

OUR VISIT TO MICHELHAM PRIORY – Thursday 22 May 2025



20 members met on a sunny morning at the beautiful 13th century Michelham Priory, crossing over the moat, which turns out to be the biggest unbroken moat in the UK. Our guide, David gave an interesting and entertaining tour, including how to pronounce Michelham (known as *Mikkleham* by the locals, but posher as *Mitchelham*)

The Priory has had a wide range of owners over the centuries who have all left their mark. At its height 8 canons (ordained priests, rather than monks) were served by 29 staff. In Tudor times it became part of Anne of Cleves' divorce settlement. Inevitably it fell prey to Henry VIII's ransackers. In 1927 a fire caused considerable damage. It has housed wealthy aristocrats and wartime evacuees, as well as Canadian troops. Throughout it all, people have knocked down or re-built many parts of the building.

During one of its many reconfigurations secret passages were added behind the walls, so that the children could amuse themselves – and frighten visitors.



Some interesting pieces of furniture were pointed out to us. There was the curious centuries old chair that was used to house a bible, with snakes, and an image of the devil on its seat (the devil's chair).



In the dining room David demonstrated how a triangular chair for men was used (back to front so that their coats would not crease).

The spit in the kitchen was also of interest. At one time a small child would turn it, while seated in a small chair with a screen to protect the child from the heat.



The building is set in glorious gardens amid a variety of trees, including a 1200 year-old yew, sweeping lawns and walled physic and herb gardens.

Michelham Priory has a magical feel to it, and surely it is a place many of us will return to.

