

# Sutton House Society Newsletter

June 2005



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

## Proposed changes at Sutton House

The National Trust is considering making some radical changes to the way that Sutton House is run. These changes are being proposed in order to make crucial savings within the Thames & Solent region of the National Trust, and to provide better line-management support for other properties in London. In summary, the main changes are:

- Reduced opening hours at Sutton House — the house will be open to visitors on Saturday and Sunday, and closed except for school groups and community groups Monday to Friday;
- The cafe and the shop will be closed during the week, and only open at weekends;
- The cafe may have to run in a reduced capacity;
- There will be no room hire at Sutton House;
- The posts of Property Assistant, Assistant House Steward, Volunteer Coordinator and Retail Assistant will be deleted;
- The Property Manager of Sutton House will line-manage four other NT properties in London in addition to Sutton House.

The National Trust held a Consultative Meeting to discuss the changes on 21<sup>st</sup> June. Unfortunately, at such short notice there was insufficient time to notify the members of the Society about the meeting. So the Trust has agreed to hold a second Consultative Meeting. This will be at Sutton House on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> July, starting at 7pm. Clearly, many members of the Society will have a keen interest in the outcome of these discussions. So please, if you possibly can, do come to the meeting!

For more information in the meantime, you may wish to consult some of the supporting documents that are available. You may download them from the Society's website [www.suttonhousesociety.org.uk](http://www.suttonhousesociety.org.uk) or have them sent to you by telephoning Sutton House.

## Summer outing

This year's summer outing will be to Loseley Park and Clandon Park, both near Guildford. The outing will take place on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August, departing from Sutton House at 9.30am, returning at 6pm.

Loseley House is an Elizabethan house presently lived in by three generations of the More-Molyneux family. It is a fine example of Elizabethan architecture, dignified and

beautiful, set amid magnificent parkland scenery. Inside are many fine works of art, including panelling from Henry VIII's Nonsuch Palace, tapestries, paintings and a unique carved chalk fireplace. The two-and-a-half acre walled garden, based on a design by Gertrude Jekyll, is one of the hidden secrets of the South East. Compared favourably by experts to gardens of national renown, its series of 'rooms' includes the award-winning Rose Garden planted with over 1,000 bushes (many old-fashioned varieties), the colourful Flower Garden with its maze of pathways, the White Garden with fountains and a splendid array of blooms and lush silver and grey foliage, and the extensive Herb Garden (divided into household, medicinal, decorative and culinary sections). There is a gift shop and a tea room on the property. The cost of entry to the house and gardens is included in the price of the outing.

Clandon House is a National Trust property. Built *c.* 1730 by the Venetian architect Giacomo Leoni, Clandon is notable for its magnificent two-storeyed Marble Hall. The house is filled with the superb collection of 18th-century furniture, porcelain, textiles and carpets acquired in the 1920s by the connoisseur Mrs. David Gubbay, and also contains the Ivo Forde Meissen collection of Italian comedy figures and a series of Mortlake tapestries. The attractive gardens contain a parterre, grotto, sunken Dutch garden and Maori meeting house with a fascinating history. The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment Museum is based at Clandon Park. There is a cafe on the site, and plenty of picnic tables. Admission to the property is free for NT members, £6 for non-members. This is *not* included in the price of the outing.

The exact timetable for the outing will depend partly on the weather. Do feel free to bring a picnic if you wish. The price of tickets for the outing will be £12 for members of the Society and £15 for non-members. Unfortunately, we have had to put up our prices since last year because our transport costs have increased. To come on the outing, please fill in the attached form and return it to Sutton House.

## The Robertson Bequest

*Many of you know that Sutton House's purchase by the National Trust was supported by the Robertson Bequest. The following article, adapted from one written by Ann Noyes in Spring 2005, provides details about the Robertson Bequest and the other sites purchased as a result.*

The Robertson Bequest is named after William Alexander Robertson. William lost his two younger brothers in the First World War. He left money in his will to the National Trust to commemorate them. The money he left was to be matched by the Trust and used to buy land or buildings of interest, within reach of London.

There are eight areas of countryside (four in Surrey), and Sutton House in Hackney, known to have been bought through this bequest. William specified that at each site a memorial must be erected, specified as to size and form, stating its location, followed by details of his brothers, their rank, their regiment and when and where they died.

