



Burghley House, Lincolnshire

THE ATTINGHAM TRUST 60TH ANNIVERSARY

**LOOKING AHEAD:
THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY HOUSE**

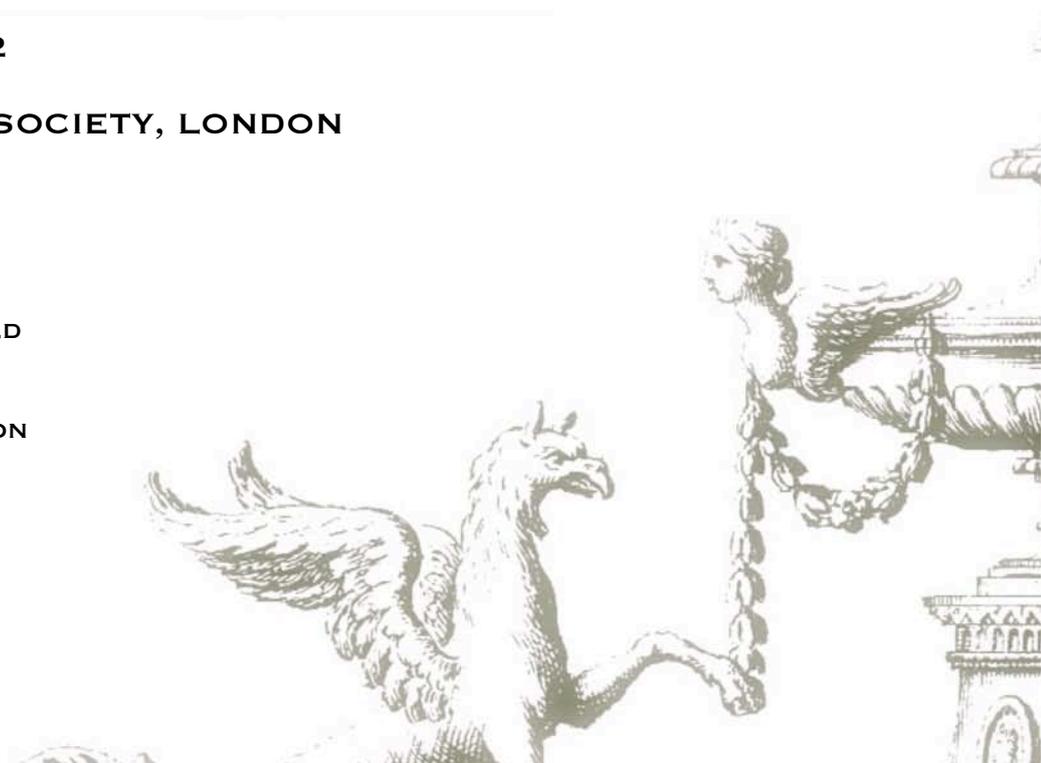
CONFERENCE PAPERS

12 & 13TH OCTOBER 2012

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, LONDON

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- Foreword -

John Lewis
Chairman, The Attingham Trust

It is a great pleasure to thank the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, who kick-started our planning for the conference with their kind offer of support, following the success of our fiftieth anniversary conference in 2002. Brian Allen, the former Director, and his colleague Martin Postle were especially encouraging and helpful. The Centre's generous grant allowed us to invite speakers from the United States and the Republic of Ireland, and to offer bursaries for postgraduate and undergraduate students to attend the conference. I would also like to thank Lowell Libson, who in memory of our founder Helen Lowenthal provided assistance to allow a group of Central European alumni to attend. A further generous donor prefers to remain anonymous.

This conference would not have occurred without the inspiration of Giles Waterfield, who has gathered together an international group of excellent speakers. Giles has been involved with the Attingham Trust for many years and continues to direct Royal Collection Studies, which he founded with Sir Hugh Roberts seventeen years ago. Giles has been ably assisted in the planning of the conference by Rebecca Parker, who with inimitable spirit and good cheer held it all together. Considerable thanks are also due to Annabel Westman and Kate Morgan, both of the Attingham Trust, for all their work, while Mia Jackson admirably transcribed the proceedings for publication.

If any of our readers think that the conference addresses a subject that could conceivably be regarded as esoteric, I would emphasise that tourism is the United Kingdom's third largest foreign exchange earner. *Visit Britain* has established that the vast majority of overseas visitors come to Britain because of our heritage and in particular our country houses. The National Trust, the Historic Houses Association and English Heritage, which were all represented at the conference, between them have over 1250 properties open to the public. This comparatively unsung area of the British economy is exceptionally important in the UK, especially in the current economic climate.

We are very proud of the Attingham Trust and all that it has achieved in offering professionals – whether curators, academics, architects, or art dealers and auctioneers – in the field of art and

architectural history the opportunity to study historic buildings and their contents, in this country and overseas. The work of the Trust has expanded greatly since the first summer school took place in 1952, but I believe it remains true to its original ideals. It is my great pleasure as Chairman to introduce the proceedings of this conference. I believe that they reflect the continuing liveliness and vigour of the Trust's achievement.

- Welcome and Introduction -

Annabel Westman

Executive Director, The Attingham Trust

The vision of our founders in 1952 was reflected in the subject of this conference. The study of the historic house, its collections and estates is central to all the Trust's activities and remains as clear today as it did in the 1950s. As many of you know, the courses we run - the Attingham Summer School, the Attingham Study Programme, Royal Collections Studies and latterly, the London House programme - all promote this core theme and it seems the message is still pertinent. To quote from the opening paragraph of one report submitted by the English Heritage scholar this year,

The experience of the Attingham Summer School was for me in all respects rewarding: challenging, stimulating, a great learning environment and enjoyable. The areas in which I benefitted most are subject knowledge, professional skills and professional development.

Ten years ago at the Royal Geographical Society, the Attingham Trust held a conference on the European Country House with speakers from Britain, France, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Poland. Its success encouraged us to consider the future of the country house by spreading our net over three continents with speakers from America, Australia as well as Britain and Ireland.

America is highly important to our success. The Attingham Summer School was originally founded for American curators and today, through the invaluable efforts of the American Friends, 50% of members on the Summer School and Study Programmes and a good number on Royal Collection Studies come from the States, often funded by the American Friends. This year the American Friends celebrated their fiftieth anniversary with activities including the Attingham Study Programme in New York and the Hudson River Valley, and a lecture given by David Cannadine, also a patron of the Attingham Trust.

Our links with the southern hemisphere are also important to us. In Australia, the Copland Foundation celebrates its fifth anniversary and provides two scholarships in perpetuity for Australians to attend the courses. The Foundation is holding a conference in Adelaide on a similar theme in late November, and we are delighted that there are delegates here from New

Zealand who have benefitted from the Clark Collection/Creative New Zealand scholarship, which has been running for some ten years.

We are indebted to the generosity of our benefactors. I would like to single out The Monument Trust which has supported dozens of scholars since the 1980s. Its support and that of many other donors - private individuals, institutions and charitable bodies - enable us to maintain an academic standard integral to our purpose of continual professional development and education within the heritage field.

- Confessions of a Country House Snooper: Tim Knox interviews John Harris -

Tim Knox
Director, Sir John Soane's Museum

John Harris
Architectural Historian

TIM KNOX: John Harris needs no introduction; he is one of greatest architectural historians and certainly our greatest architectural maverick. Born in 1931, he's had a variegated career, which extends from national service in Malaysia to being honorary curator of the Schweppes Grotto, which was a Festival of Britain attraction in Battersea Park. He then went on to survey Lincolnshire for the Buildings of England Pevsner series, something we'll hear about later. He became Curator of the RIBA Drawings Collection and presided over a great revival of that institution in Portman Square. It became the dynamo of architectural history of its time. Not only was it a fantastic source of gossip round that little coffee table, but the catalogues, the exhibitions, John was at the forefront of all of that, as well as advising other collectors such as Paul Mellon - the distinguished collection at the Yale Center for British Art was formed partly under John's advice. Since his retirement from the RIBA, John has been writing book after book: *Chambers*, *Inigo Jones*, *Lord Burlington*, *Talman*, *Moving Rooms* which is a study of period rooms, and indeed a chapter in the new William Kent catalogue. But in a way the two books that are most personal are *No Voice from the Hall*, which came out in 1998, and *Echoing Voices* of 2002. These wistful elegiac memoirs chart his explorations in the Thames Valley and in Lincolnshire just after the Second World War. If anything they are the coda to the great exhibition that John co-organized, *The Destruction of the Country House*, held at the V & A in 1974. So I want to start off, John, by asking about your earliest memories of country house creeping?

JOHN HARRIS: Well, let me think. 1948, I was born '31, or something like that?

TK: You were young.

JH: And of course I was under the tutorship of my Uncle Sid, the ubiquitous Uncle Sid. Uncle Sid was a pantheist, one would often find him walking the South Downs in Sussex, lying on prehistoric earthworks and having conversations. He was an upholsterer, he came from a long line of upholsterers and before he settled in Sussex, he was the principal upholsterer in West Middlesex and South Bucks. And every house he upholstered in – and he upholstered in

something like twenty – he made sure that if there was a lake or if there was a stream, he would fish there and this was really my introduction to fishing and the country house. I think my next book may be titled *Fishing for Houses* but we will see. I was transfixed particularly by one house, Richings Park, which summed up the decline of the English estate following the Second World War. The house was requisitioned in 1939, I went there with Uncle Sid in 1948 and there was this incredibly handsome house: foursquare, late Georgian, with a fine wing, a most beautiful park laid out by Stephen Switzer in about 1710 for Lord Bathurst and the interior had marvellous plasterwork, it was a most delicious place. At the end of the war it had been ruined by RAF Bomber Command and that set me off on my interest in all these other country houses that had suffered during requisition in the war, and I began to compile lists of lost or demolished country houses.

TK: I think now the M4 charges through the park and the house has gone, but in those days it was standing empty. How did you get in, were you trespassing?

JH: Yes, of course. Up, over and in.

TK: Through a window?

JH: Through a window, yes.

TK: And what sort of experiences did you find, getting into these houses?

JH: The experience at Richings was pretty typical. I mean, pretty grim. Dirty interiors, in some rooms a few books lying about on the floor, official notices stuck on walls. Horrible nasty things in the corners of rooms. But every room was nearly intact, it was tragic. And there was no reason for it to have been pulled down.

TK: In your *No Voice from the Hall*, there's a particularly disgusting discovery in one house... Something in a bath?

JH: Yes! A dessicated Alsatian! I mean, to this day, I'm puzzled. People don't believe it, they say it's an invention...

TK: Where was this?

JH: Draycot, Draycot Cerne. It was a very handsome house, mid-Georgian, it had very good plaster rooms, built around an earlier core, and I got into the back of this house through a window...

TK: Tilney-Long!

JH: The Tilney-Long family from Wanstead, yes that's who the family were. When Wanstead was demolished, they moved to Draycot. I was upstairs and there was this dessicated...

TK: And, were the houses still furnished? Presumably people often just left things behind?

JH: Yes they did, it's surprising how much was left in country houses.

TK: In your book, there's a wonderful house in Lincolnshire, when you were doing your Pevsner explorations, where you went in and it was just filled with hay.

JH: That was Burwell. Burwell was one of the most ravishing houses you could ever want. It was a square red brick house of the 1760s, almost certainly designed by Sir Robert Taylor and every room was in the highest style of Taylor's rococo phase and throughout, every room had piles of potatoes, or bales of hay. And Rococo mirrors were still hanging on the wall!

TK: Wasn't that the house where you found a cabinet full of Greek coins?

JH: Yes, yes! No, no! The cabinet of Greek coins – oh God, what was the house called?

TK: Is that the one you have at home?

JH: Oh dear oh dear...

TK: But John, your explorations for Pevsner... you didn't always see eye-to-eye with Nikolaus Pevsner, did you?

JH: No, no.

TK: What were his methods of going round houses, how did you differ?

JH: I didn't agree with his methods, because he went to the one inch Ordnance Survey and took ten by ten squares and as he travelled, he crossed off each square. And he was meticulous in doing this, so he never allowed himself to look into the adjacent square, in which he would have found all sorts of things. To give him his due, he was short of time. I mean, the idea that you could write Lincolnshire, travel Lincolnshire in thirty days, was just madness. He didn't have the time. But I never agreed with his method. And I always felt, to coin a military simile, that he never considered what was on the other side of the hill.

TK: And do you think the arrival with a clipboard was rather off-putting?

JH: Very. Oh yes, Mrs. Fountaine at Narford! Now Narford in those days was the most inaccessible house in England and if I had to choose any English country house to be mine, or to have access to all the drawings and papers, I would choose Narford. But Mark Girouard and Dickie Girouard, his father, they always wanted to get into Narford. And regularly, we sent a letter to Mrs. Fountaine saying 'may we come and see your house?' Either never a reply or 'no'. And then one day, the telephone rang and it was Dickie Girouard saying 'My goodness! We've got a letter, a postcard, she says 'come tomorrow'!' So we shot up and the next morning we arrived at Narford, went to the door, pressed the bell, nothing, pressed the bell again, nothing. Then I did my usual thing, I walked around the circuit of the house...

TK: Looking for open windows...

JH: And nothing. And we were just about to say, well what should we do, should we just go, when all of a sudden the door opened and there was a German maid who could hardly speak any English and she listened to us and shut the door very firmly. But after a little while, the door opened, she said 'you may come in', and we came into the hall, which to my mind is the most beautiful room in England. It was entirely surrounded by paintings by Antonio Pellegrini that had been taken out of Burlington House by Lord Burlington and presented to Andrew Fountaine for Narford, and they were set up there. Wonderful. And there in the middle of this painted room was the astonishing Mrs. Fountaine entirely dressed in peacock feathers, a peacock feather dress and a peacock feather hat, and you could hardly see her eyes or face. And she said to us 'Oh, I can't see you, I can't see you'. Anyway, she then became rather friendly and what was astonishing, she started to tell us about this house, and she knew the history of the house, she had looked at the papers in a way that none of us have ever been able to see them since, and she said 'well, I'm now going to take you round'. And then we heard the front door bell ring, and she looked a little surprised and we heard her German maid go to the door, and

she came back and said 'Ma'am, I'm not sure, it might be to read the meter, or the water man, they have a clipboard with paper'...

TK: It was Nikolaus Pevsner!

JH: It was Nikolaus! And when they came into the hall, they didn't see the joke. We roared with laughter.

TK: One of the people who was a great source of inspiration was the sculpture historian, Rupert Gunnis, who wrote the Dictionary of British Sculptors, and you used to travel around with him.

JH: Yes, I had two mentors. One was Sir Francis Watson at the Wallace Collection and the other was Rupert Gunnis. Rupert was a wonderful person. I met him through Howard Colvin and Howard said you must go to see Rupert, so I wrote to Rupert saying may we come and see you and I got a reply, of course. Eileen and I went down to see Rupert, and that was the first of a dozen, twenty visits. A day with Rupert was tremendous. He specialised in growing exotic flowers in a greenhouse. The house was full of scents.

TK: This is Hungershall Lodge.

JH: Hungershall Lodge, Tunbridge Wells. The house was absolutely full of sculpture, paintings, it was marvellous. And the tradition with him always was, you have coffee and then he would say 'Now, question time!' and you had to come prepared with questions like 'What was that house in Kent, called Dandelion?'. He had this wonderful topographical library.

TK: Another great person was Geoffrey Houghton-Browne, the interior decorator and antique dealer, and he had a series of country houses he bought, but he wasn't such a good custodian. What sort of things did he do?

JH: He buggered up every house. He bought Philip Webb's late nineteenth-century house, Clouds, from the Wyndhams, then he bought a whole series of houses...

TK: Felix Hall in Essex?

JH: He bought Felix Hall, immediately pulled down the wings to restore it to its original Palladian villa plan and sold off all the chimneypieces and a wonderful room of Chinese

wallpaper. Then at Christmas he went off to stay with the Duke of Argyll and the house had been derequisitioned by the military at that point, and the telephone rang and a voice said “Ello

Mr ‘Oughton-Browne, I’m afraid we’ve burnt your house down’. It still sits there as a shell and this wonderful Roman mosaic pavement is still in the hall. And a bungalow in the middle of it.

TK: And then another house he had was Winslow Hall in Winslow in Buckinghamshire.

JH: Winslow Hall was one of his later houses, that was really the only fully-documented house by Sir Christopher Wren, I remember he paid £13,000 for it. I think it was the very first house to have a historic buildings grant...

TK: But Geoffrey was an antiques dealer and you used to help in his shop and then he sent you up to Winslow

JH: Yes, I was sent up to Winslow every Friday to open up the house for the antique trade on Saturday and there was one incident, which is always in my mind. The week before, there had been a disastrous sale, which should never have taken place, at the point when Claydon House was being handed over to the National Trust, and Verneys decided to get rid of a lot of things, enough to make you cry. They sold this whole set of Grand Tour cork models of buildings, they got rid of a dozen full-length family portraits without even looking up who they might have been. Geoffrey bought these portraits and one Friday I walked into the hall of Winslow and was taken aback with these people standing there, and what Geoffrey had done, he had taken four of the Hudson full-lengths and had cut them all out and tacked them onto the doors, so you had these lifesize figures standing in the doorways looking at you.

TK: Probably only cost £50 for the lot.

JH: Or less.

TK: And another great country house explorer was Gervase Jackson-Stops.

JH: Ah, Gervase, yes. Gervase really was my principal snooper with country houses. Gervase had no reservations whatsoever. If there was difficulty getting into somewhere shut up he was far worse than I was. He was more agile. I remember once, we were confronted by a church that was shut up, and there was some scaffolding at the end of this church and Gervase got up the

scaffolding, opened a window and went in and dropped right down into the church. He had the greatest difficulty getting out.

TK: And you had 'not-in-Pevsner' tours. It was finding those tell-tale signs like cedars of Lebanon, a gate pier, a promising-looking lodge, and then darting up the drive.... But you don't drive?

JH: No, but I did have a Lambretta. I did Lincolnshire on my Lambretta.

TK: So the houses in Lincolnshire, a particularly rich county, with fabulous houses, had been heavily used during the Second World War, so it must have presented an extraordinary sight of one house after the other...

JH: All empty still...Except for the principal ones like Brocklesby.

TK: Wasn't there another house you went where there was somebody there? A lady...

JH: Well. Horkstow, yes, yes. Eileen's there, is she?

TK: Eileen, stop your ears, please!

JH: Yes, Horkstow in north Lincolnshire. I went to Horkstow and it was a romantic ruin. It's now beautifully restored. It was a mid eighteenth-century house, utterly ruined, but you could crawl through the ruins and see fine plasterwork all falling down. But looking across from Horkstow was this Edwardian pavilion and the door opened and there was this naked lady. I didn't say in my account that I moved on two days later.

TK: Of course there were other people who were also doing this chronicling of houses. One we were very fond of was Derek Sherborne.

JH: Oh we loved Derek Sherborne, oh, Squeaky. Yes, Derek lived at Fawne's Manor in Middlesex, right under the runways of Heathrow Airport. The house is still there. It's a strange-looking house because it's all covered in a sort of cement, it was an invention I believe from Portugal.

TK: Someone said it was like being inside an Egyptian pyramid.

JH: Yes, something like that.

TK: It was very unpleasant inside.

JH: And we arrived there, I think Eileen was with us and met Derek for the first time, and we were invited for a picnic dinner, it was summertime, and there was this small swimming pool. We were arranged around the pool and when you went to stay with Derek you very rarely saw his mother but mother arrived with food on a tray and quickly disappeared and then Derek's friends arrived. Now I should add that Derek, whilst he lived at Fawne's, was burgled three times and he was burgled because his gentlemen friends were rough trade. And the friends arrived at the swimming pool, rather a sinister lot, heavily tattooed and bejewelled, probably baggage handlers from Heathrow, and immediately off came their clothes, and they dived into the swimming pool in front of us all and frolicked.

TK: Now, you were seeing houses *in extremis* in the late forties and fifties, it's a very different situation today when so many houses are open to the public and also whenever houses come onto the market, providing they are in striking distance of airports and so on, they are snapped up and lavishly restored. Can we talk a little about country houses today and what your impressions are of the challenges and opportunities that face historic houses, in both public and private ownership?

JH: I have to constantly refer back to my experiences with these country houses and consider that statistic that in 1955, one house was demolished every two and a half days. In the mid fifties, England was a country of empty and decaying country houses. The transformation has been astonishing, I don't entirely agree with how the National Trust treats their houses, to my mind the Trust's interiors are lacking in personal feeling, they don't sparkle in any human way, and I think that's common to most National Trust houses, that there's not this spark of private ownership.

TK: But Simon Jenkins has often said how much he wants to bring houses to life and he's gone so far as to say that there should be a compulsory Labrador in the front hall of every Trust house.

JH: I don't agree with it at all. If you have a brilliant curator, and there are many brilliant curators, agreed, but if you have one who doesn't care very much, he's given leave to do what he likes in the house.

TK: What about revivals of houses, because obviously some of the houses you visited when you were a young man, had been right at the bottom of their fortunes and then have reached a great efflorescence. In Ireland, for instance, the situation has been transformed.

JH: It has. And here, we have a situation where no country house has been demolished in recent years.

TK: There are still lots of houses which are causes for concern and it's usually because they tend to be in difficult out of the way areas. Is this something that we're getting rather complacent about?

JH: It's possible.

TK: Tell me, of all those great lost houses that you wrote about in the V&A exhibition, and you published, which one, if you could wave a wand, would you have back? And why? Was it Belvedere?

JH: Yes, he's whispered something, which is absolutely true. It's Belvedere, near Gravesend, I think, a most tragic loss. Belvedere was an early Georgian house and had wings added in the Robert Taylor style and it looked across the Thames but there was a lower terrace and a long tunnel, which has never been photographed. It was completely painted in antique style, the whole way. And it was never photographed because of Cecil Farthing at the National Monuments Record. In the fifties, they were constantly being asked to go out and photograph a house, and they did not have sufficient photographers to cope with this demand, and in consequence, he gave this order that if there were half a dozen photographs in a box of a particular building, don't bother. And that was terrible for Belvedere, because there were just five photographs of the exterior.

TK: And does anything survive?

JH: Nothing. Except syringes. It's a notable place for druggies.

TK: And no chimneypieces and ceilings?

JH: Oh absolutely nothing.

TK: It was built for Sampson Gideon, the great Jewish banker...

JH: Yes, that was his house.

TK: Well, John, what's the chance of another volume?

JH: Yes, I think there is a chance.

TK: I hope so. It's been a great privilege talking to you John. I'm very fond of John, and he is one of the most extraordinary people to accompany on a trip round the country because he has usually very out of date maps and they don't show the latest motorways... and yet searching for those distinctive grey stippled patches on the map which show the former domains of great houses...

JH: I always use the 1954 edition of the Ordnance Survey.

TK: So it doesn't often show the latest motorways and things like that... so can you imagine if you're driving him around, he will scream with indignation and says 'well this shouldn't be here!', and there's a whizzing four-lane motorway right in front of you. And it takes much longer getting around that it should.

JH: What I scratched off here was that snooping demands one's curiosity, it requires the culprit to be thick-skinned and immune to owners who value their privacy, but I did say that I don't think in all the years that I travelled about with Gervase we actually used the word snooping. It was his illness, in 1995, that brought Tim Knox out of the RIBA Drawings Collection job and into the National Trust, so after Gervase's death, I had a new companion snooper.

TK: Thank you John, thank you very much.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE COUNTRY HOUSE IN BRITAIN
Chair: Martin Postle, Assistant Director, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

- Studying the Country House: The View from the Academy -

Giles Waterfield
The Attingham Trust

When the Attingham Summer School began its life in 1952 – significantly, a year after Nikolaus Pevsner initiated the Buildings of England series but before History of Art was taught at any university in England other than the Courtauld Institute - it was aimed at an almost exclusively American audience who, the founders felt, were largely unacquainted with British country houses. In those early days the students were taught by Nikolaus Pevsner, Anthony Blunt, Ernst Gombrich, John Summerson and many other leading art historians. Though the Attingham Trust has changed enormously in the past 60 years, the fundamental aim has not altered: to study the material culture associated with historic buildings, their collections and their surroundings, whether in country houses, royal palaces, or town houses, and to apply the highest standards of scholarship. At a time when material culture was frequently despised as a subject of study, Attingham continued to regard it as important, becoming for a while one of the last redoubts of such an approach. It is a reflection of the importance that the Trust attaches to scholarship and the diffusion of new ideas that we are opening this conference with a discussion of the role that the country house now plays in academic studies. I will be considering in my talk the nature of relevant publications – the teaching of the subject at university level – and the research currently being carried out by individuals and organisations in England. I have to apologise that for reasons of time I am restricting my remarks to England, though you will be hearing about Scotland and Ireland from others.

I approached the subject in a rather gloomy spirit. It was my impression that country house studies were in decline. Following the 1974 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum on the *Destruction of the Country House* curated by Roy Strong, John Harris and Marcus Binney, interest in the preservation of such houses was heightened. This interest was stimulated by the *Treasure Houses of Britain* exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1985 and more negatively by the threatened dispersal in the mid-1980s of three great houses – Kedleston Hall, Calke Abbey and Weston Park – an outcome averted by major contributions from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Mark Girouard's hugely important *Life in the English Country House*, published in 1978, revolutionised our view of the subject. Much of the controversy around the role of the country house was, however, far from favourable towards a social organism that was

seen as contributing to the intellectual decline of Britain within a cocoon of artificial and sentimental heritage.

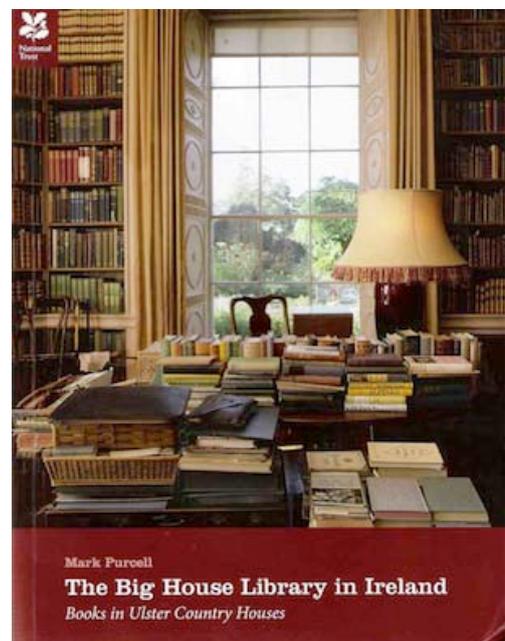
Since that time, the study of the country house and of English architectural history, at least of the eighteenth century, may seem to have become increasingly unfashionable, certainly in the United States and Europe (with an outpost of interest in Pisa) but also in Britain. This decline mirrors the gradual fall in the numbers of visitors to historic houses, at least below the top rank of such houses as Chatsworth and Burghley. Ironically, one of the reasons for the lessening of interest may be the absence of any particular crisis – not many major houses have been threatened with dispersal in the past twenty years, with owners reacting to funding problems by realising the rising financial value of major works of art. When a major property with its original contents comes on the market as Tyntesfield did in 2001/02, the level of public concern is surprisingly high.

In academic terms, the focus of attention has generally moved away from architectural history towards social history – the place of the great house within a political and social context – the functioning of the household – the development of technology – and the role of women in the creation and care of houses, along with a more holistic consideration of patterns of collecting. And it is not only the great house that attracts attention: Amanda Vickery's books *The gentleman's daughter* and *Behind Closed Doors: at home in Georgian England* indicate the extension of country house studies, for both a specialised and a much wider audience, to the gentry house and the 'middling sort'. This extension has reached an even wider audience through the recent television series by Vickery and by Lucy Worsley, both based on innovative research particularly into the role of women, which have added spice to the previously sober drafts of academic study. The success of *Downton Abbey* in which social history, the political role of the great house, and the role of women are all looked at - testifies to the continuing potency of the country house myth.

On the other hand, relatively few books on the theme are being published. Yale University Press, the most active publisher on British art and architecture, issued this year a major book on James Wyatt, last year a book on English castles, in 2009 a work on Strawberry Hill, in 2008 a study of Design and Plan in the country house. It is a continuous stream but a narrow one. Ashgate has produced nothing on a relevant theme for several years, nor have other publishing houses interested in British cultural history such as Manchester University Press. Even a small but active publisher like Phillimore which in recent years has issued books on researching the country house and on London's country houses as well as on Hardwick Hall and Parham House, remarks that the outlook for this genre is 'not particularly good'. Moving towards more

general publishers with an interest in the arts, there are only two recent books relevant to the genre in a very long list published by the Antique Collectors Club, on the British as art collectors and Edwin Lutyens. To Dan Franklin of Random House, a leading publisher of non-fiction as well as fiction, it is surprising that he is sent almost no texts related to collecting, the country house or the historic garden: the only relevant book they have published in recent years is a study of Capability Brown.

This is not, however, a universally black picture. The National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland has until recent years been relatively quiet in publishing terms, other than through its outstanding guidebooks. I would cite the picture collection at Petworth, for which the last academic catalogue, written by Charles Collins Baker, was published in 1920. The digital revolution has made a huge difference here. The Trust's Collections Management Scheme has recently completed an astonishing programme of digitising 750,000 items in its collections, which are readily available to all without charge, while the Public Catalogue Foundation is putting all the Trust's paintings online. Catalogues of collections in individual houses are also going on line. Another inspiring element of the Trust's work is the programme of books published, or planned, on aspects of its huge collection: the catalogue of architectural drawings at Wimpole appeared in 2007, and several others are promised including Mark Purcell's study of *The Big House Library in Ireland*. A book on Ham House, assembling essays on paintings, furniture, textiles, sculpture, framing, copies of Old Masters, plasterwork and other themes by some nineteen authors, is due in the spring of 2013.



In relation to country house studies in universities, the picture is again mixed. Some courses have recently closed (as at Hull) or are in abeyance. On the other hand programmes on heritage studies, including such houses, are offered by at least twelve universities. For some curious reason it is in the North of England and the Midlands that country house studies are particularly active. I would cite the University of Leicester, where the Centre for the Study of the Country House works in collaboration with the Lamport Hall Preservation Trust, which is responsible for the care of this ancestral seat of the Isham family, notable for its souvenirs of early Grand Tour collecting. Set up as a trust in 1976 on the death of Sir Gyles Isham, Lamport has been looking at ways of fulfilling its educational brief and this collaboration amply fulfils that brief. The MA taught at Leicester uses Lamport as a prime case study in the investigation of the architecture and gardens of country houses, their collections, their artistic representations, the technologies they involved, and their current funding and administration. Particularly significant is the close collaboration between house and university, the wide-ranging nature of the course, and the involvement of academics and students from various backgrounds, making the country house the focus of creative interdisciplinary studies.



Lamport Hall

The University of Leeds has since the 1970s actively engaged in country house studies, at undergraduate, master's and doctoral level. The History of Art department works closely with houses close by including Harewood, Temple Newsam, Lotherton Hall and Burton Constable. Here the country house is seen as a key to unlocking an understanding of such issues as architectural space, social history and the development of technology. A very popular feature has been the introduction at undergraduate level of a strand on the country house in the twentieth century, including a consideration of the place of the house in literature – as in Agatha Christie's novels – and film, as in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. The National Trust, its changing attitudes to the presentation of houses, has proved a fertile subject for dissertations. Kerry Bristol, Senior Lecturer at the University, is currently researching the voluminous archive at Nostell Priory in preparation for an exhibition on the theme of everyday life at Nostell in the eighteenth century – including such subjects as shopping, eating and travelling – which will be held throughout the house.

As this bold initiative suggests, country houses remain extraordinary and often unexplored

repositories of information in terms of documents and material culture. In the case of archives, many have been deposited for years in county record offices, although their rising financial value has in recent years led to several sales. Other major archives remain in private hands, sometimes in the care of the traditional country house archivist, the type whose prime ambition is to prevent anyone from ever gaining access to any information.

This situation is open to change. The large and intact archive of the Dukes of Northumberland is kept in a tower at Alnwick Castle. Until recently it was hard of access though some scholars did extract information on, for example, Robert Adam's work for the first Duke and Duchess of Northumberland of the third creation. These two were active patrons of the arts from their marriage in 1740 until his death in 1786 and were responsible for the rebuilding of Alnwick, Syon and for much work at Northumberland House in London as well as for the assembly of an outstanding collection, notably by the Duchess. In spite of the publication of extracts from her voluminous travel diaries, their patronage is relatively little known. The appointment of a new archivist in 2005 led to the reorganisation of the archives and a scientific approach to cataloguing and to finding aids, and coincided with a request for access by a young Italian scholar named Adriano Aymonino. He emerged from an Italian training where the study of such aristocratic collections was not seen, as it sometimes is in Britain, as the prerogative of the upper class reactionary, but rather as essential fuel for a traditional Marxist analysis of class structure, though this is an approach that he has adapted to the application of a broad social context. Through, as he says, persistence, persistence and persistence he eventually was able to study the archives in depth, uncovering a vast quantity of material. Aymonino's work analyses these three great houses in terms of the London mansion at Northumberland House, sited in relation to the royal court, the antiquarian villa suburbana at Syon, and the ancestral baronial seat at Alnwick, complete with family portraits. Each house was, and in the last two cases to some extent still is, decorated and equipped in a style whose deeper meaning can be adduced from previously unstudied sources.

This work is paralleled by the notable series of partnerships funded in recent years by the Arts and Humanities Research Council through its collaborative doctoral awards. This system brings together on the one hand museums, historic houses or other sites of historic interest that possess collections and on the other hand universities (generally in the vicinity) to sponsor one or more doctoral candidates. The student is supervised jointly by an academic from the university and by a curator or other relevant person from the historic property, with the student based on site. This inter-disciplinary project has led to a number of exciting projects including the following:

Consumption and the country house 1730 – 1800 at Northampton University examines patterns, spaces and cultures of consumption at Stoneleigh Abbey, Arbury Hall and Canons Ashby (respectively an individual trust, a private house, and a National Trust property).

