

Carlton House

by Patrick Baty

Carlton House was the town house of the Prince Regent for several decades from 1783 until it was demolished forty years later. It faced the south side of Pall Mall, and its gardens abutted St. James's Park in the St James's district of London. The location of the house, now replaced by Carlton House Terrace, was a main reason for the creation of John Nash's ceremonial route from St James's to Regent's Park via Regent Street, All Souls, Langham Place and Park Square. Lower Regent Street and Waterloo Place were originally laid out to form the approach to its front entrance.

An existing early eighteenth century house had been sold in 1732 to Frederick, Prince of Wales, and son of George I. William Kent had been employed to lay out the garden of which no trace remains. Frederick's widow, Augusta, enlarged the house, had the entrance gates and porter's lodge redesigned and a colonnaded porch built. She died in 1772 and for some years the house was unoccupied.

In 1783 George III handed the house over, with £60,000 to refurbish it, to George, Prince of Wales on his coming of age. During the following years the interiors were remodelled and refurbished on a palatial scale.

Initially Sir William Chambers was appointed as architect, but he was quickly replaced by Henry Holland. Both Chambers and Holland were proponents of the French neoclassical style of architecture, and Carlton House would be extremely influential in introducing the Louis XVI style to England.

Holland began working first on the State Apartments along the south (garden) front, the principal reception rooms of the house. Construction commenced in 1784. By the time of his marriage to Mrs Fitzherbert in December 1785, however, construction at Carlton House came to a halt because of the Prince of Wales' mounting debts. Costs continued to soar and more money had to be found by the Prince.

Much of the work that took place, especially in the 1790s, was with the assistance of many of the leading furniture makers and craftsmen of France, whose work had dried up as a result of the onset of the French Revolution.

Amongst other things, Henry Holland was responsible for the Ionic screen that fronted Pall Mall; the Corinthian porte-cochère; the spectacular oval staircase and a suite of rooms that led Horace Walpole to claim that when completed, Carlton House would be "the most perfect in Europe".

Clifford Smith, in his book on Buckingham Palace remarked that:

"The influence exercised by Holland on the furniture of his epoch was immense; and that the Graeco-Roman detail, which

he was instrumental in introducing into England during the last ten years of his life [1796-1806] formed the basis of the true "Regency Style."

Carlton House was approximately 202 feet long, and 130 feet deep when completed. Visitors entered the house through a hexastyle portico of Corinthian columns that led to a foyer that was flanked on either side by anterooms. Carlton

House was unusual in that the visitor entered the house on the main floor. (Most London mansions and palaces of the time followed the Palladian architectural concept of a low ground floor (or rustic) with the principal floor above.) From the foyer, the visitor entered the two storey top lit entrance hall that was decorated with Ionic columns of yellow marble scagliola. Beyond the hall was an octagonal room that was also top lit. The octagonal room was flanked on the right by the Grand Staircase and on the left by a courtyard, while straight ahead



Portrait of The Prince of Wales, later King George IV (1762 - 1830) 1790. John Russell RA.



The Grand Staircase.

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Carlton House (cont.)

was the main Ante-Room. Once in the Ante-Room, the visitor either turned left into the private apartments of the Prince of Wales (the Blue Velvet Suite), or turned right into the formal reception rooms: Rose Satin Drawing Room; Ante-Chamber; Throne Room; Circular Dining Room; and Crimson Drawing Room.

On becoming King George IV in 1820 the Prince Regent felt that his own residence, the official royal residence of St. James's Palace and his father's Buckingham House were all inadequate for his needs. Some consideration was given to rebuilding Carlton House on a far larger scale, but in the end Buckingham House was rebuilt as Buckingham Palace instead. Carlton House was demolished in 1826-27 and replaced with two grand white stuccoed terraces of houses known as Carlton House Terrace. The proceeds of the leases were put towards the cost of Buckingham Palace.

When Carlton House was demolished, most of the furniture and paintings were moved to Buckingham Palace. Many of the doors in the house were re-used at Windsor Castle. The columns to the portico were donated to the National Gallery, while the Ionic columns to the screen were used by Nash in the conservatories at Buckingham Palace



Blue Velvet Room.



About Patrick Baty

Patrick Baty has spent the last thirty years investigating the paints and colours employed in the decoration of historic buildings. He has carried out the technical analysis of the decoration of many hundreds of buildings, as can be seen on his website – www.colourman.com

He has advised on the redecoration of projects ranging from King Henry VIII's Royal Beasts and the Royal Festival Hall to Tower Bridge. Patrick also writes and lectures on the subject of historic decoration.

With his wife, Alex, he runs the family business, Papers and Paints, in Chelsea. They specialise in colour and are constantly developing new ranges, many of which are for other companies in the UK and Europe. Accurate colour measurement has been a focus, and Patrick has pioneered the making of colour surveys, dealing with many important public and private institutions.