



The Arts Society Sevenoaks: Godinton House Outing, 14th April 2026

On a day that suggested that the darling buds of May had come a month early, our latest arts society outing took place deep in the heart of the Kent countryside, at the delightful Jacobean gabled country manor that is Godinton House.

Our house tour guides were exceptionally well informed about the history of the house, those who had lived there and the treasures that they had collected over time. They showed off each of the rooms in detail, so that we could all appreciate how well the vast art collections have been preserved and cared for and in some cases reacquired.

We started with The Great Hall, which was at least 600 years old, a Medieval Hall House, that had been adapted to accommodate an expanding dynasty of the Kentish gentry family, the Tokes. The first of whom, Captain Nicholas Toke, in a desperate quest for a male heir, nearly matched the marital records of Henry VIII. Tragically dying of pneumonia in the pursuit of his sixth wife in 1680. However, he did manage to decorate the Great Chambers with carved images of his own personal militia with pikes and muskets, rather reminiscent of Rembrandt's *Nights Watch* I felt, or more lately *Dad's Army*.

Each room that we were shown had its own gasp factor, either because of the ornate and decorative carvings, the elaborate furnishings and textiles or the total contrasts in ambiance and atmosphere that they evoked. Over time, we were told that walls had gone up and down, windows expanded, carved intricacies added and ceilings adorned by want of fashion and taste or to meet the needs of the business and function of the house. I particularly liked the carved slate fire surrounds with exotic animals that didn't quite match our current grasp of their anatomy.



Much was done post 1890, including the addition of Liberty of London panelling and wooden screen carvings and updating of the décor to give a brighter more homely feel, including the Chinese wallpapered room, stuffed with Oriental treasures. The Worcester porcelain collection was also started around this time, with one of the finest displays in all of England, our attention was drawn to the use of kaolin to make the clay heatproof enough for scalding hot tea to be served from pots to the delicate china cups.

On every wall were paintings that had been collected over time, as well as a vast array of portraits; a dashing cavalier caught our eye and in the bedroom was an artist that I hadn't come across before, John Piper, an abstract landscape in ink and gouache, purchased in the 1970s. The artist is well worth some extra research, famous for the stained-glass window in Coventry Cathedral, as well as an aquatintist, a technique mentioned in the recent Lois Oliver lecture.

The gardens were also extensive and maintained to a very high standard and despite it being so early in the season, there was enough colour to put into practice what I had learnt about *gardens as fine art* from Timothy Walker and enough space to walk off a little of the calories of the most delicious scones that we were served for an early tea.

Elaine Johnson