At Castle Howard, with its extremely rich archives, recent projects have examined the Builder Earl of Carlisle and the Victorian Seventh Earl, a reforming Whig politician and much-respected Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

The Department of Archaeology at the University of York has sponsored, in collaboration with Harewood House, a study of the people involved with the Harewood Estate between 1698 and 1813 – as well as a dissertation around the excavation of Gawthorpe Hall, the original Lascelles family house, and the creation of the modern landscape at Harewood. The most recent award for York and Harewood studies is ‘Colonialism and Horticulture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ which has allowed Jonathan Finch, the academic of these projects, to travel to Barbados to study the Lascelles sugar plantations.

At Sussex University students are working, or have completed their work, at Charleston, the Bloomsbury house in Sussex, on its photographic archive; at the Royal Pavilion on the evidence for its late eighteenth century interiors and their relevance for contemporary colour theory; and with the National Trust at Knole on two projects, the fifteenth century archbishop's palace and the seventeenth century interiors.

This outstandingly imaginative and successful scheme has proved itself one of the most successful ways of exploring the riches of country house collections, even though few of these projects have as yet been published.

Before concluding, I would like to mention two other research schemes, which demonstrate the wide potency of country house studies. Both, it is worth noting, are sited in history (rather than art history) departments. The Lost Mansions of England project at Essex University, led by Professor James Raven, aims to excavate physically and in terms of personal memories Marks Hall, an Essex house demolished in 1950 but with a surviving garden open to the public. This is the first of what is planned as an extended series of investigations of lost and often forgotten houses, for which in some cases interviews with people who remembered the houses are still just possible. At University College London the East India Company at Home research initiative, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and led by Professor Margo Finn, works in an imaginative collaboration with local historians, curators and academics to investigate the impact of Empire and colonialism on collections particularly in country houses. It includes an

intriguing section on that little studied phenomenon, the dowager.

I hope I have painted a positive picture. But I would suggest that there is still a gap between the two sectors. On the part of the academy, the country house does not need to be seen as a shrine of outmoded reaction. Such places embody a vital part of this nation's history. The survival of houses, collections and relevant archives in Britain is unparalleled in the world and can stimulate research not just on architecture and taste but on a much greater range of subjects. On the part of owners, curators and property managers, I would suggest that a house or property that remains intellectually static is a property that is on the way to decline, and that research into its past can stimulate new thinking about its future. The informed visitor also needs to be looked after, as much as the fabled family visitor. Research and a willingness constantly to reassess one's expectations can, and should, be as central to the work of country houses and house museums as they are to university departments.

When I was preparing this paper I was interested to discover that the people leading the East India Company at Home research at UCL had been unaware of the Lost Mansions of England project at Essex, and on being told of one another's existence immediately established contact. I hope that this is an example, however small, of the role in bringing together people and ideas that the Attingham Trust has played over sixty years and will, with luck, continue to play for at least another sixty.

- The Buildings of England and the Country House 1951-2011 -

Charles O'Brien
Series Editor, Pevsner Architectural Guides

Last year, the Buildings of England series, one of the four branches of what we have come to call the Pevsner Architectural Guides, passed the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of its first three volumes. 2012 is the sixty-fifth anniversary of the actual commencement of work on what some have been kind enough to describe as 'one of the greatest works of scholarship of all time'. As we reach this anniversary we are within a decade of having fully revised and updated editions of each of the original volumes.

It is highly appropriate and significant that the anniversaries shared between Pevsner's series and the Attingham Trust should be marked together, for they represent just two expressions of the interest, during the tight years after the War, in the nation's buildings and in the country house in particular as something special in England. It is also appropriate because Pevsner was among the first group of lecturers to be engaged by Helen Lowenthal to speak at the Attingham Summer School in 1953, along with Harold Nicolson, Anthony Blunt, Geoffrey Webb and Rudolf Wittkower (each for ten guineas). Among other contributions, Pevsner guided students around the medieval and Tudor buildings of Shrewsbury and he remained a regular lecturer on architecture at the School until the 1970s. His last visit was in 1977. Helen Lowenthal once wrote to thank Pevsner for saving Attingham from 'taking the easy way out with rich amateurs'. Among the subjects of the lectures we know about, but have no text for, is 'How to be Write about Architecture', a subject that will have been foremost in his mind as these visits to Attingham coincided directly with his efforts to produce the 46 volumes of the Buildings of England series from 1951-74.

It is still quite common to be told, even as joint editor of the series which bears his name, that Pevsner 'was only really interested in churches'. It is a well-worn idea but it is deluded. After churches, country houses large and small make up by far the largest category of buildings described in his guides and after cathedrals absorb the lion's share of the words in each county volume. Though he would never write about houses as a subject in itself, his gazetteers of entries in the county volumes and the short introductory essays on this subject at the beginning of each book make him one of the most prolific writers on country houses for an informed lay audience.

First, some summary history. Pevsner was born in 1902 in Leipzig. He made his first trip to England in 1930 following the line of research on the British antecedence of continental

Modernism in art and design which later became his first publication in English, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936). He was deprived of his teaching post in Gottingen in 1933, left for England that year and first secured a fellowship in Birmingham, resulting in his *Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (1937). He made his home in London with his family from 1935, became a contributor to the *Architectural Review* in the pre-war years and during the war became its editor. He was interned for a period at the outbreak of hostilities but published his *Outline of European Architecture* in 1942, before obtaining a post as Lecturer in History of Art at Birkbeck College the same year.



Nikolaus Pevsner

Pevsner's idea for a topographical survey of England's buildings, along the lines of the existing German Dehio *Handbuch* series, was put to Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books, before the war and to this subject Pevsner returned in 1945 at Lane's invitation. The same meeting also resulted in the proposal for the multi-volume scholarly history of art and architecture, which became the Pelican History of Art. Is Lane's own house, Silverbeck, a William IV house by the River Colne at Stanwell in Middlesex on the west edge of London, perhaps the first candidate for an English country house visited by Pevsner?



Basil Spence, *Gribloch House*, 1938-9

Pevsner's pre-war activities would not lead one to make any connection between him and country houses. But one fascinating piece of information came to light in the course of research ten years ago for the *Buildings of Scotland* volume on Stirling and Central Scotland, which is that

Pevsner submitted a proposal for interior decoration of Basil Spence's Gribloch House. This was in 1936, while Pevsner was working for the furniture designer Gordon Russell. The house, built in 1938-9, falls into the category of modernistic rather than modernist houses of the type that Pevsner would have regarded as representing the most progressive stream of architecture in Europe. The final scheme for the interior would have been even less to his taste, in a Hollywood Regency style.

Visiting for the Buildings of England series began appropriately enough, with *Middlesex*, conveniently close to home and unlikely to make too heavy a demand on the petrol ration permitted to Penguin. But Middlesex was not regarded as having much of a chance commercially and so it was *Cornwall* which launched the series and then *Nottinghamshire* in the following year, establishing a pace that even with Pevsner's other encroaching commitments over the next two decades permitted publication of two new titles each year up to 1974.

Progress on the series was stimulated by a public appetite for informed books on a variety of subjects. The relaxation of petrol rationing made tourism (and Pevsner's own rapid tours of the counties) easier and saw a corresponding surge in the number of visitors to country houses. Peter Mandler has noted in *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (1997) that 'the first widespread opening of privately owned houses to the public took place during the summer of 1950 and the number of houses would double in the summer of 1951, as part of a tourism offensive for the Festival of Britain'. Visits were made to the new National Trust houses – Cotehele in Cornwall had been acquired under new legislation in lieu of death duties in the year Pevsner visited the county – and to those in state care, as well as to the growing number of private houses thrown open to the public by their owners. Pevsner was able to surf the wave of interest in these buildings and provide what for their date were detailed accounts of houses the public could pay to see.

A comprehensive survey of the kind Pevsner was attempting required of course entry to far more medium or small houses which were not on the tourist's trail. Something which gave Buildings of England a distinctive edge over earlier guides was not only the application of a scholarly art historical perspective or the willingness to take an interest in buildings up to the present day but also the fact it also exhibited a polite disrespect for the closed door. While earlier guides had often demurred from describing anything which was private, the Buildings of England set out to describe what was known rather than simply what could be seen (indicating where it had not actually been visited by the use of brackets in the description).

It didn't always work: in the South Somerset volume at Hinton St George, a footnote says: 'An adequate appreciation of Hinton House is impossible, as Earl Poulett would not allow me to see inside', and in Warwickshire, one attempted visit was seen off by men armed with staves. In the Home Counties there was the additional frustration, as proved to be the case in Surrey, of the impenetrable defences of rhododendrons which surround so many houses of potential interest; a situation hardly improved upon fifty years later with the advent of the electric gate.

The experience of undertaking the work for Nottinghamshire, armed with the notes extracted by his researchers from a small number of secondary sources, seems to have provided the material for Pevsner's first public foray into the architectural history of country houses. It was not in print but on the air, in a talk for the BBC's Third Programme in 1948 on The Dukeries -- covering Clumber, Worksop, Thoresby and Welbeck. It is a very interesting piece, not least because of Pevsner displaying a certain sentimentality towards the houses and their fate in the twentieth century: 'the Palladian Worksop has gone, the Victorian Clumber has gone. What will go next? I suppose that is the pattern of the twentieth century: empty and superfluous mansions, disused church, working-class suburbs approaching the fringes of the forest from Nottingham and Worksop and Mansfield, and ammunition dumps in the national Park. Sometimes one is tempted to speculate whether the thriving monasteries and even the outlaws with their honest yew bows and broadswords were not better suited to the spirit of the Dukeries than anything our century is putting in place.' Seen through the stereotypical view of Pevsner as objective cataloguer this reaction seems wholly uncharacteristic (an indication that generalising about Pevsner's approach is something to be wary of). His entries on the same buildings in the published volume on Nottinghamshire were perhaps more realistic but personal reactions became a leitmotif of his writing.

What is remarkable is how quickly Pevsner arrived at the format which would serve him, and others, up to the present: a capturing of the genius loci, a brief history, just enough on the owners to credit the leading players in the development of the principal phases of the house, the drawing of attention to the evidence for earlier fabric, then the brisk tour, with description preceding analysis.

Pevsner's account of the houses of the Dukeries also reveal some of his enduring interests as an art historian, as well as the breadth of his vision and authority in relation to his subject and in particular the European perspective, which comes out again and again in the entries for country houses in the early guides. As previously noted, this is often combined with a very personal aesthetic response, as well as an association of the character of patrons with the character of their houses, such as the 'weird burrowing' of the fifth Duke of Portland at Welbeck Abbey, or Mad Jack Byron who about 1740 had built the two miniature fortresses by the lake at Newstead

Abbey to play at naval warfare. Welbeck also offered Strawberry Hill Gothic interiors, in which Pevsner was particularly interested, and in its chapel the Art Nouveau strain of the Arts and Crafts that Pevsner regarded as progressive and as one of the high points of English architecture. Notable also was his recognition of the significance of Victorian houses especially those like Anthony Salvin's great 1860s neo-Elizabethan Thoresby which represented the 'historicism' of their period. The house had added interest for Pevsner because it was then still lived in by Lord and Lady Manvers for whose family it had been built, though tellingly this would not be for long. Other particular preoccupations came out early in 1952 in his broadcasts on *Three Englishmen's Castles*, with Strawberry Hill again receiving lavish treatment, as it had done in his Middlesex guide. The choice of two others derived again from recent work on the Buildings of England in County Durham and Derbyshire: Lumley Castle and Bolsover Castle. Here one finds references to the originality of the Elizabethan and Jacobean architects, on which he was already lecturing at Birkbeck in the late 1940s, to the beginnings of the revolution made by Inigo Jones and to the English strain of Baroque represented by Vanbrugh. These provide just a few examples of Pevsner's interest in styles at the moment of transition. It was a major preoccupation for him, whether in the phases of medieval Gothic or the change from Gothic to Renaissance in domestic architecture as at Layer Marney, Essex, a house that required not for the first time Pevsner's employment of the 'technique of the confidence trickster' to obtain entry, on that occasion posing as the prospective headmaster of a school looking for premises.

Individual architects enjoyed favour, like Soane and some of his contemporaries. See for example Pevsner's enthusiasm for the gateway at Tyringham, Bucks, earning as many words of description as many actual houses. The rigorous austerity of architects like Henry Holland also appealed to him: the house at Southill in Bedfordshire for the brewer Samuel Whitbread he declared 'one of the most exquisite English understatements.' Architects like Holland were often the ones who held much appeal to those inclined towards the spare cubic style of the mid-century Modern Movement, encounters with which were made in the home counties, e.g. High

and Over at Amersham or the Staff Houses at Dartington Hall. The spread from the updated edition of Devon shows Castle Drogo and its stair. Pevsner was an admirer of Lutyens, writing in the *Architectural Review* in 1951 of his conversion, from his first encounter in 1929 with classical Lutyens in London, to realising twenty years later 'I do not find them silly any longer, and I know that there is more to Lutyens than belated classical



Castle Drogo

revivalism. ' As with so many of Pevsner's enthusiasms, he was attracted by buildings and environments of spatial daring and architects or nameless builders and masons with the skills to achieve it. It is odd that in the Buildings of Entry entry for Drogo he does not mention the stair, yet he had already in 1951 noted that it and the classical vaulted corridors at Castle Drogo 'have a spatial force which Mr Hussey rightly compares with Piranesi's'.

Pevsner was much less interested, if at all, in those twentieth century English architects in whom there did not seem 'to be more than classical revivalism', so that among smaller or medium twentieth century houses a dismissal of 'something Neo-Georgian' is not uncommon. In fact one should be careful of overstating this to the point of hostility. More often than not references to recent (1930s or post-war) rebuildings or replacements of houses by architects like Gerald Wellesley or Claud Phillimore are dealt with quite dispassionately suggesting they simply did not arouse any passion. His contributors are the ones who are usually more positive or negative e.g. Ian Nairn on Arundel Park, West Sussex, the new house of 1960 for the Duke of Norfolk; 'disappointingly dumb neo-Georgian'.

For much of the period, Pevsner's description of country houses depended heavily on the volumes, where they had been completed, of the Victoria County History, and the inventories made by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments, though the domestic architectural coverage of the former was patchy and the latter excluded anything after 1700. In addition there were the Little Guides, or Murray's, which were hardly reliable companions, even where they were willing to be distracted from the family history of houses or their contents. A much more reliable resource was *Country Life* and the detailed, well-researched and well-illustrated multi-part articles that characterise the peak of that magazine's architectural surveys after Christopher Hussey, whom Pevsner deeply admired, took over as architectural editor in 1930 and produced numerous articles on eighteenth century and Regency houses, steering the magazine away from its preoccupation with earlier houses. Victorian country houses were included from the 1950s. From 1954 it was possible to make use of the *Biographical Dictionary of Architects 1660-1840* prepared by Howard Colvin, though this would really be of benefit only once the second edition had been produced in 1975, and to a lesser extent use of the *Dictionary of Sculptors* by Rupert Gunnis. In due course the programme of listed buildings surveys prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government was available, sometimes in advance of publication, though the variable quality might do as much harm as good and it is often down to the revising authors to unpick the unintended errors in the interpretation of houses. To a lesser extent use was made of the publications of local archaeological and antiquarian societies. Nineteenth century architectural periodicals could be combed for references to Victorian, Edwardian and pre-war buildings, the indexes of the RIBA Drawings Collection could be

consulted, and the 'red boxes' of photos trawled through at the National Buildings (later Monuments) Record.

Three county volumes stand out in the 1960s for showing the benefit of mining richer seams of information available from local experts or from the participation of younger architectural historians: *Northamptonshire* (1961) where Sir Gyles Isham of Lamport gave Pevsner advice and documentary assistance; *Lincolnshire* (1964) where John Harris undertook primary research, and *Dorset* (1970), where the houses were in the hands of John Newman.

The approach set by these books was continued in the revised editions from around 1970 which concentrated on overhauling the thinnest earlier volumes. Here the work was undertaken by the series editor Bridget Cherry (beginning with *Northamptonshire* and *Surrey*, the latter primarily focussed on bringing the account of new buildings and demolitions up to date) and after 1976 by the assistant editor Elizabeth Williamson. The first task, as it remains today in the revision programme, is to correct factual errors, to bring the text up to date with new research, and to record alterations and, sadly, demolitions (over half a dozen houses in *Northamptonshire* had gone between 1961 and 1973, while sixteen losses could be counted since 1920 in *Derbyshire*).

As the expansion of the new editions attests, the extent of new research in architectural history published or available by the 1970s was already impressive, and was growing. It was represented not only by publications such as Mark Girouard's *The Victorian Country House*, the first edition of which appeared in 1971, but was also revealed in the early revised editions by the acknowledgement of assistance from scholars still in the process of gathering research for theses (some later published) on architects such as Voysey, Butterfield, Pearson, Street, Paine, Nesfield, Shaw, Blore, and Carr of York among others. Much more assistance was offered and exploited locally for corrections (testament to the considerable growth in the activities of local history societies by the early 1980s) and new information, often requiring extensive rewriting of entries, especially in those counties where initiatives had been made to publish surveys of their houses. For some indication of the expansion of writing on the subject one need only look at Michael Holmes's *The Country House Described* (1986). Meanwhile the journals of the amenity societies, especially the Georgian Group and the Victorian Society and the Society of Architectural Historians, produced deeply researched articles on individual houses and their architects. Houses taken into the care of the National Trust and the state (as now represented by English Heritage) after the war increasingly showed the benefits of an increasingly expert and scholarly examination of the fabric of their buildings, leading to informed guide books or spin off publications and collections of articles. More recently the revolution in IT has made it

possible to make intelligent and productive use of the archives of country houses deposited in county archives and libraries. The transfer of these records from owners to public repositories was a major achievement of the postwar decades. Although little or no use of it was made for the first editions of the series, the production of proper catalogues and now the availability of these catalogues online has made a major change to our understanding of country houses and their estates and our ability to communicate this understanding to our readers.

The advent of the larger format volumes from 1982 went some way to accommodating the expansion of knowledge on the subject of houses and occasioned a more root-and-branch approach for the revisers of Pevsner's work with much revisiting of houses and a more thorough examination of their evolution. To date, effort is made to take account of documentary evidence and to offer a more balanced treatment of houses to which Pevsner had given only perfunctory treatment. It is now possible to take greater interest in the role of patrons, penetrate deeper than the evidence of façades, and investigate those elements of building in the wider landscape to which Pevsner's attention had not been drawn. The same inquisitive attitude was adopted for the series on the buildings of Scotland, Wales and Ireland from the late 1970s. Small but significant innovations have also been made in the presentation of houses especially through the inclusion of colour photos, text illustrations and specially drawn plans and elevations replacing – if they had been used at all – generic plans from available publications. It is for this reason that as Pevsner wrote, 'the first editions are only *ballons d'essai*, the second editions are the ones to have'.

- Country House Collections: What Do They Mean Today? -

Christopher Ridgway
Curator, Castle Howard

In 1952 when the Attingham Trust was founded the country house in the UK was in a rather contradictory position. This was a decade in which the destruction of houses was beginning to assume an alarming magnitude, with growing numbers demolished and their fixtures sold off, and of course long before that moment their contents had been dispersed. From another perspective things looked rather more promising. By 1956 some 300 properties across Great Britain and Ireland were opening their doors to the public. This see-saw pattern was repeated for some years: houses continued to be lost through neglect, demolition or fire, but at the same time ever more numbers jumped onto the national bandwagon of heritage tourism. Thus by 1974, the year of the seminal *Destruction of the Country House* exhibition, nearly 800 properties were open to the public. The toll of vanishing houses was ending, although collections still continued to be sold or reduced, as Michael Sayer was to report in his *Disintegration of a Heritage*.

Attingham was not founded with any specific preservation mission in the way that organisations like SAVE were launched by Marcus Binney in 1975. Attingham's main mission in 1952 was to enable American curators to 'become acquainted with the fabric and contents of British country houses'. The opportunity to study architecture, paintings, sculpture, the decorative arts, furniture, and much more in situ meant that context was everything. Implicit in this mission was the idea that private collections that had been dispersed to museums and galleries, no matter how well looked after and researched, were essentially lacking something, having been divorced from their historic house setting.

To the question 'What do country house collections mean today?' there is no single response. Instead we have to ask 'What do they mean to whom?' There are a number of constituencies here with separate but overlapping interests: owners; curators, scholars and conservators; the art trade; Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs; and last but not least, the visiting public.

For owners these collections remain part of a priceless patrimony imbued with layers of family history. They are the source of justifiable pride and helpfully illuminate the story of the family. But they also represent something of a headache in that they come with all sorts of responsibilities. Their physical care and protection against theft or fire usually entails a hefty insurance premium, and the expense of security systems. And there is often an obligation (not

always cheerfully met) to make such items publicly accessible, particularly in the case of exempted items.

For curators and scholars these objects demand intellectual scrutiny; they have to be understood physically and contextually. The settings tell us what the object is and who made it, they uncover its provenance, and much more. Conservators analyse its physical condition and often make intriguing interventions by way of repair or cleaning. The forensic passion evinced by all these specialists seeks to explain the wider significance of an object: this might be in relation to a family narrative about collecting, or with regard to wider historical frameworks.

The art trade takes account of all these factors but its priority is to place a value upon such objects, whether for insurance or sale. Any cash figure is underpinned, in the first place, by the quality and condition of the object. If it is an undisputed masterpiece, or if it is rare or unique, then the noughts at the end of that total multiply accordingly. But understanding the object is equally important: recognising its wider significance clearly adds value, and so the art trade either relies upon academic research, or invests time in investigating the object, albeit with a very different type of audience in mind – the buyer, whether a private individual or an institution. There is a pragmatic and commercial motive behind the relations that the auction houses forge with country houses, they hope this contact might one day generate a level of business beyond just their client services.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs also devote time and attention to art collections, their interest largely governed by what something is worth at time of death or time of sale, and what the tax implications are. They also rely on expert advice to tell them how important objects or collections are, and this is even more critical when reviewing acceptance-in-lieu cases. The cash value of the object is situated within wider considerations of the national heritage, in recognition of the need to prevent too many items escaping the country.

And finally there is the great visiting public, who help sustain many houses by paying the entrance fee, wandering the grounds, touring the interiors, and spending money on merchandise or refreshment. What do these collections mean to them?

In one sense these collections belong to the public no matter who actually owns them. Exemption or in-lieu status mean that the taxpayer does actually own a slice of some of these items and they have a right to see them. But in a wider sense these collections have always been owned by their viewers and their audiences. Houses have received visitors of all sorts from the eighteenth century onwards, but that historical pattern changed with the birth of the historic

house industry in the early 1950s. Both the scale of, and the demographic behind, country house visiting grew enormously, so that today millions of visitors pass through historic properties every year, where they are faced with a bewildering panoply of objects.

While I have identified several interested parties in relation to country house collections my emphasis is principally upon what they mean to visitors. Herein lies the meaning of country house collections today, in unlocking their public value. By opening up collections to a mass public there has been a shift away from the exclusivity of private owners; in some cases this yielded to a narrow priesthood of connoisseurship and expertise. There is nothing wrong with such expertise, indeed such knowledge is crucial, but if the fruits of that learning are couched in arcane vocabularies then collections remain inaccessible. These art works may have been assembled through a system that handed wealth and power to a select few, but in an age of international mass tourism their meaning must be articulated in a more demotic manner. And this does not mean dumbing down.



The Turquoise Drawing Room, Castle Howard

Now, the first problem anyone faces when encountering collections in a country house is simply how to take them in. How does one see the wood for the trees, or comprehend the individual things amongst such a mass? Take the example of the Turquoise Drawing Room at Castle Howard. Refurbished in 2002, it has new damask wall hangings, a fresh hang of portraits, and a suite of furniture that has been re-upholstered and re-gilded. The impact on walking into this

room is startling, not least of all because it appears new, bright and shiny. Guides explain this within the broader narrative of Castle Howard as a house that is continuously evolving. But after that the visitor has a choice of 64 objects to look at. Where do they start, how much can they absorb, how much do they want to know, and how much can they possibly hope to recollect? Selectivity and not stamina has to be the basis of their experience, otherwise they would never leave the building before nightfall.

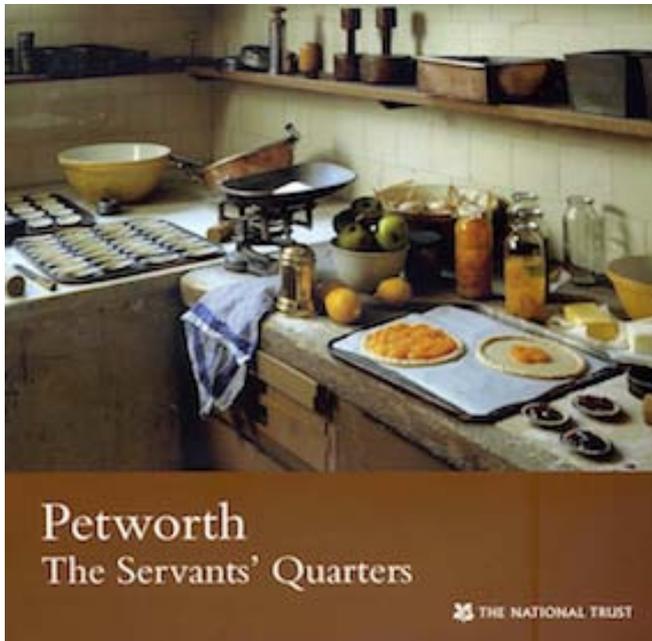
What methodologies are available to steer the visitor through these embarrassments of riches? Clearly house guides have a crucial role to play (providing they have been properly trained), but perhaps the next most important thing is the guidebook. However, its traditional focus upon collections has undergone something of a change in recent decades; what defines a collection today is different to 20 or 30 years ago, and I want briefly to consider some examples of this change.

At Petworth in Sussex the Little Dining Room was once described exclusively in terms of its picture collection, and while mention of the furniture and porcelain was made in passing, the two-page entry in the 1957 guidebook listed twenty paintings and two pieces of sculpture. By the time of the 1973 guidebook more detail was supplied for the chimneypiece, cornice and frieze, and the carver John Selden was identified, with mention of comparable examples of work from the 1690s. The chinoiserie qualities of the rococo mirror were remarked on, but the entry still concluded with the same listing of paintings and sculpture.

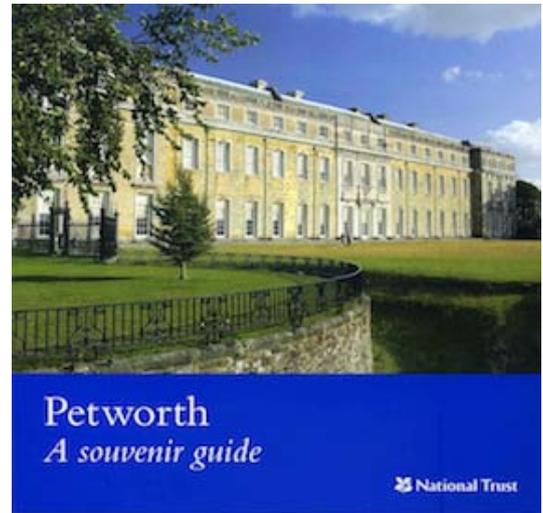
By 1990 the room was illustrated next to its written description, and the section on furniture had been expanded; the mirrors were now attributed to James Whittle. But the list of paintings was moved to a separate section in the book. By the time of the superior next edition, written by Christopher Rowell, aside from high-quality colour photography the description began with the history of the room and its different names and contents as understood from inventories. The early wall-hangings were explained but there was now no mention of John Selden's carving. The inventory of paintings had become selective under the heading 'Principal Pictures', affording space for more information on artist, subject or provenance, as well as room for information on items of furniture and porcelain.

These editions marked a steady growth in scholarship and a desire to offer more information to the visitor. But in the 2006 'Souvenir Guide' the process seemed to go into reverse: a great deal of the information was either condensed or stripped out, and in the case of the Little Dining Room the primary focus of the paintings was reduced to two single examples. The previous guidebook was replaced by something barely a quarter of the size (23 pages as opposed to 96).

The outdoors was still covered, as were the servants' quarters: the latter had even been the subject of a special publication back in 1997, when the rooms, brimming with utilitarian implements, were described in terms of the daily routines of servants. The recent publication by Christopher Rowell, *Petworth: The People and the Place* marks a new level in country house scholarship and publications.



The Servants' Quarters, 1997



A souvenir guide, 2006

A second example is the Music Room at Harewood House. In the 1950s it was lauded, unsurprisingly, in terms of the complementary work of Robert Adam, Angelica Kaufman, and Thomas Chippendale. The visitor was invited to perceive the space as an ensemble, although the Antonio Zucchi landscapes were named, as well as Reynolds' famous portrait of Mrs Hale. By the 1960s the two-page spread balanced a colour image with black and white photos of a table, door handle, and a Zucchi landscape. This selection of images marked a conscious effort to encompass both wood and trees: the ensemble was still celebrated but so was the detail. The description made heavy use of adjectives: *perfect, classical, princely, dazzling, supreme*. A line from John Keats was invoked to celebrate the power of music. All in all the entry was more subjective, and perhaps because of the absence of detailed background information it conveyed a memorable impression of the room.

By the 1990s this breathless tone had been muted. This edition, written by the late Lord Harewood, reflected the house through his eyes and emphasised the changing nature of the interiors. The Music Room is the least altered room in the house since Adam's time, but the Earl

expressed regret that two Chippendale pier tables designed for the room had had to be moved elsewhere in order to accommodate the visitor flow through the house.

Harewood is also fortunate in being able to supplement information on its collections through dedicated exhibitions and publications: in 2000 celebrating Chippendale; in 2001 the paintings of Lady Wenlock; in 2004 its Below Stairs history; in 2006 and 2008 its oriental collections; and of course it has extensively investigated the origins of the family wealth through the slave trade. At Harewood the rise of scholarship has stimulated special displays and publications which complement, but do not replace, the information on the core interiors.

My final example comes from Attingham Park, and in particular the Entrance Hall. The 1949 guide offered very brief descriptions of the rooms, and consisted largely of long lists of paintings and furniture. The 1987 edition, written by John Cornforth, supplied the architectural history of the Entrance Hall, explaining and illustrating John Nash's alterations to George Steuart's interior, and mentioned a few other items – table, chairs, and a Nollekens bust. The 2000 edition made a few additions to the architectural description, and inventoried the paintings, sculpture and furniture in more detail. But the section was prefaced with an intriguing paragraph on the experience of visitors arriving at Attingham, and how they would wait in the hall in their muddy boots. This human glimpse into the past was cut in the revised edition. Then in 2011 Attingham was presented in a wholly different way as, 'A story of love and neglect'. The history was themed through generations of the Berwick family; it covered the gardens and wider estate, as well as life below stairs, and concluded with the story of Attingham's refurbishment prior to opening up more of the interiors.

The same exercise could be pursued with any number of houses and would produce similar narratives of change and development. There are of course caveats. How collections were described in a guidebook was not necessarily identical to the way the house was interpreted by owners, curators or guides, who might have had different priorities; nor indeed to the way the house was perceived by visitors. But we can infer that the guidebook, in whichever edition, was intended to represent the house at that moment, to steer or guide the visitor with its emphasis on particular objects and explanations.

What conclusions can we draw? The first is that these collections, as in many houses across the UK, have been the subject of serious and extensive research, although this has not always been accompanied by rigorous historiography. Second, there have been shifts in the way this knowledge has been communicated. The emphasis has changed, things have been added or left out; corrections and improvements have been made, all of which reflect how the interiors

change. Partly born of a need to refresh the guidebook, this was also a reflection of the tastes and priorities of particular owners, curators or managers; and to some degree these adjustments will have reflected changing tastes or expectations on the part of the public.

Physical descriptions and sparse listings have largely given way to more detailed accounts, providing a degree of context. But at the very moment of applauding this scholarship we have also to concede that this encyclopaedic presentation of a country house in art historical terms has more or less had its day with the visiting public. Collections today can no longer be presented through the exclusive prism of high art. They are now understood to be more diverse, encompassing a variety of items and perspectives beyond the traditional disciplines of fine and decorative art, and architecture. This more eclectic understanding of what a collection consists of immediately means that many more things are admitted into the field of interpretation, which helps underpin a far richer understanding of the house.

Country houses are no longer perceived primarily as 'treasure houses', a sobriquet that reached its high-water mark with the *Treasure Houses* exhibition held in Washington in 1985. Where once the public was directed to view houses exclusively in terms of their treasures, that is no longer the case. One effect of this way of seeing was to engender a frame of mind whereby the object *per se* was paramount, creating a kind of mandatory connoisseurship. Houses were presented as glorified repositories for these treasures, they were temples to art history, with visitors expected to show a reverential appreciation and encouraged to genuflect in front of Gainsborough, Adam, Nollekens, Meissen, or Chippendale, even if their gaze or sense of wonder was uncomprehending or uninformed.

Today country houses are still filled with treasures, they continue to display an abundance of precious objects, and often the narratives around them are more developed. But at the same time audiences seek other ways of understanding the country house, and art histories have yielded to social histories. The 'treasure house' has yielded to the 'story house', with visitors displaying a boundless appetite for information regarding the lives and activities of the occupants of houses and estates.

The perspective of social history changes the relevance of collections, which now embrace the impedimenta of ordinary life: luggage at Lanhydrock, the tack room at Charlecote, laundry at Beningbrough, and in the case of Manderston a collection of Huntley & Palmer biscuit tins. For some this shift away from the pantheon of high art represents a decline, and is acutely felt in a house like Brodsworth Hall, which is presented in such an untouched way that the effect is one of arrested decay. Water-stains, flaked paintwork, faded hangings, and chipped gilding have

not been repaired or refreshed. But this appearance is intentional, and the tired feel to some of the rooms operates in a twofold manner. It reveals the interiors as designed and furnished by the Thellussons in the nineteenth century, and reminds us that these spaces have largely escaped any glitzy, modern makeover. But the decay also mirrors the decline of the family's fortunes in the twentieth century. The house exists as a series of historical layers, nowhere more dramatically presented than in the bedrooms with their peeling wallpaper, and the Lathe Room which is filled with discarded lumber from various decades. In this respect Brodsworth manages a neat trick, it appears locked in time, but its layers allow it to jump through time. And it is precisely its decayed quality that enables it to chronicle this process of change and decline. Here, we might argue, decay and ruination speak more volubly than a pristine interior or objects in perfect condition.

