

**THE YORK HOUSE SOCIETY  
TWICKENHAM**

**(Founded in 1924)**

**Notes on the oldest amenity society in Middlesex**

**1<sup>st</sup> edition Compiled by Adam Brand, 2011  
2<sup>nd</sup> edition Updated by Yvonne Hewett, 2016**

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## **HISTORY OF THE YORK HOUSE SOCIETY – Patricia Woram**

The Society developed from the York House Committee which was set up in 1922 for the specific purpose of preserving York House. The late Mr Noel Viner-Brady, together with several other local gentlemen, persuaded the Twickenham Urban District Council to purchase York House to be used for their municipal offices.

In 1926 when Twickenham was granted a Charter of Incorporation, the Society had the honour of presenting the Mayoral chain of office, a chain which contains two pounds of gold.

To commemorate the purchase of York House, the Society presented the Council with the magnificent George II silver loving cup (circa 1732). This cup is produced annually at the Twelfth Night Ball, a function inaugurated by Mr Viner-Brady. A plaque in memory of Mr Noel Viner-Brady was unveiled in the hall of York House on 1st October 1948. In February of that year, a portrait of a Cavalier (attributed to Van Dyke) was presented to York House by the Viner-Brady family – ‘on condition that it may hang at the side of my father’s memorial plaque’ wrote Miss Dorothy Viner-Brady.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Society, a picture of the statues painted by Jill Storey was presented to York House at the summer party. The leader of the Council, Sir David Williams, accepted the gift on behalf of the borough.

The Society has had its ups and downs. At the first A. G. M. in 1928 some 90 members and visitors were present but no meetings were held between 1939 and 1945. From time to time the Society has struggled with lack of members and enthusiasm, but is now strong and active.

The Twelfth Night Ball has been held every year since 1946 – and is one of the highlights of the winter. The summer party continues to be a fixture and the Society has regular meetings with good speakers.

The Society has been active in many spheres over the past 75 years. The restoration of the statues was an important project in 1988. A sum of £55,000 was raised, with substantial contributions from the Council, English Heritage and other bodies such as the Tata Foundation which contributed £2000. Suzanne Hodson was Secretary of the Charitable Trust set up to coordinate the restoration. Sadly she died only a few months after work on the statues had been completed. To perpetuate and honour her memory the Society established an annual prize to be awarded to children in the first year at Orleans Park School who devise a “Heritage Trail”. The idea behind the “Heritage Trail” is for it to lead visitors through old Twickenham. Each year the work of the children is judged, and prizes awarded to a group of the best “trails” devised by the children. This is an important project – introducing the local children to their heritage.

The Society continued to take an active part in local matters, especially those concerned with preservation and restoration of local amenities. The Society also liaises with the Twickenham Society on matters of local interest.

## PROJECTS

The main concern of the York House Society is care for the environment. Care for the environment is properly the duty of local authorities. Communication and consultation are now fundamental elements of the planning process, and consequently the place of amenity societies becomes vital in providing means of communication between local residents and the authorities.

The best amenity societies are not simply preservation societies, they are as much concerned with improving as with preserving what is best in the environment, and in Twickenham, the need for improvement is all too evident and pressing.

The York House Society is not just concerned with York House. Its interests are concentrated around the central area of Twickenham and the river frontage. The York House Society also supports the work of other societies both within and beyond its area.

The Society owes no political allegiance. It is neither for nor against the 'Establishment' and looks towards the future, preserving only what is best of the past.

Members of the Society have played a major role in the following achievements.

1. Acquisition of Orleans Gardens for the Borough
2. Formation of the Borough of Twickenham Local History Society (1962)
3. Preservation of tennis courts at York House
4. Preservation and improvement of the Embankment
5. Revival and maintenance of Church Street
6. Restoration of the York House Statues
7. Suzanne Hodson Memorial Prize for the Heritage Trail
8. York House Tours
9. Tree planting programme
10. Creation of the Museum of Twickenham
11. Repair of riverside walls

Represented on:  
London Forum

**SPEAKERS AT YORK HOUSE MEETINGS**

(m) = Society member (where known)

Apr 1979	D Parton	River Thames Authority
Nov 1979	Edward Bostock	Richmond Arts Council
Feb 1980	M Brown	Richmond Park
Apr 1980	Diana Howard	York House
Feb 1982	H Warburton	Exploring British Conservation System
Nov 1982	Dr. R. Cashmore	Orleans Family
Apr 1983	J Keesing	History of the Gardens
Feb 1984	Donald Simpson	Personalities of St Mary's
Nov 1984	Catherine Parry-Wingfield (m)	Furnishings at Ham House
Apr 1985	P Finch	Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust
Feb 1986	Donald Simpson & Alan Urwin	Town Place of 1635
Apr 1986	Dr Richard Cashmore	Three Bridges to Twickenham
Nov 1986	P C Mullins	Policing in Twickenham
Apr 1987	Catherine Parry-Wingfield (m)	Regency furniture
Nov 1987	Tony Beckles Willson	Twickenham Green
Apr 1988	Diana Howard	Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
Nov 1988	Keith Taylor	Restoration of Y.H. Statues
Feb 1989	Jonathan Nowell	Senior Archaeologist, S.W. London
Sept 1989	Donald Simpson	Twickenham Cemeteries
Nov 1989	Gerry Davies	Parks & Recreation Department
Sept 1990	Catherine Parry-Wingfield (m)	Palladianism
Apr 1990	Derek Jones	Libraries and Arts
Nov 1990	David Stabb	Borough Conservation Officer
Feb 1991	Alan Urwin & Derek Plummer	Orleans House Gallery
Apr 1991	Howard Greenwood (m)	Richmond upon Thames Arts Council
Oct 1991	David Cook	Collecting plants in Madagascar
Jan 1992	Derek Jones	The plaque scheme
Apr 1992	John Dangerfield	Restoration of Rooms 6&7, Y.H.
Sept 1992	Lesley Fraser	English Heritage

