



## **RUSSBOROUGH COUNTY WICKLOW ROOM by ROOM GUIDE**

20p

This is a room by room guide, set out in the order in which the rooms were visited. *(1970's - Not the current guide and includes many items not on view today)*

### ***GUIDE TO RUSSBOROUGH***

*by*

**SIR ALFRED BEIT**

The history of the house and its architect is given in the illustrated brochure of Russborough available at the kiosk here, and at bookshops. This is a room-by-room guide, set out in the order in which the rooms will be visited.

### **THE DINING ROOM**

The fine plasterwork of the ceiling is of a quality that would justify its inclusion in the work of the great stuccists, the Francini brothers, to whom the ceilings of the library, saloon and music room are attributed, but such inclusion cannot be made with certainty.

The mantelpiece is characteristic by virtue of its size of the Italianate quality of the house: it represents a mask of Bacchus supported by his attribute, the vine.

The carpet is modern, especially made for this room by the Royal Carpet

Factory of Madrid, in 1952.

The dining table is also modern, made in the 1930's of Cuban mahogany, and the English red lacquer chairs are copies of an original model made during the Chippendale period for export to Spain.

The console tables are attributed to William Kent and were originally at St. Giles, Dorset. On each is a Chinese celadon vase mounted in eighteenth century French ormolu.

The mirror between the windows is of the George II period; the glass is original.

From time to time there will be small exhibitions on the dining table of such objects as porcelain, glass, bronzes, etc.

The six pictures by the Sevillian painter, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682) depict the story of the Prodigal Son. Jesus told the parable in St Luke, chapter 15, thus: ~~

"A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered altogether and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living~ And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be ill wretched.

And he went out and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.. But his father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry;

for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

And he was angry and would not go in; therefore came his father out and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found."

The pictures start on the right of the door leading to the front hall and go clockwise round the room, and follow the story fairly closely:-

1. The father gives the younger son his portion.
2. The younger son leaves for a far country, his mother weeping and his baggage going forward on asses.
3. Riotous living, or, at least, extravagance.
4. The Prodigal is driven out of the harlots' house.
5. He is reduced to herding the swine.
6. The Prodigal's return; the elder brother looks on deprecatingly while the fatted calf is led in in the background.

These pictures have an interesting history. They were painted for a convent in Seville after the middle or the seventeenth century. Queen Isabel of Spain dissolved this convent in 1856 and gave the last picture, the Return of the Prodigal, to the Vatican. The remaining five pictures were bought by a Spanish nobleman, the Marques de Salamanca, who later sold his collection in Paris in 1867. An Englishman, the Earl of Dudley, bought these five pictures, and in 1872, after the unification of Italy and the withdrawal of the Pope into the Vatican, having lost the Papal States to the Italian crown, Lord Dudley sent a mission to the Vatican and recovered the last picture by an exchange. Thus the whole series was reunited. Later, Alfred Beit (1853-1906), uncle of the writer of these notes, bought the six pictures in 1895.

## THE FRONT HALL

Whereas all the other rooms on view have covered ceilings which bring down the cornice and frieze by two or three feet, this hall is rectangular and gives the impression of greater height than the other rooms: actually they are all a uniform twenty feet in height.

The large carpet on the floor is an Yhiordes from Asia Minor of the early nineteenth century. That on the platform is a Holbein, so called because this pattern appears so frequently in his pictures. It is also from Asia Minor.

The two niches on either side of the Kilkenny black limestone fireplace contain 18th century French stone busts of an unknown lady and gentleman by Pajou (1730-1809).

The niche opposite contains Chinese porcelain of the Kang-Hsi and Yung-Chen periods (17th and 18th centuries) and a few pictures of green Korean pottery.

In the two niches on the north wall arc busts of Sir Alfred and Lady Beit, by the Florentine sculptor, Antonio Bertì.

The four lunettes above the doors contain Italian marble busts of the 17th and 18th centuries.

The glass chandelier, which forms a pair with the chandelier in the saloon is by Perry of London, ca. 1820.

