



The Friends of Osterley Park

*Ian Conacher
File*



A Supporters Group for the National Trust

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 16

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

WINTER 1994

Ian Conacher

1994 has been a successful year for the "Friends". The Winter Lectures were well attended. Members and volunteers gave overwhelming support to the programme of visits, ably organised by Jim Tickle.

Jim also broke new ground by setting up a plant stall in the stableyard during the Spring, which was much appreciated by visitors. Indeed, judging from the enquiries made of Batricar Stewards in following weeks, support could have continued for a longer season than Jim's resources would allow! However, a satisfactory sum was raised for the "Friends" during the short season.

Shakespeare at Osterley was another new venture - although the September timing and the strong competition from other Open-air Theatre events earlier in the season affected ticket sales.

During the Family Day on 25th September, Audrey Conacher, with help from Audrey Ebison and Margaret Friday, ran a Bric-a-Brac stall. Thanks to the generous gifts of those Friends and volunteers that we were able to contact at short notice, this raised over £100 for the Trust.

We plan to finish the year with Carols around the Christmas Tree in the Stableyard - details elsewhere in this Newsletter.

During the year, we have provided funds to cover part of the cost of the 8-seater Buggy and continue our support for the maintenance of the Batricar fleet.

1995 - THE NATIONAL TRUST CENTENARY YEAR.

Exciting plans are now being developed by the Trust for Osterley's part in the national celebrations of this occasion. A few preliminary details are given in this Newsletter, together with news of the "Friends" involvement in activities at Osterley.

Help from the Membership will be needed to meet these challenges, and to use the opportunities that they will give to increase our numbers.

Full details of the Centenary Programme will be given in our Spring issue, which we hope to publish at the end of February.

I hope to see many of you at the Carol singing in December, or at the Volunteer's Party on December 11th. If not, may I now wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

It all started in the autumn of 1993, when Verity Walker from the Regional Office at Hughenden suggested that the "Friends of Osterley Park", together with Ealing National Trust Association, should provide practical support for the Trust by managing the detailed arrangements for the staging of "Open-air Theatre" at Osterley.

Verity had been in touch with the Albion Shakespeare Company, based in Norwich, who were planning to tour with productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*, and whose itinerary already included a number of Trust properties in East Anglia.

Dates were available in September, and with some trepidation, Olive Marke of E.N.T.A. and I accepted the challenge to put on the plays on the 3rd and 4th of the month.

The location agreed for the performances was the courtyard of the stable-block, which is surrounded on three sides by buildings dating from the time of Thomas Gresham, the Elizabethan builder of Osterley. It was felt that they would provide an authentic back-drop for Shakespearean drama.

A budget was prepared for the costs of seating hire, printing, publicity, etc, and ticket prices were agreed before the end of the year, for publication in the Regional Events leaflet.

Bookings began to arrive in April via our P.O. box, and numbers mounted slowly until at last the point was reached where we knew we had an economically viable project. It was noticeable during the summer how many similar attractions were competing in the same market area.

Posters and leaflets were printed for local publicity and circulated during the early summer. Some press coverage was arranged with local newspapers, and a limited amount of paid advertising was booked.

The two weeks before the event were hectic, involving liaison with the seating suppliers over the details of their timetable for installation, the Company over the facilities needed on site, and the Administrator at the property, Barry Williams, to ensure that there was a minimum of interference with the normal flow of visitors to the House and Park.

Saturday, September 3rd dawned grey, and as I walked across the lawn to the stable-block the first spots of the drizzle that was to persist for much of the day began to fall. However, the seating was up, the Company had arrived, and the erection of the simple set was under way. The scenery comprised a tower, with the essential balcony above and a multi-purpose arch below, with two flats on either side.

An area of the yard in front of this was swept clear of loose chippings, to expose a tarmac surface below, on which the bulk of the action would take place.

The persistent drizzle dashed our hopes of making a last minute killing on ticket sales. However, about 180 ticket holders turned up, well water-proofed, dried off their seats and settled down to enjoy *Romeo and Juliet*.

As the stage lights went up, the rain intensified, beating down on players and audience alike. Some few of the less well protected spectators were unable to stick it out, but the great majority stayed through to the interval, to watch the drama unfurl.

An added distraction was the sounding of the fire bell within the stables - fortunately a false alarm.

By the interval, the rain had eased off, and it was possible to admire the quality of the acting and of the production. Liz Hann was impressive as Juliet, well portraying the headstrong teenager rebelling against parental opposition. Effective use was made of the simple set, and the breadth of the playing area gave ample scope for some well choreographed and enthusiastically played sword fights. A side-effect of the rain was that those who fell or were slain rose from the surface of the yard soaked and covered in mud.

