



Chair Chat December 2017

Here we are in the festive season again and 'tis the season to be jolly'. It has been a very eventful year one way or another and, at too many times, a tragic and sad one so it is good to end the year with the happy news of a Royal wedding although I suspect we might grow tired of hearing about it by the time May comes around!

We have yet again sponsored a tree for the Christ Church, Erith Christmas Tree Festival. The festival will be taking place between 15 and 17 December. If you do have a chance to visit, do go and see all the trees in place. They provide a magical and heart-warming sight. Many thanks to the ladies who helped to decorate our tree.

To those of you coming to the Social on 14 December, I am sure you will enjoy the entertainment and excellent food. Thanks must go to all those members who have organised the event. Remember the starting time is 1.45 pm.

I wish you all a happy Christmas and a healthy and peaceful 2018.

Regards

Carole Hunt

Monthly Meetings and Speakers

The main meeting is held on the 2nd Thursday of every month at 2 p.m. (be there by 1.45 pm to get a seat!) at Roberts Hall behind Christ Church, Bexleyheath Broadway.

December 14	Christmas Social	Singalong With Tom Carradine
January 11	Richard Griffin	Body Guard to the Queen
February 8	Roger Stevens	Return Visit! Audio Visual Show - Guaranteed to lift a winter's afternoon
March 8	Ian Packham	Encircling Africa. Around Africa by Public Transport
April 12	Tony Farnham	Romance of London's River

May 10	Dave Pattenden	My Life in Magic
June 14	Tony Neild	Hall Place Gardens
July 12	Summer Social	with Sherlock Holmes

Local Lights

Your next trip to The Orchard

Sunday 1st July, 3pm

Listen to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra play

A Night at the Ballet

Enjoy extracts of ballet music from *The Bartered Bride*, *Coppelia*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Sylvia* and *Swan Lake*.

Group rate £28

Please book and pay cheque or cash at this meeting.

Carole Alleway

And please don't forget to collect your tickets

TOWN AND AROUND

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

ALL OUTINGS AT YOUR OWN RISK

THERE APPEARS TO BE A MISCONCEPTION THAT OUR OUTINGS ARE ALWAYS FULL. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO COME TO THE MEETINGS YOU MAY PHONE OR E MAIL MAIRE CARR ANY TIME

NO VISIT PLANNED FOR DECEMBER

Wednesday 24th January 2018. Second visit Backstage at the Royal Opera House. Meet Charing Cross at 11.45, please note time. A guided tour of the backstage areas of this fabulous building. If a rehearsal is in progress there will be no admittance to the auditorium. £10.50.

Thursday 22nd February 2018. National Army Museum. Meet Victoria Station by Platform 7 10.15/ 10.30ish and then 170 bus. Introductory talk, followed by guided tour around the permanent exhibits. Café, Loos. Free of charge, but donation please of £3.00.

Wednesday 14th March 2018. Dr Johnson's House. Meet Charing Cross at 10.15. Bus along Fleet Street and short walk. Guided tour of this 300 year old townhouse in which Dr Samuel

Johnson, writer and wit lived and worked whilst compiling his great Dictionary. Steep and narrow stairs. £5.00

FULL PAYMENT (PREFERABLY BY CHEQUE MADE OUT TO TOWN AND AROUND) MUST BE MADE AT TIME OF BOOKING. See notices in Roberts Hall for more details. **If you are on the reserve list for a trip please keep day free, or let Maire know as soon as possible if you are unable to come.**

If you have booked a place on an outing and cannot attend please let us know as soon as possible. It is unacceptable to keep other members of the group standing around waiting for you. Please make a note of our Mobile telephone numbers which are printed in the Newsletter so we can be contacted by phone or text even on the day of the visit

Organiser: Margaret Collins		
Bookings: Maire Carr		
Money: Sabine Wayt		

TOWN AND AROUND

BACKSTAGE VISIT TO ROYAL OPERA HOUSE

BY MARGARET COLLINS

It may only have been November but the Christmas lights were up in the Strand, and when we reached Covent Garden we were greeted by a huge silver stag, decorated with lights which was really impressive and we began to feel a little Christmassy.

After security checks we were met by our most enthusiastic guide who took us to sit in the foyer to give us some history of the building. This is the third theatre on this site. During Cromwellian times theatres were banned, so after the reformation of the monarchy Charles II gave letters patent to allow a theatre to be built. Performances began of plays but by 1719 George Frederic Handel had become Musical Director and many of his operas and oratorios were premiered here. In 1728 the Beggars Opera was commissioned, which was a great financial success and this funded the building of the 1738 theatre. This building burnt down in 1808, and was reconstructed only to be burnt down again in 1856.

By 1887 the building was known as Royal Italian Opera as all operas, even those composed by other nationalities, were performed in Italian. By 1892 the theatre was known as the Royal Opera House and performances of ballet as well as opera were in the programme. During WWI the building was used as a furniture depository, and during WWII it was a dance hall, but by 1946 the ballet and opera were being performed once again with Sadler's Wells Ballet as the resident ballet company. During the 1990s a major rebuilding on this two and half acre site, comprising of ten floors, was undertaken. The main pillared façade, foyer and staircase, along with the auditorium was retained but refurbished. The building is now the home of The Royal

Opera Company, The Royal Ballet Company and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House. Major renovation works to open up the facilities are now in progress. Our tour began.

