



The Friends of Osterley Park



A Supporters Group for the National Trust

Issue 19

NEWSLETTER

Winter 1995

Centenary Autumn

Ian Conacher

October 31st marked the end of a very busy period at Osterley. Having been chosen as the featured property for the Trust's Thames and Chiltern Region during the Centenary Season, it became the focus of many additional events. Exhibitions were held in the refurbished basement galleries, and a "sculpture trail" was set up in the newly-planted Pleasure Grounds. All this in addition to regular events such as the Band Concert.

For the "Friends", activities at the property began with the Plant Stall, selling bedding plants during May and June. In total, this operation raised over £320 - out of which we purchased the "gazebo" and donated £70 to the National Garden Fund.

July was full of activity, which began on the 16th with the "Village Fair", organised jointly by the "Friends" with Ealing, Harrow and West Middlesex N.T.A. This was held in the Pleasure Grounds, and introduced many visitors to the work being done by the Estate staff in restoring this area to its 18th century planting pattern. The Fair itself was blessed with fine weather, apart from a capful of rain in the late afternoon, and a total profit of £1,600 was made on the day, divided between the Groups taking part. Our thanks are due to all who assisted in this.

July 22nd and 23rd saw the second season of "Shakespeare at Osterley", featuring a return visit of the Albion Shakespeare Company. Their performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* on the Saturday was well received by a large audience. Unscripted humour was added to evening by the appearance of a pigeon, which made an emergency landing on the set, and by a cat which wandered across the stage. *Richard III* on the Sunday was not well supported, which was unfortunate, as the Company gave a very lively performance. However, in spite of the poor numbers on the Sunday, a profit of approximately £1,500 was made for the National Trust.

During the season, Jim Tickle's programme of coach excursions to National Trust properties was well supported, with very few empty seats. As a result, a surplus of approximately £415 was made on the season.

Our Annual General Meeting, on 10th October, was attended by about 70 members, who were able to enjoy a glass of wine while touring the Exhibition of National Trust photographs in the basement gallery.

The year will finish again with Christmas Carols in the Stableyard on Sundays 3rd and 10th December, at 3 pm - details on page 4.

Plans for the 1996 programme are now well advanced. The first of these are the *Winter Lectures* - details in this Newsletter.

May I close by wishing all members a Merry Christmas and health and happiness in the New Year.

A Scorching Summer!

The long hot days of July and August brought many visitors to the Park, although, as in the rest of the country, the green of the grass turned rapidly to brown. One of the first results of this was that the firework display following the Glenn Miller Concert on August 5th had to be modified. At the request of the Fire Brigade, rockets were replaced by other pyrotechnics which did not pose any threat to the surrounding areas - although, judging from the "Ooh's" and "Ah's" of appreciation from the audience this did not affect their enjoyment of the display.

In preparation for this event, the estate staff had mown the grassland between the middle lake and Osterley Lane, gathering over 250 bales of hay from the area. The wisdom of this was demonstrated on Sunday 13th August.

On that day, I was sitting in the Stableyard, on duty as a "Mobility Steward", offering the use of the self-drive battery-electric cars to visitors with mobility problems. Suddenly a small boy came running round the corner from the North Drive. He spoke to Angus in the Stable, and they both went off in haste. We soon learned that the cause of this concern was a grass fire, which had started near the Osterley Lane fence. With a North-East wind, the flames were advancing rapidly towards the lake.

Simon Rumsey appeared from the House to take charge of operations, and the Estate staff started to fight the fire with water from a tank drawn by their tractor. Two Fire Engines arrived in a very short time, and began in deal with the outbreak.

Next on the scene was the Fire Brigade's most recent acquisition - a helicopter, which landed near the lake. This machine was being evaluated for its ability to assist at fires, and could have been used to scoop up water from the lake in a canvas bag and dumped it on the fire. However, after consultation with the crews on the ground, it was evidently agreed that this was not necessary, and the helicopter departed.

As the grass had been mown, although the flames spread rapidly at the perimeter, there was no body of fuel to sustain a major fire. The outbreak was soon brought under control, and damage was limited to the grass and a few scorched leaves on some of the trees in the area, which have now recovered.

News of the Friends

Many members will be sorry to learn of the sudden death of John Shackleton, in late October, while on holiday in Cornwall. John was a member of the "Friends" from their beginnings in 1990, and a regular Room Steward at the house from the time of its opening under the Trust's management. He also joined many of our coach excursions. Our condolences go to his family and friends.

