

The Castle Howard Wallpaper Collection

Introduction

In 2018 disaster struck in a store at Castle Howard in North Yorkshire, as a leaking roof led to a hasty salvage operation. Efforts concentrated on a shelving unit closest to the worst drip; known as the wallpaper tower, it carried dozens of rolls of uncatalogued paper. With catastrophe averted, the relocation of the collection presented an ideal opportunity to discover exactly what was there. The subsequent cataloguing project has revealed the scope of the collection, spanning close to 150 years and representing the changing tastes of four generations of the Howard family. Ongoing research continues to reveal the role of wallpaper in the decorative history of one of Britain's great stately homes.

Background to wallpapers at Castle Howard

The earliest surviving examples of wallpaper at Castle Howard date from the 1870s, but there is evidence for the use of decorative paper hangings since the house was built in the early 18th century. The 4th Earl of Carlisle's probate inventory of 1759 records papers in 25 rooms throughout the

house, including 'India paper hangings', but little is otherwise known about the acquisition or appearance of these.¹ Bills, accounts and correspondence show that subsequent generations also bought wallpaper. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries the 5th Earl patronised several London paper hangers, including Thomas Bromwich, Isherwood & Bradley, and Bridges & Davenport, although it is uncertain whether these papers were destined for Castle Howard or his London residence at Grosvenor Place.² The 6th Earl and Countess made significant purchases, mostly for Castle Howard, from Duppa & Collins (later Cowtan & Sons) in the 1830s and 1840s.³ None of these papers has survived at Castle Howard, but their use was generally restricted to private, domestic spaces, a cost-effective alternative to the tapestries, silks and velvets that had long dominated the state apartments.

Much of the wallpaper now in store was accumulated during the tenure of George and Rosalind, 9th Earl and Countess of Carlisle (Fig.1). Having taken on the Howard estates in the early 1880s, they found Castle Howard in need of updating, with Rosalind commenting: 'we must make things ship-shape, *délabré* [dilapidated] finery is not pleasant to see'.⁴ While George pursued his career as an artist, Rosalind oversaw the running of the family estates and threw herself energetically into revitalising their homes. What



Fig.1.1 Portrait of George Howard, 9th Earl of Carlisle, painted by Sir William Richmond, 1879



Fig.1.2 Portrait of Rosalind Howard, 9th Countess of Carlisle, painted by Sir William Richmond, c1870s

Ceura's room.	Morris yellow Indian	odd pieces	
Geoffrey.	" Bower	" "	1 piece colour (spoiled)
Michael	" Larkspur variegated	" "	" "
School Rm.	" White daisy.	" "	" "
East wing. (over Bed Rm)	" dark green Broomrape	" "	" colour spoiled
West wing. Nos. 1 & 2.	" Blue mallow.	" "	" "
Yellow school room.	" yellow sunflower	" "	" "
Long Gallery.	" red sunflower	" "	11 pieces
Old Library.	" light red poppy.	" "	" "
High Floor	" Red Bird & vine	" "	2 pieces
West wing. main floor.	" yellow Venetian	" "	" "
East wing N.E. corner	" dark green daisy	" "	" colour spoiled
Orleans Room	" Green acorn	" "	1 piece colour spoiled
West wing S.E. Rm	" Red & gold sunflower	" "	1 1/2 pieces
High Floor. Blue Rm.	Blue & silver paper.	" "	1 piece
Music Room.	Embossed paper. Green & gold	" "	3 pieces of 24 yds.
Dining Rm.	Gold Japanese	" "	1 piece
Museum.	Embossed paper. red & gold	" "	6 rolls
East wing sitting Rm.	Gold Japanese paper	" "	1 piece
Gold birds & foliage on wall in Orleans Rm.	40' x 20'	9 rolls odd pieces.	1 piece
West wing. on each floor.	Japanese paper. wild geese	odd pieces.	5 pieces.

Fig.2 Page from the 1905 Furnishing Book, entitled *Castle Howard wallpapers*. Rooms in the house are listed alongside the paper used, plus notes on remnants in store and whether the colour of the paper has 'spoiled' over time.

followed was an almost total overhaul of the interiors, with wallpaper her primary medium.