Feb 1993	Diana Howard	York House
Apr 1993	Dr Chris Turner	River Thames Society
Sept 1993	John Cloake	History of Richmond Palace
Apr 1994	Malcolm Richards	Editor, Rich & Twick. Times
Sept 1994	Roy Massey	Music in York House Part 1
Feb 1995	Hilary Morris	Head of History at Orleans School – Heritage Trails
Apr 1995	Alan Urwin	The Naked Ladies and the search for the Sculptor
Sept 1995	Roy Massey	Music in York House Part 2
Feb 1996	Catherine Parry- Wingfield (m)	Fashionable Faces – the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century Portrait
Apr 1996	Dr Richard Cashmore	History of York House
Sept 1996	Eve Risbridger	Nature Conservation – Richmond
Nov 1996	Stephen Chapman	History head, Orleans Park School & Heritage Trail children
Feb 1997	Tony Beckles Willson	Tillemans' Twickenham
Apr 1997	Joan Heath (m)	Visiting the Tudors at Hampton Court
Sept 1997	Stanley Rust	Hammerton's Ferry
Nov 1997	Ann Bayne	Special Needs Teacher Orleans Park School, & Pupils w Heritage Trail
Feb 1998	Ray Sandys	Fishmongers in Twickenham
Apr 1998	Trevor Baylis	Invention of windup radio
Sept 1998	Donna Clack	Thames Landscape Strategy
Nov 1998	Stephen Chapman	History head, Orleans Park School & Heritage Trail children
Apr 1999	Jane Dalton	Plans for Orleans Gallery
Sept 1999	Charles Erskine, Kew	Collecting rare plants in China
Nov 1999	Denise Carr	The draft Local Government Bill
Feb 2000	Riverside baths scheme working party reps	Revised brief for Twickenham poolsite
Apr 2000	Janet Knox	Twickenham Town Manager
Sept 2000	Prof Livermore	Turner in Twickenham & Turner's House
Nov 2000	Mrs Negrotti & Mrs Simmons	Orleans Park School: prize-winning pupils on Heritage Trail
Feb 2001	Colin Squire (m)	History of Squire's Garden Centres
Apr 2001	Maureen Payan (m)	The work of HANDS
Sept 2001	Paul Velluet	English Heritage in W London

Feb 2002	Jason Debney	Thames Landscape Strategy
Mar 2002	Joy Lee (m)	York House Gardens & their history
Feb 2003	Fraser Cullen	Rugby in Twickenham
Apr 2003	John Inglis, Jill Sanders	Twickenham Online website
Sept 2003	Prof Michael Lee (m)	Formation of York House Soc
Nov 2003	Mrs Negrotti & Mrs Simmons	Orleans Park School: prize-winning pupils on Heritage Trail
Feb 2004	Paula Vokes (m)	Print-making
Apr 2004	Stuart Wolff	The Great River Race
Sept 2004	Anne Partington-Omar	Arcadia
Nov 2004	John Dangerfield (Insall Associates)	Repairs to York House
Feb 2005	Esther Warboys	Being Town Centre Manager
Apr 2005	Dr David Parr (m)	English Dial Clocks
Sept 2005	Robert Woodward (m)	The Colosseum
Nov 2005	Michael Snodin	Walpole's House, Strawberry Hill
Feb 2006	Harriet Bacharach for Prof Bacharach (m)	The works of Turner
Apr 2006	Paul Mudge (m)	Tea: growing, varieties, serving
Sept 2006	David Noakes, Peter Davies, Sgt Gary Jupp	Community Safety Partnerships, Licensing, Ward Policing
Nov 2006	Angela Kidner (m)	The Environment Trust
Feb 2007	John Shepherd	Richmond Shakespeare Society
Mar 2007	Bruce Lyons	A Lifetime in Travel
Oct 2007	Bob Tough	Shipbuilding on the Thames
Nov 2007	Gaye Galvin	Renovating York House Statues
Feb 2008	Prof Michael Lee (m)	1966: the end of the British World?
Apr 2008	Aileen Cahill	Libraries, history and future
Oct 2008	Adam Brand (m)	Handwriting
Nov 2008	Paul Chadwick, LBRuT	Twickenham poolsite
Feb 2009	Gail Hébert (m)	Richmond & Twickenham Times
Mar 2009	Prof Walter Holland (m)	How can the nation's health be improved?
July 2009	Fraser Cullen	(visit to the RFU)
Oct 2009	David Turner	London & South Western Railway
Nov 2009	Judith Lovelace (m)	Restoration of Strawberry Hill
Feb 2010	Tim Cousins, EA	Thames Fisheries

Apr 2010	Camilla Panufnik (m)	Her life as a photographer
July 2010	Tony Kirkham	250 years of Kew
Oct 2010	Prof Paul Leonard	Water Quality
Nov 2010	Prof Michael Lee (m)	History of the York House Society
Feb 2011	Tony McSweeney	Hidden Twickenham
Apr 2011	Peter Dolan	A Life in Oil
July 2011	Catherine Parry-Wingfield (m)	Reynolds & his friends in Richmond
Oct 2011	Judith Lovelace (m) & Vince Cable MP	Proposed Parliamentary Boundary Changes
Nov 2011	Howard Greenwood (m)	Five great musicians in borough
Feb 2012	Chief Insp Graham Simpson	Policing the Olympics in Twickenham & London
Mar 2012	James Heather	Ham Hydro, Teddington Weir
July 2012		(Visit Kneller Hall)
Oct 2012	Rachel Tranter & Miranda Stern	(Visit Orleans Gallery) Highlights of the Borough's art collection
Nov 2012	Helen Montgomery-Smith	The Makaton Teaching Method
Feb 2013	Peter Eversden Paul Cook, LBRuT	London Forum Changes to York House
Mar 2013	Bruce Gordon-Smith w Joy Lee (m)	Queen's Diamond Jubilee Regatta
July 2013	Ian Jones-Healy	(Visit Normansfield) Langdon Down and his work
Oct 2013	Joy Lee (m)	Photographic visit to Yunnan
Feb 2014	Lindsey Cape	The work of Macmillan Cancer Support
Mar 2014	David Allister, Head of Parks, LBRuT	The borough's parks and associated facilities
July 2014	Bill Stevenson (m)	The U3A and its work
Oct 2014	Rosanna da Sancha	Dutch Paintings in the Royal Picture Collection
Nov 2014	Mike Cherry (m)	Radnor House
Feb 2015	John Dangerfield, Donald Insall Associates	Renovations to York House
Mar 2015	Jason Debney	Thames Landscape Strategy
July 2015	Louise Sibley	(On board the Thames Venturer) The River Thames Boat Project
Oct 2015	Rachel McLean	Using Social Media



