

North Craven Heritage Trust
Summer Outing 2024: Cumbria Again
Wednesday 5 June 2024

This, my 21st, Summer Outing focuses on two historical houses in Cumberland; Isel Hall on the River Derwent north-east of Cockermouth in the morning, and Newby Hall near Morland south-east of Penrith in the afternoon.

The maximum number of participants is 18 – so book early. I will keep a waiting list for bookings beyond that number

Getting to Isel Hall

The obvious way is to use the A65, the M6 up to Penrith and then the A66 westwards from the M6, as far as the northern end of Bassenthwaite Lake. At the end of the lake, look for the right turn at Dubwath and turn left almost immediately to Brathay Hill where you turn sharp right again, with a brown tourist signed to the Lakes Distillery at Barkhouse. Turn left here to follow a road, signed Isel, that roughly parallels the Derwent for 2 miles or so to take the first right turn just after Kirkhouse Farm, signed Isel. The road drops down to Isel Bridge over the Derwent where you will get your first view of the hall across the valley – ignore the first right turn but when you pass the second right turn (a very narrow road) slow right down because the half-hidden entrance to Isel Hall, a narrow gateway in a high wall, is very close. Go up the driveway and park in front of the hall. I would suggest parking on the left-hand side of the broad gravelled area to leave a clear view of the hall.

Via the M6 Isel is 138km (86 miles), via Windermere 117km (73 miles; the 2023 journey was 74 miles).



Isel Hall as seen from the Derwent

For satnav users, follow CA13 0QG. Grid reference NY1584 3367

Isel Hall

This splendid house is not open except on specific days: our host, Esme Lowe, stresses that we will be given a “full-fat tour” so, as in 2023, any HHA members from NCHT will have to pay the full cost. Because of the nature of the interior, and for security reasons, backpacks, large bags and outdoor coats are not permitted – leave them in the car. Photography within the house is not permitted. There are stairways and uneven surfaces within the house. There are no toilet facilities at all.

Grade 1-listed Isel Hall displays various stages of structural development. It is dominated at the eastern end by a 12.5m-high, four-storey pele tower with probable origins in the 14th century and possibly completed in 1425. It is now entered from the south from within a later two-storey hall-block extension dating from 1535 within the Tudor period. This was further extended westwards in later centuries. The original tower was slighted during a Scots raid in 1387 and is thought to have been rebuilt/repainted around 1400. The hall extensions have seen changes, as in most historical houses, with alterations in the 18th and 19th centuries.



Isel Hall seen from the north-west

Isel Hall has never been sold but passed through various lines of the extended family; the Leighs held it from the mid 14th century to 1572 and the Lawsons from then until 1986. You will be given a useful history of the hall and its occupants by Mr Lowe on arrival. Our group will be divided into groups of six, each with a volunteer guide who will take us round the accessible parts of the complex; as it is a family home certain areas will be excluded from our tour. We are of course indebted to Esme and his family for their hospitality.

Within and without the hall complex there are examples of the Lawson family crest – can you ‘deconstruct’ its meaning from the photograph? If not, Esme will enlighten you.



The (north) formal gardens with one of several crests of the Lawson family

This tour will start promptly at 11am and end by 1pm. The cost per person is £10.

Lunch

Unless you search out a pub somewhere, or go to the Rheged visitor centre near Penrith, your best bet is to bring a packed lunch. My vehicle will be having this at Isel's church, immediately north of Isel Bridge where there is ample room to park by the church entrance.



Isel church from the south-east

St Michael and All Angels is also Grade 1 listed and is also splendid and well worth a look. It was restored in 1878 – sympathetically, I would venture to add. In 2009 and 2015 the church was badly damaged by floods from those two horrendous storms. The church is thought to originate in its present form c. 1130 though it has fragments of Anglo-Saxon cross shafts.

The church has four Norman windows, a Norman chancel arch and a Norman doorway, a 13th-century font, two blocked doorways and a mysterious stone staircase near the pulpit that has thus far defied explanation. Externally, the church has four sundials – see if you can find them!



The Norman chancel arch

Onwards

To get to Newby Hall, return to Penrith but do not take the M6; it is 40km (25 miles) from where you rejoin the A66 to the M6 junction. Instead take the A6 southwards from Eamont Bridge passing through Clifton and Hackthorpe. Shortly after going underneath the M6, at Shapbeck Gate, take the left turn signposted Morland which takes you back over the motorway. This road passes Newby Hall, which lies between Newby Head and Newby itself and is on the right-hand side of the road – I will give you parking instructions and time of arrival at the end of our Isel tour. From the A66 roundabout to Newby Hall is c. 16km (10 miles).

Satnav CA10 3EX, grid reference NY5904 2125

Newby Hall

This Grade-2 listed building shows as an H-shaped structure from the early 17th century but most likely standing on the footings of an earlier (medieval?) structure. Two datestones of 1685 mark later alterations to the earlier hall; one bears the inscription I EN Nevison, the owners at that time. The house has many original features.

We will be guests of Philip and Amy Chapman, owners and occupiers – this is their family home – to whom we are very grateful.

After the end of our house and garden tour Philip and Amy have very kindly offered to provide tea and bites. I am taking it for granted that everyone will stay for this.



Newby Hall north elevation

Philip and Amy do not want to levy an actual fee but we have agreed that each person will donate £4 for refreshments.

Return

The easiest way back home is to retrace your steps to the A6 then follow it joining the M6 at Shap.

Bookings

Please make your booking using email not phone or answerphone. For insurance liability purposes Isel Hall needs the names and addresses of all participants so make sure you give me them. Last year, because of the larger amounts and the venues' preferences. I asked for payment to be made by BACS transfer to the NCHT account. For 2024, please let me have £14, either in cash or by cheque payable to 'Dr DS Johnson'. I feel you will think this a very reasonable cost for what should be an enjoyable Outing.

Thank you

David

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01729 822915 (evenings only) if you have queries

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