Oliver Hinch sent a note of apology, as he was unable to attend our A.G.M. At that time, he was laid up with a fractured pelvis, sustained when he was knocked off his bicycle. We are glad to hear that he had now regained his mobility, and hopes to be back in the saddle shortly - at the age of 85!

Treasure(r) Trove!

As reported in our last issue, we had been without an Hon. Treasurer since the end of March. Many approaches were made to members with some expertise in book-keeping, but without avail, as it appears that such skills are greatly in demand among voluntary organisations. Many of those I spoke to had already two or three sets of books on their desks!

As so often happens, the ideal candidate was close at hand; after a Probus Club lunch, I spoke to fellow-member Michael Pfeiffer, recently retired from the banking profession, and a recent recruit to the stewarding team at the House. Michael readily agreed to take on the duty of Hon. Treasurer for the Friends, and his appointment was confirmed at the A.G.M.

Another "treasure" acquired at the A.G.M. was a new member for the Committee. After our appeal for help, Angela Lynskey volunteered to join us. Angela has been a Steward at the House and a member of the "Friends" for some years, and is also actively engaged in the Hounslow Festival of Music and Dance.

I am sure that both Angela and Michael will be valuable members of the Committee.

Volunteers Wanted!

Members will recall that in 1993 the "Friends" presented a Stairclimber to the Trust, capable of lifting a visitor in a wheelchair up the steps to the principal floor of the House. However, safe operation of this machine calls for the assistance of two helpers, with the confidence and physical ability to handle the machine and reassure the passenger. Due to changes in the Trust's staff, and pressure of other duties, it is not now possible for them to provide this service on demand. Recently, it has been necessary for visitors wishing to use the service to telephone to make a booking. Even so, it has not always been possible to arrange for qualified helpers to be available on the preferred dates.

One solution would be to recruit and train a sufficient number of volunteers who would be willing to help with this service. Booking enquiries for the following day could then be received, volunteers contacted and bookings confirmed.

We shall shortly be writing to caring groups in the local community to appeal for suitable volunteers. Any "Friends" who feel they have the qualifications for this service are asked to contact Simon Rumsey at the House - 560-3918.

Volunteers are also needed to assist with carpentry and painting work, repairing and refurbishing seats for visitors in the Park. Hopefully, this will lead to more seats being available beside the middle lake.

THANKS are due to Lewis Orton for the carpentry work on the notice board, and to Jim Tickle for erecting it in the garden of the Flats opposite the Park entrance.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

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Carols at Christmas

We are grateful to the choirs who have agreed - weather permitting - to sing Christmas Carols in the Stableyard next month.

On Sunday, 3rd December, Tony Underwood will be conducting a choir from West London Opera, between 3 and 4 p.m.

On Sunday, December 10th, Howard Stephens will be leading the St. Mary's Singers, at the same times.

Christmas Shopping

The Trust's Shop at Osterley will be open from now until December 17th, from Wednesday to Sunday, between 12 noon and 4 pm.

The Stableblock Tearoom will also be open, should you require warming refreshments.

National Trust Photographic Exhibition

During this period, the basement gallery will also be open, and visitors can see the Exhibition of National Trust photographs, and also the winning entries in the Centenary Photographic Competition. Car parking and admission to the gallery will be free, and a courtesy vehicle will operate between the car-park and the stableyard, principally for the benefit of those with mobility problems.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Simon Rumsey on the Winter Work Programme at Osterley Park

The house always takes on a rather cold, ghostly feel immediately after closing at the end of the season. The contrast between the lively atmosphere of the summer, with shutters thrown open, the house filled with people and general hustle and bustle and the quiet that befalls the house for the first week or so after closing, is somewhat eerie. Now the rooms are plunged into darkness, curtains are down and all the furniture swathed in linen covers; the atmosphere is one of dignity, solitude and stillness. Somewhere amid the spectral gloom two or three figures can sometimes be seen, performing some dark and ancient ritual to the hum of a Hoover Dustette. This is what lies at the core of Winter in a National Trust property and remains so every year, but there is always something afoot here at Osterley to liven up those five cold months.

Last year we were overrun by builders working to a very tight deadline (they actually finished at 9 o'clock the night before we opened for the season!) to convert a series of rooms on the ground floor of the West and North sides of the house. There is still time to admire the fruits of their labours since we have been able to keep the photographic exhibition open to the public until 17th December, independently of the rest of the house. This had been made possible by the demolition of the 1950's lavatories and reinstatement of the room as a lower hall, the original everyday family entrance to the house.