Nov 2015	Yvonne Hewett (m)	York House and its History
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**OFFICERS**

## Chairmen:

1924-1935	Mr Noel Viner-Brady
1936	Captain A Robertson
1937	Mr R Were
1938	Mr Thomas Smith
1939-1945	No meetings
1945-1950	Mr G Farrer
1951-1952	Col Edmund Viner-Brady
1953-1969	Mr L P Sedgwick
1970	The Rev. W John Davies
1971-1972	Mr A S Knolles
1973-1976	Mr Edward Morris
1977-1978	Mr Philip Cranswick
1978-1982	Commander John Rathbone
1983-1984	Mr Philip Cranswick
1985	Mr Charles Malley
1986-1991	Dr Peter Payan
1991-2000	Mr Terence Woram
2001-2006	Mr Adam Brand
2007-2010	Ms Joy Lee
2011-	Ms Yvonne Hewett

## Patrons:

Sir John Betjeman was the first Patron  
 Lady Panufnik is the present Patron

## Presidents:

1936-1984	Mr Noel Viner-Brady
1986-1997	Mr Edward Morris
1998-2015	Mrs Jean Cranswick

**MEMORIES**  
**(Joining date of members in brackets)**

**John and Rosamund Armstrong (1997)**

I was 22 in the late 1950s at a time when Rock and Roll was hitting the headlines. At the York House Ball, I, along with the rest of the 'Vicarage Party', rocked the night away. Apparently much was said at the committee meeting afterwards deploring the activities of those "roughnecks".

**Edward Bostock (1968)**

I go back to the early 1950s when I had entered civic circles in Twickenham and the opportunity to get tickets for the Society's Twelfth Night Ball was much prized. I was elected a borough councillor in November 1947 and soon became aware of the standing of the Society and the splendour of its Ball, the high point of the local social calendar. Two of the leading members of the council then were Jim Knaggs and Elsie Jamieson, both Aldermen, and, so far as the Society was concerned, I think Elsie Jamieson was the more involved. I got the impression that she 'held court' in York House on the night of the ball and that then, for all practical purposes, the nominee for the mayoralty for the following year was selected! How true this was, I don't know. My own mayoralty was 1959/60. Was I so vetted? I wonder.

Another personality was C Vaughan Hoad, an amateur actor and a leading member of the Twickenham Amateur Operatic Society. He was MC of the annual ball when I started attending. He would marshal us on either side of the large hall, which I think didn't then have dining tables in it, with ropes to keep the centre part clear for the procession. The carols were sung by boys from George Olerenshaw's Shaftesbury Home School, Fortescue House. Hoad was often called 'Don' or 'the Don', because he had played the part of 'Don Alhambra' in the Operatic Society's production of the Gondoliers and the nickname stuck. It was some years before I realised that he was not christened 'Donald Hoad'.

When Hoad's time to retire came, Alfred Knolles was chairman of the Society and he invited me to take over as MC of the Ball, and Alfred wanted to add a touch of lightness to the procedure. I had one of those Arab hats, red pillbox style with a black tassel, which Alfred persuaded me to wear, somewhat to my embarrassment, but I think I only wore it that one year.

At some time we introduced acrobatics, or 'tumblers' who performed cartwheels along either side of the procession as it moved through the large hall. These were often clumsy rather than graceful. Some tumblers were my grandchildren. Children inevitably grow up and the tumbling faded out.

George Olerenshaw retired from Fortescue House, or the school closed down, and I think that for a few years we got members of the parish church choir to process and lead the singing, but this proved difficult to arrange. I suspect that at that time Geoffrey Bowyer was the organist at the Parish Church and, through him, we involved Cantanti Camerati; and that brings us up to the present day.

**Adam Brand (1985)**

The first musician I met when I moved to Twickenham was Peter Payan, when we walked up the steps of St Mathias Church in Richmond to play in the first Richmond 'Instant Messiah' on June 29, 1979. I kept in touch with Peter and in January 1983 he invited Prudence and me to the York House Ball. At the beginning of the evening William Marsden and I were cajoled into dressing up in chef's uniforms and carrying the cake, made by Maureen Payan, in the Boar's Head procession. That first ball was thoroughly enjoyable: good company, excellent food, and energetic dancing – lead by a pianist who had her own private electric fan to keep herself cool. Since then we have attended every York House Ball. On Friday February 1, 1985, I became a member, and in 1992, vice-chairman of the Society.

**Jean Cranswick (1971)**

In 1960, when we moved to 5 Sion Road, Twickenham, the membership of the York House Society was limited to fifty. As a member had died, Philip was asked to fill the gap, but he declined, asserting his independence. The policy on numbers changed in due course and we were enrolled. Our basement dining room was the venue for committee meetings, especially when Philip was the chairman.

The Society has relentlessly engaged the authorities on matters of conservation and revitalisation. The York House Society with a smaller membership than most amenity societies tries to encourage some input from every member. I imagine there is a storeroom in the bowels of the earth under the council offices which contains filing cabinets full of correspondence from the York House Society over the last 75 years.

