

AN ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE

by Anthony du Boulay

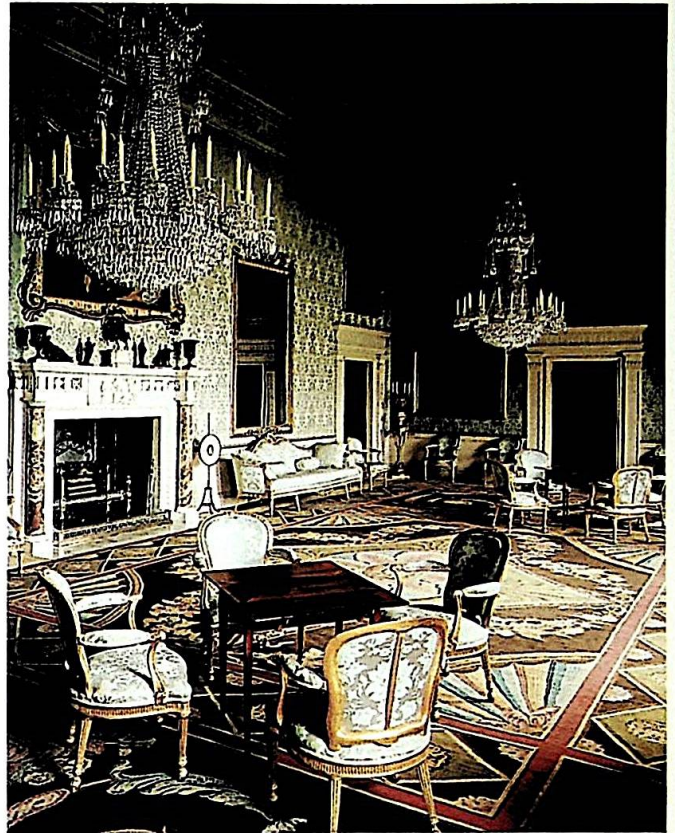
BRITAIN is blessed with a great number of stately homes and country houses which are open to the public, and many of them still contain much of their original furnishing, decoration and pictures. Of those not as imposing as Blenheim or Castle Howard, Saltram, near Plymouth in Devonshire epitomises the best of 18th century taste.

The house evolved from its 16th century origins being built by the Bagg family, who moved from Dorset to Plymouth early in the 16th century. They constructed a quadrangular house which forms the core of the present building. It passed to the Cartarets after the Civil War when George Bagg forfeited his estate, and they built the central block of the west front. The property was sold to George Parker in 1712 and he built the south and east facades as well as extending the west to incorporate the central block and enclose the Tudor core. His son succeeded in 1768, becoming Lord Boringdon in 1784, and it was at this time that the house acquired most of its present internal appearance and many of its contents. Sir Joshua Reynolds was a life-long friend of Lord Boringdon's, and seemed to have helped him acquire most of the pictures now in the house. Lord Boringdon also used Robert Adam to extensively alter the Saloon and what is now the Dining Room, and to bring the rest of the house up-to-date. Lord Boringdon's son, John, was created Earl of Morley in 1815, but by spending a great deal

Saltram from the South West by Philip Rogers 1794 - 1853. *National Trust Photographic Library/Jonathon Gibson.*



of money making improvements in Plymouth and Plympton to the benefit of their citizens he had to mortgage the house. The family then made a disastrous venture in a clay works, and luckily had no money during the Victorian period which saved the house from further change. Through the marriage of the 3rd Earl of Morley to the daughter of R. S. Holford of Westonbirt the family fortune improved and the 4th Earl was able to maintain the house during the first half of the 20th century. When he died in 1951 the house, its



Saloon at Saltram designed by Adam in 1768 for Lord Boringdon. plaster work attributed to Joseph Rose. *National Trust Photographic Library /Rob Matheson.*

contents and 291 acres of park land were accepted by the Treasury in lieu of death duties, subsequently vested in the National Trust in 1957.

