

Kirstead Hall, Norfolk

Sunday afternoon, 26 July

The last visit of the conference was to Kirstead Hall, a Grade 1 listed house, by kind invitation of Dermot and Judy Murphy and with the assistance of their family. The house dates to around 1570, though it is thought parts of an earlier house were incorporated into the building. The site had been bought in 1544 by Thomas Godsolve, lawyer and registrar of the court of Norwich, and it was his grandson Thomas who seems to have begun building the house. The house is red brick, Flemish bond, with a blue diaper pattern and a tiled roof, which may have been originally thatched. The brickwork on the east end, which dates to an earlier period, is of a different size and colour. The porch has polygonal piers, with benches inside for servants who were waiting for their masters. Marks on the bricks in the door arch indicate they are hand-made. In the room above the porch is a priest hole. After Dermot's introduction, we divided into groups and looked at the main house, Dermot's furniture restoration workshop, and the dovecote.

In the east room, 8in square pammments (floor tiles) are laid directly on sand. There is evidence of movement in the window, although the use of lime mortar, which is elastic, prevented cracks in the glass, much of which is early. The artist Edward Seago (1910-1974) used this room as a studio. Off the inner hall is a study, formerly a stillroom, which had access to the cellar where meat was hung. In the study is an oak food cupboard with a pierced diamond pattern in the doors. The dining room is panelled, with a tudor arched fireplace, re-plastered by a previous owner. A number of glass panels in the window are inscribed with the names of members of the Rayner family, and dated 1751.

The dairy wing, which is probably 17th century, is Dermot's workshop. We saw some of his current work, including sheets of leather in various stages of being coloured a rich red for upholstery. Lastly to the dovecote, which has a 16th-century plinth in English bond, with the upper section in Flemish bond. The roof and cupola have been added by Dermot and Judy, as the dovecote was derelict when they moved in. Inside, brick boxes housed the doves, which were kept for meat for the household. Droppings were used as an ingredient for explosives.

We had a splendid tea with home-made scones, sitting on the grass in the garden enjoying the late afternoon sun: a welcome finale to the weekend.

Liz Hancock