As major step forward was taken in the consultation process when the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee was formed in the late 1960s. The area around York House, the riverside and St Mary's Church was one of the first conservation areas to be designated. The committee met every three weeks to discuss proposals in all the conservation areas in the borough of Richmond upon Thames. Their deliberations were then reported to the Planning Committee of the Council.

Commander John Rathbone who lived at 3 Sion Road was the York House Society's representative. He pursued the task with great diligence for many years. I followed John with Julian Hastings as the York House Society members and the current representative is Patrick Doyle.

**George and Peggy Davidson (1981)**

Sometime around 1966 we were invited to purchase tickets for the York House Ball which we did and have attended every one until recently.

In due course we enquired if we could become members, only to be told our names would have to be put before the committee.

Much later we were allowed to become full members of the York House Society. Then George was asked to become treasurer.

**Patrick Doyle (1985)**

As a representative for the York House Society on the CAAC (the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee), I am unusual in being the only non-architect. As a result I am free to express vehemently 'unprofessional' opinions. I can say things that architects on the committee may think, but can't say.

**The Rev Alun Glyn-Jones (1989)**

We came to Twickenham in 1965 and were introduced to the York House Society by Mary Davies and John Davies, the then vicar. The great things that Christine and I remember were the York House Balls, which were very full.

The one we remember best was when we were in our late 20s. Louis Petch had just been awarded his knighthood, as he was then Chairman of Customs and Excise. It was a very merry evening for Society as he was the only knight we had ever had as a member at that time. He was a very nice man and everyone was delighted for him.

**Monica and Howard Greenwood (1987)**

We remember well trying to join the York House Society and at that time it was a somewhat stuffy affair! Both of us were under the mistaken view that the annual subscription would be about £50 each. To be told that it was £2.50 or some small amount shattered us.

We had to be vetted as suitable members but over the years have met many wonderful people who had Twickenham's best interests at the front of their minds. It is a great society and the saving of the statues is evidence of what can be achieved by such a society.

**Freda Hammerton (1985)**

On joining the York House Society I remembered being told as a child how my father and his brothers used to climb up and sit on the walls to watch Sir Ratan Tata and the Indian ladies in their coloured saris walking in the gardens of York House.

My father would have been amazed that I now belong to a conservation society helping to preserve York House and the area.

**Gail Hébert (1996)**

We lived in Amyand Park Road for 20 years and in Newry Road for 4 years before that. During all that time, the profile of Twickenham has changed out of all recognition. Inevitably older residents die off, but I have never seen so many very young people driving posh cars and living in the very expensive properties (which those in Twickenham have now become). It is said that nurses, teachers, etc. can no longer afford to live here. Do the affluent young newcomers care about Twickenham? We shall see.

**Pat Ingham (1997)**

When I first came to Twickenham in the 1960s the statues in York House Gardens were still covered with grey paint as a partial blackout (preventing glare to enemy aircraft) and the local children used to wander around the back and climb up on them.

One of the children even managed to leave a pair of lady's tights dangling from a nymph's outstretched arm.

### **Paul Kershaw (1983)**

My first recollections of York House go back to the summer of 1941 or 1942 when my mother used to take me with my younger sisters for walks in the gardens and along the river. The war, on the home front, was going through a fairly quiet phase and at the age of six or seven every mountain had to be climbed! The highest mountain in Twickenham was (and possibly still is) the mound behind the statues, and my sister, Jane, and I used to spend a happy time running up the back surveying the view from beside the horses, looking towards Richmond. Of course, we were relatively well brought up to respect other people's property and there was no question of vandalism. Incidentally, throughout the darkest days of the war, the gardens were always beautifully maintained, especially the herbaceous border that backed on to the wall to the left of the sunken lawn (when viewed from the house).

My first recollection of the York House Society was some forty years later in 1983. My Aunt Margaret moved to Twickenham in 1982 and with her great enthusiasm for life was soon involved in local matters and was invited to join the Society. This got me thinking and after a brief discussion with Charles Malley and Donald Simpson, Janice and I were also invited to become members in 1984. At my first AGM I volunteered to audit the books and two or three years later reversed roles with George Davidson, when I became treasurer and he became auditor. The role of Treasurer is something I enjoy and, I hope, gives support to those members who are better able than I, to keep an eye on environmental issues.

### **T Stan McRoberts (1971)**

In 1968, while we were looking for a house 'between Hammersmith and Hampton Court' my wife was attracted by an advertisement for 'a funny villa' in Twickenham and, partly from curiosity, visited it and found an owner who was less than amused by the misprint ('funny' for 'sunny').

Negotiations complete, Hugh Irwin, gave me his membership card for the York House Society and suggested I should join. So I rang Ted Morris, the secretary of the Society, who was deeply embarrassed and gently pointed out that membership was by invitation. However, I was soon forgiven and nominated by John Davies, Vicar of St Mary's, the then chairman of the Society.

Ted Morris proved to be a mine of information on Twickenham. At the turn of the century his father was the baker in Church Street which was then a busy thoroughfare with well-populated alleys running to the river. The inhabitants of the alleys, sometimes referred to as "the gypsies" were a lively bunchy and, from time to time, fights would break out on Saturday nights as their young men competed for the favours of the local beauties.

When we first came to Church Street there were scenes of chaos at rush hour since, at that time, vehicles were allowed to move in both directions. Then a worker from the Adana Print Machinery Works (15 to 19 Church Street) took over control of the traffic

at rush hours, an unpaid task which he seemed to enjoy greatly. He was very disappointed when one-way traffic was instituted.

In pursuit of some degree of traffic control I wrote to Toby Jessel, then our MP, who responded immediately and came to see for himself and to discuss possible solutions. We continued our discussions over a sherry during which I volunteered that I worked for Shell, to discover that Marcus Samuel, founder of Shell was Mr Jessel's direct ancestor.

We have continued, for 30 years, to enjoy living in Church Street. The principal threat, which we survived, came from a proposal by local politicians to demolish a substantial, part of Church Street, including our house, and build an administrative palace stretching to the river.