This year's major works centre around the refurbishment of the Long Gallery, and consolidation of the Entrance Hall paint scheme. I open up the Hall around 7:15 every morning which is an absolute joy as the view across the courtyard through the portico and over the verdant sward to the middle lake is one I never tire of. It is at its best with the trees lining the lake edge adorned with their autumnal colours, illuminated by the early morning sun. At around 8 o'clock John Sutcliffe arrives armed with the morning paper and perhaps an entertaining yarn or two about life in the Trust some years ago when he was Historic Buildings Representative for East Anglia. Mr. Sutcliffe is now a specialist decorative artist and is currently earning himself a crick in the neck applying a 'glaze coat' to the Hall scheme. His mission, undertaken with unerring enthusiasm, is not to change the colour scheme but to give it the animation and harmony Robert Adam intended. This involves toning down the stark white ornament of the walls and ceiling and applying a lighter glaze to the grey grounds to give a feeling of depth and fluidity.

Crossing the Hall into the Long Gallery you plunge into a room in the early, painful stages of refurbishment. In the first frantic week after closing the room was stripped of its contents; the furniture was dispersed to various parts of the house while the two hung sofa's from either end of the room were removed for much needed conservation work to the frames. All the paintings have come down and some are to be found looking curiously at home hanging in one of the corridors. One of the principal rooms has been renamed 'the hall of mirrors' as all the girandoles and pier glasses stand in the middle of the room on great sheets of ply. The incongruity of the scene is fascinating. Occupying the only remaining piece of floor space left in the room is a lonely figure surrounded by a wealth of interesting looking tools. Beside him is a pot of warmed pearl glue which he uses to carefully reapply loose gilding and other decorative elements from the mirrors. It is painstaking work but the results are

outstanding.

The scene in the Gallery itself is rather strange. The room stripped of its contents looks rather sad and shabby, also somewhat smaller without the lines of mirrors and paintings. The small team of decorators from Waddesdon are busily preparing the room and patches of white filler are peppered all over the walls. Cracks in the ceiling which were barely discernible are now highlighted and stark white lines snake across from either side. The floor is carpeted with decorators dust sheets and the only thing to catch the eye as you look the length of the room, lain across a pair of trestles like a sick patient, is one of the grand mahogany doors having its wounded veneer tended to by the ever attentive 'Doctor' Robin Merryfield, furniture conservator. Everywhere there are scenes of painstaking, industrious, labour. The marble urns and statues from the hall are being cleaned and other furniture from the hall and Gallery will be taken away for treatment throughout the Winter. It is a gladdening sight and four months from now I am confident that the Gallery will be ready once again to take its place as the stately centre-piece of the House.

Winter Lectures 1996.

This rather forbidding title refers to the series of talks which we have been arranging in St. Mary's Parish Hall, Osterley Road, for the past 4 years.

These are far less formal occasions that the title suggests. We have guest speakers, who give a talk for about an hour on a subject of interest to members and their friends. Talks begin at 8 pm, and are usually illustrated by slides or demonstrations. After questions, coffee - or tea - and biscuits are served, and the evening finishes about 9.45. This year, as usual, we have four speakers.

On Wednesday, February 14th, Andrea Cameron, Local History Archivist of the London Borough of Hounslow and President of the Hounslow Local History Society, will be talking on "The Highwaymen of Hounslow Heath".

On 28th February, Melanie Venes, a member of the Guild of Weavers, will be giving demonstrations of spinning techniques using the materials and technology available in the late 18th Century, before the Industrial Revolution. Members may recall that Melanie, with her friends, attracted a large audience to their demonstrations of spinning at the Village Fair in the summer.

On 13th March, Simon Rumsey, the Custodian at Osterley House, will be giving a talk on "Practical Conservation Techniques", illustrated by slides of work in progress during the winter months. A foretaste of his talk is given in his report in this newsletter.

On 27th March, Jane Clark, a musician who had researched the part played by music in the lives of notable 18th Century characters - including Bonnie Prince Charlie! - will be talking on "The Musical Life of Robert Adam", with recorded illustrations of contemporary songs and extracts from his letters, which reveal the wit and humour of the man.

Admission to individual talks is £2.50 - no increase since 1992! - or £8 for the series of four. An application form is included with this Newsletter.



Nice to go Travelling.

