LISS1002 The English Country House: A Social History

Module Syllabus

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Module summary
Country houses (stately homes) are one of Britain’s greatest contributions to world culture, but who created them and why? Have they always functioned as ‘containers’ for art collections or have they had deeper meanings and a wider social impact? Using Yorkshire’s world-class country houses as case studies, this course will introduce you to:

- the builders of the country house
- the rise and fall of the great estates
- the ‘upstairs’ lives of the men, women and children who lived in the country house and the ‘downstairs’ world of the men and women who served them
- the idea of a ‘court style’ and its regional variations
- the often difficult relationship between patron and architect
- the allied arts of interior design and decoration
- the relationship between the aristocratic great house, the more modest gentleman’s house and the villa

Tutor-led visits to houses such as Temple Newsam, Harewood House and Castle Howard are an important feature of this course.

Objectives
On completion of this module, students should be able to undertake a critical analysis of visual and textual documentation relating to the history of the country house in England between the Tudor era and the present day. Students should be able to:

- identify who built country houses, when and why;
- understand how the 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' realms functioned;
- understand how patrons, architects/designers and craftsmen interacted;
- and distinguish between different types of country house.

Learning outcomes
With critical engagement suitable for a summer school module, students should be able to demonstrate:

- an understanding of when, why and by whom country houses were built;
- an understanding of the relationship between the country house and its estate;
- visual literacy through the identification of key country houses;
- an awareness of the relationship between masters/mistresses and servants in the country house;
- how planning reflects social hierarchies;
- how interior decoration could reflect socially constructed ‘taste’;
- an understanding of the development of the architectural profession.

Teaching methods

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<th>Delivery type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Length hours</th>
<th>Student hours</th>
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<td>On-line Learning</td>
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<td>Visit</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Fieldwork</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<th>Seminar</th>
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### Private study

Pre-course preparatory work (materials available on the VLE): 15 hours. Students will be encouraged to undertake further reading during non-class time using the ‘Suggested further reading’ on the module syllabus as a guide; they may also be set preparation tasks.

### Methods of assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment type</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>% of formal assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>3 pieces of written work (33.33 % each)</td>
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### Module outline

**DAY 1**

**9:30-11:00 – Introduction and discussion of pre-course readings**

*Questions to consider:*
- What is a country house? How does it differ from a house in the country?
- Who built country houses? And why?

*Recommended Reading:*

**11:30-1:00 – Landowners and land-based wealth**

*Questions to consider:*
- How did the pattern of land ownership change c.1550-1950?
- How is the concept of landownership represented within the country house?

*Recommended Reading:*
DAY 2

9:30-11:00 – The Builders of the Country House

Questions to consider:
- What motivated the building (or rebuilding) of country houses?
- How was the supply of money, labour and materials managed?

Recommended Reading:

11:30-1:00 – The Idea of the Architect

Questions to consider:
- When is it legitimate to use the word ‘architect’ when speaking of country house builders?
- How does the concept of abstract design relate to the emergence of the architect?

Recommended Reading:

DAY 3

9:30-11:00 – Style and the Eighteenth-Century Country House

Questions to consider:
- What do the stylistic labels ‘Baroque’, ‘Neo-Palladianism’ and ‘Neo-Classicism’ mean?

Recommended Reading:

11:30-1:00 – Country House Planning

Questions to consider:
- What can we learn about a building from its plan?
- What were the different functions of spaces and what role did they play in defining gender and class?
- Which spaces were public, which were private, and how/when did boundaries change?

Recommended Reading:

1:15 – 4:15 Visit to Temple Newsam House, Leeds, West Yorkshire
DAY 4
9:30-11:00 – Eating and Drinking
Questions to consider:
• What social rituals revolved around food and drink?
• What role did breweries play in the social and economic life of the country house?

Recommended Reading:

Day 5
Visit to Castle Howard, North Yorkshire

DAY 6
9:30-11:00 – Cookery Books and Domestic Manuals
Please bring a pencil, not a pen, to this class. Laptops etc. are also fine.

11:30-1:00 – The Villa
Questions to consider:
• What were the social functions of the villa?
• What cultural associations informed the villa - taste, antiquarianism, wealth?

Recommended Reading:
Ackerman, James, The Villa: Form, Function and Ideology (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), pp.9-34

DAY 7
9:30-11:00 – Women
Questions to consider:
• What role did women play in the social and economic life of the country house?

Recommended Reading:

11:30-1:00 – Servants + student presentations
Questions to consider:
• Can the life of domestic servants be seen only as a reminder of the patriarchal and feudalistic values that dominated the social structure of the country house?

Recommended Reading:
Hardyment, Christina, Behind the Scenes. Domestic Arrangements in Historic Houses (London: National Trust, 1997, pp.11-27
DAY 8
9:30-11:00 – Understanding Harewood House

Questions to consider:
- How did Harewood House function as a socio-economic unit in the eighteenth century?
- Why was it built and by whom?

Recommended Reading:
Mauchline, Mary, *Harewood House. One of the Treasure Houses of Britain* (Ashbourne: MPC, 1992), pp.7-41

12:15 – 5:30 - Visit to Harewood House, West Yorkshire

DAY 9
9:30-11:00 - The End of the Country House? 1

Questions to consider:
- Was the first half of the twentieth century one of ‘doom and gloom’ for the aristocracy?
- Why were country houses demolished?

Recommended Reading:

11:30-1:00 - The End of the Country House? 2

Questions to consider:
- Whose history was displayed in country houses after the war?
- How do modern heritage organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage present the country house today? Do these differ from the presentation methods of private owners?
- In what ways do you think country houses and their contents should be displayed?

Recommended Reading: