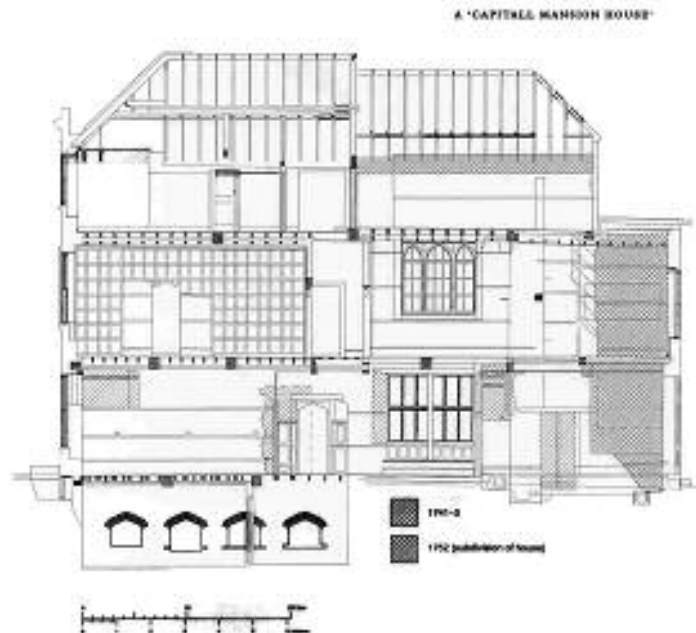


Sutton House Society Newsletter

April 2003

For all interested in the past, present and future of Sutton House



The page proofs are now arriving from English Heritage of the monograph on the history of Sutton House suggesting a publication date later this year. This is one of the illustrations. It shows a section through the west wing along the line of the 'Armada' window.

Conservation Statement update

Sutton House has now been open to the public for almost 10 years. Given the emphasis on learning and discovery at the property, staff at the property and at the National Trust feel that now is a good time to review the interpretation of this immensely important building. We also wanted to take a step back and look at what works well and what doesn't work in terms of layout and use of the building. In this latter context there is also a need to consider constraints on what the building can deliver in terms of size, and whether this can be resolved by the acquisition of additional land.

Staff at Sutton House and the National Trust regional office discussed the need for information and agreed that a good first step would be the production of a Conservation Statement. Conservation Statements traditionally serve to highlight the important historical elements of sites and properties, identify conservation issues, and make preliminary suggestions about how these issues can be resolved.

A Conservation Statement brief was drawn up in Autumn 2002. Alan Baxter & Associates and Richard Griffiths Architects were selected to take on the work, and a steering group formed to manage the process. The steering group consisted of property-based and regional National Trust staff, Robin Cousins representing the property volunteers, and Lissa Chapman representing the Sutton House Society.

The Conservation Statement has now been finalised and a copy is available at Sutton House for loan if you would like to see it. Contact Siân Harrington, Property Manager, on 020-8525 9054 or by e-mail on Sian.Harrington@nationaltrust.org.uk.

The document stresses the importance of Sutton House as a unique example of an urban house built by a Tudor courtier, and reflecting so well the changes in use over subsequent generations. Its significance is also partly related to its location in the midst of Hackney and its huge potential for learning activity. The building has served its various audiences well since its opening as a visitor attraction and community resource, but the document puts forward some options for improving circulation around the building and increasing the amount of display space. The

issue of the land next door — the car yard and the backs of houses on Sutton Place — is discussed. The land is in many ways essential to releasing the true potential of Sutton House, and the document makes that very clear.

The next step will be consideration of what the options put forward in the Conservation Statement mean in terms of income generation and management of the property. We hope to move towards the production of a full Conservation Plan later this year. We'll keep you updated and involved!

Property Manager's update

We are pleased to report that as of 1 March 2003 Mary Colson, Community Education Officer, is now full time. Sutton House is the only National Trust property with more than one full-time Education or Learning Officer. This support demonstrates that Sutton House is fully meeting the National Trust's learning vision.

Sutton House hosted the National Trust's start-of-season press launch on 13 February. Fiona Reynolds, Director General of the National Trust since 2000, and a founder member of the Sutton House Society, presented her vision for the development of the Trust and all the exciting new properties that are opening in 2003, such as the Red House in Bexleyheath, and Tyntesfield near Bristol. Fiona mentioned the learning work at Sutton House a number of times in her presentation: this shows that we are still very important to her!

Siân Harrington, Property Manager at Sutton House, is now a member of the Central Hackney Conservation Committee.

Sutton House continues to be a popular wedding venue. We now have a wedding booked for every Saturday in July, August and September!

Article in SPAB News

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) recently featured the theft of architectural heritage from British properties in its Spring newsletter in an article called 'The Big Steal'. Staff at Sutton House contributed a piece to the article. The piece appears here as edited for *SPAB News* after it was written by Siân and Shelley with advice from Mike Gray, so do excuse any simplification of the issues!

Return ticket for linenfold panelling: The taking of inner-city Tudor

Sutton House is a survivor from the early 16th century, and now thrives — thanks to the National Trust — amid the urban clutter of east London. Thieves struck as the house was being reborn, but then, as Siân Harrington and Shelley Garland report, luck and craftsmanship came into play.

