



# Friends of Fairfax House

YORK

**NEWSLETTER NO 66**  
**February 2016**

*Dear Friends,*

Things are looking up! Since the worries expressed in the last newsletter about our future, much thought has been given to how our activities and events should be shaped in the coming years. The results are perhaps even now beginning to show themselves. As it happened, we made a good start with the unchanged format of the garden party last summer. This made a record profit of over £1200, admittedly with the help of a good few non-members attending. You will see from the programme that we are coming up with something a little different this year, but its traditional attractions will remain.

for stimulating interest in history and architecture generally. It is also very necessary to make sure that the Friends themselves are getting value for their money!



Rodney Tennant addressing the Friends

Careful consideration has been given to the overlap of events with Fairfax House and the York Civic Trust, a problem that did not exist in former days. The outcome will be that activities staged by the Friends will be designed to complement, rather than compete with the programmes of other organisations. We will also be trying out some innovative ideas with the objective, not only of raising money for Fairfax House, but also to meet the obligations set out in our Constitution



Bourne Park

The fact that we have more than 400 members, many more than similar societies in York and elsewhere, is proof that we are far from being in decline. Our future programmes will aim to ensure that membership levels are maintained or improved. We have a very firm base on which to build and there is much reason for optimism in the future.

A promising start was made in the autumn season, but before that something must be said about the last of the summer events. On our visit to Tennants Auction Rooms in September we were privileged to be in the hands of the Chairman himself, Rodney Tennant, for a remarkable talk followed by a revealing tour of the magnificent new salerooms. We were particularly inspired by his affection for and appreciation of Fairfax House,

which he regarded not simply as an important historic house museum, but more for its immense value as an educational establishment illustrating the need to recognise the great significance of constant social change. This surely has relevance to some of what is written above. Let us hope that his telling words on the acquisition of wisdom have not come too late for some of us.

Perhaps the highlight of the year, if not the decade, was the overnight visit to Bourne Park, a little-known Queen Anne style mansion set in extensive grounds in delectable Kent countryside. It is owned by Lady Juliet Tadgell, daughter of the eighth Earl Fitzwilliam. The building was acquired for housing one of the greatest private collections of paintings, furniture and art treasures, most of them from Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire. Only the most prestigious of organisations, with names such as ours, are granted the rare privilege of a private view.

It is difficult to narrow down the high spots of our tour in which there was no problem in sitting down on lovely Hepplewhite chairs, or others of equal beauty and value. There are not enough visitors to do them any harm. What can one pick out from the dazzling display? The magnificent Van Dyck portraits of the Fitzwilliam family perhaps; the wonderful Stubbs horses, or more unusually, his delightful portrayal of a group of dogs. The remarkable display of Fabergé eggs, tucked away in a corner, must themselves be worth a fortune. Then there was the furniture, specially commissioned for each room, and the architecture itself, including a fine walnut staircase with balusters of fluted Ionic and Doric columns.

It was a long way to go for such a short stay, but this remarkable experience will stay in our memories for many a day. It was something not to be missed! We were just in time. Fifty of the most important paintings were shipped over to Lisbon shortly after, where the lucky citizens must even now be enjoying just a fraction of what brought us so much pleasure.

The journey home was no anticlimax either. Island Hall in the attractive little town of Godmanchester was a more relaxed and sociable experience where we simply enjoyed the pleasure of being entertained by its charming owners in what Octavia Hill described as "the loveliest, dearest old house - I never was in such a one". The extensive, secluded island garden hiding behind the house,

surrounded by the Great Ouse and its tributary, added to the pleasure.

And so we had better get on to the autumn season which started with what seems to be emerging as a regular feature, a visit to three more Yorkshire churches. Once again this event was well supported, the tours by local 'experts' proving enjoyable and informative. The warm welcome and afternoon tea at Oldstead Hall that followed brought the day to a memorable close. Thought is already being given to holding a similar event later this year.

