

GENERAL INFORMATION

Web: www.islandhall.com Email: enquire@islandhall.com

We are a small family run and owned home and pride ourselves on a bespoke service and in providing an experience which is not your typical 'country house experience'. Yours will be the only group visiting the house on the day and all tours are given by a member of the family, tours last 1 – 1 ½ hrs. A Group Visit lasts 2 ½ - 3 hrs in total. A visit lasting more than 3hrs is subject to a surcharge or can be classed as a private event, please contact us for further pricing on Venue Hire.

We do not have a cafeteria or restaurant, so each meal is specifically catered for and served (unusually) within the house itself – this is reflected in our pricing.

HISTORY OF THE AREA

Godmanchester was, in Roman times, a major settlement at an important crossroads and became one of England's earliest boroughs when it was awarded its charter in 1212.

Once the town was referred to, in the 17th Century, as a "very great county Towne". Yet despite that, Godmanchester has always had more the character of a village enhanced by the extensive commons which border it, commons belonging to local freemen, providing excellent recreational areas. Modern housing has now been built beyond the commons but the town centre is still village-like.

It is a close neighbour of Huntingdon and the towns are separated by attractive water meadows criss-crossed with footpaths and rivulets from the Great Ouse. A beautiful 13th century road bridge across the Ouse links the two towns.

Island Hall is in Post Street, in the centre of the town, set on the banks of the river Great Ouse, overlooking the ornamental island from which it takes its name. There is approximately 1.5 acres of formal garden with a large river frontage, and a 2 acre ornamental island in the river, linked to the mainland by a Chinese Bridge.

Beyond is Portholme, reputedly the largest water meadow in Britain and an area of 'Best Landscape' and a triple S.S.I

THE HOUSE

Island Hall is an elegant riverside mansion built in the late 1740s. It is built of red brick with stone dressings to windows and doors, to a neat, classical design, the central three-storey portion standing under a classical triangular pediment.

The frontage to the road is exactly matched by the garden front. Both side wings are two storeys. The central porches on both sides have Tuscan columns and stone surrounds, and the windows on the first floor have distinctive, Baroque stone surrounds.

The interior of Island Hall has some very fine elements, a spacious stone-flagged entrance hall, with a screen of Doric columns, and an exceptionally handsome oak staircase with a carved acanthus leaf scroll detail and turned and twisted balusters. The drawing room and dining room also have exceptionally handsome carved wood panelling original to the building of the house.

It is, in feel, very much in the spirit of an early Georgian country house, but is in fact built within the small town of Godmanchester. The house was built for John Jackson Esq, Receiver-General for Huntingdon, and bought by Jacob Julian Baumgartner in 1804, a merchant of Huguenot Swiss extraction.

His wife, Tryce Parrat, had inherited land in Godmanchester from her uncle, Richard Tryce. She inherited other properties in Cambridgeshire from her grandfather, the Revd. Joscelyn Percy, a descendant of Thomas Percy of Gunpowder Plot fame. Tryce and Jacob Julian had married in 1774, and spent most summers visiting their farms in the locality.

The Baumgartners also married into other local families including the Knights of Milton Hall near Cambridge, the house designed by William Wilkinson Snr., and landscaped by Repton, a close family friend. John Jacob's son John Thomas, a doctor, and his wife also occupied Milton as their principal residence from time to time in the early 19th century, before it was sold in the 1850s.

John's brother Robert lived at Island Hall, but he died after an unfortunate prescription which included arsenic, given to him in 1810 by Dr Robert Darwin, father of the famous Charles. Poor Robert wrote to his brother saying "I think the remedy a very odd one", and was dead four weeks later.

Island Hall later passed in 1874 to John's second son, General Robert Baumgartner, and, as the property was divided between John's surviving 10 children, the house became separated from the landed property. The Baumgartner family lived here for six generations.

They changed their name to Percy during the First World War, as they were heirs general to the distinguished Cambridgeshire family of Percy (among members of the family who changed their name then was General Sir Jocelyn Percy who played such a remarkable role in Albania in the 1920s in the service of King Zog).

