



# CHISWICK HOUSE FRIENDS

## NEWSLETTER Autumn 2021

Charity No 289907

Patron: Lord Burlington



"If it's 5.30pm, it must be September..."

*Human Sundial in the Gardens*

The Friends was founded in 1984 to support the House and Grounds "for the benefit of the inhabitants of Chiswick and its neighbourhood..." This has been taken to mean a charity and membership independent of the body that actually manages the site (since 2005, the Chiswick House and Gardens Trust). Of course we support this Trust with our fund-raising, and donated over £70,000 in the last, exceptional, Covid year. Our membership has grown over the years from the twelve original founders to more than 650 today. We have kept our subscription low - currently starting at £15pa - to be as inclusive of all income groups as possible.

Last year the Trust started its own membership scheme, with a £50 sub, and this has caused some confusion - people ask why are there two separate schemes? One answer is that we, as Trustees, are accountable to our membership whereas the CHGT is not. Our independence would be negated by amalgamation, and the members attending our recent AGM felt strongly that we should remain independent. But we are of course open to the views of you, our members, so please write and tell us what you think.

In this edition, Dr David Jacques looks at the lost jewel of the original House - the Loggia - and how it might be reinstated. Along with a report of this year's Dog Show and our other articles.

*John Armstrong, Chair, Chiswick House Friends*

## "Close to Perfection"

### *Chiswick Villa's Loose End, the Loggia* - an article by Dr David Jacques

In this article David Jacques, the well-known Garden Historian, looks at Chiswick House today and compares it with Burlington's original conception, built between 1731 and 1739.

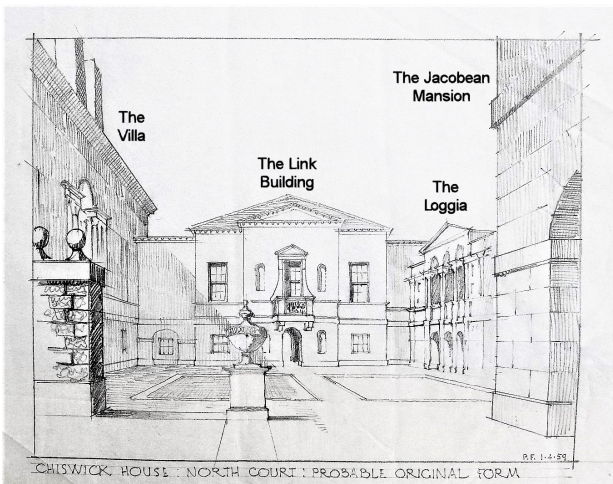


Chiswick House (the 'Villa') today

It was a compromise from the start. Lord Burlington's exquisite new Italian-inspired annex to the old Chiswick House (a Jacobean mansion where the temporary banqueting centre stands) was very close to the Villa, yet physically divided from it by the path that now continues between the double line of urns. Within a very few years Burlington acknowledged that this was not practical in the English climate and that a physical connection was required at first floor (piano nobile) level.

This was something of an architectural problem. The annex was an idealised symmetrical villa in the style made famous by Andreas Palladio and Vincenzo Scamozzi in the Veneto. Nothing could be added nor subtracted without the whole being compromised.

Burlington's solution was a not-inelegant two-storey passage touching the villa at its north-east corner. Not perfect, but needs must. This is now known as the Link Building. However this was only half of the job, for another leg of the 'L' shaped connection was required to plug into the old house.



Faulkner's 1950s Sketch of the Original House and Links

Its distinguishing feature was a 'loggia' screening off an apsidal space where, I suggest, Burlington could have displayed some of his sculpture. At ground floor

level the Loggia was open, as was the ground floor of the Link Building. There was also a corridor to the Summer Parlour, Lady Burlington's private room looking out over the garden (and still in place today).

Burlington took great trouble with this Loggia and corridor, as several plans and views of alternatives attest. He may have subtracted from the architectural perfection of the villa, but a later visitor, Horace Walpole, no mean slouch in designing his own house at Strawberry Hill, noted that in doing so Burlington had added something too:

*"His Lordship's house at Chiswick... is a model of taste ... The classic scenery of the small court that unites the old and new house, are more worth seeing than many fragments of ancient grandeur, which our travellers visit under all the dangers attendant on long voyages."*

The 'small court', as Walpole called it, was a composition of three dissimilar architectural treatments, yet managed to achieve a harmonious space that appealed to his picturesque taste.

Notwithstanding, the 5th Duke of Devonshire, anxious to house his brood of legitimate, illegitimate and other children, decided to do away with the old Chiswick House, and to add wings to the Villa, which would make it far more commodious and convenient for life in the late eighteenth century. He respected Burlington's north and south facades to the Villa, but the east and west ones were knocked through for more spacious rooms. The 'small court' was completely filled by the east wing, and although the north facade of the Link Building was kept and replicated at the other three corners, its south facade was enveloped in the new arrangement of walls and openings in the wing. The Loggia was entirely demolished.



