



New Hall: The History of England in One House

by Kate Holt and Charlotte Eagar, London, Clearview Books, 2022, 143 pp.,
Illustrations, £35.00 (Hardback), ISBN 978-1-90833-762-7

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BOOK REVIEW

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New Hall is one of England's oldest inhabited, moated houses, situated near Sutton Coldfield in what was once the vast hunting forest of Sutton Chase in the ancient county of Warwickshire. This beautifully presented volume full of contemporary and historic photographs traces its history from medieval through to the present day. Before it was sold to a hotel group in 1985, New Hall changed hands many times over the centuries and for most of the time it remained a private family home except for a short spell in the 1880s when it was a school for boys. New Hall Valley Country Park was created in 1990 from the estate farmland and remaining estate buildings were either sold for redevelopment or as private family homes.

Part One of the book begins with a useful timeline and nine chapters that focus on the main house with the first, placing the lands that New Hall was built on in the manor of Sutton Coldfield, as part of the estates owned by Edwin, Earl of Mercia. Subsequent chapters cover the building of the hall in the age of the Plantagenets through to 'checking in' at the New Hall Hotel (p. 84), linking monarchical houses or major periods to the owning families of Lizours, Gibbons, Sacheverell, Chadwick, Wilkinson and Owen. The book is described as offering 'a microcosm of the history of England itself' (p. 7), and it includes reflections of England's political, social and economic development in addition to biographical family information. The reflections briefly place New Hall and its owners in context with Warwick the Kingmaker; the Reformation; the granting of the Royal Charter for Sutton from Henry VIII; the English Civil War; the industrial revolution and empire; with the last two owners Walter Wilkinson and Alfred Owen (owner of the West Midlands conglomerate, Rubery Owen) exemplifying the modern industrial era and the 'Midlands' economic boom' (p. 66). It is also interspersed with short stories of alchemy, forbidden love and ghostly presences.

A smaller Part Two explores the history and land use of the New Hall farmland estate with three distinct farms: New Shipton; New Hall Farm and Wincelle House; and Warren House Farm which is one of Bishop Vesey's original fifty-one stone houses built between 1520 and 1540. It includes a larger section on New Hall Mill which is still a working water mill today for milling grain, one of only two working mills surviving in Birmingham.

A house history draws on many sources that are very familiar to family historians, genealogists and local historians and indeed much is drawn from earlier research by Sutton Coldfield research groups and local history publications. *New Hall* is an up-to-date account enriched throughout by contemporary photographs of this historic building and its grounds, all taken by photojournalist and author of this book, Kate Holt, showcasing key architectural features. It also benefits from Holt's personal connection with the Owen family and the use and inclusion of material from their family archive

and photograph collection. It is a delightful, colourful new addition to the history of Sutton Coldfield that will appeal to a general audience with its mixture of architectural history and insight into regional and British history, told through the stories of the people who lived and worked at New Hall.

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