



PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB

RETFORD PARK

THURSDAY 12 OCTOBER 2023



An early departure of 8 am on this fine, sunny day, with 36 of us including two new members. Malcolm, our coach driver, headed over to Beverly Hills in pretty solid peak-hour traffic, but it was easy going once we reached the M5 and then the M31 (Hume Hwy) the Campbelltown/Canberra road. We branched off to the B73 which led us to Mittagong where our coach negotiated narrow suburban streets to reach Lake Alexandria for morning tea, arriving there at 9.20 am. A pretty spot with a fountain and several species of ducks all very friendly and obviously hoping for food scraps. Well, they didn't get too many, as we ate every last skerrick of Elizabeth's delicious morning tea. About 35 mins here.



After a short drive, and by 10.15 am, we'd arrived at Retford Park in Bowral to be welcomed by Duty Manager and Guide Jackie who gave a short talk before we were split into two groups (and had donned rather unattractive blue booties) for the inside tour. The house had beautiful and immaculate flooring, so this protection was absolutely warranted. Jackie took one group and Lynne the other, for what was a two-hour extensive and well organised tour of much of the house.

From information taken from a couple of websites: Retford Park on 30 ha is located on Gundungurra Country and has a European history extending back to land grants made to Edward Riley Snr by Governor Macquarie in 1821. A stunningly beautiful grand Victorian Italianate mansion, designed by Sydney architect Albert Bond, it was built by Samuel Hordern (of the well-known retailing family) in 1887, for use as a cattle stud, breeding Jersey and Ayrshire cattle.



James Fairfax purchased it in 1964 for use as a country residence and, over many years, developed the surrounds into an extensive, sumptuous, and superb garden and arboretum, where no expense was spared to create the best possible large scale Southern Highlands garden. James made various other additions to the property that became famous: the swimming pool pavilion designed by Guilford Bell, the Dining Room mural by Donald Friend, an emu-walk, an aviary, various sculptured gardens, and more, to create a remarkable property that he adored.

In 2016, James bequeathed Retford Park, then estimated to be worth \$18 million (but obviously valued at a lot more these days), to the National Trust, believing it should be preserved for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations. These days, the original dairy, schoolhouse, workers' cottages, coach houses, stables and round yard have been converted into spaces for community and cultural events, and a part of the home has been made into flats for much-needed income.

After our tour, there was about half an hour to wander the manicured grounds closest to the house before it was time to depart the property, via their gift shop, for the main streets of Bowral. Here, we were free to choose our lunch venue and go shopping if we wished – Bowral has many great shops to choose from!

At 2.30 pm, it was time to leave, with a short stop at the Bowral Vietnam War Memorial Cherry Tree Walk which begins from Bowral Swimming Centre and winds for 5 km through Rivulet Park, Foley Park, Venables Park, and Shepherd Park. Originally planted in 2000 to bring comfort to the families of local veterans, each magnificent Tai-Haki Japanese Cherry Blossom tree along the walk was intended to honour community members who had served their country. Unfortunately for us, the blossoms had finished (perhaps been blown away by recent high winds), but we took a short stroll anyway, before heading home the way we'd come. Lucky Seat prizes were won by Cheryl D and Maria B and we'd returned to Penshurst at the comfortable time of 4.15 pm.

