

London Chapter

John R Redmill & Ashleigh Murray

The London Chapter has had a most interesting fifteen months since the last Newsletter report, thanks to the Committee members, particularly Colm Owens, who give so much time to plan and organise events throughout the year; without them there would be no events at all. The Committee is also most grateful to the members who support our events, making everything worthwhile and also helping the work of the Society in Ireland.

After a particularly wet tour at the end of May 2013 in Cumbria with the 20 Ghost Club, our summer programme concluded with two events, the first being a visit to two Hammersmith houses in early June. Both are significant 18th-century houses, but both are particularly associated with the great Arts-and-Crafts designer William Morris. No 7 Hammersmith Terrace is the earlier of the two, and was the home of Morris' great friend, the typographer Emery Walker; the trust in his name was set up in 1999. After lunch nearby, we went to Kelmscott House, Morris's own home from 1878, the year after he had founded the first conservation society in the UK, until his death in 1896. Morris ran his private printing company from premises nearby and today, while the house is privately owned, its Coach House houses the William Morris Society, whose annual garden party we were able to join during the afternoon. Our own Summer Drinks Party in early July, most kindly hosted by members Fielding and the Hon Dr Julia King in their garden in Lexham Gardens. As part of the evening, Dr King gave a short account of her forthcoming book on George Hadfield, a pupil of James Wyatt during the 1780s before he emigrated to the USA and his work on many important buildings in Washington DC; he also designed Annaghmore House in Co. Offaly in about 1790.

Our Autumn programme began with a visit to Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, the home of the Marquesses of Salisbury, and Knebworth, home of the Lyttons. Hatfield is one of the greatest Jacobean 'Prodigy Houses', but in the grounds are the surviving parts of the old Royal Palace built in 1497 and where the future Queen Elizabeth was confined for much of her youth by her sister Queen Mary. James I gave the property to his chief minister Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, who rebuilt most of the house from 1608 onwards.

Knebworth was first built only 7 years before the Old Palace of Hatfield, but it too was drastically rebuilt and completely altered during the 19th century, first in 1813 and then during the 1840s for Henry Kendall, and it is his mock-Tudor house that is on show today. Perhaps more surprising, many of the interiors of Knebworth were designed by Edwin Lutyens, whose wife was the sister of Edward Bulwer Lytton, whose descendant Henry Cobbold Lytton is the present owner. The day concluded at Scott's Grotto, probably the largest grotto in the country. Built during the late 1760s at a reputed cost of £10,000 by the Quaker poet John Scott, it was acquired by the local District Council in 1974 to prevent its threatened demolition.

On Sunday 13th October 2013 the London YIGs, ably organised by Ashleigh Murray, visited Chiswick House, West London, a magnificent neo-Palladian villa that was originally built as a wing that sat beside an older Jacobean house. The construction of the villa began about 1726-9 to the designs of its owner the Irishman Richard Boyle (1694-1753), 3rd Earl of Burlington, assisted by William Kent (1685-1748). An English Heritage guide gave the main tour and provided a fascinating insight into the overall history and significance of the house. Ashleigh then gave a short talk on the Summer Parlour (built c.1716), a standalone garden room connected to the villa by a covered walkway, and she revealed its great importance and connection with Lady Burlington and William Kent. After this, some members went to the nearby Hogarth's House, built c.1700, the country home of the great painter William Hogarth (1697-1764) from 1749 until his death.

A visit to the downright bizarre 575 Wandsworth Road was a treat for Halloween, and showed how to transform a modest two-up two-down into a vision of the Moorish architecture of Southern Spain. Khadambi Asalache, a poet and civil servant, purchased the house in 1981 and, having decorated and furnished the interiors, left it to the National Trust on his death in 2006; it first opened to the public in early 2013. A few days later, Mayo-man David Hicks gave an excellent lecture on the recent changes to a number of Irish country houses in recent years.

The magnificent former Ballroom, now the Coffee Room, of the In-and-Out Club was the lavish venue of our now Annual Pre-Christmas Formal Dinner, kindly organised as always by Tim and Marylyn Bacon. The club, correctly the Naval and Military Club, was founded in 1862 but the building itself is a 1728 rebuild of a house built in the 1670s. Our evening began with the private launch of *The Last Knight: A Celebration of Desmond FitzGerald* by the well-known author Robert O'Byrne, who then regaled us with entertaining stories of his visits to various Irish country houses and their not always welcoming owners. It was lovely to also welcome the Knight's widow Madame Olda FitzGerald, as well as our founder Desmond Guinness and his wife Penny, along with many other friends and supporters.

In early 2014 we had another first-rate lecture, this one on 'The Big House Library in Ireland', given by Mark Purcell, Libraries Curator for the National Trust, who concentrated on the libraries and their owners of country houses in Northern Ireland. This took place at the National Liberal Club, after which several stayed for dinner afterwards.

Volume XVI of the Society's *Architectural and Decorative Studies* was launched on 12th February at the Authors' Club in deepest Soho, which was followed in mid-March by our traditional St Patrick's Day Party at Lettsom House, near Cavendish Square, attended by over 70 members. In time-honoured fashion, the year's events were reprised as an illustrated slide show by Chairman John Redmill, and this was followed by a short presentation by Dr David Fleming, Society and Board Chairman, of the work of the Society in Ireland. David also announced the launch of the Society's Small Grants Scheme, funded by the London Chapter, and, at his request, the retirement of John Redmill as Chairman of the London Chapter, after 24 years in that role; on behalf of the Society, David thanked John for all his work as Chairman and during the 40 years he has been a London Committee member. The usual excellent buffet supper afterwards was provided by Fabulous Feasts.

