



**Art history: C17th to C19th**

*Kedleston Hall*

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

Kedleston Hall is a very useful example of how Robert Adam is moving architectural design on at this period.

**PENNY BOREHAM:**

Dr Susie West of the Open University.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

He's a young man, he's only just come back from Italy where he was seeing the surviving classical structures first hand so he was pretty excited and stimulated by this contact, and this was one of his first commissions when he returned.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

Kedleston Hall confronts us with this monumental centrepiece, the four columns topped by statues that really blare out, they're almost like trumpets announcing their presence on the front of what without them would be, you know, a relatively plain rectangular design.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

I identified this as Robert Adam's particular contribution to design practice at the time, the 1760's. It's taking an established pattern of laying out the front of a house on this scale and adding a twist. It's lateral thinking about classical sources.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

The classic elements here are the reworking of the Arch of Constantine, one of the great triumphal arches built in the Roman imperial city, and Robert Adam is placing something that used to run across a roadway on the front of a house.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

So he's thinking about classical forms and he's finding new uses for them. We might say this is appropriation. It's taking something over and reworking it. I think it works incredibly well here.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

And behind it we have the tantalising glimpse of the lead-covered dome, and that is Robert Adam's second appropriation. This is a historical reference to another great monumental piece of Ancient Roman architecture, the Temple of the Pantheon, the round temple in Rome for all the gods.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

So it's an extraordinary combination, a round temple, a rectangular arch, massaged into the body of an otherwise plain, you know, mid-18th century Palladian house. Luckily, Robert Adam's working drawings, and some of his very finished drawings that he would show to his client, have survived from the 1760's so we can compare stages of design, perhaps think about the influence of the client's wishes, if changes can be identified between something that was planned and the way something turned out.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

An example of this would be the survival of all the drawings for the library on this side of the house, and looking at the drawings you can see that Robert Adam worked as an architect, of course, to create the structure, the walls and the ceiling, but he also designed the bookcases for storing the books. He designed the chimneypiece and he suggested how the pictures should be hung, so he provided the design for a total environment, and the use of an archive

is absolutely essential in architectural history. So although I love going out and looking at buildings, I also need to track down how they were designed, what the drawings are, are there letters exchanged between patron and client, diaries, all of these are incredibly useful sources for tracking down what people were thinking about in the design process.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

But increasingly there are also social questions in architectural history, and one question is how is this house intended to be used, what is the relationship between the grand rooms on the piano nobile, the first floor, and obviously smaller, lower-height rooms in both the ground floor basement level and the top floor. What I really want to do then is go through one of these doors and have a wander round, and start investigating what's behind this façade.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

This house would have been used only in particular months of the year. At other times the owners could be away in London, where the Court was, or travelling, or at any one of other properties around the country. So this house is in some senses somebody's home, but it's not their only home, and it's definitely a showcase.

**DR SUSIE WEST:**

Of course now it's used as a heritage house, it's a visitor attraction. It is preserved for its art historical qualities, but it's essentially there to be enjoyed by a wide range of visitors now. Well these are the wider social questions, but this is where a first encounter with a façade can start to lead us.