

# The Friends of Osterley Park

*A Supporters Group for the National Trust*

## NEWSLETTER

**Issue 12**

**Autumn 1993**

### **CHAIRMAN'S LETTER**

**Ian Conacher**

This has been an interesting year so far for the "Friends". The Winter Lectures were well attended, the Stairclimber Appeal reached its target, and we had a sell-out success with Cantanti Camerati's "Songs for Springtime".

During the Summer, Jim Tickle has organised four visits, jointly for members and volunteers. After some initial concern about numbers of participants, these have been well supported.

Financially, we have made several small donations to support activities at Osterley, including tools for volunteer gardeners and a barrow for the flower arrangers. Your Committee are seeking a suitable project for more substantial support.

When the "Friends" were set up in 1990, it was felt that a formal organisation, with Annual General Meetings and elections for Committee, was not required. However, it now seems to us desirable to meet the membership semi-formally and seek their views and suggestions on the activities of the "Friends".

Such a meeting may also help us address the problem of growth. It was my hope as Membership Secretary to see our numbers rise into four figures, but this has not happened. We would welcome suggestions as to how we should set about contacting potential members.

For these reasons, we are proposing to hold a "Reception" at the House on Monday 20th September from 7:30pm to 9:30pm. This will include a discussion session when members can put questions and suggestions to the Committee.

During this evening, we shall be able to report the use made of the Stairclimber, and thank those whose generous donations contributed to the purchase of this machine.

The discussion session will hopefully be followed by some musical entertainment and the opportunity to circulate and chat over a glass of wine.

There will be no charge for this reception, but we do ask those wishing to attend to kindly fill in and return the enclosed "Acceptance Slip" by 13th September so that we can order the wine!

## **NEWS FROM THE HOUSE AND PARK**

The Park has been heavily used by visitors during recent summer week-ends. The extreme heat has even persuaded some individuals to attempt swimming in the lower lake! The two "golf buggies" have been extensively utilised, transporting the less mobile visitors from the car park to the House. It is hoped to obtain a further 6-seater vehicle for next season.

Work in laying the drive on its nineteenth century line, to approach the House from the South-East, will start shortly. The road across the end of the upper lake will be resurfaced to take in the existing pavement and form a new pedestrianised area, where only the occasional motor vehicle will intrude.

The path around the woods to the West of the House will also be resurfaced and linked to the paths around the House. Work in restoring the Adam "Garden House" is now well advanced, and planting of the "Pleasure Grounds" will commence this Autumn.

Scaffolding of the East, West and South fronts is commencing. This will give access for decoration and repairs to woodwork, pointing of brickwork and repairs to the stone balustrades. The Portico will be re-roofed, with access to the House maintained by tunnels through the scaffold. The eagles - arms of the Child family - have been removed for conservation and will be replaced shortly.

Planning applications have been made to the Local Authority for the demolition of the existing toilet block and its replacement by a new block behind the wall, and also for the construction of a National Trust shop inside the old coach house, currently used for storing garden machines. It is hoped that this work will be carried out during the winter.

Among the work planned for the interior of the House this Winter is the complete redecoration of the Library. The ceiling will be repainted white, as recent study of paint flakes leads to the belief that this was the original colour.

Finally, major work will be needed during the next few months on the essential services to the House. Fire mains and gas pipes will be laid up the main drive and new lighting will be installed.

The changes in the Park and the building works around the House and in the Stables will be the subject of an exhibition to be displayed in the Stable Block on Sunday afternoons for the rest of the season.

## **COMING EVENTS AT OSTERLEY**

On Sunday 12th September at 10am, an expert from the R.S.P.B. will lead a "Bird Walk" around the Park. Tickets for this will cost £2.50.

Saturday 2nd October is the date for the Regional Open Day. Centered on the Stable Block area, there will be displays illustrating conservation work in the Park, demonstrations of crafts such as wood turning and building of "bat-bones". Stalls will show the work of the R.S.P.B., the Police, the St John's Ambulance and others - not forgetting the "Friends" - and entertainment for children. Admission will be free. Programmes at £1 will be available on the day.

