



## Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill

6 March – 4 July 2010

A new V&A exhibition will examine Horace Walpole's extraordinary collection and evoke the magnificent interiors of his house Strawberry Hill, Britain's finest example of Georgian Gothic Revival architecture. Following extensive restoration by the Strawberry Hill Trust the house is set to reopen in 2010.

The exhibition will bring together more than 250 works owned by Walpole and not seen together since 1842, when they were auctioned by his heir. It will show the breadth and significance of his collections ranging from paintings by Joshua Reynolds and Van Dyck to his unrivalled collection of portrait miniatures, from a pair of gloves that Walpole believed belonged to King James I to an Aztec mirror used by the Elizabethan magician and astrologer Dr Dee.

An influential historian and man of letters, Walpole was one of the most important English collectors of the 18th century and one of the best known commentators on the social, political and cultural life of his time. Walpole built Strawberry Hill as a summer villa beside the Thames at Twickenham between 1747 and 1790 and designed the interiors of the house together with his friends and architects including Robert Adam.

The house provided the setting for his unique collections encompassing paintings, ceramics, glass, silverware, sculpture, furniture, portrait miniatures, arms and armour, historical relics, and rare books and manuscripts. Open to the public, the house became a popular tourist attraction and inspired what is regarded as the first Gothic novel, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*.

The exhibition will explore several rooms from the house in detail including the 'Holbein Chamber', a bedchamber designed by Walpole to evoke the court of Henry VIII. Drawings by Holbein will be on display alongside copies by George Vertue of the famous Holbein portrait drawings in the Royal Collection. 'The Armoury' was a Gothic interior filled with an array of arms that greeted visitors to the house. A highlight on display will be the spectacular golden parade armour that Walpole believed had been made for King Francis I of France.

Walpole gathered a remarkable collection of portrait miniatures, covering the whole history of the medium. On show will be miniatures by Hilliard, Holbein and Isaac and Peter Oliver. Walpole's collections of ceramics and glassware were among the largest and most varied in England. Elizabethan glass and masterpieces of Renaissance maiolica as well as porcelain by Sèvres and creamware by Wedgwood will be on display.

Walpole was also a keen critic of contemporary painting and sculpture and his patronage of modern artists and practitioners will be explored through works including Joshua Reynolds' *Portrait of the Ladies Waldegrave* and a number of pieces by female artists including painter and designer Lady Diana Beauclerk and the sculptor Anne Seymour Damer.

Other objects reflecting Walpole's personal fascination with history will be relics such as a comb that Walpole believed to have belonged to Anglo-Saxon saint, Queen Bertha; a lock of Mary Tudor's hair; and a hat and furniture Walpole thought were once owned by Cardinal Wolsey.

A new film about the renovation of the house, commissioned by the Strawberry Hill Trust will be shown as part of the exhibition. *Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill* is organised by the V&A, the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University and the Yale Center for British Art.

### **About Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill:**

Horace Walpole (1717-1797) was the youngest son of Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first Prime Minister. He was an aristocrat, politician antiquarian, man of letters, social commentator and collector. His writings, and especially his letters, have crucially shaped our view of the time in which he lived. At the centre of his interests lay Strawberry Hill. A substantial private income enabled Walpole to turn Strawberry Hill into a 'Little Gothic Castle', the ancestral home of the Walpoles and a pioneering

example of the revived Gothic style. The resulting atmospheric interiors inspired the first Gothic novel, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*. The house also had its own printing press which supported Walpole's literary activity.

## Ends

### Notes to Editors

Admission: £6, concessions available. Book in advance online at [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk) or call 0844 209 1770 (booking fees apply).

The exhibition has been curated by Michael Snodin, Senior Research Fellow at the V&A with Cynthia Roman, Curator of Prints, Drawings and Paintings, Lewis Walpole Library.

Prior to the V&A the exhibition will be at the Yale Center for British Art (15 October 2009 – 3 January 2010).

The exhibition has been designed by Block Architecture.

*Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill*, (ISBN: 9780300125740) the exhibition book, is published on 26th November at £40.00 by Yale University Press in association with the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University; the Yale Center for British Art; and the V&A, edited by Michael Snodin, with Cynthia Roman. For press information about the book contact Jessica Lee on 020 7079 4900 or email [Jessica.lee@yaleup.co.uk](mailto:Jessica.lee@yaleup.co.uk)

For press information about the restoration of Strawberry Hill contact Susie Seagrave, Strawberry Hill Trust, on 020 7371 8385 email [susie.seagrave@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:susie.seagrave@hotmail.co.uk)

The exhibition has been generously supported by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

**For further PRESS information about the exhibition contact Alex Bratt in the V&A Press Office on 020 7942 2503 or email [a.bratt@vam.ac.uk](mailto:a.bratt@vam.ac.uk) (not for publication).**

**There is a selection of high resolution press images available to download from [www.image.net](http://www.image.net)**