



The Friends of Osterley Park



A Supporters Group for the National Trust

Issue 22

NEWSLETTER

Summer 1996

Midsummer Magic

Ian Conacher

After a cold start, Spring came late to Osterley this year. When the warmer days did arrive, there was a sudden transformation; trees burst into leaf, and the park was filled with a subtle mixture of different shades of green.

The removal of the yew hedges has opened up a vista of the house and stable block from the drive, across the open area of the front lawn; in the opposite direction, the view from the stable yard, of the trees at the head of the lower lake, with all the variations in the shading of the leaves, was breathtaking in early May.

In the woods behind the Great Meadow, those who followed the signposts along the "bluebell trail" set out by the estate staff were rewarded by the sight of a profusion of flowers, lasting for some weeks. These were followed by a display of the pink blooms of the campion.

During a walk through the woods, I noticed a hole in an oak tree near the path, and was able to watch a pair of great spotted woodpeckers coming and going, and disappearing into the trunk with food for their brood within the nest.

Birds have also been breeding successfully on the lake. Coots and Mallards can be seen with young, and the immigrant Mandarin Duck are also raising families. One of the most interesting sights is that of the Great Crested Grebe, apparently "weaning" its chicks by ignoring the strident calls for food from young birds who are almost full-grown and capable of fending for themselves.

Twenty or thirty years ago, Grebe were to be found in small numbers at Osterley, in the more secluded parts of the lower lake. The species was almost wiped out by the demand for their feathers in the Victorian era for trimming ladies' hats, but they now seem to have recovered not only in numbers but also in confidence!

Exhibitions at Osterley

The Exhibition rooms in the West Range of the ground floor of the house have been used for two major shows this season. In April, there was a presentation by the Surrey Sculptors Association, which contained an impressive display of the work of members of this group - mostly representational, with some striking studies of human and animal subjects.

In May, there was a major exhibition of the "Coastline" paintings of Charles Lane, presented in association with the Trust's "Enterprise Neptune" Appeal. The exhibition was opened by Sir Andrew Lloyd-Webber, who was introduced by Lord Chorley, the Chairman of the Trust.

"Friends" had the privilege of a special viewing of the Exhibition at a Reception held on 28th May in the Servant's Hall. This included a talk by the artist on his philosophy and techniques, and by David Glaisyer, the director of the Gallery promoting the Exhibition, on the arrangements for framing and presenting the work.

The Long Gallery

This has now received its full complement of pictures, mainly from sources within the Trust. The two large pictures at each end, on loan from the Royal Collection, remain, but all the rest are new to Osterley.

Volunteers at the House had the pleasure of a talk from Alistair Laing, the Trust's Adviser on Sculpture and Paintings, in early June. He recalled how various arrangements had been tried for the Long Gallery during the early years of the Trust's ownership. Many older "Friends" will recall the tapestries depicting the *Four Continents* which hung there in the sixties. These were removed when it was realised that exposure to strong light was having an adverse effect.

Following these came the paintings on loan from the Victoria & Albert, which remained until the end of last season, when redecoration of the Gallery began.

Pictures have now been selected from sources within the Trust, to represent a collection, such as might have been assembled by the Child family during the 17th and 18th centuries.

A leaflet describing the paintings will soon be available to visitors; members who have not yet seen the Long Gallery since its redecoration should make an early visit.

Annual General Meeting

This will be held at 7 pm on Tuesday, 8th October, 1996, in the new Tea Room area of the Stable Block (formerly the V & A workshop). A formal "Notice of Meeting" and Agenda is included with this Newsletter; in view of the rising cost of postage, this will be the only notification of this event - so make a note in your diaries now!

We plan to combine the business meeting with a social evening. Wine will be served, and Barry Williams will be talking to us about the latest news from the property.

The Long Gallery has received a lot of attention in recent newsletters and I propose to continue the theme, except that the gallery I am concerned with is the Oak Gallery at my previous place of employment, The Vyne near Basingstoke. This Gallery reads like a Who's Who of the early part of the Henry VIII reign, as each heraldic panel is embossed with the arms or insignia of a courtier of Henry VIII, or an associate of The Vyne's owner Sir William Sandys.

I spent my first year at The Vyne lodging with one of the tenants, Bill Harrison. Bill had compiled a guide to the panels in the Oak Gallery, an academic in-depth study identifying each panel and researching connections and family backgrounds.

