

## **Polesden Lacey, Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

**Polesden Lacey** was bought in 1906 by the Hon Ronald Greville and his wife Margaret. At that time it was an up-to-date Edwardian house derived from an Regency villa by Thomas Cubitt. Mewes and Davis, the architects of the Ritz hotel, were engaged to make further improvements by revamping the house interiors with extensive use made of architectural salvage.

After her marriage **Mrs Greville** became part of a newly wealthy smart set, competing to entertain the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, in ever more lavish style. Her father was a millionaire Scottish brewer. She used his wealth, her husband's connections, and her own natural abilities to become one of the most influential hostesses of her generation and embarked upon a career as a society hostess. She acquired museum-quality treasures which included fine examples of Dutch, Italian and British paintings, Chinese and European ceramics, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century miniatures, and silver as well as exquisite objets d'art.

The **Tour of the House** started in the **Central Hall**, dominated by the wood carving of the reredos from Wren's St Matthew's church in the City, leading to the **Dining Room** with portraits of Mrs Greville's father, and of the Paterson Children by Raeburn, and others by Thomas Lawrence, Joshua Reynolds, and studio of Peter Lely.

Mewes and Davis improved the sweeping central stairs leading via the **Portico Bathroom** with the latest Edwardian plumbing, heated towel rail, tap-less bath, the height of sophistication, to the **Portico Bedroom**, loved by the Queen Mother who and her newly-married husband the Duke of York, later King George VI, spent part of their honeymoon at the house.

Downstairs the **Picture Corridor** leads to the **Tea Room** in Louis XIV style incorporating late 18<sup>th</sup>c pastoral landscapes, probably Flemish in the Rococo style of Fragonard or Boucher, and the **Saloon** designed by Arthur Davis as "a room fit to entertain Maharajahs in" with glittering Baccarat chandelier, and gilded panelling from an Italian *palazzo* c1700 probably supplied by White Allom.

The **Picture Corridor** itself makes up three sides of the Inner Courtyard, and acted as a picture gallery. There, *The Alchemist* by Teniers, *The Golf Players* by de Hooch, Gerard ter Borch's *An Officer Making his Bow to a Lady*, and many, many more are displayed.

The **Library** was designed by Mewes and Davis with cream walls and golden carpet to offset the Kangxi porcelain, and there is a connecting door to the **Study** where an arrangement allows both a window and a fireplace in the centre of south wall. 18<sup>th</sup> century Meissen and Furstenberg porcelain is displayed in this room.

The **Tour of the Gardens** included the Roman Bath Lawn, the Upper Sunken Gardens with tulip tree, handkerchief or dove tree, and Judas tree, the Rockery newly-restored to its Edwardian heyday, and the 4 croquet lawns, in Mrs Greville's time used by her guests as a lawn tennis court.

The Herbaceous Borders, the Rose Garden, with a 14<sup>th</sup> century Venetian well from the Palazzo Morosini Sagredo, and the Winter Garden have been created from the designs of Graham Thomas (after whom the rose and the honeysuckle are named). The tour concluded with the Lavender and Iris Gardens, the Ladies' Garden and the Pets' Cemetery.

**Patrick Higham, Visits Secretary**