The players were applauded at the end of the last act, as much for their fortitude as for their performance. As we made our way home, the lake in the Park lay calm, without a drop of rain or a puff of wind to disturb its tranquil surface.

Sunday, 4th September was much better - cool, with a strong breeze, but at least dry. The audience was bigger - and we were able to sell some seats at the box office! A well-filled house were able to enjoy a lively performance of *Macbeth*.

John Hales took the title role, well portraying the emerging lust for power under the influence of the witches' prophecies and the urging of his wife. Here again, the production was first class, with energetic sword play. Particularly effective were the witches, who when not at the centre of the stage, lurked in the wings, gleefully watching the unfolding tragedy, and busy all the time with their dreadful trade.

All things considered, a successful first attempt at "Shakespeare at Osterley".

The setting could hardly be bettered, and we are now considering plans for 1995.

Note: some visitors to the Saturday performance enjoyed a picnic with wine, smoked salmon and all the trimmings (including a groundsheet) under the glorious trees in the park before the performance. They may have been the only picnickers but they enjoyed the experience none the less - followed by an excellent performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in the rain.



PAT RUMSEY

For the past four seasons, visitors to the House and volunteer room-stewards have all been made to feel welcome by Pat; who came to Osterley from Claydon in 1991. Unfortunately, at the end of the '94 season Pat decided, for personal reasons, to retire. She has now moved down to Kent, to be close to her daughter and grandchild. The warmth with which she was regarded was evidenced by the turn-out on Thursday, 25th August, when a large gathering of volunteers - many of whom had come up to the House especially for the occasion - were present to wish her well. Pat was presented with the proceeds of a collection taken among her many friends, a pair of ear-rings from the Friends and a gift from the Ealing National Trust Association.

NEWS FROM THE TRUST.

Members can hardly have failed to notice the advance publicity for the Trust's Centenary in 1995. The restoration work at Osterley Park has been chosen as the Thames and Chiltern Region's major Centenary Project, and means that during the closed season, there will be frantic activity within the House and in the Park.

Members who are volunteers will already have had details of this work in Barry Williams' Volunteer Newsletter, from which we quote:-

"As I write work has commenced on the final phase of the Centenary Project - the reinstatement of the secondary entrance to the House (adjacent to the existing north side staff entrance) and the restoration of the Servants' Hall, the Grotto beneath the West Steps and the range of rooms beneath the Long Gallery. This will cause major disruption to the House throughout the closed season since it will generate huge amounts of noise and dirt. The lavatories at the foot of the Grand Staircase are being demolished and new ones created on the ground floor at the lakeside end of the West Range. Room Stewards will be pleased to note that adjacent to the new facilities will be a purpose-built Volunteers' Rest Room/Kitchen! Work has to be completed before the end of March since the re-furbished rooms will play an important role in the Trust's Centenary celebrations at Osterley"

"There is a good deal of tidying-up still to be done in the park. We are not satisfied with the surface of the new driveway. The loose stones are uncomfortable to walk on and are particularly unpleasant for wheelchairs and pushchairs. The depth and quality of the gravel in front of the House has been subject of numerous complaints by our visitors. We have thinned it out, but I am sure that we shall have eventually to replace what remains with gravel of a much finer consistency"

Barry also reports an increase in the annual number of visitors to the House, up to 27,404 in 1994. This is in spite of a national trend of reduced visitor numbers.

NATIONAL TRUST CENTENARY EVENTS.

Full details of the Centenary Events Programme have still to be settled before announcements can be made. Volunteers will hear the latest news at their Christmas Party on 11th December from David Horton, regional Public Affairs Manager.

Events which are settled include:

Sunday

15th January: Bird Walk, led by the R.S.P.B. Meet in the Stableyard at 10 am. The charge of £2.50 is payable on the day. Please wear warm clothing and stout shoes - it will probably be wet underfoot. The walk will take about 2 hours.

Sunday

4th June: Children's Day. An event at Trust Properties region wide. A fair at Osterley is being organised by Kensington and Chelsea N.T.A. "Friends" have agreed to provide a plant stall.

Sunday

16th July: "Village Fair" - organised jointly by Ealing, Harrow and West Middlesex National Trust Associations with the "Friends".

Saturday &
Sunday

22nd & 23rd
July: Date provisionally reserved for Open Air Theatre.

Saturday

5th August: The Centenary Band Concert with the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

CHRISTMAS AT OSTERLEY

The new National Trust Shop at Osterley will be remaining open during the weeks before Christmas.

From November 1st through to December 18th, it will be open from Wednesday to Sunday between 12 noon and 4 p.m.

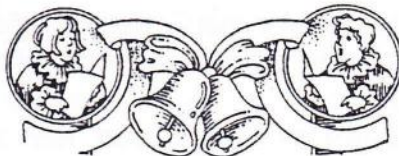
The Tea Room will also be open at these times for light refreshments.

