

Visit a Public Interior – The Wallace Collection, London

The Wallace Collection is a museum in Central London; the exhibits are displayed in Hertford House which previously was the main London residence of the Marquess of Hertford and Sir Richard Wallace.

The Front State Room is one of the first rooms you come to when visiting the house and according to the Guide Book “When Hertford House was the home of Sir Richard and Lady Wallace important visitors would be received in the Front State Room”. The Guide also explains that the room was refurbished in 1994 so that its appearance is now much closer to how it was when first used for entertaining important guests.

Formerly known as Manchester House it was built between 1776 and 1788. In 1797 the 2nd Marquess of Hertford acquired the property. During the Paris revolution of 1871 Richard Wallace, the illegitimate son of the 4th Marquess of Hertford, moved back to London from Paris and brought much of his collection of art and antiques with him. He commissioned extensive alterations to



the building and moved in in 1875 when they were completed. According to the Guide Book “Under Wallace and his wife, Hertford House again became a fashionable place to visit though not because the Wallace’s were renowned hosts but because of their fabulous art collection”.

As such the Front State Room would be a very important room in the house as it would be the first-time visitor’s main impression.

When first entering the room one gets an impression of grandeur. The walls are panelled with crimson silk in gilded frames with matching curtains. The high ceiling is elaborately gilded and from the centre of it hangs a 190cm wide chandelier made by Jacques Caffieri.

Elaborate furniture lines the walls and display items

of Sevres porcelain.

There are many paintings in the room, all of them portraits, including;

Queen Victoria painted by Thomas Sully in 1838

George IV as Prince of Wales painted by John Hoppner in 1792

Family portraits painted by Joshua Reynolds in the 1780's

The room seems to have been designed for two purposes, to impress visitors and to display parts of the Wallace family collection to its best advantage.

It certainly succeeds in impressing the visitor with its grandeur, fine furniture and furnishings and displays of porcelain. It is also of sufficient size to easily display the many paintings, some of which were quite large.

I found it interesting that the only paintings displayed in this room were portraits, apparently this is how it was at the end of the 19th century.. With such a large and valuable collection of art the Wallaces must have thought that the main room for entertaining visitors would be most impressive with a display of family and royal portraits; perhaps indicating the family' important connections.

The house is very interesting in that it was acquired and adapted to house a collection of works of art and display them to their best advantage. It was not just built to impress (although it does that) but the design, furnishings and art all combine to display each to its best advantage.