### The Robertson family

Four sons were born to William and Mary Elizabeth Robertson, née Grant, between 1872 and 1880. The family home was at Cranley Gardens, South Kensington, and all the boys attended Westminster School. The eldest, William Alexander Robertson, studied at Christ Church College, Oxford, and was called to the bar at the Inner Temple in 1901; subsequently he served on the North Eastern Circuit. The second son was named Reginald. The two younger sons, Norman and Laurance, were also professional men who, already in their

thirties, volunteered for active service in the enthusiasm of the early months of the First World War.

Norman Cairns Robertson was born on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1876. He joined the Inns of Court Officers Training Corps in 1914 and was commissioned Captain in the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Battalion Hampshire Regiment on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1915. He was taken prisoner after action near Monchy on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1917 and he died in a Military Hospital in Hanover, Germany, in June of that year. He is buried in Hamburg Cemetery.

Laurance Grant Robertson was born on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1877. He qualified as a chartered accountant and worked for the Local Government Board on the District Audit staff. He was commissioned 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. in the Army Ordnance Department in February 1915 and transferred, at his request, to the King's Own Scottish Borderers in July that year, seeking front-line action. He was killed during the course of the Battle of the Somme on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1916, and his name is among those classed as 'missing' on the Thiepval Memorial.

William Alexander Robertson died on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1937 at the age of 65, the last survivor of the Robertson brothers. His will sets out in great detail what he planned for charitable bequests in memory of his parents and brothers. There is no indication that the brothers had descendents. There is no mention of marriage for any of the four brothers in the Westminster School list and no bequests to any widows or children.

For his parents he endowed a bed at the Royal Masonic Hospital in London; for his brother Reginald, who died in 1936, money to be invested and the income devoted to providing annual prizes for the Ministry of Health Golfing Society and the Richmond Golf Club. The Robertson Memorial Trophy is still one of the major events of the Richmond Golf Club and is played for annually. For himself, there was to be a plaque in the London church where he worshipped, but the residue of his considerable estate was to be applied to an altogether more imaginative and expansive memorial to his two soldier brothers. The money (over £50,000) was to go to the National Trust, with careful instructions; the Trust 'shall supply a sum at least equal to the net amount received by them ... purchasing, acquiring and thereafter holding such land, building or places so far as possible within easy reach of London ... as a memorial to my brothers'. There were exact instructions about care and maintenance of the proposed memorials. The Bank, as Trustee of the Robertson estate, was to make a early inspection of each 'column, pillar or tablet and in the event of the same being in want of repair, re-lettering, cleaning, renewal or otherwise needing attention, to forthwith require the National Trust to perform the same at its own expense'. This duty was performed by the Bank until some twenty years ago, by which time the money in the trust had run out. The National Trust has accepted the ongoing responsibility for inspection and maintenance. No records remain of whether the Trust supplied an equal sum to that donated but, in general, bequests only provide a part of purchase funds when new acquisitions are made. If the National Trust had decided against accepting the bequest and its conditions, the money was to be invested as the Bank should think fit and the income devoted to Westminster School, not for scholarships for new entrants but to 'boys intending and desiring to enter the Army Navy and Air Force or any recognised profession, or for the assistance of boys intending or desiring to proceed to and permanently settle and work in a British Colony or Dominion'.

### **The memorials and the inscription**

The will further prescribes that 'before any such land, building or place is or are opened to the public, the said National Trust shall erect in a prominent place thereon ... a column or pillar at least eight feet in height or in the case of the building, a large and prominent tablet with an inscription thereon'. The eight memorials all conform to these

instructions. The inscriptions on the pillars and the one building are similar, a bronze plaque with the name of the property, followed by the details of the two men

**NETLEY PARK  
THIS LAND WAS  
PURCHASED FOR THE  
NATIONAL TRUST  
FROM FUNDS BEQUEATHED  
BY WA ROBERTSON IN  
MEMORY OF HIS BROTHERS  
NORMAN CAIRNS  
ROBERTSON CAPT  
2<sup>ND</sup> BATT. HAMPSHIRE REGT.  
WHO DIED 20<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1917 AT  
HANOVER GERMANY AND OF  
LAURANCE GRANT  
ROBERTSON 2<sup>ND</sup> LIEUT  
2<sup>ND</sup> BATT. KING'S OWN  
SCOTTISH BORDERERS WHO  
WAS KILLED IN ACTION IN  
FRANCE DURING THE BATTLE  
OF THE SOMME IN OR NEAR  
DELVILLE WOOD  
30<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1916**

### **Locations of the properties purchased by the W. A. Robertson Bequest**

#### Hackney, East London

##### Sutton House TQ352851

This was the first to be purchased from the bequest and the only built property as opposed to landscape.