Villa with the 1788 Devonshire Wings

That remained the situation until the Ministry of Works acquired the house in the 1950s to save it as an architectural gem. Today, Historic England would have insisted that everything was kept as found, but then the philosophy was to restore the building to reveal Burlington's architectural perfection. That meant removing the wings, all except for Burlington's Link Building.

That was easier said than done, as surgically removing the east wing to leave just the Link Building caused great problems, and it is still argued today just how much remains of Burlington's fabric. Likewise the east and west facades of the villa had been very much altered when the wings were built on. The windows one sees today are a testament to

the restoration skills of Patrick Faulkner, the Ministry of Works architect, and are not the originals.

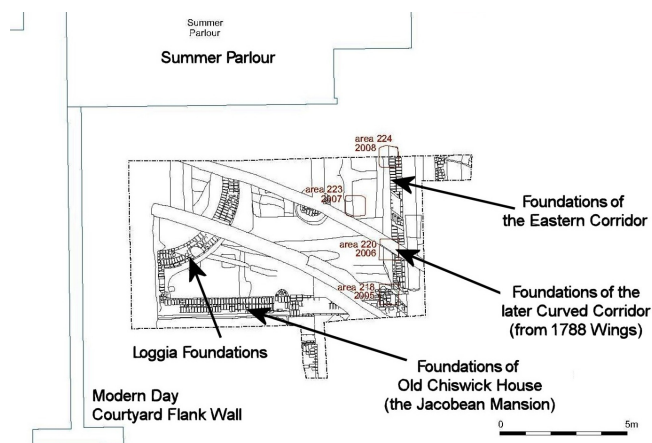
Screening the external staircase to the underground heating plant was the principal reason why Faulkner built the eastern wall of the courtyard in 1959. He was acutely aware that it re-invoked the Loggia wall, and he prepared one sketch (previous page) showing how the courtyard would have looked in Burlington's day, and another of his proposed wall on the same line which he perhaps thought could be the first step in reinstating the two-storey Loggia. Seeing the nonsense of a Link Building leading nowhere on the first floor was perhaps his motivation for imagining a future restored Loggia, a still valid point today.

In summary, all three walls of the courtyard were the work of the 1950s. Architectural historians who gaze out of the Green Velvet Room window mostly fail to appreciate that in Burlington's day it would have looked out over the two-storey Loggia with its pitched roof. Such are now the heightened but misguided sensitivities at play, that any construction in that direction is frowned upon, and proposals for a visitor centre or even the faraway café have had to be as low profile as technically feasible.

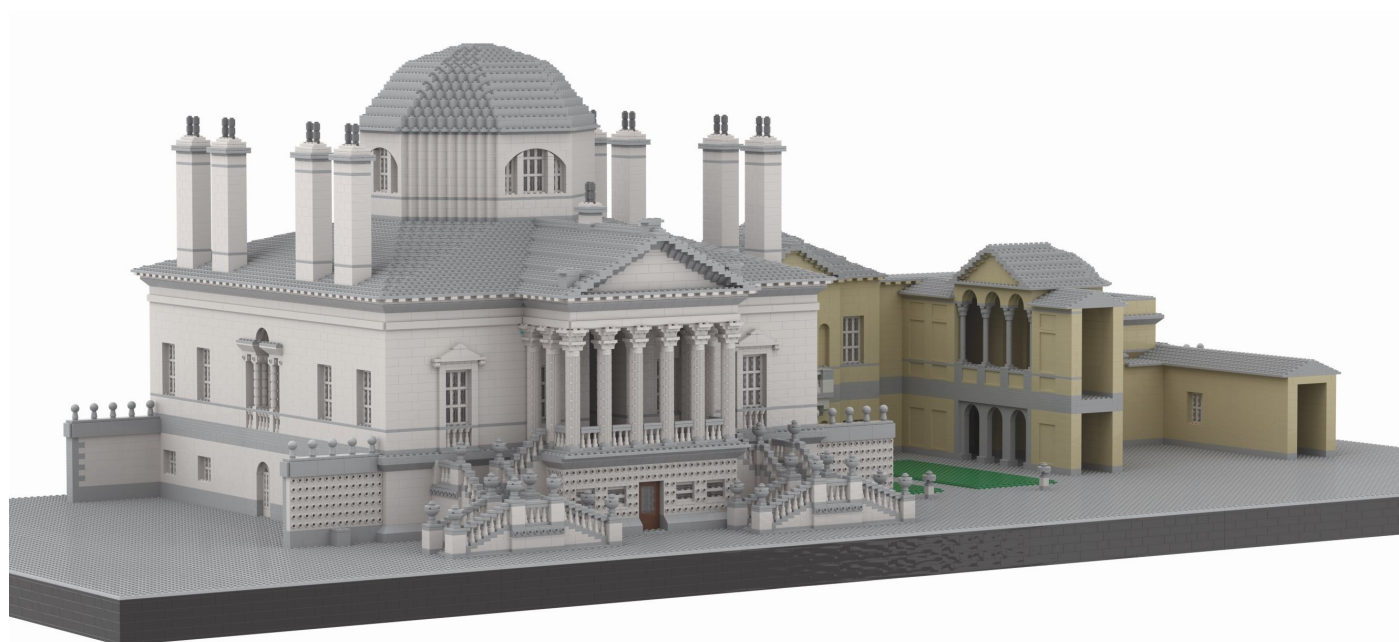
For a new visitor centre behind the Summer Parlour (and there have been numerous proposals for this over the years) a more logical approach, in view of the history of the courtyard, would be to rebuild the Loggia as its western facade, thereby concealing modern work behind. Architectural historians often argue against this on the grounds that building

something that is other than a perfect reproduction of the original would be misleading to the visitor and a violation of the principles of conservation. On the other hand the entire villa and the grounds around it were heavily restored according to the principles adopted in the 1950s, and there would be nothing incongruous in further reconstruction work today.

