



## History with a twist at Hampton Manor

**Hampton Manor is a country house hotel on the outskirts of Birmingham, the UK's second city.**

Steeped in a history that takes the estate back to the Norman Conquest, the Manor was in need of much care and attention when, in 2008, it fell, fortuitously, into the hands of Jan and Derek Hill.

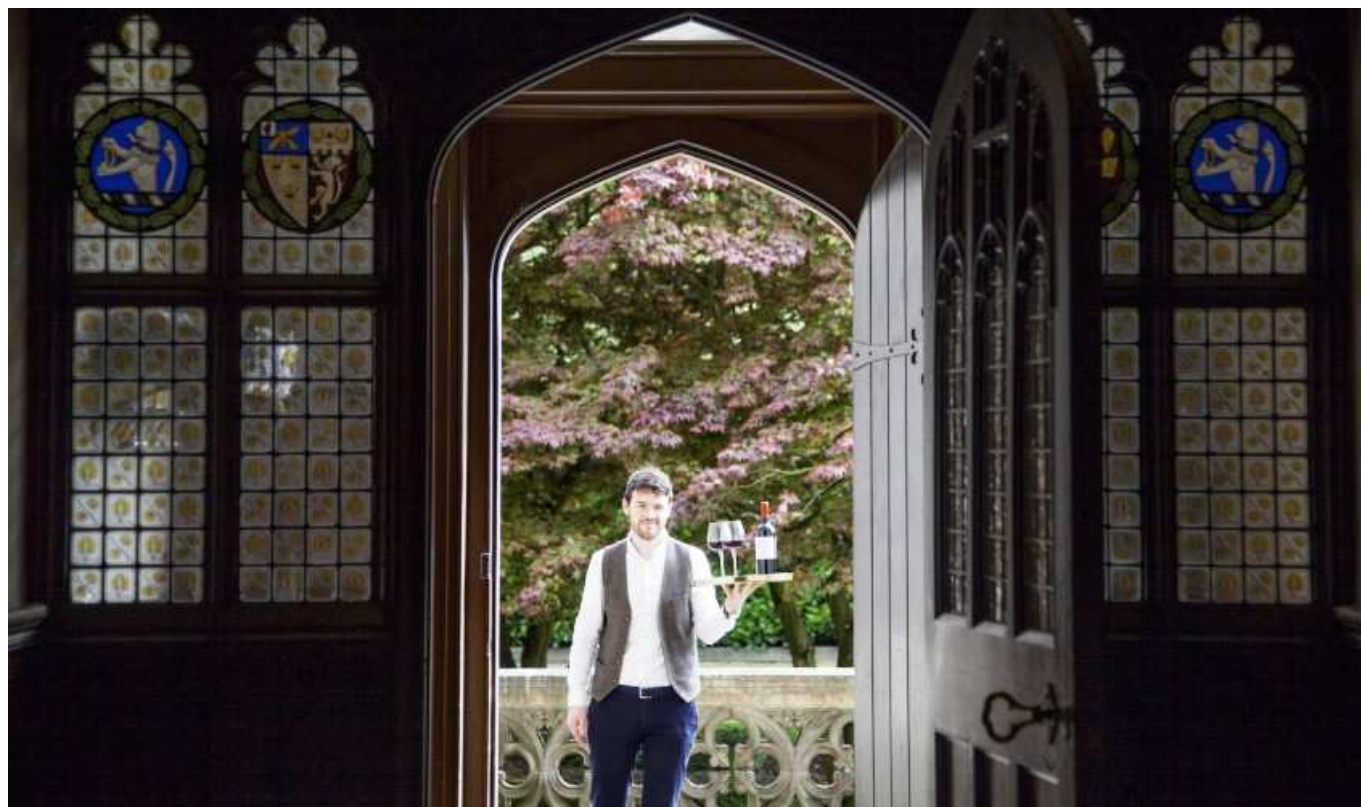
The couple, with son James, his wife Fjona and a committed team have refurbished the property and are creating a special experience for those able to spend time there.

Wining and dining forms a focus to any stay, with Peel's, the hotel's Michelin Star and four AA Rosette restaurant, truly memorable.

The hotel is also conveniently situated for quick trips into Birmingham or throughout a part of the UK known as Shakespeare Country.

**Ashley Gibbins**  
Commissioning Editor  
**AllWays traveller**





# This manor's future is in very good hands

By Ashley Gibbins

**Time was when grand manor houses scattered the English rural landscape, forming the country 'seat' of the landed gentry.**

Maintaining the opulent lifestyle for these lords and ladies of the manors was a veritable industry in itself, and one that offered a generations-long source of employment for many of those living in the surrounding communities.

The domestic servants included valets, butlers and footmen, nannies; scullery maids, man servants and cooks.

To maintain the gardens and park and agricultural land would provide work for gardeners, park keepers and farm hands.