The most striking room in the house is the Saloon designed by Robert Adam, the work being carried out between 1770 and 1772, with plaster work attributed to Joseph Rose and painted roundels by Antonio Zucchi. Adam also designed all the fixtures and fittings, even down to the door handles based on designs illustrated in the second volume of his *Works in Architecture*. The Dining Room next door is another example of a Robert Adam interior. The owner and architect originally conceived this room as a Library constructed between 1768 and 1770, but changed it into a Dining Room in 1780-81, the old Dining Room (which is now the Library) proving to be too far from the Kitchen. As before the plaster-work is by Joseph Rose and the wall painting, overdoors and ceiling painting by Antonio Zucchi, or possibly partly by Angelica Kauffmann whom he had married while working on this commission.

The Velvet Drawing Room, which leads from the Morning Room to the Saloon, has a mid 18th century deco-

ration with a fine plaster ceiling and Corinthian columns at the Saloon end. The marble chimneypiece is by Thomas Carter the younger; while the original red velvet wall hangings have perished and can only now be seen on the chairs and the end wall. However, the original pierced gilt fillet survives.

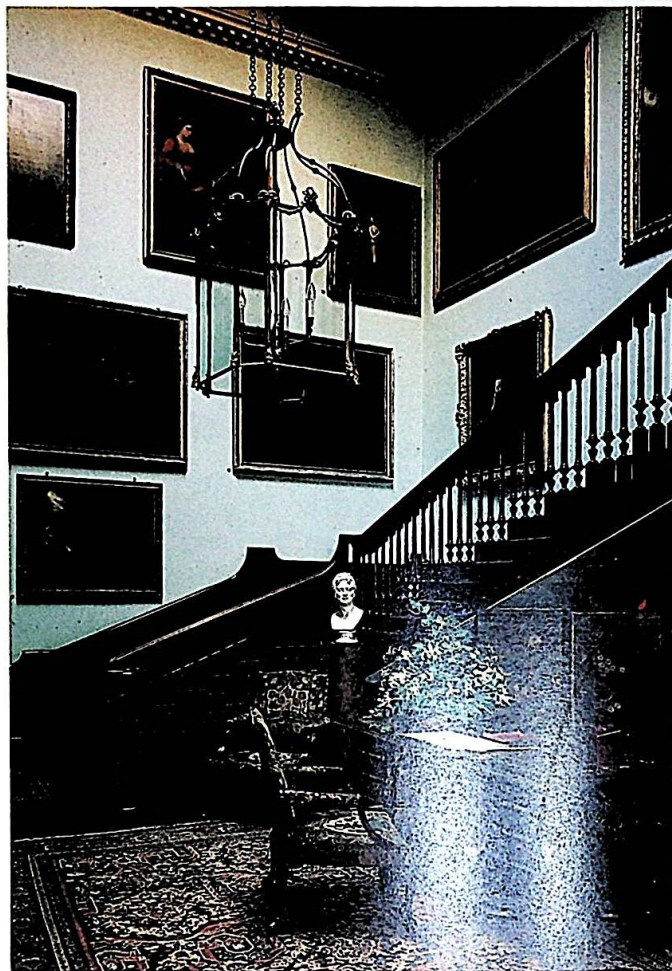
The Morning Room used by the family for eating when not entertaining grandly in the Adam Dining Room has the mid 18th century plaster work of Lady Catherine Parker's alterations, more festive and not so assertive as that in the Velvet Drawing Room. The red silk velvet wall hangings, which had been saved after the first Countess of Morley had redecorated the room in the early 19th century, were put up again at the end of that century and are still there under the serried ranks of pictures. The marble chimneypiece is also of the same date and attributed to Sir Henry Cheere who was paid £109 in 1753 for unspecified work. The Entrance Hall is quite a modest room for such a grand house, but also has fine mid 18th century plaster work. The chimneypiece is attributed to Thomas Carter the elder. In the same year as Cheere, Carter was paid £144.10s. for work done.

