

Sutton House Society Newsletter

September 2006



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

An Evening with Iain Sinclair

In November 1992 we published, in this newsletter, an extract from Iain Sinclair's book *Down River*.

A couple of weeks later, hustled by his producers, Fredrik rang me. We arranged to meet for a drink in the Chesham Arms, Mehetabel Road, Hackney: just down the ramp from Sutton House, a genuine, but well-disguised Tudor Manor that had probably survived thanks to the obscurity of its location. 'They' had not yet decided which motorway would bury it. The planners assumed this weather-boarded relic was another bankrupt mock-Tudor sandwich bar, and they left it alone: 'Turn that one over to the Pest Squad, Ron!' The building was sealed, and guarded by a depressed gaggle of ghosts and clinically-reticent poltergeists. It burst into life, infrequently, as opposing factions argued about its purpose, or jemmied away the skirting boards to reveal – in triumph – stubs of rat-gnawed chalk or some defunct grammarian's detention exercises. Both parties would fervently claim these rodent droppings as the evidence that clinched the very case they were attempting to prove. Then the whole business would sink back once more into perpetual limbo.



Since then, of course, Sutton House has been restored and the 'rat-gnawed chalk' the mummified rat and the 'defunct grammarian's detention exercises' have been preserved in our collection along with many other curious artefacts discovered during the process of restoration.

This year we warmly welcome **Iain Sinclair**, Hackney novelist and idiosyncratic travel writer, as speaker at our Annual Lecture. His subject is "Disappearances". Sinclair's latest book *London, City of Disappearances* is to be published this October. The publisher's blurb describes the book as follows.

London is a city of disappearances and fallible memories. Alongside the material city, of noise and celebrity, is that other place: a city of the dead, the unvoiced, the erased. Here you will find fabulous identities which, freed from their mundane reality, survive as eternal fictions, and urban myths with more blood and vigour than any of our contemporary cartoons of manufactured notoriety.

Iain Sinclair has long been fascinated by interzones, cracks, crannies, "lost" biographies. In *London, City of Disappearances* he turns away from official versions and approved histories, and, with the help of high-profile contributors, brings to light the fugitive scraps, ragpickers' bundles, faded newspaper cuttings and patterns in the dust.

The Annual Lecture takes place at Sutton House on Thursday 19th October 2006 at 7.30 pm. The cost is £5 for SHS members and £6 for others. Please book your seat by filling in the slip and sending it with a cheque to the Sutton House Society.

Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will take place at Sutton House on Thursday 16th November starting at 7.30pm. All members of the Society are urged to attend. The current committee comprises Mike Gray (Chair), Alan Hayday (Vice-chair), Joy Geary (Treasurer), Carole Mills (Secretary), Peter Mudge (Membership and Website), Ailsa Pain, Lissa Chapman, Audrey Seabrook, Leah Nicholson, Julie Lafferty and Bill Sadleir. Whilst all members of the committee are willing to stand for re-election, new members are always welcome, and in 2007 we have a particularly busy agenda with an anticipated appeal for funds to support archaeological investigation on the old car-yard site and the Sadleir Quincentenary celebrations. If you would like to be involved please let the Secretary know either by writing to the address on the booking form, or by telephoning 01892 545861 or by email to caroleann.mills@virgin.net – serving on the committee will not take up much of your time but your contribution would be invaluable.

Before the Meeting there will be an opportunity to view the Intergenerational Caribbean Heritage Exhibition in the Art Gallery. This interactive exhibition produced by local older and young people of Caribbean heritage explores intergenerational cultural connections.

Summer Outing

Ten members joined the trip on August Bank Holiday Monday.

In the morning we went to Chalfont St. Giles to visit an unspoilt 17th century cottage where John Milton finished *Paradise Lost* and was encouraged to begin *Paradise Regained*. The custodian is very knowledgeable and was anxious to point out that Milton was a perceptive political thinker as well as a poet. Before leaving we enjoyed the terraced garden, which reflects Milton's interest in botany.



After lunch we went to Chenies Manor, once the seat of the Bedford family, but now privately owned and only occasionally open. Henry VIII stayed here three times and Elizabeth I held a privy council here. A less happy aspect of its history is its mention in the indictment of Catherine Howard as a place where she was unfaithful with Thomas Culpepper.

The house is surrounded by finely kept gardens, from where there is an interesting view of these Tudor chimneys. A building in the grounds, originally for the children and their servants, has been converted into an art gallery. When the Elizabethan Lord Cecil visited, he was accommodated in the Child House "to give him quiet". It is difficult to know whether such hospitality was meant sincerely or as an insult!

On the way home, we stopped to see a medieval wall painting in Sarratt parish church.

Our thanks are due to Peter Mudge for driving the minibus and to Ailsa Pain for making all the arrangements.



The Macaroni Penguin

A recent visitor to Sutton House was Shirley King, from Darlington. She was fascinated by an engraving in the Victorian room and was inspired to add the following extract to her website about penguins. A trip to the Antarctic inspired her interest in these curious and comical avian creatures. Her website tells you everything you ever wanted to know about penguins, except why polar bears don't eat them (they can't get the silver foil off, as if you didn't know...). We are very grateful to her for giving permission to reproduce the extract.



