The Tapestry Room from Croome Court

In the Annual Report of 1957-1958 a gift to the Museum from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation was announced as “one of the most important donations of decorative art ever made to any museum at any time.” Ever since the gift was received a major curatorial preoccupation has been research into the history of the various objects and planning for their public exhibition. The groups of French eighteenth-century furniture, Sévres porcelains, and other related objects of art that form one part of the gift—most of them from the celebrated collection of the Lords Hillingdon, formed in England more than a century ago—will be placed on exhibition early next year.

This issue of the Bulletin is devoted to the other part of the gift: the Tapestry Room from Croome Court, which will be opened to the public November 10. This magnificent room was designed by Robert Adam and constructed in the 1760s for Croome Court in Worcestershire, the country seat of the Earls of Coventry. It receives its name from the Gobelins tapestries which so resplendently cover the walls and the seat furniture. It measures approximately twenty-seven feet long, twenty-four and a half feet wide, and fourteen feet high.

It is one of half a dozen interiors so furnished in French tapestry. Yet it remains a typically English creation—for no such tapestry rooms are known in France—and superbly represents the current fashion in England for interiors “in the French taste.”

This is the only complete tapestry room that has left England and, more significantly, the prototype of those remaining there. Mr. Parker’s article describing the architecture and furniture not only throws light on the development of this particular interior, but also shows how in the great age of English country houses such creations came into being. Miss Standen’s account of the tapestries, which were woven to measure at the Royal Gobelins Manufactory in Paris, deals with the complicated system of French tapestry manufacture and the relations of the entrepreneurs with their British clients. The tapestry room from Croome Court is a masterpiece of its kind, and no visitor can fail to be moved by the splendor of its “crimson sea” of tapestry.

The public opening of this room is the culmination of more than a decade of cooperative effort between the Museum and the Kress Foundation to acquire it. Shortly after the close of World War II the tapestries and the original room were separately bought by the Kress Foundation and thus united after being apart nearly eighty years. The Museum was advised in 1947 of the possibility of receiving this room as a gift, and from that time forward unremitting effort has been devoted to the problem of its complete and fitting exhibition. As recently as last summer

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the Director and two other staff members, James Parker and Jack R. McGregor, visited Croome. The tapestries and the tapestry-covered seat furniture had been removed from Croome Court in the 1880s, when they were sold to a French collector. Our studies revealed that during their sojourn in Paris the delicately carved and gilded wood frames for the seat furniture, which may well have been designed by Robert Adam, had been replaced by modern frames carved in the Louis XV style, apparently in an effort to give the Gobelins tapestries a more authentic French air. After years of search, which at times seemed utterly hopeless, the original frames were located in Paris. Now, covered once again with the tapestries made expressly for them, they are where they belong: in the re-established room.

The room’s location in the Museum galleries was chosen so that visitors might go directly from it to Robert Adam’s contemporary Lansdowne dining room, the cool muted tones of which stand in sharp contrast with it. The two rooms are displayed en suite, and one complements the other. In no other museum, either here or in England, is the work of Adam represented with more stunning effect.

JOHN GOLDSMITH PHILLIPS
Curator of Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Art

_Croome Court, by Richard Wilson, 1758_
Croome Estate Trust