



The Friends of Osterley Park

A Supporters Group for the National Trust

Issue 6

NEWSLETTER

February 1992

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Ian Conacher

Since our last Newsletter in December, there have been several major changes in our organisation. Sheila Chapman, who has been our Chairman from the formation of the "Friends" in 1990, has decided that, for personal and family reasons she will be unable to devote as much time and energy to that office as the job has demanded over the past two years. She has therefore asked me to take over from her and I shall do my very best to follow the guidelines she has laid down in the development of the "Friends".

Sheila cited the distance from her home at Gerrards Cross to Osterley as a factor contributing to her decision to resign. Against that, I feel sure that her proximity to Hughenden Manor and the contacts she established there with the Regional Management of the Trust contributed greatly to the welfare of the Friends during their formative period. I am glad to know that she will continue as a member of the Friends Committee.

We have also had to accept with regret the resignation of Scilla McLintock and John Latchford, both of whom have found that the pressures of business life and family commitments have made it impossible for them to continue to give time to the work of the Committee.

Scilla was responsible, through her contacts with Hoechst (U.K.) Ltd, for editing and producing the early editions of this Newsletter, which was sponsored by that organisation at considerable cost to them, for which we are very grateful. However, it is not felt desirable - not, indeed, it is feasible - to continue to spend such large sums of sponsorship money on printing. Your Committee has therefore decided to change to a less expensive format which we hope will be acceptable to our members. We are happy to know that the more modest costs of this will still be sponsored by Hoechst.

To assist with this production, we have co-opted two new members to the Committee: Christina Scherer, who will be acting as Editor, collecting contributions, news items and information on forthcoming events, and Olivier Vorms, who has generously offered to use his word-processor skills to transfer this material to the printed page. This edition is very much a test run for the team, and we hope you will find the format acceptable.

One other change on the Committee is that Audrey Ebison, who has been giving invaluable assistance to me during my time as Membership Secretary, has been persuaded to take on the full responsibility for this function, following my move into the "Chair".

Incidentally, we still feel the need for a "Minute Secretary" to assist the Committee - offers please to the Chairman on (081) 560 8523.



REVIEW OF THE YEAR

1991 has been a year of evolution for the "Friends". It was not perhaps fully appreciated in advance how different the Trust's approach to the management of a historic building would be from that of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Major changes are the replacement of paid museum attendants by volunteer room stewards, the closure of the House during the winter months, and the restrictions on the use of the property for entertaining and events.

Even the Victoria and Albert Museum, in recent years, has come to realise that the cost of preparing for functions in the House could not be absorbed into their general budget. The Trust, operating with a smaller staff and depending heavily on volunteers, were and are unable to provide manpower on a large scale to assist groups such as the "Friends" in setting up "Events". This came as something of a shock to these who had, in V & A's days, become accustomed to holding "Events" in the house without having to bear the full labour costs.

In spite of these problems of adjustment, the "Friends" were able to hold two major events: the George Melly Concert in June - somewhat dampened by the weather - and a Reception in the House in August, which was well attended.

Financially, we have had a good year. Approximately £1,300 has been donated to the Trust for various purchases, including the two Batricars described elsewhere in this Newsletter. Additionally, suitable reproduction furniture is on order so that seating can be provided at the head of the main staircase for visitors needing to recover their breath after the ascent!

We start 1992 with a comfortable balance in hand. The accounts have been audited: any member wishing to see a copy should contact the Hon. Treasurer.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Apart from the comfortable balance, I feel that we start 1992 with several major advantages. We have now established good relationships with the management of the Trust both at Hughenden and at Osterley, based on a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all involved.

We have an active Committee ready to work for the interests of the "Friends", and active support from members, evidenced in the bookings for the Winter Lectures and the Opening Party.

We are planning a programme of "Events" for the year, and endeavouring to give opportunities for members to visit "places that others cannot reach" - such as the guided tour of Sutton House planned for April 11th. Obviously, we cannot compete with the Trust in offering free admission to the House, or even free car park! (Incidentally, any Friend who is not a member of the National Trust should be aware that membership gives one a "season ticket" for the car park as well as all the other benefits!)

