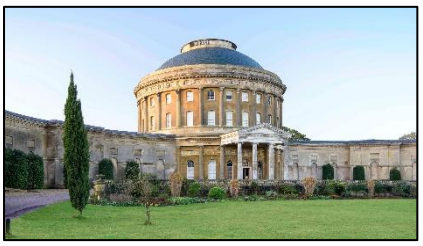
The Lost Houses of Suffolk – A Talk in Forty Houses

Firstly, I should like to thank our supporters for this evening, Castleacre insurance, who have kindly sponsored the event, and Haughley Park our very generous hosts, and of course all of you for supporting the Suffolk Preservation Society through booking your tickets.

In preparing this talk I also owe a huge debt to a number of publications, and their research, which has made my job significantly easier. Most notably "The lost Country Houses of Suffolk" by William Roberts, which provides an encyclopaedic summary of the county. And I have followed his alphabetical structure and decision-making criteria on what constitutes a country house. Namely, the "big" houses in a particular village, at the centre of the estates that supported them, as well as being of architectural and/or historic interest. I have also made extensive use of the research provided by Giles Worsley in "England's Lost Houses", and the Lost Heritage Website, which has provided many of the images.

Each of the houses included could be a talk in itself, so please forgive me that there is sometimes limited depth in what I am covering. I should start by briefly summarising where my own interest in this subject began. I was not a sporty child, but what I did enjoy was a visit to a National Trust property, and I was fortunate in having parents and grandparents who shared my enthusiasm, or rather nurtured it, and so if you were visiting one of the range of properties across East Anglia in the 1980s, you would have likely spotted me, clipboard and quiz in hand, haranguing a room guide on the scagliola columns and the ha ha.



Two of my favourites, and two Suffolk survivals are shown here – Ickworth with its subterranean servants' halls and kitchens – worthy of an ocean liner, and with the army of domestic staff servicing the state rooms above – more about them later. And a house that even after National Trust ownership was still in the headlines until relatively recently, due to the hedonism of the Marquis of Bristol, whose private wing is now a smart hotel.

And Melford Hall, damaged by fire in the 1940s, restored by the Hyde-Parkers, and now a perfect example of the variations on a theme of the red brick U, H and E pattern houses scattered across Suffolk and East Anglia, from its near neighbour at Kentwell, up to Blickling over the border into Norfolk.

But where did it all start to go wrong? A little context is helpful here, as national and indeed global changes were to result in such far-reaching consequences that by the middle of the 1950s, historic houses were disappearing at a rate of around one a week. 16 in Suffolk alone were lost in the decade, and this rate of destruction began to be seen as a matter of national concern.

Individually, while fortunes were often won and lost throughout history, and one profligate heir – see the Marquess of Bristol at Ickworth - could quite successfully burn his way through a vast inheritance most proficiently through addiction, over-reaching ambition and general poor decision-making, that was more on a stand-alone basis, rather than a societal position.

Huge country houses were never built for practicality, they were built for display and status. But their viability was reliant upon income from the surrounding estate, a preferable position on tax, a top up from the occasional advantageous marriage, and cheap labour. As the 19th century drew to a close, the comfort and certainty of three of these factors was increasingly challenged.

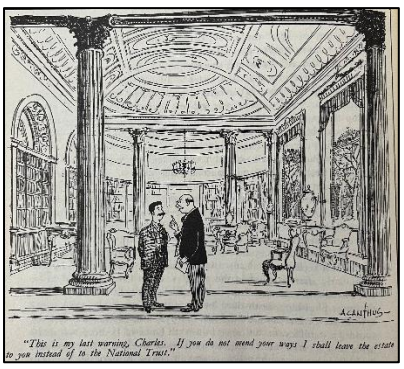
Here you can see the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, and his friends, the Marlborough House set, at the end of the 19th century. This picture really shows the last hurrah of a way of life that was to change significantly within the next 20 years. The leisured house parties, supported by a huge retinue of domestic servants, laying fires, heating baths, and cooking lavish meals, was to come under strain – first with the agricultural depression.

