

floral crowns in particular, were popular features of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century commemorative tributes, and it is most encouraging to see that the horticultural skills required to make and maintain them have not been lost.

The spread of coronation and jubilee parks across Greater London during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been very varied and it would be most unwise to try to judge the loyal or royal sentiments of particular boroughs or areas by the presence or absence of them, for the acquisition of such spaces depended on many factors. During the period from 1887 to the First World War the initiative for much of the park creation came from the threat of building development and the recognition of London's need for green spaces. In the interwar period the emphasis changed to that of health, sport and physical recreation. The new coronation and silver jubilee spaces for Queen Elizabeth II have shown great variety, while the concerts held in the gardens of Buckingham Palace provide an excellent example of increased accessibility.

Further information on many of these sites is available on the London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust's *Inventory of Public Parks, Gardens, Squares, Cemeteries and Churchyards of Local Historic Interest*. I was fortunate in being a member of the team researching the initial entries for the Inventory in 1995. Further research is being undertaken by Sally Williams, who has created a database of the information; I would like to thank her for her help in researching this article.

DR PHENÉ'S 'ITALIAN RENAISSANCE CHATEAU' set amidst a 'DANK WEED-YARD' in CHELSEA

By Samantha Wyndham

On 23rd July 1907, the friends of Dr Phené gathered in the grounds of his house on the corner of Oakley Street and Upper Cheyne Row in Chelsea to mark the end of their host's year of office as Master of the Clothworkers' Company. The party, according to the invitation, was a *Fête in the Ancient Greek Style*, combined with an opportunity 'to view the Italian Renaissance Chateau now in progress of being finished'.¹ Writing shortly after Phené's death in 1912, his old friend Annesley Owen, the Recorder of Walsall, recalled the scene:

He conducted his guests through the garden, which was arranged in avenues of statues of the personages of Latin, Greek, and Scandinavian mythology, to heroes of Tudor times, and ending in a gigantic statue of Queen Victoria. Alternating with the statues were ancient vases of brilliant flowers and pedestals showing the progress of civilisation from corn-grinding querns, flint celts and arrowheads, onwards.... A pavilion formed of matwork, like the dwellings of the Gabii, an ancient Greek colony in Italy, was erected for the distinguished company of guests, to whom Phené gave an address, describing his archaeological travels in Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor.² (fig. 33)

Dr John Samuel Phené, FSA, FRGS, FRIBA, was born in 1822 and inherited the leasehold of extensive properties in Chelsea. In the 1850s he built the stuccoed houses of Oakley Street and Margaretta Terrace off the King's Road, adorning his new streets with regularly spaced trees 'specially imported by the doctor from Holland' and 'selected by him for their special oxygenating properties'.³ The avenue, allegedly the first of its kind in London, was reputed to have attracted the attention of Prince Albert, inspiring him to plant trees in front of the South Kensington Museum in the late 1850s.⁴

¹ Dr Phené's invitation to his 'Fête in the Ancient Greek Style', in *Chelsea Scraps* (Chelsea Reference Library, Local History Scrapbook, hereafter CRL/LHS), p. 631.

