



City of Westminster

Apsley House



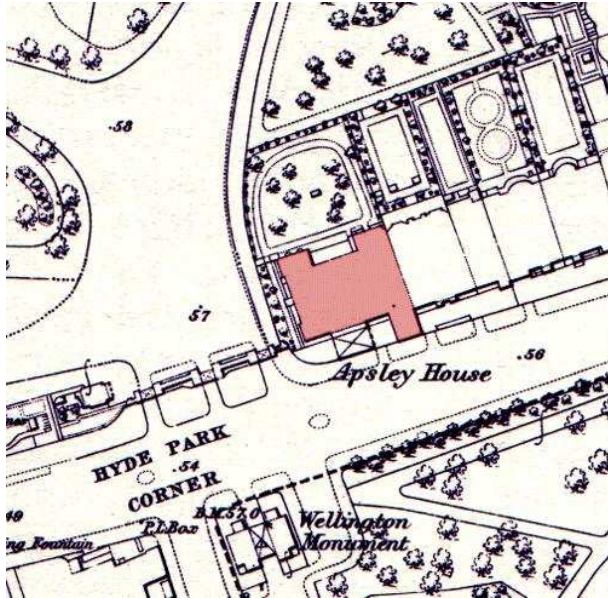
Addresses don't come much grander than 'Number One London', the popular name for Apsley House, one of the most interesting visitor attractions in London. Apsley House is the former London townhouse of the Dukes of Wellington after his victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, the interior of the house has changed very little since the days of the Iron Duke.



Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker by Antonio Canova

It boasts one of the finest art collections in London, with paintings by Velazquez and Rubens as well as a wonderful collection of silver and porcelain. Pride of place goes to a massive nude statue of Napoleon.

It stands alone at Hyde Park Corner, on the south-east corner of Hyde Park, facing south towards the busy traffic roundabout in the centre of which stands the Wellington Arch. It is a grade I listed building. The house was given the popular nickname of Number One, London, since it was the first house passed by visitors who travelled from the countryside after the toll gates at Knightsbridge. It was originally part of a contiguous line of great houses on Piccadilly, demolished to widen Park Lane: its official address remains 149 Piccadilly, W1J 7NT.



Apsley House on an 1869 map.

The neighbouring houses were demolished in the post World War II period to allow Park Lane to be widened. The Wellington Arch has been moved since this time



The house was originally built in red brick by Robert Adam between 1771 and 1778 for Lord Apsley, the Lord Chancellor, who gave the house its name. Some Adam interiors survive: the semi-circular Staircase, the Drawing Room with its apsidal end, and the Portico Room, behind the giant Corinthian portico added by Wellington.

In 1807 the house was purchased by Richard Wellesley, 1st Marquess Wellesley, the elder brother of Sir Arthur Wellesley, but in 1817 financial difficulties forced him to sell it to his famous brother, by then the Duke of Wellington, who needed a London base from which to pursue his new career in politics.

Wellington employed the architect Benjamin Dean Wyatt to carry out renovations in two phases: in the first, begun in 1819, he added a three-storey extension to the north east, housing a State Dining Room, bedrooms and dressing rooms.

The second phase, started after Wellington had become Prime Minister in 1828, included a new staircase and the "Waterloo Gallery" on the west side of the house.

The red-brick exterior was clad in Bath stone, and a pedimented portico added. Wyatt's original estimate for the work was £23,000, but the need to repair structural defects discovered during the work led to costs escalating to more than £61,000. Wyatt introduced his own version of French style to the interior, notably in the Waterloo Gallery and the florid wrought iron stair-rail, described by Pevsner as

"just turning from Empire to a neo-Rococo" .

The Waterloo Gallery is, of course, named after the Duke's famous victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. A special banquet is still served annually to celebrate the date — 18 June 1815. The Duke's equestrian statue can be seen across the busy road, cloaked and watchful, the plinth guarded at each corner by an infantryman. This statue was cast from guns captured at the battle.



The Waterloo Gallery at Apsley House by Joseph Nash, 1852

The magnificent collection of 200 paintings includes 83 which were acquired by the first Duke after the Battle of Vitoria in 1813, the paintings were in Joseph Bonaparte's baggage train, they were from the Spanish royal collection and were presented to Wellington by King Ferdinand VII of Spain.



The Agony in the Garden,
Antonio da Correggio, c. 1524

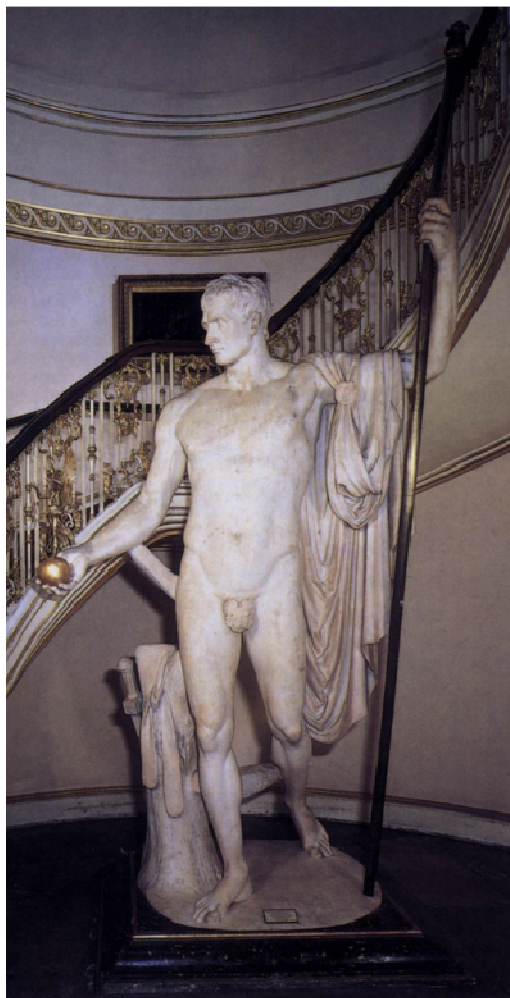


The Waterseller of Seville, Diego
Velázquez, 1618-1622



Two men sitting at the table,
Diego Velázquez, c. 1618

Gerald Wellesley, 7th Duke of Wellington, gave the house and its most important contents to the nation in 1947, but by the Wellington Museum Act 1947 the right of the family to occupy just over half the house was preserved "so long as there is a Duke of Wellington". The family apartments are now on the north side of the house, concentrated on the second floor.



The house is now run by English Heritage and is open to the public as a museum and art gallery, although the 8th Duke of Wellington still uses part of the building as a part-time residence. It is sometimes referred to as the Wellington Museum. It is perhaps the only preserved example of an English aristocratic town house from its period. The practice has been to maintain the rooms as far as possible in the original style and decor. It contains the 1st Duke's collection of paintings, porcelain, the silver centrepiece made for the Duke in Portugal, c 1815, sculpture and furniture.

Antonio Canova's heroic marble nude of Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker made 1802-10, holding a gilded Nike in the palm of his right hand, and standing 3.45 metres to the raised left hand holding a staff. It was set up for a time in the Louvre and was bought by the Government for Wellington in 1816 (Pevsner) and stands in Adam's Stairwell.

Opening Times

1 April - 4 November 2012

Monday Closed

Tuesday Closed

Wednesday 11:00 - 17:00

Thursday 11:00 - 17:00

Friday 11:00 - 17:00

Saturday 11:00 - 17:00

Sunday 11:00 - 17:00

Joint ticket with Wellington Arch: Adult £8.20, Concession £7.40, Child £4.90

Overseas Visitor Pass Available