Just a few of the papers installed during this period still survive in situ today, most having since been replaced or destroyed in the fire of 1940, which obliterated 22 rooms in the house. Rosalind was a diligent record keeper however, and details relating to the purchase and installation of many wallpapers can be identified in her personal accounts.⁵ Another useful resource is Rosalind's 'Furnishing' book of 1905, in which virtually every aspect of decoration and furnishing at Castle Howard is listed, from fabric and wallpapers, to chairs, mattresses, even toilet fittings.⁶ Some pages in this handwritten notebook list papers in situ, while others record what was 'in hand', comprising a mixture of remnants and sample rolls (Fig.2). Handwritten labels on many of the papers in store have helped to identify them within the written resources.

Although Rosalind's wallpapers form the core of the collection, it has since been augmented by papers from across the 20th century and up to the present day. These later examples are generally not as well documented or labelled, but nevertheless many can be identified via photographs, are remembered in use by family and staff, or still survive in situ.

To date a total of 135 papers have been catalogued. These range from small samples and fragments to single or multiple rolls of a pattern (whole or partially used), and even to full lengths of paper kept after they were removed from the walls. In some cases there are several colourways of a

particular design. Of course, every paper comes with its own story – how it was selected, purchased, used – and work is currently underway to expand this information and make it accessible. The following sections summarise three of the key groups identified within the collection, and how they relate to the decorative history of Castle Howard. Numbers given in brackets (WP) correspond with the Castle Howard wallpaper catalogue.

Morris & Co. wallpapers

Wallpapers designed by Morris & Co. make up a significant proportion of the collection in store: 42 out of a total of 135 patterns, including varying colourways. Today just one room still has Morris & Co. wallpaper on the walls, but at the close of the 19th century these papers dominated the interiors throughout Castle Howard.⁷

When George and Rosalind took on Castle Howard, they had already firmly established their decorative taste through the creation of their London home, 1 Palace Green in Kensington. Built and decorated from the 1860s onwards by some of the leading architects and designers of the period, the house encapsulated the tenets of the Arts & Crafts movement within a compact but relatively cohesive whole.⁸ This project, which used wallpapers and fabrics from Morris & Co. throughout, together with the couple's personal friendships with Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris, certainly inspired the later redecoration of both Castle Howard and the ancestral family seat of Naworth Castle, but there is little evidence of an integrated decorative scheme for these two older properties.

However, when Rosalind began to use the colourful and contemporary designs of Morris & Co. at Castle Howard in the 1880s, this was not a wholly new innovation for the house. The Chapel had been renovated in the Arts & Crafts style in 1870–1875 by George's uncle, Admiral Edward Howard, 1st Baron Lanerton. The decoration was designed by C.E. Kempe and executed by Wyndham Hope Hughes, accompanied by stained glass windows designed by Edward Burne-Jones and manufactured by Morris & Co.⁹ It was also during this period that the first wallpapers from Morris & Co. were purchased, although it is not known where these were used (Fig.3).¹⁰ Lanerton and his wife cannot be characterised as typical supporters of the burgeoning Arts and Crafts movement, and it is tempting to see the influence here of their fashionable young relatives, although no direct evidence of this has been found.

Rosalind was perhaps hesitant at first about using the modern Morris & Co. designs in an 18th century building, as her first purchases of wallpaper in 1881 were for the Castle Howard Inn, now the Gatehouse.¹¹ However this was followed fairly swiftly by papers for the house, several of which are distinctive in their colour choice; purchases in 1884 included *Mallow* for the Boys' School Room (WP110), *Queen Anne* for George's studio (WP099), and *Poppy* for the Old Library (WP101), all in a red colourway.¹² The following