To the left of the Entrance Hall the Library is one of the latest rooms in the house, being enlarged in 1819, and the cornices and pediments added at the beginning of the 20th century. The Mirror Room beyond is a conversion made by the National Trust and now houses the 18th century Chinese wallpaper and mirror pictures from the Collopy Dressing Room, now in a part of the house lived in by tenants. The last living room on the ground floor is now known as the Garden Room and was the Billiard Room during the 19th century.

The Staircase Hall in the east centre of the house is of the same date as the Entrance Hall with a fine decorated plaster coved ceiling and leads to the five upstairs rooms open to the public. The first two are called the Chinese Dressing Room and the Chinese Chippendale Bedroom which formed part of the family living quarters in the early 19th century and are at the south east corner of the house. The Chinese wallpaper in the Dressing Room dates from the early 18th century and has large figures in landscapes, while that in the Bedroom has landscapes with small figures. This latter was originally in the Collopy Bedroom in the north-east corner of the house, so named after the picture restorer who worked at Saltram in the late 18th century.

The Boudoir on the south front is furnished somewhat as it was when the 1861 inventory described it as 'Lady Morley's Sitting Room'. The room next to it has been furnished as a bedroom, but was another sitting room in the 19th century. The last room visited by the public is the Green Dressing Room next door.

The pictures at Saltram were mainly collected during the late 18th century by Lord Boringdon with the assistance of Sir Joshua Reynolds who was born nearby at Plympton St. Maurice in 1723. There are in fact ten pictures by Reynolds himself still at Saltram excluding four studio works. They represent various members of the family and neighbours, and date from c.1748-1779. Some are in poor condition but the large full length portrait of Theresa, Lord Boringdon's second wife painted c.1772 in the Saloon and the small full length of Lord Boringdon himself in the Morning Room are



Hall at Saltram from the foot of the stairs with Queen Ann style stair rail.
National Trust Photographic Library/John Bethell.

excellent examples. The early portrait of Admiral Paul Ourry painted c.1748, that of the engraver F. Bartolozzi painted c.1771-73 and the group of Lord Boringdon's son and daughter painted c.1778-79 are all attractive examples of Reynolds's portraiture.

Two other late 18th century portrait painters are also well represented at Saltram. The Staircase Hall has portraits of Lord Boringdon and Sir Joshua himself by Angelica Kauffmann, as well as four large classical scenes taken from the Iliad and Odyssey, painted on Theresa Parker's instructions between 1771 and 1772, while two further large pictures of Saxon and ancient British subjects appear to have been bought in 1777, though painted c.1770-71. In the Library there is a self portrait by Kauffmann and nine portraits (eight framed as ovals) by the American artist Gilbert Stuart, born in Rhode Island in 1754. He came to England and entered Benjamin West's studio in 1777, and he painted all the Saltram portraits between 1781 and 1786, returning to the States in 1793. The Entrance Hall has an excellent portrait of Lady Catherine Parker by Thomas Hudson, while the Boudoir has six small chalk and wash portrait drawings by John Downman, four dated 1780 and one of Lord Morley 1805.

The Old Masters are typical of those collected at the end of the 18th century. Most were bought by Lord Boringdon,

probably on Reynold's advice. Some are straightforward copies, but others are original and of great interest. It must be remembered that at the time the pictures were bought attributions were made without the benefit of modern scholarship, and that it was deemed more desirable at that time to have copies of famous pictures by great artists than originals of lesser renown.

Among the Italian paintings is a Guido Reni in the Morning Room, probably finished by a pupil after the master's death. The Velvet Drawing Room has four views of Naples by the mid 18th century artist Gabrielle Ricciardelli. The Saloon has some large copies after Raphael, Correggio and Titian as well as originals of classical buildings by the 17th century artist Viviano Codazzi, while the Dining Room has a typical Zuccarelli landscape. In the Staircase Hall hangs a Madonna and Child with the Magdalen and St. Petronius by the 16th century artist Orazio Samacchini, the altarpiece from the Capella Maggiore in the Church of Santa Maria della Morte, Bologna.

