

## Government Art Collection - evening visit 19 June 2012

The Government Art Collection supplies works of art, usually in the form of paintings and prints, to decorate Government offices around the world and in the UK to help promote Britishness. The artists have to be British or depict British scenes here or abroad, e.g. Charles II and his wife in Holland before the restoration. The choice of painting for embassies must be carefully selected so as not to offend local feelings or religion.

The collection was set up in the reign of George V and it initially bought paintings from country house sales. Today, it sponsors artists as money becomes available. The collection is about 14000 works of art, most of which are on loan. About a third is in store here and selections are sent on tour, e.g. to the Whitechapel Gallery. Currently there are 4 groups in London and these will be combined for an exhibition in Birmingham and then in Chester. When a new minister is installed he/she often does not like the predecessor's choice and so chooses new ones.

Andrew Parratt gave us a potted history of the collection and showed some of the restoration work being carried out on works that have been returned. The painting and frame must be robust enough for the conditions abroad. We saw a piece of one frame that had had wood eating beetles through it – woodworm and death-watch beetles are small compared with some; one hole was one inch across. One recently returned frame had been taken to pieces and sealed ready for shipping to insect exterminators such as Rentokil. There is a Jubilee display of royal portraits on the office floor of the building. Of the modern paintings in the loan store, we saw a 1946 Lowry, the "Daisy Nook", and Grayson Perry's "Print for a Politician". This visit was very popular and a repeat visit has been planned for 2013 for those who could not get on this one. Most of us had dinner together before departing.



**Anne of Denmark (1574–1619)**

Queen of King James I and VI c.1600

Painter unknown, British

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**Tilly Kettle (1734/5–1786)**

**Portrait of a Lady with a Dog c.1765**

The lady is probably a member of the Wombwell family. Sir George Wombwell was chairman of the East India Company and the lady is wearing eastern style clothing. The painting belonged to his family.

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