The badges help to date the construction of The Gallery, as Thomas Wolsey's badge is often represented as a Cardinal's hat, and as Wolsey was made a Cardinal in 1518 and died by 1536 The Gallery must have been constructed during these years.

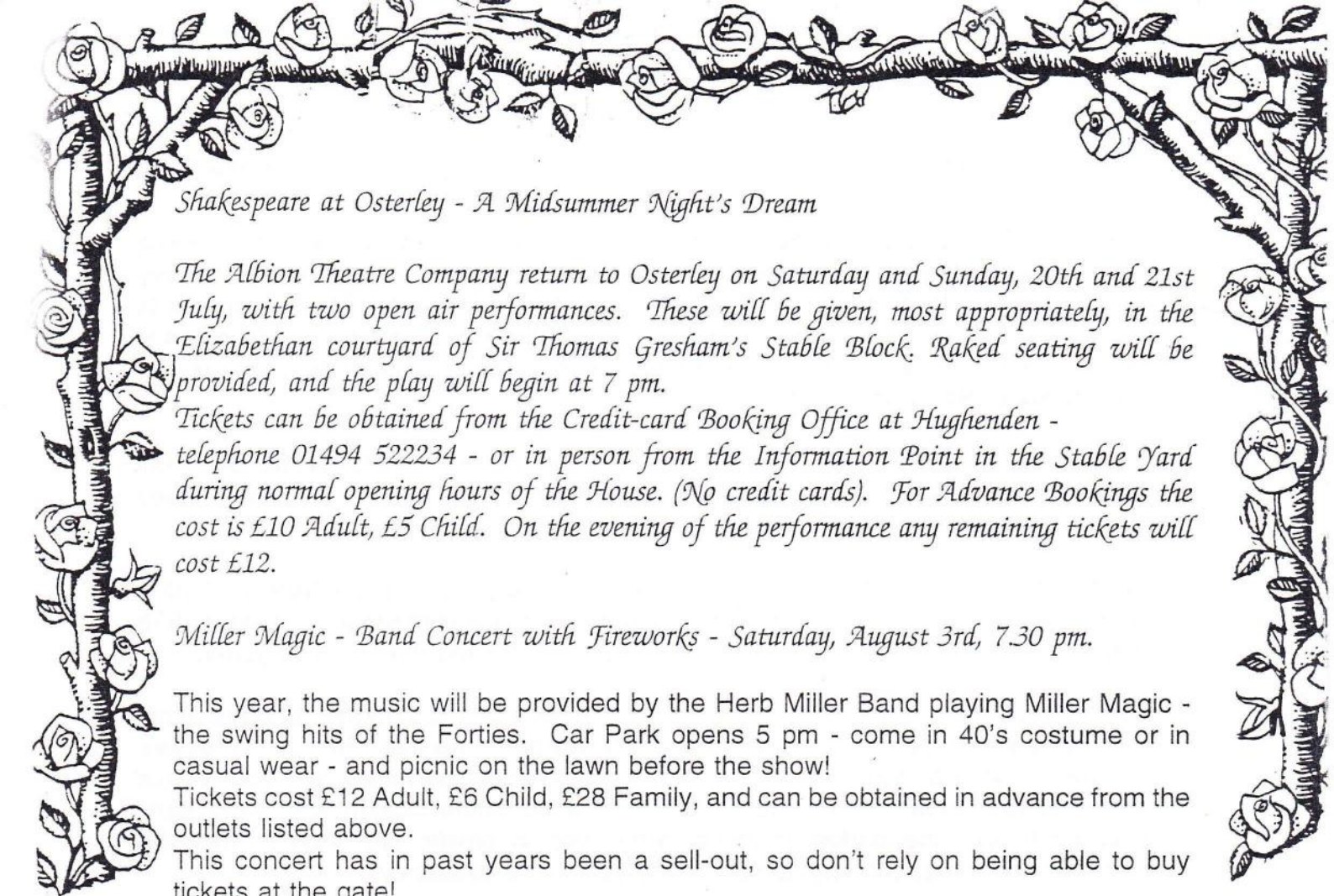
Upon completion Sandys' associates must have felt proud to view their badges within the showpiece of one of the first brick-built buildings of the day. Not so impressive however, if your badge had been carved by an illiterate craftsman and your initials appear upside down! Likewise, I do not suppose Anne Boleyn was particularly pleased to see the badge of Henry VIII's wife in prolific prominence, with the pomegranate of Aragon appearing with embarrassing frequency.