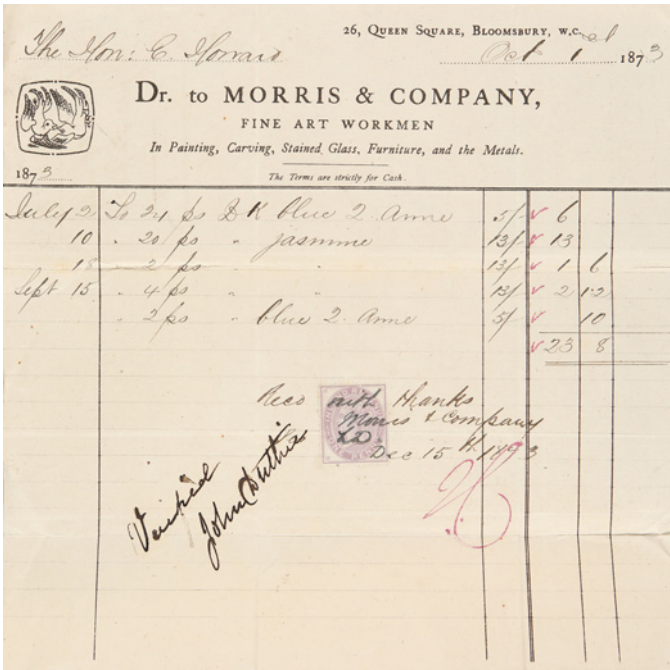


Fig.3 Morris & Co. bill for wallpapers, dated 1st October 1873

year the neo-classical Long Gallery, previously a bright and airy space with a painted light stone colour scheme, was transformed with red *Sunflower* paper (Fig.4).¹³ The rationale for these choices is not known; maybe Rosalind felt that red was a suitable choice of colour for a grand old house. The redecoration of the Long Gallery coincided with the space being used more as a library, and it may have been felt that the darker tones provided by the wallpaper helped to create a more suitable atmosphere. A *Bird and Anemone* design, in red again, was used in one of Rosalind's more controversial interventions; hung in panels across battens, the wallpaper covered over Antonio Pellegrini's 18th century murals in the High Saloon which were not to Rosalind's taste (WP087).¹⁴ In the same year *Acorn* paper in green was bought for the Orleans Room (WP103), a space which had almost exclusively been decorated in variations on green since the second half of the 18th century.¹⁵ Coincidence perhaps, but through these choices we can discern at least an element of consideration for the house and its history, beyond purely personal preference.

In less public areas of the house brighter colours and patterns were used. In 1892 Rosalind decorated two bedrooms and a shared dressing room for her sons, Michael and Geoffrey, in *Larkspur* (WP102), *Bower* (WP113) and *Mallow* in yellow (WP112), respectively.¹⁶ The rooms are only referred to by the family names, so it was not possible to firmly identify these spaces against historic plans. However, in 2006 fragments were discovered under a later wallpaper in a private East Wing bedroom, and on close examination these were found to be part of the *Bower* design, thus identifying this and the adjacent rooms as the spaces in question (Fig.5).¹⁷

For most of the papers used at Castle Howard there are remnants surviving within the stored collection, although the Long Gallery *Sunflower* paper is a notable absence. But the collection also includes many other designs which never seem to have been used. In 1897, the year following William Morris's death, 19 fabric samples were bought from Morris & Co., along with six single rolls of wallpaper.¹⁸ It is possible that this group of purchases represent some form of tribute to Rosalind's departed friend, an effort to collect examples of his work without any real intention to use them. This creates



Fig.4 British Railways poster showing the Long Gallery c1950s, from the Castle Howard archive. 170 rolls of the Morris & Co. *Sunflower* paper were needed to decorate this enormous space. The paper remained in situ for around 80 years



Fig.5.1 Fragments of Morris & Co. *Bower* wallpaper (WP064)



Fig.5.2 Bower wallpaper, Morris & Co., designed 1877

something of a dichotomy for Rosalind's wallpapers; while they can be seen as merely a group of remnants and samples, leftovers from the practical aspects of selection and installation, there is also this hint that Rosalind was actively, even consciously, forming a collection.