There are other examples in the UK of houses arrested in time, the most famous being Calke Abbey, which became a *cause célèbre* when rescued in the 1980s. The eclectic contents of the state rooms, as well as upstairs, were left in a state of suspended animation; the house was shown as it was when the family relinquished it, virtually fossilised. Curators and the public were forced into redefining the meaning of a country house collection. A similar picture emerged at Tyntesfield, a house where nothing had been thrown away, even to the extent that shabby carpets that had been replaced many years earlier had been kept in store. The challenge lay in conserving, displaying, and interpreting a vast accumulation: this might be wonderful carving, fine furnishings, and pictures in the grand interiors, or below-stairs material of a quite bewildering variety. Cornucopia or junk shop - how does one interpret houses like Brodsworth, Calke, and Tyntesfield? The eye has to work hard to assimilate such eclectic material, and the enquiring mind struggles to find a coherent interpretation. Decay, clutter, and a mix of material might suggest that the house is in danger of becoming a historical mish-mash; on the other hand it is precisely such a condition that offers the richest historical experience if properly explained.

But in an era when more integrated narratives can be generated (and indeed are demanded), there is another engine driving this new level of interpretation. The documentary records, the wealth of written material in muniment rooms, the words on paper – these constitute the bedrock of altogether more nuanced levels of interpretation. And the archive, often forgotten, and virtually never seen by the visiting public, is of course a core part of any country house collection. In 1974 Roger Ellis memorably described the value of this: 'To the historian', he wrote, the muniment room 'is a store of inexhaustible treasure. It is the heart of the house'. These rooms hold a huge range of records: deeds, plans, maps, accounts, bills, vouchers, inventories, correspondence, diaries, photographs, and often much, much more. We should

never forget that these records were once living documents, recording activity in a diverse number of spheres: legal, commercial, political, religious, cultural, social, local, national, personal, and so on.

Examples of these integrated approaches to understanding a house and its contents could be found in *Maids & Mistresses*, a series of inter-linked exhibitions held across the member houses of the Yorkshire Country House Partnership in 2004, which focused on the role of women in country houses. At Nostell Priory the famous double portrait in the library by Hugh Douglas Hamilton of Sir Rowland Winn and his wife Sabine was a way of introducing the book collection, which contained a substantial number of eighteenth-century Swiss publications belonging to Sabine Winn's family. At Temple Newsam, a vast array of material was highlighted and explained, including a portrait of Frances Shepheard by Benjamin Wilson; satires and caricatures of Lady Hertford; the log book of Mrs Meynell Ingram's 360-ton yacht the *Ariadne*; a 1746 suite of furniture by James Pascall; as well as account books, letters, and diaries. At Castle Howard the displays included the diaries of the sixth Countess of Carlisle, containing plangent reflections on her health and duties as a wife and mother. These tiny documents would never have seen the light of day, let alone been properly understood, if they had not been investigated in relation to the topic. The entry for 1817, 'my confinement after the birth of my 10th child', when juxtaposed against a less than remarkable portrait by Yorkshire artist John Jackson, provided a special moment of reciprocal illumination for both items.

Such a combination of objects and narratives demonstrated how each house was themed through a feminine perspective, enabling a diverse range of material to be drawn together in the service of a wider narrative, which encompassed various generations and strata of society. This approach allowed the individual objects to speak for themselves, but at the same time the sum of their parts was greater than the whole since they acted as an ensemble. Thus at Burton Constable, the Chippendale writing table was presented not only as a piece of furniture but as the place where Winifred Constable wrote her diaries and conducted her correspondence, examples of which were shown and explained.

Archival research also drove a second series of exhibitions in 2007 entitled *Work & Play*, which looked at the relationship between house and estate. Any sense of unchanging rural tranquillity was dispelled at Brodsworth Hall and Temple Newsam where extensive mining had disfigured the landscape. The juxtaposition of cows and collieries opened up the realisation that for some estates industrial ventures existed alongside the traditional structure of agriculture as a way of raising vital revenues. Indoors there were maps, paintings, photographs, and archival material

chronicling in more detail the lives of landowner and labourer alike, and recording the balance between a landscape that was ornamental and productive.

At Burton Constable there were lengthy explanations about obscure degrees of medieval ownership and property rights such as escheats, deodands and seigniories. But the most startling exhibit, dominating the great hall, was the skeleton of a sperm whale washed up on the East Yorkshire coast in 1825. This 58-foot monster famously merited a brief mention by Melville in *Moby Dick*, but it was an astonishing object in itself: the last thing one would expect to find inside a country house. And yet surely there was no more graphic way of explaining the seigniority of Holderness, a post enjoyed by the Constable family for 300 years, which meant that they could lay claim to items recovered on the seashore.

After years of being told that the public 'didn't do reading' any more, that visual and electronic media were the sole means of conveying information, it was particularly gratifying to see people lingering over text panels, scrutinising documents in cases, and marrying their understanding of these with the objects around them.

The primary material needs to connect all the time with wider frames of investigation which when properly disseminated greatly enrich the visitor experience. In the past there has been a tendency for archives to play merely an ancillary role. Documents were adduced to support *some thing*. It is now possible to look through the other end of the telescope: the documents in many instances pre-date the accomplishments of material culture: memoranda, letters, contracts are after all declarations of intent. But archives also provide a historical commentary. Inventories fix in time a household. Diaries provide reflective comment. Ledgers reveal broader economic patterns. This invaluable paper trail reveals stages of inception, progress, or completion; as well as subsequent episodes of change.

By acting in concert with things far beyond the muniment room, archives open up a broader understanding of historical process. The things they connect with may be the grand, familiar set pieces we expect to encounter in historic houses, or they may be more prosaic items – inexpensive, of little monetary value, and negligible artistic significance; and very often it is the most modest objects that have the strongest stories to tell. The marriage of archives, collections, family, architecture, and landscapes means that macro- and micro-histories can be told; it also means that context and narrative merge. The interpretative resonance of the country house is underpinned by one key feature – its dwelt-in quality, the lack of which can be acutely apparent in a museum or gallery setting.

This returns us to the *raison d'être* for Attingham, and the opportunity to 'become acquainted with the fabric and contents of British country houses': a mission statement that surely embraces the visiting public today. As one learns more about particular items one gains a deeper knowledge of the individual treasures themselves, and begins to reach a greater understanding of the history of such collections. This is a process of heritage enrichment. Country houses and their collections can accommodate multiple interests: the monograph or PhD at one end of the scale, the guidebook, explanatory panels, or children's quizzes at the other end. And in a digital era ever more exciting possibilities lie ahead with regard to the understanding of collections at a virtual level. These various perspectives are not, and should not be, mutually exclusive.

The journey from high art to everyday life has not always been a comfortable one, nor has it always been handled in a balanced and intelligent manner. Equally, it does not signal a one-way street. We have not left behind the splendid treasures that have traditionally made a country house so special. Instead, a host of additional things qualify for similar levels of attention and interpretation. And this mix will determine our future understanding of the country house for years to come.

Session Two

NEW VISIONS FOR OLD HOUSES: THE PRIVATE PERSPECTIVE Chair: Edward Harley, President, Historic Houses Association

- Introduction -

Edward Harley
President, Historic Houses Association (2008-2012)

The importance of the historic house

Let me start with a quote from Lady Harewood in a letter to the Daily Telegraph last year: "It is our belief that once the family moves out, the soul of the great house leaves with them. It is true but rarely acknowledged, that the most committed, responsible (not to mention cheapest) curators of these precious places are the families for whom they were built and whose presence keeps their heart beating."

Private ownership is not the only model (and certainly not always the most appropriate) but it has been successful. Private owners built our great houses and formed their matchless collections. Nicholas Penny remarked, at the Annual General Meeting of the Historic Houses Association in 2010, that there was no need for regional national galleries - we have the Historic Houses Association. These houses have survived better than those in most of the rest of Europe, suffering no invasions, no Code Napoleon, no revolution. Most importantly, they retained a royal court. The existence of the trust system has also helped, not so much with regard to tax but in preserving houses from improvident heirs and other such disasters – a form of ownership stretching back to the Crusades.

Christopher Hussey famously wrote: 'Country houses are England's most characteristic visible contribution to the riches of European civilization.' I prefer Lord Lothian on the subject: "The country houses of Britain with their gardens, parks, their pictures, their furniture and their peculiar architectural charm, represent a treasure of quiet beauty which is not only specially characteristic but quite unrivalled in any other land."

It is worth considering how else these houses contribute to society in general and can continue to do so:

- Tourism: It is clear that people want to visit. In a recent Visit Britain survey, visitors to the UK were asked what activity they were most likely to undertake. The most frequently given response was “ to visit houses and castles”. In addition, the survey found that this ‘activity’ scored the highest visitor satisfaction. Tourism is our fifth largest industry and historic houses are of central importance.
- There is also a significant contribution to local economies. Castle Howard does business with 1000 suppliers generating a turn-over of £4 million, 60% of them local.
- Education: over 300,000 educational visits were made to houses belonging to HHA members last year.
- Employment: HHA members employ at least 32,000 people. They provide a focus in the community. Equally, there has to be a balance between privacy and conservation with the need to share and generate an income. There is a real question as to whether aspects of this commercialisation have been bad for conservation of the contents of historic houses. This balance will need to be judged even more finely in the future as the cost of maintenance and repair rises inexorably.

The past sixty years

What is the environment like now, in the context of the last 60 years?

The period after the Attingham Trust was founded in 1952 coincided with the very worst era in the history of historic houses. Mark Girouard records that in the five years leading up to 1950, 78 houses were demolished. In the five years to 1955, 204 were lost. Many more (possibly twice as many) were sold and became institutions, schools or golf clubs.

The 1970s proved another tricky era, marked in 1974 by the seminal exhibition, *The Destruction of the Country House*. In the same year, John Cornforth wrote “Country Houses of Britain can they Survive?” for the Country Houses Committee of the British Tourist Authority (the godfather of the HHA). There was a feeling of gloom. Aside from the famous sale at Mentmore in 1977, there were many other house and contents sales. Often when a house open to the public was sold, the new owner was not interested in opening – as at Brympton D’Evercy and Pitchford.

After this bad patch some farsighted tax incentives (from both the main political parties), a reasonably favourable grant regime and increasing general prosperity created a relatively benign environment. This led to significantly greater access to historic houses. The 1980s and 1990s were not so bad.

In past 15 years, however, there has been an onslaught of unwelcome tax measures and other changes. Under the last administration, the rules for conditional exemption were made considerably more onerous (very few owners who do not have existing obligations go down this route now). The one estate election was abolished, the rules on 'Pre-owned assets' were toughened and additional taxes were applied to trusts.

In 2012, we had a disastrous budget including:

- VAT on alterations to listed buildings – ignoring the fact that historic buildings have to adapt to survive.
- The prospect of an Annual Charge on houses owned in companies.
- The prospect of capping income tax relief available to house opening businesses.

Against this backdrop, other problems have developed:

- Grants from English Heritage to the private sector have declined to less than £1 million p.a.
- Many rival attractions make it hard for houses to increase their visitor numbers.
- The cost of repairs remains very high.
- The key problem is the backlog of repairs which has risen from £260m at our last survey to £390m – despite owners spending £ 140m pa. This backlog can only be funded by the sales of works of art and other assets which reduce the cultural value and sustainability of houses in a way that is likely to be irreversible. We have identified that one in eight owners have sold to fund repairs in ten years.

The problem is that when the tax balance is upset, the implications may not be clear until there is a generational change. Even then, as we discovered when we gave a seminar at Woburn Abbey on succession, views on inheritance are changing. It is no longer a 'given' that children want the responsibility of these houses and the associated financial burden, regulation and loss of privacy. A willingness to accept the burdens of ownership is too often taken for granted.

The advantages of private ownership

Does it matter if families no longer want to live in these houses?

Aside from the sentiments expressed by Lady Harewood, occupation by private owners has many advantages: they have a long term commitment to conserve these houses, they are cost conscious and they retain and enhance the houses' soul and history. Visitors like the idiosyncrasies and dynamism of privately owned houses and the private owner is undoubtedly the cheapest way of keeping these houses going – indeed a much better bet than state intervention. The ties between the National Trust and the Historic Houses Association are very

strong but I do not see the National Trust as the longstop. Even if the Trust wanted to take over more houses, the exigencies of the Chorley formula would make it impossible to take on more than the occasional and significant Tyntesfield or Seaton Delaval.

In any case the number of houses in the private sector is still large. The HHA has more houses open to the public than the National Trust, English Heritage and national equivalents in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland combined.

Although the backdrop is tough, I genuinely believe that the majority of owners are resilient, innovative and determined to remain custodians of these special places. The HHA continues to lobby hard and there have been two pieces of good news recently:

- Heritage Lottery Fund: In the new strategy, published in early July, private owners are now able to apply for HLF funding where the application provides increased public access.
- Heritage Maintenance Funds: In the last budget, a significant improvement in the operation of HMFs was announced. Further changes are necessary, but we believe that HMFs are likely to become a key vehicle for preserving houses open to the public.

In the catalogue which accompanied *The Destruction of the Country House* Roy Strong wrote: “We take them for granted. Like our parish churches the country houses seem always to have been there - since time immemorial part of the fabric of our heritage.” My view is that owners are up for the challenge, but if these houses are to remain “part of the fabric of our heritage”, then they do need a fair climate, especially on tax, not a harsh one. Policy makers must recognise that there has to be a balance between public access and the need to share and generate income on one side, and privacy and the quality of conservation on the other.

- The Buccleuch Estates -

The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry KT

It's a great joy to be playing a part in this celebratory event. For my family, few visits set pulses racing more than an Attingham study group's. It is a curiously emotional reaction, inherited from my parents and in particular my father, who used to talk about it as the most important event in the calendar for months ahead. Being able to spend time getting beneath the surface of the house, lingering and pondering with a coterie of experts, all makes for rare pleasure, not just for our visitors but for us too. It's a sort of escapism. We owners are surprisingly rarely able to enjoy extended periods of research or collection management even in our own homes. When an informed group leaves, sadly we do not go back to the archive room. In the way, invariably, are a host of things to be organised or issues for decision.

This is not a talk about the Buccleuch collections, more about the nature of the challenges and the very personal fears we have, as well as a few of the things we do or dream of doing in the future.

I was deeply struck by Christopher Ridgway's talk and his mention of archives and by some of the closing sentences of Giles's address: 'Properties that remain intellectually static are properties that are on the way to decline. Research into the past can stimulate new thinking about the future.' I passionately agree. Pretty well top of the list of priorities for my wife and me in the five years since we have been getting to grips with the collections has been the archives. In July 2012 we appointed our first professional archivist, Crispin Powell, formerly of the Northamptonshire Record Office. When I reach the positive aspects at the end of my talk, archives will be found to be underpinning almost everything.

The battle to survive remains for many private owners, and not only private ones, the battle that matters above all. Our battle for the last century for the Buccleuch houses has come at no small price, and today when there is a huge wish list of things we would like to do there are hard choices to be made, for us as for others.

I was asked to say a word about the wider Scottish scene so let me start there. After ten years I stepped down last month as President of the National Trust for Scotland after a roller coaster ride veering from optimism to pessimism and back again. The nadir came three years ago when money was so short that amongst others the wonderful Robert Lorimer house in Fife, Hill of Tarvit, was mothballed. Following the failure to intervene in the crises surrounding Dumfries

House, and Abbotsford, and the subsequent sale of the Charlotte Square headquarters, the future for the 26 country houses and castles in the Trust's ownership seemed uncertain – let alone the remaining hundred-plus properties. The membership was in a healthy state of outrage. But a corner has been turned not least because of great generosity in gifts and legacies, which has seen the General Income Fund rise over the three years from £4m to £23m. There is now a proper management structure and an exceptional chairman, Ken Calman, and it is clear that even a gloomy year like this, with paying visitor number and trading figures down by twelve or thirteen per cent, can be ridden.

For me it has been turned too because of the strategic approach now being adopted: a newly published analysis of all Trust properties has put Brodick on Arran at the top of the pile in terms of heritage significance. Culzean is now the subject of the first in-depth study for many years. It would be unrealistic to see the Trust as being able to resume its role as a rescuer of last resort. Newhailes, on the edge of Edinburgh, was the Trust's last major acquisition in 1997, and I suspect it will hold that title for a long time to come. But there is reason for optimism. A cause of huge celebration is that those two properties, which in different times might have ended up in the Trust's hands, have forged new futures for themselves.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of what happened at Dumfries House, thanks to The Prince of Wales and The Great Steward of Scotland Trust, and what is equally important is what happened after it had been saved – its transformation into a flagship for country houses, the vitality and vision with which it has been conserved and opened. It has set a new benchmark for us all, private owners or the Trust. So too in a way is Abbotsford, Walter Scott's creation near Melrose in the Scottish Borders, another house that following the death of the last of his descendants to live there, Dame Jean Maxwell Scott, was in intensive care. The house is now in the hands of an energetic trust and undergoing comprehensive conservation with a £14m HLF-led programme.

It is an encouraging story, but remember that one of the most special houses in Scotland, Sir William Bruce's Kinross House overlooking Loch Leven in Fife, suffered the removal and sale of its contents and then the sale of the house itself by the Montgomery family, two years ago. It has found an enthusiastic and determined private owner, but it is a reminder that in the historic house sector, with those that are privately owned a fine line is often trod. And the privately owned historic houses hugely outnumber those in other hands - HHA has some 250 members in Scotland of whom over forty open regularly to visitors and quite a few more run hospitality businesses and the like. I can't believe that there aren't a few walking a perilous tightrope: reported in the Scotsman recently were the sale of David Bryce's Torosay Castle on Mull and

the closure of Carbisdale Castle, a former house of the Dowager Duchess of Sutherland in the Highlands, which had been functioning as a youth hostel.

Quite a lot of what I say has the risk of sounding like special pleading. I hope you will believe me when I tell you it isn't, it would be ludicrous and shameful. I and my family are extraordinarily fortunate, as the beneficiaries of generations of taste, acquisitions and creativity. It is the antithesis of the white man's burden and we are hugely privileged.



Dalkeith Palace, rebuilt 1700-1710 by James Smith

A glance at a map shows how many Buccleuch family houses have disappeared. A colossal downsizing has taken place since the late nineteenth century particularly since the fifth Duke died in 1886. Of the principal houses then, Dalkeith, just south of Edinburgh, is let to an American university while Montagu House in Whitehall is now the site of the Ministry of Defence building. Caroline Park, our second house in Edinburgh, was sold. Both Buccleuch House in Richmond and Langholm Lodge, in the Borders, which suffered from wartime occupation, were pulled down. Beaulieu went to the fifth Duke's second son, as did Ditton just to the west of London. There were houses in Warwickshire and also in Cumbria, the list goes on. So we have been in significant retreat for the last hundred years. Of course we still have some wonderful houses: Boughton, in Northamptonshire, Drumlanrig in the south west of Scotland, Bowhill in the Scottish Borders, and Dalkeith. And it is in the surrounds of Dalkeith, which are still managed by us, that you come across some of the additional, and maybe unseen, challenges such as the enormous Adam bridge in the park, or the wonderful William Burn conservatory next to the stable yard, desperately in need of repair. We have of course the gardens, the parterres and all the things that go with them and we have the things which do not

appear on our books, like the churches, and the monuments within them, nestling around the historic houses. And then we have the things that tug at the heart-strings, like Newark Castle, a ruinous peel tower, which needs a great deal of work and loving. And the reality for me as an estate manager is that across the portfolio we still have 25 either Grade A or Grade 1 listed buildings, we have over 200 Grade B or Grade 2 listed buildings. As my father used to say, we are a sort of mini-National Trust, without the tax privileges or the vast membership. We do have a charitable vehicle, the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust, which looks after two of the properties, and we are able to harness the trustees' support and experience. But on the whole, we are very much operating on our own.



The origin of 'Buccleuch' recreated in silver

Why do we keep going? Those of you here who are house owners know that that is a daft question. We are completely attached to our houses, hook, line and sinker. Garrard in the 1820s created a monster of a candelabra, which told the origin of the name Buccleuch. A young man called Scott seized a stag that was threatening King David of Scotland by the antlers and threw it over his shoulder in a small ravine or 'cleuch' in the Borders. The problem is that that story takes us back nine hundred years

and when you have that length of history behind you, it is incredibly difficult to give up or part with anything, even though a lot has been down to being in the right place at the right time. My forebear, Anna Scott, Countess of Buccleuch, was married off to Charles II's illegitimate son, James, Duke of Monmouth. But that was a seminal moment for the family, brought from being wild Border folk in a relatively lawless era to being part of the establishment. And so things grew. And with each of my constituent families, be they the Scotts of Buccleuch or the Montagus who owned Boughton, or the Douglasses who built Drumlanrig, there has always been a moment of good fortune. For Henry, third Duke of Buccleuch, who united them, his success was due to a good marriage and an inheritance from two generations back through his grandmother.

What is more, these houses are our homes. Grand though they may be, they have dining rooms, drawing rooms, bedrooms, and comfortable sitting rooms which we live in and use. We live with the Boulle desks, the chinoiserie cabinets, the ambassadorial silver and the Sèvres. Some people will react with a *frisson* of horror when I tell you that for my 21st birthday, many years ago, the first course was served on the Louis XV *bleu céleste* set. There are the tapestries,

the portraits of the great and the good or not so good, the cook and the messenger, and the ladies of the sixteenth, eighteenth, twentieth centuries. All these add up to a single wonderful inheritance. It is very difficult to divide it into categories, to me it is absolutely indivisible.

Again, it is very hard to remove oneself from our emotional attachment to places like, the Eildon Hills in whose shadow I was brought up. Those of you familiar with sheep-farming will know of the phrase 'hefted': it's how you describe a flock of hill sheep that's attached to a particular area of ground. My family have a deep sense of being hefted to our hills, to almost all our land. Sadly nowadays neither the sheep nor the cattle nor the hens nor the timber any longer pay for the upkeep of these houses. We have had to look elsewhere. This has meant the shrinking of the landed estates – now a little over 200,000 acres, they are less than half what they were on the death of the fifth duke. Land sales are what have kept the show on the road. I am sad to say that sales of treasures have also done so. Rubens' *Watering Place* and *Saskia in Arcadian Costume*, by Rembrandt, both in the National Gallery in London, are just two major items sold by my family in the 1930s. We don't know what the challenges are going to be in the future. I will fight with every fibre I have to prevent it happening, but I cannot say that the next generation won't turn to the remaining Rembrandt.



The Eildon Hills from Scott's view

In the last forty or fifty years, we have been able to take advantage of our location on the edge of a number of towns and villages. Controversial though greenfield development is, it has paid for the reroofing of both Dalkeith and Bowhill but like many estate owners, we are faced with fresh dilemmas. Wind energy is the Scottish government's preferred means of generating energy in the future and landowners are pocketing huge amounts for providing turbine sites. Yet to me the consequent industrialisation of our landscape is appalling. Can it be traded even

with something as desirable as an enhanced conservation or education programme? So far I have resisted selling my soul for what is undeniable short-term gain and we resist every neighbouring application we can. It is galling though when our neighbours are cashing in. Within twenty miles of Drumlanrig, 65 monster wind turbines have already been completed, 112 have planning approval, and a further 87 are in the pipeline for planning permission.

I have no doubt that my parents would feel that we have sold our souls in other ways, whether by lining the Ferraris up outside Boughton, running the Tough Mudder events there to which 11,000 people came in May, or offering location shoots for a celebrity TV programme.

I want to talk positively for my last ten minutes, because the joys of being a house owner and a house manager are the creative projects. Clearly conservation is one of the most important and we have a pipeline of work. Thanks to encouragement from Helen Wyld from the National Trust we are once again addressing the conservation of the tapestries. An almost Forth Road Bridge-type work will start quite soon on the painted ceilings at Boughton, Louis Chéron's series through the Great Hall, Little Hall, staircase and five State Rooms, which are now showing evidence of flaking. I think it is one of our fundamental duties as historic house owners to show that we are responsibly looking after the treasures in our care. We need also to improve the quality of our displays. Over this last winter, we rehoused part of the Sèvres collection with the help of Rosalind Savill, and we plan to rehouse the miniature collection over the coming winter. Rehangings is the sort of thing that private owners can perhaps do with a dash and gusto that if you were a National Trust administrator, you wouldn't quite dare to apply. At Bowhill, we moved a score of seriously large pictures including the two Barrett landscapes which hung at the end of a long corridor in the dark and were hardly seen – they now form a key feature of the central saloon. We learnt from Dumfries House the use of Eye-mats, and in the Bowhill Saloon these provide an exact photographic replica of the rug so that the atmosphere is saved. We need to bring more light and colour into our houses, again something that private owners can show dash and spirit over. My mother used a vivid yellow as a backdrop in the staircase hall at Bowhill. I dread to think how long a committee would have taken to reach such a decision. Lastly in keeping the spirit of the place alive, is the filling of gaps where possible. My mother also took a dim view of the fact that the family stopped collecting about 1850. She bought a magical MacTaggart, and my wife and I have continued buying both works related to the houses and contemporary work.

I want to go on to four final themes. Education has always been a critical part of what we do. At Boughton, we are very proud to have been involved with the Heritage Education Trust, which came under our wing for several years and, with it, the Sandford Awards. My father was a passionate pioneer in getting schools involved on the estate and tens of thousands of children

have visited us as a result. Now in addition we are finding growing interest for further and higher education links. For instance this year we have had pathfinding visits from the History of Art department at Cambridge and the Fitzwilliam. Being only 45 minutes away from Boughton they will use the collections as study material for undergraduate courses. For this and other links to flourish, I know we have to delve more deeply into the archives, not least to find the human element that underpins generations of collecting. There are obvious places to start. My third Duke ancestor had Adam Smith as his tutor and we have rich material relating to his travels on the continent, his visits to Voltaire in Geneva and their subsequent lifelong friendship. We have as a kinsman Sir Walter Scott, a very close friend of the Lady Dalkeith of the time, who was considered one of his muses. As a friend of his said, 'Sir Walter has a partiality for a gentlewoman' and from that friendship comes wonderfully rich material. For postgraduate students it will be especially important. We are partners with the Universities of Birmingham and Westminster in a research project about the place and influence of the French in London over the centuries. Ralph Montagu's extensive employment of Huguenot refugee craftsmen both at Boughton and his London house provides rich research opportunities. We have also joined with the University of Leicester and Sir Gyles Isham's house, Lamport Hall in their East Midlands Initiative and again are discovering the wonderful range of their students' enquiries, from agricultural tenancies in the eighteenth century to the magnificent Roubiliac monuments at Boughton.



Andrew Garlick's Harpsichord, 2010

Perhaps the most important single aspect of our use of that archive material is to do with music. The wife of the third duke, Elizabeth Montagu, is seen here with her brother John, who was our great Grand Tourist, painted by Batoni. He is holding on his lap a sonata by Corelli, which turns out to be in the music archive along with a huge amount of other material, partly collected by her when she moved to Scotland. Their grandfather was deeply involved in the Royal Academy of Music in the 1720s, supporting Italian opera.

Amongst the accounts we came across is a list of the dinner guests at Montagu House, with Mr Handel among those enjoying asparagus and guinea fowl. The third Duke of Queensberry and his wife Kitty were equally prominent in eighteenth-century musical life – they were John Gay's patrons and *The Beggar's Opera* is dedicated to her. All of that produces fascinating musical material. I see music as a living part of the house. I am rather proud of the new Boughton

harpsichord that was commissioned from Andrew Garlick, a maker in the West Country three years ago, who decorated it with Daniel Marot motifs from panels at Boughton, and we now have marvellous concerts. The pianist Melvyn Tan recently played a sonata by Johann Gottfried M \ddot{u} thel. He was a friend of the Bach family and died in Riga in obscurity, but he wrote some decent music, which we have in the archive and which has perhaps never been heard since.

We are adding to the archive with new music. The Great Hall can be set as an opera stage. Last year we had the premiere of an opera based on Mansfield Park by Jonathan Dove. It was a glorious evening. In a subsequent new opera evening, *The Mad Duchess*, we took the audience round the house for musical snatches and catches including the bedroom where to their surprise a young couple appeared singing from under the blankets.



Orpheus, Kim Wilkie 2009

When it comes to landscape restoration we start again from the archives. We are blessed with a wonderful sequence of plans from the eighteenth century. This is the bird's eye view from the 1720s which we are hoping to return it to. Boughton was virtually uninhabited for nearly a hundred years, nature took over, the lake which disappeared but was restored by my father. Everywhere we turn at Boughton there are the most marvellous opportunities. The Mount five years ago was a forest, it was cleared and dug and became a place of magic. Through our development of the gardens and our researches, we have now – it sounds rather over-ambitious this, doesn't it? – 'developed' a link with Versailles. The head gardener of Versailles stayed with us last month at Boughton and it is surprising how much useful information can be gained. Kim Wilkie had a fanciful notion that the rill on the top might project the water that flowed through it in a curve that landed at the bottom and we tried for quite a long time with fire hoses, but it became apparent that it was never going to work. But the hole was dug and then it was turfed.

To me, it is projects like this that keep everything alive. Judgements can always be made about whether we're spending our money on the right things but you have to innovate to keep things going. Where there is water, you need a boat and the wonderful Mark Edwards, the expert on historic craft, built for me in his workshop in an arch under Richmond Bridge, a beautiful wherry of the sort that you see in Canaletto's views of the Thames.

I wish I could talk about other land art projects, the Andy Goldsworthys and Charles Jencks, work at Drumlanrig, but I am going to move on now to my very final theme. Boughton is famed for its tapestry and we have begun adding to it, commissioning from the Dovecote Tapestry works in Edinburgh. The Scottish painter, Victoria Crowe did a wonderful series on the life of a shepherdess, one of which we selected for transformation into a tapestry, and it is a textile with which I am going to end. This is not tapestry proper but I love links with other people and through a combination of accidents and friendships, I now support an agricultural community in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. They have made a name for themselves producing remarkable narrative textiles, some of which hang now in the Parliament building. We brought them over to Boughton, a wonderful team, the two weavers and the people who support them. They worked away and here you see them working on what they did for Boughton. This may not be great art but to me it is part of the spirit of the house, it is one of the threads that a great house can have and should have, linking up all over the world. And who knows what direction my children will take it in, I hope they take it somewhere but they will only do so if we make it fun, if they feel that it is not a burden. At the point where they feel that they are ready to take it on, I have every intention of heading off into the sunset of the Eastern Cape, the Keiskamma River.



The Fish Courtyard, the Keiskamma River Community, 2012

- Burghley House in the Twenty-First Century -

Miranda Rock

House Director, Burghley House Preservation Trust

I am a direct descendant of William Cecil, and although we have the great privilege of living at Burghley, I am not the owner. We - my husband Orlando, our children and I - moved there five years ago, and I work as House Director for the charity that now runs the house and estate. I therefore have the unusual position of being both inside, as a member of the family, and outside, in my work for the trust. I will try and explain what this house was intended for and what it has become today.



Burghley House from above

At its height, Burghley was an estate of about 50,000 acres, now some 17,000 acres, bordering Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. It is a typical estate of its type; it comprises agricultural land, quarries, pubs, commercial and about 450 residential tenants. The house sits in 2000 acres of parkland and is surrounded by fourteen miles of stone wall. It was built by William Cecil, seen in his robes of state as Lord Treasurer to Elizabeth I, in a portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts of the 1590s. He was from a family of minor gentry. He was not an aristocrat by birth, but he rose to these heights through the court, using his brains. At the height of his power, he was ranked as second only to the queen and he acquired land and enormous wealth. He was ambitious for his sons and future descendants and aspired to establish a dynasty bearing his name.



William Cecil, Marcus Gheeraerts

The building of Burghley - and another house, Theobalds, that he was constructing at the same time, and that no longer exists - was a crucial part of this plan. The building of the house took about 32 years and was mostly finished by 1587. It was designed by Cecil himself as a modern classical palace and in the words of a visitor of that time 'rather for pleasure than for battery or fight'. This was to be a house fit for entertaining all manner of dignitaries and the queen herself. As the person who oversaw domestic and foreign policy, Cecil was ideally placed to gather all the contemporary architectural treatises and it is completely in character that he would have undertaken the research into the design himself. We can

identify stylistic details and Serlian motifs lifted from buildings that he would have seen on his travels in Northern Europe. We know that he was in Antwerp in about 1555. He employed an Antwerp mason for help with the design and some of the decorative elements were manufactured in Antwerp and brought back and installed in the house. There is also a heavy influence from the original Tudor palace of Somerset House, built by the Duke of Somerset and finished in about 1551.

Although the Tudor exterior of Burghley is pretty much intact, there are very few Elizabethan interiors left. The Old Kitchen, decorated with Victorian copper pots and pans and ovens that have not been used for a long time, is a spectacular room reaching about sixty feet in height with glorious fan-vaulting leading to a lantern at the height of the roof. The roof is one of the glories of Burghley. The leads were designed for walking on, and in the far corner is one of the little banqueting turrets that were used for entertaining.

The courtyard forms the heart of this house but sadly is no longer really visible for most visitors, as an interior passage was added in the nineteenth century. Sixteenth century visitors would have passed through a triumphal gateway and been welcomed into this inner sanctum. In contrast with the relatively plain architecture of the exterior, this is a richly articulated inward-looking space. It denies all knowledge of the landscape and was designed for entertaining and social assembly. It was a vast and light-filled meeting place, more than sufficient to receive an ambassador or indeed the queen on her northern progress. The climax of the courtyard and of Burghley is the clock tower crowned with an enormous obelisk and supported by lions as buttresses from the Cecil arms, immodestly standing up either side of the clock face, expressing permanence and continuity. The obelisk symbolises eternity and royalty, while the clock face, mounted with the arms of the Cecil family carved in stone, is surrounded

by the Garter, which Cecil was enormously proud of receiving, in the manner of the royal arms. There is a strong message in this architecture and the iconography of the stonework leaves us in no doubt that this is a monument to the Cecilian dynastic foundation.