### **Paul and Sally Mudge (1991)**

How we first heard about the York House Society.

Years ago we were intrigued by 'rave reviews' of the 12<sup>th</sup> Night Ball. Having eventually experienced one, and subsequently joined the York House Society, we wholeheartedly concur.

We enjoy belonging to a group of like-minded people, who are prepared to fight to keep Twickenham at its best.

### **Mr and Mrs E E D Newman (1975)**

When we first came to live in Twickenham in 1951 we were here three years before we were invited to join the York House Society by Mr Viner-Brady. After another year or two, some new neighbours arrived and wanted to join. But in those days, you didn't ask to join, you waited to be invited. Our neighbour's wife got cross about this policy. Even though her husband became chairman of the Society and she was constantly asked to join, she never did. Nonetheless she did regularly make coffee for the meetings.

### **Lady Panufnik (1965)**

When I moved to Riverside House in 1963, the York House Society was strong but small. The leading lights were Suzanne Hodson's father, the fiery Colonel Viner-Brady and his artistic spinster sister, Dorothy (long time allies of my grandmother Nellie Ionides, who had always been unquenchable in her determination to prevent destructive change). Edward Morris, clever and mysterious, with elegant, old-fashioned manners, was the main protagonist in all our undertakings. I was in my mid-twenties, newly wed, with no experience of local politics or conservation. Everyone seemed extremely senior, but they were all encouraging. I remember Ann Woodward and Mary Owen first as helpful councillors and then as enthusiastic members.

On the whole we were successful in guarding our inheritance, arguing furiously about the design of lamp posts, the future of Church Street, the revamping of the windowless Orleans House, the preservation of our precious river frontage, as well as York House itself. In those days, there was less to worry about over planning

permissions, and more for the York House Society to worry about, because people destroyed or built things more easily. On the other hand, we were part of the Twickenham Council area rather than a sliver of a vast borough; there was a stronger local feeling, and life was less dominated by committees. I remember writing impassioned letters on important issues or going to see the town clerk or the borough surveyor, virtually always they acted on our opinions.

### **Dr Peter Payan (1982)**

We spent the first three years of married life in Aden and Copenhagen, coming home to live in Twickenham in 1969. Buying a converted coachhouse near the Green, we immediately became involved in vigorous protest against plans by Shell to build a large and unsuitable garage and showroom on the corner of Hampton and First Cross Roads (where stood the butchers Caress and Seymour). This was our first experience of local politics.

A 'Twickenham Green Neighbourhood Association' was formed, its motto 'Keep the Tiger off the Green'. Excited meetings were held in the prep school classroom and posters put up showing a beguiling but predatory tiger. Councillors were written to. Toby Jessel, then on the GLC, was much in evidence. After long and painful uncertainty we won; Shell withdrew and we learned the lesson: nothing is inevitable until it happens.

Twelve years later we moved to the riverside, confident that its distinguished and long-established residents could know nothing of the grubby political street fighting with which we were familiar. On the Green we had heard distant mention of an aristocratic York House Society, because Julian Hastings represented both of us on the Conservation Area Advisory Subcommittee (a useful protector of our interests whose teeth were eventually to be drawn by a jealous council).

Commander John Rathbone, the peppery ex-navel officer chairman of the York House Society must have learned of this connection, and perhaps of our famous victory over the Tiger, because, not long after our arrival in d'Aumale Cottages, we received from the secretary, Harvey Ward, a charming and courteous invitation to become members. We were surprised, a little apprehensive and in no doubt that it was an honour. At our first meeting we sat quietly and behaved ourselves, pleased at becoming part of the local community. We shyly missed out first Twelfth Night Ball, thinking it might be beyond us, but were jollied into the next by Pam Rathbone, the Chairman's wife. We have been every year since.

By the time Philip Cranswick had completed his second term as chairman I was a member of the executive committee, which used to meet enjoyably in his basement in Sion Road. He asked if I would succeed him and I agreed, though not without misgivings. I was more than fortunate in having Suzanne Hodson, a granddaughter of our founder, as the Society's secretary throughout my period of office. No one could have been more helpful or supportive.

My memory of these five years is coloured by two events above all: our famous (and successful) confrontation with the council over Marks and Spencer's wish to occupy the swimming pool site, and our equally rewarding struggle to save the statues in York



House Gardens from terminal vandalism and disintegration. Suzanne was secretary to this project, but sadly died of cancer shortly after it was complete. To honour her memory we founded an annual prize at Orleans Park School, in competing for which a generation of twelve year olds has learned enjoyably of its priceless heritage in Twickenham.

### **Nualan Penning (1974)**

Some years ago, around 1975, a friend had been to a dinner where a real pig's head was a central decoration. One of the waiters said he could make up a special one for York House Society.

He produced a real pig's head done up with jelly and chocolate sitting on a large platter. My friend brought the 'Boar's Head' over to me in her car, so that it could be used in the York House procession. At one point on the journey she stopped next to a bus load of passengers who looked down on the 'Boar's Head' in amazement. We used the head in the procession. The problem was what could we do with a chocolate covered real pig's head? We decided to put it in the raffle. It went as the last prize. A young girl won and when she got close up to it, she yelped.

### **Pamela Poyser (1980)**

My parents Alfred and Amy Featherstonehaugh lived at 52 Lebanon Park at the back of Mrs Nellie Ionides's home, Riverside House. My father and Mrs Ionides were both founder members of the York House Preservation Society, as it was then known, my father being secretary.

My sister Barbara, brother Bruce and I were born in 1921 within a stone's throw of York House at the Nightingale Nursing Home, Haggard Road. We made medical history as the first triplets in the country to be born by Caesarean Section. We have many happy memories of our childhood playing in York House Gardens, where parents and nannies could sit and shelter in the loggia.