Japanese and embossed papers

Despite her obvious preference for Morris & Co., Rosalind was not so slavishly devoted to their designs as to be immune from other fashions of the time. In fact, during the initial few years after George and Rosalind took on Castle Howard, the first wallpapers to go up in the house were Japanese. Perhaps the most distinctive of these is the Goose wallpaper which survives in two rooms, along with short rolls in store (WP052) (Fig.6).¹⁹ This striking pattern is most likely the '27 pieces blue stork paper', purchased from Maple & Co. in 1884.²⁰

One of the leading furniture retailers and cabinet makers of the late 19th century, Maple & Co. also stocked wallpapers and all the Japanese-manufactured papers used by Rosalind were bought here. At least some of these were made by Rottmann, Strome & Co. in Yokohama, Japan.²¹ All, aside from the Goose paper, were embossed 'leather' appearance papers designed to imitate the rich gilt leather hangings of the 16th and 17th centuries. Two of these survive in situ in the Museum Room (WP011) and Castle Howard Dressing Room (WP004); sections of these, and others which once



Fig.6 Goose wallpaper, Japanese, c1884

hung in the New Dining Room (WP015) and Orleans Room (WP001) survive in store (Fig.7).²² Another embossed design, featuring gold putti and bunches of grapes on a green ground, was installed in the Music Room (WP012) (Fig.8). This was produced closer to home, manufactured in England by Jeffrey & Co., and bought via a stockist or retailer called Simpson.²³ Rosalind also managed to combine her preference for Morris & Co. and the rich qualities of leather-effect papers, with the use of a red and gold version of Morris's *Sunflower* design in Lady Georgiana's Dressing Room (WP086).²⁴

It is useful to consider the types of rooms being decorated with these distinctive papers. Four of them, the Museum Room, New Dining Room, Orleans Room and Music Room, are part of the state apartments, relatively large rooms well suited to the gilt and textured finish of high-relief embossed papers. Indeed the specific use of a room may have had an influence; for example, the 'sanitary' qualities of embossed papers may have motivated the choice for the New Dining Room.²⁵ Similarly, the paper used in the Orleans Room, an embossed design of birds in gold against a dark red ground, coincided with the transformation of this space into a billiard room; ten years later, around the time that the billiard table was moved elsewhere and the room became a drawing room again, it was redecorated with Morris & Co. green *Acorn* paper.²⁶ The dark, rich tones of the embossed paper were perhaps deemed conducive for playing the game, and may have been thought suitable for what was typically a masculine space. In the Castle Howard Dressing Room, and Lady Georgiana's Dressing Room, by comparison, the papers used were lightly embossed and with a reasonable proportion of gilt, presumably chosen to help make these relatively small, east-facing rooms feel much brighter.

All of the Japanese and embossed papers were installed between 1882 and 1886. Most stood the test of time and remained on the walls for some years. Those that have since disappeared were either destroyed in the fire or subsequently removed as a result of smoke or water damage; only the



Fig.7.1 View of the Museum Room at Castle Howard, 2019



Fig.7.2 Japanese embossed leather-appearence paper in situ in the Museum Room, supplied by Maple & Co.

Orleans Room paper was purposefully replaced. Nonetheless, it is clear that they represent a relatively fleeting decorative preference for Rosalind. Exactly why is not certain; perhaps because by the 1890s Japanese embossed papers were increasingly ubiquitous as they became more affordable.²⁷ However, this seems unlikely given that she continued to use Morris & Co. papers long after they became widely popular.²⁸ It seems more likely that, having used this style of paper in several rooms Rosalind felt that she had exhausted the fashion and knew when to stop.

1960s wallpapers

And now for something completely different. While Rosalind's wallpapers may constitute the core of the collection, there is another small but significant sub-section worthy of mention. These are the papers used by George and Cecilia Howard, most of which date from the 1960s on. The archive for the second half of the 20th century is largely uncatalogued, so further research is required in the future,

but supporting information has been found in sources such as colour photography and the memories of family and staff.

When George Howard, grandson of the 9th Earl and Countess, unexpectedly took on the running of Castle Howard following the Second World War, he was faced with a mammoth task. Not only were parts of the house badly damaged by the fire of 1940, but the areas still inhabitable were sorely in need of repair and modernisation. George and Cecilia lived initially in the Gatehouse (formerly the Inn), but by 1952 they had moved their young family to Castle Howard and made the bold decision to open the house to the public.²⁹ Rooms on the new visitor route were redecorated, taking inspiration from the past but not attempting to recreate historic schemes directly. Given the scale of work required this was all done with limited funds; for example, in the Orleans Room the walls were hung with a paper-backed woven textile (WP073), a cost-effective attempt to imitate the expensive textile hangings of the 18th century.