In order to overcome some of the historians' reservations, an important issue would be how accurate a reconstruction of the Loggia could be. It happens that the foundations of the apse behind the Loggia were uncovered by archaeology in 1982 and those of the Jacobean house were revealed in 2008, so the plan is pretty much known (see below). The elevation is less certain, partly because design sketches and detail shown in prints and paintings agree in some respects but do not tally in others.



Features exposed by the 1982 Archaeological Dig



LEGO® computer model design of Chiswick House (the Villa) with the Loggia as in Burlington's original

The Friends have commissioned a magnificent Lego model of the three historic configurations of Chiswick House. One can be satisfied that the model, yet to be completed, is as accurate (within the constraints of Lego) as can be, but the feature worth paying further attention to is the Loggia. It was dimensioned using all the available archival and architectural evidence, but does it look right to the historian's eye? The Friends would be interested to hear people's views.

**David Jacques's book "Chiswick House Gardens: 300 Years of Creation and Re-creation", is currently in production at Liverpool University Press and should be in print in the new year.**

**We are interested in holding a competition for designs for a potential Resources Centre to be located at the site of the old Jacobean Mansion, with a reinstated Loggia, providing disabled access, toilets, open space and all the features currently needed.... let us know what you think!**

## Chiswick House Friends News

### ***A Pawfect Day: Chiswick House Dog Show***

The return of the Chiswick House Dog Show was welcomed by a huge turn-out of dog owners, walkers, and handlers – and many non-dog owners too. The event, again sponsored by John D Wood, was organised by the local CHF 'dog show committee' led by Jan Preece – all greatly relieved by the fine weather on the day!

More than 150 volunteers work to put on this community event – with the money raised going towards the upkeep of the Chiswick House gardens and for dog-related activities within the grounds. Organising this number of volunteers is a mammoth task, which committee member Caroline Starkey has been doing for some years now – with huge success.



*Visitors to the 2021 Dog Show*

The three show rings were sponsored by DogTown, Wolfe Vets and Butternut Box, and there was the usual range of commercial stalls as well as a large number of mouth-watering catering outlets. The ever-popular 'Doggy Dash' was a major feature, manned by volunteers from the Dogs Trust's Rehoming Centre at Harefield.

Sixteen classes (all sponsored by local businesses or by stallholders) ranged from "Best Rescue," to "Best-looking" bitches and dogs in their age groups.

The competition for "Best in Show" was really tough this year, and was won by an endearing 13-week-old cocker spaniel puppy, Little Chief, seen below with Ralphine and CHF Chairman John Armstrong. The winner was presented with a splendid hamper from Grove Park Deli, and a Hogarth Health Club voucher.



*Best in Show Winner Little Chief with Ralphine*

## ***Summer Update from Richard Sales***



*Across the water in Summer 2021*

How different the weather has been this Spring and Summer from the previous two years. April was the driest, sunniest and coldest ever. May and August were very cool; June was also wet. July was initially hot, then wet and cool. This has had unusual effects.

On the downside, a huge increase in slugs and snails hammered the lovely salvias in the Italian Garden.

On the upside, both the box moth caterpillars and the sweet chestnut leaf miner have been less rampant. Then the tufted ducks have had breeding success for the first time since 2018 and there have been many 'tuflets'.

The pair of male swans forlornly built a nest and then harassed the Canada geese from breeding so that we only had two goslings. Still no Egyptian goslings despite there being up to six adults.

Both coots and moorhen have been rearing successfully and there has been less predation of mallard ducklings this year from our visiting herons.

Our 'angel-winged' Canada goose is still down at the Park Road end of the lake, but no sign of our broken legged mallard for two months.

There are two 'coy carp' in the lake near the Temple.

### ***Trustee Changes***

We are sorry to be saying goodbye to Guthrie Luke, who has been a Trustee since our inception 37 years ago, and to Victoria O'Bree, who has moved away from London. Our thanks to them for all their service. We welcome Gwen Young as Treasurer, and Tara Fair as Newsletter Editor. There is space for more Trustees, so if you are interested, please contact the Secretary.

### ***Events***

Next year's Dog Show is the only Friends event we have planned. The Trust have done a brilliant job of steering us through Covid, but have withdrawn our five free days access to the House, which enabled us to put on concerts, e.g. for students of the Royal Academy of Music. Regrettably, they will also not let us display the LEGO model in the café, and are reluctant to allow it to be on permanent show in the House, where it could be seen by some of the 675 people who have so far made donations.

***Published by the Chiswick House Friends***

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