Macaroni penguins were named after young 18th century dandies who considered themselves the leaders of fashion and taste in London society. They were young men who had done their grand tour travelling through Europe to Italy and copied the tastes and styles of continental society. They set up their own club in London called the Macaroni Club and wore hats with feathers stuck in them. At the time a popular image of Italians was of them wearing hats sporting feathers. In 1764, Horace Walpole described the club members as travelled young men wearing long curls and spy glasses. The word became synonymous with the young men and anyone affectedly stylish. Dr Samuel Johnson's biographer and fan Boswell wrote in 1773 about a person he described as a delicate Londoner, a macaroni who couldn't ride. The picture is of an Upper Clapton macaroni, a fashionable Hackney gentleman of the 1790s. It is on display at Sutton House in Hackney, a magnificent Tudor house in east London saved

from extinction by local enthusiasts and now in the care of the National Trust. This house is a rare survivor with stunning linen-fold panelling and many other interesting features. According to Mike Gray, President of the Sutton House Society, there was a series of such illustrations depicting macaronis from different areas in London. The Hackney macaroni in the picture wears breeches with legs of different patterns, carries a stick, sword and silk handkerchief and has his hair (or would it be a wig?) done in a long ringlet. In his case the feathers are sticking out of his pocket. The picture is dated 1792. Everyone has heard of the song Yankee Doodle Dandy, which was written by an English surgeon to poke fun at the continental army during the [American] revolutionary war. It implies that Yankee Doodle was such a hick that he considered himself a dandy if he stuck a feather in his hat and called himself a macaroni. The word macaroni itself is derived from the Greek *makaria*, food from barley (c. 200–600 A.D.). Whoever named the penguins had a wicked sense of humour!

To learn more about penguins, please visit Shirley King's website www.communicate.co.uk/ne/penguins.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

We at Sutton House tend, quite naturally, to emphasize the early years of Ralph Sadleir's career, when he was assistant to the 'master conjurer' of the Reformation, Thomas Cromwell. In 1535 he built what we now call Sutton House but by 1550 he had sold his Hackney property to the Master of the Clothworkers' Company, John Machell. Sutton House Society member Rob Street has been researching Sadleir's life after he moved to Standon, Hertfordshire in the 1550s or, as Rob suggests, even earlier. For the full article go to www.sadleir.org and click on 'Standon'. We are very grateful to him for giving permission to reproduce this introduction.

Sir Ralph Sadleir and his wife and children lived in Standon for some 48 years. We have evidence that in 1539 he either lived in a house on the site of the present day Lordship or in the village of Standon. It was in the same year that Henry VIII appointed Sir Ralph “keeper of the site, parker, bailiff of the manor and steward of the Lordship”. People writing the history of the Lordship have repeated the mantra that there was an older house on the site before Sir Ralph got down to building his pile in 1546. We have no evidence of this. 1546 was the time of the building boom if you had money in England. And by this time Sir Ralph had the money to build his prestigious house. Hertfordshire and especially the north-east bit around Standon was to become the Tudor commuter belt for court officials like Sir Ralph.

But what to build? These were the days before architects as we know them today so the design of the Lordship was a mixture of Sir Ralph’s ideas, copying features from existing houses, and designing bits as you went along. We don’t think that Sir Ralph did the grand tour to Italy so there was no question that the Lordship would have had any renaissance bits and pieces. The Lordship of 1546 was bog-standard Tudor. The west elevation had a central arched gateway (still seen today) with brick turrets either side similar to many houses of the period. Running from the west elevation it had a north and south wing. Sir Ralph’s status was rising fast; he needed more space for servants and his ever-increasing family, plus the fact that to attract the monarch to stay you had to have a large showy house. It wasn’t long before he was adding extensions, an east wing giving the house an internal courtyard and a further extension down to the river Rib.

Sir Ralph was rewarded. In 1578 Queen Elizabeth stayed for 3 days with about 150 of her party. Sir Ralph loved his house and estate at Standon and couldn’t wait to get back to it after his many journeys to Scotland.

In March 1587 he died peacefully at the Lordship. His son and grandson continued living at the Lordship for another 70 years before it passed to the Aston family, then to William Plumer, then derelict, before coming into the hands of the Duke of Wellington where after several other owners it became the building you see today.

Our celebration of the life of Sadleir, next year, will feature on 23rd June a talk by historian David Starkey about the role Ralph played in English history, from his early years in Hackney to the onerous task of being custodian of the imprisoned Mary Queen of Scots and a judge at her trial. If you haven’t already registered for the quincentennial celebrations, please do so soon on the form enclosed.

Membership subscription

The Sutton House Society was founded in 1988. When it was founded, the annual membership subscription cost £2.50 for concessions, £5.00 for individuals and £7.50 for families. During the past eighteen years, average prices have increased by 90%, but in all that time the membership subscription has stayed the same. (The life membership rate of £50.00 was introduced in 1999.) We are now in a situation where a significant proportion of our income from subscriptions goes on administrative costs. So we have reluctantly decided to put up the rates from next year – to £3.00 for concessions, £6.50 for individuals, £10.00 for families and £65.00 for life. We very much hope that this will not put you off renewing your membership!

Unless you are a life member, you will be sent a renewal letter before the end of the year showing the new rates. If you pay your subscription by standing order, the letter will include a form to change the amount, which you should sign and send to your bank. Alternatively, you may wish to consider taking out life membership.

Booking form

Please fill in this form if you would like to come to the annual lecture or would like to be on the mailing list for the Sadleir Quincentenary, and send it with a cheque (if applicable) payable to "Sutton House Society" to the Secretary, Sutton House Society, High View, 44b Woodbury Park Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9NG.

NAME

ADDRESS

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TELEPHONE

EMAIL

	<i>Price per person</i>	<i>Number of people</i>	<i>Total</i>
SHS members	£5		£
Non-SHS members	£6		£
Total			£

I should like to be on the mailing list for the Sadleir Quincentenary (please tick the box):

SIGNED

DATE