



Louis Curtis, historic building conservation volunteer, inspects panelling in the White Parlour at Frogmore House

## **Frogmore House update/ February 2014**

**by Suzannah Fleming (Chairman, The Temple Trust)**

Dear Friends of Frogmore House (and other supporters),

It has been a long time since I have been able to offer you anything in the way of news of further activity/progress concerning Frogmore House, and many of you will no doubt have been wondering exactly what has been going on there -- not only concerning the dismantling of the huge Gas Container, a project currently reaching an advanced stage -- but also concerning any effects on the building itself as a result of recent flooding in the vicinity of the Lower High Street.

First of all, I can report that last week we visited the site and were able to gain access to the interior of the building to inspect (see photos above and below). This visit had been carefully planned for some while and was intended to give several of our professional consultants and colleagues the opportunity to see (for the first time!) the various panelled rooms and staircases, with a view to organising a measured survey and paint analysis in the near future. We had to prepare meticulously for the visit with a full safety briefing and, accordingly, arrived on site with all the necessary protective gear. You will appreciate that without electricity and heavily boarded up windows, we could only see with the help of torches.



We were in the company of Watford planning officers, as well as Sarah Priestly (Curator of the Watford Museum), and were met on site by Richard Alden (Head of Commercial Property, National Grid) and Scott Lewis (Joint Venture Manager, National Grid). Two local Watford-based historic conservation graduates, Louis Curtis and Maddie Horrocks, accompanied us as well (and are now signed-up Friends of Frogmore House!). These two dedicated heritage surveyors (part of a team of four) have generously volunteered their services to the Trust in the proposed upcoming survey of the interior fabric of the building. It is encouraging to consider that there is a new generation of emerging conservation professionals living in Watford and the vicinity – ready to pitch in and get involved in such a project! The survey team (who we shall call our ‘Conservation Army’) will be working to a careful brief set out by our architect Gary Butler (of Butler & Hegarty).



**Patrick Baty, paint historian and analyst, at Frogmore House**

The prominent paint historian and analyst Patrick Baty (who you will remember helped us enormously three years ago to identify and recover the missing doorcase) was likewise on the visit and I am pleased to report has now offered to contribute very significantly to this survey as well. You can read about Patrick’s amazing work, including many of the highly important historic projects he’s been involved with, on his website at: [www.patrickbaty.co.uk](http://www.patrickbaty.co.uk)



**Sarah Priestly (Curator, Watford Museum) in the White Parlour at Frogmore House**



You will all be relieved to hear that despite the devastating flooding in the area of Frogmore the interior of the building has remained totally dry! We were anticipating the basement would have been flooded, but there was absolutely no sign of water in there. Also, the building in general appears to remain wind and watertight, and there have apparently been no more break-ins since the last occurrence at the end of 2010 – obviously thanks also to vastly improved security measures put in place by National Grid!



**Maddie Horrocks, one of the team of local conservation survey volunteers, on a preliminary inspection of the panelling in a first floor bedroom suite at Frogmore House**

As you may be aware, the dismantling of the Gas Container on the former gasworks site has been a huge undertaking (as becomes especially apparent when on site) but certainly it seems it has been a necessary step forward in order for National Grid to assess the extent and costs of the vitally important land remediation. One beneficial effect already to be observed with the dismantling of the container is that Frogmore House somehow appears taller and prouder!!!

We understand that National Grid is currently in the process of discussing an alternative option concerning the redevelopment of the overall site that will aim to take into account (and contribute very substantially to) the full rehabilitation of Frogmore House and its walled garden. Please keep fingers crossed that it will indeed work out to our advantage and that Frogmore and its garden can be secured as a local heritage amenity and, moreover, serve as a catalyst for positive forward-looking regeneration in the Lower High Street area! I shall keep you updated as best as I can on this account, especially when any new information becomes available. With a little luck we will be hearing more of this in the foreseeable future. Encouragingly, we appear to be entering a new (and what seems more positive) phase of dialogue with National Grid on Frogmore House.





**Inspection of the upper section of the principal staircase**

We have agreed informally with the National Grid representatives to put together a proposal for the measured survey and paint analysis programme. The information we hope to gather from this work will assist us greatly in recording the historic fabric of the interior and will ultimately contribute to our understanding of the building, its history, and its future conservation. The idea will be to make available the resulting report to National Grid, the Watford Planning Authority, English Heritage, and of course the Friends of Frogmore House and other supporters – possibly tying this in with a special event (a little later in the year) at the Watford Museum.

One of the things that all on the visit observed afterwards is how ‘sprawling’ the interior of Frogmore House appears once you are inside, and although there is still so much original historic fabric remaining throughout the building (especially panelled timberwork) the survey team could see that the previous structural works had led to the removal of much plaster from ceilings and timber mouldings from walls (although much of the later is stacked in the individual rooms awaiting re-instatement). Overall, the team could see that there will be a lot of expensive work to do in the future, and at least better appreciated the projected costs of conservation in the proposed rehabilitation of the building.

The other bit of news to report is that the third year students of the Historic Woodcarving Course at the City & Guilds London School of Fine Art have agreed to help us by re-carving some of the missing ornamentation to eventually go back onto the Frogmore House doorcase hood. This work, which will have a significant skills-training element, will be supported by a generous grant from the Leche Trust and will be due for completion by the end of April 2014. Again, I shall endeavour to keep you informed of any progress. You can see the City & Guilds Course information and gallery of the students work at the following link:

[http://www.cityandguildsartschool.ac.uk/departments/historic\\_carving/wood\\_carving\\_gallery](http://www.cityandguildsartschool.ac.uk/departments/historic_carving/wood_carving_gallery)



Finally, we are thinking of creating a Frogmore House Blog – perhaps using Wordpress. Is there anyone out there with appropriate skills/know-how who would be prepared to help with designing and getting this blog set up and running? If so, please contact me as soon as you can. We were thinking it would be a way of reporting some key events as our Frogmore project begins to develop and move forward, and it would be a good way of getting a Frogmore Friends forum going.

In the meantime, thank you all for your patience and support. Please let us hear from you with any ideas or comments/questions either via the address below, phone, or e-mail. I look forward to hearing from you in any case.

Kindest regards,

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Alternatively you can contact Sarah Priestly at the Watford Museum (phone: 01923-232297 e-mail: [info@watfordmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@watfordmuseum.org.uk)) and please ask to forward any messages or queries or information as you see fit.



**Louis Curtis, local historic building conservation volunteer, inspects the panelling in one of the first floor bedrooms at Frogmore House**