

# The Temple, Euston Hall

By Ian Baird



The word 'royal' when affixed to any noun in the English language has an uplifting effect: we think of kings and queens, palaces, crowns and gowns, and a splendour that ordinary people like us are unlikely ever to achieve.

In saying that when my wife and I recently spent a night at Euston Hall we were treated 'royally', it is on the one hand an attempt to capture that splendour and out-of-the-ordinariness that we associate with royalty in its real - as opposed to its metaphorical - sense; but with Euston Hall the 'royal' addition is more than a mere metaphor attempting to add dignity to an experience: for the Grafton family, dukes and duchesses thereof since the time of Charles II (1660-85) are literally 'royal', in that the first duke was a son - albeit an illegitimate son - of the aforementioned King Charles II, his mother having been Barbara Villiers, one of that merry monarch's many mistresses. Thus the present duke, the 12th Duke of Grafton can claim as his 9-greats grandfather a king of England, and that's royal enough for anyone!

Even before the magnificent buildings and lands became the property of the Grafton family, however, royalty had already been around - for Queen Elizabeth I and King Charles II had both stayed there with earlier owners of the estate.

In addition to its royal connections - both real and metaphorical - Euston Hall has been connected with several of the most important people in their various professions: everyone has heard of Capability Brown (1716-83), the landscape gardener; he was a regular visitor and a significant contributor to the grounds at Euston. John Evelyn (1620-1706), a close friend of King Charles II, whose Diaries are second only in fame and importance to those of Samuel Pepys, was another regular, and he too had an influence in the layout of the grounds and gardens. The architect

Matthew Brettingham (1699-1769) made several significant changes to the main building. The major contributor in the 18th century, however, was the slightly less well-known William Kent (1685-1748), described in the guide-book as a 'polymath', who did a great deal of work in re-aligning the river which travels through the property and in creating a mill to transfer water-power into power that could be used in other areas.

Among the contributions Kent made, perhaps the finest was the Grafton Temple, a large and splendid extra building slightly away from the main hall, sited at the top of a small rise so that the views from it are spectacular in all four directions. Its original purpose was as a banqueting hall for the duke's visitors. Recently, however, the temple has been modernised and re-organised so that it is now a kind of air bnb - which is where we stayed on our visit. The modernisation has been done very sensitively, with every effort having been made to make the new harmonise with the old: as an example of what I mean, all electric wiring had to be tacked on to the original brick walls rather than buried within them; this external wiring could have led to the pipe-work screaming 'modernism' at the visitor. In fact what has happened is that the pipework has been painted in the same kind of colours as the original bricks and mortar of the building, so that when one looks at the pipes, they are almost invisible.

The Temple has two well-appointed bedrooms, a wonderful dining-room, an enormous sitting-room on the first floor with a television set-up that accords with the most modern televisual developments. Plus a kitchen and two bathrooms, the downstairs of which has one of the finest showers I have seen in any building ever, and the upstairs one has an impressive and very large free-standing bath. In the event of a larger party needing more bedrooms, there is a small 'cabin' about twenty yards from the temple with

similarly modernised facilities including two more bedrooms.

Staying in the Temple gave us the nearest we have ever got to feeling royal. All the accoutrements as well as all the basic furniture were of the highest standard, and we lacked for nothing during our brief stay. Everything in the kitchen and in all the bedrooms is of high quality with nothing bought at a bargain-basement store.

The basic ingredients of a simple breakfast were provided, but for our evening meal the night before, we chose to visit a local pub, of which there are several within a short drive. Walking round the estate the following morning was a real pleasure, with views like those painted by another Suffolk boy, John Constable, at every turn, and nothing visible in any direction except woods and fields and the river.

Of the buildings on the estate, the main hall is the private home of the current duke and duchess, and is not open to the public except on some special occasions. The church of St Genevieve, an original 17th-century edifice, is in the grounds and is the local parish church for Euston. Its graveyard is the place of rest for Grafton family members.

I said at the start that we were 'treated' royally. In fact, we were hardly 'treated' at all - in that, in the tradition of air bnb, we managed the stay almost entirely without any input from anybody; but the manager of the estate was on hand to answer any questions - which he did 'royally' on those very few occasions we needed answers.

Before driving through the park gates on the first afternoon, we had very little idea of what to expect from this stay. As we drove out the following day, we agreed that it had been truly wonderful!

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