Hopefully, though, we can provide information, activities and social functions for all who are concerned about the welfare of the House and Park, as well as generating an income to enable the Trust to provide additional amenities for visitors.

Finally, we must mention the practical help and support given to the "Friends" by the staff of the House. Barry and Christine Williams, Jim, Pat and Simon Rumsey, all surely deserve our thanks as generous "friends of the Friends" and we look forward to a congenial and mutually beneficial relationship with them over the years to come.

E.N.T.A. DONATION

We learn from Olive Marke Chairman of the Ealing National Trust Association - who have had a long and close relationship with Osterley House - that they were able to donate £3,000 to the work of the Trust at Osterley during 1991. Well done!

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Our thanks to those who responded pro subscriptions were due on 1st January. Party as well as the subscription!

There are, however, a fair number who "behind the clock" but now, with Spring This year, memberships will run to 31: therefater be on an annual basis from 1 should be returned to our new Members

OPENING PARTY

This event, organised by the Committee the House on Friday 6th March 1992 include a "finger buffet", wine, and e composer and performer of the music Christmas Party in 1990. An application

VISIT TO SUTTON HOUSE, HACKNEY -



NATIONAL TRUST EVENTS AT OSTERLEY - 1992

Trust members will shortly be receiving details of the events programme for 1992. We give here a summary of what is planned for Osterley.

- Monday 6th April 6:30 p.m. "Wine, Women and Songs" - an evening lecture on Classical Mythology at Osterley Park, by John Hardy.
Buffet supper and wine. Tour of the House. Tickets: £20.00.
- Monday 29th June Robert Adam Study Days, with lectures, tour of the House, buffet lunch and wine. Tickets: £20.00 for each day.
Monday 6th July
- Saturday 20th June 7:30 p.m. Ealing National Trust Association Gala Concert. Performance by the Vivaldi Concertante. Wine and buffet supper. Tickets: £25.00.
Doors open at 6:30 p.m.
- 27th June - 3rd July Robert Adam Bicentenary Concert series. Song, music, verse and anecdotes reflecting the life and times of Robert Adam.
Tickets for 27, 28, 29 June and 1, 2 July: £9.00 for each day
Friday 8th July: Gala Concert with wine and birthday cake. Tickets: £15.00.
- Saturday 11th July 7.45 p.m. Grand Military Band Concert and Fireworks Display, with the Band of the Scots Guards. Tickets: £10.00 (children under 12: £5.00).
- Monday 24th August, Past Times with Good Company. A lunch with Thomas Gresham, his family and friends at Osterley in 1592. Readings, music, song and dance in the Elizabethan stable block. Tickets: £12.00 (including lunch).
Tuesday 25th August,
(at noon)

For full details, please send a stamped addressed envelope to:

The Regional Public Affairs Manager
The National Trust
Thames and Chilterns Regional Office
Hughenden Manor
High Wycombe
Bucks HP14 4LA

(except for E.N.T.A. Gala Concert - Mrs Olive Marke, 17 Hillcroft Crescent, Ealing, London W5 2SG, with S.A.E.)

Please note that volunteers will be needed to assist in stewarding at these events. Any members interested should contact Christine Williams on 081 - 560 3918.

RECRUITMENT FOR THE FRIENDS

We would hope that all "Friends" would act as recruiting agents for the organisation, telling their friends and relations of the work being done by the "Friends" to support the National Trust and the benefits of membership.

Additionally, we hope to set up recruiting stands at local events in order to publicize the "Friends" and enlist more members.

Anyone wishing to help in this - or wishing to invite us to their local Fete - should contact the Chairman on 081 - 560 8523.



WANTED - VOLUNTEERS FOR BATRICARS

The two machines referred to in our last Newsletter have now been supplemented by a two-seater vehicle donated to the House by the Enfield National Trust Association. These will now all be garaged in the west wing of the Stable Block, where charging facilities will be provided, hopefully by Easter.