Walking up the wide chandelier lit staircase, double the width of ladies crinoline skirts, allowed us to enter the Paul Hamlyn Hall. This is also known as the Floral Hall as it used to be a flower sellers' market area. The hall had been reduced by half, with the portion of unrequired beautiful ironwork now fixed in one of the London Markets. We then were taken to look through glass on the enormous backstage area. We viewed a video of the way the sets and scenery were manufactured in Thurrock before being brought by road to the Theatre for assembly. The complicated pallet system, devised and built by Rolls Royce, could change sets on stage in a flash. However there are approximately 1,000 staff employed so we could appreciate how expensive it is to put on a show. When a production was finished for the season the sets, costumes, and props would be taken to Wales for storage until the next production of that particular ballet or opera. Some sets have been recycled up to 40 times.

The ballet rehearsal spaces were our next viewing through glass although sadly nobody practicing just then. We were told that the junior dancers have their ballet school in the White House in Richmond Park, and the senior pupils have their schooling in a building next door reached via a bridge. I just loved the hat and jewellery department we visited next. We were allowed to handle the different type of hats, or headdresses required for performances following design instructions. What a job. Walking through long corridors and peeping through viewing windows down into the backstage area continued to engage us with the enormousness of it all. Our guide kept us entertained with stories and information all the time. Sadly we could not visit the auditorium as a rehearsal was in progress. Eventually we returned to the ground floor where our guide left us.

Coming out into the busy Covent Garden we slowly walked through admiring the decorations, huge baubles and mistletoe, towards the piazza to admire the beautifully lit Christmas tree before making our way back to Charing Cross and home.

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## Themed Walks

At the end of October our group met at Charing Cross Station. We then travelled by Northern Line to Hampstead Station, where we stopped for drinks at the nearby Café Rouge.

Our walk along a narrow lane, the home of antique and flower shops. We continued downhill through Flask Walk where one of the houses was decorated with Halloween symbols- a large skeleton and some smaller objects on the balcony. The passers-by stopped to see this unusual display and took photographs and so did we.

Further on along Willow Road, we noticed that No 2 was a National Trust property. Apparently the house which dates from 1930 used to belong to the Goldfinger family was considered 'an architect's vision of the future'. On the opposite side of the road was a large playground well patronised by children and their parents. We were also in the vicinity of another NT property, Fenton House from 1686, but we did not visit any during this walk.

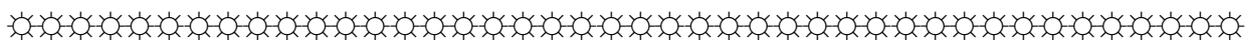
Eventually, after following the path uphill and downhill, we reached appropriately called Downhill Road which took us to Hampstead Heath. The area was covered in lush vegetation, with trees and bushes all around us and yellow and brown autumn leaves carpeting the ground.

Following a narrow path we came upon a vast open space - a sloping field covered in soft green grass. The area was a hive of activity. A group of young people were engaged in flying kites, a few colourful kites were seen in the sky above us. Another group were playing football. There were walkers with their dogs and small family groups enjoying the bright sunny autumn day in the nature yet less than five miles from Charing Cross.

From the top of this field we had a wonderful view of London; we could see the BT tower, the Shard, Docklands and the City buildings. When we reached the bottom of the field we followed the directions to the Parliament Hill Farmers Market, held every Saturday. We walked in between the various stalls - the smell of cooked food was inviting!

Finally, after a walk of nearly four miles, we enjoyed our rest and lunch at Carluccio's at Rosslyn Hill before returning home in the late afternoon.

Tomira Carson



## Executive Committee 2017 - 2018

|                            |                       |  |                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chair                      | <i>Carole Hunt</i>    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Vice Chair                 | <b><u>VACANCY</u></b> |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Secretary                  | Sandra Goulding       |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Treasurer                  | Ron Clayton           |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Membership                 | Douglas West          |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Speakers                   | Terry Moseley         |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Group Liaison              | <b><u>VACANCY</u></b> |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| E-mail & IT                | Jo Livingston         |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Social Secretary           | Thelma Wilkes         |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Catering                   | Vi King               |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Hall Manager /Database     | Nino Parascandolo     |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>NON-COMMITTEE ROLES</b> |                       |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Meet & Greet               | Edna Sutton           |  | Please let Edna know of personal events e.g. significant birthdays, anniversaries, condolences, etc. so that she can send cards. |
| Newsletter Editor          | Mary Jupp             |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Webmaster                  | <b><u>VACANCY</u></b> |  |                                                                                                                                  |

*Please submit all contributions to January newsletter by  
Midday - Friday 29th December*

**Please ensure you have an email acknowledgment from me that I have received your contribution!**

**Thank you to all our wonderful contributors this year.**

**And thank you all for helping me through my first year as Editor and the nice feedback.**

**Mary Jupp**