

CROMWELL country

JOHN BATEMAN SAYS ROUNDHEADS AND ROYALISTS ALIKE WILL LOVE THE CLUB'S RECENT DEVELOPMENT NEAR HUNTINGDON

NOTTOO many of us, I suspect, set off on a caravan break with history in mind. But without getting too bogged down with dates and battles and royal hanky-panky, I have found that Club sites with a bit of a past and a tale to tell can add interest to a few days away.

We're all quite used to pitching in old quarries, on former railway stations or even on sites that were once under several feet of water, but it's not every day that we book in our caravan and tribe courtesy of Oliver Cromwell or, to be perfectly accurate, dear old Ollie's family.

Grafham Water, one of the Club's more recent site developments, resides in pastoral middle England. It's almost on the shore of one of Anglian Water's four largest water parks, which is the leisure and sporting centrepiece of 1500 acres of countryside crying out for anglers, walkers, cyclists, birdwatchers and sailing folk to relax and have fun.

It also sits on what was once a hunting, fishing and farming estate owned by the Cromwell family who, 350 years ago, had the foresight to build a cottage made to last and the vision to leave enough space out

front to allow us to park car and caravan or motor caravan while booking in.

Welcome to Cromwell country and a peaceful, splendid little site just five miles out of Huntingdon, where Oliver was born and educated at the grammar school, now home to the Cromwell Museum and a fascinating collection devoted to the former farmer who created a republic.

If you're minded to learn more about the Lord Protector, a brilliant soldier and skilled parliamentarian, I can think of few better settings for a quiet read than Grafham Water, formerly a commercial site but now sprinkled with the Club's redesign magic dust.

Hand on heart, I can tell you it is vastly better than it was. Who says so? Well, not only Club members I met who had stayed here before the changeover but also local residents who live in the few estate cottages that cluster close to the site.

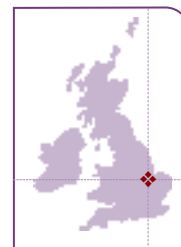
I spoke to several locals on walks along paths skirting arable land wrapped around the site. "Have things changed," I wondered. Oh, yes; the site looks better, is better managed and is so much quieter than it used to be, I was told. If that bit of

research doesn't earn me a bonus point or two from EGH then nothing will!

First impressions of the site are created by the rural approach. Although only a short distance from the A1, Grafham village, the site and the water park are deeply imbedded in the gentle embrace of Cambridgeshire countryside.

The theme continues along a pleasant drive leading to the Cromwell cottage 'arrivals' complex and, inside the site, the ambience of green, rural seclusion is enhanced by an imposing avenue of mature yew trees and more recent planting, which sub-divides the attractive six-acre plot into distinct areas.

Grafham Water, open all year, has 71 pitches, 24 of them hardstandings and eight of which are serviced. The ratio of grass to gravel adds further to the parkland feel of



Ordnance Survey
Landranger Map 153

ABOVE: Parkland peace and beauty – all part of the scene around Huntingdon

INFORMATION TOURISM

- Huntingdon TIC – tel 01480 388588 or e-mail Hunts.TIC@huntsdc.gov.uk
- St Neots TIC, The Old Court, 8 New Street, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 1AE. Tel 01480 388788

INFORMATION | CYCLING

The Grafham Water site is close to National Cycle Network Route 51. You can head east to Cambridge or take a pleasant, mostly traffic-free route south around Grafham Water to St Neots. See sustrans.org.uk for more information.



INFORMATION | SITE

Full site details can be found on p69 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2009/10*



Waterpark wonderland – Grafham Water invites relaxation and offers a wealth of sporting activities

the site, with reminders of the area's historic past still visible.

Three sections of the moat that once surrounded the estate survive, and one is now a pond which provides a splendid base for mixed wildlife, some transient, others – like the ducks – happily resident.

If birdwatching is among your interests, smile nicely at Wardens, Steve and Jan Rosam, who have been at the helm here since the site ownership change in 2006, and they will point you at the likely roosting branch of Grafham Water's most unusual resident – an escapee American great horned owl. Ollie (who else?) adopted Grafham Water as his new home and he sits watchfully in the mature trees, preferring shadow. It makes photography tricky, but I didn't try flash in case he took offence – after all, this is one very big bird!

Grafham Water's treats don't end there. Close to the complex of Cromwell cottage, warden's office and splendidly redeveloped shower and toilet block, is a well-equipped play area and a heated outdoor swimming pool (open mid-May to mid-September). I'm no swimmer but I could happily have lingered longer under water in the showers. The block, a skilful marriage of renovation and innovation, is excellent and of a standard deserving a fanfare that would have delighted Cromwell at the head of one of his armies.

You'd be hard-pressed to find anything to grumble about (that's not a challenge!). Amenities include privacy cubicles, baby and toddler washroom and changing facilities, launderette, vegetable preparation area and so on.

TV reception is okay, with a booster system available, and dog owners can stride off-site to join a network of paths and unploughed farm fields that characterise this essentially agricultural area.

Huntingdon offers the nearest supermarkets and major shopping outlets but, if the lack of a herb or two or a tin of mushy peas deters you from creating something magical for dinner, have a word with Jan in the wardens' office. Chances are she'll lay hands on what your culinary skills demand – and if her mini-shop can't solve the problem, it's not at all unusual for Jan to raid her own supplies.

So add Grafham Water to your touring plans list. It's a quality site and I like to think that the orderly transformation of the family estate would have earned a nod of approval from Cromwell himself. ■

INFORMATION | ATTRACTIONS



Godmanchester

- **Godmanchester** – linked to Huntingdon by medieval causeway and stone bridge over the river Great Ouse. Photogenic and fine meadow-parkland. Guided walks. Tel 01487 815229
- **Cromwell Museum**, Huntingdon. Free. Tel 01480 375830 or see cambridgeshire.gov.uk/leisure/museums/cromwell
- **Huntingdon Market** – Weds and Sats; Farmers' Market, alternate

- **Hamerton Zoo Park** – has a conservation theme. See hamertonzoo.com
- **Cyclists** – pick up a pack of 'drift through time' map-pamphlets from TICs. Rides to suit all levels
- **Walkers** – try the 26-mile Ouse Valley Way, from source to sea
- **Cinnamon Restaurant** – if you fancy a meal out, or an evening in without cooking, this restaurant is

- half a mile from the Club site in Grafham Village and also does takeaways. Tel 01480 812211
- **Healthy walk** pamphlets include a 'golfing saunter' around and across Ramsey golf course. Or just sling the walking boots and play golf – much better
- **Grafham Water** – call the visitor centre on 01480 812154 or see anglianwater.co.uk for more details