There are many Dutch and Flemish pictures in the house including a set of the four Elements from the Studio of Jan Brueghel the Elder in the Morning Room. The Velvet Drawing Room has Dutch cabinet pictures, the best being a Puritan Meeting dated 1678 by Egbert Heemskirk and a late Pieter de Hooch of a tavern scene. The Saloon has a large interior of Antwerp Cathedral attributed to Pieter Neefs the Elder. The Staircase Hall has the fine Rubens portrait of the Duke of Mantua originally in Charles I's collection. The

Saltram. Theresa Robinson, Mrs. Parker and her son later Lord Morley by Sir Joshua Reynolds 1772-3. *National Trust Photographic library/Rob Matheson.*



catalogue of the pictures by St. John Gore made in 1977 lists one hundred pictures in all, many of which not referred to in this article are of great beauty and interest.

The Furniture in the house is also very fine and mainly reflects the taste of Lord Boringdon, though there are some pieces probably bought by Lady Catherine Parker. In the Entrance Hall are two large mahogany side tables with marble tops dating from about 1735, well-carved with cabriole legs, claw and ball feet and elaborate friezes, and a set of four armchairs with pierced fret backs and blind fret legs, dating from about 1765. Of the same date are the two sets of dining chairs in the Morning Room, one of provincial make with 'Gothick' backs, the other slightly earlier with conventional pierced vase-shaped splats. There is also a typical late 17th century lacquer cabinet on elaborate giltwood stand, a pair of Florentine inlaid marble tops with mosaic pastoral scenes in the centre were mounted on serpentine giltwood tables, probably answering to the entry in John Parker's account book for '5 Feb. 1778. To Mr. Perfetti for Frames...£8.17.-'

In the Velvet Drawing Room there are a pair of tables with more elaborate bases as well as pier glasses above, and indeed much more expensive as the account book for 31 March 1772 includes 'To Perfetti for table frames in the Velvet Room...£41.0.0'. Robert Adam's drawing for these pier glasses and tables signed and dated 1771 is in the Soane Museum. There is also a suite of twelve Louis XV style fauteuils and three window seats of English manufacture, obviously ordered for this room in about 1775. They are still covered in their original red Genoese silk velvet which matched the original wall covering. A giltwood side table in the style of James Moore, though much restored, has a scagliola top with a facsimile letter signed by John Pollexfen and dated 2 May 1713 recording the Treaty of Utrecht. There are two fine pieces of French furniture in this room, the first a Louis XIV Boulle bureau Mazarin of usual type, the second a Louis XVI upright secretaire by Maurice Bernard Evald. The marquetry vases of flowers in the lower doors are based on designs by Maurice Jacques who worked at Gobelins. A clock-watch in a Boulle case is signed 'Tho. Tompion, London 50'.

The Saloon has the grandest Adam furniture and decoration in the house and the carpet designed to echo the ceiling was woven at Axminster by Thomas Whitty, who was paid £126 in October 1770. The 18 armchairs and two sofas are attributed to Thomas Chippendale, five payments being made to him by Lord Boringdon between 1771 and 1772 for £225. The design bears many similarities with the two suites at Harewood House, also made by Chippendale, and he probably also designed the frame of the overmantel picture. Other craftsmen were involved; the monumental tables between the windows with Florentine marble tops are like those in the Velvet Drawing Room after Adam designs by Joseph Perfetti who was paid £41.1.0, on 29 January 1771 'For table frames for the Great Room', while Henry Kettle's trade label appears in a drawer of one of the pair of satinwood Pembroke tables. Matthew Boulton is responsible for the four 'Blue John' and ormolu candelabra in the corners, for which he was paid £126.7s.0d. in 1772. They are similar to the pair made for George III in 1770, now at Windsor



Velvet Drawing Room at Saltram, mid 18th century colour scheme of red, white and gold. National Trust Photographic Library/Rob Matheson.

Castle. Boulton sent Adam a plan of the plinth from part of a *garniture de cheminée* in the Queen's private sitting room, suggesting that the latter designed the torchères on which the Saltram candelabra stand. The seven bronzes on the chimneypiece are by the Zoffoli brothers, probably acquired by the 1st Earl of Morley when he visited Rome in 1794, while the chimneypiece itself is attributed to Thomas Carter the Younger.

