

Sutton House Society Newsletter

December 2004



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

Society activities

A lot has happened since our last newsletter. Here are some of the highlights.

Summer outing



Osterley stable block

This outing was a visit to Osterley Park in West London. It provided an opportunity to visit parts of the National Trust property that are not normally open to the public. It took place on

Thursday 12th August.



Part of the roof

Autumn outing



Hill Hall from the south

This took place on 12th September and consisted of visits to a number of lesser-known sights in Essex.

The first stop was Hill Hall where a local farmer's wife proved a very well informed and amusing guide for our tour as part of Open House Weekend. The mansion was constructed in 1567 by Sir Thomas Smith. Like Ralph Sadleir at Sutton House he was a Tudor courtier, and being a protestant he, like Sadleir, felt relief at surviving Queen Mary's reign. His splendid tomb in Theydon Mount Church, within Hill Hall grounds, shows a salamander in his crest, a token of

his thankfulness at escaping burning at the stake.

The Hall is of especial architectural interest as it reflects Sir Thomas' study of French and Italian buildings. Within the courtyard one can see Doric columns on the ground floor, and Ionic on the first, topped with Tudor gables with unusual angles, not seen in later classical work.



Hill Hall courtyard



King Hezekiah

The Smith family owned the Hall until the middle of the 20th century, when it was purchased by Lady Hunter who entertained high society, built a swimming pool and finally had to sell up when she exhausted her funds. After the Second World War it achieved distinction as the first open prison for women. In 1969 it was badly damaged by fire. However, some very interesting sixteenth-century wall paintings showing the life of King Hezekiah and the legend of Cupid and Psyche survived.

Today one can visit the restored Great Hall and view the paintings, but most of the house has been converted into flats.

We then visited the ninth-century parish church of Greensted. The remarkable (and indeed unique) feature of this church is its nave, which is built of half logs.

The day ended at Waltham Abbey with Roman ruins and King Harold's tomb. The Abbey has a fine Norman nave leading to a bright Victorian altar and an early "doom" (a medieval picture of the Last Judgement).

We are very grateful to Ailsa Pain for organizing the outing so efficiently.



Waltham Abbey

Annual general meeting

This took place on 18th November. The Chairman, Treasurer and Membership Secretary presented their reports; and the officers and members of the committee were re-elected. There were two changes to the committee: John Houston stood down, and Colin Brooking joined the committee. The full committee now consists of Mike Gray (Chairman), Joy Geary (Treasurer), Peter Mudge (Vice-chairman), Siân Harrington (Secretary), Victor Belcher, Lissa Chapman, David Fields, Jenny Golden, Alan Hayday, Julie Lafferty, Leah Nicholson, Ailsa Pain, Bill Sadleir, Audrey Sedgemore, Felicity Tregear and Colin Brooking.

The following is the Chairman's report.

This year should prove to be a memorable one in the history of Sutton House and the Sutton House Society.

The Sutton House Society continues to work closely with Sutton House's Property Manager, and will be funding the purchase of replica chairs in 2005. [See the Property Manager's report for further information.] In due course we hope to be able to assist with a new fund-raising campaign to fund the development of the car yard.

The Society has produced three newsletters this year and another one is planned for early December.

There have been three outings this year, coordinated by Ailsa Pain and Peter Mudge. The spring outing was "Hampstead through artists' eyes" and took place on 22nd May. The summer outing was "Behind the scenes at Osterley Park" on 12th August. The autumn outing on 12th September was to Hill Hall, a Tudor courtyard house in Essex, followed by visits to Greensted Church and Waltham Abbey.

The annual lecture was given by David Mander on Thursday 14th December. David gave an illuminating talk on the development of the Tudor Hackney website [www.learningcurve.gov.uk/tudorhackney/default.asp], which revealed some fascinating information about the Daniels family of the Old Rectory, who moved from one financial disaster to another during their time in Hackney.