The 'Friends' have agreed to provide a Christmas Tree, to be erected in the yard for this period. Two of our members have generously agreed to bring choirs to sing Carols around the tree.

CAROLS IN THE STABLEYARD

On Sunday, December 4th, at 3pm. Tony Underwood will be conducting a group of singers from the West London Opera. On the following Sunday, December 11th, at 3 pm. Howard Stephens will bring the St. Mary's Singers.

We hope to see many Friends at these occasions: there might even be opportunities for audience participation!



HELP WANTED

Following the success of Jim Tickle's solo efforts this year, we are being urged to run the Friends Plant Stall over a longer period in 1995, including the Kensington and Chelsea N.T.A.'s Children's Day Fair on 4th June.

This will be impossible without the involvement of a greater number of members in the planning and growing of the produce to be sold, and in the actual staffing of the Stall.

Lesley Orton - the leader of the team of volunteers growing flowers in the walled garden for decoration of the House - has agreed to assist Jim with this project. Any members wishing help in any way should contact either Lesley on 0181 574 1757 or Jim on 0181 894 4174.

Some members may even be able to start preparing now - taking cuttings of shrubs and fuschias, potting up surplus plants when dividing perennials, and so on. Donations of small plastic plant pots would also be welcomed!

The Village Fair on 16th July will also need an input of willing helpers. A variety of stalls are at the planning stage, and anyone interested in helping with the staffing of these should contact Ian Conacher, on 0181 560 8523.

Audrey hopes to follow her success at this year's Family Day with an even bigger Bric-a-brac stall at the Village Fair. Donations of costume jewellery, china, glass, ornaments etc. would be appreciated - nearer the time! Contact her on the same number as Ian!

WINTER LECTURES 1995.

We are planning to hold our 4th Season of "Winter Lectures" as usual in St. Mary's Parish Hall, Osterley Road, early next year.

The series opens on Wednesday, 8th February, with a talk by Andrea Cameron, archivist of the London Borough of Hounslow and President of the Hounslow Local History Society, on *Sir Joseph Banks* a one-time local resident at Spring Grove House, Isleworth.

On Wednesday, 22nd February, Suzi Clarke, Theatrical costumier and author of several books on historical costume will give a talk on *Eighteenth Century Costume - illustrated with garments which you are welcome to touch!* Those of you who saw the Covent Garden Minuet Dancers perform last year will have seen her costumes in action. Apart from making Margaret's "dress to go with Osterley Park House", more recently Suzi has made some of the gowns worn by Glenn Close in the film *Dangerous Liaisons*.

Alan Bender, of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, will give an illustrated talk on the *Bird Life in and around Osterley Park* on Wednesday, 6th March.

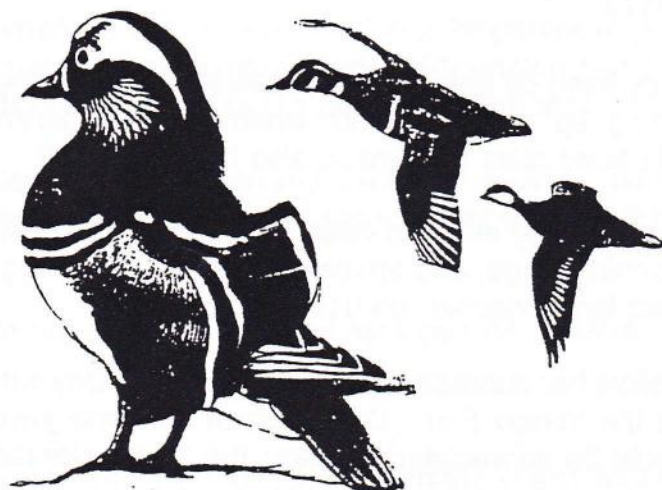
We finish the series on Wednesday 22nd March, with a visit from Ron Rowland, a member of the Trust's governing Council and founder of the West Middlesex Centre, who will give our Centenary Lecture on *The Spirit of the Founders*, illustrated with slides.

All lectures will begin at 8 p.m. and will be followed by coffee and biscuits.

Admission to each lecture is £2.50 - or £8.00 for the series.

A booking form is included with this Newsletter.

Those who have been before will know that these are, as befits our group, Friendly occasions - so do not be put off by that rather academic word "lecture".





GWEN AND DUDLEY FOY

Their many friends at Osterley will want to join with me in sending all good wishes to Gwen and Dudley, who have moved from Heston to a new home in West Mersea, Essex.