## The first country house hotels

The sumptuous manors also served as a network of informal hotels, with their owners hosting friends, acquaintances and other well-to-do travellers during the social seasons.

## Change on the way

This seemingly inalienable way of feudal English country life was underpinned by the low cost of wages paid to workers at this time.

But dramatic change was on the way.

The industrial revolution, that swept through Britain in the mid-18th Century, began sucking workers from the countryside into the better paid jobs offered by owners of factories in the burgeoning industrial cities.

And the Great War of 1914/18 took many young men to the battlefields of France and Flanders.

England's aristocratic class struggled to keep their country manors viable.

When peace eventually returned to Europe, and those surviving the war had returned to Britain, a social class structure that perceived domestic 'servitude' as a norm, had gone forever.

As was the source of cheap labour.

The wages demanded by those willing to work for the lords and ladies of the manor soared and the imposition of punitive death duties took an increasingly heavy toll on the fortunes of the landed gentry.

Without the financial or staffing resources needed to maintain the upkeep of England's stately homes, many fell into disrepair before being vandalised, scavenged or, as in many cases, demolished.

Of those houses that survived, some were saved for the nation by conservation organisations like the National Trust and are now open to the public.

Others have been purchased as private residences or converted into luxury apartments.

And finally, a smaller number have become country house hotels, with Hampton Manor is a shining example of this.



# Around since Domesday

While the first recorded mention of Hampton Manor estate appeared in the Domesday Book of 1066, the current house was built by the son of Sir Robert Peel, the 19th century Prime Minister.

Peel, who is also credited with setting up the country's police force, was living at nearby Drayton Manor when he came across the land at Hampton and decided to acquire it for development.

Before work could commence Peel died after falling from his horse, and it was his son, Frederick, who built the neo-Tudor gothic style Hampton Manor as a mirror image of the family home at Drayton.

Sir Frederick Peel occupied Hampton Manor until his death in 1906, and the house remained a private residence until 2008, when it was bought by Jan and Derek Hill.



## A leap of faith

The couple had sold a thriving pub, hotel and conference centre in Worcestershire when they happened upon Hampton Manor, found it was on the market and embarked on a great leap of faith.

With son James and his wife Fjona brought on board, there began a major refurbishment of the old manor before opening it as a hotel.

But while retaining the grandeur of the house, this entrepreneurial quartet has created an experience that marries historical pedigree with modern design and relaxed ambiance.

# All you could wish for in a country house hotel

By Ann Mealor

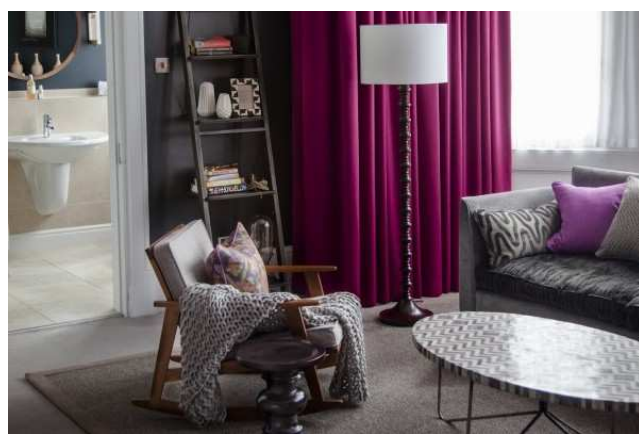


**Our room at Hampton Manor was everything you would expect from a luxurious country house hotel.**

The George Fentham suite, named after a local business man and philanthropist, was traditionally sumptuous with a modern twist.

High ceilings, huge bay windows, an open fireplace over which hung an antique, gilt arched mirror and massive kingsize bed with a large wooden chest at one end and a tall, padded headboard at the other.

The pink floor to ceiling drapes, coloured cushions and chic designer furniture and lighting gave the traditional room a very modern feel.



A deep, double ended boat bath took pride of place in the spacious bathroom which also featured a top-of-the-range walk-in power shower and full size bottles of quality spa toiletries.

Super soft bathrobes and slippers were provided, ideal for lounging in the comfortable chairs with a glass of wine of an evening and admiring the stunning views across the lawns.

A selection of teas and coffee, plus home made cookies (always a welcome treat) were on the tea tray by the door and generously replenished each morning. All the home comforts you could ask for in glorious, historic surroundings.



## Dining at Peels

**Dining at Peel's Restaurant started with cocktails and canapés in front of the fireplace in the elegant candlelit lounge. With its muted beige, green, tartan and plum colour scheme, floral wallpaper and upholstered chairs and sofas, the lounge chic, light and airy writes Ann Mealor.**

Sitting listening to gentle jazz, I sipped on a delicious, expertly made Hendrick's gin cocktail with clear crème de cacao and light, frothy egg white. Admiring my grand surroundings I nibbled on a selection of cheese, shrimp and venison canapés served on small, flat stone platters.