In private rooms there was less pressure to meet expectations, and decoration could instead focus on the creation of a comfortable family home. Some of the wallpapers installed during this period have since been



Fig.8. Embossed leather-appearence paper in green and gold, Jeffrey & Co., c1882



Fig.9 Bamboo design wallpaper. The two surviving rolls were found in a wrapper annotated 'Coles', suggesting the paper was acquired via Cole & Son

removed, such as the bamboo pattern paper (WP065) installed in a guest bedroom in 1967 (Fig.9). Others survive in situ but with no remnants in store, such as the paper now in Lady Georgiana's Dressing Room (Fig.10).

One of the most memorable papers from this period is still in situ in another private guest bedroom on the upper floor; made by Zuber et Cie, this eye-catching pattern was probably installed sometime in the 1960s (WP068) (Fig.11). The same design, on a green ground, is in the adjacent closet space (WP069). Nicholas Howard, one of George and Cecilia's four sons, recalls that his parents originally intended



Fig.10 Lady Georgiana's Dressing Room, decorated in the 1950s or 1960s with this wallpaper featuring birds and foliage on a pink ground



Fig.11 An eye-catching design of stylised feathers or foliage, similar in style to floral paisley patterns, the bright colours, large-scale design and vertical arrangement are particularly appropriate for the period.³⁰



Fig.12 Watts & Co. *Odyssey* wallpaper, the design inspired by a French 18th century mythological toile fabric design, being installed in 2021 by Hesp & Jones

to decorate this room for their friend Rupert Gunnis, the preeminent historian of British sculpture. A regular guest at Castle Howard, Gunnis would often use his visits to write. After his death in 1965, George and Cecilia still wanted to create a space that would be suitable for guests who were writers, and chose this wallpaper accordingly.³¹ The rationale behind the selection of this particular paper is not clear, especially as it somewhat dominates the room. Nonetheless, this is a fascinating survival from the more recent decorative history of Castle Howard.

Conclusion

Castle Howard has been home to the Howard family for more than 300 years. Each generation had their own priorities and preferences when it came to interior decoration, and as a result the house has been in a constant state of evolution. Wallpaper continues to be used; at the time of writing, a striking paper by Watts & Co. is being installed in a guest bedroom, replacing another that was introduced in the 1990s (Fig.12). Consequently the Castle Howard wallpaper catalogue will continue to expand, as new wallpapers are added to the house and, possibly, as remnants of past papers are revealed during decoration projects.

Eleanor Brooke-Peat

Eleanor Brooke-Peat is Assistant Curator at Castle Howard and completed a Master's degree in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at the University of Leeds in 2009–10. She has a specialist interest in the decorative arts and historic interiors.