William never lived at Burghley. The first inhabitant was his eldest son Thomas, first Earl of Exeter. His second son Robert became first Earl of Salisbury, and the Salisburys now live at Hatfield House. John, fifth Earl of Exeter, married Anne Cavendish, who was enormously wealthy, from Chatsworth. They undertook an enormous programme of modernisation and redecoration, and we have them to thank for the interiors we see today. They chopped up the long galleries in the court style of the seventeenth century and they went on three, possibly four, Grand Tours, once for three years. They bought over 400 pictures. On their first visit they took an enormous retinue of servants and family members, their dog, their priest, tents, arms (which they had to surrender every time they went into a city), cooking pots and cloaks. They had very little understanding of what sort of land they were going into and many of these things were discarded and sold by the wayside. Documents in our archive relate stories of the hapless steward, Culpepper Tanner, who had to make a note of everything purchased by the Earl and brought accurate measurements of every room at Burghley that these pictures and pieces of furniture were destined for.



The Heaven Room, Antonio Verrio

They made an inventory of the house in 1688, which is one of our most important documents because it tells us about their taste and the collection and it is gratifying to know that so much of it is still in the house. On the west front of the house, left and right of the gilded gates, are the apartments which the Earl and the Countess carved up as an enfilade. They paid a thousand

guineas to clear glaze the state rooms just on the first floor. Probably their biggest contribution is the work of Antonio Verrio: the Heaven Room is his masterpiece. He was at the house for ten years, on and off, and this room is the only painted room that is complete. It shows the discovery of Mars and Venus caught between the columns *in flagrante* – a curious subject.

The fifth Earl died in 1700 and his great-grandson, Brownlow, the ninth earl, took on the completion of the decoration that the fifth earl had started. Rather than again modernising the house, he was more interested in finishing what had been started. But he also went on the Grand Tour. He commissioned suites of furniture from Mayhew and Ince and employed Capability Brown for over twenty years to remodel the south side of the house on the upper register, where the windows were altered. He made changes to the interior of the house as well as landscaping the park.

Now we leap into more recent history and what Burghley has become. The late 1920s mark the end of a period of acquisition and remodelling, and the beginning of a modern world for Burghley, of conservation and renovation. The fifth Marquess managed to keep the estate going through two world wars and that should not be underestimated, given the financial excesses of his ancestors. Through both wars, the house was used for convalescing soldiers.



Lord Burghley at the 1928 Olympics

My grandfather was a hero for his generation, he won a gold medal at Amsterdam in the 1928 Olympics as seen in *Chariots of Fire*. Amateur athletics were a lifelong passion for him and he was part of the Olympic movement, and belonged to the organising committee for the 1948 Games in London. He was also a keen horseman and welcomed the horse trials to Burghley when they could no longer be held at Harewood 51 years ago, and that has become one of the big events of our calendar. He inherited in 1956 when he was 51. There was no electricity in the house, the gas for lighting and heating was manufactured on the estate and he had to undertake a tremendous programme of renovation and modernisation

including experimenting with a new light aluminium alloy, which he put on the roof and which unfortunately had to be replaced with lead thirty years later. He also took the decision to open the house in a consciously commercial way in the 1960s. He wrote a picture guide with the help of his son-in-law, fixed the opening times and charged admission. Although houses had always been open, this was a step towards a much more commercial operation. A kiosk arrived in the courtyard, it sold pencils and postcards and not much else, and the orangery was turned into a

coffee shop, known as the caff. He married twice, had four daughters, and a son who sadly died as a small child, so he was left with a problem. His brother was due to inherit the title but he was managing his own estates in Canada and was not in a position to come back to Burghley. There was an attempt to give the house to the National Trust, but negotiations broke down over the size of the endowment, and after suffering the loss of many items in death duties following the death of his father, he was adamant that nothing should be sold again. So before his death, he created the Burghley House Preservation Trust, a charitable trust for the advancement of historic and aesthetic education and preservation and showing Burghley House and Estate. To this he gave a large part of the estate, all of the works of art and the contents of the house, and those parts of the house open to the public. However, he was very clear that he wanted a member of the family to carry on living in the house and to continue the work he had started, to avoid it becoming what he thought would be a museum. To enable this he gave the private apartments to a discretionary trust and that tension still exists, but functions perfectly happily.

On his death in 1981, his brother Martin inherited the title but was not able to return from Canada, and the Trustees asked my mother and father to move in. They embarked on another great scheme of restoration and rescue. The house was very tired, my grandparents were elderly and there was a lot to be done. The roof needed to be replaced, we lived under scaffolding for twelve years, fortunately during the 1980s when there were grants available. They took the opening of the house to a new level, they pioneered in organising exhibitions of objects that travelled abroad, lacquer and porcelain went to Japan on tour, and that stimulated not just interest for Burghley and other houses but also sponsorship - two beds were restored courtesy of American Express and Rémy Martin, and numerous other objects acquired sponsorship as well. An area of scrubland, not used for anything, was cleared and trees were felled and a sculpture garden created. Each year a seasonal exhibition is put on by a local curator for young sculptors wanting to exhibit their work. This provides a great opportunity for education outside and it's a very unthreatening environment for school groups to come and sketch and talk about the environment or look at sculpture. In 2006 they received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to convert the seventeenth century brewhouse into an education centre for visitors, with two classrooms, a large reception area and an exhibition room. This really became a new phase of modernising the visitor experience, and enabled us to put on a much better education programme and follow the house's charitable objectives. The Treasury, I think, is one of the best things at Burghley. It enables us to display things out of the house that are small and fragile and could not possibly be seen on a house tour, and to put on annual themed exhibitions. Our education programme is ongoing and last year we had seven thousand schoolchildren to Burghley, and we won the Sandford Award, which is a huge

achievement. I think it is very important that we continue to attract children to houses: that is really the point of everything we do.



The Garden of Surprises

The last big project undertaken at Burghley was the creation of the Garden of Surprises. It was designed by George Carter with help from my mother who undertook some of the research, and it is based on a written description of the gardens at Theobalds, where there was a typical Elizabethan trick garden. It was a huge investment for the Trust and we were supported by many generous donors but it has become a huge success and has added to the family day out and filled a gap, the lack of a garden. Though this is not a typical garden it does go some way to fulfilling that need and it has made us enormously popular with local families, our core business. We are reviewing at the moment how to attract more local families on a continuing basis. It is all very well looking to attract visitors from abroad but those have declined enormously and we need to continue to be valid to our neighbours. Our visitor numbers last year were at their highest ever, with 55,000 visitors to the house and 50,000 to the gardens alone. It is inconceivable that we would

have had that number of people coming round the house before we had the Garden of Surprises.

One of the things that I am keenest about is making what we have within the archives more available to people who are doing research. We have enormously increased the amount of information about the house available to visitors through digital media: this is an essential way of reaching new audiences and making the house a more useful point of research. We now have a facility on our website to search the collections and gradually we are photographing in high definition every object in the house and aiming to put all that information online. We already have a computerised inventory of the entire collection, so it is quite straightforward for us to upload that and make it available to researchers. The cost of the photography is the only thing slowing us down. We have two long-suffering and hard-working archivists, who have worked at Burghley for about twenty years. They are cataloguing and digitising every deed and document that they find in every drawer of the muniment room. It is enormously comforting to

know that there is a copy and a readable and accessible web-based way of looking at the history of Burghley, not just for us but for visiting academics and university students.

Our life at Burghley has brought new use to certain areas, we live on the ground floor but we sleep on the second floor and that involves 72 stairs on a regular basis and has created certain challenges. It hasn't always been straightforward but one of the greatest advances for us was moving the kitchen into the dining room, which then meant that we had a window in our kitchen, we could see people arriving. We play badminton in the courtyard, it's almost a rite of passage that anyone who comes to the house has to go through.

As for the future, this house was built to be a home and it still is, nearly 500 years later, and I think that is an enormous achievement for all my ancestors and everybody involved with Burghley over the years. I think it does more now than Cecil ever intended. It made a monumental shift in the twentieth century, which set it on a path as a place of education and research and public enjoyment and this has been a huge success. But this tension of privacy as a family home and openness for visitors is critical. It is the strength and character of Burghley but it is fragile and I think that too many visitors and over-commercialisation will kill what people come to enjoy.

The emphasis for us now is to look outside the house. We are in the fortunate position of knowing that the house is watertight, the pictures are inventoried and clean, the furniture is in a similarly good state and we are looking more at the environment of the park and doing all we can to protect and learn about the historic plantings there, and to protect the trees. We aim to record every tree in the park and its condition. We took advantage of the Woodland Trust initiative last year and planted a Diamond Wood, which involved schoolchildren from Stamford, a really exciting project. Personally I am rather conservative, I've discovered this about myself, I didn't know it until we moved to Burghley, but I now question commercial development on the fringes of the park and the development of buildings within the park. I think we should go carefully into the future. I think what we have is worth protecting and we should not do anything in a hurry.

Elizabeth I is recorded as saying to William Cecil 'Thy wit and my money have built a great house' and I really hope you agree.

Lord Fellowes of West Stafford

Writer, Actor and Broadcaster

Giles Waterfield

GILES WATERFIELD: You have written quite a few films and screenplays about the country house. What do you find particularly intriguing about this topic?

JULIAN FELLOWES: I think the answer is that at the time when I was growing up, and particularly when I was in my teens, it was a very low point for the country house. There was a 'throwing in of the towel' going on all over the country. A letter's been quoted from the Duchess of Devonshire saying 'it's over, that's it', and in those days people hadn't rethought the houses, so the stables were empty and the servants' quarters were empty, or full of old prams and signs for the village fête; they had not found any new life. In the midst of this, when I was about fifteen, I remember going to see Temple Newsam in Leeds, and I suddenly had a flash of what this life and these houses had been so recently, and so I wanted to know more.

My grandfather's elder sister was born in 1880. She was presented at court in 1898 and got married in 1903, but I knew her well, she only died when I was 21, so I was able to hear first hand about what life had been before the First War, or I should say before the Second War, because quite a lot of it went on until then. I always think I was very lucky, because I wanted to learn about these things when I was young and still able to talk to men and women who remembered the old world. My brothers were not interested in our family history or in any history when they were young, and by the time they got interested, everyone was dead. After that, as I grew older, I think I did nourish a sense of a lost culture that had been operating until only a short time before I was born, and then finally the opportunity came, thanks to Mr Altman [director of *Gosford Park*]. When I was given my lucky break with *Gosford Park*, when someone said would you mind writing about a subject that you are already incredibly fascinated by, it was a happy moment.

GW: Is there something about the layers of the house, the drawing room and the servants' hall, that you find particularly interesting? That relationship seems to be a recurring theme in your work.

JF: In the past, a great house was a world in miniature. The modern version would be a house that is self-supporting, where you're producing your own food and providing employment for the local area. I suppose one thing has changed, and I would like to feel that I have had some influence on it, which is that, years ago, when these houses were shown by the National Trust or by private owners, you saw the drawing rooms and the libraries and the ballrooms and the picture galleries, but the Trust particularly would take over all the kitchens and ancillary rooms for their offices. I remember going to see that wonderful "prodigy" house on the edge of Nottingham, Wollaton Hall, and while I was there, literally they were tearing out the butler's rooms and pantries, taking away all the cabinets and all the glass, to make these rooms into offices. Because of this approach, we used to have houses presented to us as the homes of the upper class, or the former upper class, and there was no real thought about how they ran or the rest of the working community there. That is out of date now and, today, a much wider audience feels rightly that these houses are part of their own history and the history of their family. Now you get displays of the kitchens and the servants' halls, helping the personalities of the servants, as well as of the family, to come through.

And there has been another shift of attitude. If we had made *Downton* in the 1950s, the Crawleys would have been very gracious and charming and all the servants would have been funny. If we had done it in the 1990s, all the servants would have been downtrodden and gallant and the family would have been mendacious and vile. We have chosen not to go with either. We just have a group of people who live and work in different guises and with different expectations, under one roof in an interdependent world. Of course in a way I take a rosier view of this way of life because it has been solidly under attack for the last twenty or thirty years, but I do believe these communities were successful in many cases. Apart from anything else, if you hated your lady's maid or she hated you, it would be an untenable relationship. You can't have someone scrubbing your back and running your bath that you detest, so of course people chose butlers and lady's maids and valets and so on that they thought they could get on with. The only exception to that, I suspect, was the cook, who were notoriously difficult, but apart from that, these houses seem to have run pretty smoothly. What I also like is that these houses functioned for the area surrounding them. They had to engage local people, as they needed their support and, in the revival of these places, many of them are managing to do that now.

GW: Just going back to your own work for a minute, are there any other films, books, whatever, that inspired you in this field?

JF: I loved *The Shooting Party*, the film of Isabel Colgate's wonderful book. I was asked to write a prologue of a new edition a couple of years ago and when I read it again, like *Brideshead Revisited*, I found it more or less the perfect book. I love *Brideshead*, too, the novel and the television series, but funnily enough there are not many servant characters in either.

GW: There was *Upstairs Downstairs*, wasn't there?

JF: There was *Upstairs Downstairs*. That was the first time this subject was mined and it was at almost exactly the same time as Roy Strong's famous exhibition, *The Destruction of the English Country House*. I think *Upstairs Downstairs* began in 1971 and *The Destruction of the English Country House* was in 1974, showing that there was a general emerging interest in the fact that these places had been abandoned and forgotten. *Upstairs Downstairs* was marvellous.

GW: In *Downton Abbey*, how many years has the story been running so far?

JF: We started in 1912 and this series ends in 1921. The fourth will begin in 1922.

GW: In the background, are you involved in the sets - you must be very interested in how the house looks? Do you suggest that the décor of the library or whatever should be changed, is that something you take an interest in?

JF: The trick of show business, like most things in life, is never to think you are more powerful than you are. Occasionally I say 'Are we sure? Are we quite sure about that?' And while I don't pretend I have a great influence over the look of the thing, every now and then I go into battle. There were some ghastly tablecloths at one point and I did declare that 'It's me or the cloths!' but on the whole the great advantage of Highclere is that it's a house that had been in continuous ownership by one family and accordingly it already has the kit that such a family would have. We couldn't possibly have afforded to create the same effect in a studio, or in a house that had been stripped of its contents. Basically we have borrowed the Herberts and made them into Crawleys, so they decorate every wall and suggest that the history of this family is our history.

GW: But didn't you have new family portraits painted?

JF: No, we didn't but we took out everything that was painted after 1912. The rooms are wonderful. In fact, the library is one of the great rooms of Europe. I had tried to use Highclere twice before. I made a version of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* at the BBC in the 1990s and I wanted it

filmed there, and I also had a go at getting *Gosford Park* shot there but Altman had this notion that he could not get leading players to come and play rather small parts for not very much money if they weren't sleeping in their own bed. For that film, we retreated to Wrotham Park, which is inside Greater London so we didn't have to pay overnights, a big factor in filming, and Wrotham did us very well. But I was pleased we got Highclere for *Downton*. One advantage Highclere has for a filmed narrative is that, although clearly a very large house, it's a straightforward one. There is a great atrium hall and the rooms go round it, the small library, large library, the drawing room, the smoking room which we don't use, the staircase, the entrance to the servants' area, which is an incredibly useful detail, and the dining room. So the audience quickly becomes aware of the geography. The bedrooms are the same, they run round a gallery. There is a back wing, in fact, but we don't really use it. When we shoot somewhere else, which we have done for the odd room, we pretend it is in the back. But for the main house, most audience members grasped the lay-out at once: 'Oh they've gone from the dining room to the library, I know where they are now, they're going into the drawing room,' and that is a tremendous help.

GW: So the ideal house has a rather straightforward plan with big rooms?

JF: I'm never very keen on the idea that you go through one front door and then you're in a hall in a completely different house, which you often see in films. I always feel you can tell. They often get into trouble with the fenestration for a start. I remember coming up against this when I was filming down in Dorset at Athelhampton. It is a beautiful manor house, untouched because it was turned into farm cottages early on, after some altercation over a divided inheritance and co-heiresses and all that malarkey, which meant that until the 1890s it was never modernised, so it has the most wonderful, untouched interiors. The funders for the film, which was called *From Time to Time*, wanted us all to walk through the front door of Athelhampton and find ourselves in the Home Counties so we didn't have to pay overnights and I eventually struck a bargain. Pleading that the house was interesting because it was so idiosyncratic, I argued for the great hall, so we could use an extraordinary oriel window, inside and out, and for the drawing room. I surrendered on the dining room and the bedrooms which were shot within easy reach of London, but I did win over these two rooms, so that the inside of the house seems to match the exterior convincingly.

GW: What about the servants' quarters, how do you deal with filming them?

JF: The servants' quarters and the kitchens are the two areas that are the most difficult to film in, because they have invariably changed the most. At Highclere, for example, the kitchens have

been converted for modern catering so they are totally unsuitable for our purposes. Then again, the old servants' attics have usually been converted into flats. Sometimes they have just been abandoned, and in that case, you would have to spend so much to get them back up to snuff, to say nothing of struggling up narrow staircases with heavy equipment, that none of it is realistic. So at Ealing we have built the kitchens, the attics and the reverse of the kitchen staircase. At Highclere you go through that servants' door off the hall and there is a glass screen on your right; then you turn right and go down a staircase into what was then the kitchen passage. At Ealing, we have built the kitchen passage and an identical staircase round an identical glass screen. In fact, we did the same for *Gosford Park*, with the kitchens and the servants' attics at Shepperton, but the middle rooms were almost all at Wrotham with a couple of bedrooms at Syon.

GW: Tell us a little bit about the progress of a long series, how do you keep your actors looking the right age? Because they get older in real life and they get older in the film but not at the same pace. Unless you took it very slowly indeed.

JF: They are going to be ten years older in the fourth series after four years have passed since we started, but this is not that big a gap. And we helped ourselves with the young characters, in this instance the girls, by casting them about ten years older than their characters, so they are only now the same age as the characters they play. From now on they will need to get slightly older than they really are for as long as the show goes on. There can come a moment where you feel you are entering the territory of talcum powder and wobbly stick acting, which I do not enjoy because it is not believable. But we haven't reached it yet.

GW: And you cannot have a major car accident in which several members of the cast are disposed of ...

JF: I think it would be hard for us to do a *Coronation Street* tram crash. We wouldn't be allowed to get rid of so many people at once.

GW: It would be an exciting episode.

JF: It would be very exciting. Whether it is quite *Downton* remains another question...

GW: How far are you planning ahead at the moment?

JF: Well, that would be what they call 'telling'.

GW: Just give us a tiny clue.

JF: My own belief, although one makes these statements and then immediately contradicts oneself, is that film and television has already 'done' the thirties. The thirties and the Nazis and the years leading up to war and the Cliveden set, I feel all of it has been adequately covered. Whereas the decade of the twenties is a rather under-done period. People have a vague idea that the twenties were about having your hair cut like Louise Brooks and dancing the Charleston and that was about it, but of course that wasn't it. It was a strange period and a very difficult one for these houses and these families because at the beginning they were still questioning how much of the old life had survived the war, and in many houses it was easy to believe that not much had changed. There might be two footmen instead of six, but essentially life resumed in a pretty similar way. But as the years went on, it became clearer and clearer that the world had changed substantially, not just because workers' rights had changed, or because the role of women had changed radically by the end of the War, or because of the vote, or because young people did not want to be coralled as their parents had been and told where to be and what to wear. But because somehow people's expectations of life had changed fundamentally and would never change back.

There are lots of laments from people like Lord Claud Hamilton, who wrote a marvellous book about this period. He blames the motor car because you could not organise a house party in the same way as before. Now people came when they wanted and left when they felt like it and the whole thing had become chaotic, as opposed to the Edwardian house party which was almost like a ballet. But the other thing which the government did, and it is hard not to see it as a kind of conspiracy, was to remove the land subsidies in 1921, as agricultural income became extremely insecure. At the same time, selling land was still counted as a capital gain, which attracted no tax. So you were offered this choice as a land-owner of essentially cashing in your chips for an enormous tax-free sum or struggling on with all the difficulties of a landed estate and paying steep income taxes through the nose. As a result, between 1918 and around 1926, a third of England's agricultural land changed hands, a tremendous disruption to the country house culture. I am sure some of them used the money well and invested it properly but in many families, the money just slid away, leaving an estate that could no longer support the house. For a lot of them, the six years of the Second World War finished it off. People had moved out and when they came back and the army or the navy or the air force had biffed the house up, many of them thought 'Oh for God's sake'. That was a terrible time for country houses and the reinvention did not really start for about 25 years after that. In *Downton Abbey*, we are beginning to examine the insecurity of those years.

GW: Now we know the finances of Downton Abbey have not been very well handled, do you find yourself doing a lot of research into that social background or do you know the background already?

JF: With things like medical conditions and tax and anything legal, I have a group of experts who are amused to give advice on *Downton Abbey*. I have to watch it in case I stray over the line where they resent not being able to send in a bill, but as long as I stay this side of it, I'm all right. I remember Fiona Shackleton helping me to upset Bates's divorce. We made him offer his wife money to agree to the divorce, which meant that if the judge found out, he would have cancelled the petition. I was given some stick for Matthew Crawley getting the use of his legs back but this was in fact real because often in the trenches the doctors were working under intolerable conditions and they had to make quick diagnoses which were then written on a sort of luggage label, after which you would be given some kind of temporary holding treatment and shipped back to hospital in England meaning the patient did lose the use of their legs, but in these cases the use of their legs would return. Of course, when I was told about this, I was thrilled, because the last thing I wanted was Matthew stuck in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. People miss the details of these plots, because they don't listen and you pay for that, but, hey ho, we're still getting the figures.

GW: And you're not tempted to do a grandson of Downton Abbey, skip a generation or two, post-war...?

JF: There is potential for a series about the modern problems of these estates because we're living in a very interesting time. It's not the blackest period for country houses by a long chalk, that was back in the fifties, sixties and seventies, and many of them have been reinvigorated. In fact, it would amaze earlier generations to learn these places had survived into the twenty first century. They were sure it was over, *après moi le déluge*, and they would pop something by Fra Lippo Lippi so they could eat on Thursday. We don't think like that now, happily, and there is a great future for these places if they are only allowed to have it. But there is also the constant encouragement of class warfare which politicians use *faute de mieux*, when they can't think of another argument to get themselves elected. I don't actually think that most of the population feel these things deeply any more and I suspect they're sick of class warfare. If they weren't, twelve million of them wouldn't watch *Downton Abbey*. All today's house-owners know that local support is far greater than any local opposition. The truth is, people are proud of these houses and they are glad of them in their midst.

What interests me is that these houses are being reinvented in a style that is absolutely compatible with the way we all live now. Naturally, that doesn't mean there aren't tricky moments. I remember at Eastnor Castle, we arrived to film in one of the bedrooms and there was a Landrover display in the forecourt, some aerobics in the great hall, a Waterloo reenactment in the park, and a businessmen's dinner being planned for that night in the Dining Room, and I recall thinking, 'God, wouldn't a rectory in Norfolk be better than this?' But as long as the family retains the energy, we are all the richer for these houses. That said, we have to persuade the government of this, not just the present government, any government.

GW: I have one last question for you. Why do you think the country house exerts such enormous appeal still, both in this country and in the United States, and for all I know, all over the world?

JF: The country house is in a way the greatest work of art that is peculiar to Britain. The English love the country, or they pretend to, because, for us, it is what you are supposed to love. Sometimes this can be rather entertaining. If you are talking to a toff who has the nicest apartment in Eaton Square and some scraggy old cottage by the coast, and you ask, 'Which do you think of as home?' he will always say 'Oh the cottage'. He is never prepared to say he hates the country, it is part of our culture that we love it, and in most cases, we really do. As a society, we have always supported the interlocking community of the village, of the people who work on the estate, the people who work in the gardens, the people who work in the house, and all the gossip that goes with them, so it comes back once again to that sense of a world that is complete in itself. You cannot have this in the middle of a great city. Spencer House, say, is absolutely marvellous but it is not a complete entity. It is meant to be part of a great metropolitan society, functioning all around it, whereas a great house in the country is complete, and there seems to be a kind of romance there that no other living format quite achieves.

Session Three

HOUSES IN TRUST: THE COUNTRY HOUSE IN PUBLIC/CHARITABLE OWNERSHIP

Chair: Giles Waterfield, The Attingham Trust

- The Crisis in Country Houses in Local Government Care -

Jeremy Musson
Architectural Historian

One would have to be a Trappist monk not to think there is a crisis in the field of country houses owned by local authorities. In this paper I will confine my attention to those that are run as art museums, or house museums, or historic house venues open to the public, as opposed to any listed historic former country houses owned for institutional uses – from schools, hospitals, to judges' lodgings or offices. I am conscious there is a large uncharted territory in this field, recalling my days working for the Victorian Society in the early 1990s, which were largely devoted to debating pew removals or visiting recently closed down hospitals and care homes, as health authorities divested themselves of countless fine former country houses. I imagine there must have been those who could think of no better use for a country house than a remand home or lunatic asylum. I will look at what makes up this sector, what the crises seem to be and in conclusion suggest some things that might be done in the future. There have been crises before and there will be again. In truth, it was often a crisis that first brought these houses into local government ownership – war, taxation, economic woes brought on by agricultural depression, or simply loss of confidence about the future of the country house in private ownership. The last of these, in the 1950s, led to a crisis compared by Sir Ernest Gowers to the cultural disruption of the dissolution of the monasteries.

Is the crisis today, at root, just about money? Or is it about different perceptions of the way in which historic houses contribute to a wider sense of the past? Or is it a matter of confidence in a sector excessively dominated by ideas about accessibility, landscape amenity, and education – worthy as these things are – when the physical wellbeing and presentation of a historic house should really be the baseline on to which these other legitimate ambitions are laid?

Putting these more philosophical questions to one side for the moment, it is a complex subject. Even professionals in the world of the historic house would find it difficult to pin down, so diverse is its nature. Some historic former country houses are owned by metropolitan and county councils, some by borough councils, some have come a sideways route, after being owned for institutional use as hospitals, college etc. Some were given to a city by wealthy

benefactors, who believed strongly in their straightforward social and cultural benefits for local people, others were direct purchases in the name of the people. Some have important indigenous contents of national importance, some, contents of only local importance; others have been converted entirely to museums of local or social history. Some are registered museums, some not, some are run as part of a museums and art galleries service, others of a parks service, some have been recipients of considerable public and charitable monies over the years, others not. But I will try to keep it simple.

To begin with, the historic country houses open to the public that I have considered for this paper are all of architectural interest, all listed, and all strong in historical association for the locality they serve. Most are set in significant parklands or rural settings.

The crisis of the title, is, of course, closely allied to the crisis of so many public services today: drastic cuts in a difficult global economic climate. But in our sector there have been drastic cuts to the funding of English Heritage, the Arts Councils, and council budgets generally. The funding of local authority museums services appears to have been going in reverse, in real terms, for over twenty years. Perhaps these current cuts may be justified in the immediate term, given the economic crisis. But they will undoubtedly leave a sorry legacy if they are allowed to be a permanent feature of how we collectively manage our cultural heritage and significant buildings, especially those out of the orbit of London, where the scale of audience and London-centric philanthropy can produce a different result. It should be admitted that considerable political sensitivities arise from the comparison of the needs of the aged, the infirm, the weak or the long-term unemployed, to the costs of keeping an old country house in repair and public use. But a culture that does not support its art and heritage is one that has no faith in its own future, and one without the vital wellsprings of curiosity and imagination, even of hopefulness. All sectors of society, fortunate and unfortunate, need that – and the arts sector alone will not deliver it. I would go further and say that much contemporary art needs more sense of historical and cultural context to be understood at all.

I often reflect, in the more intense debates about conservation, on the importance placed on the reconstruction of damaged historic towns and houses after war damage during the twentieth century, when there must have been so many other human ills to conquer. In Communist countries, ruined royal palaces were rebuilt, as they spoke of a nation's history and not just that of the elite. Lord Courtauld-Thompson presented Dorneywood to a trust in the service of the government of the day, after having used his house as a hostel for recuperating US servicemen during the Second World War, conscious of the positive and recuperative qualities of fine architecture, gardens and landscape.

Just how significant is the country house museum (or historic house venue) in local authority ownership and open to the public, as part of the heritage sector? There are some 433 local authorities in England alone. But while there are many thousands of important listed historic buildings owned by local authorities, the ones that can be classified as country houses and are run in some sense as a museum or are open to the public to enjoy, I calculate to be around a hundred in number – although possibly more. This number is based on a survey of the local authority websites accessible, via www.local.direct.gov.uk, and is compiled using the most elastic definition of a country house, to include mansions houses built by industrialists in landscape parks, in the country house tradition.

Let me put this figure into proportion. English Heritage owns nearly 400 properties, including many internationally important ruins and sites, and maintains around twenty country houses that fall into this heritage sector. They include such important buildings as Audley End, Osborne House and Brodsworth Hall. CADW also has internationally important castle sites, but only three major historic house properties, including Castell Coch and Plas Mawr in Conway. The National Trust for Scotland has 25. The National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland owns 350 historic properties including landscapes and ruins (and owns them in that unique, inalienable way that no other agency or individual does or yet can). Using the most generous definitions of a country house, the National Trust has around 150 country houses (excluding town houses, workhouses, mills, farmhouses etc. but including some tenanted properties not always visitable). Some have historically been managed and opened by local authorities, including Tatton Park in Cheshire, (usually listed as one of the most visited country houses in the U.K.) and Shugborough, but all the earlier arrangements of this kind have reverted to the National Trust. Country houses open to the public, which are privately owned by families or charitable trusts, run to several hundreds. Those owned and run by local authorities do, however, account for a substantial number of the historic country houses that can be visited by the public and are in public or quasi-public ownership. They can be considered a major factor in the field.

Some country-house museums are well-known names, such as Temple Newsam, outside Leeds – an important Jacobean house, with a fine collection. Run as part of Leeds City Art Gallery, it is ranked by Mark Fisher in his guide to *Britain's Best Museums and Galleries* as one of the most important museums in the country outside London. Few with any interest in historic houses will not be aware of the work that has been done at Temple Newsam, through its team of distinguished curators, to foster the study and understanding of country houses, their furnishing and decoration.

Lotherton Hall, also near Leeds and run by Leeds City Council, is the former home of the Gascoignes, with a much prized indigenous collection of furniture and portraits related to the Gascoigne family, who acquired the house in the early nineteenth century. The interiors are largely Edwardian in character, with many interesting eighteenth and nineteenth century contents. The last Gascoigne owner, Sir Alvary, presented the house, contents and estate to the City of Leeds in 1968, with a purchase endowment. It is interesting too, that the story of the family remains so strong here – which is not always the case with country house museums in public ownership.

Aston Hall, Birmingham, built by Sir Thomas Holte in 1618-1635, and acquired by the Birmingham Corporation as early as 1864, is the first historic country house to be owned by a civic authority as an amenity for the public. The house had been hemmed in by roads and housing on all sides. The family wanted out and offered it twice to Birmingham City. Eventually a local campaign took root and a private company was set up to give a future to the parkland and house, which could have all too easily been built over. From the 1870s, it was used as an art museum, and it has also housed a museum of arms, furniture, paintings, textiles and metalwork from the collections of Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, under whose wing it is run. Aston Hall was recently subject to a £10 million restoration project and re-launched in summer 2009.



Aston Hall, Birmingham

Heaton Hall, run by Manchester City Council, is an enormously interesting work of architecture, one of the first complete houses designed by James Wyatt. Long since encircled and surrounded by Greater Manchester, the house and its park were acquired by the city as early as 1902, from the fifth Earl of Wilton. From 1906 it was run as an extension of the

Manchester City Art Gallery. Currently, due to cuts in funding, it is not open to the public 'on a regular basis'. This is a disgraceful situation, to which I shall return.

Lydiard Park, an important Palladian mansion owned by Swindon Borough Council since 1943, was previously the seat of Viscounts Bolingbroke, and was put to hospital use during the Second World War. It has been open to the public since 1955, and the park received a £3 million Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant in 2005.

Newstead Abbey – the family home of Lord Byron, subsequently owned by the Wildmans and the Webbs – was acquired by the philanthropist Sir Julien Cahn and presented to the City of Nottingham in 1931. Nottingham also maintains Wollaton Hall, an architecturally important Elizabethan house. Acquired by the city in 1925, it has served as a long-time home to the Museum of Natural History.

These names are well known, but I thought it might be instructive to mention some others that suggest the range and interest of this genre. Wythenshawe Hall, in Greater Manchester, is a sixteenth-century house. When the estate was acquired for new housing, the Labour peer and industrialist Lord Simon bought the house and park and presented it to the Manchester Corporation, 'to be used solely for the public good' – an interesting challenge for the lawyers. Shibden Hall, Halifax was given to the Halifax Corporation, now Calderdale Council, and opened as a museum in 1934, with a fine antiquarian collection of oak furniture. Sixteenth century Blakesley Hall has been run as a museum by Birmingham City Council since 1935; while fourteenth and sixteenth century Bramall Hall was acquired in 1923 by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council to be opened to the public. Towneley Hall was sold to the Burnley Corporation in 1901. It houses an art collection and a natural history museum and has benefitted from two recent sets of HLF funding. Cannons Hall has been owned by Barnsley Council since 1951.

Classical houses in this category include Normanby Hall, the Sheffield's house, which ceased to be a family home in the 1960s and is owned and run by North Lincolnshire County Council as a furnished house museum within a popular park. Cusworth Hall at Doncaster is a Palladian mansion with a fine chapel, run as a social history museum, with few concessions to its history as a country house.

Then there is the Dewsbury Museum, originally Crow Nest Hall, Dewsbury, opened as a museum in 1896; Himley Hall, owned from 1946 to 66 by the Coal Board, now by Dudley Council; Sewerby Hall, owned by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council since 1934, with a

current restoration project seeking to present furnished interiors; Stratford Park, owned by Stroud Borough Council, and known as 'The Museum in the Park'; and early nineteenth century Hylands, Essex (Chelmsford Borough Council). Mount Edgcumbe in Cornwall has been owned and run by Plymouth Council and Cornwall Country Council since 1971, and was much restored in the 1950s after major bomb damage in the Second World War. Victorian mansions are also in evidence. Cliffe Castle, Keighley, is a fine Victorian textile manufacturer's mansion, which has been a dedicated museum since the 1950s, having been acquired for the Bradford Corporation by a local industrialist Sir Bracewell Smith. 1860s Saltwell Towers has been owned since 1876 by Gateshead Borough Council, acquired from the builder only a few years after it was built. The park has been subject to a £10 million restoration, funded by the HLF, which included the restoration of the long derelict mansion for public use, with a modern gallery and refreshment room interiors.

