

Nostell Priory lanterns restored to celebrate 25 years of the National Heritage Memorial Fund

25 June 2005

A rare pair of 18th century gilt metal lanterns have been restored to their former glory, complete with sets of miniature bells, in honour of the 25th anniversary of the organisation that saved them in 1986.

Image



The Nostell Priory gilt metal wall lantern in the Chinese taste

Nostell Priory, near Wakefield in West Yorkshire, a Palladian mansion designed by the architects James Paine and Robert Adam, was presented to the National Trust by the 4th Lord St Oswald and members of the Winn family in 1953.

At the time, the family retained the contents of the house which included the most important documented collection of furniture made by the pre-eminent eighteenth century cabinet maker Thomas Chippendale.

When the 4th Lord St.Oswald died leaving a heavy tax liability, in 1984, the future of the collection appeared uncertain and it was feared that it might have to be sold to meet the debt.

Fortunately, with the full co-operation and assistance of the family, the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) provided a grant of £6.1million which enabled the collection to pass to the National Trust and thereby to remain at Nostell Priory.

In celebration of the NHMF's 25th anniversary, the National Trust has unveiled a pair of newly restored lanterns which formed a part of the acquisition funded by the 1986 grant.

The restoration was funded by the Friends of Nostell, a dedicated group of volunteers who seek to raise funds to assist the property.

Although not believed to be by Chippendale, the lanterns are extremely rare Chinoiserie wall lights which formed a part of the house's original contents and which were illustrated by the great furniture historian Percy MacQuoid in his ground-breaking Age of Satinwood book in 1908. At that time, the lanterns were shown to each have four hanging bells and other delicate decorative details which disappeared over the intervening ninety years.

Nostell's House & Collections Manager, Gareth Williams, liaised with London-based metal work conservators Rupert Harris Conservation who oversaw the conservation work required by the fragile gilt metal of the lanterns. The conservators also commissioned new miniature bells from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry which were based upon those illustrated by Percy MacQuoid. "The lanterns themselves are extraordinarily rare survivals of wall lights from the latter eighteenth century", explains Gareth Williams, "being of extremely delicate metalwork and with mirrored backs, which would have maximised the light of the candle burning within them. Their Chinese style of decoration – or Chinoiserie as it was known – is to be found throughout the decoration of several rooms at Nostell and this, again, makes them unusual. We are delighted to have been given the opportunity of restoring the lanterns, thanks to the Friends of Nostell's generosity. Without the NHMF, though, of course, we would not have had lanterns to restore and it is a privilege to be able to reveal them in their newly conserved state in the NHMF's quarter century".

Notes to editors

Nostell Priory is a National Trust property near Wakefield in West Yorkshire. The house opens for the 2005 season on Saturday 19th March from 1.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. and the house is then open Wednesday to Sunday until November. For general enquiries please telephone 01924 863 892

The National Trust was founded in 1895 by three Victorian philanthropists - Miss Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley. Concerned about the impact of uncontrolled development and industrialisation, they set up the Trust to act as a guardian for the nation in the acquisition and protection of threatened coastline, countryside and buildings.

More than a century later, they now care for over 248,000 hectares (612,000 acres) of beautiful countryside in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, plus almost 600 miles of coastline and more than 200 buildings and gardens of outstanding interest and importance. Most of these properties are held in perpetuity and so their future protection is secure. The vast majority are open to visitors and are constantly looking at ways in which they can improve public access and on-site facilities. We are a registered charity and completely independent of Government, therefore relying heavily on the generosity of our subscribing members (now numbering over 3 million) and other supporters. For further information on the National Trust and Nostell Priory please contact Bobbie Robertson on 01924 866 831.

Further information

National Heritage Memorial Fund please call Katie Owen or Sam Goody, NHMF press office, on 020 7591 6036 / 33.

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The NHMF was set up in 1980 to save the best of our national heritage as a lasting memorial to those who gave their lives for the UK in armed conflict.

There is much to celebrate. Since 1980, the fund has spent £220million on more than 1,200 emergency acquisitions.

From the British Museum to the Wildlife Trust, many organisations will be helping the NHMF to celebrate this important anniversary.