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The Friends of Osterley Park

• NEWSLETTER •

Issue 3

April/May 1991

Profile

The primary role of the Friends of Osterley Park is to support the National Trust's staff at the property in the promotion, management and maintenance of the house and grounds. Our quarterly newsletters aim not only to keep you abreast of developments at Osterley Park but also to introduce you to some of the people closely connected with our activities.

Following the profile on Barry Williams, the National Trust's Administrator at Osterley, and his wife Christine, in our last issue - we continue the series with a brief introduction to Mrs Sheila Chapman who became our first chairman last year.

Sheila's interests and past experience are particularly valuable to The Friends. A strong and lively interest in the arts and our cultural tradition has led to her involvement in helping young people to become more aware of their heritage. She is a strong supporter of NADFAS (The National Association of Decorative & Fine Arts Societies) and was their national chairman from 1982-84. She is a past chairman of the 'Young NADFAS' Groups.

Through her work with these groups Sheila, a Life Member of the National Trust, was asked by NADFAS to be their first nominated member of the National Trust Council. From 1986-89 she was an elected member in her own right.

Sheila has also been a member of the National Trust Panel for Youth, and in 1984 founded the Trust's Thames & Chilterns Education Group, of which she remained chairman until 1989.

Married, with two grown-up sons, one of whom is marketing & publicity manager of the Royal Court Theatre in London, Sheila was born in Malawi and educated in South Africa. Her mother was at one time a member of Malawi's (then Nyasaland's) Legislative Council and her family continues to farm there.

Sheila and her husband came to England in 1963, ostensibly for a one year visit. They are still here! alive and well and living in Gerrards Cross.

Sheila continues to be active not only for the National Trust but also for the NADFAS Church Recorders, the National Council of Women and the Slough Post Office Users' Committee!

And as if she wasn't busy enough, Sheila accepted an invitation to become chairman of the fledgling Friends of Osterley Park at the end of last year.

You may be surprised to know that she still has enough time to spare for reading, writing, gardening and visiting country houses, gardens, museums and galleries - and going to the theatre!

This is an exciting but demanding time for the Friends of Osterley Park. With the hand-over of the property from the V&A to the National Trust the Administrator and his team need as much support from volunteers as they can get. Sheila's experience of working with the Trust over the years is certainly a great help in steering us through these early days.



HELP!!!

Over 90 of you are doing a first class job as volunteer room stewards, recruiters, litter pickers and cleaners. But this is only a small proportion, just 30 per cent, of the total number of Friends.

We are still in urgent need of more volunteer room stewards. We are 50 short of our ideal establishment and unless additional volunteers can be recruited quickly we shall be unable to continue opening all our rooms to the public.

We hope that you, as Friends of Osterley, can help. A form is enclosed with this newsletter. Please complete it and return it to me as soon as possible. Training will be arranged.

Barry Williams
Administrator





A Temple of Flora



This is how John Hardy described Osterley Park House, pointing out that although it is a superb example of Robert Adams' grand, neo-classical style, it was also dedicated to pleasure, a place where the Child family and its guests could forget the worries of city life and revel in the delights of the country.

Its household gods were Ceres, Goddess of Plenty, whose statue stands in the entrance hall, Bacchus, God of Wine, whose emblems dominate the decoration of the Eating Room and Vestumnus, God of Spring, who woos Pamaona, Goddess of Fruit, Trees and Orchards, on one of Boucher's tapestries in the small Drawing Room.

The theme of flowers and fruit and venture was echoed outside. Together the Orangery, the Garden House, the Walled Gardens and the Pleasure Grounds produced a luxuriant flow of plants and flowers to decorate the rooms.

In 1794 an inventory was made of the store, greenhouse and hardy plants which included, as well as many others, specimens of camellia, fuchsia, daphne, jasmine, oleander, hydrangea, gardenia, mimosa, hibiscus, rhododendron, as well as oranges and roses.

But the taste of the eighteenth century was not all for the grand and exotic. We must remember



that this was long before the immense towering arrangements that are associated strongly with the name of Constance Spry, came into fashion. At Osterley, wild flowers would have been mixed with cultivated ones, bedrooms might well have been decorated with wild flowers alone or a single flower – an anemone, a rose, a lily – placed by itself in a glass for special admiration.

Containers were of particular importance. Small, square containers and flower bricks were made in Sèvres, Worcester, Strasbourg and Chelsea porcelain, some with plain backs to be placed against walls, others decorated for reflection by mirrors. Pot plants, particularly auriculas, hyacinths, anemones, campanulas and geraniums were grown for display on specially made tables or placed on a ladder of shelves known as a "theatre".