From the 1870s, cheaper grain imports from the USA caused the wheat price to fall on the domestic market, reducing the rents that tenant farmers were able to pay, and the reduction in the price of the land owned. The consequent effect was that the income needed to sustain such grand houses was beginning to be impacted significantly, and the purses of the big house owners took a direct hit. This was compounded with increases in death duties for significant estates, starting in 1894 at 8%, rising in 1907 to 15%, in 1919 to 40%, in 1930 to 50%, in 1940 to 65%, and then in the 1950s to 80%.

Add to this the impact of the First and Second World Wars, and the odds really were stacked against owners in maintaining such expensive and inefficient houses. A knock-on effect of the First World War was the "Servant Crisis", which seems like an incredibly privileged problem to deal with – although it did have a very real impact. Conscription meant that young fit men were drafted into active service, and for the men and women left behind, many took on active roles in the war effort, leaving many houses chronically understaffed. And why would you stay in a remote country house with long hours, poor wages, being overworked and under-resourced, when you could work in a munitions factory near to home for better rates of pay and conditions? War work opened up a wealth of opportunity – particularly for women, and even after the wars concluded, there were far fewer incentives to return to domestic service.

A more tragic element were the heirs to estates who died in both the First and Second World Wars, causing complex inheritances, the need to pay higher death duties, often in quick succession with the death of heirs and subsequent spares. And for those who did inherit, they took on houses that had been poorly maintained, damaged by military occupation, and lacking the servants to staff them. The country house was becoming a white elephant for all but the most wealthy and fortunate of owners. And many took the difficult decision to vacate, sell and move on.

For some, the National Trust provided a lifeline. From 1936, James Lees-Milne was racing round the country on behalf of the Trust, agreeing terms with many landowners so that their houses and estates would not befall the fate of many families who decided that admitting defeat was the best course of action. In Suffolk, Ickworth came to the Trust in 1956, and Melford Hall in 1960, and indeed for those families who did come to such an arrangement, it meant that their homes were safe, even if they did need to share.



This cartoon is from Punch magazine in 1947, it reads "This is my last warning, Charles. If you do not mend your ways I shall leave the estate to you, instead of to the National Trust." While intended as a humorous and somewhat tongue in cheek comment, it does communicate the sense of relief that would have been all too immediate for some owners in being able to give up a house that they could no longer afford to maintain. And while Ickworth is a house and collection of national importance, for others their loss would be felt locally and as part of a larger picture of destruction, but perhaps not as a major architectural or historic loss.

In April 1942, a leading landowners' representative, RG Proby wrote in relation to Historic Houses that "Some, such as Arundel and Wilton are of such historic importance that they must at all costs be preserved, but there

are many Victorian barracks which I think might well be demolished without great harm being done. I doubt myself it will be possible in the future, except in very exceptional circumstances, for the owners to live all over them."

We're now getting onto the detail of the Suffolk houses, so you can judge for yourself on whether they count as Victorian Barracks or jewels in the county's architectural crown. I would say they're a mixed bag – some very sad losses indeed, and others are of a type well represented in many other examples in other counties.

1. Acton Place, demolished 1825 & 1960

What you see here is the original Acton Place, near Sudbury and constructed to designs by James Gibbs in the 1720s. A classical design with the central house, flanking pavilions and curved wings. The house was built for the Jennens family, and William Jennens, who owned and occupied the house for the majority of the 18th century, was evidently somewhat eccentric. He died as allegedly the richest commoner in England, leaving a fortune of more than £2.5million (in 1798 money), so a huge amount of cash. His affairs were chaotic and it was not until 1816 that the estate passed to his relative, the Hon. Richard Curzon, later Earl Howe.

By the time he inherited it, the house was in very poor repair and the estate overgrown. And the decision was therefore taken to demolish the main house. Later in the 19th century one of the remaining pavilions was demolished. The other pavilion, shown on the right here, was converted into an individual dwelling, and was occupied by a succession of owners until the 1950s. The house was demolished in 1960 and the former site is now the Acton Place Industrial Estate.

