

Aston Hall

The Victorian Connection

Background information

In early Victorian times James Watt Junior lived in Aston Hall. He was the son of the famous engineer.

James Watt Jnr was interested in the house because it was already 250 years old by that time. The Victorian times may have been a period of lots of new inventions and great progress, but there was great interest in history too.

Many rich Victorians had copies of historic designs used in the new houses they had built, like Joseph Chamberlain did at Highbury later in the nineteenth century. James Watt Jnr was very proud to live in a genuine old house.

He employed a man called Richard Bridgens to make furniture to match the designs in the house. They were some of the earliest examples of what was called 'gothic revival'.

James Watt lived in Aston Hall from 1819 until his death in 1848. In 1835 he entertained Victoria when she was a princess. She came to dine with him when she and her mother, the Duchess of Kent, were on one of their tours of the country.

After James Watt's death the future of the house was very uncertain. Money was raised by the Aston Hall and Park Company to save Aston Hall and open it as a museum. Queen Victoria was invited to officially open the house to the public in 1858. She and Prince Albert came up from London by steam train and travelled to by means of horse and carriage. A balcony was created on the west side of the house for the Queen to step on to and declare the house open to be 'a boon and comfort' to her people.