

3. Taking the Grand Tour

Introduction

The term 'Grand Tour' was coined by the Catholic priest and travel writer Richard Lassels (1603-68). He used it in his influential guidebook *The Voyage of Italy*, published in 1670, to describe young lords travelling abroad to learn about art, architecture and antiquity

During the 18th century the tour was a highly desirable way for aristocrats and gentry across Europe, and especially Britain, to finish their education. Young men, exposed to Greek and Roman history, language and literature in their studies could now experience this – usually chaperoned by a paid tutor ('cicerone' or Bear Leader). From 1764 to 1796 was a golden age for travellers, tourist-painters, excavations and export licences with relative peace in Europe.

The usual route meant arrival in Paris. Tourists would bring or buy transport to then cross the Alps, carried by chair at Mont Cenis, before moving on to Turin. They would also head for famous festivals such as the Carnival in Venice or Holy Week in Rome. They then made their way slowly to Lucca, Florence, Siena, Rome and Naples with a return to Rome before heading to Venice via Loreto, Ancona and Ravenna. From there tourists visited the delights of Vicenza, Verona, Mantua, Bologna, Modena, Parma and Milan before returning to Turin and home.

The Grand Tour, popular amongst scholars, was hugely influential in Britain's cultural, social, political, architectural, gastronomic, sartorial and artistic elevation. It transformed fine historic houses, providing much of their contents, defined the syllabi of many English prep schools, and introduced the architectural language of neoclassicism. A tutor was de rigeur but those of lesser means relied on guidebooks, fold-out maps with panoramic views marked and also monuments, but education had another meaning. Alexander Pope expressed this in verse:

'Led by hand he saunter'd Europe round,
And gather'd every vice on Christian ground.'

Once in Italy, many young men were on a freer rein. Gaming was popular, cards in particular. Sexual mores were widely flouted with much bragging about exploits whilst others studiously avoided temptation. Writing to his nephew from Rome, Sir Richard Lyttelton reflected: 'What a figure my fine room will cut when it is adorned with all the fine pictures I am collecting; God send me safe and well from this wicked place of Gaming and Extravagance.'

Preparations

The very rich Earl of Burlington set out from his Piccadilly mansion in 1714, accompanied by a tutor, an artist to make drawings of appeal, an accountant to keep a detailed record of his expenses, five or six servants, a groom, a valet, a postilion, three liveried footman and three other gentlemen; an imposing retinue but hardly unknown. Lord Baltimore arrived in Vienna with, amongst others, a doctor, two black eunuchs and eight women. Asked which one was his wife, he took great exception, quite prepared to reply with his fists.

James Boswell hired a servant in each town. "Trust nothing to them, I mean of your linen, wearing apparel etc," Dr McKinlay, a friend of his father, commented that a few were honest but most were rogues. Payment of 18 pence a day was advised. Numerous guidebooks spoke of a legible and quick hand, conversant in French and treating all servants as a father would a child. Lord Byron suffered the misfortune of an 'imbecile servant, lamenting about food, with

a contempt for everything foreign, an incapacity to acquire even a few words of a foreign language and calamity heaped on calamity.

Take the best historical accounts of countries visited, linen maps convenient to the pocket and a copy of Sir Thomas Nugent's *The Grand Tour*, published in four volumes in 1749, a pair of spectacles, a mariner's compass and a quadrant to assist navigation. Notebooks, dictionaries and grammars were pre-requisites too plus crayons, a pocket sun-dial, or watch if wealthy, an ink-stand, pocket knife, pen-knife to eat with, a passport holder with name, rank and family crest, an inflatable bath, tinder-box to light a fire in an emergency when travelling at night, a medicine chest, a bottle of vinegar, bottle of brandy, spirit of salmiak, (salty liquorice) in case of fits and Hoffman Drops, otherwise known as spirit of ether, a pain killer. Take no chances!