The operation of "Putting the House to Bed", which it had been hoped to display on November 4th, will not now be demonstrated to the public, due to the urgent need to complete this operation before work inside the property commences.

## **TRIP TO KENWOOD AND FENTON HOUSE**

**Margaret Friday**

On Tuesday 6th July, the Friends of Osterley and volunteers to the House set out once more in search of Robert Adam. The object was the renowned Kenwood House sited in fine grounds backed by the famous Hampstead Heath.

Kenwood, like Osterley, was originally an Elizabethan house. William Murray employed his fellow Scot, Robert Adam, to enhance the house in 1764, creating the portico entrance. Adam wrote that Lord Mansfield gave full scope to his ideas. Kenwood is the first house where the Adam style is expressed equally on the outside and in the interior.

We regretted the lack of furnishing at Kenwood and the haphazard arrangement of the few pieces which have been restored to this house. We admired the glorious barrel vaulted ceiling in the famous library, knowing it to be a superb example of the work of Robert Adam. The Iveagh Bequest paintings, particularly the portraits at Kenwood are exquisite - how splendidly Osterley would complement a similar collection.

After lunching in the Rose Garden adjoining the restaurant or picnicking on the spacious lawns surrounding the house, we boarded the coach for the short drive to Hampstead to view Fenton House. Fenton began life as a William and Mary house, but was remodelled in the 19th century. The painted Chinese mirrors brought to mind the mirror in the Yellow Taffeta bedchamber at Osterley. The many examples of fine porcelain on display reminded us that the cabinets at Osterley will soon contain Meissen and Sevres services.

There are three playable Kirkman harpsichords at Fenton House, and we look forward to hearing and seeing them played on a future visit. It would be lovely to know how the fine instrument at Osterley would have sounded.

The gardens at Fenton were a delight and the beautiful summer day allowed us to enjoy them at their finest - from formal statuary and lawns to secluded woods. Following this second successful outing, we returned to Osterley Park.

Our thanks again to Jim Tickle and Ian Conacher who masterminded this afternoon in pursuit of Adam and things pertaining to Osterley.

## **VISIT TO CLANDON AND HATCHLANDS**

**Mary Barclay**

Arriving at Clendon Park just after 1pm, there was time for a quick lunch (either picnic or in the very pleasant on-site restaurant) before the House opened at 1:30.

It has been the house of the Onslow family since 1641, with no less than three members of the family having been Speakers of the House of Commons. The Speakers' Parlour, which we were to see later on our tour of the House, takes its name for their portraits which are exhibited there. The original Elizabethan house was rebuilt in c.1731 and designed by a Venetian architect, Giacomo Leoni, in a variety of architectural styles. There were 12 rooms to see, also the grand Marble Hall and the Oak and Stone Staircases. Particularly noteworthy were the magnificent Rysbrack chimney pieces and the stunningly baroque plaster work ceilings etc. fashioned very much in the Italian manner and attributed to Artari and Bugatti.

Also worth mentioning is the Gubbay Collection of English, Continental and Oriental Pottery and Porcelain, and the collection of jade, metalwork and glass. These colourful and well displayed collections really merit a day's visit to themselves. There is an interesting and well stocked old kitchen in the basement. A small, but well manicured formal garden flanks the South front, and a colourful herbaceous border can be glimpsed from the windows of the House. A Maori meeting house, brought back to England by the 4th Earl Onslow and re-erected by the lake, is also within sight of the windows of the Blue Wallpaper Room.

At 3:15, we set off again by coach to Hatchlands Park, a mere 15 minutes drive away. This house was built by Admiral Edward Boscawen to the design of the architect Stiff Leadbetter, and Robert Adam was commissioned in 1759 to design the interior rooms. Although there were major alterations carried out in the early, and again in the late 1800's, and early 20th century, enough of Adam's work remains to confirm his early style, Hatchlands being one of the first houses he worked on after his return to his country from his Grand Tour. He was very much feeling his way and his work is different when compared with his great interiors of the late 1700's. Nevertheless, as was his work throughout his subsequent career, he included many decorative sculptural motifs in deference to his patron, and in the Admiral's case, nautical references in the shape of dolphins, merfolk, marine trophies, Neptune, etc. Fireplaces and mirrors are very much early Adam. The mahogany doors are exceptionally fine with decoration in carved wood, and not stucco or composition as happened in some of his later work.