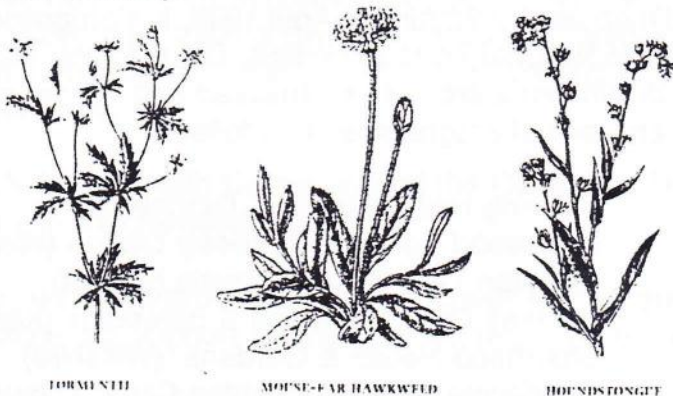
Gwen and Dudley became active supporters of the Trust at Osterley and members of the "Friends" in the 1991 season. Dudley provided practical support for the George Melly Jazz Concert in June of that year, and joined the "Friends" Committee in August. He immediately took on responsibility for the first Batricars which were obtained from Stowe.

For the last three seasons, he has devoted much time and energy to the development of this service at Osterley, recruiting volunteers, arranging rosters, and introducing systems for User Briefing, Logging of Vehicle Use, Maintenance Records, etc., which are now being adopted at other Trust properties.

His car and trailer have transported Batricars around the Region and to local Fairs where his portable stall has been set up to recruit for the "Friends"

Gwen, meanwhile, has been busy in the House and Garden - leading a team of volunteers to cut and arrange the flowers which add life to the rooms in the House.

They will both be sorely missed, as friends and for the sheer volume of support which they have given at Osterley.



GARDENS OF CORNWALL - AN INVITATION.

Friends who joined the last two outings to Upton and Claydon may recall that Barrie, our driver, mentioned an 8-day holiday by European Heritage Tours, leaving on Tuesday, 18th April and visiting five gardens in Cornwall (including Tresco in the Scillies) and National Trust properties en route. Cost per person is listed at £275 in twin/double room (dinner, bed & breakfast) in a highly recommended hotel and includes all travel and admission fees. Single rooms are available at a very modest supplement. A number of Friends have already expressed keen interest and if others wish to join us or would like further information, please phone Barrie Pyle on 081 977 5143 or write to him at 123, Teddington Park Road, Teddington, Mddx. TW11 8NG.



FELBRIGG HALL



PACKWOOD HOUSE

OUT AND ABOUT IN CENTENARY YEAR.

Jim Tickle

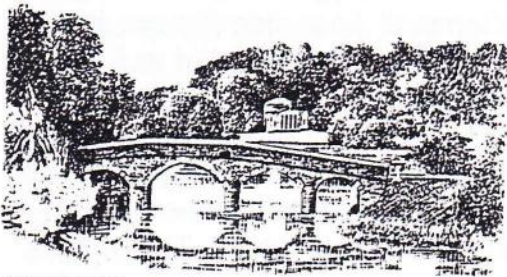
Since the Summer edition of the Newsletter featured them in such generous detail, my summary of this year's excursions is mercifully brief. Perhaps the visit to Emmitts Garden would have been more spectacular in bluebell time; hopefully Canons Ashby have sorted out their problems with the tea-urn; and sadly, my usual arrangement with the Weather-Gods misfired on our visit to Hidcote Manor Gardens. On the whole, however, the outings have been most enjoyable and we even carry a modest credit balance into next season's programme.

Finally, I must acknowledge the help and friendly advice of Barrie Pyle, our courier/driver from European Heritage Tours and thank all of my travelling companions for your continued support.

With many NT properties, including Osterley, organising a variety of extra events to commemorate Centenary Year, the planning of next season's excursions may be a little more complicated than usual. Starting in April 1995, it is proposed to offer seven monthly whole-day visits to National Trust properties. Dates for the visits have already been agreed, but the destinations are not yet finalised and will be confirmed in the next Newsletter. The provisional programme is as follows:

Wed 12th April	Blickling Hall & Felbrigg (Norfolk)
Thur 11th May	Packwood House & Baddesly Clinton (Warwickshire)
Mon 5th June	Kingston Lacy & Corfe Castle (Dorset)
Wed 5th July	Scotney Castle Gardens & Batemans (Kent & E.Sussex)
Tue 8th August	Stourhead House & Gardens (Wiltshire)
Mon 11th Sept.	Charlecote Park & Coughton Court (Warwickshire)
Mon 9th October	Snowhill Manor & Hailes Abbey (Gloucestershire)

Booking forms, including the cost of the excursions, will be available to Friends and Volunteers early in February.



STOURHEAD



COUGHTON COURT