My accommodation had been part of Anne Boleyn's Suite during her visit to The Vyne, and I often pondered about her temper whilst staying there, not to mention her daughter Elizabeth I when she viewed the same panels a generation later.

I always suspected that those old oak panels harboured more wildlife than was strictly necessary - strange noises were often heard emitting from the woodwork. This was confirmed during one winter clean when I reached into an old bronze urn on high to remove the usual cleverly placed sweet wrappers, to find more than I bargained for - a little bat had reached the end of its life there. I wrapped it in a paper towel to show Bill, who put it in the freezer to await identification by one of Bill's friends. I became rather fond of the bizarre company that our frozen food kept.

Recently The Gallery has been restored to its nineteenth century appearance and consequently some of the Tudor panelling is obscured by paintings. It is still well worth a visit, should you venture close by send the old place regards from two of its admirers.





Shakespeare at Osterley - A Midsummer Night's Dream

The Albion Theatre Company return to Osterley on Saturday and Sunday, 20th and 21st July, with two open air performances. These will be given, most appropriately, in the Elizabethan courtyard of Sir Thomas Gresham's Stable Block. Raked seating will be provided, and the play will begin at 7 pm.

Tickets can be obtained from the Credit-card Booking Office at Hughenden - telephone 01494 522234 - or in person from the Information Point in the Stable Yard during normal opening hours of the House. (No credit cards). For Advance Bookings the cost is £10 Adult, £5 Child. On the evening of the performance any remaining tickets will cost £12.

Miller Magic - Band Concert with Fireworks - Saturday, August 3rd, 7.30 pm.

This year, the music will be provided by the Herb Miller Band playing Miller Magic - the swing hits of the Forties. Car Park opens 5 pm - come in 40's costume or in casual wear - and picnic on the lawn before the show!

Tickets cost £12 Adult, £6 Child, £28 Family, and can be obtained in advance from the outlets listed above.

This concert has in past years been a sell-out, so don't rely on being able to buy tickets at the gate!

Busman's Holidays 1996

Angela Lynsky

The new format for visits this year - visiting a town and one National Trust Property is proving to be very successful especially as Jim Tickle has very thoughtfully contrived where possible to choose market day in the towns visited so far.

Cambridge & Angelsea Abbey

Cambridge was an excellent choice for our first outing of the year. A bright spring day brought punters out onto the river and market stalls beckoned invitingly beneath their bright colourful awnings. There was time to admire customised teapots in the shops, have a delicious lunch in one of the cafe's and then to stroll through college grounds and chapels and hurry among the daffodils.

Anglesey Abbey is what remains of a priory destroyed during Henry VIII dissolution mania. In 1600 the surviving Chapter House was converted into a domestic dwelling in the Jacobean style. Over the centuries successive owners embellished the house to create the warm, inviting house we visit today. The house is full of beautiful antique furniture, works of art, paintings, tapestries and fantastic clocks. One clock produced bejewelled palm trees and sprouted pergolas and revolving umbrellas on the stroke of 3.

A short report does not do justice to the Abbey. Each room was so different: from the vaulted ceiling of the original Chapter House to the elmwood panelling and bookshelves in the new library built in 1938, The piece de resistance for me was the Jade Cabinet housed in the lower gallery. I have never seen jade in so many colours from white through shades of green, marrow fat cream and brown to black, and

including pieces of translucent precious stone with names I could not pronounce. I had to wrench myself away from the house for there was one last treat to enjoy before leaving the Abbey. A few yards from the front door an almost hidden path led down a sheltered gravel walk and through a wrought iron gate - here we stood transfixed, 4,000 blue and white hyacinths stood plump and proud in their neat beds and the air was filled with their heady perfume - magnificent!

Coventry & Wightwick Manor - 16th May.

In contrast to the weather in Cambridge, Coventry was explored on a cold, raw, wintry day; we were pleased to take refuge in the Cathedral where the cold was soon forgotten in admiring the wonderful stained glass windows and the once controversial tapestry. The layout of the modern shopping precinct also sheltered us from the cold winds but very little of "Old Coventry" remains most being destroyed during World War II. We found consolation in the naughty but nice cakes and pastries oozing temptation from the coffee shops scattered throughout the shopping area.

Having admitted that William Morris Wallpaper was not my favourite form of decoration - I was really only going to Wightwick for a day out! - what a wonderful surprise I had.

