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: CURATOR'S PIECE :

DR. SYLVIA PINCHES

I only have a brief report to make this month, for although I have been very busy, it is all 'background stuff'. I don't suppose you really want to know how I have been getting on with Sage accounts package, for example!

However, there is progress to report on certain outstanding jobs in number 78. William Anelay's men came back before Christmas and dealt with certain minor defects arising from the restoration. They have also constructed the reproduction wash-copper in the kitchen, which looks very good. Any day now the decorators will be back to complete the tivating. The Stained Glass Design Partnership have got the reproduction of the panels of the front door in hand and are also doing some conservation work on the hall lounge screen. There will also be some changes to the displays in the glass case in number 80. Mike Green, who lent us a lot of trains last year, has swapped some items, which keeps the display fresh, and Bob Sutton is going to lend us a number of ship models.

As for number 82, nothing has happened yet, although we are getting closer. The Trustees have appointed the firm of Dollman Ralston to do the work, under the direction of architects John McAslan and Partners. A detailed schedule is being drawn up, which should see the complete refurbishment of the ground floor and basement. Work should begin in early April and take twenty weeks to complete. We shall see. It will obviously cause some disruption but we hope that the impact on visitors will be minimal. Where my office is going is another matter...

Bookings to visit 78 open on 1st March and there will be volunteers on reception every day from 10 to 2pm. each day. If any of you are still wondering about whether to volunteer, please do get in touch with me or Barbara Floyer and discuss the ins and outs. There is a training session for new volunteers on 5th March and a meeting for all volunteers on 9th March. In addition to the volunteers who guide, work in the shop and help with administration, this year we want to appoint a paid cleaner, for four hours on Tuesday. If any of you would be interested in this, or know of someone who would, please let me know.

: BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS :

The Friends of 78 Derngate were pleased to be able to give our best wishes and congratulations to Janet Bassett-Lowke, our Honorary Life Member, on the occasion of her 90th birthday.

Janet had her birthday celebrated with a banquet organised by her daughter, Marilyn Higgs, for over 60 family members from as far away as South Africa, and friends, including Chairman of the Trust and Trustees Keith and Maggie Barwell, as well as Patricia Douglas, who was accompanied by her husband, Tom.

Janet's nephew, David Grounds, gave a eulogy, with a reply from Janet where she reminded those present that the date of the banquet, December 27, was especially chosen as it was the birthday of her uncle Wenmen Bassett-Lowke. Those present at the meal were also invited to have a private visit to number 78 on the following day.

Janet's actual birthday was in January and presentations were made by the Trust and the Friends of 78 Derngate on that occasion.



Janet Bassett-Lowke

: DERNGATE DAYS :

Derngate Days is an autobiographical book by Eileen Bebbington (nee Lacey) who was a pupil at the Northampton High School for Girls in the 1950's and 60's and so knew the Derngate buildings well.

Over the last few years she has been collecting her memories and photographs which were published in book form last December as '**Derngate Days**'. She has also shown her own link with the Bassett-Lowke family. The book is available from 78 when we re-open and also the Kingsthorpe Bookshop at **£6**. It may also be purchased directly from the author at **£7** contact **Eileen Bebbington**, 5 Pullar Avenue, Bridge of Allen, Stirling FK9 4TB

78 DERNGATE NEWS

IN SEARCH OF ART NOUVEAU ARCHITECTURE

: IN RIGA : LATVIA :



Art Nouveau architecture, Riga

"GET STUCK INTO EUROPE'S FINEST ART NOUVEAU ARCHITECTURE", as quoted in *The Times* cover 'on holidays in Baltic States'. This reference was to inform the reader of a special nouveau treat and a 'World Heritage' status in Riga. This was in conjunction with the release of new 'no frills' airfares to some Eastern European destinations.

In view of my interest in art nouveau architecture both commercial and domestic, it was decided that with these claims this should prove to be a worthwhile visit. Before departure there was also a series of half hour television programmes with Kirsty Wark visiting various countries on the eastern side of Europe including Riga. The episode on Riga and surrounding area was somewhat disappointing as little of the city architecture was to be seen plus mention of the 'World Heritage' art nouveau treasures it contained.