The animal picture over the fireplace, representing an Indian black buck, pointers, a dead pheasant and duck, is by the French painter Jean Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) and is signed and dated 1745. He became director of Gobelins tapestry Manufactory. Opposite arc two pictures by the Genoese painter, Alessandro Magnasco (1681-1747), the picture on the left of the central niche representing St. Augustine and the vision of the child Christ, and that on the right, St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds and fishes.

The 18th century French grandfather clock is by Jean Baptiste Baillon.

## THE STAIRCASE HALL

Here is to be seen a riot of plasterwork of less fine quality, doubtless by apprentices and pupils. The late Dr. Curran, the expert on Irish plasterwork, described it as the work of an Irishman, and a lunatic at that! Mixed with garlands are the masks of hounds and other trophies of the chase, and in a

rectangular plaster frame on the left of the door from the front hall is a caricature of the first Earl of Milltown, for whom Russborough was built.

The picture at the foot of the stairs is a portrait of Lady Decies and child by Sir Joshua Reynolds. (1723-1792).

## THE LIBRARY

Here is the first of the three ceilings by the Francini brothers, the others being in the saloon and music room. Notice how individual and different each one is.

The carpet is one made especially for this room in 1952 by the Royal Carpet Factory. Madrid.

The writing desk is by Vile, who, together with Cobb, was cabinet maker to George II and George III.

The ornaments on the mantelpiece are of bluejohn or onyx, mounted in ormolu by Matthew Boulton or Birmingham (1728-1809). This remarkable man, in addition to manufacturing artistic objects in metal, was also an engineer and was largely responsible for the development of the steam engine in partnership with James Watt.

The elaborate clock is by Merra of Paris, mid eighteenth century.

On display is also a remarkable microscope in gilt bronze made in 1772 by Gozzi of Parma and traditionally said to have been a wedding present to Marie Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI, by the citizens of that town.

There are two bronze busts; one of Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister Cape Colony, colleague and partner of Alfred Beit, and pioneer of the South African diamond industry, and the other represents a weeping child by Fiammingo (Flemish, 18th century).

The principal picture in this room is the portrait of Dona Antonia Zarate, a Spanish actress, by Goya (1746--1828). This sitter had the distinction of being painted twice by him; the other portrait, done when she was younger (and prettier) being now in the Hermitage, Leningrad.

To the left of the fireplace is a portrait of a woman by Moreelse (1571 -1638), a forerunner of the great Dutch school of painting of the 17th century, The sitter is a member of the Le Leu de Wilhem family, of French Huguenot origin.

To the right of the fireplace is the portrait by Reynolds of Squire Conolly (The

Right Han. Thomas Conolly, M.P.), which was originally at Castletown, the formel home of the Conollys. Squire Conolly was the great-nephew of Speaker Conolly, who built Castletown. He was the brother-in-law of the Duke of Leinster of Carton, the neighbouring house. The Duke and he married Gordon-Lennox sisters.

Over the bookshelves on which stand the figures of three white marble children, of the French school, are two decorative pictures, one of a physics laboratory, the other of a library, the first signed and dated 1734, both by Jacques de Lajoue. These were two overdoors out of four, the whereabouts of the other two not being known at present, from the Paris salon of a rich French dilettante, Bonnier de Mossonn, who took a certain amateurish interest in the arts and sciences.

## THE SALOON

This room, 33 x 26 ft. (10x 8 metres) together with the front hall is the largest room in the house. It is distinguished by a superb plaster ceiling by the Italian brothers Francini, the only ceiling in the house representing the human form, in the shape of angels or *putti*.

The Genoese velvet on the walls dates from 1870.

The chandelier, as already staled, is a pair to the one in the front hall.

The mantelpiece, almost certainly by Thomas Carter of London (18th century) and similar to one at Uppark, Sussex, represents the story of Androcles and the Lion, flanked by Homer and Plato. It will be remembered that Androcles withdrew a painful thorn from the foot of the lion: later, when he was thrown to the lions in the Coliseum at Rome, he fortunately met the same lion which, far from eating him, licked him affectionately.