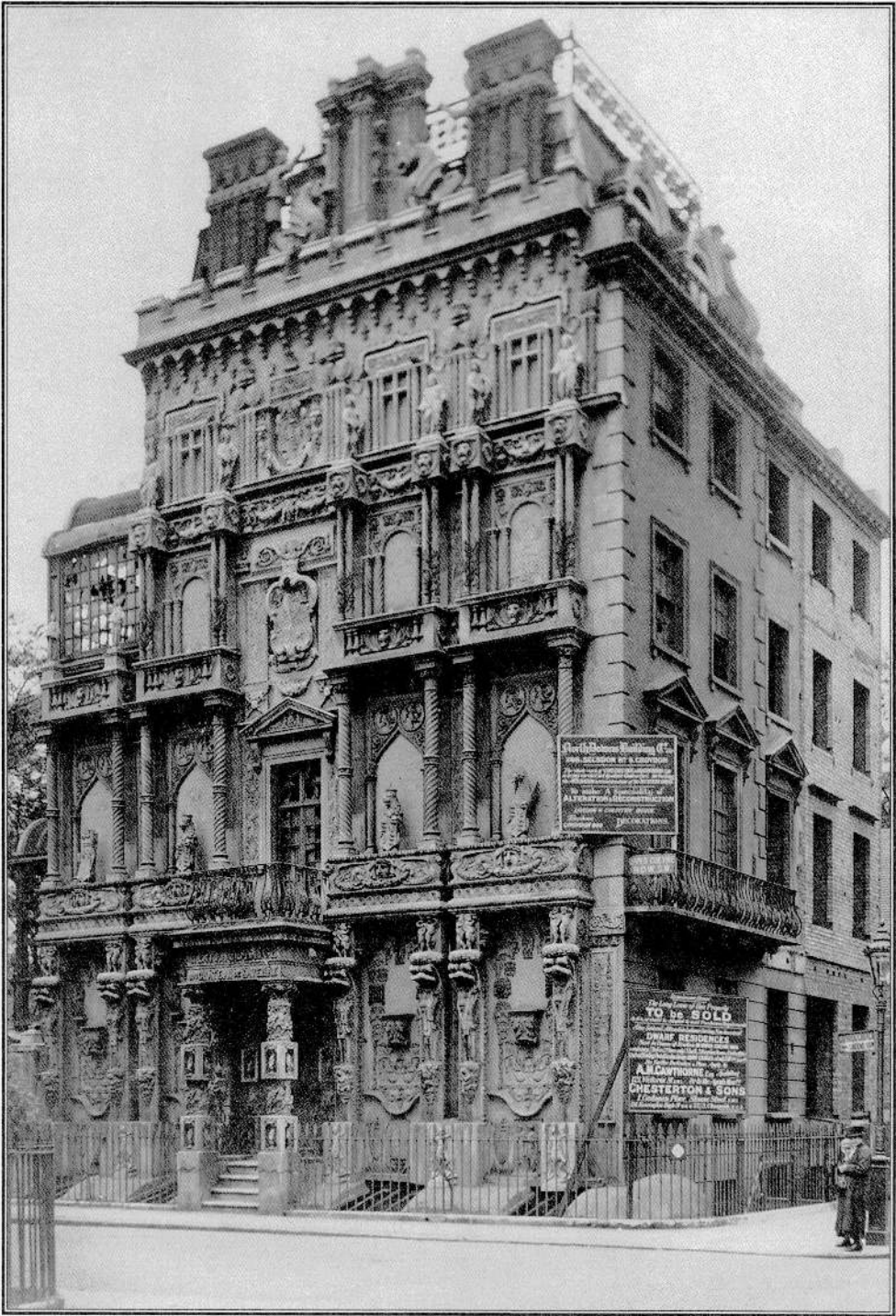
² E. Annesley Owen, 'Dr Phené and his Fantastic Mansion: Interesting Reminiscences by a Recorder', in *Daily Chronicle*, 14th March 1912.

³ Anon, 'Death of Dr Phené: A Remarkable Chelsea Character', in *West London Press*, 15th March 1912.

⁴ Alfred Beaver, *Memorials of Old Chelsea: A New History of the Village of Palaces* (1892), p. 220.



33. Dr Phené in the garden of Cheyne House, Upper Cheyne Row, Chelsea (c.1907)
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34. Dr Phene's Italian Renaissance Chateau on the corner of Upper Cheyne Row and Oakley Street, built between 1901 and 1907
(photographed prior to its sale in 1914)
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Phené's interests were widespread, and included architecture, archaeology, anthropology and genealogy. By the time he settled down to live in 32 Oakley Street he had travelled widely, visiting Japan, China, Mexico, Asia, India, North America, Iceland, Scandinavia and almost every European country. Many of his travels were based on specific themes, such as the journeys of St Paul or the wanderings of Byron's *Childe Harold* (1818) across Portugal, Spain, the Greek islands, the Rhine, the Alps and Italy. His publications included *The Prehistoric Traditions and Customs in connection with the Sun and Serpent Worship* (1875), which perhaps explains why he was described in an obituary as 'an eccentric type of antiquary' with 'a peculiar type of mind'.⁵ He was also one of the founder fellows of the Huguenot Society in 1886, and served for many years as a director of the French Protestant Hospital in north London.