It is hoped that the "Friends" can provide a rota of volunteers to assist in the issuing of these machines to visitors to the Park who are unable to enjoy a walk around the grounds. This will include explaining the simple controls and giving out maps of the paths around the Park. Volunteers need not have any nursing experience, and will not be expected to undertake any skilled duties such as assisting in the transfer of disabled visitors from wheelchairs.

The Trust will be operating an Information & Recruitment Centre in the Stable Block and it is hoped that the Batricars volunteers will be based alongside this for mutual support! Initially, the service will be provided on Wednesdays and Sundays only.

Those wishing to volunteer for this valuable "social service" duty should contact Dudley Foy on 081 - 571 8900. Friends and relations of "Friends" may well be interested in this task, and volunteers from youth organisations, churches and other community groups will be welcomed. We have the machines - it is now up to us to see that we can make them available to those in need of this facility.

OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The National Trust depends heavily on volunteers to assist in its activities. We learn from Barbara Phillips, Regional Volunteer Co-ordinator at Hughenden, that the work done by volunteers in the Thames and Chilterns Region last year was valued at approximately £250,000!

Osterley has already one of the largest volunteer work forces, with nearly 200 people engaged in various areas last year. However, further volunteers are still required so that the workload on each can be kept to a reasonable level. Vacancies exist for:-

- Room Stewards Ideally for 2 sessions every 4 weeks
- Litter Picking To join the team on Monday mornings
- Architectural Draughting To join a small team making record drawings of the features of the House

Anyone interested - including friends and relations of the "Friends" - should get in touch with Christine Williams at the House on 081 - 560 3918.

NEWS FROM THE HOUSE

During the winter, the work in rewiring the property has been continuing. Unexpected delays resulted from the difficulty of raising the 18th Century floorboards to conceal the cables and this means that, during March, only the main floor and bedrooms will be open to the public. The basement will hopefully be completed by April 1st.

Successive years of drought and exceptionally low winter rainfalls have resulted in the water level in the Garden Lake not rising to its normal level for the time of year. Action is now being taken to ensure that the drains and ditches feeding it are clear so that any Spring rains will run off into the lake.

Barry Williams reports that the majority of dog owners have responded well and are co-operating with the campaign to control dogs in the driveways and around the House. There are however a few who are militantly opposed to the idea that their dogs should be under control. It is hard to understand this reaction, as the Trust is by no means alone in its efforts to ensure that the public are not threatened by uncontrolled dogs and the health problems they can create. Control exists in many public parks and on the beaches of seaside resorts, so - why not in Osterley Park?



(Continued from Issue No 4)

Inside Osterley in the 1960's and 1970's

by Peter Thornton

While the furnishings of Osterley were owned and arranged by the Victoria and Albert Museum in the 1960s, the fabric of the house - inside and out - was in the care of the Department of the Environment. This large organisation was well versed in maintaining mediaeval castles and ancient earthworks where the interior, if there was one, consisted of bare walls, but it had virtually no experience of looking after the interior of Baroque or later houses. Its staff knew all about mending the roof and getting glazing bars right if a window needed replacing, but they knew nothing about how curtains and carpets had looked in the past, had little experience of lighting old rooms, and knew no more than anyone else about the history of room arrangement.

In the case of the interior of Osterley, moreover, the branch of the Department of the Environment that was responsible were familiar with fitting up ancient buildings for modern use, not as historic displays for the public to visit. The walls of Osterley were re-painted on a regular basis, just as they would be in the many offices which that branch of the Ministry looked after, and those who were employed to paint them were not specialists. The last re-painting of the Long Gallery was carried out by men who had just come from painting a factory. No great skill was required in this case as the scheme was fairly straight-forward and the result (still there today) was not bad, judged by the standards of the time. In those days, when something demanding greater sensitivity was required, it was necessary to turn to a team, father and son, who were of course much in demand, but only very special projects were given to them.

