

I am sorry to report that my previous plan of arranging a trip to Cambridge has been postponed because the Mosque who originally specified the days of the week that the trip could be done, appears to have forgot they do prayers on Fridays and can no longer do visits on that day because it interferes with the services. Having rearranged to a Monday they have now said they are not going to be doing any until after July. (Whose idea was this?.....). Will try and get a visit for September now.

So, we have found a trip to Holland Park and Leighton House which we can do! The date will be Monday 17th April. Probably leaving at 1030 and returning at 8pm ish to miss worst of traffic. Cost will be in region of £45 each but am still waiting for a quote so will let you know. Info below: please email (do not phone....I wont answer it) to the trips email group to book a pace. I currently have about 20 places left so don't hang around deciding.

DESCRIPTION:

In 1939, one of the last great pre-war London balls saw the King & Queen join a queue of grand cars that stretched from Hyde Park Corner to Kensington High Street and the gates of Holland House.

Within a year, Holland House had been all but destroyed in the Blitz, but what stories it left. Here had thrived one of London's most influential political salons and a circle of wealthy Victorian artists built studio houses 'at the bottom of the garden' as, parcel by parcel, the estate was given over to the developers to fund an extravagant lifestyle.

The Holland Park Set - Politics & Painters. We explore romantic Holland Park including the Kyoto Garden and visit the newly refurbished and remodelled studio house of Lord Frederic Leighton - possibly the most astonishing house in London.

The Background Story

Holland House, a large, rambling Jacobean mansion off Kensington High Street. was rejected by James I as too draughty - and he was Scottish! in the early 1800s Lord and Lady Holland created a glittering and influential salon at this grand mansion in leafy countryside just two miles from Parliament as the crow and the gossip flies.

For over 30 years in the run up to the 1832 Reform Act, Holland House was the unofficial headquarters of the Whig party. Lord Holland was the nephew of Charles James Fox, and at Holland House the Whig aristocracy — ‘they are all cousins’, as someone said — dined and talked and plotted. An intellectual nerve centre, a progressive Tufton Street if you will, Holland House was where the new men with new thinking met. The Hollands hosted an extraordinary group of politicians, writers, poets and historians.

In 1850, the artist George Frederick Watts became the permanent house guest of the Prinsep family when they took a lease on the old dower house, known as Little Holland House. Photographer Julia Margaret Cameron was Sara Prinsep’s sister and the family were renowned for their artistic interests. With Watts as artist in residence the house became the nucleus of the wealthy Victorian arty set. Valentine Cameron Prinsep, son of the family, commissioned a studio home next to Little Holland House, inspiring both Watts and regular visitor Lord Frederic Leighton to commission their own studio houses when Little Holland House was demolished and plots sold to fund the extravagant lifestyle of the folk in the big house.

Prinsep, Watts and Leighton created a fashion for artists' studio houses in Holland Park. These men were about as far from the notion of artist starving in a garret as possible. In Spring the studios would be opened to the cream of society on “Show Sunday”, and the artists previewed their entries for the Royal Academy Summer Show. Attracted by an abundance of illustrated “artist at home” interviews in newspapers and magazines there were “so many carriages and prettily dresses woman about that it looked as if some particularly smart wedding were going on..”.

Lord Frederic Leighton sold his very first important work at one such Show Sunday to none other than Queen Victoria. Best known today perhaps for *Flaming June* Leighton moved in the most elevated artistic circles. He knew Ingres, Delacroix, Corot, Millais and numerous Pre-Raphaelites and commanded a battalion in the British army composed entirely of artists. But art does not stand still and eventually Freddie Leighton came to represent the old fashioned, mocking and being mocked by the new vanguard:

“My dear Whistler,” wrote Lord Leighton, “you leave your pictures in a such a sketchy, unfinished state. Why don’t you ever finish them?”

“My dear Leighton,” replied James McNeill Whistler, “why do you ever begin yours?”

Today Leighton House is not just the only Holland Park studio house open to the public, it is the only purpose-built studio-house open to the public anywhere in the United Kingdom. An £8.5 million spend has left the orientalist interiors looking utterly magnificent and has added the De Morgan café overlooking the garden and showing off ceramics by Leighton's contemporary, the novelist and potter William de Morgan. And, at last, there are good loo's and a larger shop full of very tasteful temptations to spend your money.

Nearby only the ground floor of Holland House survived the Blitz but Holland Park is a beautiful and unique survival of a grand residence that once had the largest private grounds of any house in London, including Buckingham Palace. Here Lady Holland became the first in England to grow Dahlias and the innovations continued nearly 200 years later with the creation of the Kyoto Japanese Garden – surely one of the most beautiful public gardens in London.

At Holland House. Lady Caroline Lamb met Lord Byron for the first time, Sheridan drank himself under the table and a querulous aristocrat was shot dead in a duel. The survival of a large private country estate in the centre of the capital until the mid-twentieth century is quite exceptional. Some formal gardens have survived from the early 1800s and beautiful additions have been made, including two Japanese gardens. The Kyoto Garden is beautiful in May with colourful blossom trees, gorgeous in the autumn for the colourful acers and wonderfully picturesque all year round with a rock waterfall, a Koi-pond and Holland Park's famous peacocks.

At the heart of Leighton House is, possibly, the most astonishing room in London – an Islamic courtyard reimagined as a London drawing room. Some of the tiles for this Arab Hall were bought by Leighton on a trip to Damascus with others brought home by his friend Sir Richard Burton, traveller, diplomat and translator of the Kama Sutra and One Thousand and One Nights.