NORFOLK HOUSE MUSIC ROOM

Created 1748-56 by 9th Duke and Duchess of Norfolk, Edward and Mary Howard.

The room - wall panelling and ceiling - acquired by V&A when house demolished in 1938. (Many original contents taken to country seat of Arundel Castle and other homes still owned by family.) A rather tight fit here - had to remove 10cm from the top of the wall panels to make it work.

Part of a circuit of lavish state rooms for entertaining on the first floor - all based around the Great Staircase. Unusual style for England at the time. … included Music Room, Green Drawing Room, Crimson Velvet Drawing Room, Great Room. Ornate doorway entrance to this room was actually the entrance to the Great Room - unusual carved monkey figures reflecting those in the tapestries that hung on the walls inside.

Rococo style decoration - panels on the ceiling represent the Arts : Painting, Sculpture, Architecture (note outline plan of the house), Music, Literature, Surveying and Geometry. The large central panel represents a trophy of weapons including helmet and shield of Minerva, Roman goddess of wisdom. The wall panels are decorated with musical trophies - see cornemuse (French bagpipes) and Baroque guitar - topped with heads of Apollo, Greek god of music. See also the panel with typical S and C form curves styled into E and M initials with ducal coronet above. Major acanthus leaves!!

House by leading Palladian style architect Matthew Brettingham - assistant to William Kent, largely responsible for Holkham Hall in Norfolk. ‘Plain’ exterior, Howards wanted something more eye-catching inside so they then hired Giovanni Battista Borra from Turin to ‘improve’ interiors - also worked on Stowe and Stratfield Saye. His designs for the walls carved by Jean-Antoine Cuenot and those on the ceiling are believed to be the work of James Lovell. Compartmentalised design of ceiling based on that of Banqueting House.

One of earliest examples of its kind in London - very fashionable on continent to have a room specifically for music. Heavily influenced by French style with which Edward and Mary were familiar. Her early life and their early marriage spent in exile in France. Original glass ordered from France (this is Victorian replacement). All the giltwood carving and white painted panelling reminiscent of the contemporary music room at Versailles Palace.

Room lit by 24 candles in sconces on walls - very extravagant and luxurious. Only the cream of society invited to a great reception, in February 1756, to celebrate completion of the work. Included Horace Walpole who later commented ‘All the world was there… you would have thought there had been a comet, everyone was gaping in the air and treading on one another’s toes…’. He often referred to Mary, behind her back, as My Lord Duchess. A very intelligent and lively personality, leading London hostess - as Catholics they were socially but not politically prominent.

Several refurbishments during 19th century but mostly for regilding, repairing, cleaning. Brilliant white of walls previously achieved with lead paint - needs redoing on regular basis as it discolours. See area to right of fireplace left untouched to show original condition - major restoration and resiting to current position in V&A in 2001.

House was situated west side of St James Square - area developed by Henry Jermyn, Earl of St Albans. Great favourite of Queen Henrietta Maria, close adviser of Charles II. Area close to St James Palace, ideal location for senior nobility needing to be close to court. When Norfolks moved in, the square was home to 7 dukes and 7 earls, the most fashionable address in London at the time.

Original house (bought by 8th Duke 1722) lent (or rent?) to Frederick, Prince of Wales 1737-41 by Edward. Birthplace of George III. Edward then bought adjoining house 1748, demolished both and created new house on site with 100ft frontage.

Served as office for later Dukes, in hereditary role as Earl Marshal, for planning coronations of Edward VII, George V and George VI.

House sold in 1938 to Rudolph Palumbo, father of Peter. Demolished and replaced with current 1930s office building, still called Norfolk House. Base for General Eisenhower (SHAEF) during WW2. Both Operation Torch (North Africa) and Operation Overlord (D-Day) planned here. Plaque on exterior wall. Current plans to rebuild again.