



CHISWICK HOUSE FRIENDS

NEWSLETTER Spring 2022

Charity No 289907

Patron: Lord Burlington



Clare Balding celebrates completion of the Friends' Lego model of Chiswick House by putting the last brick in place : she put the first one on almost two years ago at the start of Covid lockdown. Since that time, the "Build as You Donate" scheme has raised almost £33,000 for the House and Gardens, and it is planned to put the model - shown here in its Victorian "With Wings" version - on permanent exhibition in the House later this summer.

Following an agreement with the Chiswick House and Gardens Trust, we are pleased to be able to bring back some of our events - this Summer the JRAM concert in the House and our Summer Party (dates on the back page), as well as our ever-popular Dog Show. But we've been unable to establish a good enough business case for revival of the Opera, so it is unlikely this will go ahead in 2023 as we had hoped.

Our membership continues to grow - we now have 658 members - and seems to have been largely unaffected by the parallel CHGT scheme, which although more expensive offers their members enhanced benefits.

Ukraine: some of our members are hosting displaced families, and if any of you are doing the same and want to link up, please contact us.

In this newsletter, Dr David Jacques follows up his article last time with a review of his new book "Chiswick House Gardens - 300 years of creation and recreation".

John Armstrong

300 Years Creation and Re-Creation

A new book on Chiswick House Gardens by David Jacques

The new book '*Chiswick House Gardens: 300 years of creation and re-creation*' is out and making its way to the bookshops.



Watts 1783 - Chiswick House Forecourt

It chronicles a hard-fought and never-ending contest – between the natural forces of change and decay on the one side, and the desire by we humans to preserve and cherish our finest creations on the other.

How the battle is fought is crucial to success, which makes restoration a complex and debateable subject. The house and gardens at Chiswick began a long decline after the 6th Duke of Devonshire died in 1858, and his successors had neither the incentive nor the finance to reverse matters. Eventually, in the 1950s, the Ministry of Works stepped in to restore the villa and its immediate surrounds as an exemplar of the 1720s for the sake of the nation. Whilst the villa was handed over to the Ministry, the gardens remained as a public park run by the Council for the benefit of the local population.

However, the resulting separation of house and garden had numerous drawbacks, and an underlying theme of conservation at Chiswick since the early 1980s was to bring them back into a single body. The garden had reached a low point, and the Council's officers were keen to talk to the Ministry again. The collaboration kicked off with the commissioning of a survey, including a thorough historical analysis.

At the time, Ted Fawcett, the Friends' first chairman, lived in Black Lion Lane. He had been an inveterate meddler in garden projects whilst at the National Trust, and seeing a new project afoot at Chiswick House was irresistible. He joined the working party, though I can't remember whether it or the Friends came first. In any case, he proved to be a regular attendee and very helpfully disposed to the project. Later he used his water-divining skills to discover features in the ground. Sometimes excavation

proved him right and sometimes wrong. He correctly identified the 1680s walls of the Jacobean mansion that Burlington demolished around 1720, but when it came to finding the tree pits of the original grove nothing whatsoever turned up in the places he identified.



2008 Dig - Jacobean Mansion Foundations

Following the survey a management plan was devised and agreed between the parties. Implementing it through the Joint Working Party, however, was another matter. The 1990s were notorious in public park terms for their crisis in funding. Public parks had taken second place to Leisure Centres and other fashionable provision, and 'rate capping' then forced councils to redirect funds elsewhere. That was followed by 'compulsory competitive tendering' which broke up the traditional management teams at parks and scattered any skills that may have been remaining. Dark days.

Matters turned around in 2006 when the Heritage Lottery Fund agreed to a massive capital injection, allowing an updated management plan to be implemented. This included the new café, attention to the infrastructure, large areas of clearance and replanting, and a general sprucing-up to bring the gardens to a high state of care, probably better than any time since the 6th Duke. The restoration reached completion in 2010.

The areas that had not been tackled were in general the less visible ones. These included the amphitheatre and the two wildernesses; neither had been markedly improved either with ornamental planting (northern Wilderness) or for wildlife (western Wilderness). The dilemma of how to finish the western arm of the *patte d'oie* remains. It would be a nice touch to create a *trompe l'oeil* of the Casina part-way along the allée, which would permit the naturalistic shrubbery beyond to be recovered. So would the recovery of Lady Burlington's and Duchess Georgiana's garden by the Summer Parlour, carelessly forgotten and grassed over. The decision

on the final form of the Italian Garden parterre is yet to be made: should it be the original French-inspired and game-changing design by Lewis Kennedy, or take the cost-conscious version of the 1880s on which we have fuller records? I know which I prefer. There are items of statuary that might be considered for re-carving, and some form of replacement for the greenhouse would at last make sense of the interpenetrating views between Grove and Italian Garden.



Donowell 1753 - Patte d'Oie. Note W arm has a focal point

The largest unanswered question, though, was whether the property should have a visitor centre. In 2019 the Friends produced a credible digital model of what the connection between the Jacobean house and villa, with its loggia, looked like, and purchasing bricks to build a Lego model was a new source of income. The model will also serve as a useful talking point when considering the visitor centre. All such discussion then paled beside the much greater crisis into which the Coronavirus pandemic plunged the Trust's finances in mid-2020.