In the 1950s, the Department of the Environment would ask my predecessor what colour he wanted the walls, whenever a room came up for its routine re-paint and, if he was bored with the green, he might ask that it be painted pink or blue next time. The notion that one might try to find out what colour the walls had been at some point in the past only began to seem important when "authentic" room arrangement was introduced in the late 1960s. Then, obviously, the colour of walls and ceilings had to agree with the period chosen for the arrangement of the furniture. So, then, suddenly everything had to be authentic Adam at Osterley and we, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, began to try to establish what had been the colour of the walls and ceilings in the rooms which were presented in this "new" way.

Our first attempt did in fact concern the Long Gallery just mentioned. We got that quite wrong even if it looks pleasant enough and seemed right to us at the time. It is difficult now to conceive of a time when no one knew very much about historic paintwork (other than wall-paintings that were regarded as Art). There were no informed specialists armed with microscopes who would lay bare the strata, layer by layer, and no one had much feeling for paint quality. If you wanted to know what a colour a wall had been, you scratched it with a penny and it was sheer chance which layer happened to be thus revealed. In the Long Gallery, we made investigations in one small area but it was considered wrong to close an important room for long, so the search was not thorough. I do not recall that anything helpful was revealed by this exercise, so we had to rely on documentary evidence and this told us that the walls had been "pea green". No one even knew what shade this was, although it had been the most commonly adopted colour during the Adam period. Was it the colour of a pea pod, of pea soup, of sweet pea, or what? Luckily, or so we thought, the walls of the Drawing Room next door had been the same colour and we found what we believed to be unfaded (or virtually unaltered, at any rate) pea green behind the pair of commodes in the room - and it was a pea soup colour. The walls of green damask were of the same grey-green colour. Everything seemed to point to a pleasing green-grey being the colour we wanted. So that was the colour chosen for the many yards of silk damask that had to be woven for the seat furniture at great cost, and that was the colour chosen for painting the walls which we now realised had to be en suite.



It was only when all the walls had been stripped of many layers of paper (both lining paper and wallpaper) that the original colours came to light in one corner where they had escaped stripping by previous generations. The Adam scheme, it seemed, had been of a lighter green, but the discovery came too late. All the damask had been woven and gallons of paint had been mixed. This did, however, teach us how important it was to allow plenty of time for initial research and that it was wrong to allow oneself to be hurried unduly by considerations of public access. It also taught me to record such experiences so that my successors might benefit from such mistakes.

The fine ceiling of the Library was quite a different matter. When I took over in 1966 the ceiling was punctuated by the small painted roundels and rectangles by Zucchi which remain untouched. But a watercolour by Adam dated 1760 showed the strong polychrome scheme that had surrounded these painted scenes, and I was determined to re-paint the ceiling in this manner. I had seen other coloured designs for ceilings by Adam in Sir John Soane's Museum and I knew that Adam's colours in the 1760s were strong and nothing like the bland, timid hues which were still, in the 1960s, being called "Adam colours", and were adopted every time an Adam room had to be painted in those days. In interpreting the 1766 design, therefore, I urged the Department of the Environment special painters - the skilled practitioners just mentioned - to err on the side of brightness when they did the job. We had no control over what they actually did, we had to rely on persuasion. But the general result pleased me, even if I was disappointed about some of the details. Yet, even if the result was not totally satisfactory, the re-painting of the Library ceiling at Osterley did at least draw attention, in circles that mattered, to the whole question of historic paintwork, and much thought and excellent research has been the real result of this intentionally provocative move. Nothing irrevocable had been done to the ceiling, be it noted; to alter what we did merely requires a new layer of paint.

This is precisely what has been done in the Breakfast Room at Osterley, which we asked the Department of Environment to paint yellow (to go with the walls) with blue scroll work. This has since had the yellow ground painted white and that may indeed be correct. We would certainly not find any yellow there at the time but I had seen, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a dozen ceiling designs by William Chambers (who had decorated that room) all with blue scrolls on yellow. Seeking to remind everyone that colours during the Adam-Chambers period had been full blooded, not washed-out, I seized on that evidence - such as it was - and chose the more colourful scheme.