The Evening Soirée at Fairfax House in November, replacing the former Christmas Carol Concerts, attracted a full house. By all accounts it seems to have been a great success with delightful musical and dramatic entertainments - from a string quartet, soloists, choir, and amusing seasonal readings to two professional actors who brought alive some 18th century comedy pieces, performed around the house. Wine and appetising refreshments were enjoyed while taking a break. It also proved to be a most pleasant social evening for chatting to our friends whilst enjoying the beauty of the house, colourfully decorated for Christmas. Whilst it is hard work for those responsible for organising the event, perhaps this is the way forward for us to celebrate the approach to Christmas. Let us know what you think.

In the past year we have had to say farewell to two stalwart members of our committee. After fourteen years service of inestimable value, Janet Mawer and Judy Webb have retired, leaving a considerable gap in the management of our affairs. Their presence will be greatly missed and the committee is in urgent need of being revitalised. Fortunately the regular Volunteers' Meeting held earlier this month produced two willing recruits to the Committee in the shape of Anthea Edwards and Marian Hodgson. They are very welcome and will surely bring new energy to your Committee.

Now for this year's activities. As mentioned earlier there will be changes in our plans. There will be fewer 'long distance' events, the emphasis being on choosing places which are little known and seldom open to the public. One such is Wykeham Abbey, near Scarborough, where we are invited by Viscountess Downe (who is one of our members) to a privileged tour of the house, followed by evening refreshments. This event will be a worthy

successor to our usual annual garden party, for which we are running out of gardens in York. We are laying on a coach from York so that you can relax and enjoy the sparkling refreshments. It will be the main Fundraising event of the summer.

The full programme, set out in the following pages, includes events intended to meet particular circumstances. The visit to Everingham has been arranged at the request of Fairfax House volunteers. Please indicate on the Booking Form if you are a Room Host or Friend of Fairfax House or both. The 300th anniversary celebration of the birth of Capability Brown is something not to be missed at the Mercer Gallery in Harrogate. Karen Lynch, from the Yorkshire Gardens Trust and Curator of the Exhibition will talk and guide us through the exhibits.

Our visit to Sion Hill, a splendid Brierley house, is maybe one you have visited in the past, but the comparatively new owner, Michael Mallaby has been putting enormous efforts into the garden and the house, and it is now only open to special interest groups.

One of the newly granted benefits to The Friends is an invitation by Hannah Phillip to exclusive previews of the Fairfax House exhibitions. The opening of 'A Century of Shoes - The Rise and Fall of the Georgian Heel' is on March 10th, so please note that our exclusive preview will be on Wednesday 9th March with the Summer Exhibition Preview on Wednesday 27th July, Georgian Entertainments.

Finally two reminders: one for those of you who pay by cheque or cash, that subscriptions were due on 1st January. Quite a few payments are still outstanding and we very much hope that our plans for the forthcoming season will prove enticing enough for you to renew your membership. Remember the current rate is £12 individual and £18 joint membership. Also please be aware that membership will cease if subscriptions have not been paid by 31st March.

The other request is that you should make sure that we have your current e-mail address. This is essential if you want to be sure of receiving up-to-date information. We will no longer be sending out reminders, changes of plan etc. by ordinary mail, as the cost is now prohibitive.

It looks like being an interesting year ahead and we hope that you will find much enjoyment in

continuing to support our efforts to ensure the well being of Fairfax House.

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I have been your editor for the last twelve years and a member of the committee since its inception no less than 31 years ago. It is now time for me to step down, otherwise what hope is there of 'revitalising' the committee as foreshadowed above? From the next issue therefore, and subject to your approval at the AGM, you will be in the capable (and comparatively youthful) hands of fellow committee member, David Yates, who has offered to take over editorship of the newsletter in addition to his duties as secretary.

It has been a great privilege and pleasure to serve you for so many years, but now goodbye and thank you for being such friendly and faithful readers.

With my very best wishes to you all and for the future of Fairfax House,

Gerry Webb