



## Summer Garden Party at Kiftsgate



Friends Organiser Christopher Hotten acting as barman for the evening.



Friends and Volunteers at the 2017 GRDM Summer Party at Kiftsgate

Thanks to the generosity of Anne Chambers, who allowed us use her magnificent gardens at Kiftsgate Court, Chipping Campden, Friends and volunteers met for the GRDM Annual Summer Party on Friday 14th July.

The Chairman, Gabrielle Falkiner, welcomed over 60 guests who enjoyed the prosecco and soft drinks donated by Guy Warner of Budgens in Broadway. Thanks to the hard work of Maggie Osborne we also had some excellent canapes.

Comments both on the night, and later by email, commended the wonderful location and the ambience of the occasion. Those new to Kiftsgate were so impressed by the gardens that we are sure that Anne Chambers will receive many visits from our Friends in the future.

## The Portwell Bench, Faringdon

Following our visit to Buscot Park on Wednesday 13th September the GRDM Friends will have an opportunity, when we take our lunch break in the nearby town of Faringdon, to see the Portwell Bench in the market square.

This stone seat was cleaned in 2014. Local artists were invited to submit proposals for renovating the Bench against a brief of invoking the spirit of Lord Berners, the wonderfully eccentric former occupant of Faringdon House.



A gifted composer, writer and painter Lord Gerald Berners was a friend of Stravinsky, Gertrude Stein and H.G. Wells and many others. Prior to the Second World War Berners made Faringdon an aesthete's paradise where exquisite food was served to many of the great minds, beauties and wits of the day.

John Betjeman, a frequent visitor with his wife Penelope, wrote: "People came to stay at Faringdon not as the famous men and women they often were, but to be themselves".

Lord Berners's eccentricities were legion. There is a wonderful photograph of Moti, Penelope Betjeman's horse, enjoying afternoon tea with the Berners family in their sitting room. Faringdon was home to a flock of doves painted pink by Lord Berners. On one occasion he advertised in a national newspaper: "Lord Berners wishes to dispose of two elephants and one small rhinoceros (latter house trained). Would make delightful Christmas present". Replies were to be directed to R. Heber-Percy at Faringdon House.

Although homosexuality was illegal at this time Robert Heber-Percy was Lord Berners constant companion from the early nineteen thirties. Twenty eight years Berners junior he was wildly physical, unscholarly, a hothead who rode naked through the grounds, loved cocktails and nightclubs, and was known to all as the 'Mad Boy'. If the two men made an unlikely couple, the addition of a pregnant Jennifer Fry, a high society girl known to be 'fast', as Robert's wife in 1942 was simply astounding.

Lord Berners died in 1950. He left Faringdon to Robert who in turn left it to Jennifer's granddaughter Sofka, the author of the magnificent account of this dysfunctional family, *The Mad Boy, Lord Berners, my Grandmother and Me*.

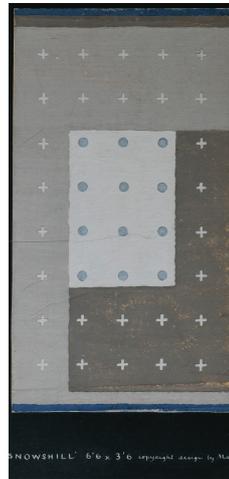


And so to the Portwell Bench which incorporates a figure in a diving suit, helmet and a quotation by Lord Berners: "*Mistrust a man who never has an occasional flash of silliness*". In the summer of 1936 Faringdon received a visit from the noted surrealist Salvador Dali and his wife Gala. At the height of his creative powers, and on the cusp of great fame, Dali decided he would wear a diver's suit to give his lecture in French as part of the International Surrealist Exhibition held in London in July 1936. Lord Berners procured the suit for him. When the suppliers asked how far Dali intended to descend Berners replied "*to the depth of his subconscious*". He tried the suit by putting it on and walking across the market square in Faringdon, right by the site of the Portwell Bench. It is this event the bench celebrates. As Dali gave his lecture he realised that he was running out of air. Increasingly terrified he grappled with the metal globe, his face visibly panic-stricken behind the thick glass window. Lord Berners banged at the bolts with a hammer. The audience assumed that it was all part of a mad pantomime and deemed it a great success.

Continuing the surrealist fun at Farringdon Dali persuaded Lord Berners to put the grand piano in an ornamental pond in the garden and then placed chocolate eclairs on the black notes!

## My Favourite Piece - Jennifer Piepereit, Volunteer Archivist

Although I have many favourite pieces of furniture in the GR Collection, I thought that I would choose an object that is not made of wood but still represents an important part of the GR Company history.



GR Trust Collection

Before re-training in Conservation and Museum Studies in 2003, my first degree was in Fashion and Design, so textiles and design have been a very important part of my life. I have therefore chosen as my favourite piece one of Marian Pepler's rugs named 'Snowhill' that is on display in the Museum's First Floor Gallery. This rug was Marian's first design for the company in 1930 it was made in hand-knotted wool for Sydney Bolton Russell's house, Tower Close, at Snowhill. This same design and others is now manufactured under licence by the international rug designer Christopher Farr.

Marian Pepler was born in 1904, the daughter of the architect and town planner Sir George Pepler, and niece of (Douglas) Hilary Pepler, founder of the Ditchling Press. She attended the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London and joined Gordon Russell Ltd in 1929 and was put in charge of the company's showrooms that by now stocked textiles, glass, china, lighting and carpets alongside their own furniture. By now Dick Russell, Gordon's youngest brother and a fellow student at the AA, was in charge of the drawing office.

In 1930 she attended a course at the London School of Weaving, where she learnt to set up a loom and weave a rug, which led her to become a leading designer of rugs, carpets, curtain fabrics and upholstery fabrics.

In 1931 Marian married Dick Russell. The following year they moved to London to enable Dick to become more closely involved in the running of the firm's showroom at 28 Wigmore Street, which had opened in 1929. Dick encouraged Marian to design rugs and carpets in a new geometric modern style that would complement his furniture and interior designs.

Working for such manufacturers as Wilton Royal, Alexander Morton & Sons, S.J. Rybczyk and Tompkinsons, her work swiftly came to public attention and was commended for its grace and originality and promoted by Gordon Russell Ltd in its advertising for complete room settings. In 1937, Marian, along with 'Curly' Russell, designed the Gordon Russell room set for the Paris International Exhibition.

Marian's career as a designer spanned 40 years, during that period she designed over 200 rugs and carpets. Her main purpose in designing a rug was 'to use it to bring together all the elements of the room with the choice of colours being an important factor'.

In 1947, she was elected a Fellow of the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers in recognition of her work as a designer.

The Russell family kindly donated Marian's portfolio of rug designs and other items to the Museum a few years ago which are now kept in the Archives.