The Sutton House Society and Sutton House had a joint stall at the St John's Church summer fete on 24th July. Felicity Tregear made a wonderful banner and she will produce a drape to be used for the front of the stall at any future events.

Peter Mudge has been working hard on the internet and we now have a new website: www.suttonhousesociety.org.uk.

Members are reminded that in 2007 we will celebrate the 500th anniversary of Ralph Sadleir's birth. Sutton House will be hosting family activities on a weekend during the summer of 2007.

Members of the Sutton House Society have been involved in putting together proposals for two local restoration projects: St Augustine's Tower and the Hackney Churchyard.

The launch of the monograph

The Sutton House Monograph *Sutton House: a Tudor courtier's house in Hackney* was launched at Sutton House on 1st December. Over 80 people attended and the evening was a great success.

David Starkey, historian, author and broadcaster, had kindly offered to chair the evening. As he introduced the speakers he spoke about the changes in fortune of Sutton House over the last 470 years. Fiona Reynolds, Director General of the National Trust, spoke about her involvement in the project to restore Sutton House, and stressed how important Sutton House is today to the Trust's aims of inclusion and access for everyone. She thanked the Sutton House staff — Siân, Ruth, Kathleen, Emma, Lucy, Matt and Ann — in undertaking this important work. The authors of the book — Victor Belcher, Richard Bond, Mike Gray and Andy Wittrick — were present. Victor spoke about how he got involved in the project and brought in his colleagues Richard and Andy for what turned out to be quite a lengthy project. Mike Gray's speech is included in full below. The Speaker of Hackney Council, Geoff Taylor, rounded off the speeches by talking about how much Sutton House means to the people of Hackney.

Mike Gray, author and Chairman of the Sutton House Society, said:

This book was originally conceived in 1987, and therefore has been about 17 years in gestation — but I am very pleased at last to hold the final result (the baby) in my hands.

I think that the publishing division of English Heritage should be congratulated for having produced such a beautifully designed and presented book. But I think it only fair to say that without the enthusiasm and determination of the Sutton House Society this excellent book and our presence here tonight could never have happened.

In 1987 Sutton House was derelict and occupied by squatters, ceilings were collapsing, panelling and fireplaces had been stolen and one of Hackney's most important historic buildings was literally falling to pieces! The National Trust, who had owned the house since 1938, in its desperation had decided that the only solution was to sell a lease on the house to a property developer for its conversion into five housing units.

Three people, unknown to each other, wrote letters of protest to the local newspaper, *The Hackney Gazette*. They were Julie Lafferty who had been on the staff of the union A.S.T.M.S. in this house, Ken Jacobs a postman and local-history enthusiast, and myself. This gang of three met up and formed the core of the Save Sutton House Campaign later to become the Sutton House Society.

Right from the start we decided on three principal objectives:

- 1) To convince the National Trust to restore the house and open it to the public for a wide range of community uses and general visitor enjoyment;
- 2) To research the, then unknown, history of the house in the hope that this would lead to a substantial publication;
- 3) To seek acquisition of the car yard to the west of the house, which in the 16th century was part of the estate of the house, so as to give visitors the least altered view of the original edifice, give an opportunity to create a garden and provide wheelchair users with access to the first and second floors.

The first objective was achieved within two years. What was known as the Community Scheme was approved by the National Trust in September 1989. The campaign was helped considerably by the support of two members of the Regional Committee who lived locally: Peter Burman, now with the National Trust of Scotland; and a young woman, then Secretary of the C.P.R.E., Ms. Fiona Reynolds, and now Director General of the National Trust. Also critically important was the sympathetic hearing we had from the Regional Director of the National Trust, Robin Mills.

The second and third objectives took a little longer to achieve but eventually we realized the second — the publication of the monograph — and we hope the third will be realized before the end of the year!

In respect of the research process we were once again fortunate in that a senior officer of the G.L.C. Historic Buildings Division (later absorbed into English Heritage), Victor Belcher, was a Hackney resident. He was able to arrange for two of his historic-buildings surveyors Richard Bond and Andy Wittrick to undertake over a period of 18 months or more a careful analysis of the

built structure, a process which was incidentally made easier by the derelict condition of the building at the time.