The Dining Room beyond has a carpet which also relates to the ceiling and is probably by Whitty after a design by Adam, though there are no bills or drawings. The pair of plaster urns were made by Peter Vannini, and are shown in two drawings by Adam dated 22 November 1780 and are mentioned in accounts preserved in the house. The three-piece curved side table in the bow, the marble-topped side table, the wine coolers and the mirror above are all en suite, and Adams' drawings for them can be seen in the Sir John Soane Museum. The only other original furniture is the set of 15 mahogany chairs with oval backs dating from c.1780-85. The chimneypiece dates from when the room was a Library (shown in the drawing by Adam of 1768 also in the Soane Museum) and was probably also supplied by Carter.

Returning to the Library, which is to the west of the Entrance Hall, there are several examples of fine late 18th

and early 19th century furniture. There are two pieces bearing trade labels, the first a mahogany Pembroke table opening into library steps, identified as 'Campbell's Newly Invented Library Steps' which according to the account book cost £6.10s.6d. on 14 June 1777. A Regency rosewood games table has the label of John McLean & Son of London (fl 1770-1815) while a metamorphic library chair is attributed to Morgan & Sanders c.1811. Among other pieces are a circular mahogany rent table on square base c.1810 and a burr yew rectangular library table on lyre end-supports c.1800. Finally, probably brought back from France by Lord Morley in 1818, are the French mahogany bergères, two of which are stamped by P. Bellange, an official menuisier to Louis XVIII. The Mirror Room next door, which was created by the National Trust, is named after the set of Chinese mirror paintings in English rococo giltwood frames dating from the mid 1750's. One has a spare piece of paper from the Chinese wall hangings now in the Dressing Room dated 1756 and fitted to the back. There is also another rosewood table by John McLean as well as a set of padouk chairs with fretwork backs.

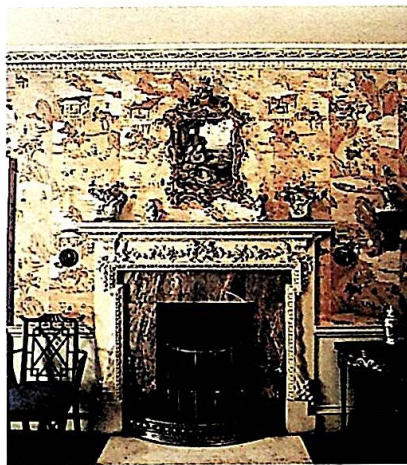
Returning to the Staircase Hall there is a bust of the first Lord Morley by Nollekins dated 1806 as well as one of the most important pieces of furniture in the house, a massive Boulle bureau plat reputedly given to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough by Louis XIV. On the desk is an ornate silver-gilt inkstand made in Madrid in 1777 to a design by Lord



(Above) The Dining Room at Saltram by Adam. National Trust Photographic Library/Rob Matheson.

Grantham. At the top of the stairs are two card tables of c.1770. Passing through to the Chinese Chippendale Bedroom is the mahogany four poster, possibly supplied by Chippendale as well as one of the mirrors and some of the padouk chairs en suite with those in the Mirror Room. The Boudoir has a mahogany bureau cabinet of elegant proportions bearing the trade label of Henry Kettle, while in Lord Morley's Bedroom beside the four poster bed is a particularly good example of a serpentine chest with the top drawer fitted as a dressing table and superb gilt bronze mounts.

