THE ADMIRAL’S HOUSE – RE-STAGING POWER

Seaton Delaval Hall, Northumberland. Built for Admiral George Delaval in 1720.

Darkroom reprint of my photo of 2012.

A story of land, inheritance, entrepreneurial opportunity, the roots of local power in global interconnections – and quirky radical taste transformed into an archetype of architectural style.

[Link] to a previous post.

The Delaval family had owned this landed estate since receiving it as gift from William of Normandy, who took ownership of the kingdom by right of conquest in 1066. The older Delaval estate drew income from agriculture, coal and salt production, supported by the little harbor down the road at Seaton Sluice. Sir Ralph Delaval's seventeenth-century harbour improvements helped these businesses. By the early eighteenth century, however, the estate-owning branch was in financial trouble, allowing George, from another branch, to buy it from his impoverished kinsman, Sir John Delaval, in 1717.

George Delaval was a significant figure in the growing imperial aspirations of Britain in the early eighteenth century.

With an inheritance of £100 (about £3.5million equivalent in GDP today) George had entered the navy through family patronage, and accumulated more wealth through naval and diplomatic service. That money enabled the estate purchase and he commissioned Sir John Vanbrugh, playwright, theatre impresario, architect, radical Whig member of the Kit-Cat Club, to rebuild the house. Seaton Delaval Hall is now considered a paradigm of Vanbrugh's English baroque, one of the great country homes of England – precious heritage.

George Delaval's connection to expanding British power was operational as well as financial. He served as envoy to Morocco and Portugal, and commanded a squadron under George Byng during the Mediterranean campaign culminating at Cape Passaro in 1718. He earned a great deal from prize money for captured ships.

George bought South Sea Company stock in 1711. This was a slave-trading enterprise. The company combined government-debt financing with overseas commerce, including the *asiento*: the right, confirmed in the Utrecht settlement (1713-15), to supply enslaved Africans to Spanish America. Its slave trading supported by the Royal African Company and Royal Navy.