When St John's Church Institute decided to sell this Tudor house in the 1930s an appeal was launched to 'save the house for the nation'. Among the sponsors was George Lansbury, Vicepresident of the National Trust and Labour M.P. for Poplar. The recently established W. A. Robertson Bequest was drawn on to facilitate the purchase, completed in 1938. A tablet was attached to the front of the house in the 'prominent position' requested.

#### Surrey

The National Trust owns separate but adjoining areas of woodland on the scarp slope of the North Downs: Abinger Roughs (1950), Hackhurst Down (1928), Little Kings Wood (1972) and Netley Park (Gomshall) were all given by different donors.

##### Netley Park (Gomshall) TQ784484

This property was acquired by conveyance on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1940 from F. E. Bray of Shere and funded from the W. A. Robertson Bequest.

The land lies east of Shere, on both sides of the A25, extending almost to the ridge of the North Downs and is 85.4 ha (211 acres) in area. Gomshall Netley is one of the four manors in the parish of Shere (which includes Gomshall and Peaslake); one was granted to Sir Reginald Bray in 1497 and the others followed by grant or purchase. The lordship of all four is still in Bray hands after five hundred years. The name Netley derives from its being in the hands of the Abbey of Netley on Southampton Water from 1249 until the Dissolution. It includes a house, rebuilt about 1850 (not of outstanding interest), a farm, cottages and woodlands. The house is leased and is not open to the public. There is footpath access to the

land only. The memorial is two-thirds up the scarp of the downs behind Netley House and a swathe of about one hundred yards in width is kept clear of tree growth between the house and the memorial to allow wide views to the south.

As at the other locations in Surrey, land was bought to increase the area of National Trust holdings already established.

#### Frensham Common SU8540

The land held by the National Trust is on both sides of the Farnham-to-Hindhead road (A287) with a total area of 373.3 ha (922 acres), mostly heathland, and includes Frensham Great Pond and some cottages. On the crest of the common is a line of large bowl barrows. Stony Jumps, the largest of the Devil's Jumps with a path to the summit, with an area of 14 ha (34.6 acres), was bought in 1925 by subscription and support from Mr. F. Mason. In 1940 266.3 ha (658 acres) were bought at King's Ridge, funded by the W. A. Robertson Bequest. Further land has been bought since. The memorial stands on rising ground about two hundred yards from the road.

#### Hindhead, Inval and Weydown Commons SU8936

These commons lie 12 miles south-west of Guildford on both sides of the A3. There are 435.5 ha (1076 acres) of connected common, heath and wood. East of Hindhead village is the Devil's Punchbowl and the viewpoint of Gibbet Hill; to the south-west, Inval and Weydown Commons. The greater part of this area was given in 1906 by the Hindhead Preservation Committee. Highcomb Copse (85 ha (210 acres) of heath, farmland and coppice) and two cottages on the west side of the Punchbowl were bought in 1938 through the W. A. Robertson Bequest. It is marked 'Meml' on the OS map. The memorial stands on the western edge of the great declivity of the Devil's Punchbowl, with views over to Gibbet Hill and also long views to the north and the line of the Hog's Back. On a visit in October 2004 it was noticed that there was a collection of little 'Poppy Day' crosses stuck in the sand at the base of the memorial, a sign of local respect and interest. Other areas of adjoining land were acquired in 1939, 1953 and 1955.

#### Hydon's Ball and Hydon Heath SU978396

Hydon's Ball lies three miles south of Godalming, 1½ miles west of the B2130. This is an area of 51 ha (126 acres) of heath and woodland, mostly bought in 1915–26 as a memorial to Octavia Hill, nineteenth-century social reformer and co-founder of the National Trust. The remainder was bought in 1959 through the W. A. Robertson Bequest. The memorial to Octavia Hill takes the form of a very large, stone seat with a high back standing on the cleared summit of this fine viewpoint. The Robertson memorial is below the summit, facing back up the hill.