Sutton House is east London's oldest house. It was built in 1535 for Ralph Sadleir, a courtier to Henry VIII. The National Trust acquired the property in 1938. From 1983 until 1986 the building was occupied as a squat. Then, in the late 1980s, the Trust restored the building.

Nowadays, the house is open to the public as an N.T. visitor attraction and education resource, and is known for its high-quality Tudor panelling. However, much of the panelling was almost lost during the 1980s, while the building was being squatted. The major thefts were of panels from the Linenfold Room — each one carved to reproduce the look of folds of linen — and a section of panelling with fleur de lys and Tudor Rose carving from above the fireplace in the Great Chamber. In addition three cast-iron fireplaces, the oak front door, and carved bargeboards were stolen.

Sadly, only the Linenfold Room panelling and the front door were recovered. The panelling was stolen in 1986. The garage owner next door to the house saw men arrive in a van to take the panelling away — the men claimed that they had permission. The panelling was taken to the London Architectural Salvage and Supply Company (LASSCO), a few miles away, and sold to them for £1,000. The manager at LASSCO immediately contacted the N.T. regarding this panelling, which he strongly suspected came from Sutton House. The Trust confirmed that it had not given permission for the removal of the panelling, so the panelling was soon generously returned to the Trust by LASSCO.

The theft of the linenfold panelling provided an opportunity to examine the walls of the Linenfold Room. The north wall showed the pattern of original fenestration, and alterations. Battens in the brickwork suggest that the room was intended to take panelling.

The recovered linenfold panelling was taken to Park Farm, the N.T. regional workshop, and a study made by English Heritage of damaged and missing pieces. The few missing pieces and those too damaged for repair were replaced by new panels, carved by Trust specialists, and re-instated. Some are now hinged so that visitors can see the wall's construction, and view painted panels recovered with the carved panels. The panelling with fleur de lys carving has not been found. N.T. craftspeople have recreated the panelling from photographs and installed it in the original position.

Hackney Anecdotes from Gayne Wells

Fellow residents will be well aware of the reaction to the news that one lives in Hackney. Sometimes it is puzzlement to disguise the fact that they don't really know where it is: even most Londoners don't. Often it is disbelief: 'I've never known a place to be so often in the news', a friend, a resident of demure Shepperton, recently commented.

In the early 1980s, out carol-singing with the Mapledene Residents Association, we were chased along the street by a generous Cherie Blair (the Blairs were then residents), eager to donate a number of pounds to our collecting tins — that at a time when one was doing well to obtain 20p. One of the children (presumably Euan) stood at the door with the bright eyes that children have as Christmas approaches. On a London Society visit to 10 Downing Street in 2000 Mrs Blair was waiting in the hall to welcome us. I reminded her of this, to her great surprise, and I said that I hadn't made the same kind of progress — same house, same jobs — she looked rather envious!

When the campaign to save Sutton House was raging many of us did not appreciate how much Fiona Reynolds, the present Director General of the National Trust, was doing, behind the scenes, to help our cause. Attending some kind of heritage conference at the Tate Gallery (there was only one in those days), heading for a coffee break I found myself on the stairs behind the then Director of the National Trust, Sir Angus Stirling. Diffidently I began 'Sir Angus, I don't suppose that, at your level, you hear much about this matter but some of us are most concerned about a property called Sutton House.' He nearly burst! 'Never hear about it — I seldom hear of anything else.'

Whilst not overtly religious I do sometimes attend services at a variety of churches. The music, the architecture and the serene atmosphere are well worth experiencing for their own sake. About 1990 I went one Sunday morning to St Simon Zelotes, probably selected for its unusual dedication, in Milner Street, Chelsea, and was surprised to be met by a fellow member of the Executive Committee of the London Society who proved to be a church warden. 'What in earth are you doing here?' he asked. 'I have come to worship my maker' I replied, not entirely truthfully. As a result of this connection I was invited to the sherry party, at the nearby vicarage, which immediately follows the service. 'Our new incumbent and his wife have just moved here from Hackney' my friend told me. A little later I introduced myself to the vicar's wife and said 'I hear you come from Hackney'. 'Hackney!' she exploded drawing herself up to her full height ('Handbag!' in *The Importance of Being Ernest* came to mind). Continuing in real *Banks of the Limpopo* style, 'We don't come from Hackney; our *ministry* was in Hackney!'

GAYNE WELLS (Secretary of the London Society
and founder member of Sutton House Local Committee) March 2003

Any contributions to the Newsletter about Sutton House and Hackney are very welcome.

The Kitchen Table

The Sutton House Society is pleased to announce the arrival at Sutton House of a reproduction table for the Old Kitchen at Sutton House. The table was funded by the Society. Siân Harrington, Property Manager, said 'The table is a wonderful addition to the house as it looks fantastic and can be used for our regular workshops. It is just the right height for children to work at. When you are next in Sutton House do pop into the Old Kitchen for a look.'