This brief survey suggests the architectural richness of this genre of country house open to the public. It is true that their collections can differ considerably in quality. There are only half a dozen with really significant collections of furniture and art, although many others could be suitable homes for such collections. Remember what imagination, effort and energy have gone into these acquisitions over the past century and more, great efforts by local people, local councillors, council workers, curators, administrators and others; there is, after all, no legislation which requires of a borough the maintenance of a historic country house.

These acquisitions mostly began in the later nineteenth century and continued into the mid-twentieth. Some were acquired in more recent times, but very few after the 1960s, although some which had been acquired for other purposes have been turned into museums or historic venues. The trajectory was more often than not that the estates had become surrounded by industry or spreading urban development, and had ceased to be attractive residences for their owners.

Local corporations, as they usually were then, took an interest in them for a variety of reasons including civic pride at owning, on behalf of the city or town, a slice of national or local history. It is notable how many of these houses are venerable timber-framed old manor houses, immediately evocative of Olde England. A sense of general public amenity was also paramount, often the resource of a park for the population of densely built industrial towns. When Aston Hall was first acquired, the park was immediately renamed 'the People's Park', and when the company formed to buy it could not raise enough money, the corporation stepped in with the active encouragement of Queen Victoria, who had attended the public opening shortly before. This was a conscious, practical aim, reflected in many other contemporary movements such as

the Open Spaces Society, founded in 1865, and the saviour of Hampstead Heath; as well as the founding of the National Trust in 1897, and indeed the creation of many public parks not associated with historic houses. In the houses we are discussing, I would never under-estimate the philosophical underpinning of the mansion as the visual and meaningful centre of these landscape parks. The houses were the centres of their economy, development and design. They are the physical evidence of the culture, which created those landscapes. This must not be forgotten.

Some audiences perceived these early acquisitions as an expression of veneration for Olde England; others, at the same time, as the triumph of a New England. The majority of those I have mentioned were acquired between 1860 and 1930 by the industrial towns of the Midlands and the north of England at the peak of their wealth and achievement. The acquisition of the old landed estate represented, for some, the twilight of the landed interest that had dominated British politics until the First World War – a symbol of social revolution, without the guillotine. Such acquisitions were a sign of culture and strength, and civic pride, and often had their parallel in the foundation of art galleries, museums and art schools. They were part of the idea that the study of the fine building and decoration of the past, would enrich and stimulate the design and imagination of the present.



Temple Newsam

Let us consider Temple Newsam in a little more detail. It was acquired by Leeds City Art Gallery in 1922, from Lord Halifax. This was one of several estates that he inherited from an aunt, and was already hemmed in by the spreading city. The compulsory purchase of part of the estate for a new sewage plant was probably the last straw. The Halifax family withdrew to another estate, where they still live. As with Aston Hall, the social amenity of the parkland was always paramount, but a series of imaginative curator-directors helped carve a glorious niche

for Temple Newsam, which put it on a par with national museums. Philip Hendy went on from there to be Director of the National Gallery, and after him Christopher Gilbert and more recently James Lomax and Anthony Wells-Cole have given Temple Newsam exemplary leadership. This remarkable Jacobean house with its layers of different generations, and decorative schemes of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the epitome of the historic house that has evolved over centuries. There have been extraordinary achievements in decoration, furnishings and accessions. And yet in a vivid illustration of the crisis today, under current financial pressures no equivalent curator has been appointed after Mr Lomax's recent retirement, and even the surviving assistant curator has moved to another job and has yet to be replaced.

Even more alarming is the effect of budget cuts on the management and future of the enormously important Heaton Hall, which should be the Kenwood of Greater Manchester, and yet is currently not open at all. Even the Wyatt-designed furniture, originally from Heveningham Hall, which was loaned to be shown in this highly suitable place, has been returned to English Heritage. There has also been considerable furore locally about a plan to install seventeen football pitches in the parkland, a proposal opposed by a petition of 10,000 signatures. The effective closure of this important house is extraordinary. It also appears that Newstead Abbey is now actually open to the public just one afternoon a week.

These two houses are of national importance, without a doubt, as is Gunnersbury Mansion, owned by Ealing and Hounslow Councils. This provides another salutary tale. An important Regency and Victorian house, once owned by the Rothschilds, set in a landscape park with a number of important follies, it has since 1929 housed a local museum of some 40,000 artefacts. However, the pressure on council budgets over decades has resulted in the situation where a local authority has a major building on its hands in a poor state of repair, which has also been on the buildings at risk register. Fortunately the public interest in the museum and the park have helped secure the relevant local authorities generous funding from the HLF – £3.8 million, announced in July.

Among the smaller country houses in local government ownership, there are a number of sad stories, including that of seventeenth century Clarke Hall in Wakefield, owned by Wakefield Council. Despite its relatively modest size and popularity – principally as a living social history museum used by local schools – this has just been put on the market, after cuts to annual budgets led to the withdrawal of its annual grant. It has been a feature of the education of Wakefield school children since the 1960s, so the closure and sale are the end of half a century of a historic house in public ownership. There may be other such stories not yet made public.

There have been positive stories of houses which languished in other decades now being opened to the public and managed with mixed revenue-generating programmes, alongside public opening and education, such as Hylands, in Chelmsford or sixteenth-century Shaw House in Berkshire, a former school, has been restored and re-ordered in a programme initiated by West Berkshire Council who took it over in 1998. The programme was completed in 2005, including office, conference facilities and council offices, funded by English Heritage, the HLF, and Vodafone, to a total of £6 million. In very many of these stories, the Heritage Lottery Fund has paid a critical part, as has English Heritage. The most recently unveiling is probably Forty Hall, owned by Enfield Borough Council, which has been restored with £4.3 million from Enfield's own funds and around £2 million from the HLF, with a restoration programme returning the interiors to their seventeenth-century character.

In safeguarding the future of historic houses in public ownership, one future course might be vesting them in independent heritage trusts. In some cases these have been created – part-funded by local authorities – as vehicles for the preservation and economic future of several historic country houses, creating another subset of historic houses owned in the public interest. This category also includes houses of beauty and significance. One example is Lytham Hall in Lytham St Anne's, a handsome house built by John Carr of York for the Clifton family, sold in the 1960s by the last of the line and acquired by Guardian Royal Exchange Insurance. More recently sold to the Lytham Town Trust, it is now managed on a 99-year lease by the Heritage Trust for the North West, which also manages a number of historic properties including the late seventeenth-century merchant's house Tanner's Hall, known as The Folly, at Settle. Recently Lytham Hall attracted HLF funding for a much-needed major restoration, which includes a John Carr study centre. It is open to the public and used for weddings and events. The York Civic Trust run a number of very important historic buildings in a similar vein, including the eighteenth century Fairfax House (admittedly not a country house). And in the outskirts of Greater London, Hall Place, Bexleyheath, a highly romantic building of considerable presence and charm, was sold to Bexley Council in 1925, subject to the life tenancy of the Countess of Limerick, who died in 1943. It was later a school and from 1969 to 1999, the headquarters of the Libraries and Museums Service. After 2000, it was vested in an independent trust, with grants from the local authority. This also runs Danson Park, one of the most exciting recent restorations of a Palladian villa, in its own park.

Perhaps there is a case to be made for trust status to be applied to other major historic houses in public ownership, which allows the historic houses to have their own identity and voice and still serve the people of the area. An endowed trust could be nuanced and local in intent, with the local authority represented on the board. Then the trustees and officers could run the

property for its own long-term benefit, with due regard to the needs of the local community. But such arrangements will depend on dedicated funding and a degree of endowment funding and fundraising.

It is interesting to consider the case of Ashton Court outside Bristol, owned by Bristol City Council since the 1950s, in a park of 850 acres. The mansion is a conference and functions venue, rather than a house museum; nonetheless, it is reckoned that over 1.6 million people pass annually through the house. It was almost derelict when purchased by the council from the Smyth family in 1959-60, but the overall structure has been restored and the ground floor made available for functions. As a Grade I historic house in a Grade II* historic parkland, this must be considered a success story. There is more to achieve and, late last year, English Heritage and Bristol Council funded a study into the future restoration of the mansion.

Where the future and funding have been yet more uncertain, new solutions give hope for brighter futures. There have been two important deals struck between local authorities in Wales and the National Trust for two historic country houses of great importance. Dyffryn House is owned by the Vale of Glamorgan Council. It is an interesting mansion built in the 1890s for John Cory, which had been a police college and conference centre and is being restored and will open to the public next year. It is now the subject of a lease by the National Trust, although Vale of Glamorgan retain ownership. The better known example perhaps, which has already been transferred via a fifty-year lease to the National Trust, is Tredegar House, one of the flagship local government historic house rescues of recent times. I note the strong sense of value to the community that is expressed in numerous press reports, and how important a sense of public ownership still is. It is an excellent solution for which the National Trust deserves the warmest praise. I can imagine there may well be other dialogues between local authorities and the National Trust, which as a body has so much to offer in terms of expertise and national infrastructure. It is certainly to be hoped that current discussions with Manchester City Council over Heaton Hall can prove fruitful, as the situation there is perhaps too complex for an independent trust to pull it out of deadlock. Naturally, I have to ask whether this is a solution that should not be explored more widely – in some cases, a relationship with the English Heritage, CADW or Historic Scotland may be more appropriate. At the very least, could a task force be created, drawing on the expertise of these state bodies and major independent trusts to offer advice and guidance? There undoubtedly is a crisis in funding, but everywhere there are minor triumphs, whether they are the redecoration of interiors, the purchase of important furnishings, the re-creation of what had been lost, or the finding of new resources through grants or bequests. These are events we should know more about, and that leads me to one of my final points.



Tredegar House

As a writer and author, I wonder whether there is also not an opportunity here for a national press strategy – one that embraces the network of historic house museums in partnership, and that could co-ordinate national press coverage of so many of these remarkable places and projects which I have found myself looking at with excitement and interest? Some were new treasures revealed in the preparation of this talk, and I was conscious that though I have been writing about country houses owned by a variety of institutions and individuals since the mid 1990s, I had never heard of many of these places –for example, the Haworth Art Gallery in Accrington, a neo-Elizabethan house designed by Walter Brierley, with an international collection of Tiffany glass, standing in nine acres of parkland. Such a national collaboration has a model in the national press office in France, which promotes regional gallery exhibitions.

Another approach might be to create a central forum/lobby for debating and promoting country houses in local authority ownership of management (an equivalent to the HHA). Area partnerships such as the Yorkshire Country House Partnerships, across different types of ownership, have proved very effective. The national promotion of local authority-owned country houses needs a major kick start - maybe a new version of the *Art Treasures of England: The Regional Collections* exhibition in 1998, with both fine and decorative art included.

Alternatively, a national institution such as the Victoria & Albert Museum might host periodic showcase exhibitions of works of art from specific regional collections. In the case of the V&A, that museum could do more to make the public aware of the very creditable role it already plays in supporting regional museums' acquisitions of works of art.

There is also a question in my mind in relation to the more significant houses with collections which are run by art museum curators as outposts: is there a problem inherent in that those trained in the study and curatorship of fine art, especially twentieth-century fine art, may be less instinctively in sympathy with the challenges of presenting a historic museum? There are serious issues to be considered relating to training available to curators with responsibility for historic countries and related fine and decorative art collections, and their levels of remuneration and reward.

In surveying much of the material put out by local authorities on the Internet I was struck by how quickly interest springs up locally over old buildings in crisis, and their potential for community use as buildings and landscapes together. In the 1930s, social analysts, pioneered by Mass Observation, tried to gauge the feelings and experiences and opinions of ordinary people, by interview and correspondence, and now we have instant access to local interests and excitements through the blogosphere and through twitter and so forth. Local feeling can be very productive – only last week, a new thousand-strong Friends of Wythenshawe Hall group was founded, which has managed to get the hall opened on occasions. Numerous local groups and friends' organisations spring up like phantom armies, reassuring us that interest in these things is widespread.

Above all I believe that these houses stir, in a wide – and, I am certain, diverse – audience, a sense of curiosity and hopefulness. In our national and local cultural life, there is space for continual reflection on the past. The country house in local government or any other care has a unique role to play.

- The National Trust and its Country Houses -

Lisa White
Chairman, National Trust Arts Panel

I have a very limited time in which to deal with a large subject, so all the favourite quotations, delicate insights and thoughtful asides have been ditched for the sake of brevity. You may be relieved. I speak as Chairman of the Arts Panel, not as a member of staff, and what I have to say is spoken with deep love for the National Trust, but without sentiment.

This is not the place in which to celebrate (although I would love to) the National Trust's great achievements in the twentieth century and its Country Houses Scheme: great houses, estates and collections saved from collapse and dismemberment, buildings and contents conserved, millions of visitors enjoying these historic places, and the Trust's reputation enhanced. Rather, my brief is to peer into the future and tease out some ideas about the direction the National Trust may take next in relation to its Country Houses.

This talk comes at an interesting moment. In November 2012 Dame Fiona Reynolds steps down as Director General of the National Trust after eleven years, to be succeeded by Dame Helen Ghosh. Simon Jenkins remains to complete his second term as Chairman of the Trustees, and staff are settling into a new management structure. The economic downturn, coupled with atrocious summer weather and the popularity of other attractions – Jubilee, Olympics, Paralympics – have meant that the National Trust's budgets are being challenged, and may not be met this year. The ambition to recruit 5 million members by 2020 may also need revision: we live in less certain times. The Chairman has stressed that the Trust's strategy will not change with the appointment of a new Director-General: his statement on the subject reads: 'The Trustees' strategy is to widen the Trust's appeal and grow its membership'. This is not entirely new: in the 1990's it was 'Deepening the Interest and Broadening the Appeal'. The strategy has been developed during Fiona Reynolds' directorship, with increased emphasis on the Trust's open spaces, an energetic programmes of activities at Trust properties, and a determination to make the National Trust appeal more to urban communities. However the Trust's country houses, their gardens, estates and art collections, still remain at its heart. Taken together, they represent a resource unmatched in the world. Apart from anything else, they rotate the turnstiles of income.

So, what of the future? I will divide what I have to say into two sections: the first is a consideration of what I hope will continue to be the permanent achievements of the National Trust in the twenty-first century; the second part will deal, rather briefly, with the more

transient issues of interpretation and access. The Trust's strategy with its country houses needs to be considered in the wider context of its ownership of much more: open spaces and coastline, and its commitment to campaigning on national issues: HS2, Wind Farms and all the rest.

The acquisition of country houses. Already in this century the National Trust has acquired two major country houses outright, with substantial collections of works of art: Tyntesfield in 2002, and Seaton Delaval in 2009 – both subject to the terms of Heritage Lottery Funding which stress community involvement, education and conservation in action – conditions very different from, for instance, the bequest of Kingston Lacy in 1981. Indeed the Trust was not in a position to purchase major properties until the National Heritage Memorial Fund came on the scene in 1980 and enabled the Trust to undertake the rescue of Belton and Canons Ashby, and onwards.

The Trust is not seeking *actively* to acquire large country houses and their collections either through bequest or purchase, for various reasons – partly because so much has been achieved, and partly because there are other solutions for the future of such houses: better legal protection, covenants, charitable trust status, new owners prepared to take on the challenge and so forth. The Chorley Formula, introduced in 1975, remains the benchmark by which the Trust can assess the financial risk posed by the acquisition of new properties; the Trustees and the Property and Acquisitions Committee have developed other formulae for assessing acceptance of new properties and collections. I have been assured by senior staff that for the moment, there are no major acquisitions on the horizon – but of course, the horizon never stays the same. This policy should be seen in the context of the Trustees' commitment to a greater presence in urban areas – hence the acquisition of the Beatles houses in Liverpool, Mr Straw's house in Wolverhampton, the Birmingham Back-to-Backs and Khadambi Asalache's house in Wandsworth.

Having said that, there are some quiet, significant acquisitions of country properties: one such was William Morris's Red House in Bexley Heath, (once surrounded by apple orchards) acquired in 2002 and undergoing slow but fascinating research and conservation. Another addition to the Trust's slim holding of Arts and Crafts properties may be Ernest Gimson's little masterpiece, Stoneywell Cottage, in the Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire, designed by the architect for his brother and cherished by the Gimson family through three successive generations. Another interesting gift to the Trust in 2008 was the group of three Historic House Hotels, Middlethorpe Hall, York; Hartwell House, Buckinghamshire and Bodsygallen Hall in North Wales.

A future challenge for the National Trust may be the acquisition of more twentieth century Country Houses. Current discussions (albeit at a very early stage) involve a rare 1930s Modern Movement property – not a country house in the old-fashioned sense, with large gardens, park, estate et al, but more a ‘house in the country’ – a *villa rustica*. Such houses are not always large, and *very few* have original furnishings or collections. Willow Road in Hampstead and The Homewood in Surrey do have contemporary contents, a major factor for their inclusion in the National Trust portfolio in recent years.

Management partnerships for country houses is another activity for the National Trust in 2012. There have been previous such partnerships, for instance for Shugborough and Tatton Park. Now come Nuffield Place, taken over from Nuffield College Oxford; High Cross, Dartington from the Dartington Hall Trust, and Tredegar House, Gwent, from Newport Council – the last being the largest, most challenging and exciting of these three. More are in the pipeline. These developments should be seen alongside those in London, where this year has seen the start of the Small Museums Partnership, of which Leighton House, Kensington, is the flagship. As Jeremy Musson has pointed out, the funding crisis in local authorities may in turn put heavy pressure on the National Trust to take over more and more of their burdensome country houses or estates: the Trust will need to assess carefully the policy of management partnerships, especially in terms of allocating its own resources.

Consolidation. The National Trust continues its responsible consolidation of land and collections of works of art for its country houses: this is often an understated activity, and depends upon the remarkable skills of its staff and advisers. Such consolidation may be the quiet but essential acquisition of land or buildings that enhance the integrity of a country property in the Trust’s care, or protect it from creeping development. Sheringham Park, in Norfolk, is a good example of the Trust’s thoughtful acquisition of land formerly within the Upchers’ estate, which helps to protect the estate from the development that is creeping south over the A 149 coast road. Off-shore wind farms planned here are another headache, in more ways than one.



Seaton Delaval, Northumberland

Conservation and maintenance. The National Trust continues to devote, and will *always* have to devote, huge sums to its country house properties and their collections. £100m has been spent in 2011-12. Some of these projects are on a massive scale: the conservation of the buildings at Knole will take £11m over ten years, while Croome Park also involves a slow, complex and inevitably expensive project of £7m and upwards. More are in the pipeline, including major re-roofing at Dyrham and Seaton Delaval. Conservation of the wider estates attached to country houses, especially the let estates with their numerous vernacular buildings, farmhouses, cottages and so on, present immense challenges in the future as there is a substantial conservation backlog. And this is just the planned work, leaving aside the repairs that have to follow disasters such as fire and flood and often have to take priority in National Trust time, staff and financial resources.



Croome Park

With respect to **Country House collections**, in recent years the Trust has increased its acquisitions, although figures vary hugely from year to year. In 2011-12 these amounted to over £3.5 million. These have included the repatriation of major individual works of art, securing objects that have been on long term loan from donor families, and even the recovery of objects

that have been stolen. A major factor is the ability of the trust to acquire through the system of Acceptance in Lieu (AIL), but this may be more challenging in the future. Outstanding successes have been the acquisition of Breughel's *Procession to Calvary* for Nostell Priory in 2011 (with major grants from the NHMF, the Art Fund and a public appeal by the National Trust); The Legh family's missal for Lyme Park in 2009 with substantial HLF support; magnificent Featherstonehaugh silver for Uppark, and much, much more. Many of these acquisitions can be followed up through the House and Collections Annual Supplement to Apollo Magazine, and through the Trust's electronic magazine ABC (Arts Buildings and Collections). I cannot praise too highly the scholarship and persistence of the National Trust's sleuthing curators in their pursuit of significant objects that enhance the collections at the country houses. 142 properties are currently registered museums, and it is much to be hoped that the quiet but essential policy of acquisition continues. The Trust is only too aware of the huge value, both financial and aesthetic, of the indigenous works of art loaned to their properties by donor families. Sooner or later, they may need to be acquired.

Collections Management. The Trust has recently completed the first stage of its Collections Management System (using software developed with the Royal Collection) and it is now accessible on line. It needs much enhancement, but for the first time in its history the Trust, and its global audience, knows what it owns (over a million objects), what they are (more or less), where they are and what they look like. Electronic links are being created to other relevant institutions, including the National Portrait Gallery and the BBC site, My Pictures. Another brilliant achievement has been Mark Purcell's cataloguing of the libraries in the Trust's Country Houses using the MARC standard and available through COPAC, but also cleverly linked to the Trust's CMS system. Alastair Laing and his colleagues have almost completed the volumes on the National Trust's holdings for the Public Catalogue Foundation. The need to continue with high-standard cataloguing of the collections must, in my view, remain a top priority, *not least in order to assist those who now run the Trust's country houses in interpreting and presenting them well.*

Resources for scholarship, research and teaching. The Trust's Country Houses provide superb resources at the highest academic level, and recent initiatives in this area have been extremely successful. Examples are doctorates from the Universities of Sussex, Southampton, and Warwick on historic subjects at Knole, The Vyne, Bodiam Castle and Standen, and participation in joint academic projects such as the 'Understanding British Portraits Network'. The Trust wishes, eventually, to gain Higher Education Research Status in its own right, and not just as a partner of another established Higher Education institution, which would unlock more financial resources for research. In the meantime it hopes to join a new scheme funded by the Arts and

Humanities Research Council to establish a total of 18 Collaborative Doctoral Awards. These initiatives will extend the brilliant research and publication programme begun with the support of the Rothschilds at Waddesdon Manor. Publication of the Trust's architecture and art collections at the highest academic level is achieved through the annual National Trust issue of *Apollo* and its specialist publications programme: forthcoming volumes will be devoted to porcelain, furniture, books, tapestries, carriages, musical instruments, Chedworth Villa, Ham House and Petworth – and these are just a few. Key to this new publications endeavour are partnerships with the Paul Mellon Centre for the Study of British Art, Yale University Press and Scala Books. (I hope more of these books will appear in National Trust shops.) Electronic PDFs are multiplying too, and adding immensely to the information available to actual and virtual visitors to the Trust's country houses.

All these activities keep country houses and their collections at the heart of the National Trust's operations, and promote its national and international reputation as one of our leading heritage organisations. There is a great deal going on, and it is very, very good.

Widening the appeal. The second part of this review concentrates on the more transient aspects of the National Trust's involvement with country houses, and centres on the Trust's responses to the changing tastes and opinions of its visitors and members, of the public at large, and also of the Trust's own leadership. "Widening the Trust's appeal and growing its membership" is promoted by energetic marketing. So far in the twenty-first century the 'strap-lines' used to attract visitors have included 'Forever, For Everyone', 'Bringing Properties to Life', 'Getting Outdoors and Closer to Nature', 'Time Well Spent' and the current 'organising idea' is 'Growing the Nation's Love for Special Places'. On and on they roll, and there will be plenty more of them – generally pretty forgettable, but they perform a useful function in focussing the Trust's marketing machinery in a competitive world. No-one can ignore the financial bottom line.

Increase its membership. The NT's self-imposed challenge to increase its membership from one million members in 1981 to around four million now and five million in 2020, is creating some serious challenges for its country houses, and the future will reveal whether the impact of hugely increased visitor numbers is good or bad. The Trust's country houses, many of them ancient and fragile, have had to adapt to higher visitor numbers than ever before. A typical increase is from 60,000 to over 140,000 per year. Properties are required to be open for longer each day, every day, to use timed-ticketing, to recruit more and more volunteers, and to convert more and more ancillary buildings to visitor use – restaurants, cafés, shops, education rooms, bicycle sheds, baby-changing rooms and lavatories. Car parks get bigger and bigger. Country

houses are now run by Property Managers with large supporting teams of professional staff, under pressure to deliver satisfactory financial returns for the Trust's strategic objectives. Is there a danger that the distinctive character of these lovely houses may be eroded by the weight of the National Trust 'brand'?

'Widening the Trust's appeal' has also created curatorial and conservation challenges for the country houses beyond more footsteps and longer opening hours. In recent years ropes and barriers have been removed, chairs and sofas sat upon, pianos played, books read and billiard balls knocked about, in order to give visitors a greater sense of inclusion and connection with these houses and their histories. Interpretation and presentation have moved away from a presumption that such houses and their collections were to be enjoyed by a narrow élite (although I, personally never believed this to be the case, and my observations over fifty years support my belief). More and more service areas have been opened to view, more 'stories' told of those who worked in country houses rather than those who owned and enjoyed them – Ickworth is the current example. The private lives of previous owners have been exposed through 'story-telling', with or without costumed interpreters and sometimes, in my view, in an over-prurient way. All these changes are vividly expressed in the new style of covers for National Trust guide books. As a result, the Trust is under fire for 'dumbing down'. The Trust has a weighty moral responsibility to tell the history of its country houses very, very well, both to inform their care, and to stimulate the curiosity of their visitors at all levels. Presenting 'stories' requires professional experience and flair, and to maintain a high standard, the Trust needs to make full use of its superb research teams and curators. I'm not convinced it is being done nearly well enough at the moment.

Many of the current initiatives are highly laudable, popular, and have, indeed, increased and diversified membership and changed the perceptions of many visitors. The Trust is determined to continue with this strategy – but it does raise questions about 'Visitor Satisfaction'. Surveys suggest that 'Visitor Enjoyment' diminishes when country houses are too crowded, too noisy, too busily managed, and the opportunity for quiet, personal enjoyment is lost. The challenge that lies ahead is in creating and maintaining the right balance between conservation and access. The Trust is not, and cannot be, a 'visitor-led organisation'.

Contemporary Art. The Trust's strategy to widen its appeal has also re-introduced the promotion of displaying contemporary art in and around country houses, in line with other historic properties. The last three years have seen installations, (often in partnership with the Arts Council) of sculpture, painting and craft-work during the summer months. While at the

moment there is no immediate intention to acquire contemporary works of art for country houses in a permanent way, it is a question that may be raised in the future.

Major commercial assets. The National Trust's country houses are, of course, major commercial assets: as locations for films, television series, the Antiques Road Show, trade shows, craft and country fairs, weddings, concerts, caravan rallies and much, much more. Historic houses, gardens and parklands create a perfect backdrop, and this activity is undoubtedly likely to continue, probably at an even greater pace, although this year's weather has accentuated the commercial and environmental risk attached to large-scale outside events: apart from cancellation itself, other damaging impacts have been car-parks that look like the Somme and waterlogged tent-pitches on sensitive ground within historic parkland. I believe the Trust has a duty to maintain a careful balance between commercial opportunity and responsible conservation.

Another recent initiative by the National Trust is in developing its smaller country houses as holiday lets alongside its successful holiday cottage business. Godolphin House in Cornwall is the latest project, and it is likely that more will follow – perhaps going rather against the grain as far as widening access is concerned, but creating good commercial returns. This may raise an interesting question about priorities for the Trust in the future. Its smaller country houses, often architectural gems in wonderful and remote settings, attract far fewer visitors than the big battleships, and make little or no income for the Trust. Will the Trust still be keen to open them, especially if reliance on volunteer room stewards may no longer be possible?

These are some of the questions about the future that have occurred to me during my spell at the helm of the Attingham Summer School, and as the Chairman of the National Trust's Arts Panel.

To do well is fine: to do better is better.

- Nationalised Buildings: Reflections on their Presentation, Past, Present and Future -

Anna Keay

Director, The Landmark Trust. Former Properties Presentation Director, English Heritage

In 1883, after ten years of campaigning by John Lubbock, Lord Avebury, the Ancient Monuments Protection Act became law, and the nationalisation of historic buildings in Britain began. This ground-breaking piece of legislation saw the state take upon itself the powers of acquiring, in fact if not in title, historic structures of significance, with the explicit aim of caring for and presenting them to the public. Attached to the bill was an appendix: a 'schedule' of the structures which were judged to qualify and which could be taken into the 'guardianship' of the state. A professional department with archaeological, historical and architectural expertise was established to manage these buildings, led in the first instance by Lubbock's father-in-law, the distinguished archaeologist Augustus Pitt-Rivers.

The 1883 legislation was not the start of the state's role in presenting historic buildings to the public. For over 200 years various state officials, among them the employees of the War Office, the Office of Works and the Lord Chamberlain's department, had been engaged in managing historic buildings in part at least as 'visitor attractions'. First among these in scale and date was the Tower of London. The first historic building to experience mass tourism, formal arrangements for visiting the Tower were in operation by the late seventeenth century. From the reign of Charles II the obsolete armour of the Ordnance Office was enlivened and English history animated through the 'Line of Kings', a series of carved mounted figures representing the sovereigns of England from the Conquest onwards, many of the dramatic events of whose reigns had been played out at the Tower. Grinling Gibbons himself had been employed to provide some of the carving of the horses and the characterful faces of the sovereigns. Guidebooks were being printed almost annually by the end of the eighteenth century and by 1820 a purpose-built ticket office and waiting room was in operation. As well as its collections, the appeal of the Tower was, of course, the fabulous cavalcade of British history which had passed through its gates, and the Yeomen Warders happily fed the visitors' appetite for tales of the Princes in the Tower, the incarceration of Walter Raleigh, the interrogation of the Gunpowder plotters and so on. By 1840 almost 100,000 people a year visited the Tower. Also popular were other royal buildings, including Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood House. At Holyrood by the 1760s visitors were shown the room where Mary Queen of Scots was married, complete with furniture and fittings billed as hers. Where Rizzio was murdered, a dark stain on the floor was identified to curious visitors as his blood, and the spot marked by a brass plaque.

The experience of visiting involved little architectural history, archaeology or fine art, and a great deal of narrative national history and personal drama.

All of these arrangements, and many others, were essentially organic affairs which had evolved out of the informal access that had long enabled the curious to see national historic places in the company of a housekeeper or steward. Long before the passage of the 1883 Act or the appointment of specialist staff, these buildings were managed for their primary function, residential or military, and the relevant official – Lord Chamberlain, architect or Military Governor – simply turned his hand with more or less enthusiasm to the presentation of the buildings to the public.



Kenilworth Castle

By 1900 some 63 places had been acquired through the Ancient Monuments Act, and with an expansion in the range of places the Ministry of Works would take on, by 1950 the number was well in excess of 400. For some of the newly nationalised historic buildings among that number this was the start of their life as tourist attractions. Others had long seen organised tourism. Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire and Ashby-de-la-Zouch Castle near Leicester, for instance, had gained international fame from the early nineteenth century thanks to the Walter Scott novels in which they featured, while Boscobel House and its famous oak had been a sight of pilgrimage since the seventeenth century. In all of these places those responsible had made alterations which played to their audiences' interests: so in the 1820s Walter Evans had 'restored' his house at Boscobel in Worcestershire 'as it was when Charles was there', complete with remodelled exterior, newly acquired historic furniture and new 'seventeenth century' panelled rooms.

The 1882 Ancient Monuments Act had been carefully formulated to ensure it posed no threat to the owners of property, and so the places named in that first appended schedule were almost entirely prehistoric monuments (hence a 'scheduled ancient monument'). Successor legislation, of 1900 and 1913, expanded the definition to encompass 'any structure, erection of historical or architectural interest or any remains thereof' but there remained a presumption against the acquisition of inhabited buildings. Importance and obsolescence were the common denominators in those early days and this was to have far-reaching consequences for the approach the Ministry took to their presentation.

And so standing stones, dissolved monasteries, castles and out-dated fortifications were all handed over to the Ministry, their owners generally pleased to be relieved of responsibility for maintaining them. These were the natural habitats of the men from the Ministry, and their work on acquiring places usually involved ground and vegetation clearance to reveal buried archaeological elements, the removal of unsightly 'later' structures and the provision of guidebooks with plans to equip the visitor to 'read the building'. But before long, buildings started to be acquired which were only in some senses, if at all, obsolete. So a host of country houses built on the remains of dissolved monasteries were acquired: Mount Grace Priory, Cleeve Abbey, Brinkburn Priory, Blackfriars in Gloucester. Obsolete as abbeys they certainly were, but each had enjoyed a subsequent, and often longer, life as houses. Decommissioned military buildings, abandoned country houses and significant civic and industrial buildings all joined the stock, which across Great Britain reached 700 by the 1970s.

The approach of the early and mid-twentieth century staff of the Ministry, who had cut their teeth on dissolved monasteries and archaeological sites, was defined by a belief that buildings each had a defining period and that the responsibility of the department was to make this legible – without indulging in the historical fantasies of the amateurs from whom they had taken over the buildings. This could and did have radical results, and in some cases the sense of certainty about the key period saw extensive destruction of what was thought to be 'later'. In Gloucester a dissolved monastic house, the Blackfriars, was converted into a comfortable secular residence in the sixteenth century - like many houses throughout the country - and remained in use as such for 300 years. In the hands of the Ministry all that had happened to the building after 1536 was enthusiastically removed to 'reveal' the friary church. The results were desperately sad: neither a friary church nor a domestic residence, the building now has a profound bleakness. This approach was applied widely, so that at Kirby Hall, where the first and second phases of building for the Stafford and Hatton families in the late sixteenth century were considered the important work, the Ministry removed from the interiors whole schemes of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to reveal the 'original' or 'authentic' interior.

Again the result, which the Ministry considered 'legible' as an Elizabethan primary document in stone and mortar, was desperate, a dissected corpse of a building.



