

Year 12 Trip to the Wallace Collection

Tucked away into a corner of Central London is the absolute treasure that is The Wallace Collection, a world-renowned museum accommodating a range of gorgeous artefacts from the 15th to 19th Centuries. The treasury is fairly inconspicuous from the outside, and not amazingly publicized. An eight minute walk from Bond Street Station should make it almost as popular to Londoners as The Natural History Museum or the V&A but unfortunately many people living in its home city haven't even heard of it. A valuable point to note is that it is absolutely free! So visiting the museum and being able to go shopping afterwards just a few minutes' walk away is a total bargain.

This was a fantastic opportunity for us Year 12 students to enhance our previous knowledge, as well as our current learning, and to get a real sense of what life was like during the French Revolution.

The Wallace Collection itself was truly a cave of wonders for a historian. Just a few steps through the entrance hall you can feast your eyes on the beautiful interior architecture and luxurious ornaments elegantly displayed throughout the rooms. It was easy to actually *feel* you were in the study of King Louis. Even the wallpaper was beautiful, the colours and textures changing throughout the rooms. Perhaps a little too grand for a living room, but it would not look out of place in any majestic palace of the world. Having learnt a lot about the everyday lives of the common people in our lessons, this experience enabled us to really understand why it was so difficult for the wealthier members of society to sympathise with the poorer ones, and why this led to a break down in communication between the different social groups. Beautifully ornate desks, colourful ceramic dinner sets, porcelain pen stands and luxuriously decorated snuff boxes were just some of the common possessions of the French nobility. A typical member of the Third Estate, much like us, could not have dreamed of owning such expensive items, and it was precisely this contrast which made life, and therefore understanding of and outlook on life, so different for each social class. The gilt, enamel, porcelain and precious stones of the nobility would have contrasted massively with the mud, stone and wood of the poor, and this insight into regal existence helped us to understand the mentality of those in power during the *Ancien Regime*, the system of authority in 18th Century France.

The lectures given to Year 12 were by author and historian Jocelyn Hunt, who kept the students interested and entertained with her enthusiasm and passion for her work and The Collection. Not only did she give us background information on the royal routine, but she also gave us juicy details of intimate family life in the Louis' household, and this gave our historical personalities a human face and helped us empathise with them further. We came to understand in more depth exactly why peasants were becoming increasingly angry and desperate in the years preceding 1789, with regards to Royal Income and Expenditure. This helped us to put into perspective the economic crisis at the time and some of King Louis XIV's primary concerns

Touching upon some of the events following the revolutionary year of 1789 enabled us to gain an idea of the implication the events we have recently been learning about had. Debates amongst the Nobility and Clergy regarding slavery, votes for women and, arguably most importantly, capital punishment came to light after 1789, as did suggestions to change the French calendar. It was during this period of time that the infamous Guillotine was designed, tested and approved for use. Having had an insight into what is to come in our AS History course, we all left from the Wallace Collection inspired, enlightened and more desirous to learn than ever before.



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