

RUSSELL-COTES

HOUSE • GALLERY • GARDEN

Digital Guide

Welcome to East Cliff Hall. This sumptuous Victorian villa was built for Annie Russell-Cotes by her husband Merton as a home for both the couple and their extensive collections in 1901.

To visit this Victorian treasure trove, follow the corridor past the café and into the historic house...

The Main Hall

When Annie and Merton lived here, they would open their home on the first Wednesday of every month for select guests. The visitors would be given one of Merton's famous private tours, where they would be shown highlights of the eccentric villa's collections.

The perfect backdrop to Merton's entertaining tours, this magnificent space features a mishmash of styles, taking inspiration from Italian courtyards, Japanese aesthetics and much more besides.

In homage to Merton, we've picked out a couple of items of note...

The fountain

The addition of this ornamental mosaic fountain to this space was likely inspired by the aesthetics of the Arab Hall of Frederic, Lord Leighton's house, which Merton visited before building East Cliff Hall.

The stained-glass skylight

Look up to see the impressive skylight depicting the arc of the sun and the twelve signs of the zodiac. The panes you see today are replicas of the originals which were destroyed during the East Cliff bombing of 7 October 1941. This is the same bombing which took down the ceiling of the adjacent Morning Room.

For more information about the paintings in this room, please take a look at the attached paintings list, or ask a member of staff.

The Stairs

This magnificent staircase would have been what first greeted visitors to the museum, as they would have entered the building from the road.

Did you know that East Cliff Hall is full of upmarket off-the-shelf home décor?

If you look up, you can see that the ceiling is framed by a gilded plaster panel showing a reproduction of the Parthenon Frieze. This particular piece was bought from the Tynecastle Company, a company which produced wallpapers and mouldings for fashionable interiors of the day. Unfortunately, the decorators installed the panel incorrectly, so the sacrificial procession is walking away from the seated deities.

The Balcony

Before building the galleries, this was Annie and Merton's main location for displaying paintings, and the display was always changing to highlight their most recent acquisitions.

A couple of highlights include:

Pereat, 1895

Orazio Andreoni

Two female spectators in a Roman gladiatorial area look down to the main hall below...

Good News and Bad News, 1876

John Bagnold Burgess (1830-1897)

Oil on canvas

The contrasting fortunes of two young Portuguese girls in a post office are shown in this painting. Both have received letters – the lady on the left received good news; the seated lady's correspondence contained bad news. Clues to the contents of the letters are hidden in the painting. A black edged envelope is at the feet of the seated lady. In the background, an anxious group scrutinises a list of printed names, as the post office clerk waits nervously to hand out further letters.

For more information about the paintings here, please take a look at the attached paintings list, or ask a member of staff.

The Irving Room

This micro-museum was created by Merton as a tribute to the famous Victorian actor Sir Henry Irving after his death in 1905. Merton claimed Irving was a close friend of his, and after his death, gathered all memorabilia that he could to create this tribute to the actor.

The collection ranges from the human skull which Irving used in his productions of Hamlet to Irving's own death mask.

The Study

The Study is plainly a masculine domain, with dark wood and rich colouring. Although referred to as the Study, this is not actually where

Merton liked to work as the Dining Room was his preference for paperwork.

Items of note in this room include:

Merton's coat of arms and other motifs were incorporated into the design of this room. Take a look above the door and around the fireplace to spot these details.

The Dawn of Love, 1828

William Etty (1787 – 1849)

Oil on canvas on panel

The painting was originally titled '*Venus now wakes and wak'ns Love*', when it was exhibited at the British Institution in 1828. The lines are from Milton's Comus:

*'Night hath better sweets to prove,
Venus now wakes, and wak'ns Love.
Come let us our rights begin,
'Tis onely day-light that makes sin
Which these dun shades report.
Hail goddess of Nocturnal sport'*

The sensual subject of this and many other subjects that Etty painted scandalised many Victorians. The outrage that this work caused when it was exhibited in Glasgow in 1899 is gleefully recorded by Merton in his autobiography: '*The above picture, however, created quite a furore when exhibited in the Glasgow Corporation Gallery....*'

The Moorish Alcove

The decoration of this alcove was inspired by Annie and Merton's visit to the Moorish Palace of Alhambra, Granada, Spain, in 1910.

This alcove features *trompe l'oeil* decoration. *Trompe l'oeil*, meaning 'trick of the eye' is a technique which creates the illusion of three

dimensions through decorating a two-dimensional surface. The yellow jug is a good example of this technique.

Il Moro Di Venzia, Othello, 1872

Pietro Calvi (1833-1884)

This incredible sculpture is one of the earliest examples where marble and bronze have been combined. It is modelled on Ira Aldridge (1807-1867), the first African-American actor in Europe to play Othello.

The Boudoir

As Annie's private space, this room was the space where she would relax, write letters and read. Contrasting with the masculine aesthetics of the Study next door, the Boudoir's pink walls and delicate decorations demark it as a clearly feminine space.

Annie was particularly interested in flora and fauna as highlighted by the beautiful butterfly fire screen. Taxidermy items were particularly popular during Victorian times making items like this one common features in fashionable homes.

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The Yellow Room

This light and airy room was originally Annie's bedroom. Inspired by her passion for natural history, the coving decoration features delicate depictions of British flora and fauna.

As this was a private space, we have no photographic information of how this room would have been displayed when Annie slept here. We do, however, have photographs of Annie and Merton's private rooms

in the Royal Bath Hotel, and these are providing our inspiration for the reimagining of this room.

Crammed with souvenirs from their travels, Annie and Merton's rooms in the hotel were a cacophony of curios, and we are in the midst of replicating their display here, focusing on the places which were the most important to Annie. Come back in September to see the new displays.

