

The Friends of

THE TWICKENHAM MUSEUM

25 The Embankment, Twickenham TW1 3DU

NEWSLETTER, December 2009

Registered Charity no.1028984

An Anniversary

It was close on twenty one years ago, on 3rd February 1989 that a group meeting was held to discuss the setting up of a Museum for the old Borough of Twickenham. This being 'Museums Year' was seen as the ideal opportunity for the council to act. The Orleans stable block (below) was already designated within the council's statutory planning framework as an extension to Orleans Gallery, which was already well established.



The aim was for a permanent display of a large section of the Ionides Collection, as well as a selection of associated items from the Local Studies Collection to illustrate the history and life of Twickenham, Whitton, Teddington and The Hamptons, with small specialised exhibitions catering for tourists, the local community and new residents looking to extend their knowledge and interest in the community.

A vigorous campaign was started to include representatives drawn from all the local Societies, to lobby the press and local politicians, apply pressure on the council for an early announcement of its intentions and to explore potential sources of sponsors and funding.

The Twickenham Economic Museum was founded in 1860 by Thomas Twining, but burnt down in 1871. Between 1897 and 1922 the private collections of the Duc d'Orleans and Sir Ratan Tata were displayed at York House. Radnor house was considered and York House briefly utilised. Twickenham's Museum proper eventually came about in 2001 as a voluntary, self-supporting organisation reliant on help in kind and the financial generosity of its many supporters. Tony Beckles Willson was one of the original members of that group meeting in 1989 and has to date facilitated over one million virtual visitors online.

The new exhibition for 2010, *Down by the Riverside*, illustrates the history and life of Twickenham, Whitton, Teddington and The Hamptons. Focusing on all aspects of the river and riverside life, including boat building, regattas, islands, locks and bridges, there is a special look at five centuries of the Hampton Ferry, which began before 1519 and is still going strong. Although not down by the Thames riverside, Whitton's local watery associations include The Crane, The Duke of Northumberland's River and Whitton (formerly Birket's) Brook. And in a tribute to the music years of Eel Pie Island, the Museum's first floor window will be used to provide an unparalleled view of the more recent past across the Thames to its once wild neighbour.



Down By the Riverside will be launched by the Mayor, Councillor Celia Hodges on Saturday 5th December at 12.00 noon.

In Good Hands

Our last Newsletter ended with the announcement of a working party set up to determine the future management of the Museum. In this the Trustees considered how the museum might be managed in the future by means of restructuring existing management responsibilities.

The possible creation of a part-time curator was also investigated, but given the tremendous complexities of employment law governing even the voluntary sector, the idea has been rejected. What the exercise did make plain was that the Museum can only continue to function effectively as a wholly voluntary enterprise – provided there are the people in place.

The baton of Voluntary Coordinator was seamlessly handed over from Geoffrey Morgan to Alex Skinner who has coped admirably and has put out a call to arms. While we are blessed with some 60 volunteers on the books, Alex has to rota over 40 each month, leaving a tiny margin for seasonal and personal drop-offs.

Tony Carmona, for example, after years of sterling support at the front and as Museum sommelier, has had to step down for health reasons. We wish him well, and others too looking to return after bouts of sickness. The message from Alex to friends, colleagues and associates, therefore, is clear:



The business of accessioning is one area that has benefited from the recent restructuring, with a small working party meeting regularly to assess items donated to the Museum. With the donation form filled in by the volunteer on duty and the item placed on the kitchen shelf ready for assessment there have been few (if any) complaints over past months from anxious donors wondering what has happened to their treasure. A letter is sent out to each donor from the Chairman, Peter Payan, informing them of the Museum's decision.



Recent donations waiting accessioning



The Accessions Room (the loft).

Considering the economic turmoil of the past two years, the Museum's finances could not be in better shape, or more prudent hands. The endowment fund target was set at £150,000 to put the Trust in a strong financial position with assured core income from careful investment. At nine months through 2009 The Museum's income is 97% of forecast whilst our expenditure is only 67%. As well as the work of the finance sub-committee, it's hats off to our Treasurer, Colin White, for this remarkable achievement.

On The Map

There is a school of thought abroad that believes The Twickenham Museum is a 'private affair'. It is true that we enjoy a lesser profile than our publicly funded counterpart on the Surrey bank, but happily this is not a perception shared by the wider world. The media, for example, looked first to The Twickenham Museum last year for comment on the tragic fire that destroyed Garrick's villa.

When ITV's *Countrywise* programme urgently required a photograph of Eel Pie Island this summer, they contacted The Twickenham Museum. And as part of the proposed restoration of the historic Water Gardens in Bushy Park, The Twickenham Museum played its part by hosting an exhibition that helped to stimulate significant interest in the project across the borough and beyond.