### Kent

#### Toy's Hill (Weardale) TQ465517

Toy's Hill is situated 5 miles south-west of Sevenoaks, 2½ miles south of Brasted and 1 mile west of Ide Hill. The National Trust property consists of the areas known as Parson's Marsh, Scord's Wood, Toy's Hill Beacon, Weardale and the Chart. The property was acquired in eight lots between 1898 and 1986. The total area is 111.7 ha (275.8 acres). It was the Weardale property that was bought, on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1940 (with the co-operation of Sir Archibald Hurd), with moneys from the W. A. Robertson Bequest. Weardale was a large but short-lived property, built in 1906 on the edge of the scarp of the greensand ridge by Stanhope, Lord Weardale, for his wife, the Countess Alexandra Tolstoy. Their main residence was in London, and Weardale, in spite of its 145 rooms, was used only in the summer months. After Lord Weardale's death in 1923, Lady Weardale (known locally as 'the Russian Princess') rarely visited the property, and at her death in 1934 it was left to her

husband's nephew, the then Lord Stanhope, but without dedicated funding for its maintenance. Tenants were hard to find and the property deteriorated to such an extent that it was demolished in early 1939. The site received a direct hit from a bomb the following year, in the early stages of the Second World War.

### East Sussex

#### Micheldene TV548965

The memorial here is on 256 ha (632 acres) of arable and downland known as Michel Dene and Went Hill, part of Crowlink Farm, which were bought by subscription between 1928 and 1931 with additional land purchased through the W. A. Robertson Bequest in 1940. It is above the line of white chalk cliffs known as 'The Seven Sisters', with access from the car park at Birling Gap.

### Bedfordshire

#### Sharpenhoe Clappers TL0730

This spur of high ground, the north eastern end of the Chiltern range, stands 160 m above sea level and has sweeping views to the north over Bedfordshire. An area of 55 ha (136 acres) was bought in 1939 with funds from the W. A. Robertson Bequest. It is capped by Clappers Wood and the Robertson Memorial is among the trees. The memorial is about 1 mile from a car park. The hill has a spectacular profile, viewed from Sharpenhoe village.

#### Robertson Corner, Dunstable Downs TL0019

Dunstable or Whipsnade Downs was bought by or donated to the National Trust in several 'pockets', amounting to 115 ha (285 acres) between 1935 and 1948. One such pocket was funded from the W. A. Robertson Bequest in 1940. This memorial is on a triangle of land at a road junction and thus the only one visible to motorists as they drive by. The Downs here cover the edge of the ridge and are used as a jumping-off point for hang gliders, for picnics and to observe the gliders being launched from the land at the foot of the slope. It is a very scenic and popular place for outdoor enthusiasts. There is an entry on the Roll of Honour, Bedfordshire, on the Internet, with a picture of this memorial and a transcript of the inscription.

### **Acknowledgements by Ann Noyes**

My brother, David Goodland, first drew my attention to the correspondence in *Stand To!* the bulletin of the Western Front Association, alerting me to the memorial at Netley, Gomshall. Dan Finnigan has allowed me to quote from his letter to *Stand To!* and an article he wrote for the *Farnham Herald*. Mary Webb of the NT Legal Department and Marcia Dover of the Legacies Department were able to research areas that I could not reach and provide useful facts, as have the local NT Countryside Managers. Mr Richard Moss of the Sutton House Society welcomed me to the house and provided helpful information and introduced me to Mike Gray and his excellent booklet *Sutton House*. My daughters Alice Noyes and Cathy Sharman and son-in-law Richard have entered into my enthusiasm and have provided transport to remote sites and photographs of the memorials and the views.

# Summer outing; Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2005

*Please fill in this form if you would like to come on the outing and send it with a cheque payable to the "Sutton House Society" to Sutton House, 2&4 Homerton High Street, London E9 6JQ.*

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

TELEPHONE .....

EMAIL .....

	Number of people	Cost per person	Total cost
SHS members		£12	£
Non-SHS members		£15	£
<b>Total</b>			£

SIGNED .....

DATE .....