



Welcome to Northwood House Open House Day

The Trustees of Northwood House Charitable Trust are delighted to welcome you to Northwood House.

We would like to show you some of the restoration work which has been carried out since the Isle of Wight Council handed over all responsibility for the House and grounds to the Trustees last September. There is still much to do and so we apologise if you see areas where we still have work to do. And if you would like to help for an hour or two whenever you have time we would be delighted to hear from you. Simply email us on trustees@northwoodhouse.org or call 01983 293642.

We hope you will enjoy your visit to the House today, have a cup of tea and piece of cake and meet some of the Trustees and volunteers who have done so much to help get the House back on its feet. The House is very much 'Open for Business' and is available for wedding ceremonies, receptions, conferences, seminars, musical evenings, meetings and so on in this delightful Grade 2* listed building. Please tell your friends about the House and Park - you would be amazed how many people still think the Isle of Wight Council are still involved and that the Registrar still has his offices here!

Here are a few things we have done which we hope you will notice as you walk around!

Rotunda Car Park

When we took over, we found that cars were being left on the Estate land for days on end (mainly by commuters) preventing visitors to the Park and House, dog walkers, bowlers and other Park users from parking. The first hour is FREE! A second handrail has been fitted on the steps from the car park and sensor lighting fitted to improve security. You may also notice that a large tree is leaning against one of the main walls – as a result of the absence of a Council tree maintenance programme (now in place) – and it will have to be taken down.

Rotunda Entrance

The main columns have been stripped of flaking paint and repainted after years of neglect and more work is to be done on the side walls which have all now been washed removing years of grime. The car park used to flood after heavy rain and water would run into the Rotunda, due to a build-up of compacted mud in the drains. This mud was



more than 12" thick under the grating and has now all been removed by stalwart volunteers – however, another job is to ensure that water from the roof is channelled into these

newly opened drains.

The Rotunda

Much work has been done around the walls and columns but the ceiling is in need of restoration. The panels in the roof were originally blue but were painted orange a few years ago without the knowledge of English Heritage. The doors in this area have all been undercoated and will shortly be top-coated.

All the external doors of the House are in the process of being painted holly green.

Rotunda Corridor

The walls have all been rubbed down and repainted in their original blue shades by volunteers. Cleaning of the domes in the ceiling will take place during the summer.

Toilets

As much repainting as possible has been done but the toilet areas will be refurbished as soon as possible. Much work had to be done on the roof to prevent water ingress.

Main Corridor

All the walls from the 'Egyptian corner' through the Crush Hall to the Ballroom have been repainted and there is a fresh smell about the House. Flaking plaster has all been removed and walls renovated. Several of the lights did not work but have now been mended and electrical sockets have been installed so that the House can be heated in the winter. Many volunteers worked in thermals last November and December!

Morning Room

This annex to the elegant Drawing Room next door was at one time used as a Council Committee Room. It was the first room to be completely renovated after the Trustees took over: it has been repainted (apart from the glorious decorated ceiling), new wall lights, blinds and chandelier fitted and the filthy brown carpet tiles have been replaced by a new carpet.

Drawing Room

Like all the other fine public rooms, this room, which was called the Medina Room by the

Isle of Wight Council, has now been returned to the name it bore when the House was occupied by the Ward family. Sadly, all the paintings and artefacts which once hung here were removed by the Council but they have been replaced by items donated to the Trust. All the chandeliers throughout the House have been taken down, rewired and cleaned, a mammoth task – the large central one did not work and one is missing and is being rebuilt as it became rusty due to water coming in from above which was never dealt with satisfactorily (we have just had to call in a roofing specialist to repair the roof in this area). A second closet was exposed in this room which had been boarded up and now matches one in the opposite corner. More efficient heating has been installed. The House heating bill last year was over £22,000, largely due to the type of contract we inherited, which has now been amended to make savings. French doors open out onto the lawn and this is a delightful room for small ceremonies and wedding receptions.

Dining Room

This room, previously known as the Albert Room, has the most remarkable and well-preserved trompe l'oeuil wall paintings in the House. All the curtains had been neglected and damaged by pulling them shut as the thick wooden curtain poles were thick with grease and dust. The headings have now been reattached and the poles



cleaned and the curtains once again glide. The background floor heating has now been mended (the room is north-facing and can be chilly). A roller shutter can separate it from

the large Ballroom and 60 diners can be accommodated. A generous local resident has loaned the Trust a boudoir grand piano which will be installed shortly.

Ballroom

(Previously the Victoria room) We have fitted electric fan heaters in this large, high-ceilinged room as the only practical form of heating. Power cables have had to be surface-mounted, but the white trunking will be painted to 'lose' them against the marble-effect skirting. Unsuitable dimmer switches had been fitted which had burnt out and had to be replaced. This room held three giant seascape paintings by AW Fowles which the Isle of Wight Council removed when they left; we have been told that they are being held at Cothey Bottom. Repairing and repainting all



the walls was a huge task and we hope that at some point some large paintings can be donated or loaned; for

this reason we have left the lighting and alarm systems in place. There was considerable water ingress in the corner window which has taken several weeks to repair. Many will remember this room as the room where you could donate blood, lie down and admire the paintings on the ceiling! This room will host the finals of the top five young bands and DJs on 2 June, with the winner appearing at Bestival.

Crush Hall

The walls of the corridor were in a terrible condition with flaking plaster and all have been repaired and painted. Two AW Fowles paintings were removed from this wide corridor and we hope for some larger



paintings to replace them. Extra electrical sockets have been installed for heating.

