



# The Friends of Osterley Park



*A Supporters Group for the National Trust*

NEWSLETTER

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## **CHAIRMAN'S LETTER**

**Ian Conacher**

With the beginning of November, another season at Osterley Park House - and at other National Trust properties - has ended. While Administrators are calculating their visitor statistics, and Volunteers, relieved of their room-stewarding duties, are preparing their Christmas Shopping lists, there is time to reflect on the Summer's activities.

The visits which were made by parties of "Friends" and volunteers "in pursuit of Robert Adam" showed not only the extent and variety of his work, but also illustrated two other points, which for me were further emphasised by visits to several Trust properties when on holiday.

First was the realisation of the unusual status of Osterley, which, by a happy combination of circumstances, retains the furniture designed by Adam for the House, stripped of all the additions of later years. Kedleston Hall is similarly graced with its original Adam interiors.

This almost academic perfection is perhaps more greatly appreciated when one contrasts it, say, with the state of Kenwood, where English Heritage are trying desperately to recover dispersed furniture, and re-assemble the original room settings.

At Hatchlands, the work of Robert Adam sits alongside later additions, notably the collection of musical instruments belonging to the tenant of the House - a collection which is frequently re-arranged by its owner, often to the surprise of the Custodian and his stewards!

A more extreme example of how the contents of a property can fluctuate is at Barrington Court, in Somerset. This Tudor building was restored from a shell by the Lyle family in the 1920's, and is now used for an ever-changing display of the products of a manufacturer of reproduction furniture!

The other benefit arising from "travels with an N.T. card" is an appreciation of the wide range of the Trust's activities. Through our familiarity with Osterley, we are tempted to think of the Trust as being concerned principally with the preservation of "Stately Homes", and overlook its role in looking after smaller properties and, more particularly, in the conservation and protection of landscape. Our stop at Avebury, when returning from Lacock, gave us a glimpse of this aspect of the Trust's work.



My wife and I, when on holiday in South Wales, were able to visit and enjoy a wide variety of Trust sites. The Trust has done much to preserve the coastline, and owns many miles of cliff-top walks in Pembrokeshire and the Gower Peninsula, with access to magnificent unspoiled beaches at, for example, Stackpole Quay and Bosherton. These contrast with the compact "Tudor Merchant's House" at Tenby, or the industrial archaeology of the Dolaucothi Gold Mines and the Aberdulais Falls.

At Aberdulais, the Trust have restored a derelict site, at one time celebrated for its natural beauty, but latterly used as a tin-plate works. A water-powered turbine has been installed, which will provide power for sale to the National Grid, together with the largest water wheel in Europe, which will supply electricity to the site.

One feature, of interest to those involved with "Access for the Disabled", was an ingenious lift for wheel-chair users. This was concealed at top platform level by a steel plate which rose with the cage, expending a bellows housing to protect the shaft.

One other point of note was the caption to one of the illustrations in the Information Centre, which recorded the adverse comments of a nineteenth-century visitor, who complained that:-

*"A natural cascade called Dyllais, which was so beautiful as to excite the admiration of travellers, was destroyed by an agent to Lord Jersey, in order to build a few cottages and the lock of a canal. The rock down which this cascade had flowed since the time of the flood ....was blown up with gunpowder!"*

How strange to find an Osterley connection here!

Our best wishes to all "Friends" and their families for Christmas and the New Year.

## WINTER LECTURES

Once again, your Committee have arranged a series of talks during the winter months, in the Parish Hall of St. Mary's Church, Osterley Road, Isleworth.

The series opens on Wednesday, 9th February, with a return visit by Andrea Cameron, of the Hounslow Local History Society, who will speak on "The History of Heston."

On Wednesday, 23rd February, we again welcome Ted Fawcett, landscape consultant to the Trust, who will talk about "History in National Trust Gardens".

Brian and Patty Briggs, of the Vincent Wildlife Trust, will visit us on Wednesday, 9th March, to give a talk entitled "Basically Bats - an introduction to the fascinating subject of the winged mammals."

The series concludes on Wednesday, March 23rd, with a talk by Alan Bender, of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, entitled "Man and Birds".

All talks will be illustrated by slides, and will begin at 8 p.m. Coffee and biscuits will be served afterwards.

Tickets for each talk will cost £2.50 - or £8.00 for the series of 4 - and can be obtained in advanced, by post from the Chairman. An application form is included with this newsletter.



