

Sutton House Society Newsletter

October 2007



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

Sadleir Quincentenary

The weekend of 23rd to 24th June will be long-remembered in the history of Sutton House, because it marked the 500th birthday of Sir Rafe Sadleir, who built the house in 1535. Members of the Sadleir family came to Sutton House from all over the world to participate in the festivities.

On the Saturday afternoon, children from Rushmore Primary School gave two performances in the Wenlock Barn of their musical play celebrating Sadleir's 500th birthday. This event was the outcome of a series of workshops, led by members of Passamezzo, in which the participants devised their own version, including a specially written song, of how Ralph Sadleir survived the hazards of Tudor court life. This project was made possible by a grant from Awards for All. There were tours of the house throughout the afternoon.



Later there was a reception for members of the Sadleir family and invited guests in the courtyard. Mike Gray proposed a toast to Sir Ralph, Bill Sadleir proposed a toast to the Sutton House Society, and Councillor Khan (the Speaker of Hackney Council) proposed a toast to the National Trust. The invited guests included Meg Hillier (the local MP) and Revd. Rob Wickham (the Rector of St. John-at-Hackney).



This was followed by the Sutton House Society Annual Lecture, given this year by Dr. David Starkey C.B.E., on the subject of "Sir Ralph Sadleir and the Tudor Court". Dr. Starkey was on his usual excellent form, and his lecture was very well received by a packed Wenlock Barn.



The Saturday ended with a Tudor Banquet, also in the Wenlock Barn, during which guests were entertained by words and music performed by Will Birch and Lissa Chapman, and the Homerton Consort.

The next day, Mike Gray and Sean Gubbins led guided walks round the centre of Hackney, visiting the former car yard next to Sutton House, St.-John-at-Hackney and St. Augustine's tower.



In the afternoon, the Sutton House Society summer outing took place to Standon, where Sir Rafe moved to after leaving Hackney. We saw the tombs of Sir Rafe and his family in St. Mary's church.



Rob Street showed us round the village and led a walk to Standon Lordship, Sir Ralph's residence, where Lord and Lady Trenchard showed us round the gardens. The Sunday ended with a splendid tea in St. Mary's church, provided by the PCC.

Many thanks to everyone who was involved in organizing this weekend of events.

Carole Mills

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Carole Mills.

Carole was one of the most important figures in the modern history of Sutton House. She was appointed by the National Trust as the Project Manager for the restoration in 1990, and subsequently she became the house's first Property Manager, when it opened to the public. She was thus

responsible for establishing many of the innovative characteristics of the house that made it so refreshingly different from typical National Trust properties. She remained at Sutton House until 1998, when she moved to Cambridgeshire to become Property Manager of Anglesey Abbey, another National Trust property.

After she retired, a few years later, she reestablished her links with Sutton House by becoming the Secretary of the Sutton House Society. She devoted much time and effort to the arrangements for the Sadleir Quincentenary, and it was a great pity that she became ill just a few days before the weekend and so was unable to attend any of the events. Her illness was diagnosed as untreatable cancer, and she died two months later on 30th August.

Julia Lafferty, the first Secretary of the Sutton House Society, writes:

It is with great sadness that we have to announce the untimely death of Carole Mills, the first Project Manager at Sutton House. Latterly she had served as Secretary of the Sutton House Society following the resignation of the previous incumbent in 2006. Most recently, as a member of the organizing committee of this year's Sadleir Quincentenary Weekend, she played a key role in the success of that event. We were so sorry that she was not well enough to attend the Weekend to witness the enjoyment of those many members of the Sadleir family worldwide who had travelled from far and wide to be present.

Carole took over as Project Manager at an early and crucial stage in the restoration of Sutton House. She faced the daunting task of translating into reality the vision that the original members of the Save Sutton House Campaign (the forerunner of the Sutton House Society) had cherished for the House. Her achievements as Project Manager were a tribute to her managerial and organizational skills, combined with her unfailing warmth and good humour, and the sensitivity which she showed to the aspirations of the local community.

Perhaps only in retrospect has it become clear just how fortunate we were that Carole was the person appointed to take the Sutton House Community Scheme forward as the National Trust's flagship "urban project". The enduring success of Sutton House is the legacy that she has left us through her dedication and commitment to the ideals which inspired those who had campaigned so hard to save the House from the dereliction which had befallen it in the 1980s.

Her many friends in the Society will miss her very much, and our deep sympathy and condolences go to her family and to her partner Mike Gray.

Grace Bryan-Brown

Sadly, Carole's death is not the only one that we have to report. Grace Bryan-Brown, who was a member of the Sutton House Society committee from its earliest days and a volunteer at the house for many years, died on 21st July.

Siân Harrington, who was the house's third Property Manager, writes:

Grace was one of Sutton House's longest-serving volunteers until she became too unwell to continue in 2003. She was able to put her creative skills to a great variety of uses at the property, writing signs for the rooms, making theatre backdrops and props for children's performances and events, and templates for colouring-in activities. Her 3-D models of Sutton House and Hackney in the Tudor period brought the property to life for all visitors and are still used at the property for school workshops. She always did her bit to support us at Sutton House, often working late into the night to prepare something ready for an event. She loved being busy with her mind and her hands, and our hearts went out to her when she found this more and more difficult. We greatly missed her great work and having her around at the property.

Lissa Chapman writes:

Grace Bryan-Brown, who died in July, was involved in the campaign to save Sutton House from its earliest days. My own first memory of her is of a diminutive and slightly harassed figure, flanked by Stan Piesse and Ken Jacobs, handing out leaflets and receipts from behind a trestle table in the dilapidated and grubby room that was to become the Georgian Parlour. But the air of anxiety was misleading: it was just that she loathed administration, yet had taken on the role of Membership Secretary of the new Sutton House Society (whose records she kept with care for several years).