Wightwick (pronounced Wittick) is a glorious sprawling hotchpotch of Victorian architecture. First begun in 1887, the paint was barely dry when the owner, Theodore Mander (of paint manufacturing fame), asked the architect to tear down a few walls in order to add an Elizabethan style great parlour, complete with inglenook fireplace and minstrel's gallery. By the time a new dining-room, billiard room, extra staircase and guest bedrooms had been added, (the paint factory was doing VERY well) the house was twice as big and really did earn its title of Manor.

Some years later, Lady Mander, daughter-in-law to the original Theodore and wife of Sir Geoffrey, had not only a modern approach to interior decoration but also a good eye for a bargain. The Pre-Raphaelites had slipped down the popularity polls and Lady Mander was able to buy up many original paintings, sketches and portraits from artists such as Burne-Jones, Millais, Madox-Brown, Rosetti and other Pre-Raphaelites. These now hang in Wightwick upon walls covered in silk, printed cotton or woven wool, paper or linen. All were designed by Morris, with dado below of oak or walnut panelling and Jacobean style plasterwork on the frieze and ceilings above. Morris-designed tiles surround typical Victorian fireplaces and tapestries festoon corridor walls, furniture bought from Morris & Co., still has its original covering.

Although none of the Pre-Raphaelites ever visited the house they seem to haunt the place. Their ghosts dogged my footsteps as I wandered from one room to another, they seemed to belong there more than the Mander family. I still do not care for William Morris wallpaper, but it does suit this house which I like so much that I shall visit it again one day.

Salisbury, Mompesson House & Mottisfont Abbey - 4th June.

Barry, our coach driver, is a mine of information and goes out of his way (quite literally) to show us places of particular interest. On our way to Salisbury we were instructed in the ancient art of chequering walls using alternating blocks of white chalk and grey stone and were driven through the lovely Hampshire villages of Upper, Middle and Lower Woodford to see examples of this. Again it was market day in Salisbury, although we had three and a half hours there was so much to see. I personally had waited many years to visit Salisbury Cathedral and I have been

rewarded for my patience. It is awe inspiring - delicately carved facades, flying buttresses, the soaring spire. You must crane your neck to gape at the towering pillars and lancet windows from the nave. The glass in the new Trinity Chapel window was designed in Chartres, predominantly blue, you could gaze at it for hours finding something new each minute in its breathtaking beauty. I must not forget to mention the cloisters, the earliest built in England and, in my opinion, the loveliest.

Across the Chorister's Green from the Cathedral is Mompesson House, a small but beautiful Queen Anne house with an elegant carved oak staircase and plasterwork ceilings. The rooms are fairly small and comfortable. In the Library you can actually prop your derriere on the huge club fender or even sit on the sofa and read a magazine. There is a charming view of the pretty little walled garden from this room. The Turnbull collection of 18th Century drinking glasses is in the dining-room. Their stems are made with twists or inset with coloured patterns. The tea shop in the garden is a most welcome watering and resting place.

On to Mottisfont Abbey, over the centuries there has been much controversy about the name - moot and font are believed by many to be the origin of the name. Whatever you think you cannot dispute the existence of a clear, cool pool of water arising from the high ground close to the house and descending in shallow steps as a slow rivulet gently bending and falling to meet the River Test which flows through the meadows. The grounds are also renowned for the walled garden where varieties of old English roses are still grown and cherished. They have created a new pale pink rose this year for the National Trust called Octavia Hill. Although not much of the house is open to the public the buildings are steeped in history - originally part of a priory demolished by Henry VIII and restored by the Sandys family from 1538.

Late Summer Visits

As a postscript to Angela's lively accounts of our trips this year, Jim Tickle has asked us to advise you that seats are still available for the outing to Hanbury Hall and Stratford-on-Avon on Monday, September 2nd - depart Osterley 9 am. cost £9. The trips on 5th August to Ely and Oxburgh Hall, and on 1st October to Bath & Dyrham Park are fully booked; Jim has a waiting list for these! For bookings and enquiries ring Jim on 0181 894 4174.

Busy, Busy, Busy!

The cold Spring and pressure of other activities combined to inhibit the nurturing of bedding plants for sale by the "Friends" this year. Jim Tickle, who in the past has been the prime mover in this work, was also under pressure through other commitments. Not only has he organised the programme of visits and dealt with the bookings for these, but he has also been active on stage with the Teddington Theatre Group. Jim had a leading role in their production of Priestley's *When We Are Married* in May. This period comedy relies on dialogue and delivery for its success, and was brilliantly presented by the Teddington Group. We note that Jim is still sporting the magnificent side-whiskers which he grew for the occasion!