The table was made by Nicholas Berry, a specialist in oak replica furniture, based in Eastbourne. The table now appears on Nicholas' website (www.earlyoakspecialist.co.uk) with the following description:

This plain and simple oak table measures 72" × 42". Instead of being turned, the legs have hand-cut chamfers finished at each end with a 'dart' stop. Shaped brackets are the only other decoration on this functional and robust piece, made to withstand the wear and tear of regular practical demonstrations and 'hands-on' experiences held in the kitchen at Sutton House. Note the 'all round' or 'box' stretchers, which was the normal layout for original period long tables. Modern tastes now generally favour a centre stretcher, so chairs can be slid under.

The Bill Hurdman Memorial Fund (Sutton House Society)

The launch of the Bill Hurdman Memorial Fund took place on 13 March, with a talk given by Laurie Elks to the Society on *The History of the Lee Valley Park*. At a well attended meeting £120 was collected for the appeal.

The fund, to commemorate the former Hackney Rector and member of the Sutton House Local Committee, will be used to sponsor an art competition of works which will reflect activities within the house. An exhibition of this work will be displayed in the Gallery in 2004. After that one or more items will be purchased for permanent display in the house. We have been in discussion with Martin Shortis, a teacher of fine art at the Prince's Foundation Shoreditch and formerly artist-in-residence at Sutton House during the restoration works. Martin hopes to encourage his students to take part in the competition.

If you would like to make a donation to the fund please send cheques to the Treasurer, Joy Geary, c/o Sutton House, 2&4 Homerton High Street, London, E9 6JQ.

Forthcoming events at Sutton House

Discovery Days — last Sunday of every month, 11.30am to 5.00pm. Free entry.

Sunday 27 April: *Tudor Fun and Frolics*. It is party time Tudor style!

Sunday 25 May: *Terrible Tudor Life... and Death!* Plagues and sores, potions and poultices, spies and lies. Find out about the hazardous lives of Tudors.

Sunday 29 June: *Keeping up Tudor Appearances*. Tudor men wore tights and women put lead on their faces. Take part in this fashion frenzy and discover how important it was to have the right look.

Elders afternoons and classes

Every Friday 2pm to 4pm entry to the house is free to Hackney elders. If you are over 55 please drop in for a guided tour, a reminiscence session, an art-and-craft class or a talk. The project will culminate in an exhibition in the Gallery in July. Call Mary Colson, Education Officer, on 020-8525 9057 for further information.

Art Gallery — open Wednesday to Sunday 11.30am to 5.00pm. Free entry to the gallery.

2 April to 4 May: WILLIAM DICK: *Paintings*. William's paintings are inspired by ancient and tribal symbols and a fascination with the geological formation of landscape. Each painting therefore evolves out of itself, layer on layer, transforming and growing in its physical and illusionary depth.

7 May to 1 June: CAROLINE CHRISTIE: *Threads*. The artist has created a world of mysterious domestic sculptures for Sutton House: paper dresses float, a long table is set with sewn cutlery, quilts linger in fireplaces.

4 June to 6 July: PHYLLIS GOODMAN and AUDREY HAILEY: *The View from Here*. Two local water-colourists are bringing their latest paintings to Sutton House, following a successful first year of exhibitions at Bethnal Green, Bow, South Quays and Whitechapel.

Walks and Talks

Sunday 11 May: *The Peopling of Hackney and London*. From 12 noon to 5.00pm Sutton House is hosting a series of family activities and adult lectures, exploring where the people of London and Hackney have come from and what brought them here. Open University advisers will be on hand to answer queries and provide information about courses. Admission is free.

Saturday 17 May: *Sixteenth-century Bankside: the Rose and Globe Theatres*. A talk by archaeologist Simon Blatherwick on the archaeological, documentary and map evidence for the Rose and Globe Theatres. Talk starts 11.00am. Admission is £5 including coffee.

Saturday 19 July: *A Nursery of Riot*. Mike Gray reveals the story of Hackney House. Built for a governor of the Bank of England in 1723, it became a college for Protestant dissenters by the end of the century where radicals like Joseph Priestley taught and students invited Tom Paine to speak. Talk starts 11.00am. Admission is £5 including coffee.

Sundays 6 April, 4 May and 1 June: *Sutton House Free Guided Tours*. At 2pm and 4pm on the first Sunday of every month, these tours bring to life the architectural changes at Sutton House, exploring the stories of the many different occupants, their social aspirations, and the changing face of Hackney.

Concerts

The [Sutton House Music Society](http://www.suttonhouse.org.uk) will be holding concerts at Sutton House on the following dates. Tickets £8.00 adult, £5.00 concessions. Box office 01494-755 572.

Sunday 18 May, 5pm: Charles Tunnell (cello) and Gretel Dowdeswell (piano) play Beethoven, Britten and Franck.

Sunday 15 June 5pm: The Fitzwilliam String Quartet with Penelope Roskell (piano) play Rosetti, Brahms and Shostakovich.

Sutton House, 2&4 Homerton High Street, Hackney, London, E9 6JQ. Tel: 020-8986 2264

National Trust website: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk>

Sutton House Society website: <http://welcome.to/SuttonHouse>