2. Assington Hall, destroyed by fire 1957

Again near Sudbury, Assington Hall was a fire loss rather than a demolition. A mainly Tudor house, the entrance front, that you can see was refaced in the 19th century, and the projecting wings of a classic Elizabethan house were also pulled down. The estate extended to over 2000 acres, and from the mid-16th century it was owned by the same family, the Gurdons. The house remained in family ownership until 1938, when the entire estate was put up for sale. The house subsequently became a training college for Roman Catholic priests, and the rest of the estate was split and sold in parts. The separation of house and land would often begin a journey to inevitable destruction as the running of such expensive houses generally required the income from the surrounding land. In 1956, a new owner, James Frere, who was a distant Gurdon relation, purchased the house and began its restoration, although in 1957 a fire - presumably resulting from the building works, was to destroy the building, and today just fragments of the façade remain.

3. Barking Hall, demolished 1926

Barking Hall was near Needham Market, Home of the Earls of Ashburnam, to whom it passed in the mid-18th century. The early 18th century house shown here, replaced a 17th century house – so again destruction wasn't only happening in the 20th century. Barking was a secondary family residence, with the family's primary seat being Ashburnham Place in Sussex – and while the family owned it until the end of the First World War, for much of this time the property was let out to tenants. The contents of the house were auctioned in 1918, and the house and estate of 3 and a half thousand acres were purchased by a syndicate who attempted to sell it, without success. In 1926, the house was sold for demolition, and to give an idea of the low figures involved: the conservatory was sold for £17, and the shell of the main house for just £325.

4. Barton Hall, destroyed by fire 1914

Barton Hall was just outside Bury-St-Edmunds. The house was owned by Thomas Folkes, who purchased the estate in 1706. It remained with his relations until 1914. Barton was an earlier house faced in later architectural styles, rather than a new construction, and the house was altered by successive generations according to the fashions and preferences of the time. The house was let at the time of the fire in January 1914.

A local newspaper wrote of the fire:

"In three hours there was hardly a room intact. A pitiable scene met the eye. The rescuers were still at their work transferring the property from the buildings onto the lawn, and amidst all this bustle a number of ladies, still in their evening dress with overcoats over them, were sitting here and there on a sofa or standing and despondently watching the destruction of the fine old mansion."

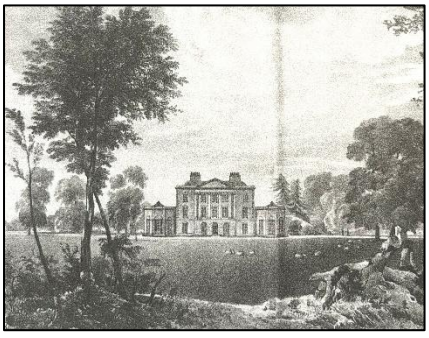
5. Boulge Hall, demolished 1955

Boulge Hall was near Woodbridge, the original house was built in 1794, although it was extensively remodelled in the 19th century, and what we're looking at is very much a Victorin house – down to the tennis court on the lawn. Following family death and a lack of willing heirs, the house and estate were sold in 1945, and purchased by Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. While by 1955 the house was grade II listed, it was still demolished not being considered of national interest.

6. Bramford Hall, Demolished 1956

Bramford Hall was near Ipswich, with an estate of just over 1000 acres. The original Brampton was built in the 1630s, and was altered substantially in the 1780s, broadly to an approximation of its appearance as above. In the mid-19th century the house was altered and extended with the two-storey wing to the right and the bay to the left. In the late 1930s, extensive modernization was carried out totalling £8,000, so money was still being spent on it well into the twentieth century, with a view to letting it to tenants. As a large house, it ended up being requisitioned as officers' quarters for the Second World War. Post-war, as a secondary family property, and without direct heirs, the contents of the house were sold at auction and the house demolished in 1956, the estate being sold 6 year later.

7. Branches Park, Demolished 1957



Branches Park was a substantial Georgian house near Cowlinge. The print shows the house in 1820. The house was extended significantly, rather ruining its classical elegance and proportion – although the additions did include an indoor swimming pool. The house was built in c.1730, with the flanking pavilions being a little later, and its park was landscaped by Capability Brown. The estate passed through successive owners, all tradesmen rather than aristocrats. The final owner died intestate, and in 1956 the house was sold at auction, swiftly sold again and then stripped of fixtures and fittings for further sale. A sadness is that, if the house had remained in its more diminutive and original form, it would have probably stood a much better chance of survival.