The Red Room

This was originally designed as Merton's bedroom with Annie's the adjoining Yellow Room. As was typical with older Victorian couples, Annie and Merton slept in different rooms. Designed with contrasting colour schemes, the rich colouring along with the alluring ladies depicted on the ceiling highlight this as a masculine domain.

This room is currently being re-displayed. Come back in September to discover more about this fascinating entrepreneur's life, what made him tick and who inspired him along the way.

The Mikado's Room

Created by Merton to fulfil the wishes of his wife after she passed away, this room features highlights of our world-renowned Japanese collection, newly presented in a recent re-display of the collection.

Look out for...

The functional and beautiful miniature sculptures called *netsuke* (toggles)

The curious items made specifically for western tourists, such as the knife and fork set

The dazzling Silver Elephant Koro (incense burner)

The Russell-Cotes' A-Z

Here you can explore the quirks of the Russell-Cotes' collection in just 26 objects.

The Print Room

This room, which was originally where Merton's secretary slept, now features changing displays.

The current display is *Sea, Land, Air and Home: Art of the Second World War*.

The Ladies' Loo

Ladies, don't forget to powder your nose in our fabulous toilette...

This toilet, originally for Annie and Merton's guests, features hand-stencilled rose and pinecone motifs. The rose symbolises Merton's English heritage and the pinecone alludes to Bournemouth's famous pine trees.

The Art Galleries

In 1916 Annie commissioned an art gallery extension. This was both to create more space for the couple's ever-growing collection and to prepare for their home becoming a public museum. The work was incredibly slow as there were severe labour shortages due to the First World War.

Galleries I-III were officially opened by Princess Beatrice in 1919. Original plans show that the intention was for the fourth gallery to feature an observatory and visitor entrance. Annie's ill health, along with labour shortages and other issues however meant that this was

never realised. It instead was delivered in a simpler form, finished in 1926.

A couple of paintings of note include:

Midsummer, 1887

Albert Moore (1841-1893)

Oil on canvas

The luxurious mood of *Midsummer* is achieved by the bright colours and exotic items included in the painting. Albert Moore never signed his works. Instead he preferred to use a Greek-style motif of palm leaves, known as an anthemion. This symbol is on the case, on the left of the painting.

Christmas Morning 1866, 1898

John Brett (1831-1902)

Oil on canvas

The shipwreck featured is the sinking of the steamship, 'London.' Despite the painting's title, this tragedy occurred on 11 January 1866. The boat was sailing to Australia but got into difficulty shortly after leaving Plymouth Harbour. Just 16 crew members and 3 passengers survived. The spectacular sunrise featured in the painting was witnessed by John Brett off the Isle of Anglesey, on 25 December 1866.

For more information about the paintings in this room, please take a look at the attached paintings list, or ask a member of staff.

Galleries III and IV

Galleries III and IV host temporary exhibitions. The current exhibition *Beyond the Brotherhood: The Pre-Raphaelite Legacy* runs until 27 September 2020. Each painting and artwork on display in these galleries has its own exhibition label and is therefore not featured in

the digital guide. Please speak to the room steward if you require large print labels.

The Drawing Room

This sumptuous display of European ceramics and furniture is truly fit for a royal...

The beautiful rosewood display cabinet which you can see originally belonged to Empress Eugénie of France (1826-1920), wife of Napoléon III (1808-1873) and was bought by Merton at auction. When the Empress visited Bournemouth, staying at the Royal Bath Hotel, she was shocked to see the cabinet again. She sent Merton a diamond ring, implying this as a gift in exchange for the return of her cabinet. Merton, however, chose to ignore the hint, keeping the ring and the cabinet!

Did you know...

Purchased on a whim from a smoke-damaged Florentine palazzo, the doors became the inspiration for the design scheme of the room, instantly quashing the previous approach and forcing the designers to start again from scratch.

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The Morning Room

Originally used by Annie and Merton for breakfast and relaxation, this space now showcases highlights of the museum's 20th century works. In the spirit of the museum's founders, we continue to collect works of art and many of these later additions have become true stars of the collection.

The ceiling itself is a 20th century work, created by Anna Zinkeisen. She entered a competition in 1948 to create a new mural to replace the previous one which had been near destroyed by a German parachute mine in 1941. Zinkeisen was well known for her murals on the liner R.M.S. Queen Mary and for her poster designs for London Transport.

Spray, 1940
Harold Williamson

This popular painting, evocative of bright summer days, was bought for the museum's collection by Norman Silvester (curator from 1932-1957). He was particularly interested in the work because of the local collection to Williamson, Painting Master at Bournemouth College of Art.

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The Dining Room

The perfect place for entertaining family and friends, East Cliff Hall's dining room was a fashionable space with all the Victorian mod-cons.

Setting the atmosphere with dark red wallpaper and mahogany furnishings typical of the popular Scottish Baronial style, the room is framed by an impressive gilded peacock and pomegranate mural.

The intimate dinners hosted here would have been waited on by staff who prepared food in the villa's kitchen (now the café). When the next course was required, Merton would request it at the touch of a button via a discreet floor-mounted bell push.

A couple of dinner party conversation starters...

Did you know that Merton was a big fan of Napoléon Bonaparte? Both the wine cooler and the octagonal table in this room were used by him.

Victorians enjoyed games after dinner, including some which we still play today. Charades, anyone?

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The Conservatory

This part of the building was not in the original plans but was added in 1899. The excellent addition allowed Annie and Merton to enjoy the incomparable views of Poole Bay. Originally this room would have been filled with plants and sculptures.

We hope you had a lovely time visiting Annie and Merton's fabulous home and we hope to see you again soon!