The floor is of mahogany with a satinwood inlay in the Centre.

The set of Louis XVI chairs canapé is by a comparatively rare French ébéniste, Pluvinet: they are upholstered with Gobelins tapestry.

There are some small French tables of which the most important shows, in marquetry, an experiment with light, based on a picture by Jacques de Lajoue, now in the Carnevalet museum in Paris.

The large round table a bouilloitte of the Empire period is of doubtful origin. Experts disclaim it as French. On the top is a porcelain figure of Madame de Pompadour's water spaniel, made by the Vincennes factory before 1753, the

date when the successor factory at Sevres was started.

On either side of the central window are two English Regency cabinets with Japanese lacquer doors: these came from Harewood House, Yorkshire. Standing on them are English Regency candelabras and above are a Boulle clock and barometer.

The remaining furniture in the room is English, including the inlaid satinwood commode and small table. On the commode stand two candlesticks of Dresden (Meissen) china with boys wearing cabbage leaf hats, and a Sevres vase.

Important Italian bronzes standing on the radiator casings are a large door knocker by Pollaiuolo or his school and a horseman by Riccio (both these Florentine). The large gilt French candelabras on the mantelpiece are by Falconnet, late 18th century, and the mirror above is English, of the same period.

The saloon contains the cream of the Dutch and Flemish pictures in the collection, all 17th century. Starting on the right of the door from the Library they are:-

- Metsu (1630-1667) Two pictures: man writing a letter and lady reading it while her maid looks at a sea picture protected by a curtain.
- Rubens (1577-1640) Head of a cavalier. The subject of this portrait has been identified as Ericus Puteanus (born Eric de Put); in keeping with the fashion of the time he latinised his name. Other academics who did the same are Linnaeus (von Linne) and Lipsius (Lips). He was professor of Latin and history at Louvain University and was a friend of Rubens' brother Philip. The Archduchess Isabel, wife of the Spanish Governor of the Netherlands, gave him the gold chain he is wearing in the picture.
- Frans Hals (1580-1666) The Luteplayer.
- Rubens Portrait of an abbot.
- Jacob van Ruisdael Castle Bentheim on the borders of Holland and Germany. (It lies in flat country; the hill is artistic licence ).
- Hobbema (1638-1709) Landscape with figures, anti cattle by A. van de Velde.
- Jacob van Ruisdael (1628-1682) The Cornfield.
- Teniers, the

younger (1610-1690)	A peasant merrymaking.
Vermeer of Delft (1632-1675)	The Letter. Lady writing with maid in attendance.
Jan Steen (1626-1679)	The marriage at Cana in Galilee. The artist who was an innkeeper is seated at the centre of the dining table and portrays himself in jovial mood, holding up a glass.

The event is described in St. John, Chapter 2:-

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

And when they wanted wine. the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.

His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set their six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and knew not whence it was; (but the servants which drew the water knew); the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

Apart from the Magnificat, this passage records one of the few utterances, if not the only one, by the Virgin Mary.

Van Goyer (1596-1656) Cottages.

## THE MUSIC ROOM

This is the last of the three ceilings by the Francini Brothers, and is very different from the others in its more geometrical form. It has the effect of a sounding board, so any person standing and talking immediately below the centre will hear his own echo, but nobody else will if they are in any other part of the room. Consequently, music is not interfered with.

The carpet is Russian, from the Caucasus, of about 1830. The mantelpiece,

probably by Thomas Carter, represents Leda and the Swan. The pianos, one Steinway and one Bluthner are encased in matching inlaid rosewood. (One piano may occasionally be moved elsewhere).

The carved mahogany canapé and chairs are Hepplewhite, late eighteenth century. There are two important English commodes and the porcelain is all Sevres with the exception of a square Berlin biscuit box and three Chinese celadon vases in onnolu similar to, but smaller than those in the dining room.

There is a small round French empire table, the top being of onyx, malachite and lapis lazuli, and two modern inlaid music stands by Robert Lutyens, son of the architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens.