8. Bredfield House, demolished 1950

Bredfield was near Woodbridge, built in 1655, but reshaped around an earlier house. From the mid-19th century the house remained in consistent ownership of a single family. The house followed an H plan which is suggestive of an earlier form of architecture, and while not a huge house it was characterful and sensitively remodelled by successive generations, including the addition of an orangery, which you can see here. The house was requisitioned in the Second World War and was sold soon afterwards along with much of the estate. The major part of the house was demolished by the new owners, who retained the service wing to create a new house, along with other estate buildings that survived.

9. Brome Hall, demolished c.1958

Brome Hall was near Eye in north Suffolk. For the majority of its existence, it was home to the Cornwallis family, who were prominent courtiers. It was a secondary seat for the family and was sold by them in 1823. It was purchased by the Kerrison family who owned it for another century. The earlier Tudor house was altered significantly in the early 19th century, and was also reduced in size, presumably to make it more manageable and modern. In the 20th century the house passed through several owners, with the surrounding estate being reduced piecemeal. The house was requisitioned in the Second World War, and a standard pattern of lack of maintenance and damage meant that by 1958, demolition was almost inevitable.

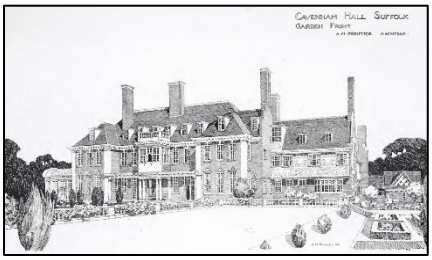
10. Campsea Ashe High House, demolished 1953

Near Wickham Market, the estate had medieval origins and the original house dated from the 17th century, and for the majority of its existence until the late 19th century, it was owned and occupied by the same family. In 1864, a fire damaged the original house and Anthony Salvin, who also designed Flixton Hall, created a house in the Jacobean style. The new house was large, with 31 bedrooms and Victorian essentials such as a brushing room and a flower room. The gardens were also high Victorian and high maintenance, which rather sealed its future fate. From 1949, the house passed through several owners in quick succession, and by 1952 the house was in a very poor state and was demolished.

11. Carlton Hall, destroyed by fire 1941

Carlton Hall was near Saxmundham. The house and estate passed through a succession of owners and tenants, and there is little known information on when the house was built or by whom, although the image is of a house with a 19th century appearance, probably laid over an earlier Georgian house. The house was another Second World War requisition, and in 1941 a fire destroyed the main block, the smaller service wing survived and was converted into another dwelling.

12. Cavenham Hall, demolished 1949



Cavenham was an ancient estate but a modern house, which in 1898 replaced something much more historic. The new house was located somewhere more private, in surrounding parkland. The architect was Andrew Noble Prentice. The new house included a winter garden and was built for entertaining with extensive servants' quarters and outbuildings. The owner, Herbert Davies, died in 1899 when the house was barely finished, and it was subsequently purchased by a member of the Goldsmith banking family who owned it until 1918. The house subsequently passed to another owner, who by 1949 was still failing to find a buyer. And so this luxurious modern house, built on a grand scale for entertaining, was demolished less than fifty years after it was built.

13. Chediston Hall, demolished 1955

Near Halesworth, chediston was an estate of over 2000 acres. From the sixteenth century it passed through multiple owners, and the original Tudor house was rebuilt in the 19th century with Edward Blore, the architect of much of Buckingham Palace, being involved.

The house was tenanted for a long period, and it was another second world war requisition, suffering fire, damage and subsequent demolition.

14. Downham Hall, demolished 1925

Downham was near Brandon and was another house with a succession of unrelated owners and was essentially an 18th century house with 19th century additions. Repeated different ownership diminished strong ties to the estate, and it was sold to the forestry commission, forming part of Brandon Forest. The house was eventually demolished, being without a relevant use.

15. Drinkstone Park, demolished 1951

Drinkstone was between Bury and Newmarket. It was a small estate of 250 acres, with the house dating from the 1760s, and in the same family ownership until the end of the 19th century. In the 20th century, the house remained in the hands of a different family and as with many others it was requisitioned in the Second World War and was badly damaged, leaving the family disinclined to return. And a pattern followed of stripping fittings for auction, further sale, and demolition.

