



# CHISWICK HOUSE FRIENDS

## NEWSLETTER Autumn 2018

Charity No 289907

Patron: Lord Burlington



It's been a full summer of events for the Friends! Our AGM in June, with a fascinating talk by Esmé Whittaker, was followed by a Junior Royal Academy of Music concert in the House, and by our Friends party in July. Early wet weather did not spoil our 14<sup>th</sup> successful Dog Show in late September. We are very excited about the return next year of an old favourite: the Chiswick House Friends Opera. More on all these inside.

*John Armstrong*

## Chiswick House and Gardens Trust News

In this edition, Clare O'Brien, Director of Chiswick House and Gardens Trust, gives us an update on recent events, including success in this year's London in Bloom awards. London in Bloom provides regional awards and forms part of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Britain in Bloom campaign. The Chiswick House and Gardens Estate has enjoyed considerable success in these awards in recent years. Clare also talks about forthcoming developments and events.

### Update from Clare O'Brien, Director of Chiswick House and Gardens Trust



The long hot summer has proved hard work for the team and volunteers at Chiswick House and Gardens preparing for the 2018 London in Bloom awards. The need for watering, in line with the RHS's watering policy, involved every member of the team. All the hard work has once again been rewarded through the London in Bloom campaign. I am pleased to write that the Estate has been recognised as *Heritage Park & Garden of the year* (joint winner with Eltham Palace) and for the first time *Walled Garden of the year* for the kitchen garden: both with gold awards. The hard work of the volunteers, for which we are always so grateful, was also recognised with a gold award for *Our Community*, and the estate volunteers (the *Goosefoots*) and the kitchen garden volunteers received the *RHS It's Your Neighbourhood Awards* and were marked as 'thriving' and 'outstanding' respectively. We are all delighted and proud. These awards reflect the many hours of care in maintenance and horticulture that the Estate receives in order for all visitors to enjoy and appreciate the landscape.



2018 Chiswick House Dog Show

A weekend of lively activities took place over the autumnal equinox, 22-23 September, with the Friends Dog Show on the cricket field, Open House at

Chiswick House and an artisan craft fair in the marquee. It was wonderful to see so many visitors coming to the House and Gardens despite the rain. Over 1,200 people came to explore Chiswick House over this weekend - 9% of the annual visitor numbers.



London in Bloom Awards: l to r, Jaimie Cook, Andrew Deaville, Geraldine King, Dee Parry

Looking to the future, the Chiswick House and Gardens Trust (CHGT) has been fortunate in securing funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Resilient Heritage scheme. This funding stream exists to enable organisations to make the first essential steps in preparing for the future. The funds we have received will allow us to recruit a full time fundraiser to help raise funds for education work, new projects and our ongoing work and staffing; an access audit for Chiswick House so that we can understand how both physical and intellectual aspects can be improved; and how to improve the visitor experience in the House and increase visitor numbers. This work will then inform our strategy and next steps - from which I know there will be projects which will require fundraising before we will be able to proceed.

After a Patrons' promotion at the Chiswick House Book Festival launch evening and personal effort by the CHGT trustees, I am happy to report that there are now 23 patrons. The next Patrons' event will be a private tour of Marble Hill with the Curator. If you are interested in the CHGT Patrons' scheme please contact [jane.booth@chgt.org.uk](mailto:jane.booth@chgt.org.uk) for more details.

Coming up this autumn:

- *Parlour Geometrique* - 13 October (3-5pm) - Artists will present site-specific works which engage with aspects of the House and Gardens.
- *After Dark* - 15 November to 30 December - A series of modern light installations will illuminate the 18th century gardens and architecture, with Chiswick House itself as the canvas for a projected light show set to curated music.

For information on these events please refer to the CHGT website below.

### Chiswick House and Gardens Trust

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## Curator's Spotlight

In this article, Dr Esmé Whittaker, Chiswick House Curator, talks about the furniture in Chiswick House. She focuses on furniture designed by William Kent who was arguably the most influential interior designer in early eighteenth century England. Born in Yorkshire in 1685, he trained as a coach and sign painter. In 1710 he was sent to Italy by a group of generous benefactors to study. He lived there for 10 years. It was in Italy that he met his future patron, Lord Burlington, who was on his Grand Tour. Burlington was so impressed with Kent's artistic vision that he persuaded him to return to London. Lord Burlington designed and built Chiswick House in the 1720s and Kent's influence on the early interiors at Chiswick House should not be underestimated.

### Scallop Shells and Fish Scales: Furniture for Chiswick House designed by William Kent

by Dr Esmé Whittaker, Curator, Collections & Interiors, English Heritage

'I hope the Signor has remember'd about my tables & glasses', wrote Lady Burlington to her husband in April 1735. The 'Signor' was Lady Burlington's affectionate name for the designer William Kent (1685-1748) who, since he accompanied Lord Burlington back from his second Grand Tour in 1719, was part of their household. Kent worked closely with Lord and Lady Burlington to create freestanding furniture which harmonised with the interiors of Chiswick House. He achieved this by manipulating scale and by repeating what would become his trademark motifs – scallop shells and fish scales.

The pair of side tables in the Gallery at Chiswick introduced this decorative vocabulary. The giltwood bases are boldly carved with sculptural forms. The corners of the tables are supported by nereids or sea nymph figures wearing pearl necklaces, while at the centre of the base is the mask of Neptune, god of the sea. A chubby putto, balancing on a central scallop shell, embraces the face of Neptune and drapes it with oak leaf swags.