Walking from the hotel, described as an original nouveau façade (but lacking evidence to show), there was little sign of any significant architectural features. It would seem that many buildings were post 1870, typical of the east with classical stucco work. There are also some very interesting wood buildings very similar to those built in USA (timber frame and shiplap façade with inset pre-built windows, slate or tin roof coverings). These were, in the main, in a poor state of repair, but in view of the construction could easily be refurbished from stock parts. Also there was the usual selection of post WW1 (very dull, poor quality) Russian style buildings/dwellings.

But where were the nouveau buildings? Why has Unesco credited the city and lest we forget the World Heritage title? Stop for a coffee, and refer to a guidebook. The area in question is described as homes for the elite of Riga, and it was. Streets of ornate buildings, beautiful (but grotesque) grandiose homes for the rich. Big heavy blocks of stucco work with ugly relief to suggest greatness, stability and power, designs of Roman/German influence. There are, of course, some of the beautiful features expected by all lovers of nouveau.

A good deal of renovation was either pending or in progress in this area. Some properties were empty and in urgent need of immediate repair. The finest examples from this unusual collection of properties were designed by the Russian architect, Mikhail Eisenstein (father of famous Russian film director Sergei - Ivan the Terrible 1942-46). A fully restored blue and white house at 10b Elizabet iela is outstanding, with very ornate interior plasterwork (removal of the damage caused from years of neglect and a previous use as student accommodation). It is interesting to note that whilst rich in external stucco work, many buildings are devoid of internal design, modest and plain, as is common in Eastern Europe.

Riga is well worth a short visit, in time more renovation will be undertaken. Although different to the writer's expectations but an enjoyable departure and interesting alternative to the pure nouveau in Paris, Vienna and Prague, and the over the top designs in Barcelona.

Paul Warren-Roberts

: DESTINATIONS TRAVEL SHOW :

The Destinations Travel Show was held again at Earls Court, London from the 4-6 February and members of the Friends were asked to help on the Glasgow stand. Sylvia Pinches arrived on the Thursday laden down with 78 Derngate leaflets, which we were able to distribute on the Glasgow stand, which was very much Mackintosh orientated. The stand drew many visitors who were interested in Scotland, but also a magnet for CRM devotees too. Consequently we were able to inform them about the gem of 78 in Northampton if they felt a visit to Glasgow was too far.

Maria from the TIC Glasgow and Stuart Robertson from the CRM Society, as well as some London branch members, managed the stand. Friends of 78 members who assisted on Friday were Barbara Floyer, Joy Saville and Chris Sherlock (Thanks to Richard Branson who supplied Virgin chocs on the stand he must have known we were going there!) On Sunday George Fenning and David Thomas were on duty promoting 78 as well as Glasgow.

Over the four days we were able to distribute over four hundred of our own leaflets as well as meeting CRM Society members and, of course, encouraging the public to 'do' the Mackintosh- Glasgow experience.

Chris Sherlock

: CALENDAR : OF EVENTS 2004/2005

78 Re-opens

March 23.
then Wednesday -Sunday

Membership due

April 1.

Aston Hall & Gas Hall Birmingham

Pre-Raphaelite
Saturday 7 May £15.00
Details. 458842

Dance / Supper & Auction Fundraising for 78

Saturday 14 May. 7.30pm.
Great Doddington. Northants
Tickets £10 inc. supper
Details 019933 224347 or
01933 359163.

Wightwick Manor

June tbc.

Blackwell & Ravenglass Arts & Crafts/ Railway

Lake District.
Fri 23 Sun 25 Sept. (prov)
Details 07802331580

Friends AGM

Thurs 26 November.

ARTS & CRAFTS

: EXHIBITION :

March 17-July 24. V & A.

Heal's is sponsoring the V & A's **International Arts and Crafts Exhibition** by showcasing antique Heal's furniture from the Arts and Crafts movement at its London flagship store.

Some forty pieces will be available to buy throughout March (020 7896 7555 or their web site www.heals.co.uk).

NEWSLETTER COPY

Should you wish to contribute to the newsletter articles and/or photographs re 78 please contact:

Rob Kendall

on **01604 711317**.

You may also like to check the Trust web site

www.78derngate.org.uk