Martin Wyatt, Deputy Director of the Handel House Museum, gave a tour of 25 Brook Street, Mayfair, home of G. F. Handel from 1723 to his death in 1759, on the

evening of 9th April. The tour was preceded by drinks in the exhibition room, and followed by a harpsichord recital of Baroque music, a thoroughly enjoyable evening for all who attended.

Ashleigh Murray also organised a YIG visit to Kenwood House on Sunday 11th May 2014. Kenwood House, now owned by English Heritage, originally dates from the 17th century but was remodelled and extended by Robert Adam (1728–1792) for William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield, from 1764 to 1779. In the early 20th century, it was owned by Edward Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh. Our tour took place shortly after the house re-opened after being closed for nearly a year – the *Caring for Kenwood* restoration programme. Half of the tour was delivered by one of the main Kenwood House tour guides, while the rest was given by Richard Ireland, the UK's leading conservator of historic plaster and paint. Richard gave a captivating talk about his involvement with the redecoration of the library.

The May Bank Holiday weekend saw the London Chapter visiting various country houses in Norfolk with the 20 Ghost Club and a number of their historic Rolls-Royces, a tour organised by John Redmill. Staying at the Knight's Hill Hotel on the eastern side of King's Lynn and dining there both evenings, the group of 52 in all enjoyed somewhat better weather than Cumbria provided in 2013 – except that is for Saturday morning! The tour around the magnificent modern gardens of Hilborough were more or less washed out by torrential rain, which then mercifully stopped as soon as, soaked to the skin, we all left for Raynham Hall. This extremely important early classical house, with interiors mainly by William Kent, is the seat of the Marquesses of Townshend, and the present Marquess and Marchioness gave us a wonderful tour in two groups before treating us to a buffet lunch in Kent's great Marble Hall. The moated Hindringham Hall, built in the early 16th century, was specially opened for us by its present owners Mr and Mrs Tucker, who also gave us tea in the gardens. Sunday saw us all up bright and early, to be at Houghton almost two hours before it opened to the public, thanks to the Marquis of Cholmondeley, so we had a private tour of this great mansion designed by Colen Campbell in 1726 for Sir

Robert Walpole, contemporary and equivalent of William Conolly of Castletown; surely they knew each other? After lunch in the Marquis's marquee, we drove to nearby East Barsham, an early 16th century house built of the most elaborate brickwork. Sir John Guinness, its current owner, showed us around and then to our surprise revealed the most lavish afternoon tea for us all, served by his daughter and her family. Consuming this as quickly as politeness allowed, we continued to the other great Kentian mansion of Norfolk, Holkham, built from 1735 onwards, where the Earl of Leicester, thanks to member John Narvel tipping him off, was ready to lead us around the stunning interiors himself – a real privilege. Our last house of the day was the delightful Stanhoe, built around 1702 and now the home of Nick and Felicity Lyons; his late father had been Provost of TCD in the 1970s, and Mrs Lyons was also there to greet several members who she knew – and help serve more tea and drinks on the lawns bathed in afternoon sunshine. On Monday morning we first visited Ryston Hall, where Mrs Pratt gave an excellent account of this late 17th-century house, and then went on to Narford, where disappointingly we only saw the exterior, but never mind – we went on to the sensational Sennowe Park, a wonderful Edwardian remodelling of an earlier house for the Cook family, of travel fame. Charles and Virginia Temple-Richards [nephew and niece-in-law of Sir John Cook] were our hosts, and the tour finished with a sumptuous lunch in the Winter Garden, where Jimmy Valentine presented John Redmill with an Irish glass water jug in thanks for organising the event.

Copped Hall is another mid 18th-century Palladian mansion, this time near Epping in Essex. Built from 1751 onwards for John Conyers, the house was completely gutted by an accidental fire in 1917, and has been a ruin ever since. Members John Barber and John Nolan, who live on the estate, arranged a visit to the house for Chapter members in early June, owned and maintained since 1995 by the Copped Hall Trust, whose architect Alan Cox was our guide. After a pub lunch, we went on to Hurst House, an early 18th-century house in Woodford, much enhanced from 1933 onwards with elements from demolished

country houses elsewhere.

The final event of the season was our 2014 Summer Party, kindly hosted by Vivienne Guinness at her home in Chepstow Villas. An elegant evening was had by all in this 1850s house, once the home of Thomas Cooper the painter; Vivienne Guinness is an art historian and director of Dublin's Lilliput Press, as well as being the creator and curator of the Borris House [Co. Carlow] Festival of Writing and Ideas, and we are most grateful for her generosity in allowing this event.

As I have now retired as Chairman of the London Chapter, it is with a certain amount of regret that I write this last of my Annual Report of the Chapter's activities. I am most grateful to all the Committee members, both present and past, who have freely given up their time to organise and lead events, and all those non-members who have given lectures, hosted events and otherwise helped the Chapter with its work in raising interest in the Society, and funds for its work. Long may this continue!