16. Easton Park, demolished 1923

Easton Park was near Framlingham and is rather a tale of two houses. On the left you can see the 18th century house, with a conventional classical façade. In 1875, the house was extended to designs by Anthony Salvin in Victorian Gothic style. As with many additions of this period, the house was expanded massively, making it vulnerable to an unforeseen future with lower income and fewer

servants. Post First World War, family debt from excessive borrowing put the estate up for sale. It passed through owners in quick succession, being demolished in 1923 and sold as architectural salvage.

17. Edwardstone Hall, demolished 1952

Edwardstone Hall was a relatively small house. The gatehouse survives, as shown on the right and it is assumed that the house was of a similar date- c.1840, although it could have encased something earlier. The house was demolished in 1951 after the owner moved to a smaller house on the estate, presumably because it was no longer sustainable and a buyer could not be found.

18. Flixton Hall, demolished 1952-3

Flixton was near Bungay. It was a very large house. It was an historic estate although the house shown is relatively modern, built to designs by Anthony Salvin. In the mid-19th century, the house suffered a fire, so while the design follows elements of the house, Salvin's version was much extended, creating a house fit for lavish 19th century entertaining. And this was further extended in the 1880s. In 1950, an auction sold off the house and contents as a result of death duties, and by 1953 all but a part of the ground floor was demolished, which is now being used as industrial storage.

19. Fornham Hall, demolished 1951

Fornham was near Bury St Edmunds, the original house dated from c.1785 and was designed by James Wyatt. Victorian additions extended the house to 26 bedrooms, and it was a very fine house with Adam interiors and Sheraton furniture. The scale of the house made it vulnerable, it was another Second World War requisition, and when institutional use could not be found, demolition and architectural salvage was presented as the only viable option.

20. Hardwick House, demolished 1926-7

Near Bury St Edmunds, Hardwick was primarily a 17th century house, with Georgian and Victorian additions. Another very large house, it passed through the same family until the last owner who died in the 1920s, leaving a complex state of affairs, which ultimately resulted in an intestate situation and the house and estate being auctioned in successive lots. By 1927, the house was being demolished for architectural salvage, another house extended massively by the Victorians to be out of scale with 20th century demand.

21. Henham Hall, demolished 1953-4

Henham, near Southwold, was originally an Elizabethan house, destroyed by fire and replaced with one designed by James Wyatt from 1792, for Sir John Rous (later 1st Earl of Stradbroke), with the landscape park by Humphrey Repton. You can see this house on the left. From 1858, the house was remodelled in the Italianate style, I would suggest to its detriment. The 19th century work also significantly increased its size to 53 bedrooms. The house was requisitioned for

both wars and by 1953 demolition was inevitable. There is a statement form Lord Stradbroke's agents, which could apply to so many houses:

"the house is far too large for modern use and internally is very badly planned for occupation, even for industrial or institutional purposes: further it has suffered considerable damage during requisition. The Hall contains vast reserves of building material which can now serve a better purpose through demolition than to remain standing at constant maintenance expense".

22. Hobland Hall, damaged by fire 1961, remaining structure demolished 2002

Hobland in Bradwell was an attractive redbrick smaller house, within a relatively small park of 36 acres. Boundary changes mean that it is now in Norfolk although it was originally Suffolk. It was a late loss, by fire, with the ground floor being converted into offices until that too was destroyed to make way for a new house.

23. Holton Hall, demolished 1957

Holton was a 450-acre estate near Halesworth. The house was a late-19th century replacement for an 18th century house damaged by fire. Another Second World War requisition, which was found to be redundant post-war and in a poor state of repair, making demolition inevitable.