Mention must be made of the excellent Cobbe collection of musical instruments. Great interest was shown in the piano used by Chopin in his London recitals, and some of our group had the pleasure of hearing it played. Others of us had the delight of hearing played the large chamber organ in its carved mahogany case. The Music Room, with its dome, was added and constructed in c. 1903. It was designed by Reginald Blomfield in the English style of c.1703. Evidently, Bloomfield was not a devotee of the Adam style and - in his view - "the work of Adam and of all his school, though skilful, was essentially decadent"!!

After tea and cakes in the Tea Room, we made for home. The weather had been kind to us and we all agreed that the afternoon had very much come to expectations. All congratulations to Jim Tickle for his impeccable organisation of the event.

#### **THE GLENN MILLER CONCERT**

Saturday 7th August saw the front lawn of Osterley Park House "en Fete" as it has never been before. It was the long awaited day of the Glenn Miller Concert for which all 3,500 tickets had been sold weeks in advance. As soon as the visitors from the afternoon opening of the House had left, a team of volunteers from the Friends and from the House team sprang into action. One group was on car parking duty, one on ticket collection and one on a roving commission. As the first of the 1,500 cars drew up to park on the field, it was clear that this was going to be a special occasion. Out came the visitors, many in forties clothes and many in service uniforms - both British and American - with tables and chairs, candelabras, gas lanterns, picnic boxes, cool boxes, hot boxes and everything that goes to the making up of a summer picnic. For an hour and a half they came in - leaving traffic chaos on the Great West Road and the whole of surrounding area. Past the ticket collectors at the lake side and on to the lawn they came to set themselves up in party mood.

At 7:30, the music began - 'Moonlight Serenade', of course - music evocative of the forties era, and music with which the whole audience was in tune. The music was played on the Portico of the House and flooded the whole of the Park. The visitors had come to hear Little Brown Jug, In the Mood, American Patrol and all the other tunes which they had first heard fifty years ago - and they were not disappointed. In classic style, the programme was divided into feature items - sometimes the whole orchestra, sometimes the "Modernairs" or the Uptown Hall Gang or the Brass Section or the Moonlight Serenaders of the Saxophone Section. The appearance at the top of the steps of each featured section was greeted with the applause due to a long remembered friend. When the audience were invited to dance, many of them did! The atmosphere was complete. Each of the halves of the programme lasted for an hour, and it was no surprise that there were calls for an encore when the programme was complete.

Then came the call for a countdown from ten for the fireworks to begin. Three and a half thousand voices joined in that countdown and, on 'zero', the display was lit. For a quarter of an hour the sky was full of coloured light, reflected in the water of the lower lake. It was a fitting climax to a long to be remembered evening. As the visitors made their way home, they were happy in the memory of a wonderful evening and the promise that it will be repeated on a similar date in 1995.

## CALL TO ARMS

Lesley Orton

*This article has been already published in the Summer edition of 'Link' for the National Trust Volunteers, and is reproduced in this Newsletter by kind permission of the author. Lesley is the Osterley Flower Scheme Volunteer Co-ordinator.*

Who can resist a walled garden? I certainly can't, and the combined blandishments of Harry Dodson of the BBC's Victorian Walled Garden fame, and a call to arms for 'anyone interested in growing flowers for the House' were irresistible, and with eight others I duly trooped along to attend a meeting held with a view to setting up a panel of gardening volunteers. A coordinator was called for and I was suddenly aware of a voice saying "I'll do it if you like". The voice turned out to be my own, and I had started my new career!