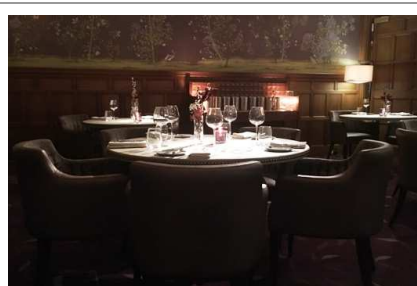
After perusing the menu, we were shown to our table in the wood panelled, richly carpeted Peel's dining room, ready to enjoy our five course meal with wine pairings.

### An amuse bouche

I love trying different dishes and so I was delighted when firstly, we were served with a moorish amuse bouche of roasted pumpkin soup sprinkled with crunchy seeds.

Served in a glazed earthenware bowl, the pottery contrasted well with the dimpled, steel topped round dining table.

The soup came with a selection of warm bread served on a wooden platter, accompanied by a choice of butter or beef dripping – different, but surprisingly tasty.



### Beetroot with goat's cheese ice cream

Our starter, beetroot with goat's cheese ice cream (a first for me) and crunchy sourdough crumb was a colourful treat for the tastebuds with its variety of textures and flavours.

Our knowledgeable sommelier poured us a glass of Davenport, a white English wine from Sussex which ideally complimented our first course.

Next up was mackerel with cucumber, toasted sesame seeds and cubes of lime jelly. It was refreshingly zesty and prettily decorated with small, edible yellow flowers.

The wine of choice was a lightly oaked Corbiere from Languedoc, France; a big flavoured white that worked so well with this dish.

Then came a rich and tender Wagyu braised beef cheek with rainbow swede, parsley and chard.

Ashley tucked in to halibut with samphire, tempura mussels, roscoff onions and turnips, all carefully placed on an island of champagne cream sauce.

A chocolately Argentinian Malbec accompanied my meat dish and a Long Island unoaked Chardonnay was paired with the fish.

Cheeses are a favourite of mine, so a course of creamy Cremet, ash layered Morbier, soft British Tunworth and crunchy Colston Bassett stilton was truly welcomed.

Fortunately I still had enough room to savour them all, along with a glass of English semi-sec Nyetimber.

A pre-dessert of light, passion fruit cream was followed by douglas fir pine mousse - unusual but delicious - apple ice cream, plump, brandy soaked raisins and warm baked apple.

A Somerset apple ice cider went down very well with the dessert.

We ended our gourmet evening with a Lalani & Co tea ceremony and a selection of petit-fours, sat on one of the deep sofas in the magnificent lounge.

Peel's Michelin star is very richly deserved.



# Spa treatments at Hampton Manor

When visiting an hotel, I always take the opportunity to use the spa and have a treatment *writes Ann Mealor*.

I find lying on a heated bed, in a candlelit room listening to soft music and having my face massaged with creams and oils, very relaxing and therapeutic.

I also know that my skin will benefit from the experience too.

At Hampton Manor, I chose an hour long aromatherapy facial.

Justine, my therapist was very knowledgeable and adapted my treatment to deal with my particular skin issues.

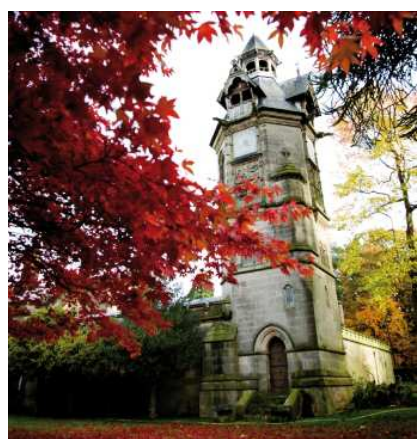
The facial massage was very thorough, really lifting the muscles from the bone and helping oxygen flow through my skin.

The spa uses Eve Taylor products, a quality range using pure essential oils that smell gorgeous – the whole facial was a treat for the senses.

Whilst the face mask was doing its work, Justine did a soothing scalp massage, so that I got maximum value from the time available.

Following the treatment my skin looked good for days after, and my facial muscles felt toned due to the excellent massage.

A snapshot of Hampton Manor



## Hampton Manor

Shadowbrook Lane  
Hampton-In-Arden  
Solihull  
B92 0EN

[www.hamptonmanor.com](http://www.hamptonmanor.com)

01675 446 080

[info@hamptonmanor.com](mailto:info@hamptonmanor.com)

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**AllWays traveller** is the consumer travel magazine from the International Travel Writers Alliance.

[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)



**Ann Mealor** is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays traveller*

[Ann@itwalliance.com](mailto:Ann@itwalliance.com)



**The International Travel Writers Alliance** is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

[www.itwalliance.com](http://www.itwalliance.com)



**Ashley Gibbins** is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.

[Ashley@itwalliance.com](mailto:Ashley@itwalliance.com)