- 1 F4/1, 'An inventory of the household furniture antiquities etc belonging to the late Right Honourable Earl of Carlisle at his Lordship's seat or mansion, 1759' (Note: all archival references are to the Castle Howard Archive unless otherwise stated)
- 2 J14/81, 'Private accounts with Gregg and Potts, 1775–1823'. The purchases from Thomas Bromwich in 1778, and Isherwood & Bradley in 1791, were small, one-off payments. Between 1798 and 1814 there were eight payments to Bridges & Davenport, with a total spend of over £212
- 3 For further detail see E. Brooke-Peat, 'Decorating Castle Howard: a survey of wallpaper purchases 1825–1848', *The Wallpaper History Review*, 2020, pp.32–36
- 4 V. Murray, *Castle Howard: Life and Times of a Stately Home*, Viking, 1994, p.198
- 5 J23/105, Accounts 1864–1868 and 1871–1897 (30 vols)
- 6 H2/6/6, 'Furnishing for BWTA', 1905
- 7 For a broad overview of Morris & Co. at Castle Howard see E. Hartley, 'Morris & Co. in a Baroque Setting', *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, 11, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp.5–9. This article laid the groundwork for the development of the catalogue
- 8 C. Ridgway, 'A privileged insider: George Howard and Edward Burne-Jones', *The British Art Journal*, Vol. III, No. 3, pp.4–18; see also B. Waters, 'Painter and Patron: The Palace Green Murals', *Apollo Magazine*, Nov. 1975, pp.338–341, and 'The Cupid and Psyche Frieze by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, at No. 1 Palace Green', *The Studio*, XV (67), October 1898, pp.3–13
- 9 Admiral Edward Howard, 1st Baron Lanerton, was the younger brother of the 7th and 8th Earls of Carlisle. The 8th Earl was incapacitated by mental illness for much of his adult life, and as a result Lanerton took on the running of the estates in his brother's stead
- 10 G6/2, Morris & Co. bills; 20th Dec 1872 for dark blue *Indian*, dark *Daisy*, dark *Fruit*, and blue *Fruit* wallpapers; 13th Dec 1873 for dark blue *Queen Anne*, and *Jasmine*; 1st Oct 1874 for yellow *Diaper*, and light *Daisy*; 10th Dec 1878 for *Indian* (colour not specified)
- 11 J23/105/13, Account Book 1881, p.95; ten designs listed: *Green Apple*, *Blue Venetian*, *Coloured Larkspur*, *Lily*, *Blue Mallow*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Trellis*, *Rose*, *Light and Green Daisy*
- 12 J23/105/16, Account Book 1884, pp.63–64
- 13 J23/105/18, Account Book 1885, p.91; in the same year there are payments to local decorator Carass Topham for 'whitewashing, cleaning and hanging paper in Long Gallery', p.100
- 14 Thankfully, the fact that the paper was hung on battens allowed it to be later removed, which her son Geoffrey promptly did after he inherited the house
- 15 J23/105/27, Account Book 1894, p.66
- 16 J23/105/25, Account Book 1892, p.119
- 17 This may be the same paper in the collection at Temple Newsam, see A. Wells-Cole and B. Walker, *Wallpapers at Temple Newsam 1635 to the present*, Leeds Art Fund, 2018, pp.296–7 (cat. 387)
- 18 J23/105/30, Account Book 1897, p.93. Six designs listed: *Spring Thicket*, *Compton*, *Tom Tit* (in two colourways), *Blackthorn*, and *Woodland Weeds*. Some of these also feature in the 1905 'Furnishing' book, under the list 'Patterns of Morris wallpaper at Castle Hd – Oct 3 1905', again with no indication they had been, or were going to be, used (H2/6/6, p.37)
- 19 A section of this paper is also in the wallpaper collection at Temple Newsam, see Wells-Cole and Walker, p.296 (cat. 386)
- 20 J23/105/16, Account Book 1884 p. 125; see also Wells-Cole and Walker, p.297 (cat. no.388)
- 21 C. Woods et al, 'Proliferation: Late 19th-Century Papers, Markets and Manufacturers', in L. Hoskins (ed.) *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper*, Thames & Hudson, 2nd edition, p.158. See also illustration 217 in the same (pp.158–159), taken from the *Journal of Decorative Art*, April 1884, which features designs by Rottmann, Strome & Co. in a tripartite hang; the design of the central band corresponds with the paper used in the Museum Room and New Dining Room at Castle Howard
- 22 The Castle Howard Dressing Room, Orleans Room and New Dining Room papers were all purchased in 1884 (J23/105/16, pp.125–26); the Museum Room paper, with the same design but different colour as that in the New Dining Room, was bought two years later in 1886 (J23/105/19, p.95)