The tables are thought to have been carved by the Italian sculptor Giovanni Battista Guelfi in around 1725 to support the specimen marble tops of the type Burlington purchased in Genoa in 1719.



Side table for the Gallery, c.1725, probably carved by Giovanni Battista Guelfi. Carved gilt pine, inlaid marble top.

Purchased using funds from the Whitley Trust and with the aid of grants from Heritage Lottery Fund, National Art Collections Fund, London Historic House Museums Trust and Chiswick House Friends.

Whether Kent designed the tables is debated but the motifs associated with the sea reoccur throughout the first floor at Chiswick House. In the Blue Velvet Room, for example, gilded marine putti - infants with fish tails - frame the oval paintings above each of the doorways.

Kent designed a set of gilt side chairs for the Red and Green Velvet Rooms which are unusually small to suit the proportions of the villa. The top rails are carved with a central scallop shell motif, the chair legs with fish scales and Venus masks suggesting the goddess's mythical birth from the sea. The fish scale pattern reoccurs on the reverse of a parcel-gilt mahogany pole-screen (fire-screen) and on the arms and legs of a set of crisply carved mahogany chairs, designed by Kent for the Gallery. These chairs, with their distinctive triangular-pedimented backs were, like much of Kent's furniture, designed for display rather than comfort and prompted the purchase of velvet cushions.



From left to right: side chair, c.1735, designed by William Kent. Carved and gilt pine with modern velvet upholstery. Originally part of the two sets of eight used in the Red and Green Velvet Rooms. Hall chair, c.1730-5, designed by William Kent. Twelve of these chairs furnished the Gallery in 1770.

These are just a few examples of the wide range of furniture that Kent designed specifically for Chiswick. Thomas Faulkner, who catalogued the collections in 1841, saw just how integral they were to the interiors describing them as 'of a Pattern to correspond with the Building'. Around 1892, by which time Chiswick House formed part of the Duke of Devonshire's estates, most of the collections were removed from the House and sent to other family properties. For example, the magnificent 'Owl Suite', a pair of commodes and giltwood mirrors carved with owl motifs and made for Lady Burlington's Garden Room, is now on display at Chatsworth House. Other pieces took a more unusual route. The Gallery tables left with the Marquess of Bute when he gave up his lease of the House in 1892 and were brought back to Chiswick in 1996, in what proved to be a particularly fruitful decade for the return of Kent furniture.

## Chiswick House Dog Show 2018

In spite of a rainy start, the weather did not dampen spirits for our circus-themed Dog Show, and we ended in sunshine and with a great turn-out! There were 18 classes in all, and all class-winners were entered into Best in Show, which was won by Evie, the Naughtiest Dog winner, owned by Lauren.



*Best in Show Evie with owner Lauren*

Our thanks to Jan Preece and her organising Committee, to our volunteers, sponsors and all our members who attended!



*Fancy Dress Winners – the Canine Cannonballs*

## Friends' Summer Events

This year's Chiswick House Friends AGM in early June was very well attended, thanks to a most informative talk by Esmé Whittaker on the "Ambassador of Morocco" portrait hanging in the Domed Saloon, and an update from Clare O'Brien on CHGT matters. The AGM was followed at the end of June by the sell-out

Junior Royal Academy of Music Concert. The evening was a tremendous success which we hope to repeat next year. July saw our Summer Party where we joined Chiswick House and Gardens Trust volunteers in the beautiful surroundings of the conservatory. It was a gorgeous summer's evening and was well supported by both Friends and volunteers. Thank you to all of you who came to these events.

## Return of Friends Opera!

We are delighted to announce that the Chiswick House Friends Opera will be returning in July 2019. The last Friends' opera was held in 2015 and many of our members have told us how much they have missed this wonderful event in the last few years. We have now appointed an Opera Committee chaired by one of our trustees, Victoria O'Bree, who is an experienced Events Manager. Two popular operas will be performed by a touring company on two separate evenings. We also hope to involve the wider community in this event by hosting, in the same week, "introduction to opera" performances for local school children. More details will follow over the next few months: watch this space!

## Gift Aid

As a charity, we can claim Gift Aid from HMRC on members' subscriptions. This can add a worthwhile amount to our funds. We are currently updating our records, and kindly ask some of our members to complete a Gift Aid Declaration form. **If you receive a Gift Aid Declaration form with this newsletter please fill it in and return it as soon as possible.**

## Tales from the Riverbank - Autumn Update from Richard Sales

After two years of speculation and observation, it can be confirmed that the rumours are true: our pair of swans are both male. They flew away for their annual moult in June and returned on 1 September.

The huge horse chestnut tree that fell into the lake between the Classic Bridge and the Temple was the nesting tree of our resident Egyptian Geese. They have been observed checking out a nearby cedar as a possible replacement. Their May brood of six were lost to heron, crow, magpie and fox.

Tufted duck, moorhen and coot all had a very successful breeding season. However, mallard ducklings were badly predated by heron, magpie and a crow.

In July, a 50cm/7lbs dead bream was found floating in the lake. It was one of three regularly seen over the years and was thought to be about 20 years old.

## 2018 Friends Events

Christmas Carols at Chiswick House – 15 December at 2:30pm; details to follow.

**Published by the Chiswick House Friends**

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