

## **March 2022: GLHS outing to Howick Hall and gardens**

On 16th March, 14 GLHS members had a tour at Howick Hall, walking through parts of the garden and arboretum, and enjoying the recently refurbished ground floor rooms which are open to the public.

### **Howick Estate and house**

The Grey family has owned land at Howick since 1319, and lived there since 1597. For many centuries they also held land in Tilmouth, Doddington, Chillingham, Coldmartin, Kirknewton, East & West Chevington and Wooler.

A survey of Howick in 1715 described a “most magnificent” extended pele tower and additional blocks including “a handsome court and gateway”. In 1781 Sir Henry Grey commissioned architect William Newton to build a new family seat – so the site was cleared, Howick Burn canalised and the village moved to make way for the fine Georgian house we see today.



Photo by Michael Ormsby

The house was enlarged in 1809 to accommodate the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl's 15 children. Then, following a fire in 1926, the house was made smaller with a new north portico and a light-well in the centre above the ground floor.

### **The family**

Members of the Grey family have largely been involved in public service, variously acting as High Sheriffs of Northumberland, MPs, Prime Minister, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Governors of countries in the Empire, admirals and generals.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Grey was awarded the title in recognition of his military leadership in the Napoleon Wars. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Grey is the most distinguished member of the family. He was a radical Whig, campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade and for Catholic emancipation. As Prime Minister (1832–4) he ensured the passing of the Great Reform Act and the Slavery

Abolition Act throughout the British Empire; he also set up the Royal Commission for Municipal Corporations (which established the basis of local government as we know it).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl's brother was Private Secretary to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, who in 1849 stayed at Howick when they opened the High Level Bridge in Newcastle. The 4<sup>th</sup> Earl served in South Africa then as Governor-General of Canada.

### **The gardens and the arboretum**

The 5th Earl saved Howick by paying off the debts incurred by his ancestors' political ambitions. He and his wife shaped the gardens, influenced by the more informal designs and planting of William Robinson. In 1930, to mark their 25th (Silver) wedding anniversary they planted Silverwood with their favourite (and then fashionable) rhododendrons.

The 5th Earl's daughter Lady Mary inherited Howick (the title moved to a distant branch of the family with no connection to the estate). She married Evelyn Baring, who became Lord Howick, 1st Baron Howick of Glendale, after a distinguished career as Governor of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), High Commissioner for Southern Africa, and Governor of Kenya.

The current Lord Howick, grandson of the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl, established the Howick Arboretum, a scientific collection of trees and shrubs which was formally opened in 2006. Lord Howick and his Head Gardener have been on more than 30 expeditions, with Kew and/or Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, to temperate regions of the world collecting seeds which are propagated and planted at Howick. For this work the RHS awarded Lord Howick the Victoria Medal of Honour.

The tour was led by Pam Ratcliffe, who's been a volunteer tour guide at Howick for 13 years. Similar tours take place on most Monday and Friday afternoons.

For more information, please see the Howick website. <https://howickhallgardens.com>