Grace's formidable talents lay in other areas. Now retired from her career as a designer with the B.B.C., her artistic gifts, her energy and her perfectionism were at the disposal of Sutton House. During the fundraising campaign she helped plan and stage many events. Perhaps most memorably of all, the Great Chamber (then without its panelling and with its ceiling held up

by metal supports) was transformed with exquisite heraldic banners of Grace's making, vast quantities of fresh flowers and almost frighteningly authentic food to celebrate Henry VIII's 500th birthday. But she would turn a capable and painstaking hand to almost anything, from a scale model of Sutton House to a "no smoking" sign. Everything she produced was of an immaculate quality.

In the 1990s Sutton House was a busy, sociable and occasionally chaotic place. Grace thrived on all this. Always elegantly turned out, with a taste for lively company and gin and tonic, and no disposition to suffer fools at all, she was an indispensable and delightful part of life there. Her 80th birthday party in the now-restored Great Chamber in January 2001 brought together her beloved nephews and nieces, her B.B.C. colleagues, her Hackney friends and others from all over the world; she was to be with us another two years before her health began to fail.

Some of Grace's work still remains in Sutton House, in books and elsewhere; and for everyone who knew and valued her, she leaves the memory of a precious and irreplaceable friend.

Annual General Meeting and Advent Party

The Society's Annual General Meeting will take place in the Great Chamber on Thursday 29th November, starting at 7:30pm. All members of the Society are urged to attend. This is your main opportunity for hearing what the Society has been up to during the past year, and for discussing its plans for next year. It will include the appointment and reappointment of officers and members of the committee. If you would like to join the committee you would be very welcome.

After the AGM, there will be a pre-Christmas party in the Great Chamber, to which all members of the Society are warmly invited. This will include an exhibition of photographs and children's art from the Sadleir Quincentenary weekend.

Welcome to Naomi Hutchinson

We were very sad to say goodbye to Deborah Hudson, who resigned as Custodian of Sutton House last summer. She has gone back to her native Canada to take up a similar job there. We wish her all the best for the future.

We are now very pleased to welcome Naomi Hutchinson as the new Custodian. She writes:

Hello there! I am delighted to introduce myself as the new Custodian of Sutton House. I have been in post since late July and have been thoroughly enjoying my role here.

While I am new to this property I have been with the National Trust variously as a volunteer and member of staff since the age of 15 working in conservation, events and house management.

I started with the National Trust in my native Northern Ireland at Hezlett House and Downhill Castle. When I went on to study English Literature at Oxford (St John's College) I stayed with the Trust, working seasonally as Custodian of Hezlett House during my summer months with the exception of my final year when I worked at the James Joyce Foundation/Museum in Zurich. After university I was the Assistant House and Visitor Services Manager at the National Trust Back-to-Backs in Birmingham. The Back-to-Backs are a new property: they had just celebrated their third birthday as a Trust property and welcomed their hundred thousandth visitor when I left to take up my new role in Sutton House in July. Despite being a considerably less grand court of tenement dwellings there is an abundance of similarities between Sutton House and the Back-to-Backs such as the urban setting, the emphasis on education and social inclusion, and of course the dramatic restoration.

I have had an absolutely outstanding welcome from everyone at the property not to mention the Sutton House Society itself which has also accepted me as their new Secretary. I look forward to working closely with the Sutton House Society to help and facilitate the fascinating and valuable work that they do.

I have met quite a few members of the Sutton House Society already but if I haven't crossed paths with you yet please feel free to pop in and say hello or get in touch. Naomi.hutchinson@nationaltrust.org.uk

We are especially grateful to Naomi for agreeing to be the Society's new Secretary, and we hope that she will enjoy many happy years at Sutton House.

Custodian's report

Sutton House Shop

The shop at Sutton House has just received its first consignment of festive goods in several years, including a stunning array of National Trust Christmas cards and great-value 2008 diaries and calendars. There are also some fabulous selections of shortbread and delicious chocolate-covered marzipan. I am trying to increase local awareness of the shop and make it a more profitable enterprise, so please do drop in if you are passing by and do let friends and family know that it is restocked with lots of lovely things. If you do have any ideas for improving the shop please let me know!

Christmas Craft Fair.

The Fair is taking place from noon to 5pm on Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd December, with a wide array of stall-holders. There will be live appearances from Ye Medieval Baebes, who will perform some festive roundels. Some local Morris dancers will also be in attendance, so why not work off those mince pies with a bit of jig! If you are after some unique Christmas gifts or just some good old-fashioned festive fun, the Fair is the perfect place to come and enjoy Sutton House decorated beautifully for the season. Admission is £2 for adults and free for children.

Welcome to Christopher Cleeve

We are also delighted to welcome another appointment to the Sutton House staff: Christopher Cleeve, who is the new Learning Officer. He writes:

It is my great pleasure to introduce myself as the new Learning Officer at Sutton House. I have already worked for the National Trust at Morden Hall Park (in the great, if a little wet, outdoors) and Quarry Bank Mill in similar roles. It's thrilling to be part of such a committed, strong team having already seen them in action when working together during my time at Morden. I'm also pleased to be back indoors, in an Historic Building with so many wonderful stories. I read History at University so I'm in my element teaching and learning about the property. I would enjoy hearing any great stories you have about Sutton House, so please feel free to share them with me. I look forward to meeting you.