

Osterley Park House, Thursday 7th June 2018

Osterley Park House was created in the late 18th century from a Tudor mansion. For the extremely wealthy brothers, Francis and Robert Child, the architect Robert Adam spent two decades from 1761 designing and refining the house in imitation of classical antiquity. The result is an exercise in total design, with every aspect controlled by Adam.

From the Entrance Hall the North Passage leads to **the Eating Room**: comparative absence of soft furnishings; Adam insisted that his eating rooms should be 'always finished with stucco, and adorned with statues and paintings, that they may not retain the smell of the victuals'. He designed the magnificent carved and gilt mahogany sideboard.

The Long Gallery: approx. 130 feet long: the frieze features stylised marigolds, the flower used as the logo of Child's Bank. Adam filled in the Venetian windows at either end of the room and hung pea-green wallpaper. He also designed spectacular pier-glasses for this room.

The Drawing Room: the pair of commodes were designed by Adam; they were purely decorative. The two tripods are Adam-style candlesticks. The sunburst ceiling was inspired by the Temple of the Sun in Palmyra. Adam stretched the central motif into an oval, and designed a carpet to match.

The State Apartment comprises: (i) **the Tapestry Room**: the fireplace was designed by Adam. The tapestries are integrated with every other room feature. He designed a pier-table with three painted plaques echoing the inlaid scagliola cameos on the chimneypiece. He added a pair of tripod pedestals to support ormolu candlestands. He also designed a carpet which incorporates baskets of flowers to co-ordinate with the flower vases depicted on the walls; (ii) **the State Bed-chamber**: the eight-poster State Bed is 14 feet 5 inches tall and 7 feet 5 inches wide. He provided the designs (seen in the Soane Museum) for the embroidered bedhangings and counterpane, as well as the interior of the dome; and (iii) **the Etruscan Dressing Room**: he designed almost everything in this room, from the pier-glass to a set of eight armchairs, and the embroidered panel on the tripod fire screen stitched by Mrs Child. The wall decoration was inspired by archaeological discoveries in Etruria, central Italy.

Climbing the Great Stair we visited the Rooms on the second floor: Adam designed the wrought-iron balusters with classical anthemions; the mahogany banister matches the wall moulding.

The Yellow Taffeta Bedchamber: the four-poster bed was designed by him; **Mr Child's Dressing Room**; **Mr Child's Bedchamber**, and **Mrs Child's Dressing Room** all very much plainer and less ostentatious than the bankers' bling on the Principal Floor.

The Gardens: Andy Eddy, Head Gardener, talked and walked us round **The American Garden**: being restored as a woodland border and being replanted with the same trees, shrubs, herbaceous woodlanders, bulbs and roses listed as being here in 1785: **Mrs Child's Flower Garden**: designed to be at its best in the summer months, planted according to a 1780s plant list and featuring vibrantly coloured flowers all summer long: **The Garden House**: designed by Adam as a greenhouse. Andy also showed us the restored **Kitchen and Cutting Gardens** and provided wide-ranging gardening advice from slug and snail control (with coffee grounds) to training and pruning roses (by harnessing the hormones that rush to produce new flowers).

Patrick Higham, Visits Secretary