Jim Tickle

Whatever happened to Centenary Year! The 1995 excursion season, more adventurous than previous ones, seems to have flown by even more quickly. Happily, the full and varied programme proved increasingly popular with members and volunteers and created a healthy credit balance to take us forward into 1996.

My most abiding impressions of the past season include the marathon, and for my part the wildly ambitious trip to Blickling and Felbrigg, when I totally misjudged the journey time to Norfolk and we arrived back at Osterley to find the gates locked and that most of the staff had gone home to bed! The gardens of Packwood, Scotney Castle and Stourhead proved welcome relaxation on our visits to Baddesley Clinton, Bateman's and Stourhead House and, on our final outing, the atmospheric, autumnal calm of Hailes Abbey contrasted sharply with the rather frenetic clutter of Snowhill Manor.

Being otherwise engaged in June and September, I was unable to renew my acquaintance with Kingston Lacy and relish the rare delight of re-discovering Coughton Court. Sadly, I also missed an excellent guided tour of Corfe Castle and the warm welcome that the party received at Charlchote.

It would be incomplete, in reviewing the year, not to mention the very successful week's trip to Cornwall that several of our members enjoyed in April. Organised by our regular courier, Barrie Pyle of European Heritage Tours, the holiday was based at the Rosemundy, a family hotel in St. Agnes, and encompassed visits to a host of National Trust houses and gardens, including Lanhydrock, Trelissick, St. Michael's Mount, Cotehele and the Scilly Isles. Such was the appeal of the holiday, that I understand that one of our members has personally booked the entire package, coach and all, for a party of her own friends next year!

Plans for our own excursions in 1996 are already well in hand. It is suggested that, rather than attempt visits to two major properties in one day, which often limits the time to explore each separate place, we should concentrate on just one property, thus allowing time for some individual recreation in a nearby town or site of particular interest. With this in mind, our proposed but yet to be confirmed destinations for next season include:-

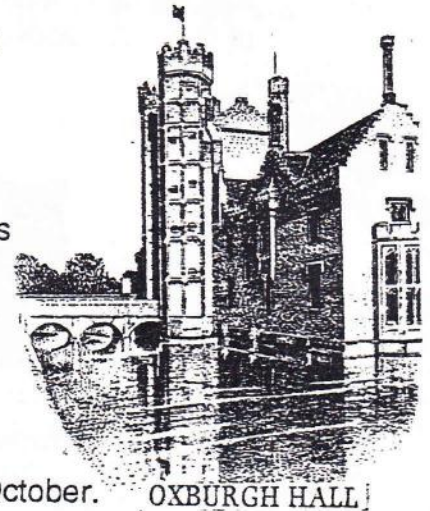
Dyrham Park House (Avon) + the City of Bath
 Wightwick Manor (W. Midlands) + Coventry and its Cathedral
 Anglesey Abbey (Cambridgeshire) + the City of Cambridge
 Knole (Kent) + Bodiam Castle
 Hanbury Hall (Worcestershire) + Stratford-upon-Avon
 Oxburgh Hall (Norfolk) + Ely and its Cathedral
 Buscot Park (Oxfordshire) + Faringdon & the Berkshire Downs

Though the specific dates of the above trips have not yet been allocated, we can confirm for your diary that the excursions will take place on:-

Wednesday, 17th April; Thursday 16th May;

Tuesday, 4th June; Wednesday, 10th July;

Monday, 5th August; Monday 2nd September; Tuesday, 1st October.



OXBURGH HALL

The finalised excursion programme for 1996, complete with prices and a booking form, will be published in the Spring Newsletter and tickets should also be available at the Friends' Winter Lectures and the Volunteers' Coffee Mornings in February and March. In the meantime, may I wish all our fellow travellers a Very Happy and Adventurous New Year.



ANGLESEY ABBEY AND GARDEN

From South-West to North-East.

Further to the popular EHT Cornish Holiday mentioned above, Barrie Pyle is now offering Friends a week's holiday from Saturday, 20th - 27th July, 1996, visiting NT and other noteworthy properties and sites in Northumberland and Durham (e.g. Cragside, Washington Old Hall, Beamish, Hadrian's Wall, Lindisfarne Castle and the Farne Islands, etc.....) The cost of this holiday is currently estimated at £350, based on good quality half-board hotel accommodation. For full details of this highly recommended offer, would you please contact Barrie directly by phoning him on 0181 977 5143.



WIGHTWICK MANOR