A House Beloved of Octavia Hill

During the 19th century, Island Hall was twice visited by Octavia Hill (later famous for her role in founding the National Trust) who wrote in a letter to her sister: "This is the loveliest, dearest old house, I never was in such a one. " She also saw the house as a reminder of "of what that deep attachment is to an inherited spot of old earth, rich with memories of days long ago."

Restoration

Given over to the WAAF and RAF during the war, converted to flats after the war, and in 1977 badly damaged by fire, it was initially restored by the Herrtage family, with the help of a Historic Buildings Council repairs grant and was then bought by Christopher Vane Percy, a direct descendant of Jacob Julian Baumgartner, in 1983, as home for himself, his late wife, Lady Linda, and their three children, Maximilian, Grace and Tryce. It is furnished and decorated as a family home, and includes portraits and heirlooms, including a portrait of a Percy relation, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon.

The Bridge and Gardens

The gardens are enclosed with 18th century brick walls and mature trees, and are connected by a Chinese-style bridge to the island in the River Great Ouse from which the house takes its name. The Chinese bridge is a replica of the original 18th century bridge, long lost, but happily recorded in old photographs. Rebuilt in 1988, the bridge's restoration received the 1989 Environmental trophy from the Rotary Club of Huntingdon, and the Cambridge Association of Architects Craftsmanship Award in the same year. The restoration of the 18th century cupola to the mews house, in 1995, also received a Conservation and Design Award from the District Council.

Island Hall is in Post Street, in the centre of the town, set on the banks of the river Great Ouse, overlooking the ornamental island from which it takes its name. Beyond is Portholme, reputedly the largest water meadow in Britain and an area of outstanding natural beauty, which is also of special interest.

VISITING TIMES

Groups may visit, by prior appointment between the hours of 9am and 5pm for daytime visits and 3.30pm – 7.30pm for summer evening visits We are also offer special candlelit and festive candlelit evening tours in November and December for numbers under 20 only. The tour of the house is given by a member of the family and lasts between 1- 1 ½ hours (see booking form for details). We can offer tea & biscuits, full teas light lunches or three course meals to visitors. Please see booking form for more information. Your entire visit should last between 2– 3 hrs depending on your refreshment choice.

I am sure you will appreciate we are unable to accommodate children under 13 years old in the house during daytime and for evening tours.

Ladies are kindly asked not to wear stiletto heels during their visit. Please inform us of guests with special access requirements or disabilities so that we can assess the practicalities.

PARKING FACILITIES

Parking for Cars:

Please use:

Mill Yard free public car park, Post Street, Godmanchester (PE29 2AQ for your sat nav purposes) which is Adjacent Island Hall itself.

Parking for Coaches:

Coaches are welcome to drop off passengers in front of the house.

The coach driver should use:

18, Post Street, Godmanchester, for your sat nav purposes.

- There is a set down point on the main road outside the house gates. Please ask your coach driver to respect our neighbours by not parking in front of their houses.
- The coach must then move to the layover bays at Huntingdon Bus Station free of charge offered on a first come first serve basis. Postcode: PE29 3PR. Image to share with your driver is attached.

PAYMENT

Entrance to house & tour (weekdays only):

GROUPS OF LESS THAN 20 GUESTS will be charged a flat rate of £250.00

GROUPS OF 21 or more will be charged £12.50 per person

GROUPS OF 40 or more will be charged £12.00 per person

A 20 person minimum charge for refreshments is applicable to groups below 20 members, where refreshments are required.

We only accept full payment two weeks before the visit. (Cheques should be made payable to Island Hall LTD, or via bank transfer to Natwest Account Number: 33992290 Sort Code: 56-00-31)

IN THE EVENT OF A CANCELLATION, WE REQUIRE A WRITTEN NOTIFICATION A MINIMUM OF TWO WEEKS IN ADVANCE - DEPOSITS ARE NON REFUNDABLE with less than 6 weeks notice

There is a 10% surcharge if payment is not received a minimum of 1 week before the day.