Two years on and the baroque water garden, built in the 18th century by Charles Montague, the first Earl of Halifax, at the Hampton Hill end of the park is open to the public.



Keen-eyed movie-goers might have caught the credit for The Twickenham Museum attaching *An Education*, the film adaptation of journalist Lynn Barber's memoir about her time growing up in Twickenham. Danish director, Lone Scherfig, felt it was important to ensure that the town was rendered as authentically as possible as a 'nice, unpretentious suburb'. And it was his close attention to detail that led Scherfig's design team to The Twickenham Museum to uncover the lost face of 1960s Twickenham.

Although the film maintains this suburban setting, all is not quite what it appears on screen. As the formidable newspaper interviewer revealed to the *Richmond and Twickenham Times*, her childhood home in Clifden Road was deemed 'too posh'. In her parent's day Edwardian houses were considered less desirable and so a more modest mock Tudor house in Ealing takes its place.



Whitton High Street c.1967 offering a flavour of the times

Following the country's loss of Turner's painting of Pope's Villa undergoing demolition, the photo editor of Russia's most popular magazine, *Karavan Istorii Kollekttsiia* (*Caravan of Stories- example cover below*) emailed The Museum for help with a pictorial story about the Twickenham based artist.



The magazine, filled with 'exciting stories about famous people, historic events and the lives of outstanding individuals', enjoys a readership per issue in Moscow of 13.2% or 1,191,200 people, and in Russia of 4%, or 2,295,000 people, so a fine opportunity to hugely increase the Museum's profile. Sadly, that prospect had to be handed over to the Tate, which actually holds the collection of 300 oils and 30,000 sketches and watercolours and not us.

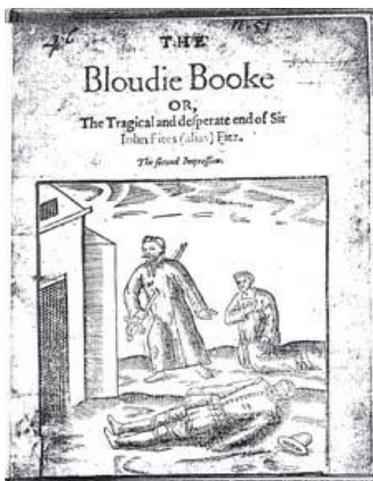
Online www.twickenham-Museum.org.uk/

Not for the first time on the Top Twenty People and Places on the Museum website, Alexander Pope was toppled from the number one spot. This time by Alfred Lord Tennyson, with Bushy Park, Strawberry Hill and Alexander Pope's Grotto close behind.

Whitton makes it into the Top Ten with Kneller Hall and Margaret 'Peg' Woffington marks her debut for Teddington. Richmond Ice Rink, Eel Pie Island, J M W Turner, Flora Thompson, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Teddington Studios, The Statues at York House, Charles Dickens, Marble Hill House, Fulwell Depot and Normansfield Hospital illustrate the diversity in interest across the impressive range of People and Places populating the virtual museum.

Recent additions to the site include entries for the **Killigrews**, a remarkable Cornish family of royalist courtiers to four monarchs through the 16th and 17th centuries, who may have rented a house on Twickenham Common later known as Gifford Lodge. Reputedly, they were not averse to a spot of piracy in the earlier years

The death of a Twickenham innkeeper in August 1605 at the hands of a Devonshire knight, **Sir John Fitz**, provoked sufficient interest for the publication of a book describing the events. *The Bloudie Booke*, as the account was called, is couched in typically dramatic language, which is used as the principal source of the narrative.



Although he may never have lived here, the descendants of 18th century surgeon **Claudius Amyand** have lent the family name to a row of cottages, Amyand Park Road, Amyand Park Chapel and Amyand House (below).



Correspondence

One of the very first visitors to The Museum when it opened and who now likes to keep in touch by letter is Mrs Aileen Griffiths, who shares her memories of the keepers of Marble Hill Park.

'I remember them well,' she writes. 'Mr Finch would come and tidy up my mother's front garden. Mr Waters was the father of my older sister's school friend, so we often went into the Clock House to their flat. There were two more keepers, and no one climbed over fences in those days!'

I remember too the sheep. I have always wondered who the lady was in black who rode a lovely horse on a Sunday morning (I think) towards Richmond. I used to stand in front of old Fordham's Nursery Garden and watch. She was very nice and always waved to me. Those were the days.'

*

Nigel B. Lott late of Hampton and living in Seattle, USA, for the past 27 years remembers Sunday afternoons on Eel Pie Island, the music of the early 60's and fond memories of Richmond Ice Rink. 'Very fond memories indeed', he emailed The Museum to say: 'I was saved from drowning at the Twickenham outside swimming pool. I don't know who eventually pulled me out or who got me breathing again. Thank you, wherever you are!'