Boxes of spices, tea, salt, sugar, mustard, ginger, pepper, nutmegs, oatmeal and sago were fairly standard. Recommended too was oil of lavender to ward off bed bugs and 'vitriolic acid' in water decanters to rid noxious particles. A linen over-garment at night was now considered unnecessary as were lice-proof taffeta-lined undergarments. Take plenty of shirts, to resist the treatment of washerwomen, several pairs of shoes, silk stockings, waterproof buckskin breeches, a plentiful supply of handkerchiefs, a pair of eye-preservers, a wide-brimmed hat and an umbrella. Luggage weight and volume were not issues, other than for servants.

Parents would reinforce the purpose of the Grand Tour, omitting reference to lascivious, lewd entertainment. Lord Chesterfield's son Philip spent five years away from the age of 14: to widen knowledge, polish his taste, manners and deportment and acquire better preparation to life than at Oxford or Cambridge. His tutor, of the highest pedigree, friend of Alexander Pope and recommended by Lord Lyttleton, was Walter Harte. The irony was not lost on Philip. His tutor's father was a former Fellow at Pembroke College, Oxford.

Precautions

Travelling with a large supply of money was irksome and risky, even though English currency was widely accepted. Better perhaps to organise phased payments via a London banker or take bills of exchange but expect hefty commission fees. Italian currency presented problems with a multiplicity of coins. Sir Thomas Nugent gave brief advice condensed into seven pages such as: don't travel at night, select travel companions with great care, avoid vermin infested sailors, and old ladies too as they selected only the best seats. Arthur Young's stern warning was reserved for inns some of which were vile, resembling a hog-sty with a "dirty wretched chamber." Fleas were a particular problem and intense cold with missing window panes.

Hot treacle provided immunity against the plague but cholera, typhoid and even malaria were rife. Look out for scorpions when in Padua and beware tape-worms. It was said that James Dawkins had a 24 yards tapeworm removed in Dresden. It paid to be vigilant. So it was when travelling as lurid stories abounded. In 1723 three Englishmen, seen changing money in Paris, where waylaid and murdered, another was murdered in Ghent and the occasional hold-up by a highwayman was reported. Many travellers commented England was far more dangerous and that highwaymen were as "common as crows." Lady Mary Wortley Montagu insisted, in reference to France, "you may cross the country with your purse in your hand."

Martin Sherlock said Italy was not a country of robbers and assassins and in 30 years there had been only one incident. In Italy a boat passed rather close, whereupon a Duke struck the boatman with his whip. In return he was shot; whether fatally is unknown. When trouble did occur it was likely to come from a postilion or guide or by being drunk. Tobias Smollett, well-

known for belligerence, had numerous wrangles with inn-keepers and would question bills, sword in hand, threatening 'manual correction.' Noisy crowds were dispersed by a discharge from his blunderbuss. Firmness was required at all times.

Whilst attack was rare, pilferers and pick-pockets were rife. In 1787 strong advice was given by Lord Berchold and others. When staying at inns do not display wealth and expect to pay double if throwing money out of windows for the destitute. At a customs house, never allow more than one trunk to be opened at a time and when travelling keep an eye on all luggage. Do not, under any circumstances, allow strangers to stand near a vehicle.

Be aware of local byelaws, such as in Dieppe where failure to have a lantern after ten at night means being taken into custody. As elsewhere, take care to arrive at a walled city in daylight as the gates shut at night. Customs regulations were a challenge such as in Prussia, banning 490 commodities in 1766. Expect severe penalties for infringements with a fine, confiscation of luggage and even imprisonment. Expect fines too for concocted and trivial reasons, such as 1/6p for unwashed stockings. Bribes, carriage and river tolls, and payment for the entire personal entourage, took its own toll on a young man's allowance.