## NEWS FROM THE HOUSE

Barry Williams

As I look out of my office window, through scaffolding and across spoil heaps, the Autumn colours in the park look particularly splendid this year. The falling leaves are doing their best to soften the construction scars!

Hopefully, the bulk of the work will be over by the time we re-open in 1994. We are currently running four separate projects at Osterley: repointing, repairing and repainting the exterior of the House and re-slating the pediment; relaying the fire main, and gas and electricity supplies, installing new lighting in the main avenue and reinstating the 19th century approach to the House; joinery and plaster repairs to the Grand Stables and restoring Adam's Semi-circular Garden House in the Pleasure Grounds.

A fifth, the construction of new park lavatories, and a shop which will be located in the east wing of the Stable Block adjacent to the Grand Stables, begins later this month. It should be well on the way to completion by next April.

Finally, in the latter part of January we are hoping to clear the leaves and other accumulated vegetation from the western reaches of the Garden Lake. There is less debris than we thought so it should only take us a week or so, but I am sure you will be relieved to know that dredging will be confined to that area and will not affect the lake around the causeway and the floating Ting.

We decided that it was preferable to end this season with the House and Park resembling a huge building site, in the hope that we might begin the next one with the House, released from its steel web, looking more splendid than ever. We are also anxious that the scars in the Park, particularly on the front lawn and north-east meadow, should have time to heal before the National Trust's centenary celebrations in 1995.

Do make yourselves known to any members of staff you may see around the Estate and please feel free to ask them about any aspect of our restoration and conservation programme. They all wear name badges.

In the New Year we shall be starting our Winter Walks Programme, which will feature a selection of Estate Walks on alternate Sunday afternoons from January until March. I hope to issue a leaflet shortly before Christmas but details will also be posted on the park noticeboard, which is adjacent to the path leading into the park from the main car park.

May I take this opportunity to wish all Friends of Osterley a very Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

## EXCURSIONS 1994 "HOUSE AND GARDEN SEASON"

Jim Tickle

For 1994, we propose to increase the number of excursions for volunteers and Friends to cover all seven months of the open season, visiting National Trust Houses and Gardens in seven different counties. It is not possible to confirm the details of the programme at this stage, but the dates for the first four visits have already been agreed with the coach company and all destinations have been finalised.

Booking arrangements will be announced early in the New Year.

- Mon. 11th April: MONTACUTE HOUSE & LYTES' CARY MANOR (Somerset)
- Tues. 3rd May : WIMPOLE HALL & HOME FARM (Cambridgeshire)
- Thur. 2nd June : SNOWSHILL MANOR & HIDCOTE (Gloucestershire)
- Wed. 13th July : IGHTHAM MOTE & EMMETT'S GARDEN (Kent)
- Wed. 10th Aug. : STANDEN & NYMANS GARDEN (West Sussex)
- Mon. 5th Sept.: UPTON HOUSE (Warwickshire)
- Mon. 3rd Oct. : CLAYDON HOUSE (Buckinghamshire)

## REGIONAL OPEN DAY

This took place at Osterley on Saturday, 2nd October. The objective was to give visitors an insight into developments at Osterley, and display work in progress in the Pleasure Grounds and elsewhere in the park.

The dawn was watery, but a team from 1st Osterley Scouts arrived at 8.30 to erect a marquee, loaned by the Scout District. This was to house the Great Western Railway Preservation Society's Jazz Band.

By mid-morning, the "Friends" stall had been put up in the Stableyard, alongside the "Batricars", with Ealing N.T.A. and the R.S.P.B. close by. Then the heavens opened! heavy rain fell from 11 to 3 o'clock, and effectively discouraged most potential visitors.

Those who did arrive swelled the numbers in the House, but the outdoor attractions suffered badly.

Our only consolation, as we made our way home, was to see that the Upper Lake was full to overflowing - a marked contrast to last years drought!



Our fully booked coach left Osterley Park at 9 a.m. and after negotiating the traffic jams proceeded to Watford Gap where we stopped for elevenses. We arrived at Kedleston at 1 o'clock, just in time for the opening of the house. This was very fortunate as it was pouring with rain. We decided to go straight to the restaurant for lunch - we had already heard this would be excellent - and so it was. For our repast we selected Fidget Pie, a local speciality containing bacon, onion and apple surrounded by delicious pastry. Following this splendid lunch we entered the house - said to be one of the finest examples of Adam architecture, inside and out.

Kedleston was Robert Adam's first large commission begun just after his return from the Grand Tour. The entrance hall is a copy of a Roman atrium designed to impress all those who enter making them exclaim in wonder at the grandeur of the colonnaded space with elegant floor and ceiling designs. Exploring further we found the music room to the left of the main doors. The Adam drawings for this fine room exist and show the Adam organ case, the only one to survive - and it is still here in the music room!

