Course

Hertford and Dorchester: Two London Treasure Houses

**Dates**  
Tuesday 24 and Wednesday 25 January 2023

**Times**  
14.00–16.00 GMT

**Location**  
Tuesday at Wallace Collection; Wednesday at RIBA, 66 Portland Place

**Tutor**  
Dr Ralph St Clair Wade

**Level**  
All Levels

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**Course Description**

Sir Richard Wallace and Robert Stayner Holford were both avid art collectors. Both men had the common ambition to build a London townhouse in which to display their remarkable collections. This course explores the monumental results of Hertford House, Marylebone, and Dorchester House, Park Lane.

Despite being the home of the Wallace Collection today, remarkably little is known about Hertford House. Who was the original architect, and who was the mysterious T B Ambler who secured the prestigious commission to rebuild it? Dorchester House is an even greater challenge. Demolished to make way for the famous namesake hotel in 1929, only the architect’s intricate drawings survive.

Offered in collaboration with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), this course combines talks, tours and guided archival study. You’ll gain an appreciation of Victorian architecture at its richest, and of the community of architects and artists that made London’s ‘Gilded Age’ a reality.
Session One: Hertford House (at the Wallace Collection)

Hertford House, although well-known as the home of the Wallace Collection, is a surprisingly mysterious building. Built as Manchester House (1776) and flamboyantly remodelled for Sir Richard Wallace (1872), nothing is known about its original architect, and very little about its Victorian rebuilder, T B Ambler.

In our first session, we’ll establish the facts behind this prestigious commission, before getting to grips with the present building. We’ll walk around, teasing out the Georgian remains beneath the Victorian opulence, and uncover fragments of Sir Richard Wallace’s lost Turkish Smoking Room in the Collection’s archives. Close study of prints and drawings from the archives will also reveal the 18th-century inspiration for Hertford House’s magnificent interiors.

Session Two: Dorchester House (at the RIBA, 66 Portland Place)

Dorchester House, Park Lane was London’s preeminent Victorian townhouse. Its patron, Robert Stayner Holford, was a prolific art collector who built his house both for display and entertainment. In a strange twist of fate, the Georgian house he rebuilt had previously housed the core of the present-day Wallace Collection. Holford’s architect, Lewis Vulliamy, was a pupil of Sir Robert Smirke, and his sculptor, Alfred Stevens, was later celebrated for his work in St Paul’s Cathedral. Despite its magnificence, Holford’s new house only lasted 76 years.

In our second session, we’ll work with a wealth of surviving architectural drawings to reconstruct this lost masterpiece. You’ll see Vulliamy’s intricate Italianate drawings – complete with his annotations and changes-of-mind – and Alfred Stevens’s more expansive, impressionistic sketches.

Course Tutor

Dr Ralph St Clair Wade lectures in the History of Art at the University of Cambridge. He has recently completed his PhD at Cambridge, and was concurrently a Visiting Scholar at Edinburgh University, funded by the Paul Mellon Centre (Yale University). He is a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Hertford and a sporadic contributor to Private Eye magazine.

Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience

None required. This course is designed as an introduction to the subject.

Joining Information and Format

This course will take place in person both in the Library, Lower Ground Floor at the Wallace Collection (Tuesday) and in the Clore Learning Centre at RIBA, 66 Portland Place, W1B 1AD (Wednesday). The course involves some walking, and close study of archival materials.