Of course, everyone knows all about such things now and it is today difficult to imagine how ill-informed we all were in the 1960s and we, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, were only a very small jump ahead of the others. So much study has been devoted to these matters in the last thirty years and we now all know an enormous amount about them. A whole industry has grown up to provide the correct materials required; skilled specialists are ready to make up fittings in a correct style; artists of all hands know how to produce authentic effects, and those who are in charge of historic homes understand the range of options on offer when it comes to presenting the interiors of these great buildings.

With hindsight, it is easy to be critical, but the circumstances in which we were operating in that early phase were unbelievably primitive. We were furthermore working against a background of deeply entrenched tradition that saw things quite differently, and we had very little money with which to do anything at all.

Whether you like the way things have turned out or not (and I myself would deplore an all-out adoption of our methods everywhere - that could be very tedious), it is now anyway a matter of history that the first steps taken in this country towards presenting rooms in what has come to be called "the authentic manner" (a question-begging term, if ever there was one) were taken at Osterley, some twenty five years ago.



LATE NEWS - STATEMENT FROM ROBIN MILLS ON THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF LAND IN OSTERLEY AROUND THE PARK

Most members will already know that much of the open space in the Osterley area, including the fields adjacent to the Park, is owned by the Jersey family. Various proposals for the development of the area have been put forward in recent years.

The latest plans, exhibited locally by M.E.P.C. Development Ltd in June of last year, proposed commercial and residential development on two sites South of the Picadilly railways line. An "Equestrian Centre" would be sited North of the M4 and to the East of Windmill Lane.

Farmland to the North of the M4 would become a new golf course, while the farmland immediately surrounding the Park could, it was suggested, be offered to the National Trust.

The loss of the acreage North of the M4 could well affect the character of the present farming operations in the fields around the Park.

A "Planning Application" based on the above proposals has now been presented to the London Borough of Hounslow and it is against this background that the following report from Robin Mills, Regional Director of the National Trust, should be read.

The outline planning application submitted by MEPC Projects Ltd represent the latest attempt to develop some part of the open land which surrounds Osterley Park. It coincides with the period of consultation for the draft Unitary Development Plan prepared by the London Borough of Hounslow. The UDP is very important because, to a very large extent, it will determine future planning in the Borough for many years to come. It incorporates several policies which are intended to protect Osterley Park and its setting. In particular, the objectives of the Trust's 1981 Management Plan for Osterley Park, which were endorsed by the Conservation Area recently designated by the Borough, have been incorporated into the UDP.