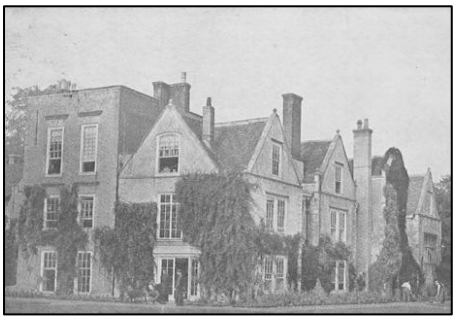
24. Hunston Hall, destroyed by fire 1917

Hunston Hall was another relatively small estate with an 18th century house and just under 700 acres. The house was a secondary residence and was unoccupied at the time of the fire, meaning that nobody was alerted to take swift action, and there was no compelling desire to rebuild.

25. Livermere Hall, demolished 1923

Livermere was near Bury St Edmunds and was a large house. The house and estate were under consistent family ownership, although through indirect descendants from the early 18th century, and it was the excellently named Baptist Lee - who also won £30,000 on the lottery in 1733, who made significant additions with the projecting wings - perhaps with his new-found wealth. Then at the end of the 18th century the main mansion was refaced in mathematical tiles, as at Althorp. Livermere was a secondary property for the family and by the late 19th century was being tenanted. The house was sold in 1919, for the sum of £43,000, but it remained unoccupied and by 1923, the decision was made by the owner to demolish it – presumably due to the required upkeep and maintenance.

26. The Manor House, demolished 1934



Located in Mildenhall, near the centre of the town, the house was in consistent family ownership from the mid-sixteenth century until 1933. The house was 17th century in origin, although successive additions and alterations made for subtle modernisations that you can see in the appearance on the left, and as a secondary seat, that was also relatively small in the scheme of things - just six bedrooms excluding servants – it was often tenanted - including as a training college for missionaries and as a girls school. The location of the manor house in the centre of town made it ripe for redevelopment, and therefore, once the family had vacated to a less urban setting, it was only a matter of time before the house was demolished to make way for new housing.

27. Moulton Paddocks, demolished 1950

A 19th century house near Newmarket, the house was owned by Sir Ernest Cassel, a very wealthy financier, who was the grandfather of Countess Mountbatten of Burma. The house and estate were very much built for racing and entertaining, with stud farms and accommodation for 100 horses. The house was built for a very particular time and purpose, for lavish entertaining, which was reliant on significant wealth. It was sold on Cassel's death in 1921, and as the world and financial position changed post war, adding in death duties for the new owner, the house and estate were unsustainable, resulting in its demolition.

28. Oakley Park, demolished 1923

Oakley Park was near Eye, and the 19th century house that you see here was a remodelling of an older house. This version of Oakley was built to the designs of Sidney Smirke, who also worked on the British Museum with his more famous brother, Robert. The design followed the fashions of the time, and created a very grand house with 25 bedrooms and accommodation for 25 indoor servants. Post-war death duties, and a succession of owners and auctions saw a swift end to the house, which like many others was far too big and unadaptable for a world that no longer functioned as it did in the previous century.

29. Ousden Hall, demolished 1955

Ousden Hall was near Newmarket, and at its heart it was a 17th century house, refaced in successive centuries, and remodelled although the H footprint remained. The house passed through various owners, and to demonstrate the contrasting sale price, when it was sold in 1863 the purchase price was £85,000. In 1913 it sold for less than half this price. Following the death of the last family owner in 1952, the house was sold although its state after wartime occupation and a lack of maintenance was considered to be beyond economic repair, and so another demolition although the clocktower still survives.

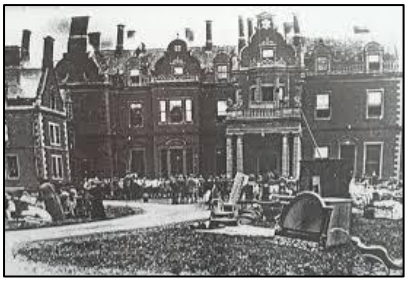
30. The Red House, demolished 1937

The Red house and its estate was located about a mile from Ipswich, a fine 17th century house, altered in the 18th century but otherwise relatively compact - a mere 10 bedrooms. In the 19th century, the estate had been heavily indebted with mortgages, which made the estate and its maintenance precarious. In addition, the expansion of Ipswich was getting ever closer, and ultimately the house, unoccupied for 10 years before it was demolished, was the victim of being on prime development land near the growing town.