While in many cases the pictures and furniture in stately homes equal or exceed in quality the best of modern collections, the ceramics are much patchier. In most cases they were acquired for different reasons and while many pieces have been broken over the years, owners have also preferred to dispose of expensive items of porcelain rather than pictures or furniture when money has been needed. Saltram has a better assembly of ceramics than most country houses, and is particularly strong in its English factories. Most of the best is housed in a large cabinet in the Mirror Room, and of particular merit is a Worcester tea and coffee service painted at the workshops of James Giles *en*



(Left) The Mirror Room at Saltram with mid 18th century carved chimneypiece and Chinese wallpaper. National Trust Photographic Library/Rob Matheson.

caïnien verte with ruined buildings and pastoral landscapes in the Meissen manner. Also after Meissen originals are the pair of Chelsea fishermen answering to the description in the Chelsea sale catalogue of March 1755 'Two beautiful figures of fishermen each different for a desert'. Slightly earlier is a white figure of a canary c.1749-50, and from the Derby

factory, and about the same date, is a sauceboat in the form of a shell with a coral entwined handle above a crayfish. Being in sight of Plymouth, this first English hard paste factory is well represented, particularly by three mugs, two painted with exotic birds in the manner associated with 'M. Soqui', the other with a Qilin pattern derived from *famille verte*. Plymouth groups and sweetmeat dishes are also represented in the collection, as are a number of Bow figures including Pierrot and Columbine based on the Meissen Duke of Weissenfels series, but with scroll bases. Some of these are shown in the Boudoir. The Meissen is fairly exten-



Saltram; a selection from the Giles decorated Worcester tea and coffee service in the Mirror Room, c.1770. *National Trust Photographic Library/Rob Matheson.*

sive with two pairs of cats, the first the well known models by Kaendler seated on mound bases c.1741-45, the other of kittens much rarer and dating from 1736-40 — they correspond with an entry in Kaendler's work notes for September 1736. There are also fourteen figures of Cupids disguised c.1755-65, an early K.P.M. marked oval chinoiserie sugar box with chinoiseries in the style of J. G. Herold and an early teabowl and saucer with raised gilt and enamelled chinoiserie in the style associated with C. K. Hunger. Other German factories are represented by a Frankenthal group emblematic of the four seasons.

In other rooms are a series of Wedgwood vases showing much of Josiah Wedgwood's innovative materials and designs. In the Library are some engine-turned creamware vases and covers c.1764-68, the earliest period in which such wares were produced as well as two basalt kraters c.1770 with red and cream Classical figures copied from a vase illustrated in D. Harcarville's *Antiquités Etrusques, Grecques et Romaines*, Naples 1766-67, Vol.1, pl.109. Another basalt classical vase is enamelled almost certainly at Wedgwood & Bentley's Chelsea studio with cupids among clouds. In the Morning Room are two basalt pot-pourri vases and covers, the bowls based on Hellenistic bronze lamps, the supports each formed as three slaves taken from a silver-gilt crucifix by Antonio Gentile da Faenza presented to St. Peter's, Rome, in 1582. In the same room are two basalt classical vases of c.1770 made by Humphrey Palmer of Hanley. The Dining Room has four 'Wedgwood and Bentley' pebble

vases as well as pieces from a large Marseilles faience dinner service c.1760 painted in green monochrome with flowers and the Parker crest. The Staircase Hall has a magnificent Frankfurt blue and white faience vase of about 1680 two feet nine inches high, in the Chinese late Ming transitional style.

There are also a number of Chinese as well as a few Japanese porcelains in the house. In a case in the passage behind the Garden Room is a large *famille rose* dinner service as well as three five colour (*Wucai*) vases and covers dating to c.1660. In the Velvet Drawing Room there are a number of pieces including two mid 18th century figures of seated pug dogs imitating the pugs modelled by Kaendler at Meissen. Pugs or Mopsen were the fashionable dog of the court of Augustus of Saxony during the 1740's. The house contains numerous other pictures and works of art of many types which illustrate the breadth of taste of the 18th century English country gentleman, but is only one of a multitude of country houses open to the public in the British Isles, where not only the architecture and the gardens but also the contents are full of interest, and above all of great lasting beauty.

SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Saltram*, The National Trust 1986 (I have extensively quoted from the above guide by Dudley Dodd who in his turn has used the late Nigel Neatby's previous guidebook)
The Saltram Collection, The National Trust, 1977 which includes articles by Nigel Neatby, a reprint of an article on the pictures by St. John Gore in *Country Life* of 2 June 1966 and another by John Mallet on the ceramics.

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