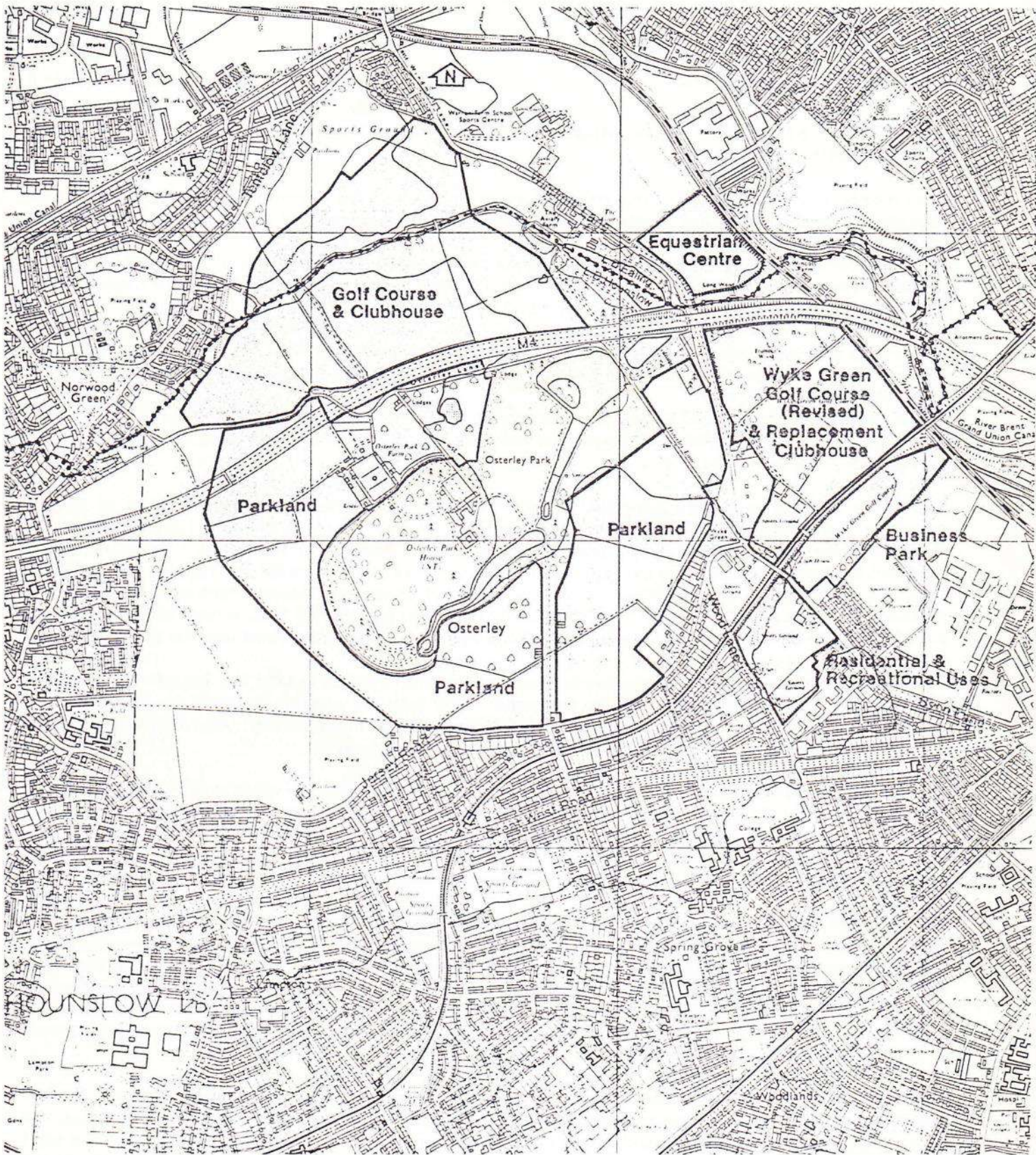
Planning policies may prevent unsympathetic development and changes in land use but cannot guarantee sensitive and positive management of the landscape. The first and greatest threat to an unified historic landscape is the fragmentation of ownership and, thereafter, of management. One of the benefits of acquisition by the Trust is that the risk of fragmentation is averted forever.

The markedly different schemes submitted by Wates and, more recently, by MEPC Projects Ltd have both attempted to justify the development of certain land for housing and commerce or industry on the basis that it would enable other land to be kept intact and managed sensitively as the setting for Osterley Park and perhaps in the ownership of the Trust. This has created a dilemma not only for the Trust, but for all concerned about the future of Osterley Park and the extensive open land which surrounds it.

Perhaps wisely, the Jersey family have insisted that the schemes submitted for planning consent are comprehensive and relate to the entire area within their ownership; it has avoided piecemeal applications, but at the same time it has meant that each application has to be judged as a single entity, with the result that constituent parts cannot be judged on their particular merits. However, such consideration is possible within the content of the UDP and it is important that the policies which it contains reflect the very best long term result for the future use and management of the open land at Osterley, together with proper arrangements for access and enjoyment of it by the public.

Within the National Trust, the scheme prepared by MEPC Projects Ltd will be considered first by the Thames and Chilterns Regional Committee and subsequently, in March, by the Properties Committee. Its views will then be submitted to the Borough and made public. I must stress that no decision has been made yet and I certainly cannot pre-empt or forecast the views of the Properties Committee. In any event, it is not the Trust's practice to support planning applications by other parties. Its comments will set out the Trust's assessment of the impact of the scheme insofar as they relate to Osterley Park and its setting, both in terms of protection and future management.

If members of the Friends care to write to me with their views, I shall be most grateful, but I cannot undertake to reply in detail.



Proposed Land Uses

Outline Planning Application by MEPC Projects Ltd,
Juant Investments Ltd and O.J. Le Mottee Ltd