Next we entered the Drawing Room and encountered the first of the Adam Blue Rooms. The elaborate ceiling with sea creatures and acanthus leaves was designed to replace a painted ceiling "which would try the patience of any spectator" according to Adam. The Drawing Room sofas were created by John Linnell using designs originally created for a George III coronation carriage but unused because William Chambers won the commission. Since the designs had been dedicated to Lord Scarsdale, Linnell revised the drawing producing this heavy and ornate seating. The elegant Adam girandoles with hinged candelabra were delightfully practical.

Entering the library we find an Adam 'mosaic' ceiling not unlike that in the Osterley library - but somehow less spirited - perhaps because it is not picked out in Adam's colours. The library is at present being restored to its former glory - bookcases and window frame decorations being replaced to give the room its original appearance.

From the library we entered the superb round saloon reflecting Adam's many visits to the Pantheon and decorated with motifs taken from the Basilica of Maxentius. The Saloon and the marble hall were inspired by the Roman atrium and vestibulum. The saloon once contained a carpet designed to reflect the ceiling. A small portion still exists and it is hoped to recreate the original. This grand undertaking will restore the room to its former glory.

The state dressing room was one of our favourites - the pleasant columned entrance and apses were a delight. This entire side of the house looking back through the saloon and the library were beguilingly reflected in the palm fringed mirror in the dressing room.

The state bedchamber lacked the grandeur of Osterley and the wider-than-long bed though smaller than Osterley was still a giant at 7' by 7'3". Its four posts were decorated in the palm motif.

The Dining room, complete with a painted ceiling and paintings of the four continents put us in mind of Osterley. The long table was a later addition acquired in 1800. The painted ceiling is said to be one of Adam's earliest designs - to some eyes it lacked the delicacy of later workdone at Osterley. From the Dining room we returned to the Marble Hall originally created to display Lord Scarsdale's collection of classical sculptures.



The many family portraits at Kedleston were particularly appreciated by the Friends. Unfortunately, the upstairs was not open so we could only glimpse the fine ceiling above the staircase. The splendid collection of treasures from the Indian subcontinent, from carpets and furniture to the exquisite peacock patterned dress were much admired.

The rooms the Friends most enjoyed were the elegant Blue Drawing Room, the State Dressing Room and the Library.

By the time we had toured the house the rain had stopped and we explored the 11th Century church and took photographs of the house, picturesque Adam bridge with waterfall and gardens. We left reluctantly at 4.30 feeling that there was so much more to see and enjoy in the pleasure grounds.

On the return trip we encountered thunder, lightening and very heavy rain - and finally a rainbow. Jim, our excellent driver deserves a special vote of thanks as driving conditions today were extremely unpleasant. We were glad to have him at the wheel. Following this, our longest jaunt 'In Pursuit of Robert Adam' we returned to Osterley at 7.30 p.m. still convinced that **Osterley is the finest Adam house we have seen!**

Our thanks to Jim Tickle for another excellent day out - we are already looking forward to the trips in store next year - our congratulations on a really splendid first season.

#### **VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES**

For those wishing to join the volunteer team at Osterley, there will be vacancies next season for Room Stewards, and "Mobility Stewards" for the Batricar service. Contact Lynne at the House for details.

**NEW - VOLUNTEERS FOR THE OSTERLEY SHOP.** If you can help staff the shop opening next season at Osterley, please let Barbara Phillips or Lynne know so that training sessions can be planned.

#### **SHAKESPEARE AT OSTERLEY**

As we close for "Press", plans for the "Friends" and Ealing N.T.A. to work with the Trust in the presentation of Open-Air Theatre at Osterley are being developed. It is hoped that the Albion Theatre Company will perform "Romeo and Juliet" on Saturday, 3rd September, and "Macbeth" on Sunday 4th, in the Stable Yard. More details ;in our next issue - but meanwhile, mark the dates in your new diaries!

#### **HESTON STUDY**

The London Borough of Hounslow are carrying out a study of community activities in the Heston area. We have been asked to publicise this; members who are interested should contact Mrs. Kiran Ballay at the Civil Centre.

#### **VOLUNTEER STREET COLLECTION IN CENTRAL LONDON - MARCH 1994.**

Contact Barbara Phillips for further information.

Thanks are due to Isleworth and Syon School for help with photocopying this newsletter.