

Six members of the Arts Appreciation Group visited Houghton Hall in Norfolk on 25th September 2019.

The Hall is a fine example of the Palladian style of architecture and was built in the early eighteenth century for Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first Prime Minister. Apart from the exquisite furniture, much of the ornate interior decoration includes original fabrics, paintwork and ornaments.



Inside the Hall access is permitted to the state apartments and two of the early private rooms, a family sitting room and a library. The state rooms are very opulent



with heavily decorated ceilings and beautiful views over the park. The dining room is set out for a formal dinner with Sevres china. Many of the walls are covered in beautiful fabric, especially a blue Chinese silk with a cherry blossom pattern.



The walls were covered with decorative fabric in the mid nineteenth century after the sale of many of the original paintings. The two private rooms are decorated more simply and give a more home like impression. The sitting room has a particularly attractive harpsicord.

The present owner, the Marquess of Cholmondeley a descendant of Walpole, has been developing since 2000 an impressive collection of contemporary art, especially sculpture, to supplement the traditional works already there. Sixteen large



scale modern pieces have been commissioned and are on permanent display throughout the extensive grounds.



We particularly liked a spectacular work in the walled garden, "Waterflame" by Jeppe Hein, where flames intermingle with a jet of water ('statue' is an inappropriate label for this beautiful and imaginative creation).



The Hall with its gorgeous walled gardens and parkland is a lovely place to visit at any time but this summer it was enhanced by an exhibition of Henry Moore statues and drawings from throughout Moore's long career.

Moore was deeply influenced by the first and second world wars. He wrote after the first "for me the war passed in a romantic haze of trying to be a hero". This attitude changed as he reflected on the destructiveness of war and in 1940 he wrote "a year or two after [the war] the sight of a khaki uniform began to mean everything in life that was wrong and wasteful and anti-life. And I still have that feeling".



Moore's signature form is a reclining figure and his exploration of this form led him to increasing abstraction as he turned his thoughts towards experimentation with the elements of design. Fans of Moore will appreciate that his large statues benefit enormously from a sympathetic outdoor setting, which the park of Houghton Hall certainly provided.

Several well-known statues were on display but our favourite, a magnificent large bronze sculpture, "Three Pieces Sculpture: Vertebrae", was prominently displayed in front of the Hall and there were fascinating works and drawings inside and out.



This was a fascinating and enjoyable visit which suited lovers of stately homes, lovely parks, gardens and art. The Arts Appreciation Group meets about four or five times a year. The next meeting will be the Christmas lunch gathering in November when members will be invited to offer suggestions for the 2020 programme.