newark and Sherwood District Council whose new building in Newark is due for completion later this year.

Since 2014," Kelham Hall and Country Park" has been owned by a private company, turning it into a hotel, conference centre and wedding venue. It was the managing director, Mr. Jonathan Pass who conducted us round the public rooms on the ground floor, showed us a BBC film of its days as a seminary and revived us with tea, coffee and generous cake.

After this, our original plan was to explore the gardens. By a happy coincidence, Judith Mills, the speaker at our April meeting, lives in Kelham. Noticing the forecast of heavy rain, she thoughtfully offered to open the village church in the Hall grounds for us and talk about its history. This generous gesture was very much appreciated, enjoyed and a fitting if unexpected end to our visit. The gardens can wait for another visit!