Displaying Your Fine Art Collection

One man embodies this culturally confident age: the Apollo of the Arts – Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington. He returned from his Grand Tour with enough treasures to fill 800 trunks. Inspired by Italian Renaissance architect, Palladio, he built a magnificent Thames-side villa, not to live in but to house his newly acquired collection. It became a hallmark of 18th century Britain. It was a marriage of art and architecture, setting the benchmark for every serious and wealthy British art collector. It was also a sign of social status and intellectual sophistication.

Whilst most of the collection has been dispersed, numerous aristocrats followed his example on a grander scale, showing off highlights in their country estates such as Holkham Hall that was funded by agricultural wealth. This Palladian villa, created in the 1730s under supervision of Burlington, was for Thomas Coke, later first Earl of Leicester. It was the perfect setting for his art collection, embracing the tastes of 18th century connoisseurs, impressing visitors with works that included Rubens. Coke's Grand Tour lasted six years, the longest in history.

He selected the best of Van Dyke paintings and statues. The house and the collection grew together. Orphaned by ten, he was looked after by his grand-parents who took his education very seriously. When Thomas became distracted by hunting and cock-fighting he was sent off on the obligatory cultural tour. In Rome in 1714 he wrote to his uncle. "I have become since my stay in Rome a perfect virtuoso and a great lover of pictures, even so far as to venture to encroach on the kindness of my guardians in having bought some few." Requesting yet more money, he could show off not only a fine collection but his knowledge and learning.

Great Renaissance artists were favoured most, such as Titian and Leonardo, but demand soon outstripped supply. This inflated prices beyond what most buyers were prepared to pay. To prevent too many works disappearing, Italian authorities imposed laws, making old masters almost impossible to export. Art lovers of Coke's generation began to develop broader tastes, not least 17th century classical painter Claude, a favourite of Roman Cardinals too.

The Landscape Room is a gem, one of the finest groups of Claude paintings in private hands, still hang there today. They depict pastoral scenes and those from classical mythology. His skill was creating imaginary landscapes. He had discovered the perfect formula with beautiful landscapes and classical narratives, inspiring a fashion for gardening amongst the aristocracy.

Coke continued collecting art up to his death in 1759. With no national galleries in existence, visiting country estates was the only way many saw art of the highest quality.

The pursuit of art reached fever pitch. In a boom year, 1725, the British imported over 750 paintings and 6,000 prints from Italy. A new gentleman's club was founded: *The Society of Dilettanti* of which Thomas Coke was an early member. This helped those embarking on the Grand Tour to gain knowledge for use on their return. It was a riotous club. Horace Walpole observed, "the nominal qualification, having been in Italy, and the real one, being drunk in Rome." Collecting was a blend of experiencing different cultures and styles in art and buying what country house owners actually liked.

By the mid-18th century, Venice had usurped Rome as the prime destination, a cosmopolitan centre for trade. Venetian painters spawned a whole new market. One artist in particular caught the eye: Giovanni Antonio Canal; known better as Canaletto who began his career by painting theatrical scenery. It served him well, often taking in views from two perspectives and then combining them into one expansive image.

Long before the impressionists, Canaletto was painting scenes from everyday life. He soon became the most popular contemporary painter in Venice but had help – British entrepreneur Joseph Smith, a former fish merchant. He had the three main attributes of any art dealer: a good eye, an instinct for what the market wanted and a natural ability to negotiate. Not for nothing was he known as the Merchant of Venice. Smith became Canaletto's agent and often held soirees to entertain visiting British aristocrats, plying them with wine. He even produced a catalogue of Canaletto's work. Together they did a roaring trade.

Smith introduced Canaletto to Charles Lennox, second Duke of Richmond, whose father was the illegitimate son of Charles II. Born at Goodwood in West Sussex in 1701, surrounded by paintings, with a good eye, a passion for art and wealth he amassed an enormous collection, including works by Van Dyke. At 18 he was forced to marry Sarah Cadogan, the 13 year old daughter of a British ambassador in order to settle his father's gambling debt. He then left on his Grand Tour, acquiring an Italian mistress. On return in 1722, one night at the theatre he spotted a vivacious young lady. Reunited with Sarah, the marriage seemed a happy one.