- 23 J23/105/14, Account Book 1882, p.100; more of this paper was bought in 1885 (J23/105/17, p.90). A sample of this same design with gold on a red ground can be found at the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession number E.9-1945)
- 24 J23/105/14, Account Book 1882, p.96; see also L. Hoskins, *Wallpaper*, Linda Parry (ed.), *William Morris*, Philip Wilson Publishers Limited in associations with The Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996, pp.202–203, 215 & 219 (cat. L.15 & L.22). A section of this paper is also in the wallpaper collection at Temple Newsam, see Wells-Cole and Walker, p.297 (cat.388)
- 25 C. Woods et al, p.158
- 26 J23/105/16, Account Book 1884, p.125; an unspecified paper was purchased for the Orleans Room from Maple & Co., presumed to be the red and gold embossed paper in store (WP001) as sections of this are annotated 'late of the Orleans Room'. J23/105/27, Account Book 1894, p.66; green *Acorn* paper purchased from Morris & Co.
- 27 W. Wailliez, 'Japanese leather paper or *kinkarakawakami*: an overview from the 17th century to the Japonist hangings by Rottmann & Co.', *The Wallpaper History Review*, 2015, pp.60–65 (p.62).
- 28 There is also evidence that Rosalind did not wholly go off this style of paper, as she records 16 papers of interest at Rottmann & Co. in her Furnishing Book of 1905, with comments such as 'very beautiful', 'good colours', 'very fine indeed' against a number; see the 1905 'Furnishing' book (H2/6/6), p.38
- 29 For an overview of George Howard's life and career, see C. Ridgway 'George Howard, Lord Howard of Henderskelfe: A Life in Yorkshire and Beyond', Borthwick Institute, University of York, Borthwick Paper 130 (2019)
- 30 J. Kosuda Warner and L. Hoskins, 'Post-War Promise: Pattern and Technology up to 1970', L. Hoskins (ed.), *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper*, Thames & Hudson, 2nd edition, pp. 206–225 (p. 222)
- 31 This recollection provided in conversation with Nicholas Howard in 2019

On Arthur & Robert's masterpiece *Ovid's Metamorphoses*: a restoration, exhibition and Publication Project by the Swiss National Museum

In 2010, the Swiss National Museum staged an exhibition *Papiers Peints: Poésie des Murs* and published a catalogue in French and in German to reveal its collection of wallpapers to the public.¹ The Museum also organised an important conference which attracted wallpaper specialists from several European countries.² Until then, wallpapers had not been part of the museum's acquisition strategy and had entered the collections randomly. There is relatively little wallpaper connoisseurship in Switzerland, and the exhibition attracted a lot of attention, especially from the various cantonal heritage protection services. This resulted in the Swiss National Museum suddenly becoming a centre of expertise and being offered wallpapers from various parts of the country. Among these gifts, the most prestigious by far is an incredibly well-kept version of *Ovid's Metamorphoses* still on its original walls (Fig.1). Won over by the 2010 exhibition, the Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie du canton de Neuchâtel, which owned the décor at the time, felt that the Swiss National Museum was best placed to include this imposing interior in its collections and to preserve it for posterity.

First mentioned in 1902, the *Metamorphoses* decor is well known to specialists and is a true icon in the history of wallpaper.³ The precision of the draughtsmanship, the quality of the printing, the number of colours and the highly sophisticated installation reveal it to be the work of one of the great Paris factories in the late 18th century. The arrival of the wallpaper at the Swiss National Museum caused a great deal

of excitement: it quickly became clear that this décor, with its 38 square metres of wallpaper, was exceptional and that it deserved a major conservation-restoration operation in order to present it to the public and that it was worthy of the production of a scientific publication. With the help of several colleagues and specialists, the research carried out by the Swiss National Museum since 2011 has shed new light on this amazing wallhanging.

An unexpected location and a colourful owner

One of the many remarkable aspects of this wallpaper is that it was found in a most unexpected place, a farm in a tiny village called La Cibourg in the countryside. How did a décor fit for the Tuileries Palace find its way into a farm in the Jura? What we knew about its provenance at the time was based mainly on three articles and can be summarised as follows: around 1795, probably on the occasion of his wedding to Eléonore Humbert-Droz, a wine merchant by the name of Charles-François Robert had the wallpaper installed in a parlour in his farm La Bise Noire, located in La Cibourg, not far from La Chaux-de-Fonds, on the present-day border between the cantons of Neuchâtel and Bern.⁴ In fact, the Bise Noire, built in around 1760, was probably a country mansion rather than a farmhouse. This thesis is supported by certain characteristics of the gabled façade, such as the symmetrical arrangement, the windbreak walls, the cut-stone base structure, and the door jambs with a base and a capital. The panelled, concave-convex barrel vault adds a Baroque touch (Fig.2).

The décor was located on the first floor of the Bise Noire country mansion. The room was fitted out in around 1760 specially to accommodate the patterned wallpaper that, three decades later, was to be covered over by the *Metamorphoses*. It had two access doors and two fitted cupboards (Fig.3). The reverse of the north interior wall is untreated, suggesting that it was probably mounted directly against the outside wall. The walls of the room are made of