Tudor Bar

Opposite the Morning Room and off the main corridor is the Bar, with probably the most ornate ceiling and chandelier in the House. It was an engineering feat getting the chandelier down to repair and clean all the drops and then getting it back together again! Guess how many drops!

St Mary's Corridor

Renamed to reflect the nearby Church, this elegant corridor is one of the main entrances to the House and is used when civil ceremonies take place in the Library (also known as the Wedding Room). This room can accommodate 40 guests and it has also been used for tribunals. Considerable deterioration had taken place in the entrance to the room which has just been repaired with a new ceiling and plasterwork. All the ceiling and walls above the St Mary's entrance from the park were also wet and damaged. This was repaired but the damage had been caused due to a blocked downpipe which had become filled with soil and leaves and never cleaned out causing gutters to overflow.

Registrar's offices

The Registrar's staff were the last Council employees to leave the house having occupied it since 2005. Volunteers repainted all 5 offices, and two offices are available for short-term occupancy. The Trustees occupy one office and can be contacted on 01983 293642.

Caretaker's Flat

Set on the ground floor behind the offices is a 5-roomed flat which had access to the upstairs rooms of the House. It has become damp and needs complete refurbishment but this would cost in the region of £30,000. One of our volunteers spent his last bachelor night here in 1966! The back stairs have rotted and access upstairs has to be via the stone steps by the staff entrance. Another set of steps leads down to one of the cellar entrances.

Back Kitchens

This whole area had been severely neglected and was virtually sealed off and full of junk. Part of it had been used as an operating theatre in the Second World War with girders to support the roof in case of a bomb attack. Considerable work has been done to clean it out and paint all the walls and install lighting for a fresh start. This area has suffered from water coming through the roof, but this is now largely under control. Despite our limited budget the kitchens have been renovated to meet hygiene regulations and are now used by our resident caterer, All About Catering. An extra 'hot' kitchen has just been brought back into use.

The Bedrooms

Off the main hall a wide staircase leads to what were once the family's bedrooms. They are of varying sizes but all have fantastic views over the Park to the Solent. There is storage heating upstairs and the rooms were used for exhibitions during the Americas Cup Jubilee in 2001. There is no longer any plumbing upstairs but this is where enabling development could occur to perhaps provide several offices/rooms for studios or training rooms. All the rooms are carpeted. One of

our volunteers, a retired BT employee, removed 'several miles' of cables and old telephone systems from these rooms and also from the exterior of the building.

Above Registrar's offices and Bar

Two wings of the house are semi-derelict but have been largely cleared of rubbish. They were used to store documents and tiers of Council records. The weight of papers which became soaked caused damage to some ceilings; the Isle of Wight Council had started repair work on roof trusses and floors but stopped several years ago.

The Cellars

Below the whole ground floor area is a labyrinth of interconnecting cellars. In the winter these cellars felt quite mild and retain the same temperature throughout the year. Records and sales prove that many thousands of bottles of wine, port and other drinks were stored in the cellars which are very dry.



Paranormal tours have been taking place during the night! For safety reasons the cellars are not open to the public; anyone interested in seeing them should come at another time. There was a boiler and hot water system in the cellar which powered the two large radiators in the Drawing Room.

Grounds

Immediately surrounding the house and inside the wire fence are the lawns belonging to the House. These and the grounds are commercially cut when required to ensure that money is not wasted on unnecessary cuts. To reduce maintenance and cost this

year, four flower beds have been turfed over



but other flower beds are being maintained and the large stone pots have been planted

up. The niche where the statue of 'Flora' stands has been renovated and repainted. The herbaceous border in front of the House is spectacular this year having had a severe beneficial pruning last November. The Trustees have reopened the tennis courts and refurbished the toilets in the park: they will be open during the day during the summer but if there is any vandalism to either they may have to close. One of the biggest tasks is the clearance of leaves and the Friends of Northwood House and Park hold a 'working bee' on the first Saturday afternoon of the month. Everyone is welcome. We have secured extra help on a daily basis now from the Careers Development Group, so please say hello to two guys Joel and John whom you may see working in the park.

Exterior

At the outset, English Heritage asked us to simply make the roof watertight and clean all the gulleys and downpipes. However, as you can see we have done much more than that! Roof repairs have been expensive and lead has been stolen off the roof of the Community Hall. Much painting and restoration has been done on the columns and windows outside the Drawing Room. Many window frames were in a terrible condition, having had no upkeep for about twenty years. It is a long process to repair them, but the lower half of the sash windows on the East Wing have largely been completed and should be finished in a couple of weeks. The upper floor windows are a

major project and will necessitate expensive scaffolding and may be a job too big for volunteers. A lot of unused iron piping has been removed from the walls giving a much cleaner appearance. When the East Wing is finished work will move round to the north side windows and surrounds outside the Ballroom and Dining Room. The drains across the park have kept getting blocked but several roddings have removed a lot of congealed fat which had been run into the drains. Hopefully we are now on top of this issue.

Summary

We hope these notes give you a brief insight into some of the work which has been carried out by a relatively small number of volunteers who come and spend time at the house and have helped to substantially improve the condition of the House and grounds which was left in such a sorry state. The Trustees are very grateful to this help and from advisors and people who have made donations and given support. Professional help is paid for as necessary, but our budget is tightly controlled.

If you would like to be contacted or can offer help to us and Chris Buckett, the House Manager, we would be very grateful to hear from you; or fill in the simple form when you leave today.

Thank you for coming.



Ann Thwaites

On behalf of Northwood House Charitable Trust