

Glemham Hall, Little Glemham

Built of the warm local Suffolk brick, Glemham Hall with its seven-bay Georgian sashed central block flanked by matching two-bay projecting wings, stands assuredly overlooking its cattle-grazed park. The façade masks the earlier Tudor house underneath. The estate was sold by the De Glemhams in 1708 to Dudley North, 5th Baron North. The Norths demolished the 16th-century gate house and forecourt, brick clad and re-fenestrated the L-shaped Tudor house and added a wing to the west to match the earlier east wing.

Inside, the 16th-century Great Hall was modernised c. 1723, the screens passage becoming a line of four handsome Corinthian columns and the walls given bold bolection panelling. A grand staircase was added to the south of the former dais end of the hall, with twisted triple mahogany balusters to each tread and lit by a pair of huge oak-framed sash windows above which were once two vast oculi windows, now blocked. The staircase has no architectural treatment or plaster cornice, just a simple huge cove presumably intended to be painted with fictive architecture and a mythological cycle or an apotheosis which was never executed. Hence the blocked two windows to give the artist a larger 'canvas'.

The Norths sold the Hall in 1923 to the Cobbold brewing family from Ipswich who refurnished the empty house. The Cobbolds, originally immigrants from Saxony, settled in the Ipswich area and did well in wool before going into brewing. John Cobbold (Captain and later Colonel), who bought the property, had married Lady Blanche Cavendish, a daughter of the 9th Duke of



High-backed cane chairs with pillar front legs and scrolled feet, three of stained beech with slat backs and cross-stretchers and, on the right, a walnut frame with cane seat and back, c. 1710

Devonshire. It became apparent as we toured the house with Colonel Cobbold's grandson, our host Major Phillip Hope-Cobbold, that the early 20th-century decorating and furnishing scheme showed Lady Blanche's fine 1920/30s taste, or that of a good (and probably metropolitan) decorator. A trawl of any surviving family papers from this era might prove revealing. From the fashionable 'pickling' of the hall panelling down to a cool stripped pine, to a grisaille French panoramic forest wallpaper in the Grey Bedroom, to a group of early 20th-century lacquer furniture including a glazed standing corner cupboard in the staircase hall and a pair of large bookcases along the first floor corridor, all of which 'blended' in with earlier pieces such as the unusual pair of Japanned fold-over card tables (c. 1790) in the Drawing Room, Lady Blanche's influence was evident in many of the rooms.

Early 19th-century painted bed cornices survived in two rooms and another bedroom had a pair of painted window pelmets (which matched neither of the two bed cornices). A small pair of demi-lune painted commodes flanked one of the beds. These had their original small leather casters and caused discussion as to whether they were 'pure' or part of the 1920s decoration.

Two long sets of high back chairs on the staircase landing (walnut and stained beech respectively), one with fine original cane work and the other with triple plain vertical 'slats', where cane work might have been expected, dated from c.1710. The slat-backed set were stamped 'RW'.

The Library or Garden Room contained a fine mid-18th-century walnut bureau bookcase. Above the windows were fabric covered 'Baroque' pelmets which matched a (surviving?) one adorning the first floor corridor window. These were in a 'Lenygon and Morant' idiom and possibly part of the early 20th-century furnishing scheme.

There was no dubiety over Major Phillip's Millennium Table which he had commissioned from Titchmarsh and Goodwin of Ipswich and made from oak and ash from the estate. The stretchers met at a central point which carried an oak vase made from timber from Sandringham. This contained a 'time capsule'. Perhaps a future RFS visit at the next millennium will discover what is hidden inside.

Major Hope-Cobbold led the tour from attics to cellars and everything in between with amusement and gusto before turning us loose to enjoy the sun-soaked and bee-humming gardens and finally turning up to serve us a wonderful tea with cake in the recently built conservatory adjoining the Garden Room and built on the exact footprint of an earlier lost Victorian original.

We are grateful to Major Hope-Cobbold for a fascinating tour, his welcome and his hospitality.

Christopher Hartley