Elmdon Park industrial remains tour, 11 May 2026.
Chris Hodrien.

After Chris Hodrien gave his lecture in November 2025 on the buried industrial remains in Elmdon Park (the systems to feed the now-vanished mansion on top of the ridge [the Hall was demolished for safety when derelict and roofless by Solihull Council in 1950s] with 'utilities' such as pumped drinking water, electric lighting, ice storage and a separate bathing building, all concealed within the wood formerly called 'Engine Grove'), Chris kindly offered to do an on-site tour for SAG members of the remains on 11th May. 10 members attended and we were blessed with fine weather. Chris had also arranged for three members of the Elmdon Park Support Group (ESPG) volunteers (see: https://www.facebook.com/elmdon.park.support.group/?locale=en_GB)to attend to help with the explanations. Chris explained that while the ESPG has only formally existed since 2009, several of its members have been intensively researching the history of the mansion, church and estate and collecting and recording small finds as individuals ever since the 1960s, assembling a large dossier of documentary research.

Chris explained that in the days before mains supplies to outlying country mansions, on-site provision of such utilities was the norm from at least the 1750s, with the facilities being dispersed across the estate at some distance from the mansion to avoid noise nuisance. Because of the wealth of the occupants of mansions, they could afford the best technology for this, before the general public, e.g. pumped water supplies long before general mains water supply in towns. Such mansion 'utilities' plant has only recently attracted the interest of engineering historians, resulting in a major HE/NT cofunded 5-year national research survey about 10 years ago and two major reference books.

Copies of relevant past documentary records were shown at each site. The sites visited included the (accidentally) partly-exposed buried (supposed) water pumphouse (which formerly until c.1950s had an associated large round structure about 30ft diameter of unknown purpose), the partly-exposed previously-supposed ice house (which may in fact be a WW2 Home Guard military training structure!), and the brick foundations outline just inches below ground level of the large bath-house which had been temporarily exposed for measurement and recording very recently since the lecture. The bath-house, formerly assumed by the volunteers to be from circa 1860s for the use of the estate workers for control of Cholera and general hygiene, now seems more likely to be 'high-status', for his lordship and guests. The electricity generator structure, if existing, is still buried and yet to be found. The water pump was worked remotely by reciprocating push-rods (the so-called 'flat-rod' system, widely used in Cornish mining) by a unique specially designed automatic water-bucket gravity mechanism (1790s green energy!), shown and photographed in a detailed 1935 engineering paper but again

yet to be located. This allowed the energy from dirty water from the lake sluice outfall to provide the motive power to pump clean spring water about 80ft vertically to the mansion up on the ridge . Chris explained the many problems of structures interpretation, with structures known from estate records and several actually marked on large-scale Ordnance Survey maps from 1870s-1950s, but difficult to identify which is which, and with no known original construction/startup dates! (the last mansion dates from 1794, whereas electric lighting would date from c.1890 or later - the mansion is recorded as the very first house in Solihull Borough to be lit by electricity).

The tour finished with a brief visit to the site of the Hall up on the ridge, once investigated briefly by SAG to record the outline of the buried foundations.

It is very sad that Solihull Council declined to support the proposed volunteer recoding dig activity on the water pumphouse promoted by Chris in 2024.



Supposed ice house interior. Photo Credit Annie Edwards



Photo credit, Annie Edwards



Supposed Buried water pumphouse remains. Photo credit Annie Edwards.