Richmond commissioned works from Canaletto as a souvenir, proudly displaying them at his West London home. In 1740 the War of Austrian Succession plunged Europe into political turmoil and Canaletto's art market in Venice crashed. He travelled to England in 1746 and in London found himself in the largest and fastest growing city in Western Europe.

Armed with a letter of recommendation from Joseph Smith, he pinned all hopes on the Duke of Richmond. This first commission introduced him to the English social scene. At a drunken dinner a deal was hatched, enabling flamboyant Irishman Owen McSwiney to be his main agent in London. It was a pivotal moment for Canaletto and the English art market as many landscapes typically included mythological references to give intellectual appeal. Canaletto painted cityscapes, depicting building design and the joys of life, captured from a window.

As London prospered, the pleasures of rural life appealed more rather than an expanding and noisy city. The shift linked well with the increasing popularity of country pursuits, creating a new genre in art that included horses and hounds. Goodwood was already famed for social events when Charles Lennox succeeded his father as the third Duke of Richmond.

With peace now restored on the Continent, the Grand Tour resumed. The Duke spent several months in Holland, studying anatomy at Leiden University. It was a formative time as he was

given a good grounding in science. On his return the Duke would have a major influence on the sporting portrait. George Stubbs lived in the magnificent stable block in Liverpool, staying in the stable-boys' quarters and soon his work would adorn many country houses.

End of the Grand Tour

In 1764 Adam Smith resigned his professorship in Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University to accompany the Duke of Buccleuch. He expressed his opinion on a 17 or 18 year old returning at the age of 20: "commonly more conceited, more unprincipled, more dissipated and more incapable of any serious application, either to study or to business that he could well have become had he stayed at home."

A chorus of tutors, pedagogues and preachers agreed, as did Lord Chesterfield. "Young men adopt the finery and fopperies of continental taste, do not bother to speak the language or seek company but dine and sup with one another only at the tavern." John Moore aged, referring to an "ostentatious preference for England," ridiculing the manners, customs and opinions whilst on their travels, yet on their return assume foreign manners and lambast all that is English. Similar sentiments were expressed by John Locke, Samuel Johnson and Lord Macaulay, all of whom felt the Grand Tour was taken too early in life to be appreciated.

In the 1750s the Grand Tour was satirised in magazines, characterised by keeping only own company, not learning the language, being seen with low wenches and playing billiards. The final word on those completing the Grand Tour belongs to Lady Mary Wortley Montague: "the greatest blockheads in nature; the worst company in the world" and who buy clothes simply to be seen in the finest coffee houses.

For those with refined tastes, many country houses were built or reconstructed in the first part of the 18th century and furnished with Grand Tour fine art. Norfolk was a prime example with Felbrigg Hall, Houghton Hall, Wolverton, Holkham and Narford that "out-Italianed even the Italians themselves." Neo-classicism dominated architecture for two centuries, impressing Inigo Jones, Wren and Vanbrugh to Pratt, Kent, Chambers, James Gibb and Robert Adam.

Petworth House, built in 1688, was home to the 2nd & 3rd Earl of Egremont, both of whom took the Grand Tour; the 3rd Earl on two occasions. It is home to an outstanding collection that includes numerous works by Turner, Van Dyck, Reynolds and Blake as well as Neo-classical sculpture and fine carvings by Grinling Gibbons.

The Grand Tour, brought to a halt by the Napoleonic Wars, never recovered. Within 20 years railways started to criss-cross Europe. Thomas Cook's Great Circular Tour of the Continent ' appeared, removing the 'disagreeable things' as Edward Gibbon put it. Instead, travellers could look forward to leisurely peregrinations, excitement and to being pampered.

References

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