During that summer of 1991, a couple of keen volunteers had already cleared quite a good sized patch of ground and had got a few clumps of flowers going so that even by the end of the first summer of Trust management some flowers went into the House.

However, to do anything on the grand scale meant that growing had to be done in straight rows for ease of access, and a certain amount of re-arrangement had to be undertaken! This we accomplished, and we then left a nice large patch of ground clear except for a generous covering of delicious leaf mould in readiness for the Spring sowing.

Someone had thoughtfully scattered wallflower and sweet william seeds among adjoining shrubs and hey presto we were set up for Winter and early Spring. All except the bulbs, that is.

Ah the bulbs... yes, well they appeared for planting in about the second week of November - a mere 400 tulips. There obviously had to be some quick action. What this meant was that the head gardener led me to another piece of garden which of course had NOT been dug recently, but in an earlier manifestation had actually been planted with pots of carnations - yes, the flower pots were there in the ground with the roots of the carnations slyly slipping through the bottom hole and anchoring the whole lot securely into the ground! I am glad to report the the tulips did us proud in the Spring, and with the wallflowers and sundry snippets of shrubbery, gave a lovely start to flowers in the House in 1992.

An assortment of seeds duly appeared in the Spring and our patch, which when bare had seemed huge, was filled with no trouble at all and we soon started on the preparation of another one, to take the overflow! So, you see, it's an adventurous business this gardening, and we are to a certain extent charting unknown territory, so do join us!

I relish the challenge, and always the walled garden holds the special magic of being a link with the past and a place to enjoy the unique pleasure of growing flowers for the House.

## HONOURED FRIEND

Congratulations to Dr Maurice Ebison, who was awarded the O.B.E. in the Birthday Honours in June for "Services to Physics". Maurice is the husband of our Membership Secretary Audrey Ebison.



# A potter in the Park



WITH WYKE GREEN

One thing that could never be said about Osterley Park is that it is a boring place to visit - even if you go there almost every day.

As nature changes the rural outlook each season, so does the man-made activity in the Park itself. The "regular" patrons, dog-walkers and early morning joggers play a guessing game between themselves about the reason for something that was not there yesterday.

The most intriguing recent construction, adjacent to the North side of the House, was 'The Cage' - reminiscent of a wartime P.O.W. compound. Rumours were rife - some amusing - many bizarre! Little re-directional notices appeared. A day or two later, enormous wooden crates - big enough for lions or tigers - arrived. The mystery deepened. A circus?

And then... young men and women, clad head-to-foot in one-piece white overalls, looking like a decontamination squad, moved in. It was then revealed - but not publicly, that they were to sort, move, classify and label hundreds of dust-grimed artefacts that the Victoria & Albert Museum had buried deep in the basement of the House for nearly half a century. Among the treasure trove is the proscenium arch of the old Adelphi Theatre, London.

Work to restore the Pleasure Gardens to its original design is well under way, and more obvious to the eye. The key building now, since the Great Orangery was destroyed by fire in 1950, is the Adam designed Garden House.

A small team of specialist craftsmen started work early in July to completely restore this delightful semi-circular building. Not so many years ago, the present Earl of Jersey used it as an aviary, and more recently it was home to a few pots of plastic miniature lemon trees, complete with plastic lemons. Ugh!

Much of the brickwork and roof needs replacing, so too do the round-headed windows and paired pilasters. Completion is expected sometime in September.

Even those visitors who fail to venture far from the House cannot have overlooked the cattle now grazing happily in the Great Meadow, where they finally took up temporary residence early in June. There are sixteen of these docile meadow-ladies - all in calf.

The first additions to the herd are expected in mid-September and thereafter, at frequent intervals, through October. Mothers, and their off-spring, will return to their "home farm" near Hughenden, Bucks. a few days after arrival. There will be no local "James Heriot" in attendance; according to my informed source, all the 'mums' have done it at least six times before!

I am sure the new arrivals will be a topic of conversation among the park regulars, none more so than the mobile-patrolling Met. Police officers whose beat also includes an occasional "Potter in the Park".

