

A New Future for Hogarth's House

by Val Bott.

Hogarth's House in Chiswick was built between 1713 and 1718 and was a country home to members of the Hogarth family from 1749 until Mrs Hogarth's cousin died in 1808. (Their London home and Hogarth's business was in Leicester Fields). It was saved from demolition by Lieut-Col Shipway, who bought it in 1901, paid for its restoration and opened it to visitors in 1904. It is currently closed for refurbishment work funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Hounslow Council, the William Hogarth Trust, the Howard Trust and the Old Chiswick Protection Society.

Refurbishment of the Grade 1 Listed structure was complete when the House caught fire in August 2009. It has taken 18 months of negotiations to get the insurance agreed, Listed Building Consent granted and tenders sorted out. On 21 March the contractors, Stephens and James, returned to the site once more, putting the House back together.

London Historians may be interested in the new approach which is being taken to the presentation of the House. For decades it has been a rather bare place, hung with serried ranks of Hogarth prints and sparsely furnished with fine replicas of furniture from Hogarth's images, made by the Chiswick Art-Workers Guild in the early 1900s. Information panels about Hogarth were installed in 1997 and attracted many letters of thanks from visitors who enjoyed their narrative, but the design was poor and the panels were rather large.

The new refurbishment is based on a very different approach. First the structure is being put into good heart for the future and,



Famous self-portrait engraving of Hogarth and his pug.

following the fire, is being rewired and provided with new heating and security systems. The second floor is being opened up for museum use for the first time. It was converted into a caretaker's flat when bomb damage was repaired in 1950/51. The partitions installed then and the kitchen and bathroom fittings have gone and the three rooms will provide much-needed storage, a work-room for staff and volunteers and a study area. Numbers on that floor will, however, have to be limited to no more than 12 at a time as there is only one staircase.



Print showing Hogarth's house a few years after his death and issued by his widow, Jane, in 1782. It shows the House with its long wall seen from across Chiswick Common Field.

The panelling and shutters were already immaculately restored before the fire; a small amount of panelling has been lost and there is a good deal of damage to the paint surfaces and the woodwork which will now be put right. A careful analysis of past paint colours was carried out by Richard Ireland before work began in 2009 and the interior will be decorated in the soft greys which we now know were there before. The fire brigade did minimal damage, even carefully opening a first floor window to take hoses in above the seat of the fire. Both the fire and the water, however, did a lot of damage to the very ugly carpeting which has had to be removed. Some areas be carpeted again but some wide 18th century floor boards will be exposed in Hogarth's bedroom and in the entrance hall. Hearths which were damaged by the carpet layers will also be conserved and left visible.

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A New Future for Hogarth's House (cont.)

The re-presentation of the House will break new ground. Research over the last ten years has gradually identified almost all of the residents of the House and though the Hogarth family will still remain the focus of the interpretation scheme, there are some interesting characters whose stories will now be told there. They include Henry Francis Cary, a celebrated translator of Dante who became Assistant Librarian at the British Museum in the 1820s and Newton Treen Hicks, known as "Brayvo" Hicks, a melodramatic actor who retired there in the 1860s. Hogarth's family, friends and neighbours will be included and negotiations are under way for the loan of personal and family items from other museum collections.

An area with seating and reference books will be set aside where high quality replicas of Hogarth prints can be studied and detailed searchable content will be provided. The study room will offer special sessions where Hogarth's work will be explored and participants will have a chance to see his prints up close, instead of struggling to see the detail while standing in front of rows and rows of frames. A learning programme is also being developed to encourage schools use – local teachers told us they did not know how to deal with syphilis and harlots and were keen to be able to use Hogarth's House as an example of a home from the past instead!

One room will serve as a modest special exhibition gallery and following the first exhibition, which will explore the conservation/

restoration work, there will be a show about brewing in Chiswick. This is being developed with the help of Fullers' Brewery which was there in Hogarth's time. As the House and the Brewery are only a short distance apart, we hope to promote a day out which includes a visit to the House as well as a brewery tour.

Once this work is completed, there will still be plenty to do. The garden contains Hogarth's mulberry tree and is sheltered from the traffic of the A4 by its high walls. The long pathway from the 18th century garden survives and provides level access from the street to the House, but the planting is inappropriate. Recent research into nursery gardeners in the area has provided plenty of useful information about the plants available and the gardeners who supplied them and this will be used to plan long-term improvements. If funds can be found replicas will be made of the fine lead urns which David Garrick gave to Hogarth for his gate posts – once these are reinstated there will be no excuse for anyone to miss the House as they roar past *en route* for Heathrow.

The William Hogarth Trust will continue to support the House as part of its remit to increase awareness and understanding of William Hogarth, his life and his work. More details can be found on the Trust's web-site at <http://williamhogarthtrust.org.uk>.

About Val Bott

Val Bott is a curator and local historian who works as a museums consultant. She is currently co-ordinating the re-presentation of Hogarth's House in Chiswick. Her book, Flood! The Brentford Flood of 1841, won the first LAMAS local history publications award in 2003; her current research explores nursery gardening in south Middlesex between 1650 and 1850. Her web address is www.valbott.co.uk.