Bookings made by COMMERCIAL TOUR OPERATORS require a 60% deposit to confirm the booking.

BOOKINGS FORM

Both a completed Booking Request Form and Deposit for £250.00 are required to secure any booking. Please make your balance payment two weeks in advance of your chosen date. Exact numbers and any dietary requirements must also be finalised and confirmed by this time via the Booking Confirmation Form.

Confirmation of numbers stated on the booking form is **essential at least two weeks** prior to the visit where any refreshments have been requested. If prior notice is not given, you will be charged for the number that was stated on the booking form. Please allow 6 weeks for cancellation of a visit in writing, to avoid losing your deposit

Groups between 40-48 can be accommodated. For ease of management if you should wish to bring a larger party we normally split the group into two. Groups of less than 20 should book through www.invitationtoview.co.uk

REFRESHMENTS

Teas:

- Tea/Coffee & Biscuits @ £5.00 per head
- Tea/coffee @ £4.50 per head.
- Afternoon Tea: Tea, fresh sandwiches & a slice of cake @ £15.50 per head - Summer Season cake is Victoria Sponge, Winter Season Cake is Rich Ginger Cake, sandwiches fillings are egg & cress, cucumber, ham, chicken salad, tuna.
- Full Afternoon Tea: Tea, fresh sandwiches, a slice of cake & a miniature scone with jam & clotted cream @ £17.50 per head – Seasonal cake and sandwich fillings as above.

Lunches:

- ‘Quiche Lunch’ – Quiche (vegetarian/non) with seasonal vegetables @ £22.50 per head. (48 guest maximum)
- ‘Pie Lunch’ – Chicken & Ham, Steak Stilton & Mushroom, Mushroom Leek & Stilton pies with seasonal vegetables @ £22.50 per head. (48 guest maximum)
- ‘Salmon Lunch’ – Piece of Salmon with seasonal vegetables @ £26.50 per head. (30 guest maximum)

Pudding:

- Lemon Tart £5.20
- Chocolate tart, Fruit Crumble or Seasonal Fruit with Ice Cream @ £5.20 per head.
- Post meal Tea/coffee @ £3.50 per head.

Drinks:

We can serve filtered water or elderflower, which is included in the lunch price, if you wish to supply your own wine there is an additional charge of £3.50 per ahead to cover costs for serving and glasses etc.

Gluten or Dairy Free provision available please ask.

Other meals (lunches and 3 course meals etc) can be priced on request. Gluten Free Cake is usually Lemon Drizzle.

THE TOUR

We are often asked how long the tour of the house and the talk will take, and appreciate that some groups have a limited time, as they may be visiting more than one place. The usual time taken is 2-2 ½ hours from arrival to departure, for a visit including a tour and refreshments.

DISABLED ACCESS

The majority of our groups are within this age group, of 55 plus, a group of mixed mobility is ok, but immobility is not ideal.

The coach drops off directly outside the house, the walk to the door is approximately 20meters walk, but if walking from the coach to the house is potentially difficult, then the tour is probably too much for these group members. We find it hard to accommodate immobile tour guests because they do not get the most out of the experience and are slightly side-lined.

Essentially wheelchair access is possible, but not optimal. The Tour is usually given party on the move in the garden and continued within the house on both ground and first floors. The garden & ground floor of the house are accessible, the garden can be accessed via our courtyard and side entrance and we have a mobile disabled access ramp for use to the rear of the property (to sit over the three steps into the house from the garden). Though there is gravel as well as grass so the amount of garden which can be enjoyed depends on the type of wheelchair. Our Ladies loo (which is on the ground floor) has plenty of space and a grab rail.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact us during office hours: 01480 459676

**It would be appreciated, please, if visitors would try not to arrive either too late, or too early!
If you arrive late for your evening tour, then you will be unable to complete the full visit.**