My parents attended soirees on the sunken lawn given by Sir Ratan Tata who was the last resident to live at York House. Apparently he was quite a character and used to stroll up and down the balustraded gravel walk, dressed immaculately in a yachting cap and ogle the pretty ladies on the river. Next door was his boathouse which became Twickenham Yacht Club of which my father was honorary Treasurer.

My sister and I spent many hours on the river during the Battle of Britain (August 1940), a lovely summer, and witnessed dogfights high up in the sky. There was an air-raid shelter in the grounds of York House under the tennis courts, which we used when ordered to take cover. One of the tragedies of the war was the bombing of Radnor House, Cross Deep. The roof and ceiling had just been restored and paid for by the Society. Although a great deal of damage was done to surrounding buildings, including the Grotto and the Kings Head Public House, nobody was killed.

The houses in Sion Road were rather run down in the 1920s and were inhabited by slum families. As children we were not really allowed down there but we enjoyed spending our weekly pocket money at the shop at No.13. Later the house where John

and Pamela Rathbone lived – John was chairman when I joined – was one of the first houses to be preserved and restored to its original state. Col. Viner-Brady also lived there and later moved to Aubrey House, Riverside (my sister used to take their daughter out in her pram in the early years of the war). When Teddington Studios were built, Sion Road became very popular and much sought after by the film world.

The Twelfth Night Ball was always well attended and, although Barbara and I were too young until after the war, my parents always took a party of ten or so, including Fred and Gwen Dimpleby, their son Richard and his fiancée, Dilys. Dilys was a reporter on the Richmond and Twickenham Times and so full details were given in a two page spread of the gowns worn etc. The various committee rooms, council chamber, the orangery were open to guests. During the procession, the Autheusa Boys from their home in Amyand Park Road (now Regal House, where the cinema used to be) led as jesters and tumblers. The mayors, as now, joined in the procession down the centre of the ballroom, with the guests lined up on either side behind ropes. Chairs were arranged around the edge of the ballroom, but there was not enough room for the tables. The scenery of the famous statues on the stage was the well-known feature it is today. There were two sittings for supper in the Octagon and Salon Suite.

### **Jocelyn Rathbone (1987)**

As a member of the Society for more than a decade there are four distinct ‘pictures’ which come immediately to mind. In no particular order these are: the Twelfth Night Ball (and especially the boar’s head procession); the resolute campaign to preserve and restore the statues (an on going task I am afraid); the contrasting but equally effective styles of two chairmen – the diplomacy and gentle humour of Peter Payan, and the open determination and admirable frankness of Terry Woram – and the charm and friendliness of the Society’s members.

My initial memories, however, go back to when I was a child living in 3 Sion Road, the house of my parents John and Pamela Rathbone. My father was a chairman of the Society and a member of the executive committee for some years. Committee meetings took place in our house around the unusual octagonal dining room table. The annual ball was also an event, even for a non-attende. I remember how on a Friday morning in early January, I helped others, such as Denis Newman and Edward Morris, with the transport – by wooden cart, no less – of hardboard statues from Col, Viner Brady’s garage in Ferry Road to the stage at York House. My parents attended the event on a regular basis, and came back to Number 3 with friends afterwards for a ‘nightcap’. I always thought of the event as being my parents’ one late night of the year!

The one other recollection I have is of the gardens. By this I mean not just the statues, the sunken lawn and the splendid views of Eel Pie Island and the river from the embankment walk. It is a childhood memory, one I will never forget, of an owl which sat, hidden by the night’s darkness, in a tree opposite 3 Sion Road. It would hoot away soothingly, almost melodically into my bedroom.

**Rt. Rev Alan Rogers (1949)**

I became vicar of Twickenham in January 1949 and as vicar I used to head the procession for the Twelfth Night Ball. It struck me that the main work of the Society was to see that old Twickenham was not spoilt. I was a co-opted member of Twickenham Council and a good deal of my time was given to education. But I doubt if I ever missed a ball from January 1949 to the end of 1954.

After I left Twickenham, Donald Simpson took over the role of announcing at the ball. He invited us back to the Ball when I retired in 1975 and we were living in Northamptonshire.

Fifteen years ago in January I returned to Twickenham and have been to every ball since I returned. The balls are spectacular events and I remember Edward Bostock playing an important role in telling the story of the boar's head.

**Stanley and Jennifer Rust (1997)**

The reason we joined was that we felt we should get involved because we wanted to know as much as possible about the area. We went to the York House Society because, in our opinion, it was the most prominent society in the borough!

**Chris Sewell (1998)**

The York House Society is a friendly, active group of people, keen to make the best of the past and improve the future of this corner of Twickenham.

I spent ten happy years as Labour councillor on Twickenham and then Richmond upon Thames Council. Most of committee meetings took place in the Salon where the York House Society meets. It was and is a privilege to meet here in York House, one of the oldest Twickenham dwellings, built in 1635.

I had a celebration in the Salon. Sponsored by the London Co-op, we had a Botswana evening attended by the High Commissioner. My first meeting with my wife was on the Welsh Dragon train from Carmarthen to Paddington. I was an army officer returning to Aldershot and she was a nurse returning to a Convalescent Home in Camberley. My first words to her were "What do you think of Seretse Khama?" He had just been deposed by the Labour Colonial Secretary as Leader of Botswana for marrying a white secretary from Croydon where he had lodged as a student in London. Later I met Lady Khama in London when she was a widow after her husband had been reinstated as a successful Leader of Botswana. But in the interim the Botswana Society had come to our marriage anniversary celebration in the Salon as did our two adult son.

Recently the York House Society had an interesting talk from Trevor Baylis of Eel Pie Island about his clockwork radio being made by disabled workers in Cape Town.

Our most spirited meeting discussed the future of the Twickenham swimming pool area. The members decided to dismiss commercial exploitation of the site and recommend that the public have open access to the riverside view of the Thames.

These views were much appreciated by the artist Turner, whom lived nearby. No doubt we shall have many more stimulating meetings.