31. Redgrave Hall, demolished 1947 & 1970

The photograph on the left shows Georgian Redrgave in the 1930s, a lovely house and a fine example of The period. The estate and house were in the same ownership for over 300 years - until its demolition. The house and parkland were completed to designs by Capability Brown, so it was very much 18th century elegance. The agricultural depression had a major impact on the Holt-Wilson family's finances, and the house was let in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was requisitioned in both wars, the furniture sold in the 1930s, and a common pattern of decline and eventual demolition took place. The two dates refer first to the Georgian demolition in 1947, and the Tudor demolition in 1970 – a very late one. The Capability brown kennels survive.

32. Rendlesham Hall, demolished 1949



Rendlesham was a 19th century house, a replacement for a house gutted by fire in the 1870s, and the replacement gutted again in 1898 – as you can see here with the furniture on the lawn. The Thellusson family's wealth demanded a very large fire replacement - and the eventual house constructed had 34 bedrooms and 25 acres of pleasure grounds. A typical pattern of decline, sale and destruction followed. A newspaper report at the time stated:

"The hall is now being demolished – once the scene of glittering functions at which royalty were entertained… Now the windows are blank, footsteps of workmen echo in the spacious rooms and water drips desolately through the lofty ceilings."

33. Rougham Hall, bombed 1940

Rougham Hall is marked out as the only house bombed, rather than being a gradual decline. It was requisitioned during the Second World War, and was most likely bombed as a result of dumped ammunition, rather than being a strategic target. Being destroyed so early in the war, there was no chance of restoration or rebuilding while the conflict was continuing, and therefore sadly the house had another five years of deterioration, by which time restoration was no longer viable – particularly with the scarcity of materials post war.

34. Rushbrooke Hall, destroyed by fire during demolition 1961

Brace yourself – Rushbrooke gets 2 slides. One of the most heartbreaking losses: a beautiful Tudor manor house with 16th-century panelling, mullioned windows and a moat. It had survived the Civil War, agricultural depression and two world wars only to be demolished in 1961. Rushbrook wase near Bury – and really was lovely, with a glorious baroque interior. The house was sold by the Rushbrooke family in 1919 – presumably due to financially straightened circumstances. It then passed through several owners, with Lord Rothschild being an owner from the 1920sThe Rothschilds carried out extensive renovations, although war requisition meant the house was unoccupied post 1945 with a lack of suitable tenants. The poor state of the house by the 1960s meant renovation costs were prohibitive, even, presumably for the Rothschilds, and fire during demolition destroyed the buildings – a very sad loss.

35. Stoke Park, demolished c.1930

Stoke was a comfortable 19th century house, with the usual luxuries expected, with a 1000-acre estate. From 1918, the estate went out of family ownership, and then passed through a succession of owners, sold off piecemeal, and the house was eventually demolished. The land is now a suburb of Ipswich.

36. Sudbourne Hall, demolished 1951

An 18th century house in 19th century clothing, the former home of Sir Richard Wallace, of the Wallace Collection, and Kenneth Clarke, the Director of the National Gallery - so certainly a home with an artistic inclinations. Another house that was significantly enlarged in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, making it swiftly too large for comfort in the upheaval of the 20th century. The house was requisitioned in the Second World War, and was not released until 1950, by which time it was in such poor state, and repair costs so prohibitive, that demolition was seen as the only option.

37. Tendring Hall, demolished 1954

Alongside Rushbrooke, Tendring Hall is one of the most significant architectural losses in Suffolk's history. Tendring was located in Stoke-by-Nayland, in a commanding position at the top of the hill. It was designed by Sir John Soane, early in his career and an early design is shown here although it was much altered in the 19th century, to the detriment of Soane's original. The building was not destroyed by neglect or indifference, but by government requisition, inadequate compensation, and a post-war economy that offered no mechanism for rescue. When architect Raymond Erith, a devoted Soane scholar, exhibited restoration drawings at the Royal Academy in 1953, it was already too late.

The building was requisitioned in 1939 for troops and later prisoners of war for seven years, it was returned semi-derelict. The portico survives at the top of the hill – although this was a later addition, not Soane's work. The landscape park is identifiable by the groups of artfully arranged trees as you drive up into Stoke-by-Nayland – that is not a wild landscape – and the walled garden also survives and is slowly being revived by a couple who have taken it on at present.