On the English commode between the windows stands a Louis XVI serpent clock above which is Gainsborough's (1727-1788) late painting Tile Cottage Girl. In point of fact the cottage girl is not a girl at all, but a boy, named Jack Hill, against an imaginary background. In the summer months of 1784 and 1785 Gainsborough had lodgings at Richmond. On one of his walks he met Jack Hill, an unusually good looking little boy whom he educated and took into his home and used on several occasions as the model for his so-called fancy pictures. At Gainsborough's death in 1788 his widow procured for Jack an admission into Christ's hospital.

Over the pianos is Raeburn's (1756-1823) double portrait of Sir John and Lady Clerk of Pennycuik, near Edinburgh. The fine family house burnt down in 1897 and remains a picturesque ruin: the Clerk family now live in well converted stables.

Over the mantelpiece is a portrait of Princesse de Lamballe, by Antoine Vestier (1740-1784), friend of Marie Antoinette and governess to her children. She was guillotined in the French revolution.

To the right of the fireplace is a view of the Grand Canal in Venice and the Palazzo Rezzonico (now the 18th century museum) by Guardi, (1712-1793).

On the remaining wall are three Gainsboroughs: Madamc Bacelli, the Italian dancer, a sketch for the life size portrait now in the Tate Gallery, and two small characteristic landscapes. Gainsborough is so well known as a portrait painter that one is surprised at the beauty of his landscapes, which he had considerable difficulty in selling to clients much more interested in their own portraits.

Giovanna Zanerini, commonly called Bacelli, was born in Venice, date unknown. and was probably trained in France (her French was fluent) where she became a very good ballet dancer. She is first heard of in England in 1779

by which time she was living with John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset, at Knole in Kent. In 1789 she left the Duke -- and a souvenir at Knole, for her former suite of rooms became known as "Shelley's Tower".

She then took up with Henry Herbert, 10th Earl of Pembroke. He died in 1794, the Duke of Dorset in 1799 and Bacelli herself two years later. She could not have been much above fifty years of age. Her son by the Duke died, serving with his regiment in Santo Domingo, in 1796, and the latter's son also died young and without issue. This picture was probably painted just before the big portrait, in 1782. Giovanna Bacelli is wearing her costume for the ballet "*Les Amants Surpris*".

Also on this wall are two so-called Capriccios (which the tourists of the time bought rather like Christmas cards today) by Francesco Guardi and two pictures of Florence, the Ponte Vecchio and the Ponte alla Carraia, the latter showing the unfinished church, San Frediano in Cestello, lacking its marble or stone facade in which precise condition it remains today, by Bernardo Bellotto (1720- 1780), nephew of Canaletto.

## THE TAPESTRY ROOM

The barrel vaulted ceiling here and the ceiling in the next room (the drawingroom and the last of the visit) are very different from the previous rooms, heavier and coarser but nevertheless characteristic.

The main feature of this room is the state bed, made together with matching chairs, armchairs and canapés, by Wilson's of The Strand, London, in 1794-6 for Richard Arkwright of Willersley Castle, Shropshire. The bed is flanked by two Venetian painted chests-of-drawers.

Another important feature is the Soho Tapestry, ca. 1720 representing Mogul characters and fantasies, with elaborate floral border, by John Vanderbank, a Fleming, who founded this factory in London, which operated for a great part of the 18th century.

The carpet is English needlework. early 19th century, almost certainly part of the original furnishings of a church.

The mantelpiece shows Aesop's fable of the dog and the bone. A dog, carrying a bone was crossing a stream and saw a much larger bone reflected in the water. So, to get it, he dropped his bone in the water and of course ended up without either.

A showcase between the windows displays French porcelain, mainly Sevres,

and another showcase contains an early 16th century Dutch or Flemish book of hours, coins, boxes, miniatures and other similar objects.

Over the mantelpiece is one of Velasquez' ( 1599-16(0) earliest paintings: The Moorish kitchenmaid and Christ at Emmaus. The girl, with recognisably African features is listening to the conversation taking place outside between Jesus and a disciple, with the arm of another disciple visible on the left.