Audley End

Alongside the enthusiastic tearing down to reveal a buried 'key period' were instances of dramatic reinstatement for the same ends. At Audley End in Essex the ground floor rooms of the south wing presented an interesting presentational challenge. Within a structure built in around 1610 Robert Adam had in the 1770s created a series of reception rooms for Sir John Griffin Griffin in a well-documented scheme. Forty years later the third Lord Braybrooke reordered the Adam rooms to create the 'state apartment', a set of formal rooms concluding with a state bedchamber. The house was bought for the nation in 1948 and in 1961 the Ministry of Works team decided on a clear presentational approach: Braybrooke's 'state apartment' was to be dismantled and the Robert Adam arrangement re-created. A similar approach, though with far more dramatic consequences, was taken to Chiswick House also in the 1960s, where the late eighteenth century wings were demolished and the house restored to its 'key' early eighteenth century appearance.

While the Blackfriars and Audley End examples involved different activities, stripping back compared to reinstating, the instinct behind them was the same. Each building had a defining phase, and the over-riding presentational task was to treat the fabric so as to reveal this to visitors archaeologically or architecturally. The Ministry reassured themselves of the validity of their approach, and its fundamental difference to the historical confections of their predecessors, by the quality of their understanding of the period in question. Charles Peers came from the Victoria County Histories, and the Ministry was used to the wealth of documentation which the Public Record Office held for royal buildings, and so a strong

tradition of archival research gave them confidence. Vital to the Audley End approach was the wealth of documentary and visual sources which recorded the Adam work, among them 20,000 bills in the Braybrooke archive. As J. D. Williams, who ploughed through this material, put it, 'on one score there can be no possible disagreement: for good or ill, the house as we have it now is the brain-child of one man, Sir John Griffin Griffin...'

So one might characterise a number of phases here. Before the 1880s the management of buildings as tourist attractions in which historical accuracy was light and the focus was on telling the great tales of history, in a way that played upon the emotions of the visitor. Then the Ministry of Works' 'archaeological' approach, characterised by the search for the defining period, a drive to physically lay this bare for visitors to decipher, and a concern above all with the buildings as specimens of architectural or art history.

Come the 1980s, the extent of intervention in the mid-twentieth century was a subject of unease, with guidebooks referring gingerly to clearance or restoration projects which 'might not have happened now'. Alternatives proliferated. As well as the opening up of service areas, to reveal people and processes hitherto hidden, with which we are all familiar, other approaches were tried. At Brodsworth Hall in Yorkshire in 1990, the pendulum swung right back with a pure 'conserve as found' approach taken to a decayed great house. Peeling paper, degraded fabrics and stained paint surfaces were all conserved painstakingly intact – testimony to the decline and fall of the country house. The effect was wonderful in its way but is baffling for many visitors, who are unclear what it is they are witnessing. At Belsay Hall – which had come with a stipulation that it should never be refurnished – Sir Charles Monck's sparse and precocious Greek revival house in Northumberland is used for periodic contemporary art exhibitions, with a host of modern artists being asked to respond in some way to the echoing halls.

As someone who had responsibility for the presentation of English Heritage buildings for a decade until this summer, I would tentatively suggest that the approach of very recent times has drawn on both the longer term traditions: sharing the concern with the quality and extent of historical and archaeological research which was the leitmotif of the Ministry of Works, but seeking to combine it with something of the feel for history, drama and personality of the nineteenth century presentational regimes. The buildings in the English Heritage collection were, as we have heard, acquired because of their national significance, and were run perhaps for a century or more on tax-payers' money. As a consequence, it is incumbent on English Heritage to ensure that their historical meaning is revealed to those who visit, but also that it should be done in ways which do not require expert knowledge and – we felt – in ways which

are not simply informative but somehow excite, inspire or surprise. A fundamental element has been the quality and range of the research that underpins any scheme undertaken or commissioned by a team of dedicated historians and curators, and an aspiration to do bold and imaginative things to bring that past vividly to life.

The best way to illustrate this is through a couple of recent examples. The re-creation of the Elizabethan garden at Kenilworth was undertaken to try to bring alive the magnificence of Kenilworth as a defensive palace, to illuminate the extraordinary political and cultural career of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and to realise a rare opportunity to re-create an Elizabethan garden through primary evidence. An exhaustive archaeological and documentary research programme underpinned it, and the result was a living acre of re-created Elizabethan England, with water playing in the fountain, birds singing in the aviary and all the structural and horticultural elements re-made. Visitors can explore it with audio guides offering the words of Robert Langham whose testimony of 1575 is such a vital source for the scheme. To achieve it the only thing lost was a 1970s 'Tudoresque' herb garden, and through it, we hope, the career and concerns of Robert Dudley can be understood.



Dover Castle

Second, a project at Dover Castle. The keep of the castle, created for Henry II in the 1180s, was re-displayed in 2009 to evoke its appearance and putative function on the eve of the king's death. Our research led us to believe that the castle was constructed as part of the king's attempt to rehabilitate his reputation after the infamous murder of Thomas a Becket. Again an extensive archival and archaeological research programme underpinned the scheme and provided its organising idea, and in this English Heritage

historians worked alongside colleagues from academia and museums to ensure we knew as much as was reasonably possible about this place at this time. Again the idea was not to do something modest or suggestive, but to realise with gusto and without apology our best understanding of what the building might have looked like on the eve of Henry II's death. The powerful effect of the scheme would be visitors' ability to inhabit this world and understand it through printed material and costumed interpretation. We removed no later features, feeling content, for instance, that the fifteenth century fireplaces, burning with great oak logs,

represented not a troubling anomaly, but a chance to light and heat these rooms once again as they would have been from its first building.

In both of these schemes something with very wide appeal was aimed at, but also something representing the results of the most exacting research – research which in both instances will shortly be published in fully footnoted form. In the end, of course, in attempting such bold recreations, you lay yourself open to criticism: is your interpretation of the past right? Are you obscuring the ‘real’ with the fake in a way which appals those for whom the unencumbered building or artefact are eloquent? On the first, I feel that so long as you are not actually removing historic fabric or permanently displacing any piece of furniture or fitting, it doesn’t really matter. If history teaches us anything, it is that our successors will think our decisions wrong almost whatever we do, and so if they can be easily undone, no lasting ‘harm’ will be done. On the second point I think custodians of a nationalised body of buildings have a profound obligation to make them meaningful to as many people as possible, so that the needs of the many should be weighed up against the few. But I also think that the real expertise and scholarly enquiry which has informed each of our schemes should mean that though the medium is different each project should stand comparison in terms of quality of research and content with any piece in the Burlington Magazine or the English Historical Review. In my experience ambitious and exciting schemes forged of exemplary research both thrill the imagination and nourish the mind.

Looking ahead at the future of the presentation of historic buildings, be they state owned or not, I would make a few personal observations.

Firstly, amidst all the energy that has gone into opening up service wings, brew-houses and kitchens, filling the stables with horses and the laundries with washing, the risk is that the experience of historic houses may be becoming Hamlet without the Prince. The great rooms are, in many if not all cases, seen by a smaller and smaller proportion of visitors and mean ever less to those who come. Re-thinking what it is we want to tell visitors in these spaces is worthwhile, and considering critically how important art historical and architectural explanation is in each case a good discipline. It is interesting to note that in the weekly fix of *Downton Abbey* that the nation has enjoyed over the past few years little or no time has been given over to the architecture of the building or Lord Grantham’s collecting. Simply put, what most interests many people is how lives were lived in the past, and I suspect that it is only by giving more time to understanding this subject ourselves that we can make these spaces eloquent to those who visit.

A second connected observation is that we need to reclaim national and local politics in relation to the historic house. The political or religious affiliations of the owner of a great house profoundly affected the lives of people connected to it and we do not make enough of this in how we show places. Objects offer ways into these subjects: the liturgical vessels of the chapel, the books in the library, the portraits or wall paintings of the polite rooms, can all speak of political and religious views which may have influenced the lives not only of the family, but of the locality and indeed the country.

My third observation is that encouraging an active rather than passive experience of places makes a profound difference. The ability to groom horses in the stables, or cook in the kitchens, or prod the fire in a reception room is, we know, hugely enjoyed by visitors. Actuality and not verisimilitude is what makes these rewarding. The simulated smells, of horses or fires, beloved of design firms of a few years ago are worthless compared to the experience of the real fire burning and so on. I wonder whether there isn't scope in historic houses where opening to the public in traditional ways has been the mode, to take this a bit further. With national museums offering hugely popular sleep overs where the public can bring their sleeping bags into the galleries, why shouldn't we offer something similar in places actually designed for such things? Why don't we offer sleep overs in the maid's dormitory, or B&B in the third bedroom? The experience for me of joining the Landmark Trust and seeing this sort of real 'habitation' of a historic building makes me think we could do much by breaking down the boundaries between the displayed and the inhabited historic place.

THE IRISH COUNTRY HOUSE
Chair: John Redmill, Irish Georgian Society

- “Tombstones of a departed ascendancy”: The Irish Country House
since Independence -

Terence Dooley

Director of CSHIHE, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

The title I have chosen for this presentation is taken from a speech delivered in 1944 in the Irish parliament by the then Minister for Lands in the Fianna Fail government, Sean Moylan. The full quotation goes as follows:

‘...in general, the majority of these Big Houses that I know, and I am very familiar with them, are not structurally sound, have no artistic value and no historic interest. From my unregenerate point of view, I choose to regard them as tombstones of a departed ascendancy and the sooner they go down the better. They are no use.’

Moylan was a former prominent IRA leader in County Cork during the Irish revolutionary period 1920 to 1923, in the course of which at least 300 Irish country houses were burned. One of his fellow IRA leaders in Cork, Tom Barry, once boasted: ‘Castles, mansions and residences were sent up in flames by the IRA immediately after the British fire gangs had razed the homes of Irish Republicans ... Our only fear was that, as time went on, there would be no more loyalists’ homes to destroy.’ Barry’s boast should be understood in the context of when his memoirs were published; in the 1940s memoirs of the War of Independence were part of a very popular genre and Barry was writing for a particular audience who wanted to read about the overthrow of the British empire.

More pertinently, perhaps, the burning of Irish country houses has too often been exaggerated as the major catalyst in their decline by those wanting to avoid more embarrassing issues of economic collapse. While the socio-political and, indeed, psychological impact of the revolutionary period should not be ignored, the simple fact of the matter is that 300 houses represented only about five per cent of the total number in existence in Ireland in the nineteenth century. It was more the long-term political and socio-economic developments since the 1880s which proved crucial in respect of decline.

As Professor R.V. Comerford has recently pointed out in his foreword to *The Irish country house: its past, present and future* (Dooley and Ridgway (eds.), Dublin, 2011), before political revolution, the demonisation of Irish country houses as symbols of colonial oppression and decadence had been practiced in its most virulent form by those who wanted to justify the long land war which began in the late 1870s in response to economic depression. Agrarian leaders were intent on stripping country houses of the vast estates that originally gave them their *raison d'être*. It is probable, therefore, that at least as many Irish country houses were burned during the revolutionary period by local agrarian agitators, intent on driving out landlords and grabbing their demesnes and untenanted lands, as were destroyed by IRA men with patriotic motives, as defined by them.

Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, agitation and British government's response to it – most particularly the introduction of legislation in 1881 which provided for fair rent fixing tribunals under the auspices of the newly created Irish Land Commission - dramatically reduced landlord incomes, as well as the collateral value of Irish estates, leaving it virtually impossible for landlords to borrow and to extricate themselves from their financial difficulties as their forefathers would have done. Hardly surprisingly, by the turn of the century, most Irish landlords were eager to avail of what might be termed the first great bail out in twentieth-century Irish history - the Wyndham Land Act of 1903 – which provided generous financial incentives for landlords to sell and tenants to purchase. But then just over a decade later many of the same families were launched into mourning for loved ones lost in the Great War and, as in the United Kingdom as a whole, a great many estates were financially crippled by the death taxes which followed. Moreover, the collapse of international markets in the 1920s decimated the great share portfolios created after the sales under the Wyndham Act.

For those whose only hope of future sustainability lay in the farming of demesnes and untenanted lands unaffected by land legislation passed by Westminster, the first government of independent Ireland dealt another severe blow when, in 1923, it introduced a land act which gave the state, through the Irish Land Commission, the power to compulsorily acquire such lands and to redistribute them amongst a hierarchy of allottees that included IRA veterans who had fought in the War of Independence 1920-21, uneconomic holders, displaced estate employees and the landless. While it may be something of an exaggeration to claim, as Luke Dodd did some years ago, that after 1923, the Irish Land Commission proceeded with 'a fanaticism symptomatic of any fundamentalist programme, and became the official state agency charged with the removal of our Anglo-Irish heritage,' its policies certainly contributed to the eradication of the physical remnants and reminders of the coloniser's cultural landscape through the demolition of scores of mansions such as the John Nash-designed Shanbally Castle

in Tipperary, demolished in 1957 in what was described by some contemporaries as ‘an act of official vandalism’. Other houses formerly located in the Irish midlands, such as Cuba Court (Banagher), Glass House (Shinrone), Thomastown House (Drumcullen) and Ballylin (Ferbane) – were also demolished by the Land Commission, and in at least two cases the materials were used to build local electrical power stations. Cuba Court was, I believe, where Charlotte Bronte spent her honeymoon.)

After independence, the Big House could hardly be regarded as part of the national patrimony. But, of course, it should also be stressed that in light of the prevailing economic climate of recession from the 1920s, it was hardly likely that the Irish government, even if it had the sympathy, would acquire country houses for the cultural enrichment of the public; it did not make any economic sense for them to do so. Thus, the decades after independence were characterised by the dismantling and demolition of hundreds of country houses, while others were simply abandoned to dereliction and decay to stand for many years as dramatic ruins amidst small farms carved from their once great demesnes by the Irish Land Commission.

If houses were not abandoned or demolished, their owners were forced to break up their collections in order to survive, a phenomenon which had been ongoing since the passing of the Settled Land Act (Ireland) of 1882, and contents predominantly made their way across the Atlantic to adorn the homes of rising American plutocratic families. There was no public outcry then or for decades more. As R.V. Comerford has contended: ‘Any attempt to acquire these, whether pictures of other furnishings, for the public, was not conceivable in the prevailing political climate.... So, the particular form that the overthrow of landlord power assumed in Ireland impoverished a class ... without achieving a concomitant enrichment of the nation.’

There were numerous other houses which were sold to fulfil new functions, whether as schools such as Garbally, Kylemore Abbey, Moore Hall and Ballyfin; state institutions such as the open prison at Shelton Abbey or the agricultural research centres such as Ballyhaise; and quite a few hotels such as Ashford, Dromoland and Adare. As these were modified to fulfil their new functions, their historical and architectural integrity was greatly compromised: chapels replaced dining areas; classrooms and dormitories replaced social areas and family bedrooms; car parks were built on former pleasure gardens and so on. But they survived and that is an important consideration in today’s debate about the future of country houses in Ireland.

It was within the climate of general political antipathy that the National Trust for Ireland (An Taisce) was founded in 1948 and the Irish Georgian Society re-formed a decade later. Again, R.V. Comerford has recently concluded that ‘Faced with the absolutist (and largely philistine)

attitudes of established national leadership, the challenging wave represented by An Taisce and the Irish Georgian Society developed its own dogmatic attitude.’ Comerford’s argument is that these organisations responded to the indifference of the politicians in respect of historic buildings, and to the even more menacing interest of the politicians’ developer friends in the same properties, by ‘formulating a morally charged, uncompromising notion of preservation, or restoration to a supposed pristine state.’ Thus Comerford concludes: ‘All too often there appeared to be no third alternative between concession to the schemes of a developer, however outrageous, and the Platonic ideal, which typically was not the *status quo*, but some *status quo ante* that could only be achieved, and maintained, with the assistance of public funding, spectacular private benefaction, or heroic voluntary effort.’

Private benefaction, heroic voluntary effort and ultimately the assistance of public funding through the Office of Public Works all contributed to the rescue of Castletown.



Castletown House

Built in the 1720s by Ireland’s richest commoner and most powerful politician, William Conolly, it was at the time described as ‘the finest [house] in the whole of the kingdom of Ireland’. In recent decades, it has witnessed a remarkable rejuvenation: more and more of the house is open for visits and events; outdoors the grounds are being gradually reclaimed, the refurbishment of the Batty Langley lodge has been completed; there is a courtyard development, and on the first floor an archive and research centre run jointly by the National University of Ireland Maynooth and the Office of Public Works.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s there were numerous examples of houses rehabilitated by wealthy business people or entertainers who made vast fortunes during the era of the so-called Celtic Tiger. Invariably, there has been divided opinion on the merits of some of these restoration projects. One of the most recent spectacular restoration projects has been at Ballyfin in Co Laois. Originally the home of the Coote family, it was sold in 1928 to the Patrician

Brothers for £10,000 and used as a boarding school for almost sixty years. About a decade ago it was purchased and its restoration undertaken by the Chicagoan, Fred Krehbiel, whose electronic business, Molex, has a major presence in UK, Asia, Europe and Ireland. It is now to function as an 'exclusive private country house retreat'. But a 'food critic' in the *Irish Times* asked recently: 'Where did Ballyfin spring from?' and went on: 'An oasis of elegance in queenly Laois, the only reason you may not have heard of this gorgeous Regency house and demesne at the foot of the Slieve Bloom mountains is because it only opened its newly restored doors this year. Prior to that it was a school, perish the thought.

I draw your attention to that last sentence: of course she is right that it is now a magnificent restoration house on which, to use her term, "oodles of money was spent" - and not just clearing the place of chalk, dust and gum as she quipped. But that it was a school beforehand should not be dismissed so disparagingly; without the care bestowed on the house by the school authorities - and, indeed, the fact that they had the farsightedness to store the original windows in the out offices as they modified the house to suit its new educational purposes - the restoration would not have been successful.

But there are also a number of other important houses, which have survived in private ownership, which have been adapted to meet various challenges, for which recognition has not always been generous from those who aspire to the Platonic ideal. Perhaps the most controversial has been the re-development of Carton House, once Ireland's only ducal residence, but now a country house hotel and leisure complex.



Carton House

Designed by the pre-eminent architect of his time, Richard Castle, and embellished by travelling master stuccadores, the La Franchini, it exemplified the grandeur of the Irish aristocracy,

surrounded by a magnificent eighteenth-century designed landscape and maintained by an annual rental of over £40,000 per annum. However, just after the Great War it was effectively gambled away by the wayward Edward FitzGerald, seventh duke of Leinster, and lost to the property developer and financier, Sir Henry Mallaby-Deeley, sometimes derogatively known as 'the fifty-shilling tailor', once owner and designer of Mitcham Golf Club.

Mallaby-Deeley never lived at Carton although, in his own words, he did become the 'Fairy godfather of the estate', saving it from dereliction and decay. However, he died in the 1940s and by the 1980s, as Chris Ridgway has pointed out, Carton was an estate 'experiencing that most common and insidious of twentieth-century fates, managed decline.' The house had become run down and the landscape overgrown and unrecognisable from its former eighteenth-century splendour.

When the Mallaghan family launched their plans to transform house and estate into a high-class sporting and leisure resort, complete with golf courses and a hotel, to be financed privately by themselves, it was extremely controversial, and fuelled much debate, from the corridors of Leinster House - formerly the town residence of the FitzGeralds and now the home of Dail Eireann - to the streets and university campus of Maynooth. However, the development went ahead and in time many of those who had been sceptical and highly critical of the proposed re-development of Carton revised their opinions. But there were and are still those who remained unconvinced.

So when a volume of essays edited by Christopher Ridgway and I, published in 2011 - *The Irish country house: its past, present and future* - referenced Carton as an example of an Irish country house which had met its sustainability challenges head on, a reviewer in the *Irish Times*, who clearly had Carton in mind, wrote that 'contentions that an Irish country house has somehow been "saved" when converted into a hotel or golf club are ... specious: one might just as easily propose a tree has survived even though all its branches are lopped off.' But as Ridgway later pointed out: if the integrated components of house and estate are fragmented - shrunk acres, diminished coffers, fractured families - you have to go with what you have got. The reviewer should perhaps have looked at a whole range of UK properties (in private and other ownership) and observed how they work to survive and make a going concern.

Carton has certainly been the most high profile case in Ireland of where people have had to confront the issue of sustainability but it by no means the only historic building which has been modified to suit modern needs. Ridgway's conclusion that 'There is an enlightened and pragmatic impetus behind the recovery of Carton, a fundamental recognition that country

estates have always functioned as places of leisure and work, and that its story of revival and adaptation has something to teach everybody about how a traditional estate can be made secure and open to all' might be better heeded than ignored.

And this takes me to what I would consider one of the most important developments in Ireland in terms of changing attitudes towards the country house – and they have changed dramatically in the last number of years. That change has largely been the result of educational developments and the promotion of high quality research and scholarship which have underpinned the interpretation and presentation of Irish country houses and placed them within the Irish national patrimony, an integral part of the country's shared heritage.

In 2004, the National University of Ireland Maynooth established the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates committed to enhancing the scholarly and public understanding of Irish historic houses through education, research and publication. One of the Centre's most important collaborative projects undertaken to date has been with the Yorkshire Country House Partnership. Working in collaboration with the YCHP has certainly re-shaped my own thinking on issues of future sustainability and encouraged me to take a much more pragmatic view of the re-presentation of great houses; in the case of Carton demesne, for example, the options would probably have included the development of the demesne to facilitate the building of hundreds of semi-detached houses in a growing university town, an alternative much less reversible than thirty-six tee boxes and the equivalent number of greens.

At the time, with inadequate planning laws, would the State have stopped such a development? Carton was suggested to the government as a national park, but the then chairman of Dublin County Council replied to the suggestion that it and Kildare County Council should work in partnership to preserve the demesne as follows: 'It is regrettable I can see no prospect in the present financial climate or in the foreseeable future of the council being in a position to join in a venture of the kind suggested...', while the then Prime Minister of Ireland, Garret FitzGerald, later revealed: 'I should have loved to have been able in the 1980s to save the Kildare FitzGerald's great house at Carton, but this was simply not possible then. I am greatly relieved that this has since been skilfully and sensitively undertaken by a wonderfully committed entrepreneur and his family who has done a better job than the state could ever have done with all the constraints under which it is required to operate.'

In Ireland, even in combination, all of the efforts of new wealthy owners and the state will not provide for more than a small proportion of properties. One should not forget that there are still a significant number of Irish houses in the ownership of the original families and when, in 2003,

I was commissioned by the government and the Irish Georgian Society to write a report on the *Future of Irish historic houses?* I found that with few exceptions, these houses faced difficulties which threatened their existence, most particularly lack of income and inadequate, though admittedly improving, State support structures.

Since then many of these original owning families have come together to form the Irish Historic Houses Association, intended as a forum to share knowledge in relation to the upkeep and refurbishment of their homes. They have adopted a variety of commendable and often novel initiatives to remain sustainable, ranging from operating as country guest houses or venues for special occasions as at Enniscoe to taking fairly radical steps to engage with the financial benefits of popular culture, generating income through events such as the Electric Picnic at Stradbally, the Flat Lakes Event at Hilton Park, the annual rock concert at Slane and so on. In the present economic climate the members of the Irish Historic Houses Association will continue to face many challenges but it is to be presumed that one of these will not be the denial of Irish country houses as part of the national patrimony, even given the fact that the nation is something of a chameleon.

Susan Kellet of the IHHA gave an interview last year in which she stressed that 'The houses are unable to remain apart from their local community and owners need to realise this'. Of herself, she said: 'I cannot operate without the support of the local community.' Her attitude is commendable and such activity in respect of the future sustainability of Irish country houses is vital. It was a lesson recently hard learned by the new owners of Lissadell in Co. Sligo – possibly to the tune of €6 million in legal costs - when after spending an estimated €13.5 million in the purchase and restoration of house and gardens a High Court ruling confirmed the existence of public rights of way through the demesne. Interestingly Susan Kellet said: 'I don't understand the thinking that if you are developing a house as a tourist attraction, why you would then object to people coming through'. She believes that if public funds are made available, the price to be paid is appropriate public access.

By way of conclusion: the story of the Irish country house is, with the exception of the historical baggage, not that terribly different from that in Britain. Over time, political rhetoric and public attitudes have changed radically, because of education and wider European and global efforts to protect the built heritage. From the 1980s it could be said by politicians that Ireland's country house heritage 'belonged' to Europe as opposed to Britain and this new link had no historical contamination. A few years ago the then Minister for Education and Science proclaimed:

The built heritage in Ireland is a fundamental and treasured part of our national identity. It encapsulates historic linkages within and beyond our shores, and illustrates a strong sense of our identity within a common European and, indeed, a broader global inheritance.

And these changes in perception have been noted by original owners. As Andrew Kavanagh of Borris put it in an interview with me in 2003: 'I've lived through public desire to pull the place down, through indifference, through reluctant acceptance that it should stand, to a desire to preserve it, and now at last we are seeing an acceptance that it really is important Irish workmanship.' Country houses in Ireland have become popular visitor centres though they are unlikely to ever match the volume here in Britain, except, seeing as we are still regarded as a British domestic tourist destination, more visitors from these shores come to visit them.

They have also become much more the focus of academic study that has moved their history away from symbols of colonial oppression to a much more enriching understanding of what they represent and the complexity of their past relationships with the wider estate communities. We have hopefully come a long way from the day when the magnificent Bishops court was offered to the state in the 1960s, but a report from the Irish Land Commission deemed it fit only for 'the crowbar brigade'. Or when Muckross, donated to the state much earlier, was allowed to stand derelict for decades, ironically stripped of its furnishings to fit out the new presidential residence, Aras an Uachtaráin, the former viceroy's home in the Phoenix Park, before its tourist potential was realised. Today, it is one of the country's most visited heritage sites.

Or perhaps the most interesting of all: when Russborough was offered to the state as a gift in 1929, the Department of Finance declared:

So far as the Minister has been able to gather neither Russborough House nor the family connected with it has ever been associated with any outstanding events or personalities in Irish history. Accordingly, the interest which the place possesses is only its interest to the connoisseurs of architecture, plus whatever interest it has as illustrating a certain phase of social life in Ireland. Opinions differ as to the aesthetic merits of the Georgian as a style of architecture, but, the period being relatively modern, good specimens of it are sufficiently numerous both in this country and in England to render state action to preserve this one superfluous.

Today, like Muckross, Russborough is one of the country's most popular heritage tourist attractions and the place where the Irish Heritage Trust was launched in 2006.

- The Work of the Irish Heritage Trust -

Kevin Baird
Director, Irish Heritage Trust

My story is an incomplete one. While Terry Dooley covered 150 years in half an hour I'm going to try and do six years, but they have certainly been an interesting six. Those of you that are involved in opening properties to the public will know my position now, when you get a call from a tour operator who says 'We'd like to book a tour of your property and we'd like to see the house and to hear about the collection and to see the below stairs and could you show us round the gardens and we'd like a light lunch as well.' 'Oh that's great, and how long do you have?' 'Oh about 40 minutes.' So I am going to be marching you along corridors, opening a door, looking in and showing you something and then saying 'Move along!'. There are lots of threads to my story where you're only going to see an end dangling and if you want to follow them up, come and visit.

As you have heard, Terry's report was a huge milestone in making the heritage argument. It stated what we already knew but it stated these things when government had bought in as a partner to fund the research, so that shifted policy in Ireland. The report was ground-breaking. It highlighted the significance in both contemporary and heritage terms, it highlighted an increasing risk and why it was important. In Ireland this was a seismic shift and it was largely down to the efforts of my founding Chairman, Sir David Davies, the Irish Georgian Society and Terry that this argument was brought to government as opposed to our banging on the door from the outside. Within the context of Ireland where the not-for-profit heritage sector is underdeveloped and completely underfunded, even these little steps are quite significant in that we have actually managed to make them. There is no Heritage Lottery Fund or National Heritage Memorial Fund. The Heritage Council in Ireland is a brilliant organisation but the largest grant it gave out last year was about €10,000 and this year it is not going to have any money and is under threat of removal. So we are faced with a lot of challenges. Anyway, Terry and Sir David made the arguments successfully, got the challenge brought into government. Government did what they always do, they commissioned an independent report to tell them what to think, and this was great because the committee did some international research and said that a heritage not-for-profit trust is cheaper to the state than a government organisation, connects better with local communities and has multiple other benefits. They also – remember this was 2006, Ireland was awash with confidence and cash, or so we thought – backed this initiative with shedloads of money, projected over the next six years. I think you probably know where this story is going, or you'll work it out as we go along. The great thing was that the trust was launched. The challenge was huge expectation, huge energy, because we were

dealing with fifty years of pent-up frustration in our heritage community wanting this type of trust and a government which had put its neck out and promised cash expecting instant results. By contrast, my first day at the office involved furniture borrowed from the Dublin Civic Trust in a room borrowed from them, redundant stationery nicked from HLF, and a laptop borrowed from HLF and a new mobile phone. So there was quite a challenge ahead.

But two projects were already bubbling, and they were perfect for us conceptually, because one was a beautiful house in County Cork called Fota, owned by a charitable trust, and the other one was an amazing privately owned property, also in County Cork, called Anne's Grove. This was terrific for us, conceptually, because, if we could produce a solution for both of those, it would show we could work with private and public owners. Anne's Grove was the conservation job, Fota the rescue job. Fota wasn't necessarily as precious as it could have been; it had no contents. Anne's Grove had it all. So in terms of a road map for us to demonstrate success it looked very exciting. As things developed, Fota became the frontrunner. Originally the domain of the estate was the whole island, it is stunningly beautiful but it had a very chequered history, it belonged to an Anglo-Norman family, the Smith-Barrys, up until the death of Mrs Bell in the 1970s. It was then bought by University College Cork, for agricultural research and dairy use, which was brilliant because that probably saved it. Then what happened was that as the university came under pressure, it responded to expressions of interest as opposed to master-planning a phased change. So, a little bit got chopped off for a golf course, the next bit got chopped off for housing. But, the nice thing is, in the middle of it all there was still the core, magical gardens, magical arboretum and quite a nice Regency house.



Fota

Another interesting aside about Fota is that because it was built on an island and was a remodelling job, the service wings are out at the sides, which is great for presenting the house because it is all roughly on one level and people can get there without jumping up and down

stairs. Where we came on board, it had passed to a charitable trust in the 90s, but it had also been rented out in lots of different forms. So when we inherited it, some of the grand rooms had been fairly well-restored in a slightly heavy-handed way, but they were empty. For a visitor there was nothing to see, no story-telling, no history, no archives and no contents. The service wings and kitchens are probably one of the best intact set of kitchens in Ireland and they had been quite well presented and the gardens had been cleverly handed over into state care, so that was a bill we weren't going to have to fund. But on the other side of that coin, it was a sad place, there were no visitors, it was losing money hand over fist and in a spiral of decline. So, liking a challenge, we jumped in, and the next challenge was what to do and I suppose that is where some might speak of 'smoke and mirrors'.

We found that there was no local audience for this beautiful property, and yet it is the only property of its type in the Cork city area. Cork city probably has about 3 or 400,000 people in its general catchment area. No identity with Fota, no audience for it. So we did the obvious and animated the place through story-telling, through participation and activities. These were a great success and got me slightly off the hook as I chased around trying to find grants to restore the house. But it was also good because it was a showcase to show we were trying to bring something different to the game, to involve people, to develop new audiences, to do education through participation and shared initiatives.



Interior of Fota

At the same time, there were no contents. We were very fortunate. I have two stories to tell you but they involve one benefactor. For almost all of the 1980s, Fota had been rented by a local collector, a man called Richard Wood who over his lifetime had built up an amazing collection of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Irish art and furniture. He had rented the house off the university in the 1980s and operated it as a gentle visitor attraction to display his collection. And then towards the end of that decade there were some catastrophic fabric failures and big fall-outs and the collection and Richard went one way and the house stayed with the university. It then closed from the end of the '80s to the millennium. So this collection was in quite a parlous state – it is of national and international significance

and was legitimately connected to the house, albeit not the original contents. It came under threat through various financial situations and probably twice in the negotiations, it was within about eighteen hours of ending up at auction in London from banks repossessing. It was really the tenacity and skill of our benefactor, Tom McCarthy, a businessman in Cork, that saved it. He and his family managed to negotiate with all the parties. They purchased it and donated it to the trust for preservation and presentation at Fota. It was an astonishingly generous act, and one of the largest philanthropic acts in our sector in Ireland in recent years. It was great for us because it gave us something to put into this empty soulless house. At the same time, totally by accident, a Christie's catalogue arrived stating that the trustees of the Smith-Barry family were selling off items directly connected with Fota: portraits of the family, inventoried furniture and other interesting items including a uniform made for one of the Smith-Barrys when he was appointed Deputy-Lieutenant of Cork. We were trying to pull together a lot of interesting things simultaneously, and meanwhile chasing money like mad, to fund the restoration projects.

At that point, I will go back to Anne's Grove. As I said, it is a magical place, the house itself very modest but in the family for four hundred years, beautiful in every way, with one of the loveliest gardens you can imagine, perched on the banks of the cliff-like river's edge. However, this was now about 2008 so the black clouds of global crisis were gathering and the cracks were also appearing in our coalition government. The minister within whose gift it was to offer a tax break on this donation was a Green Party minister and I have never seen a Green Party less interested in heritage. The world was melting down around us as we were trying to get this very generous private donation over the wire. Trying to have a conversation with a coalition government in crisis, backed by global meltdown, about tax-credits and endowment grants was not the most positive experience of my life. Tragically in November 2008, when we had the incredibly generous offer of a donation on the table that included money (which is amazing in Ireland where the pattern of inheritance and wealth is very different) the minister decided not to grant the tax credit for the donation. That was totally political, it was nervousness and inexperience. Shortly after that all the money that we had been promised was decommitted and our annual little subvention and grant were cut. But I am not going to dwell on the challenges that we faced in relation to all of that, the pain is slowly healing, and there has been a lot of success, there are green shoots appearing, there is a degree of optimism. You plant the seed, it goes dormant for years and then all of a sudden two or three things happen and things start moving again.

