

Strawberry Hill House

Strawberry Hill House, Horace Walpole's eccentric, Twickenham villa, is credited as a major 18th century catalyst for the English Gothic Revival that flourished more than 80 years later during the Victorian era.

Not only did the home, with its medieval-inspired adornments, captivate the fashionable London set who visited, but Walpole went on influence the literary world as well by writing *The Castle of Otranto*, the first Gothic novel.

Resplendent now with its pristine white elevations pierced by turrets, chimneys and finials, Strawberry Hill House has been fully restored thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). A grant of £820,000 has now revealed Horace Walpole's private apartments; rooms that have never before been open to general public view. An earlier restoration in 2010, also HLF-funded, recreated the larger rooms and repaired the exterior.

The Grade I listed building is becoming one of the major tourist magnets for this part of south west London that can also offer visitors such wonders as Henry VIII's Hampton Court Palace and Palladian villa Chiswick House. Moving eastward along the Thames they can enjoy the neoclassical lines of the Old Royal Naval College and the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich and, a few miles inland, the eclectic mixture of Tudor and art deco opulence at Eltham Palace, all contributing to outer London's varied architectural heritage attractions.

While Walpole's romantic and fanciful home was finally completed by 1776 it was the Victorians – notably Charles Barry, AWN Pugin, John Ruskin and George Gilbert Scott - who spurred the Gothic Revival. They emulated the soaring columns, fan vaulting, pointed arches, and even the stained glass windows of 12th and 13th century cathedrals, in

restored stately homes or newly built town halls, railway stations, and colleges throughout the land.

HLF has supported a wide range of restoration projects involving fine examples of the Victorian Gothic style. One such is Tyntesfield, the Grade I listed mansion in North Somerset that was extensively re-modelled by its business entrepreneur owner William Gibbs between 1863 and 1865. Purchased for the nation in 2003 by the National Trust, the building, which is regarded as a benchmark in Anglo-Catholic Gothic style, was restored with the aid of a £20million grant.

Travelling farther to the south west there are other fine examples of the Gothic revival, not least in Exeter and the recently restored Royal Albert Memorial Museum. Designed in 1868 by architect John Hayward with inspiration from John Ruskin the building boasts, among other features, a rose window of almost cathedral proportions. Described by architectural consultant and broadcaster Dan Cruickshank as “an exquisite jewel box of a building”, it has won a host of awards since it reopened in 2011 following a £24m restoration that included an HLF grant of almost £10m.

The museum is also currently hosting an exhibition *Art and Soul: Victorians and the Gothic*, which runs until early April.



Wallpaper and fireplace in Mr Walpole's bedchamber Killian O'Sullivan

Strawberry Hill completes second stage of restoration