Repton, when consulted on the design wrote that:

"The new house has been so recently built that I thought perhaps in justice to myself, to record that neither its situation nor the style of the building were suggested by me, on the contrary had I been previously consulted the house would neither have been so lofty in its construction, nor so exposed in its situation."

38. Thorington Hall, demolished 1949

This was a house in continuous family ownership until it was demolished. Built 1819 for Henry Bence Bence on extensive Bence family estates. The last owner, Ida Millicent Bence-Lambert, lived here until 1940, when it was requisitioned. Unlike many cases, soldiers were reportedly well-behaved; enemy bombs fell in the parkland but missed the house. Ida died post-war leaving no clear succession, and the house was knocked down in 1949.

39. Thornham Hall, partly demolished 1938, fire 1954

Thornham was a 16th and 17th century house in 19th century clothing. The family's straightened circumstances meant that by the end of the 19th century the house was being tenanted, which started a slow decline. There were two stages of demolition, with the principal rooms lost in 1938 as a result of a planned reduction in the size of the house. Post Second World War the house became a prep school, when it was gutted by fire.

40. Ufford Place, demolished 1956

Another house significantly enlarged in the late 19th century. In the 20th century, land from the estate was sold to cover death duties, which began its decline. Requisition followed, and the house was another that was returned in such a poor state that repair costs were prohibitive. It was demolished in 1956.

So, if I haven't utterly depressed you, let's conclude with some more positive stories. In 1974, The V&A Exhibition "The Destruction of the Country House", brought much public attention to the issue. And in

parallel, in the same year, more rigorous planning legislation and protection was established that meant that the intentional destruction of such houses was much more difficult. In addition, new economic models for historic houses, and the National Trust's expanded role meant that the surviving stock was now largely safe. And indeed, where owners - be they institutional, corporate, or private - were willing and able to be creative and entrepreneurial, their houses and estates could once again become assets, rather than liabilities. Suffolk has four very good examples of such resilience.

Heveningham Hall is one of the greatest Georgian houses in England. Designed by Sir Robert Taylor in 1778 with incomparable interiors by James Wyatt, and grounds by Capability Brown. Lionel Esher called Wyatt's vaulted entrance hall 'the most beautiful room in England'. Yet Heveningham came desperately close to being lost — the contents were auctioned 1915, fire in 1947, a second catastrophic fire in 1984, and three years in the hands of receivers. In 1994, Jon Hunt purchased the hall and 467 acres. The restoration that followed has been exceptional: Brown's original 500-acre landscape plans, never previously executed, are being realised. Today Heveningham hosts numerous events, has developed commercial businesses on the estate, and sits within a 5,000-acre rewilding reserve of national significance.

Euston Hall, near Thetford on the Suffolk/Norfolk border, is a great estate in continuous family occupation. Home of the Dukes of Grafton since the 1660s. The estate has been managed with continuity across three and a half centuries. John Evelyn visited in 1677; William Kent designed the pleasure ground; Capability Brown dammed the Little Ouse to create the lakes. Euston represents the oldest model of country house survival: unbroken family ownership combined with careful management, genuine public engagement, and the continuity that comes from seven generations of stewardship. It is not a museum but a living estate.

Helmingham Hall represents the most continuous and unbroken story of family stewardship in Suffolk. Home of the Tollemache family since the 1480s, over 540 years. The double moat — both inner and outer, drawbridges still raised each night as they have been since 1510. The gardens, designed by Lady Tollemache, have won multiple RHS Chelsea awards. The estate runs as a working agricultural unit: farming, deer park, venison, antiques fair, garden events, and educational visits all contribute.

Somerleyton Hall is a grand 19th century house on a 5000-acre estate, remaining in the family ownership of Lord Somerleyton. Today the house is open to the public and the estate and house are used for a range of commercial purposes, from filming for major Hollywood productions through to luxury leisure breaks on the rewilded estate.

Heveningham, Euston, Somerleyton and Helmingham show that survival is possible — but it requires vision, dedication, and the willingness to treat an ancient building as a dynamic living responsibility rather than a static financial burden.