It is the philosophy behind what we are trying to create, that I want to discuss. We are not there yet and there are lots of debates about appropriate restoration and change, but through good

advice and paint-scraping and benefactions a degree of warmth and personality is returning to the house. We now have so much interest going on in what we are presenting that the challenge now is we can't do a tour that covers everything, so we are developing specialist tours, which allow people to pause. As we said earlier, if there are too many visitors, if it is too busy, you lose the ambience. What we are doing is splitting the visit up so that people can experience the place in a more gentle way.

This has been a really busy week for us, recently we were delighted to win the Irish Georgian Society Conservation Award for the work at the farmyard and that went to the Trust and the team of consultants led by John O'Connell, the architect. I have never worked with a team that has carried out a more exemplary restoration project. But of course it is not just about the physical restoration, it is about breathing life back into a property. Some of our staff and volunteers harvested the apples from the orchard and as we were picking up awards in Dublin they were pressing apple juice for cider-making. It is this level of participation that is important. To give you some examples, while all this change, was going on, we launched our volunteering programme. You have experts like Peter Cox and Patty Bassett who come in with their poultices for stone cleaning and teach the volunteers, teach the staff, and then they all carry through the work. In the restoration work, when we had gilders, plaster repairers, wallpaper repairers, part of their job was not just to carry out the work but to communicate their skills to our team, staff and volunteers, so that becomes part of the contemporary story. We now have an active group at Fota, where since 2012 all our guiding is now done on a seven day a week rota by the volunteers – that is something we can be very proud of.

I mentioned that it has been a busy week. Another thing we have been actively engaged in is launching Strokestown Park Learning Zone. Now, that was with one of our government ministers and it is very important to make this connection between heritage and education because as Terry suggested we are still breaking down barriers over people understanding the value of heritage. Strokestown is a jewel, it deserves a lecture in itself. It has contents, it has an archive, it has fascinating connections, you go into the playroom and see the will, written by hand when she was aged nine, by the last lady of the house, Olive Pakenham Mahon, leaving her tea-set and her pram to her best friend, and on the wall is a picture of her and her best friend playing. It has been in private ownership for the last forty years and it is really one man's passion that has kept it alive. The archive is now being worked on by Castletown Foundation. So we launched the learning zone, it was great for us because it showed that we were engaged with more than one project, we were bringing something different to the game and we could work with partners in the private sector. Yesterday was a delight: we had schoolchildren debating landlordism and was it right that the gentleman of the house over the

Famine period was shot. There is great debate around using events associated with a particular property to interpret the wider context of history and the land around. This spun off the Fota Learning Zone that we have been running for three years and again it involves audience development as well, we are now into our third cycle of repeat visits from schools and that immersive learning experience that the house offers. Our challenge is to show that these solutions, which are different for each property, work in the Irish context.



Henrietta Street, Dublin

To give you a flavour of some of this work, here is Henrietta Street in North Dublin, probably one of the finest Georgian streets in the city, totally ignored. The prosperity is now in South Dublin and the expression is “Are you a Northsider or a Southsider?” We are passionate Northsiders because our office is over there as well, but Henrietta Street is very special. We have been working with partners on this property for three years and it is only starting to gain momentum now because there is political interest in the decade of commemorations that is coming up in Ireland, we have everything from union lockouts and tenements to Easter risings and acts of union, and indeed north and south. This building allows us to tell the story of different centuries and how they fit together.

Johnstown Castle is another classic case. Local authorities and public agencies are coming under huge pressure because their budgets are being cut. This site is the poster boy or girl of heritage properties, with three lakes, 120 acres, glasshouses, outbuildings, follies, castles, ruins, arboreta, but it is owned by an agricultural research agency that has kept it alive because it is part of its

history. Of course as budget cuts come, people are starting to say 'Why are you spending half a million every year looking after that place?' It is actually 'at risk' even though it looks fab.

A quick story to finish. Returning to Fota, the great nephew of the last occupant of the house, Andrew Pethrie hadn't been back since the 1960s when he last played cricket in the hallway and now he sees that the property is in a healthy state, people are coming back, people are re-engaging. As a result of that and the enthusiasm and energy and confidence he experienced from seeing what was going on, he and his father are trawling through their storage spaces and finding as much archival and artefact evidence about Fota as they can and donating it to us. We now have a photo album from 1901, from the great-nephew of the head-gardener's servant, Mr Beswick. This is great archival stuff for a property that had no archives. And stuff is coming back almost on a monthly basis from people in the local area who bought things at the property auction in the 1970. That is a stunning endorsement for us, we have also gained academic interest and a great team of volunteers.

So that is it, the trials and tribulations of starting a heritage trust in Ireland. We have been through the largest financial crisis the world has ever seen, national economic meltdown, but we have managed to struggle on and survive. We have a huge mountain to climb.

TIME TO RETHINK? THE HOUSE MUSEUM IN THE UNITED STATES

Chair: Peter Trippi, Editor, Fine Art Connoisseur

- The American House Museum in Historical Perspective -

Craig Hanson

Associate Professor, Calvin College, Michigan

In addressing the history of the American house museum, one point seems crucial: the number of house museums in the United States is staggering. A study conducted by the Pew Charitable Trust suggests there are some 15,000.¹ Summarizing the historical context swells into a daunting task, and suggests how many different versions of this paper there could be.² So I have made some assumptions: that many of this audience are already well-versed in the history of the American house museum; but also that many – despite a familiarity with a handful of important examples of American houses – know little about the history of house preservation in the United States. I would like to do two things. Firstly, to sketch the broad contours of this history, singling out a handful of key houses, major preservation strategies, influential individuals, and important legislation, with an admitted bias toward the early history and the South. Secondly, along the way, to suggest some ways of thinking about the history of house museums alongside the larger topic of American houses vis-à-vis display. For it seems to me the story of turning houses into museums – interesting as it is – remains only part of the history. And in widening the frame to include houses that do not obviously fall under the historic house museum label might actually shed more light on courses of action for the future.

¹ There were a couple of dozen American house museums in 1895, nearly 100 in 1910, and 400 by 1933; Laurence Vaile Coleman, *Historic House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1933), p. 18, quoted in Sherry Butcher-Youngmans, *Historic House Museums: A Practical Handbook for Their Care, Preservation, and Management* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3. The Pew estimate of 15,000 is cited in a press release from America's National Trust for Historic Preservation, "National Trust Initiative to Innovate House Museum Model," posted July 9, 2012, www.preservationnation.org/who-we-are/press-center/press-releases/2012/national-trust-initiative-to.html. Current estimates of house museums, in fact, vary widely. The *Directory of Historic House Museums in the United States*, ed. by Graham and Patricia Chambers Walker and Thomas Graham (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999), for instance, provides details for just 2500. Much of the problem lies in defining the parameters of what constitutes a house museum. As Donna Ann Harris stresses in *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2007), p. 11, most are extremely small, receiving fewer than 5,000 visitors a year and employing no full-time staff.

² As a starting point into the preservation literature, see the following: Jessica Foy Donnelly, ed., *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003); Michael Holleran, "America's Early Historic Preservation Movement (1850-1930) in a Transatlantic Context," *Towards World Heritage: International Origins of the Preservation Movement, 1870-1930*, ed. by Melanie Hall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 181-99; Charles Hosmer, *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States before Williamsburg* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965); Charles Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981); Diane Lea, "America's Preservation Ethos: Tribute to An Enduring Ideal," *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Robert E. Stipe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Randall Mason and Max Page, eds., *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004); William Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (New York: John Wiley, 1997); and Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice* (New York: Norton, 2000).



Mount Vernon

Historical accounts of the American house museum typically begin in the 1850s with the preservation of two houses, both associated with the nation's military hero and first president, George Washington. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Mount Vernon for establishing models. Under the leadership of Ann Pamela Cunningham of South Carolina, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association was formed in 1853. By 1858, the women had, through a national grassroots campaign, raised enough money to purchase the Virginia house, 200 acres of the estate, and to establish an endowment.³ As suggested by these two paintings – Joachim Ferdinand Richardt, *View of Mount Vernon*, ca. 1858 (Fine Art Museums of San Francisco); and Thomas Pritchard Rossiter and Louis Remy Mignot, *Washington and Lafayette at Mount Vernon in 1784*, 1859 (Metropolitan Museum of Art) - the house served as a potent shrine for the country's iconic leader, and could be portrayed in various registers from topographical celebration to historical stagecraft. Such pictures help contextualize the initial preservation of Mount Vernon as a mid-nineteenth-century event, entirely consistent with the larger celebration of Washington as general, statesman, and Father of the nation. This much more familiar painting of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emmanuel Leutze from 1851 was a product of that same cultural milieu. There is perhaps a useful analogy to be drawn between preservation history and period films, the best of which always manage to say something meaningful about two points in time: the purported historical setting of the story but also the contemporary moment when the film is produced (*Dangerous Liaisons* is, for instance, a quintessentially eighties film about eighteenth-century France). The success of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association would

³ See the important study by Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1999).

inspire preservation efforts for the next century. This landmark example also established precedents that would soon become the American preservation pattern:

- 1) Preservation was typically driven by private individuals – often with a local origin or a local focus.
- 2) Activities were disproportionately the work of women.
- 3) Goals centered on saving individual buildings, closely associated with key individuals or events in American history.

One more item should be added to this list of notable recurring features: the north-south political dynamic. As Patricia West demonstrates in her 1999 study of the political origins of America's house museums, if the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association brought together supporters from both Northern and Southern States, the conflicting political orientations must still be understood as a crucial part of the story. In the years just before the outbreak of the American Civil War, Mount Vernon was for the South a potent reminder of Washington's status as a plantation owner, an owner of a plantation that depended upon the labor of hundreds of slaves. Appeals to the North, on the other hand, stressed the site as home of the Father of the Nation and thus a moral compass of sorts. To give you an example from Susan Fenimore Cooper, the daughter of James Fenimore Cooper:

“Children of America! We come to you today, affectionately inviting you to take part in a great act of national homage to the memory, to the principles, to the character of George Washington . . . Let this work become, on our part, a public act of veneration for virtue—of respect for love of country in its highest form, pure, true, and conscientious – of loyalty to the Union, the vital principle of our national existence. Let it become, for each of us, a public pledge of respect for the Christian home, with all its happy blessings, its sacred restraints.”⁴

In the end, Mount Vernon was saved by women not only in the years leading up to the Civil War, but also through their commitments to the site actually during the war. The Southerner Ann Cunningham did her best to remain politically neutral or at least moderate, by the standards of the day. And yet, if she genuinely hoped the Ladies' Association could avoid political entanglements, in another more subtle sense, the Association was *all about* politics, a prime example of the cult of patriotic domesticity in which women were expected to safeguard the home as a site of virtue. In 1858 Cunningham, declared (wishfully, in hindsight), “Our

⁴ Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Mount Vernon: A Letter to the Children of America* (New York: D. Appleton, 1859), pp. 68-70, quoted in West, *Domesticating History*, p. 28.

country can be saved, one and indissoluble, forever – for *woman* has become her guardian spirit.”⁵

In fact, Mount Vernon was the second house saved, not the first. That distinction belongs to Hasbrouck House in Newburgh, New York, though the story is hardly as compelling. General Washington used the house, completed by 1770, as military headquarters from 1782 to 1783. In contrast to the general rule of preservation through a voluntary association, the site was acquired by the State of New York in 1850. But it was part of no larger preservation strategy and was hardly viewed as establishing a meaningful precedent. The main point is simply that it was the cult of George Washington – as both general and first president – which fueled these initial preservation achievements.

From here, most histories of American preservation advance into the latter half of the nineteenth century. I want, however, to move *back* in time, to the beginning of the century, to consider briefly three other houses that don't typically feature in accounts of American house museums. And yet all three help underscore an important feature of the American story, a feature that largely distinguishes this story from what happens in Britain. The first house is ironically, the most famous house in the United States, indeed one of the most famous houses in the world: the White House.

Built between 1792 and 1800 (and then rebuilt after it was burned by the British in 1812), it has been open to the public since the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. Starting with his second inaugural in 1805, large open house receptions became the norm, and occasional public visits took place throughout each year. The expectation of the sitting president (and his family) residing at the White House with at least the possibility of the public walking through portions of the house's public space is one of the more enduring political conventions of the United States. It is a convention that has evolved, with abrupt disruptions during times of war, but I am not sure on what grounds the White House does not qualify as a house museum (and I am thinking primarily of the visitor's experience), except for the fact that its relevance speaks not only to the past but also the present and future. It is not just a former seat of power but a current one. And here we come to a fundamental distinction between the American and British contexts. British country houses, of course, have a long history of being on display – for various audiences to varying degrees – long before the notion of preservation emerged in the mid and late nineteenth centuries. We might think of the White House as following this pattern wherein the central function of the building as a locus of power coincided with the admittance of

⁵ Ann Pamela Cunningham, *Mount Vernon Record*, July 1858, p. 1, quoted in West, *Domesticating History*, p. 26.

visitors. At the same time, it is easy enough to find examples in British history corresponding to typical American house museums. Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon, for instance, was acquired by a preservation committee in 1847, roughly a decade before Mount Vernon was acquired: its history as a tourist destination stretched back into the eighteenth century and the formation of the committee resulted in part from fears that the showman P. T.

Barnum was going to buy the house and move it to America.⁶ But the fact that we can draw parallels between a 200-acre plantation, owned by the first American president, and the childhood home of the Bard reinforces the point. As a site of global cultural importance, you may place your chips on Shakespeare, but in terms of political power, the two seem hardly comparable. If the White House does belong in this story, it belongs as an exception. All the same, two other examples come to mind in support of a rather different model of house display, a model requiring no gesture of public enshrinement premised on separation from other spheres of cultural activity.

I am thinking here about the Philadelphia museum of Charles Wilson Peale. By the nineteenth century, it had outgrown its original home and had come to occupy various sorts of dedicated public space. Initially, however, the collection – in many ways an Enlightenment collection – was simply an extension of Peale's own domestic arrangements, similar to the early eighteenth century London collections of British virtuosi such as Dr. Richard Mead or Sir Hans Sloane. It does not require huge outlays of imagination to envision an alternative past in which Peale's house and gallery at Lombard Street were passed down within the family, eventually becoming part of the institutional history of the museum. And yet, scholars of American museum history have found the expansion of the collection into the public space, and the first purpose-built museum structures, far more interesting than the model of the house as museum. I am suggesting a counter-factual vision of what the house museum could have come to mean, that is a clearly conceived museum housed in a house. This scenario points up a current problem of the American house museum that was, in many cases, built into the history from early on: while it may be clear that these landmarks are historic houses, it is not always clear in what sense they are museums. Completing the circle in the actual history of the Peale's museum is the fact that part of the collection was acquired by Barnum. As a leitmotif, the spectacle stalks this history of display.

⁶ I'm grateful to Melanie Hall for sharing a copy of her paper, "Literary Houses, Their Role and Purpose," her 2010 keynote address for the annual conference of the Literary Houses Group, *Sustaining Museums: Sustaining Communities* at The Centre for the Study of British Romanticism, Dove Cottage, Grasmere, 14-15 October 2010.

A third counter example takes us to Charleston, where the Joseph Manigault House will have to serve as a proxy. Designed by Gabriel Manigault for his brother Joseph, it was completed in 1803 and became a preservation site only in 1920. Gabriel served as president of Charleston's Library Society, which in 1773 founded the Charleston Museum, an institution sometimes described as America's oldest museum, predating even Peale's. It did not, however, open to the public until the 1820s, by which point it was near the city square in what seems to have been a designated public building. But in the eighteenth century, it seems likely that the museum would have been stored in a house, perhaps another Manigault house, and the executive committee's minutes point to such a precedent on Manigault's part.



Joseph Manigault House

My point is that other models for associating these categories of 'house' and 'history' and 'museum' could have developed alongside the one that has become so familiar to us.

In returning to the more traditional tack of what actually did happen, I want to address several key events and developments from three periods: the years around 1889, the opening decades of the twentieth century, and some major changes following World War II.

1889

We can begin with the opening of The Hermitage in Nashville, Tennessee, the home of Andrew Jackson, the seventh U.S. President during the 1830s, remembered for both his populism and his savage policies toward Native American populations, including policies of ethnic cleansing and forced relocation. The current house, completed in 1836, crowned a plantation that depended upon 150 slaves. Even in the 1850s, the estate had been purchased by the State of Tennessee

with the goal of honoring Jackson's memory – not by establishing a house museum but by putting the estate to some public use (there was, for instance, discussion of a Southern equivalent of West Point being housed there, though Congress never pursued it). Finally in 1889, it was placed in the control of the Ladies' Hermitage Association, a group modeled directly on the Mount Vernon Association, and it soon opened as a historic site museum.

Also in 1889, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities was founded, the first statewide organization. Once again a model of female leadership and agency emerged, in this instance in the service of conservative politics. The next year saw the founding of The Daughters of the American Revolution, The Colonial Dames of America, The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America (curiously, not the same organization), and by 1894 the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Attending to the legacy of Southern elites was hardly a neutral historic enterprise in the decades following the Civil War, precisely at a point (1890) when 'separate but equal' emerged as a basic constitutional premise.

Meanwhile in the North, 1889 saw the publication in *Scribner's Magazine* of an extraordinary essay by the Harvard art history professor, Charles Eliot Norton. For anyone at all interested in the place of houses in America, "The Lack of Old Homes in America" is essential reading.⁷ As is clear from the title, Norton bemoans the irrelevance of the hereditary house for the United States. He understands it runs entirely counter to the logic of the industrial revolution, but he is none too pleased. Taking trains as a synecdoche for the larger production economy, he judges that "the railroad train brings the city newspaper and the outer world, opens the way to a larger, less concentrated, less friendly and domestic life, it brings strangers, it carries away neighbors, it empties homes." For Norton, the ancestral home is a site of memory, offering moral instruction: "birth and death, joy and sorrow, hope and disappointment all that men endure and enjoy, give to [an old home] a constantly increasing sanctity, and a power to affect the hearts of those who dwell within it." Norton questions the legitimacy of immigrants (for him "the confused mixture of the people"), the distribution of wealth based on principles of equality, the anonymity of urban life, the sameness of metropolitan centers, the emancipation of slaves, the decline of civic pride, the routine destruction of things in preparation for the next layer of construction, the failure of Americans to choose the permanence of the European ancestral home over the transience of the wigwam. While it is not always clear where observations end and normative claims begin, Norton's dissatisfaction is entirely clear: at stake is civilization itself.

⁷ Charles Eliot Norton. "The Lack of Old Homes in America." *Scribner's Magazine* 5 (May 1889): 637-40. It is available online for free.

Lest one imagine that it is simply wealth that Norton prizes, he goes after that, too, arguing that new money may be as great a threat to the ancestral home as any of the other things he targets. As a counter-example he points to the cottage, which he judges “may be as venerable as the hall.” Here it is hard not to think of the modest, honest cottages of the influential designer Andrew Jackson Downing, whose *Architecture of Country Houses* had appeared in 1850. Downing was crucial for interpreting the American home as a physical center of morality, and Norton’s essay is an entirely logical elaboration. Norton also invokes the writer Washington Irving, who in 1818 had visited England, writing about his visit in Stratford to Shakespeare’s Birthplace (already an unofficial tourist site) and then nearby Charlecote Hall. Norton looks to the sixteenth-century house as a model, arguing

“there are advantages belonging to Charlecote Hall, which do not attach to the wigwam or the tent. It was of the trees of Charlecote itself that Irving wrote that their size bespoke the growth of centuries, while they betoken also the long-settled dignity of an ancient family; and I have heard a worthy but aristocratic old friend observe, when speaking of the sumptuous palaces of the modern gentry, that money could do much with stone and mortar, but, thank heaven, there was no such thing as suddenly building up an avenue of oaks.”



Irving's Cottage

The reference to Irving brings to mind Sunnyside, Irving’s own cottage in Tarrytown, New York, the oldest portions of which date to the 1690s, though it is really an entirely Romantic house from the nineteenth century, with most of the construction completed around 1835. In tribute to America’s Dutch settlers, Irving went out of his way to make it look much more Dutch (among other things) than it ever was as an actual Dutch-American house. The cottage

was illustrated by Currier & Ives and was well known. It became a house museum in the 1940s after being acquired by John Rockefeller. Another New York example of the Romantic house is Olana, the home of the painter Frederic Church. Most of it was built in the early 1870s, though a new studio was added in 1889. In 1966 as developers threatened to raze the house, it appeared in *Life Magazine*, and was soon after purchased by the State of New York, which opened it to the

public.⁸ As we shall see, 1966 was the single most important year for preservation in the United States.

My last point regarding Norton's essay concerns one other crucial bit of context for both the essay and the broader history of American houses. It is difficult to overstate the strength of the colonial revivalist tide, from the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia straight through to the opening decades of the twentieth century. Coinciding with America's second great wave of immigration, which brought some 15 million new arrivals, not only from Europe (especially Germany) but also Russia, Turkey, and Asia, the colonial building style and colonial history served as one means of staking out a claim to what American-ness was or should be at its essence.⁹ Part of the problem, as Michael Holleran usefully observes in his essay on America's preservation movement in a transatlantic context, lay in the fact that there was no consensus as to whether a built environment constituting a heritage even existed in America. In contrast to Europe, where modernism emerged with a keen awareness of the past (whether one means by modernism, fifteenth century Florence or nineteenth century Paris), America had no obvious historic fabric.¹⁰ This explains, in part, why so much early activity was focused entirely upon a *narrative* of America history (great leaders, key events, &c.) and why it was not until the twentieth century, that *places* could begin to take priority.¹¹

1889 as a temporal coordinate helps us see various pressures at work in the forging of a national identity that is laying claim both to historical accounts and to material markers and remnants of those stories. Preservation was one route whereby those impulses found expression, but we should also bear in mind that this is an enormously productive period for the *construction* of great American houses.¹² 1889 is, for instance, the year that the Biltmore House in Asheville, North Carolina was built by William Morris Hunt for the aptly-named George Washington Vanderbilt II. Still in the possession of the family, this enormous house, the largest privately owned one in the United States, has been open to the public since 1930. The decades on either side of 1900 give us houses such as The Breakers and Rosecliff in Newport, Rhode Island, the J. P. Morgan home in New York (soon followed by the Frick), Ventford Hall in Lennox, Massachusetts (acquired by preservationists only in 1997), the Christian Heurich House in Washington, and the list could go on. My point is simply that we might do well to think about

⁸ David Huntington, "Must This Mansion Be Destroyed?: A Century-Old Refuge of Art and Splendor," *Life Magazine* (13 May 1966).

⁹ Donald Albrecht and Thomas Mellins, *The American Style*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Monacelli Press, 2011); James Lindgren, "'A Spirit that Fires the Imagination': Historic Preservation and Cultural Regeneration in Virginia and New England, 1850-1950," *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, Ed. by Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 107-30; and William Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and the Americanization of Immigrants," *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. by Alan Axelrod (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), pp. 341-61.

¹⁰ Holleran, "America's Early Historic Preservation Movement (1850-1930) in a Transatlantic Context," p. 186.

¹¹ I should note here that the Holleran essay appears in an outstanding recent volume, *Towards World Heritage* edited by Melanie Hall

¹² Clive Ashlet, *The American Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

the history of houses opening to the public alongside the history of newly constructed houses that would decades later themselves open to the public. The more we allow these two stories to speak to each other, the better. Otherwise, we run the risk of writing a history of preservation that reinforces the narrative of separation and exceptionalism upon which preservation itself tends to depend.

1900–45

Turning to the twentieth century: if I have slighted New England, I will try to right the imbalance with the enormously influential figure of William Sumner Appleton.¹³ From an old and wealthy Boston family, Appleton was educated at Harvard and studied under Norton. He led the campaign to save Paul Revere's Boston house in 1907, and while initially this may feel like more narrative, more attention to a great man of the Revolution, it is notable that this seventeenth century house was restored with respect to its earlier history rather than to the 1770s: architecture was emerging as a proper end of preservation in its own right. Appleton went on, in 1910, to found the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities,¹⁴ and he is widely credited with introducing substantive professionalism and method to the care of houses and preservation, including ways of de-accessioning sites that did not compromise their condition. At its height of ownership, Historic New England owned 55 properties; today it's down to 36. Appleton edited the *SPNEA Bulletin* and through his extensive correspondence exerted an even wider influence than the properties themselves generated.¹⁵

If nineteenth-century preservationists had trouble conceiving of historic protection beyond narratives of great men, Appleton's expansive grasp of historic significance remained focused on individual buildings, and in this regard he was entirely typical of the period leading up to the Second World War. For all the ways in which we might place historic preservation and stylistic modernism in opposition to each other, it seems to me that deeply modernist assumptions still shaped much of the activity of the twentieth century, even up to the 1970s.

The creation of the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916 bears this out in a particularly interesting manner. Enormous parks were created: Yosemite, Yellowstone, Glacier and others. Initially, the built element in National Park lands was incidental, but in the coming decades it would become part of the Service's mandate. Today the NPS is a major organization for historic

¹³ Michael Holleran, "Roots in Boston, Branches in Planning and Parks," *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, ed. by Randall Mason and Max Page (New York: Routledge, 2004); Holleran, "America's Early Historic Preservation Movement (1850-1930) in a Transatlantic Context"; James Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism, and the Remaking of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Lindgren, "'A Spirit that Fires the Imagination': Historic Preservation and Cultural Regeneration in Virginia and New England, 1850-1950."

¹⁴ Renamed Historic New England

¹⁵ Holleran, "America's Early Historic Preservation Movement (1850-1930) in a Transatlantic Context," p. 185.

houses, including the Petersen House in Washington, just across from the Ford's Theater, where Lincoln died (for a while it was officially known as The House Where Lincoln Died, and I imagine that is still how most visitors would describe it). And yet, the National Park Service was premised on a model not simply of preservation but of preservation via separation. The major parks had to be created as parks and *then* preserved. Playing out well-established European tropes of America as virgin territory, the service required the removal of Native American populations in pursuit of this notion of topographical purity.¹⁶ A major feature of American attitudes toward preservation seems to me to depend upon a notion of the sacred – sacred in a vague sense of religiosity, and all that goes along with civic or cultural religion – but also in the sense of being 'set apart'. Notions of regulation and management do not inspire the American spirit, but demarcating a site as preserved, 'saving' a site, has terrific currency. It is, of course, much easier to apply this approach to individual buildings rather than to streets or neighbourhoods.

This is one of the reasons why the Period Rooms in the American Wing at the Met proved so compelling to viewers when they opened in 1924. Winterthur might also be mentioned here. This desire to gather something authentic and then reassemble it within a newly constructed context connects these spaces to the outdoor museums being built at precisely the same time. Rockefeller's support of Williamsburg in Virginia is the most important example, along with Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Michigan, Strawberry Banke in New Hampshire, Old Salem in North Carolina, and Plimouth Plantation in Massachusetts.¹⁷



Colonial Williamsburg

¹⁶ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Park Service* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, pp. 78-115. For Williamsburg, in particular, see Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating a Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Duke University Press, 1997); and Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002). Also Jeremy Aynsley, "The Modern Period Room – A Contradiction in Terms?" in *The Modern Period Room 1870-1950: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior*, ed. By Trevor Keeble (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 8-30

An interesting counterpoint to Williamsburg is Charleston, which by the 1920s was poor and languishing, preservation by neglect as it were.¹⁸ At the same time that Rockefeller was pouring money into preservation at Williamsburg, his Standard Oil Company was decimating the historic fabric in Charleston. Ultimately, several hotly contested battles for sites – plans to tear down houses for building service stations and parking lots – galvanized Charleston’s preservation movement. This is what saved the Manigault House, for instance, but even more importantly, Charleston enacted zoning laws in 1931. It was the first instance in America of a city using zoning regulations for historic protection, and other cities followed suit: New Orleans, Annapolis, Philadelphia, Boston, and Alexandria.¹⁹

1945–2000

This chart gives you a quantitative sense of what has happened from the 1890s to 1940. Yet the history I have outlined is a prologue for what happens in the latter half of the twentieth century. From 1940 to the 1980s the number of house museums swells to 6000 by some accounts – probably far too low – and today the census ranges from between 12,000 and 15,000. Part of the problem, no doubt, lies in what is counted as a house museum.

I want only to note a couple of crucial developments in this age of expansion. First, there is enormous building activity of all sorts, especially urban renewal projects (projects that nearly always started with huge bouts of demolition) and the construction of the interstate highway system. An interesting approach to the subject of the American preservation might be simply to focus on the impact of the automobile (which, of course, replaces Norton’s pernicious railroads). There were commentators, even in the 1930s, who attributed the growing number of house museums to the rise of car ownership. The problem with interstates is that they tended to impose a model of continuous speed onto urban landscapes that formerly operated on the basis of blocks and stopping and starting. If whole neighborhoods were to be overpassed, or bypassed, or cut in two, whole neighborhoods were to die. And they did.

On the other hand, two enormously important things were achieved in the middle of the century. The National Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1949, empowering a public advocacy voice on the preservation scene. For although by this point important legislation and regulatory bodies had been created, including the National Park Service, there

¹⁸ Robert Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997* (University of South Carolina Press, 2000); and Robert Weyeneth, “Ancestral Architecture: The Early Preservation Movement in Charleston,” *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, ed. by Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 257-81.

¹⁹ Brian Greenfield, “Marketing the Past: Historic Preservation in Providence, Rhode Island,” *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, ed. by Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 163-84, esp. p. 164; and Diane Lea, “America’s Preservation Ethos: A Tribute to Enduring Ideals,” p. 7.

was no clear national face of preservation in the United States. The National Trust provided that leadership, and, in part, as a result of recommendations from the Trust, 1966 saw the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, far and away the single most important legislation for the American preservation story. Until this point, there had actually been incentives to *tear down* buildings. Creating a National Historic Register that recognized historical significance not only in terms of contributions to a national narrative (a high bar indeed) but the importance of local significance as well, the 1966 act instituted funding and created a federal oversight council, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. It empowered local efforts while simultaneously providing a national framework. That the National Trust could do. Starting in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s and 90s, its policy of addressing preservation in terms of Main Streets and neighborhoods points to a major shift in how the country conceived of historic significance. This growing appreciation for an expanded context of preservation is exciting, and we might add to it recent efforts to protect views. In 2008 the National Trust placed the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens on its endangered list not because the house itself was in danger but because developers were planning to build three high-rise condominium towers on the adjacent property. The good news is that two court rulings blocked the new construction until viewshed protection could be added to Miami's new zoning code in 2010 (following in principle the examples established by Charleston). Another recent and widely trumpeted success of the National Trust was the acquisition in 2003 of Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, just outside Chicago, an example suggesting that whatever changes, acquiring and caring for houses is still a crucial part of the story.

In closing, I will note one of the most exciting shifts: the gradual growth of heritage to include African-American stories and audiences. Slave narratives are at least beginning to receive their due at many former plantation sites, and African-Americans are being addressed as ideal consumers by ad campaigns. This development seems to mark a point at which Americans in the twenty-first century engage the difficult question of what exactly we think it means to be an American and what role the built historic environment plays in how we claim those identities.²⁰

There are, of course, lots of other ways this paper could have proceeded. It would be interesting, for instance, to think of New York as the center of the story, rather than Virginia; or Philadelphia, or Boston. And I have said next to nothing about sites beyond the East Coast. I trust, however, that this paper is a useful introduction to the subject, heightening interest and raising questions about the American house museum's future.

²⁰ Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

- Newport: A Case Study in Preserving Great Houses, Great Landscapes and a Great City -

John Tschirch

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Newport is a city where historic houses and the act of preserving them have helped revitalise both the built environment and the city's cultural and economic life. Let us go back to 1789 and *The First Geography of the United States*, written by Jedediah Morse. It is a classic example of how in America – in any culture really – you start with what is around you, your natural landscape. In his geography, without a long historic built heritage, Morse was looking at those places that defined American culture. This is what he had to say about Newport, Rhode Island, which sits at the very end of the Aquidneck Island in the middle of the bay: 'The island is exceedingly pleasant and healthful; and is celebrated for its fine women. Travellers, with propriety, call it the Eden of America'. What better advertising slogan could you have for an historic community?

Of course, it had a rich history, Newport emerged in 1639 as a great colonial seaport. In the latter half of the 1600s Charles II granted the Colonial Charter to the colony, codifying the principle of religious tolerance. All of a sudden, swarms of Sephardic Jews settled in town bringing their business acumen with them, as well as Quakers. Already in the eighteenth century, Newport was a free-wheeling, free-partying, free-trading zone, sometimes a shady place for shady people, sometimes a place for great divines and great statesmen. That was the eighteenth-century city and then it burgeoned through the nineteenth century into one of America's most famous and fashionable resorts. How did preservation come into the fold? It came in during a crisis. *LIFE* magazine in 1944 called Newport 'a fading place'. The article suggested that though Newport still had its great summer cottages, income tax was slowly depleting that lifestyle. Here is what the article [October 16th, 1944] says: 'They [the mansions] stand in stately rows along Bellevue Avenue in Newport, Rhode Island, once the richest street in the world. Since the passing of the gilded age that these houses symbolize, two wars, a long depression, high income taxes and a shortage of servants have dimmed Newport's splendour. The doors of these villas will never be open again'.

Here is a view of the eighteenth-century city from the harbour, with Trinity Church from 1726. In America, frequently, it was antiquarian interest in the pre-revolutionary period that initially prompted preservationists. And Newport was no different. Redwood Library from 1748, one of the first temple-fronted buildings in British North America, designed by Peter Harrison, armed

with his architectural pattern books, is still in continuous use. And Touro Synagogue, also by Peter Harrison from 1762 is a brilliant adaptive classical design for a synagogue in America. There is the interior with its twelve columns representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The Preservation Society of Newport County, formed in 1945, was first attention was drawn first to the eighteenth century when our founding member and President, Mrs Warren, became worried about the Nichols-Wanton Hunter House (1748), situated right in the Point district of Newport, overlooking Newport Harbor. It was acquired in 1945, purely from antiquarian interest, the house was considered one of the finest Georgian houses in America, but what is notable about this story is the pediment. It was the craftsmanship of eighteenth-century Newport that fascinated people. This house was saved by a committee including Mrs George Henry Warren, who was very good friends with the Rockefellers. She was a collector of early modern art and first met the Rockefellers while serving on the board of MOMA with them. Then she was led to their work at Colonial Williamsburg. She once remarked that she never had a master plan for Newport, and that she didn't have the Rockefeller pocketbook. She had to save what she could save. And they first set out to save this eighteenth-century part of town.

