



KIRTLINGTON PARK – An outline by Peter Buxton

I am very pleased to welcome you to Kirtlington Park.

The house is set in a Lancelot ‘**Capability**’ **Brown** (1716-83) designed landscape. The original estate was about 3000 acres. You will have come through the park down the drive. Brown worked the design of the park from 1752, around the time he was working at Blenheim Palace. However some of the oak trees originate from the order of the Duke of Clarence in 1475 to, “plant the great oak forest of Kirtlington”.

From the garden to the rear of the house Brown built a lake, beyond which you can see 26 miles to the Chiltern Hills.

Kirtlington Park was built in 1742 for Sir James Dashwood (the 2nd Baronet – who lived 1715 to 1779). The local builder, Smith of Warwick did the construction. Sir James married an heiress, Elizabeth Spencer and he set out to make a big statement with the scale, and grandeur of a Palladian mansion. However some parts of the house were not finished until the 1820’s as Sir James Dashwood had a son, Henry Dashwood, who gambled excessively *in company with his cousin the sixth Duke of Marlborough*. The Saloon and the main staircase were completed by Sir James’ grandson.

The house stayed in the family until Sir George Dashwood, the 6th baronet sold the house in 1909 to the Earl of Leven and Melville who then sold to Hubert Budgett in 1922. During World War Two, the Budgett family housed many displaced children and the gardens were used to grow vegetables, known as a Victory Garden. The Budgett family still retain the surrounding farmland and the Park. My first cousin-once-removed, Christopher Buxton acquired the house in 1971; Eleanor and I took charge of the house at the end of 2017 shortly after Christopher passed away.

The architect for KP was James Gibbs who also designed the wonderful Radcliffe Camera in Oxford, also Ditchley Park, near here in Oxfordshire. Gibbs did five schemes for Kirtlington Park. However it was another architect, John Sanderson, who finalised the drawings and interior decoration.

The Hall had its plasterwork designed and installed by Thomas Roberts (1711-71) of Oxford. The apse is particularly fine. Over the great fireplace carved by Cheere is the Grinling Gibbons carving of 1695, which had been acquired by the Dashwood family long before building Kirtlington Park.

Grinling Gibbons, who lived 1648 to 1721 was one of the greatest wood carvers who ever lived. His work is in Windsor Castle, Hampton Court Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral, Petworth House in Sussex and Trinity College, Oxford, Trinity College Cambridge and Blenheim Palace. He carved this and many of his works in lime wood. This piece contains many of his signature carving techniques including birds, fish, decorations with garlands, fruit and ribbons.

The statue is of Mercury.

The **Saloon**, to the rear of the house, is a ball room 36 feet high. We suspect the original design would have been more glamorous, but budget constraints affected the finished result.

Above the pier tables you will see the two "Coronation Portraits" of William III and Queen Mary, which are the only coronation portraits not at Windsor Castle. Over the fireplace is a beautiful long portrait by Michael Dahl of a young lady with a red parakeet.

The **Drawing Room**, was originally the dining room. You will notice there is no plaster on the ceiling. The entire room including fireplace and plasterwork was purchased and shipped to the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1933; not until 1955 years later it was reconstructed there in their collection of European rooms. The money raised by this sale helped the Budgett family pay to tackle dry rot which had been found in the house at the time.

The marble fireplace is a skilful copy of the original by John Cheere which is now in the Metropolitan Museum. Sir James Dashwood bought it when he was on the Grand Tour in the 1730's. It had been carved in Venice for the Sultan of Constantinople, but it was stolen by pirates on the sea voyage who took it to Rome, where Sir James bought it and brought it to England for his new home.

Figures of summer and autumn feature in carved wood either side of the over mantel painting by John Wootton, painted in 1748. On either side of the fireplace are two handsome portraits of the Crofton family, painted in the 1820's with their marvellous frames.

The painting on the end wall shows Lord Paulet with his three sons returning from hunting and being greeted by his wife and five daughters. At 17 feet wide and 12 feet high it is the largest 17th Century painting in England.

Over the console table is a painting by the Belgian artist, Lens, in the early 18th Century of the "Marriage of Cupid and Psyche", attended by gods and goddesses.

The **Monkey Room** was painted by the French artist, Andien de Clermont (died 1783) in 1760 for £100. Clermont was known for decorative flower paintings, chinoiseries and singeries, or monkey rooms. Clermont's work features at Wentworth Castle and Wilton House, near Salisbury.

This ceiling illustrates the unusual scenes of monkeys taking part in human activities and wearing the appropriate clothes was a tradition originated by Louis XIV in the 17th Century. *There is another singerie at the Chateau de Chantilly near Versailles.*

This painting has four hunting scenes: fox hunting, hare coursing, stag hunting and boar hunting. Each one is painted with the uniforms and weapons correctly drawn for the different types of hunting.

In the four corners of the room are scenes symbolising the seasons – a duet for winter; presentation of a rose by an ardent monkey to a lady for spring; the cutting of the harvest for summer and a bacchanalian celebration of the vintage for autumn. In the panel on the ceiling is an effusion of wonderfully painted birds. It has been suggested that the portraits on four sides were Dashwood children.

We have the portrait by Carlos Sancha of my uncle Christopher Buxton, who bought this house in 1971 and lived here until his death in 2018.

The **Library,**

Has a flamboyant 18th Century rococo plaster ceiling by the renowned English plasterer, Thomas **Roberts of Oxford**. He is noted for the delicacy and multiplicity of flowers and fruit; the plaster had been coloured to look like carved stone. The Roundels on the upper walls depict scenes from Aesop's fables.

PB 2019