

All That Glistens...

The huge job of re-gilding some of the State rooms in the Hall became a family affair when Lord Coke asked his brother, Rupert, to undertake the work. Here, Rupert explains how he got involved and how the work is progressing



Rupert Coke skewing off the excess gold leaf from a skirting board

I became interested in gilding and restoration two years ago. My girlfriend Karen Pecenkus is a gilder and conservator; through her I became interested in this specialised skill. Two years ago I took a water and oil gilding course at West Dean College in Sussex and at the same time I picked up invaluable tips from her. She has taught me a great deal.

Since successfully completing my courses I have worked on a freelance basis in a beautiful Pugin church, St Thomas' of Canterbury in Fulham,



Applying "size" to the skirting board so that the gold leaf will stick

London. I was part of a team of restorers polishing the beams to seal the wood and putting "size" on, which is a sticky substance which allows the gold leaf to stick to the surface being gilded.

After this I worked for the same company on an apartment in Mayfair where Winston Churchill had once lived. We were applying aluminium leaf to the cornices, columns, pilasters, skirting boards and dado rails. The aluminium leaf created a modern look to simulate silver.

I have undertaken many other interesting jobs including preparing and water gilding eight newly carved wooden dolphins in the style of William Kent which were then attached to console tables.

However my biggest challenge was when my brother Tom asked if I'd be interested in re-gilding some of the state rooms at Holkham – I accepted with speed! The last three months have been fascinating, very therapeutic and I have found the family motto *Prudens Qui Patiens* (Wise is he who is patient) particularly pertinent.

I started off in the Green State Bedroom and then moved onto the dressing rooms. The amount of gilding at Holkham is extensive and

includes dado rails, skirting boards, egg and dart mouldings on the window shutters, door cases and architraves. The work in these historic rooms is very detailed and intricate. Eight of the flower mouldings themselves needed restoration before the gold leaf could be applied.

Since I have been working on these rooms I have made an interesting discovery – traces of the original candle wax which had dripped onto the mouldings from the 18th or 19th century.

It has been a great pleasure having the opportunity to work at Holkham in such beautiful surroundings. I found it very satisfying to be so personally involved and I think I am the first family member to actually physically work on the structure of the house. It is wonderful to see these rooms back to their former glory as they had not been re-gilded since the 18th century.

Rupert Coke • Gilder



Using a soft brush, the gold leaf is applied to the ready-sized pattern on the skirting board