Scent was an attribute much to be valued: Tuberoses, a bulb that can be flowered at any time of the year, have a powerful, penetrating scent, too strong for some tastes, but oranges and lemons, which flower in spring and autumn, are exotic without excess. All the roses they cultivated had a delicious perfume.

Flowers would have been set on chimney pieces, on tables, stands

and between groups of chairs or in huge Chinese pots to brighten empty fireplaces. Freshness, variety and scent were the qualities most desired.

Without flowers, without company, a neo-classical house can be sad. So what do we propose to do? Fill it with flowers. That is easier said than done. The garden staff is already overstretched and flowers bought in the market are expensive. But we shall try. We need also to acquire the right sort of vases and containers. Can you help? There are great opportunities for sponsorship and assistance. Some of you may already grow old-fashioned varieties of plants, such as pinks, carnations, stocks and sweet-peas and we welcome gifts of those and other plants. Others may wish to help with arranging and maintaining the flowers; and somewhere, surely, there must be a sponsor who would help us to turn Osterley Park House back into a Temple of Delight, a Temple of Flora, that would astonish all who saw it.

Anyone wishing to help should contact Christine Williams at Osterley: telephone 081-560 3918.

We are extremely grateful to Ted Fawcett for this fascinating insight into the flowers of Osterley.



NEWS ROUND UP

CUSTODIAN APPOINTED

Jim Rumsey has now joined the National Trust's team at Osterley. Formerly Custodian of the National Trust's Claydon House, Jim and his wife Pat have moved into a flat in the property. As Custodian, Jim will be assisted by his son Simon (who has just been appointed house steward), two part-time conservation cleaners, Dorothy and Shirley, and Pat who runs the front desk. This brings the complement of staff up to full strength.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Jim and Pat played a large part, with Barry and Christine Williams, in the very successful training of room stewards which took place prior to the opening of the house to the public on 31 March. Earlier, Barry and Christine had attended a 'stewards and volunteers' course organised by the National Trust. They found it 'very very useful' - which was reflected in the professional and interesting presentations they made to volunteers.

FAREWELL TO THE OWL

As you may know if you are a frequent visitor to the property, an owl took up residence on site earlier this year. Ric Dowds, a night security guard, reports that the owl, which seemed quite tame, 'adopted' the staff, perching at window sills and accepting food by hand.

After a licence to handle the bird had eventually been obtained, the owl is now happily settled with a qualified handler in Kingston. As Ric Dowds says, the owl has gone to a good home but his visits are sadly missed!

EMERGENCY REPAIRS

As reported in our last issue, measures are being taken to repair and conserve the ceilings in the Drawing Room and Eating Room. Both rooms have been cleared of moveable furniture. Fireplaces, pier-glasses and other fixtures have been boxed in to provide protection while the work is being carried out. Scaffolding has been erected though visitors can walk through the Drawing Room to the Tapestry Room to continue their tour of the house. Unfortunately, the Yellow Taffeta Bedchamber has also had to be closed temporarily as it is immediately above the Eating Room.

Every effort is being made to have the work completed by the summer.

SNOW DAMAGE

The heavy snowfall in February caused more problems with the roof. Water froze in the down-pipes and leaked through the roof space as it thawed.

Happily, after close inspection it seems the damage was limited with no injury to the show areas of the house.

TEA ROOM

The tea room in the Stable Block opened its doors to customers on 1 March. They did a roaring trade with 400 customers on their first Sunday. Julie Dunn and her team are doing a tremendous job producing delectable teas, light lunches, ice-creams and simple snacks: if you haven't visited the tea room yet why not look in on your next trip to Osterley?

Our Big Summer Event

Saturday 15 June is the date set for our summer spectacular. George Melly and John Chilton's Feetwarmers will be entertaining al fresco in the park. Why not come along?

This remarkable musical team have thrilled huge audiences in Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and the Far East as well as all over Europe. Their blending of jazz, blues, humour and showmanship is unequalled.

The concert will take place in the grassy area behind the house and promises to provide the perfect setting for a musical treat. Please bring your own picnic (and chairs, if you want them. There will be no formal seating for the concert.)

Tickets are only £7.50 each, including free parking. Not only will you enjoy a marvellous evening but you will be helping to raise funds for The National Trust's activities at Osterley.

Just bring yourselves, a picnic - and a few friends? A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter. Ask at the house for more forms, or write to 21 Creffield Road, London W5 3RR for information.

Saturday 15 June 1991

George

MELLY

with

**JOHN CHILTON'S
FEETWARMERS**

entertain al fresco



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