**Felicity Shepherd (1988)**

When we contemplated buying 6 Sion Road, the owner, Harvey Ward, said, “and there’s the York House Society, which is wonderful”, which we assumed was his way of promoting the local community. Indeed, when we moved in, there was a board advertising tours of York House and the gardens. We waited and waited to be invited to join the York House Society, but discovered we were considered too young and not sufficiently conversationally minded – although we were already members of the Georgian Group. Since becoming a member, however, the Society has given me a wonderful forum to be rude to pompous dignitaries.

**Donald Simpson OBE (1967)**

I joined the Society in 1967 and its activities have generated a lot of interest. A highlight was the cleaning of the statues. What I have enjoyed most about the Society is the opportunity it has given me to meet people.

**Robert Woodward (1978)**

In June 1994, the York House Society resolved to set up a tree-planting fund to sponsor street trees in Twickenham in partnership with the council. Peter Payan, Lindsey Parr and I formed a sub-committee to carry the initiative forward. In May 2000, 37 trees had been planted – 9 in Richmond Road, 15 in Sion Road, 3 in Oak Lane, 2 in Cornwall Road, 1 in Poulett Gardens, 2 in Crown Road, 4 in St Margaret’s Road and 1 in St Mary’s Churchyard.

Fifty seven individuals had made donations to the scheme by the spring of 2000, and trees had been planted in memory of two former chairmen of the York House Society, Philip Cranswick and Charles Malley, and its president Edward Morris. Wayne Morrison, a Sion Road resident, was also commemorated with a tree.

Alexis Napier of Sion Road, a distinguished calligrapher, has kept as record of donations, planting and commemorative plantings in a special book.

It is pleasant to think that the current generation of York House Society members will have left an enduring improvement to Twickenham’s townscape which will be enjoyed by residents of the borough for hundreds of years to come. It may be of interest to future generations to know the cost of planting a tree in partnership with the council at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the first five years of the scheme, the Society contributed £40 per tree. The price rose in the year 2000 to £80 per tree.

**Tony and Jackie Yates-Watson (1998)**

When we first came to Twickenham we went for a walk around York House Gardens and made our first visit to the statues – a wonderful, hidden treasure that must be preserved. We were initially taken to York House Society by the chairman and were so impressed by the friendliness and purpose of the Society that we decided to join.

**A small contribution from Maureen Payan, for Adam's collection, patiently waited for, for the York House memoirs!**

I have lived in Twickenham with my husband and two daughters for over thirty years. From nursery school to brides at St Mary's Parish Church, our family has been happy here.

An inveterate volunteer, I was able to create a help scheme twenty two years ago called HANDS in response to unmet local needs, especially those of elderly and disabled people. Relating to this, I organise the annual Twickenham Green Charities Fair (originally this was a contribution to the town's 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 1981 when a royal visitor, Prince Charles, was received, arriving by boat). These activities are only made possible with the outstanding support of local volunteers.

My earliest memories of the York House Society, when Peter and I joined 18 years ago, are of a rather austere committee of venerable gentlemen facing the meeting and before which I hardly dared speak! I admired greatly their determination, skills and achievements in preserving York House and its environs from inappropriate planning and neglect. An example was Philip Cranswick's prevention of the garden tennis courts being turned into a car park.

Some years later Peter became Chairman for five years. He and I welcomed guests and took part in the procession at the Twelfth Night Ball.

At my first Ball Committee meeting, anxious to be helpful, I accepted the task of making the huge fruit cake and continued to do so for a number of years. September would see the great day of creaming butter with sugar and mixing fruit and flour in our largest bowls. Anyone passing was obliged to relieve the cook's aching arm. At last into the oven for 8 hours and the alarm set to wake up to take it out at 3am. It was stored to mature and later be formally decorated with obligatory green and white icing, a challenge for any amateur. The cake was to be carried shoulder high in the procession by our 'volunteers' in their white chef's hats.

Because HANDS risks losing its office on the derelict swimming baths site it will be much affected by the negotiations currently taking place between local groups such as the York House Society and the Council.

The York House Society is a much respected and friendly organisation which can, and does, make an impression on local government so far as that is possible! The meetings are always interesting and a place for discussion of local affairs of every kind.

On the morning of the Ball Pat Woram with her little band of helpers prepare the hall, arrange seating, covering the tables with paper cloths and putting out the pretty table decorations of fresh flowers she and Christine Glyn Jones have made. The 'electrician' (alias Adam Brand) is up an alarmingly high ladder arranging 'spots' and wires. The scene on stage is set with the charming cut outs of the statues or 'naked ladies' as they are known locally, and plants are strategically placed to complete the picture of the fountain. There is a cheerful jolly atmosphere. Prudence Brand arrives with beautifully laundered outfits for the procession and Nualan Penning is dressing

the boar's head with a lemon and some rosemary. Paul Kershaw has organised and is installing the bar which is a complex task throughout. It is run by himself and the family and includes the unenviable removing and returning empty bottles and glasses early the morning after.

## **HISTORY OF YORK HOUSE**

The first building on the site was Yorke's Farm built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is believed the present house was built in the 1630s. In 1566 Elizabeth I gave a grant to "two valets of our chamber" so that they could farm the land. James I took possession from Elizabeth and granted leases. The wife of Charles I, Henrietta Maria, was the next owner. Leases were acquired by Andrew Pitcarne and converted into a freehold in 1640. The house passed from the Pitcarne family to the Earl of Manchester, who, at Charles II's accession, became Lord Chamberlain. The Earl of Manchester sold York House to Sir Henry Hyde in 1661 who became the Earl of Clarendon and Lord Chancellor under Charles II. Ann Hyde, Clarendon's daughter married Charles II's brother, James, Duke of York. He later became James II and both his daughters sat on the throne – Mary wife of William III, and Anne.