When it came to research into the people who owned or occupied the house and were responsible for the original building and the later alterations, we had very little to go on, little more than unsubstantiated theories. A slim volume *The Old House at the Corner* published by the local church in 1906 suggested two early owners Thomas Sutton and John Dodd. Thomas Sutton was the founder of Charterhouse Hospital and School so it seemed a reasonable starting point to delve into the Charterhouse archives. We met the Master at his house near Smithfield, were entertained with tea and given permission to consult the archives.

It soon became apparent that Sutton's property in Hackney, which was bequeathed to his new foundation on his death in 1612, could not have been what we now call Sutton House at all but a property immediately to the west which had been demolished in 1805. The evidence from the structure of the house suggested a building date in the first half of the 16th century. Did the Charterhouse archives give any clue as to who were Sutton's next-door neighbours? Fortunately yes, because a sequence of deeds of Sutton's house known as the Old Tanhouse dating back to 1487 had been preserved. Correspondence between Sutton and previous owners of the Tanhouse and the house next door indicated that a family called Machell lived in Sutton House in the second half of the 16th century.

The next advance came when a well preserved coat of arms was discovered in the room which is now the Gallery, the same as others less well preserved which were uncovered earlier. The College of Arms were certain that the arms were that of the Milward family, although similar to the Dodd family who had monuments in Hackney Church, which is why the Church had jumped to the wrong conclusion in its publication.

This is when a very fortunate piece of serendipity occurred. Looking through the card index of manuscripts in the Guildhall Library for the merchant Milward, I stumbled on a deed of sale of property in Hackney, dated 1550 from one Sir Ralph Sadleir to John Machell, Alderman of the City of London. This clearly related both to the Old Tanhouse and the house next door (this house), which was described as "the brick place". Sweat started to collect on my brow at this moment!

So now we appeared to have the original builder and owner of Sutton House: Sir Ralph Sadleir, Henry VIII's ambassador to Scotland and later Principal Secretary of State. In the British Museum we found an account book of Sadleir's property in Hackney which confirmed our interpretation of the deed.

Victor Belcher, working on wills and court cases involving the early families, filled in more background information on the families, and we were well on the way to establishing the first 100 years or so of the history of the house. The rest in due course followed, but it would take too long tonight to describe the progress of the research into the next 350 years.

Finally Jane Straker phoned up a William Sadleir in the London phone book and we found that we had made contact with a living linear descendant of Sir Ralph and through him many other members of the dynasty, who were delighted that the first house of their famous ancestor had been unearthed.

Property Manager's report

The car yard

Exchange has taken place but we are not quite there with completion. We hope to have news very soon. Once we have acquired the land I shall get together with interested parties, including local residents and Sutton House Society members, to discuss future options for the site. Our first steps are to assess the pollution on the site and get it cleared, but we certainly hope in the medium to long term to have a garden and better facilities for Sutton House. Mike Gray has stressed that the Sutton House Society would like to see an excavation of the site. The financial implications of this might be significant and could not be borne by the National Trust. Certainly the National Trust recognises the importance of the site and would want to undertake some kind of assessment, even if in the short term it was a desk-based archaeological investigation.

Replica chairs

Sutton House has just ordered replica chairs and armchairs for the Great Chamber, generously funded by the Sutton House Society at a cost of £4,448.

Learning projects at Sutton House

These continue to achieve great levels of participation amongst the local community. Examples include Discovery Days, Elders afternoons, the Untold Story project with young people, and Black History Month in October. We were shortlisted for a Gulbenkian Museum of the Year award for our Black History Month project. New for 2004 were the Young People's Art Prize, and the Refugee Week project.

Staffing changes

Emily Mealey has left and Lucy Sage is now Volunteer Coordinator. Shelley has now left to go to Tattershall Castle, and Kathleen Patterson is now Acting House & Visitor Services Manager. Moyra Gardener is filling Kathleen's post on a part-time basis. In the last year the National Trust has appointed a new Director of the Thames & Solent region, Patrick Begg. The post of London Area Manager is now filled by Ian Wilson, formerly of Sutton House.

