

HOLLAND HOUSE

"In what language shall we speak of that house, once celebrated for its rare attractions to the furthest ends of the civilised world?" (Macaulay)

James I found it cold and windy when it was built in 1607 by Sir Walter Cope, Gentleman of the Bedchamber to the King, and was then called Cope Castle.

Inigo Jones is said to have extended and decorated it for Cope's son-in-law, the Royalist Henry Rich, Earl of Holland. It then acquired the characteristic appearance which made it famous as an example of Jacobean domestic architecture. Its gardens were also magnificent, and are still the largest private enclosure in London, not even excluding Buckingham Palace. In them were grown the first dahlias in England, and pheasants roamed the grounds until the beginning of the war.

During the Civil Wars, Henry Rich was executed in a velvet doublet outside Westminster Hall, where Raleigh had preceded him. Even in his death he kept good company, for he followed Lord Hamilton on the scaffold. For a time the house passed into the hands of Cromwellian Generals. Lambert and Fairfax lived there, and in a field nearby Cromwell and Ireton discussed policy. Ireton's deafness made it necessary for the discussion to be carried on in very loud tones, and the open air was thought safer as possible eavesdroppers could be easily seen at a distance.

After the Restoration, the house reverted to the Rich family, and for a time was leased to various distinguished tenants, among them William Penn, the Quaker who founded Pennsylvania. William and Mary redecorated it, but decided not to live there. Addison, the essayist, who founded the SPECTATOR, married the widow of the 6th Earl, and lived there for a time, where he adjured his profligate stepson, the 7th Earl, to see how a Christian could die.

In the Mid-18th Century, Henry Fox, 1st Baron Holland, bought the house, and made it a famous centre of Whig political life, though he died the best-hated statesman in Europe, having been accused by the City livery of London of being a public defaulter of unaccounted millions.

From 1799-1840, under his grandson, Henry, 3rd Baron Holland, and his wife Elizabeth, the house became the centre of a brilliant circle, including Sheridan, Macaulay, Crabbe, Byron, Moore, Scott, Sydney Smith, Hunt, Rogers and Monk-Lewis, Washington Irving, Madame de Stael. Lady Holland's father came from Jamaica, and was a member of the Vassall family, which had been among the early settlers in Massachusetts. In Ticknor, the historian of Spanish America, she met her match when she referred to New England as a convict settlement, to which he replied that though he was unaware of the fact, he had certainly seen a monument to the Vassall family in King's Chapel, Boston. Her house was neutral ground on which many different opinions could be discussed, but she tyrannised over her guests, and Lord Melbourne, after she had told him to change his place at table, got up and left the house, saying "I'll be d--d if I dine with you at all". She was an ardent admirer of Napoleon, and sent him parcels of books and Neapolitan sweetmeats at St. Helena.

The house had many treasures, including pictures by Hogarth, Watts, Ramsey and Kneller. In the library, Addison's folding table was still to be seen. An original portrait of Benjamin Franklin is among many other portraits, letters and souvenirs of some of the greatest men and women in Europe.

Highwaymen made the house dangerous in the 18th Century, and there is a legend that a ghost warned members of the Rich family when they were about to die.

In 1871 the house narrowly escaped destruction by fire.