One of the lessees during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the Austrian ambassador, Count Ludwig von Stahrenberg, who built the theatre at York House. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Comte de Paris, the grandson of Louis Philippe lived in the house. The Duc d'Orleans was born in York House and the last link with the French royal family was broken only in 1961 with the death of the Duc d'Orleans' sister Isabelle who had been married from York House in 1899. The house was bought from the Duc in 1906 by the last private owner Sir Ratan Tata, an Indian industrialist, who died in 1918. He arranged for the installation of the statues and fountains and constructed the sunken garden.

As a result of the efforts of the York House Society, York House was bought in 1924 by the Twickenham Urban District Council and used as its headquarters. The building was officially opened by the Duke of York (later George VI) on November 16, 1936.

## **THE YORK HOUSE STATUES (research by Dr Peter Payan)**

The origins of the statues are not precisely known. The style is distinctly fin-de-siècle and believed to be Italian. They were brought into the country by the financier Whitaker Wright for his house at Lea Park (later called Witley Park) near Godalming. It is uncertain whether the statues, possibly intended for a domed steel and glass room underneath a twenty five acre lake, were ever taken out of their packing cases. But in 1904, Whitaker Wright committed suicide in court by taking cyanide after being convicted for fraud. Sir Ratan Tata is believed to have bought the statues for £600 and they arrived in Twickenham in 1909. The Thames Valley Times of June 23rd commented:

*“A large piece of marble, part of a huge statue.....for erection in the grounds of York House was being conveyed there on a trolley.....when as it was turning the corner into Oak Lane, the van overturned. The case containing the marble was thrown heavily to the ground and smashed, whilst the shafts of the cart were broken, and the horse which was thrown down, was slightly hurt.....It was some hours before the marble was raised by means of a huge pulley and conveyed to its destination.”*

Statuary, engine and pump were taken through the wall of the riverside gardens at a point now identifiable by a change in the colour of the bricks. This event was witnessed by Edmund Viner-Brady, son of the founder of the York House Society. A member of the Society was told by a lady whose father had brought the statues to Twickenham from Lea Park that they had been collected from an underground room. When York House was sold in 1922 the statues were not included in the auction of items from the house. Miss Dorothy Viner-Brady, sister to Edmund, wrote to the Richmond and Twickenham Times on November 6, 1948 to explain that following the completion of the sale to the Borough, Lady Tata had made a present of the statues to Mr Noel Viner-Brady, her father. This seems to have been the result of a joking reference he had made to his “commission” for arranging the sale of the house. Presumably he was the one who let the Council keep the statues.

By 1988 vandalism and wear had left the statues in a poor state. Mrs Elizabeth Bell-Wright, a member of the York House Society, suggested the idea of a charitable trust or organise their repair. The Trust was formed with trustees from the York House Society (Peter Payan – Chairman, Patrick Doyle, Elizabeth Bell-Wright and later Paul Kershaw), the Twickenham Society (Derek Plummer, Wall, Ellis) and the Council (O’Connor, Emerson).

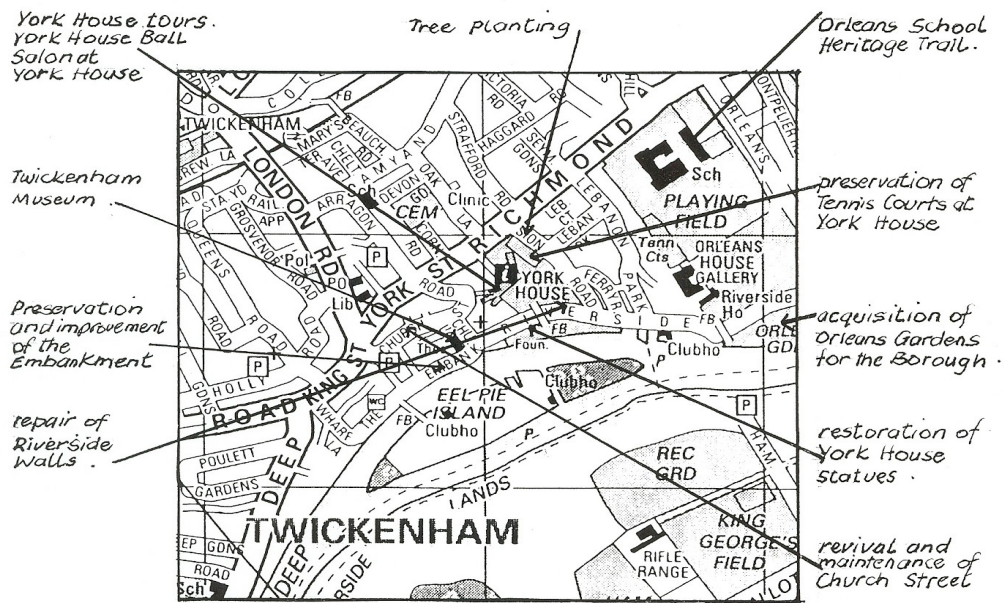
Restoration work was carried out by Taylor Pearce Restoration Services, with Keith Taylor the driving force. The cost was £55,000 for the cleaning, repair and protection. English Heritage contributed £10,000m the Council contributed £30,000, and a further £7,500 to match the £7,500 raised by the Trust. Local businesses were largely indifferent, believing the Council should pay for everything as it owned the house and gardens, but the three firms gave £250 each. The Thames Trust gave £500, the Godinton Trust £250 and the RIBA £200. The York House Society and the Twickenham Society gave £100 each. Several individuals gave £50, Sir Richard Attenborough £100. A major gift of £2,000 came from the Tata Foundation arranged through a York House Society member, Mrs Peggy Waltham and there were many small individual donations from residents and visitors. £750 came from the



Metropolitan Gardens Association for replanting. Jumble sales and social events brought in small amounts. At the York House Ball on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1989 a £7,500 cheque was presented to the Mayor, Mrs Alison Cornish by the chairmen of the York House Society and the Twickenham Society and on April 30<sup>th</sup> she performed the opening ceremony.

From Jean Cranswick, President:

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF THE YORK HOUSE SOCIETY.  
LOCATION PLAN



18.10.2000