St. Luke, Chapter 24, says:-

"And behold, two of them (that is the disciples) went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs".

St. Luke goes on to describe how Jesus came near but was not recognised and the two disciples therefore told him about the crucifixion and the events of the past three days. Then:-

"And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight."

To the left of the fireplace is an impression by the American painter John Sargent (1856-1925) or the central part of the huge picture by Velasquez in the Prado, Madrid, entitled "The Tapestry Weavers". In his youth and before becoming a fashionable portrait painter in London, Sargent travelled round the European picture galleries, studying and copying.

The remaining pictures in the Tapestry Room are:-

Bonington (1801-1828) Scene on the north coast of France. Bonington, an English painter, worked mostly in France, and died at the early age of 27.

Hubert Robert (French,1733-1808) Imaginary picture of al cottage in Catherine the Great's hamlet (the idea copied from Mark Antoinette at Versailles) at Tsarskoc Selo, near St. Petersburg. Robert was invited to visit Russia, but never did.

Moreau the elder (French-18thcentury) Cottage in a wood. Moreau was the father of the great engraver and book illustrator.

Pittoni (Velletian 1687- 1767)	The Adoration of the Magi. This picture is a study or modello for a large picture in a church in Brescia, N. Italy.
Rubens (Flemish 1577-1640)	Venus supplicating Jupiter. This is a sketch for the upper part of a picture at the Louvre in the series of the history of Henry II and Marie de Medici, of which the lower section shows the Fates weaving the future of Marie de Medici.

## THE DRAWING ROOM

This room was probably completed in the mid 1750's, after the rest of the house was finished and after the death of Richard Castle, the architect of Russborough, in 1751, in order to accommodate the four marine scenes by Joseph Vernet (1714-1789).

Lord Milltown sent his agent, R. Wood, to Rome at the end of 1749 to order these pictures from Vernet. a native of Avignon but who lived and worked in Rome for many years They probably arrived in Ireland about 1752 and the fine wall plaster mouldings were made to receive them in their present frames, which are the original ones.

The pictures represent morning, afternoon. evening and night and are very characteristic of the work of Vernet, whose output of similar scenes was prodigious. His own two brothers and a nephew imitated him and throughout the 19th century a host of copyists churned out "Vernets".

Under one of these pictures stands a small picture in Derby china representing a typical Vernet shipwreck scene.

The glass chandelier is English of the 18th century. The white and gold side table is George II and the top of the table opposite, the gilt woodwork being modern, is in marble marquetry, a special process which appears to have been invented by the monks of Vallombrosa, near Florence; the most notable of these monks being Belloni, who has signed and dated this table 1750.

English and Irish young gentlemen of the period, who did the grand tour, were very partial to this work, and at one time much of it was to be seen in Irish houses.

On the white and gold side table is a pair of Waterford glass candelabras, of about 1810.

On the Belloni table is a French terracotta bust of a young woman, signed Dagere, 1763. On either side of this bust are a pair of Chinese tall candlesticks

of the famille rose period and made for use in European churches.

A large Chinese famille rose bowl stands in front of a window.

The two small gilt bronze oval tables with the bullrush supports are French Louis XVI and belonged to Sir John Murray Scott who was private secretary to Sir Richard Wallace. These tables may therefore have been part of the original Wallace Collection.

The French clock is of the Louis XV period, enclosed in a green lacquer case of a type of lacquer called Vernis Martin.

Also in this room are a Burgundian early 16th century statue of Mary Magdalene and a small Venetian 18th century screen, the so-called art povera.

The following smaller pictures, Dutch, Flemish and French will at times be shown on tables or easels in this room (some of them possibly elsewhere):-

W. van de Velde  
(1610-1692)      Calm sea with boats.

Adrian van Ostade  
(1610-1685)      The Nativity.

H. van Steenwijk  
the elder (1550-  
1603)      Church interior in Antwerp.

D. Teniers the  
younger (1610-  
1690)      The Concert.

Francois Boucher  
(1703-1770)      Venus and Cupid.

This concludes the tour of the house.