

Island Hall Visit May 2026

The Art Appreciation Group enjoyed a delightful afternoon visiting the mid 18th century mansion, Island Hall, on the banks of the Great Ouse at Godmanchester.

As we arrived early, we took a stroll to the river and enjoyed a view downstream of the bridge over to the island which gave the mansion its name. Nearby is the “fish staircase” completed in 2022, which enables salmon or trout to climb up the steps to fight their way up river to spawn.

We were greeted by Christopher Vane Percy, whose was responsible for bringing this Georgian house back into his family after many years of neglect.

The house, a statement of status and prosperity was originally built for John Jackson, around 1794.

The mansion is typically mid-Georgian, built of red brick with stone dressings. A balanced and symmetrical composition with the street frontage and the garden façade house mirroring each other.



John Jackson’s son got into financial difficulties and in 1804, Island Hall was purchased by Jacob Baumgartner, a Swiss-born merchant but also a British citizen. He, and his descendants would shape the house’s character for generations. Through marriage, inheritance and family connections, the house remained associated with the same extended lineage for over two centuries. Jacob's wife brought substantial property and family connections of her own. They were not aristocrats in the traditional sense but part of the prosperous professional and commercial classes that flourished during the Georgian period. Yet they lived very much in the style of the country gentry. In the Edwardian period new rooms, were added and possibly the first bathroom in Godmanchester, supplied by Thomas Crapper. During the First World War, anti-German feeling led the family to changed their German sounding surname to Percy, which appeared in their lineage.

In WW2 the property was requisitioned. The post-war years proved even more difficult. The mansion was divided into council flats, and much of the original interiors compromised or obscured. Then, in 1977, a serious fire caused substantial damage.

As a schoolboy in 1957 Christopher saw the house from the river and became captivated by it. Decades later, he was able to buy it and begin an ambitious restoration programme. An internationally respected interior designer, he spent decades restoring both the house and gardens, rebuilding the Chinese bridge, recovering lost architectural details and transforming the house. He has recovered family records and possessions relating to the family which are now proudly displayed in the rooms. Today it is the home of his daughter Grace and her family.



Original eighteenth-century panelling survived in the principal reception rooms, lending a sense of continuity with the house’s earliest years. But because of the fire much of the house has had to be restored but not always as you might expect. There is illusion, what appears to be marble is in fact wood. What appears to be wood is in fact paint effect.

In the dining room Christopher has added piece by piece over the years, a collection of china, light fittings and furniture of the period. But he has also added to the house other items, some quirky, some for sentiment and some for aesthetic reasons. In the red reception room flashy glass chairs and table fit in perfectly. In other rooms family pictures, both portraits and photographs adorn the walls.

In the main hall we were treated to a lovely afternoon tea, with a variety of sandwiches and delicious home-made cake.



Going upstairs we were shown the main bedroom and dressing room. The dressing room was my favourite room, very Bridgerton. Christopher told me the what I thought was stencil was in fact wallpaper which had been cut and pasted to get the effect required.



Before we left, some of the group decided, to brave the rain and take the bridge to the island.

Report and images by Linda Nudds.