Sutton House forthcoming events

Art Gallery

Adrian Ryan: Still Life Paintings

Wednesday 2nd February to Sunday 6th March. Adrian Ryan (1920–98) was a figurative painter who largely rejected abstraction. Not included amongst the best-known twentieth-century painters during his lifetime, Ryan's work is now being re-evaluated with museum shows around the country.

Geraldine Swayne: Haunted

Wednesday 9th March to Sunday 3rd April. A response to the presence of Sutton House in Hackney through time. The work uses the house as a conduit to feel the past pushing into the present.

Activities for all ages

Free Sutton House tours

Guided tours at 3.00 pm on the first Sunday of each month from February to November. Please contact Sutton House for further details.

Half-term holiday projects

Children aged 8 to 11 are invited to enjoy special creative projects during the half-term holidays. Cost per day: £3, £1.50 concessions. **Booking is essential, as places are limited.**

Black history events

Finding Your Roots

Saturday 5th March. A talk by local historian and genealogist, Valery Small, aimed at East Londoners wanting to trace their family roots. It is the first in a series of talks leading up to Black History Month at Sutton House in October 2005. 2 to 3 pm. Free after admission to the house.

The Lascars in London

Saturday 2nd April. S. I. Martin returns to Sutton House for one of his popular talks on black Londoners. This time he will be talking about the lives of the Lascars: Indian sailors who settled in England from the 17th century onwards. 2 to 3 pm. Free after admission to the house.

Talks, tours and courses

Evening course: London from the East

Tuesdays 12th April to 28th June. This Birkbeck University course, based at Sutton House, will examine the development of London's East End since the 16th century. We will look at the East End's rich traditions, as a centre of crafts and industry, as the point of reception for immigrants from many lands, and as the home of radical political and social movements. Site visits included. 6.30 to 8.30 pm. For further information and to book your place please contact Carol Watts on 020-7631 6652.

Lecture Lunch: An eternity in stone —Women in London's public spaces

Friday 8th April. Join Cheryl Law on a journey through London tracing women's public achievements through the naming of London, its monuments and its sculptures. This lecture lunch includes a two-course lunch plus coffee. 11 am to 1.30 pm. Adults £18.

Seasonal events

Spring Fete

Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th May. Our popular spring fair returns to Sutton House. Fill your baskets with plants and herbs, and buy pots and planters by local craft workers. We will also have a selection of related crafts to buy. Adult ticket £2.00, accompanied children free. Tickets available on the door.

Sutton House Music Society concerts

Ticket prices per concert are £9 (one or two concerts), £7 (three or more concerts), £6 (concessions), £20 (families), £8 (groups) and £5 (concessionary groups), obtainable on 01494-755 572.

Wind and piano concert

5 pm, Sunday 23rd January. An ensemble of distinguished professors from Trinity College of Music returns to Sutton House with more great music for wind and piano, including Beethoven's Quintet and Janáček's *Mládí*.

Bach cello suites (2)

5 pm, Sunday 6th March. Richard Tunnicliffe, former principal cellist with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, continues his series of Bach's ever-fresh cello suites.

Bach cello suites (3)

5 pm, Sunday 17th April. The last concert in Richard Tunnicliffe's series of all of Bach's solo cello suites — also featuring Britten's great final suite for solo cello.

Shostakovich series (13)

5 pm, Sunday 1st May. The thirteenth in the Fitzwilliam String Quartet's acclaimed series of the complete Shostakovich string quartets at Sutton House, in which they are also joined by Penelope Roskell for Schumann's Piano Quintet.

Song recital

3 pm [sic], Sunday 5th June. Tamsin Coombs returns to Sutton House to perform with Lilian Wilson an attractive programme of songs by Mozart, Schubert, Wolf, Poulenc and English composers.