CH Friends LEGO Brick Model of Original Loggia

Architectural and garden history tended to see stylistic change as the product of some original genius setting the new fashion. Horace Walpole declared that William Kent was that genius as far as gardens were concerned. But this simplistic story didn't seem convincing once I looked closely into the matter. Kent's style was an amalgam of changes that had taken place within formal gardens in the 1720s: initially the shaggy planting backing up his rustic buildings, but soon drawing together ideas from various designers seeking a more 'rural' style.

I then looked at what actually happened at Chiswick and noticed that Kent's rural effects were not added, but made by removing lengths of hedge so recently planted. He must have argued strongly with Burlington, the strict Classicist, for his rustic cascade, but then a researcher from Bristol produced the amazing evidence that the cascade had been driven by a huge steam pump located in a field across Burlington Lane. The details and the date worked perfectly.



Donowell 1753 - View of the Cascade

The 5th Duke had wanted to use Capability Brown, but he had just died, so he used his assistant to modernise the grounds west of the river, leaving Burlington's rear lawn untouched. His Duchess, the famous (or infamous) Georgiana, a Francophile, appears to have been the first to create an ornamental rosary in England, using the range of varieties that the Empress Josephine was employing at the same time at Malmaison. I had not expected the rosary around the column to have had such an illustrious place in horticultural history.



Venus Statue and Rose Gardens (thanks Liz Pepperall)

What can one say about the 6th Duke that doesn't sound like exaggeration? His extravagances were extraordinary, and his garden parties were legendary, the forerunners of those at Buckingham Palace these days. Oh, and by the way, the first RHS garden was on his land, and he rang a little bell to gain access.

David Jacques

Look out for the book in Waterstones or in the Chiswick House shop. It is published by Liverpool University Press.

Chiswick House Friends News

Call to Paws: Chiswick House Dog Show 22

This year's CHF-sponsored Chiswick House Dog Show will be taking place on Sunday 25th September, and the Dog Show Organising Committee are already planning the event.



It will be the 18th Chiswick House Dog Show and, judging by last year's show, has certainly earned the title of "Biggest Dog Show in London". Despite COVID restrictions, it was a HUGE success and resulted in us donating £10K to CHGT, these funds being earmarked for the maintenance and safety of trees in the grounds, and for the recycling of dog waste.

The Dog Show is an opportunity for all those who use and love Chiswick House and its grounds to give something back by being part of a fun – and FREE – community day out!



Every year, it takes around 170 volunteers to put on this event, and we are (again) sending out a call for volunteers (aged from 9 to 90!) who would like to help by offering to do a two-hour stint on the day. These shifts are many and varied – for example, you could help on the Registration Desk, or in one of the show rings as a steward or photographer, or serving on the Bar, or even shaking a collecting bucket!

To find out more about volunteering at the show, visit www.chiswickhousedogshow.org.uk

Or contact Caroline Starkey (our Co-ordinator) at: volunteer@chiswickhousedogshow.org.uk

To volunteer in a more general way for the Friends, eg as a Trustee or organiser, do please get in touch.

Early Spring Update from Richard Sales

Very changeable weather this February and March: the water was 2.5 deg warmer with no ice on the lake so no log clearing was required this year (some people throw branches on to the ice). But then we had Storm Eunice which caused three major trees to fall, including the top of a cedar, and necessitated debris clearing from the lake.

Early to middle March was very warm causing the terrapins to come out of hibernation and bask in the sun, while it was very cold in late March. Up to 50 jackdaws, 20 Canada geese and many parakeets are pairing up. The Canada geese are being hassled by our pair of male swans who have made their usual nest on the lake bank by the 'dog free' picnic area. Still no Egyptian geese young since 2018. There are five occupied coot nests in the coppiced willows, one of which has three eggs at the time of writing. As the swampy area of willows was coppiced by the Goosefoot volunteers, we are hopeful that the tufted ducks will have a good breeding season: their nesting site was not disturbed. The kingfisher has not been seen since last September. We still have our two disabled birds, namely 'Limpy Female Mallard' and 'Angel Wing Canada Goose', both at the Park Road end of the lake.



Mallard with 21 Ducklings (photo by Paul Brown)

Our winter-visiting little grebes and shovellers have left and only one coy carp has been noticed. In February, we had a two day visit of 'red crested' pochard (not the common pochard) – presumably from Kew Gardens. A red-tailed kite was seen way overhead in late March – please let me know of any other sightings. Lastly, I read that at the 'Hammersmith High Rise' (Charing Cross Hospital) peregrine falcons are catching parakeets as well as the usual pigeons!

Friends Events

6th June, 19.00, House - AGM

5th July 19.00, House - Junior Royal Academy of Music Chamber Concert

20th July, 18.30, Italian Gardens - Summer Party

25th September, Cricket Field - Dog Show

Details from our website.

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