

WILTON HOUSE

Wilton House opened its doors to the general public on the 1st May 1951 and this 460 year old building with its history, architecture, art treasures and 21 acres of gardens and parkland has attracted visitors from all over the world.

Wilton House stands on the site of a ninth century nunnery founded by King Alfred. This, in turn, was replaced by a twelfth century Benedictine abbey which, with its surrounding lands, was surrendered at the time of the Dissolution of the monasteries, to King Henry V111, who gave them to William Herbert around 1542. Wilton House has remained in the family since that time and is the home of the Earl of Pembroke.

Around 1632 Isaac De Caus began work on a ambitious project to transform the gardens at Wilton House to include a variety of water features stretching over 300 metres across the river. At the same time plans were drawn up to extend the house to match the dimensions of the garden. However, change in family fortunes forced a scale down of these plans to the present size

Following a fire in 1647 which severely damaged the interior of the south range, John Webb completed the rebuilding of the house. The south front and State Rooms remain a testimony to the architect's skill and the popularity of the Palladian style of architecture in the middle of the seventeenth century. The Single and Double Cube Rooms are recognised as the grandest rooms of this period in England.

The ninth Earl was an architect who, in 1737 built the Palladian Bridge spanning the River Nadder. Between 1801 and 1815 the eleventh Earl had cloisters designed on two levels, at the same time remodelling the north and west sides of the house and creating what is now the main entrance.

Between 1987 and 1992, the 17th Earl commissioned a major restoration project on the inside and outside of the building and to celebrate the completion of this scheme, a new Coat of Arms was carved to replace the much eroded one on the inside of the Clock tower.

Wilton Estate is approximately one-third of the size it was in the 1870's, and today it comprises 14,000 acres in a single block of land extending over the valleys of the Wylye and Nadder rivers, with the largest wood in the south of England, Grovely Wood, surmounting the hill between the two valleys.

The social economic and political changes of the past 150 years, combined with the changes brought about by two World Wars, have necessitated the introduction of modern management techniques in order to ensure the long-term survival of the Estate. While farming, and the letting of farms and residential and commercial properties still form the traditional core of Estate business, recent years have seen the establishment of various tourist related retail operations. Salisbury Racecourse and South Wilts Golf Course are also on the Estate.

Our farming practices reflect the need for food production, but organic farming of the in-hand beef and sheep and local conservation projects play an important role today in achieving a balanced farming economy.

Community involvement has always been important for the Estate, and this continues with the Estate running the Michael Herbert Hall in conjunction with the Town Council of Wilton, as well as providing facilities for village halls and recreation grounds in many other villages. Perhaps one of the most successful community projects is the Wilton branch of Riding for the Disabled, which has a magnificent indoor riding facility run by the local branch of this charity.