



Building Belton House



Belton Park was bought by Richard Brownlow in 1609. He was a very wealthy lawyer in London, but to be powerful at that time you needed to own land. He spent most of his annual income every year buying land as a good investment and each year he bought more and more, including Belton.

When Richard's great-grandson, Sir John, and his wife Alice inherited, they decided to have a house built. They were inspired by the very modern Restoration palace in Piccadilly, London called Clarendon House (which is no longer there). With its elegant symmetry and confident common sense design Belton House is one of the greatest examples of this type of architecture. It was built to show off the family's wealth and rank. Sir John and Lady Alice moved into their new house in November 1688.

There have been a few changes over the years, with each generation making their mark and keeping Belton House fashionable. That is until the Victorian times, when Adelbert, 3rd Earl Brownlow and his wife Adelaide, Countess Brownlow restored many of the original features of the house.

In 1984, 299 years after the first stone was laid Lord Edward, 7th Baron Brownlow, gave Belton House to the National Trust.

Today it is regarded as the pinnacle of Restoration period architecture and houses one of the National Trust's great collections.

What was the Restoration?

Restoration refers to the period when the monarchy was restored and Charles II was on the throne.



Who designed Belton House?

It's thought that Sir John hired the architect William Winde to design Belton House. He was a captain in the British army, who had experience in military engineering. He then used this skill in designing country houses first for his godfather, the 1st Earl Craven. It's thought that his involvement in building Belton House was probably just drawing the first plans.

The building of Belton House was overseen by the mason and sculptor William Stanton, and it is believed that he revised and modified the original drawings over this time.

Today it's hard to say which William had the most influence on the design of the house you see today.

How was it built?

Before Belton House could be built, the old manor house had to be taken down. Workers did this very carefully and the wood, stone, glass, lead and slate was stored and then used in the new house.

It was only then that local workers started to gather gorse and bracken to fire the brick kilns in February 1684. At this time brick makers would travel to a building site and make the bricks there. Over the next year almost 2 million bricks were made at Belton and used to build the walls of this house. These walls were then covered on the outside with golden Ancaster stone from the local quarries. This is called facing as it's the side of the wall that you see.

It took four years until the brick layers, stone masons, carpenters, roofers and all the other craftsmen, including the internal decorators, were finished. Only then could Sir John and Lady Alice move into their new home.

Making changes

Sir Brownlow Cust, Baron Brownlow, inherited Belton House in 1770. By this time it would have seemed a little old fashioned. He didn't just commission any decorator; he commissioned James Wyatt, one of the country's most fashionable designers.

Transforming Belton House into a home befitting the Baron's status, all traces of the 17th century were removed. Several rooms were redecorated, but some of the biggest changes were to the outside. He removed the cupola and balustrades from the roof and put in new windows.

Inside the house, Wyatt transformed the great chamber where the family would have eaten and created a new drawing room. Now the library, you can still see his domed or shallow vaulted ceiling in what is now the library.

Sir Brownlow Cust was also responsible for dragging the house into the 19th century installing new stoves and a water closet in the house.



Next to inherit was John Cust, 1st Earl Brownlow. Where his father had commissioned James Wyatt, he commissioned Jeffrey Wyattville to put his mark on Belton House. As well as being responsible for the Orangery he made significant changes to the kitchens and created today's dining room.

The last major changes to Belton House were at the request of Adelbert, 3rd Earl Brownlow. Unlike his ancestors, he was governed by what he felt was the spirit of Belton, rather than the latest fashions.

It's unknown who his architect was, however many years were spent re-instating original features to the House, including the cupola and balustrade on the roof. A lot of what you see of Belton House today is as the 3rd Earl left it.

More details about the architecture and building Belton can be found in the guidebook.