I want to share the story of what we could call the Travelling Pineapple. Here today is Hunter House, with its celebrated supposedly eighteenth-century doorway, the pineapple a symbol of great wealth; the only other place in town the pineapple appears is the Colony House (1739-55), which would greet you the minute you got off your ship at the end of Long Wharf. In the 1870s, the American architect, Charles Follen McKim, of the great firm of McKim, Mead and White, took the Hunter House pineapple and moved it down the street and created a rather quaint Queen Anne revival doorway. In the 1920s it was moved to the front of the house. Then in 1945 when the Preservation Society restored Hunter House, we supposedly brought it back and it finally travelled to Hunter House. But only ten years ago, with the help of Historic New England, we did some analysis, and found that only parts of this pineapple are original to the eighteenth century. But it is the myth that is important. The interiors are superb, and this house was conceived of as an exhibition building for the finest of the arts and crafts of eighteenth-century Newport. And in 1953, once the building itself was restored, a loan exhibition was created and this put eighteenth-century Newport back on the map. It was Mrs Warren's version of Colonial Williamsburg. So there was this iconic build up of eighteenth-century objects that linked Newport to the great and the good of colonial America.

Then the Preservation Society realised it had to turn its attention to other places. From the 1940s to the early sixties, the Preservation Society was focused on the eighteenth century. But in the 1960s the rise of modernism threatened nineteenth-century fabric. In the early nineteenth century, Newport was a fashionable watering hole and it gradually became a laboratory for

architectural experimentation, as almost every major American designer came to Newport. The Romantic poet, William Cullen Bryant, an advocate of architecture and landscape in nineteenth-century America and a promoter of Central Park, said about Newport in 1872, 'Cottages, cottages, everywhere there are cottages, regardless of expense'. It was the place where an American architect would come to make his reputation.

I will discuss some of the houses owned by the Preservation Society, the role of the Preservation Society as a model of historic preservation, some of the latest challenges the Preservation Society has faced, and some of our newest initiatives.



Kingscote

Kingscote was built in 1839-41 by Richard Upjohn for a southern family, at the very head of Bellevue Avenue, when Bellevue Avenue was simply a dirt road. This was a reputation-maker: two years after designing this house Upjohn would receive the commission to redesign Trinity Church on Wall Street, the street of the stockbrokers. The King family would live in the house until 1972 and would give it to the Preservation Society as a complete document, which is very rare in America. Kingscote is an example of a fully documented, inventoried and archived house with family letters to go along with it. Their house is filled with China trade objects, and such things as a mosaic top table from the Vatican workshops acquired when they went on the Grand Tour, and a painting of the Roman campagna from the 1870s by David Maitland Armstrong, a friend of Stanford White and Louis Comfort Tiffany. They all gathered at Kingscote, it was like a culture camp of nineteenth-century Newport and David Maitland's son would marry into the family. In 1880, McKinley and White created a dining room with an entire wall of Tiffany glass at the back. Newport would become one of the most active centers for progressive design, bringing the ideas of the English Arts and Crafts movement and the English Aesthetic movement to the country. In 1957 Kingscote was endangered, the Ocean House Hotel once stood across the street and in that year it was demolished to make way for a shopping

centre. A shopping centre would also appear in 1958 to the north. The Preservation Society was given this house in 1973 as a bequest of its last owner, and King family descendant, Mrs. Anthony Barclay Rives.

The next house on the Avenue I wish to discuss is Chateau-sur-Mer (1852), the most important Newport house of the 1850s, built for a retired China trade merchant, William Shepard Wetmore. He engaged Richard Morris Hunt to redesign the house. Hunt created the most palatial house in town, at least until the 1890s. This house is an example of the Preservation Society's approach to the future, which is based on a few central ideas. The first is a new approach to collections management, we are digitizing our collections entirely. We have 55,000 decorative objects, and 1800 specimen trees on 88 acres of historic landscape across the city. And of course, with that we are looking into our archives and this is a house rich in that story. Newport has always been a place where Americans were commenting on the house, its social implications, the rise of the rich, the rise of the famous, and the role of the house as part of the American Dream.



Chateau-sur-Mer

We are photographing every last detail of all of our houses, but Chateau-sur-Mer is first. From the exterior, this place is legendary but the complexity and richness of the collections is not known. The preservation story in this house is remarkable in that Chateau-sur-Mer looks today the way it does in spite of a huge auction held there in 1966. In that year a grand Victorian house like this was seen merely as a setting for those popular American television shows with ghoulish characters like "The Munsters" and "The Addams Family". Historic revivalism was considered a corrupt bourgeois style from a bygone era in the very modern, forward-looking 1960s.

Henry the butler, the last witness to the past, in 1962, was photographed by a photographer, who by some miracle gained entry to all of the most fashionable houses. I think they must have

been intrigued by her. Her name was Nancy Sirkis and she caught images of these houses on the edge of the abyss. We now show these photographs as part of the interpretation of the building. She said to Henry who had served Miss Edith Wetmore for 40 years, 'Could you put more silver on the table?' He said, 'You don't understand, if I put more silver on the table it would mean it was dinnertime, I'd have to change my jacket'. It showed a disconnect between the values that once informed that house and the modern world's understanding of it. When Mrs Warren saved the house with the Preservation Society, she said, 'I could not just save the house but we could not let the grounds of Chateau-sur-Mer go.'" With its magnificent weeping beech trees, its magnolia from Mongolia, its Kentucky coffee tree, the landscape matters. This was the first time, in 1966, that the landscape is specifically mentioned as a preservation feature – landscapes frequently came last in a way in America, it was the house that mattered.

But there is a new threat, as well-preserved as the house itself is. In 1965, Newport passed a Historic District Ordinance, creating the historic district of the town to protect it, but it did not include protection of the gates, fences and all the street features of Newport. The entrance gate to Chateau-sur-Mer, composed of two neo-Grec style obelisks designed by Morris Hunt himself, and the plantings in front of it, were designed by the Olmsted brothers, sons of the great Frederick Law Olmsted: if by right you were the private owner, you could tear this down. We received a grant and we are creating an inventory of all these historic gates and wrought iron fences and designed features on Bellevue Avenue which we will present to the City Council so that they can be preserved for the future. One of the most important gates is at the very beginning of Bellevue Avenue, the Egyptian Revival Gates designed by Isaiah Rogers but not protected right now, but they will be protected after the inventory is done in 2013.

The Isaac Bell House (1881-83), saved in 1994 is shown empty as a work of art. If Kingscote, two houses up, is fully documented, and Chateau-sur-Mer went through a famous auction and we received some of the original things back, the Isaac Bell House was lived in only for a few years by its owners. Produced by McKim, Mead and White in the 1880s, it is one of the most remarkable buildings in American architectural history. It is the one great work of innovative design in Newport. We share it with the visitors as a work of architectural design and show how the open plan of the building was revolutionary and how the architecture looks to history as a source for design features, with which they created



Isaac Bell House

something entirely new. A Romanesque apse inspired the front porch, while the bamboo style porch supports were inspired by the Japanese pavilion they had seen at Philadelphia Centennial. The dolphin brackets one sees as you enter the house were inspired by Italian Renaissance sources known to Charles McKim, who was the third American to attend the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He was a true connoisseur of historic ornament. When you enter the building, it has a completely organic color palette, with the central living hall inspired by Richard Norman Shaw's houses in England, here an old English house on the left, a Japanese house on the right. At this house, we focus on design culture of the time.



Interior of Isaac Bell House

Moving on to the Gilded Age and the other projects that we are working on, Newport is famed for houses like the great Marble House, the creation of Alva Vanderbilt and her architect Richard Morris Hunt in 1888-92. America was becoming more imperial and so was the architecture and Hunt could finally do here what he could only dream about as a student at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. I want to use this house to talk about collections research. A new level of research has begun at the Preservation Society. We have started a fellowship programme, gathering of scholars who stay with us for a year to look at the collections of a building like this and others. This is the Gold Room of Marble House. It is our version of shock and awe, the dining room in pink Numidian marble, the ceiling of the dining room in four shades of glazed gold leaf, all done by Allard of Paris, the decorator who worked with Hunt. And two paintings in the collection have created quite a buzz. The entire dining room was designed around a collection of royal French portraiture, such as the Duke and Duchess of Mantua, formerly known as the Duke and Duchess of Orléans, by Hyacinthe Rigaud. By posting things on the website and sending images out to our peers, we have discovered this is a missing Hyacinthe Rigaud. People are blogging about it throughout the French art world and so it shows how the research we are doing has developed a new interest level and a new community of stakeholders. Marble House may have been built for parties and hosted some

legendary ones, but it also had another purpose. Mrs Vanderbilt knew her history well. In her unpublished autobiography she said 'I thought of Marble House as my temple to the arts in America,' and she saw herself and her husband William Kissam Vanderbilt as American Medici. Once she had gained social power through her husband, she gained cultural power through her architecture. Then she gained political power, so that the Conference of Great Women was held at the house in 1914, and she became very interested in the women's suffrage movement.

One of our greatest houses, The Breakers (1895), is one of the most visited houses in America, always in the top ten after Monticello and Mount Vernon and Biltmore, which was the home of Cornelius Vanderbilt's younger brother. 800,000 visitors a year come to us, half a million to this house alone. There was a sea change in this house, we had always had guided tours; we went to audio-tours. It has been a very freeing experience. It was a house so famous from the moment it began construction that they documented, month by month, the two-year construction period of the building. It was celebrated in *American Architectural Record* and the like.

We have a stop in The Breakers tour called 'Arguing about the Breakers'. To quote the audio tour, 'Everyone has always had an opinion about this house. In 1896 the critic Montgomery Scholar was quite pleased with what he saw: "The Breakers is an entirely decorous and correct villa. The whole gives an impression of a gentleman's mansion." But opinions change. By 1907 the writer Henry James was calling grand Newport mansions like this 'white elephants'. In 1979 architectural historian Leonard Eaton wrote the following in the *Architectural Forum*, and I quote: 'The Breakers is bad architecture. An incredible display of tasteless vulgarity. Should something with so little real architectural merit be maintained?' Antoinette Downing, the great preservationist, had an answer for him, as follows: 'As a study in taste and wealth and social patterns, the Breakers offers an authentic picture of a facet of American life. For the curious and the scholarly, to castigate, admire, reject or interpret to his or her own likes or dislikes.' We believe in doing a critical approach to history rather than just representing on viewpoint. We have modeled the entire interpretation of this grand house on multiple perspectives and we let the visitor make their own decisions about great spaces like the Great Hall. We also share the story of the house since it opened to the public in 1948. The one thing we have in abundance is glamour.



The Great Hall, The Breakers

I am going to finish with The Elms. It is a remarkable story. The house was threatened in 1960 with an auction and the newspapers began to cover this. In 1962, the *New York Times* wrote: 'An auctioneer's ivory gavel sounded on this breezy blue afternoon in The Elms. The sale to settle the estate had legal, financial and social overtones that were pure Newport. The changes in Newport have also involved striking contrasts. The Elms looks today like a haunted museum, Villa Rosa, a ruin, Stoneacre a few blocks away, just about to be demolished'. But the Preservation Society acquired this building. It was the ultimate stopgap in the destruction of historic sites in Newport. And here was what Cleveland Amory had to say when it was finally saved, 'The battle of The Elms began early this year when a nephew of Miss Berwind, who inherited the cottage, sold it to a New York syndicate and the latter promptly made plans for subdividing the property. If this had happened, Newporters agree, you could have written off old Newport or at least that part of it which comprised the world-famous cottages on Bellevue Avenue. Already half a dozen have either been torn down for shopping centres or given away to churches or schools. Newport's Armageddon, in other words, had come. Whichever way The Elms blew, Newport was going and here the Preservation Society leaped into the breach.' Once this house was saved in 1962 and opened, the Society began to organise the charge to create the historic district, which was finally achieved in 1965.



Ernest Birch and Grace Rhodes

Finally, the servants. We have opened a servants' tour this year to talk about other community stakeholders. I've talked about the great and the good, preservation issues, collections management and the importance of research: at the Elms, we now bring people downstairs. We show the kitchen, the coal tunnel, the servants' quarters and most importantly a remarkable stash of servant photographs. We did not do this project alone. An entire community of people aided with this project. This photograph shows Ernest Birch and his wife, the cook Grace Rhodes. We do not show furniture in the Servants' Rooms, we have no furniture, we talk about the auction and the loss of furnishings and we talk here about preserving something else, the human voice, the human opinion, the multiple perspective. And we show these photographs alone, one in each room, and we talk about how their descendants have given us all these photographs. And so now, their

descendants come back to visit The Elms because The Elms also belongs now to them and their descendants. In conclusion, we developed the idea of embracing several different communities, whether they are scholars, day visitors or the descendants of all who inter-related with that building. The tour has tripled attendance. Who knew that would happen?

- Falling Down: The Current State of the Historic House in America -

Sean Sawyer
Executive Director, The Royal Oak Foundation

For the past two years I have worked with Royal Oak. However, that is not what brings me to the podium today. What I am here today to talk about is my front-line experience, of nearly seven years, running a small house museum in New York, the Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum. This is a very personal talk, about my history, but also about history. I want to emphasise that I do not count myself as a great authority on the historic house museum, American or otherwise, but what I am hoping to share with you is some of the lessons I have taken from my experience at Wyckoff, as well as some broader musings about the dysfunctional world of the small house museum in America. I hope that this might be thought-provoking for both staff and boards and for the larger authorities, governmental or charitable, that have a role of shaping the future of the house museum.

When one thinks about the house museum in America, the first that come to mind are the great houses: the cottages of Newport, Winterthur, Biltmore, Monticello, Mount Vernon, Hearst Castle and the list goes on. Perhaps new establishments such as the Gilded Age mansion of Chicago banker Samuel Nickerson, reborn in 2003, as the Richard H Driehaus Museum in Chicago. However, these are the exceptions, architecturally, historically or philanthropically exceptional places that are either well-endowed or capable of attracting sustained public and private interest and support, their budgets are in the millions, and their visitors in the hundreds of thousands. They have their ups and downs financially and interpretatively, but they generally have endowment or other reserve funds and a national presence amongst both public and private funders, and they can attract the best and the brightest for their staffs and their boards.

But whereas at the most these houses number in the dozens, maybe a hundred or so, what number in the thousands are the small, usually vernacular houses that are not even well known within their own city or town. The Jonathan Hasbrouck House was the first house museum in America, acquired by the State of New York in 1850 and still operated by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation as the Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site. These are places whose annual budgets are in the tens of thousands, or less, and whose monthly visitors are in the hundreds or less, and the latter is not generally a bad thing, because unlike the mansions of the élite that were designed and engineered to accommodate dozens of staff and guests in addition to the resident family, these are houses that were not built to bear the weight of the thundering feet of hundreds of visitors a day and are, therefore,

fundamentally ill-suited to function as public museums. Perhaps it is not unexpected that these are places whose transition from house to museum is frequently ill-conceived and poorly implemented. These are places that may have regionally or even nationally important stories to tell, and whose preservation was just as hard fought as that of the big house, but I would hazard that for eight out of ten of small historic houses in America the body has been preserved, but the life and soul are gone. These are zombie houses. No-one knows exactly how many small house museums there are in America, I have heard estimates of 5,000, 8,000, 10,000, 15,000. If you define that category as any structure that has been preserved with a collection for the educational benefit of the public, I believe that they can be found in at least 75% of the 25,000 politically organised communities in the US. So, let us say 18,000, maybe 20,000, small historic houses in America.

Witness, for instance, this early nineteenth-century schoolhouse, preserved on the green in my home town, East Burke, Vermont. Thousands upon thousands of these small house museums are unrecognised, under-staffed, under-funded and under-utilised. Those operated by local government or small town historical societies are often the sacred precinct of a local caste of preservationists and village history guardians that actively or passively restrict access. As is the case in East Burke. The door is open in this photograph, but I can tell you in practice, in the over forty years that I have lived in or regularly visited East Burke, it is about the third time that I have seen the door open. In many cases these are structures that simply have been saved, and given little or no thought since. They are silent totems of the past, drive-by history. As long as the roof is not falling in, 90% of residents think all is well, and why shouldn't they? Believe me, it is a lot more fun to drive by one of these house museums at thirty miles an hour with the radio on than it is to actually visit them.

Those houses owned by state authorities have a bit more presence, more access to professional staff and advice and to limited state-wide grant programmes, but they are generally under the control of parks and recreational authorities, for whom the green space surrounding them is a higher priority than the house and collections, which are most quickly abandoned when tax revenues fall and budgets are cut. Our current recession has seen widespread closures of state-run historic sites across the US from New York State to California.

Not everything is quite so bleak. Houses and sites that are run by larger regionally focussed non-profits, such as Historic New England or the Trustees of Reservations in Massachusetts or Newport Preservation, are inherently more stable, benefitting from professional staff and boards, and at least theoretically open to current interpretative and educational innovations. Indeed, balancing the conservation and curatorial concerns of the professional staff with the

increasing imperative to become more accessible and meaningful is one of their biggest challenges. But these are the lucky houses, they are part of strong, vital and stable organisations that, whatever the cycles of public and museological opinion, make their historic properties one of their highest priorities.

On a national level, however, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) has not put the 27 historic sites it operates at the top of its priorities. Their website shows that they see themselves primarily as a preservation advocacy organisation. It has a relatively small holding of core properties that on the homepage are below the scroll bar, so you have to search them out. The recent lay-off of the senior staff and the elimination of programmes at one of its flagship houses, Lyndhurst on the Hudson River just twenty miles north of New York City, one of the largest and most loved historic houses in the country, sends the message to the outside world that the NTHP would like to be out of the historic house business. The job-posting for the chief executive position made it clear that the NTHP is putting its properties out on their own to scavenge for support with the swarming historic house hoards. The positive spin of course is that staff are being forced to cut the apron strings of bureaucracy and build local support and engagement. And indeed, this is the dominant entrepreneurial model of historic house management in America, and this is a world that I know first-hand from my nearly seven years running the Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum.



Wyckoff Farmhouse

I came to Wyckoff with no prior experience or even classwork in public history or historic site management or fundraising. I had recently completed my dissertation at Columbia on Sir John Soane's work at the Palace of Westminster, and I was searching for a way forward. Quite a wrench, it was.

And that was occasioned by a deeply personal reason, which was that I had made a decision along with my partner and our two female friends to become parents. So one Sunday afternoon I was reading through the New York Times and saw an ad that said 'Would you like to run New York City's oldest House?' I was intrigued, I discovered that this was the Pieter Claesen Wyckoff House in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. I applied, the hiring process was overseen by a typically complex trio of the site owner (the New York City

Department of Parks and Recreation), the site manager or Licensee (the Wyckoff House and Association), and the intermediary non-profit, the Historic House Trust, which had been established by the Parks Department to support the historic houses it took over from the Department of Cultural Affairs in the mid 1980s. After running a gauntlet of Parks grandees and Wyckoff descendants – those were very interesting job interviews – I got the job as Executive Director of the Wyckoff House and Association. This heavily restored Dutch American farmhouse sat on its original mid-seventeenth-century site in a public park of about an acre in far eastern Brooklyn, fifteen minutes from JFK, in an area that I had never been to, in a Caribbean-American community that was new and alien to me. The house had been closed for several years, patrolled by the caretaker, a long-suffering Jewish hippie-stoner and his Rottweiler. There were no other staff, no programmes, no presence in the community or museum world, the office consisted of a 1980s electric typewriter on a dusty Formica-topped desk in one of the bedrooms. So after I had finished pulling the dead rats from the floor, I bought a computer.

What was next, how do you make a house museum from scratch? So I started with what I did know: history. I plunged myself into New Netherlands and New York history, especially the history of King's County, which is now what we call Brooklyn today, and the Dutch in America. What was this place and where did it come from? I think it is important for you in understanding the path I took to share three important historical revelations that came out of my study in the first month or so on the job, that really served as the historical anchors for my vision at Wyckoff – I think this speaks to what we have heard all weekend, the importance of research and particularly archival research. I was inspired particularly by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, which has a wonderfully expansive vision, to promote tolerance and historical perspective by presenting the diversity of the immigrant experience.

That is what was in my mind. First, the most fundamental element of history – people. The Wyckoffs were one of the most prominent landowning families in King's County, and this house I was in charge of had been but one of an interconnected set of farmsteads across the county of this extended family. But their ancestry was much more than simply Dutch, Dutch was really a label that was given to the people of diverse Northern European origin who came to the New Netherlands in the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century. And, having driven off the native peoples, the Canarsie and the Delaware, they thrived, had large families and clung tenaciously to the land through seven or eight generations. There were also some much more recent European immigrants, first in the nineteenth century from Ireland and Germany and then the Italians. With each of these immigrant groups came new crops, from potatoes to zucchini.

Perhaps most interestingly, there were Africans on the farm, right alongside the Wyckoffs, from the very beginning. In the seventeenth century some were free men, Atlantic world sailors settling down, but soon free men were the exception and the enslaved toiled the land in increasing numbers, and in the first census of 1790, enslaved Africans accounted for a third of King's County's population, or about 2,000 souls. Slave-holding was widespread with 60-75% of white families owning slaves. It was only over the vociferous objections of King's County's representatives in the New York State Legislature that the Gradual Emancipation Act of 1799 was passed. This provided for the end of enslavement on July 4th 1827, a symbolic date comprising the horrible calculus that by that date a child born to an enslaved mother in 1799 would have worked out his or her healthy adult life and have no more value. This was the first revelation, that while the city of Brooklyn had been a wellspring of the anti-slavery movement, King's County as a whole had been a society dependent on slavery right into the nineteenth century. History was much more complex, much more interesting than just North and South, and much more tangible as Wyckoff's archives were full of information on this history, slave bills, transactions between families relating to slavery and enslavement.

The next revelation: Brooklyn had been one of the most productive and wealthy agrarian economies in the country until almost the moment the farms were eradicated. Western Long Island was one of the few places in the New Netherlands that saw sustained and successful settlement, so much so that the English were kept at bay. This was largely because it was the most fertile land in the region, the glaciers of the last ice age had ground to a halt in this very place and as they melted this fertile outwash plain of rich topsoil from Canada and New England was released and the Southern ocean shore was pierced with navigable tidal inlets, teeming with food, oysters as big as dinner plates. The tides powered the mills that ground the grain that made the Brooklyn Dutch, along with slavery, very wealthy and very insular. Historic King's County consisted of six villages, each with a small nucleus defined by a church, and then dispersed farmsteads along country roads across incredibly fertile flat fields and marshlands. As the cities of the region grew, the farms only became more profitable, grain was given up for market crops and by 1880, King's County was the number two producer of agricultural products in America, right behind neighbouring Queens County.

The final revelation was that Brooklyn's farms and farming communities vanished within a generation, from 1890 to 1930. Nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialization spread from the county's western edge, where Long Island rubs up against Manhattan, and one-by-one the villages became city. As village after village merged politically with Brooklyn, and the Leviathan of the grid extended eastwards, Dutch-American land-owners were active participants, generations on the land were sacrificed for a lifetime's profits paid as a lump sum.

Flatlands was the last village to be incorporated into Brooklyn in 1896, and the last area to be urbanised, in the 1930s and 1950s. This community, that in the twenty-first century depended upon run-down supermarkets and small corner bodegas for road-weary fruit and vegetables, had once been the cornucopia of the nation. This was the bigger historical picture that was needed, I felt, to encourage potential visitors. It wasn't included in any of the generally available materials of the Wyckoff Association or the Parks Department at the time that I came to Wyckoff.

But what the materials did present was also important, the history of eight generations of the Wyckoff family in the house, a family that originated at this site, one single couple, Pieter Claesen and Grietje Van Ness who took the surname Wijckoff under the yoke of English taxation in the 1680s and had eleven children, all of whom survived into adulthood. This was a truly remarkable American story of frontier survival and colonial success, a family now spread across North America from this one point. Here are Wyckoff descendants, some of the tens of thousands in every walk of life, who gathered in the 1930s to form a genealogical association, seen here at the Sherman Square Hotel on March 4th 1939, the three hundredth anniversary of their progenitors' arrival in New York harbour.

I also approached this place with the idea that this was public property, it had to have meaning, it had to have a public purpose. I was still looking for the bolt of lightning that would make this history meaningful for me so that I could make it meaningful to the man or the woman on the street. I was in essence searching for the soul of this zombie house. So I looked to my own emotions not just about the house but about the place that it was in. What was uncommon about Wyckoff and its survival was that it was in its original location, despite the incredible displacement of urbanization. I realised that I needed to understand how it had survived when so much else had vanished so ruthlessly. So as a child of the 1980s, I found my emotional touchstone in Duran Duran's song 'Ordinary World', a ballad of unrequited love and loss with its melancholy hopefulness.

It was through this emotional lens that I could understand the survival of the house. This was in large part an accident of fate: the land-marking of the house as the first New York City Landmark in 1965 and its restoration, completed in 1983, were accomplished against huge odds. Wyckoff descendants, most of them female, had petitioned city hall and won, but what resulted was a fenced-in monument to loss and anxiety that had never found a meaning in the tumult of the modern world. The Wyckoffs wanted to save the house but they did not want to run a public museum. I saw that the way forward was to wholeheartedly embrace the here and now, Wyckoff the native was now an alien on its own foundations, a fragment of a lost world that

desperately needed to bridge the traumas of urbanisation to reconnect with the ordinary world of today.

I realized that this acre of green space, reclaimed from gas stations and junkyards, should be precious public space in this densely built urban community and if that we could create an active, engaged and meaningful cultural resource in partnership with the community, hopefully we could create a sense of ownership among local residents and businesses and break down the metaphorical fence that surrounded the property. Outside the real fence it was gritty, noisy and urban, but this was a thriving community of attached single-family homes, a multitude of schools and businesses big and small. And most of all, people who wanted a connection, even if they did not know it at first. This had to be a vision that could embrace the Wyckoffs, my employers, especially new generations of the family, and the local African-American and Caribbean-American communities.

I had some crucial allies. Patricia Lilly had lived in the community for forty years and worked for one of the local politicians. She called me on my first day at work and said “Welcome to East Flatbush, I’ve been waiting for you”. That was a great welcome and eventually she became the first person of colour to be a Wyckoff board member in the organisation’s 75-year history. There was city council man and political boss Lou Fidler, who had grown up around the corner, and in the first month or two I was at Wyckoff, I queued up at Lou’s storefront office with dozens of people seeking his intervention and godfather-like favour. I moved through this queue up to his chair and asked for his help in getting to know the local communities. A few weeks later, I received a list of names of community activists and other interested local people and I spent hours on the phone and going to local meetings and eventually formed a community advisory board, representing a range of constituencies, including the Parks Department and the Historic House Trust. The advisory board provided a great source of ideas and support for public programmes. They were also an important counterbalance to the Wyckoffs. One of the first things we did was change the house’s name to the aspirational Wyckoff Farm House Museum and Education Center. Soon Wyckoff was on the local map, and in 2005 our community advisory board was highlighted by the National Park Service as a national model at its conference on civic engagement in New York City.

In developing programmes, we took the typical historic house approach, creating a calendar of public events and an on-site school visit program, but we tied these to the site’s historical anchors to make them relevant. The key phrase that became the museum’s tagline was ‘the diverse peoples of Brooklyn’s colonial farms’. Our public events did not treat history too sacredly, they were meant to be fun, bringing people from the community together on the site, a

celebration of community pride, whether for East Flatbush or for the broader Irish-American or Caribbean-American communities. I worked very closely with our local and state-elected officials on public events, realising that the property could become a cultural centre for the area and a place where politicians would come to meet and greet and be photographed giving out handshakes and awards at events like our Mothers' Day Tea and Tulip Festival. This was what made a historic site relevant for them, and it led to substantial regular funding for our school program. Our school program had a hands-on focus in keeping with the active nature of farm life, and engaged broader topics and curricula, not just history but science as well. Thanks to some remarkable young museum educators, within two years we had a reputation as the best historic house school program in the city and were drawing schools from incredible distances, public schools in the South Bronx, arriving in yellow busses with paper bag lunches, or elite Upper East Side schools arriving on air-conditioned coaches with catered hampers. Again, we were successful but not extraordinary, representative of any dynamic entrepreneurial historic house.

What was transformative was making a programmatic connection between the site's agrarian history and our communities' current needs for healthy food and job skills training for youth, through our Community Demonstration Garden project. This was an inter-related series of programs centred around an organic market garden, planned and maintained by local high school-age kids, who learned both horticultural and entrepreneurial skills, selling produce at our weekly farmers' market. I have to give a lot of credit for this to our brilliant young partner Phil Forsyth, a young idealistic permaculture guru, who was also an excellent grant-writer and a creative force behind the Wyckoff Farm, as it became known. The Farm generated much PR and many grants, including a federal grant from the Department of Environmental Protection, but most of all, it gave the historic farm an elemental meaning in the lives of the people who lived around it. The wonderful flipside of this was that it also created a whole new level of meaning for the house for a new generation of Wyckoffs, as far away as Seattle, particularly those with the ability and inclination to be philanthropic.

Simultaneously, I developed a major capital construction program that included reconstructing elements of the historic landscape, putting the nineteenth-century road line back in as the approach and creating a kitchen garden at the side of the house, but our successes were running up against the inherent limitations of a five-room farm house as a public museum. From the moment that I had discovered historic photos of the house with its barns, I realised that recreating a barn for the farmhouse museum was absolutely necessary. Until the house had a barn again its identity as an agrarian museum would be a half-truth hobbling through history. This big project was named the Wyckoff-Durling Barn Education Center, after the Wyckoff

descendents in central Jersey whose magnificent H-bent wooden frame was to be re-erected as the core of a new museum facility, to take pressure off the historic house and dramatically enhance the museum's facilities, providing in its lower very modern floor, restrooms, which we did not have, office space, which we did not have except for the bedroom, archival storage space for that important core collection. Above, the historic barn was to be restored to provide facilities for programmes out of the weather, as well as rentable space. This turned out to be a compelling project and within three years of presenting it to community groups and funders, I had raised over \$6 million, a huge amount in our context, we had received Landmarks approval and begun the incredibly complex design and construction process, when I decided to leave Wyckoff.

Why did I leave? A big factor was just burn out, this was exhausting work, mentally and physically, and just driving across New York City twice a day from my home in Northern Manhattan, going through 75 stop lights twice a day for seven years, it was incredibly trying. There was the added pressure of constant fundraising. Despite all our successes, I was still uncertain about meeting payroll every two weeks, including my own, and it was life on the edge and in the spotlight. I was the house, for the community boards I met with, for the Wyckoffs I worked for, and for the Parks Department, whom I had to constantly placate and persuade to take on even the smallest of tasks; it once took me six weeks to get a bulb changed in the security lights. And of course, there are always playgrounds and beaches that have more natural constituents, parents and senior citizens, voters, demanding a piece of an ever-smaller Parks Department budget. And the Historic House Trust also provided ever-diminishing support: the more successful I was, the less they felt they needed to support me: after all there were 22 other sites that they were responsible for across New York City, and many of them in much worse shape.

The great irony of our success at Wyckoff was that we were now competing directly with the Historic House Trust for funding and especially from the few private foundations who had an interest in historic preservation. So it was a great frustration in my work and for my colleagues running other houses around the city that the accomplishments that the Historic House Trust had to put forward to its funders were actually our work, on the ground at the houses, which they were very distant from in practice. So I did not earn any friends at Parks and the Trust by speaking up at the Directors' monthly round tables to label this process 'programmatically identity theft', that was not a diplomatic way to proceed, and, in retrospect, I can see that such stridency probably undercut my real achievements. I think I had reached the limit of the entrepreneurial historic house model, and with no endowment and no stable source of funding, it was just an

endless treadmill of fundraising and bureaucratic begging. Unfortunately, what happened at the site afterwards proves me right.

They have been through five directors in as many years. The first thing that the board members who are most active and most vocal did was to close down the community garden project and focus on the school programme, so that the few staff left, demoralised, are now pushing about 100 students a day through this poor old house, grinding it into sawdust. The barn project proceeds but in a very different mode. In the public bidding system required of the Parks Department they were unable to find, after three attempts, any contractor who would take on the project within a reasonable budget and is skilled enough to put up the historic wooden frame, so it is now going to be a very modern office and restroom facility. I have to conclude that the big lesson here is that the entrepreneurial house model is not sustainable on either a personal or an organisational level.

I am still involved in New York City's historic houses. Around the corner from my apartment is another Dutch-American House, the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum, where I am on the board. We are in the start-up phase, establishing a non-profit organization to be the partner, or licensee, contracted by Parks to operate the site as part of its much-vaunted public-private partnership model. In this formula we will be the private piece, that is, we will be responsible for raising funds, mainly private, to operate the site. We face challenging odds: most recently budget cuts hitting New York City Parks mean that we have gone from three staff members – a caretaker, an educator and the director – to just one, the director, who now carries out all three jobs. From some fairly innovative programming we have no programming and are open two days a week at the most.



Dyckman Farmhouse

So what is my answer? Well, this is what I believe. I think these houses have to be run in groups, they have to have enough collective meaning and support to be able to be sustainable and should not belong to Parks Departments or local authorities whose primary focus is on green space. Many of the houses in New York have so little green space surrounding them that the relationship is meaningless. So, in the case of New York City's publicly-owned historic houses, I believe that ownership should be turned over from the Parks Department to the Historic House Trust. They need to take ownership of the houses literally and metaphorically, they need to run these places directly, have first-hand knowledge of and responsibility for staff, programs, and community relations. They need to cut out the middlemen, get down to business, go to the finders and have a real portfolio of accomplishments and not stolen goods to bring to the table. What will this mean for the middlemen, the licensees such as the Wyckoff House & Association. Frankly, I think that in most cases they will celebrate their release from bondage, comforted by the knowledge that a professional non-profit historic preservation organization has them under its care. They will be free to pursue their real interests, such as genealogy, local history, historic re-enactment, etcetera, and in some cases they could become real assets to the Historic House Trust as contributing partner organizations in a unified, sustainable vision for the future of New York City's historic houses.

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