In 1901, Dr Phéné embarked on an extraordinary building project to construct his Italian Renaissance Chateau, directly opposite his own residence. (fig. 34) The house was supposedly both a reconstruction of a Phéné chateau at Savenay on the Loire destroyed during the counter-revolutionary Wars of the Vendée in 1793, and an evocation in stone of his belief in the family's descent from the Phoenicians through India, Persia, Troy, Italy and France.⁶ The site, on the corner of Oakley Street and Upper Cheyne Row, occupied the south-east corner of the garden of Cheyne House, an eighteenth-century building owned by Phéné, which was unoccupied and rapidly falling into decay.

The extensive grounds, described in 1892 as 'the most interesting private garden in Chelsea', included several trees of considerable age:

there is a mulberry supposed to date from Tudor times, the stump of a cedar, which flourished years ago, a beautiful catalpa, still vigorous, planted when this tree was very rare in England, and some old hollies.⁷

However, the horticultural attractions of the garden were surpassed by the vast collec-

tion of architectural relics and statues, arranged along the numerous intersecting paths, described as being 'only about two feet wide and almost as intricate as a maze'.⁸ According to the auctioneer's catalogue produced for the posthumous sale of Phéné's belongings, which made use of individual features to mark specific lots, the garden also included a 'Central Terrace running North and South', a 'Mound', a 'covered way', a blacksmith's forge, several fountains, and a 'Greek temple with small stone cairn adjoining' that marked the burial spot of 'a thirty-seven years' old, long blind pony which he brought from Iceland forty years ago'.⁹

The *Fête a la grecque ancien* in 1907 was probably the last time Dr Phéné entertained in any great style. Although he continued to live in 32 Oakley Street, the 'Renaissance Chateau' and its neighbour Cheyne House remained unoccupied, and the garden, hidden behind a wooden palisade, rapidly turned into a wilderness. Visitors were not encouraged, as one of his neighbours recalled:

Certainly no thought would ever have come to us of bothering Dr Phéné, had we not suddenly collided with him, one hot day, when the gloom of his dank weed-yard showed not unpleasantly through the palisade gate, for once half-open. Who could have resisted a look in? As we looked the owner alarmingly shot out...and made a gesture of welcome. We accepted. We advanced. For a moment we stood still in that overgrown desert. For a moment only; because, having made a vague gesture of explanation...the eccentric remarked explosively: 'This is the garden. Good-bye!'"

Dr Phéné died, aged eighty-nine, on 9th March 1912, leaving his estate to various cousins. In November the same year, a two-day sale was conducted in the garden 'from a rostrum formed of a rambling stone bridge'.¹⁰ Starting in the eighteenth-century Cheyne House, proceeding through the garden, and finishing in the 'Chateau', the auctioneers gradually cleared 348 lots, including over fifteen marble chimneypieces, innumerable statues, (fig. 35) 'several handsome stained glass panels', five pairs of vast wrought-iron gates

5 Anon, *Antiquities: Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, Second Series*, XXIV, p. 235; Anon, 'Death of Dr Phéné' *op. cit.*

6 Anon, 'Death of Dr Phéné', *op. cit.*

7 Beaver, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

8 Anon, 'Chelsea Hermit's Death: Vagaries of a Strange Career', in *Standard*, 12 March 1912.

9 Tyler & Co, 'Catalogue...For Sale on Tuesday and Wednesday, 19th and 20th November 1912', in *Chelsea Scraps*, (CRL/LHS), pp. 1068-70. E Annesley Owen, 'The Late Dr Phéné: Mr E Annesley Owen's Reminiscences', in *West London Press*, 12th March 1912.

10 'W M', 'An Eccentric', in *Daily Mirror*, 12th March 1912.

11 Anon, 'Chelsea's House of Mystery: Sale of Dr Phéné's Weird Collection', in *Daily Chronicle*, 20th November 1912.

with 'crestings', a pulpit canopy and 'a large quantity of old carved, moulded and enriched oak panelling, seats, and choir stalls', believed to come from St Mary Woolnoth in Lombard Street.¹² A correspondent writing for the *Daily Chronicle* vividly described the scene in the garden on the first day of the sale:

Through the bleak branches of a tree in front loomed the ruin of old Cheyne House; behind rose the tall mass of the queer building, erected for a purpose which is not clear and decorated externally with the relics of a hundred antiquated places – odd columns and capitals, gargoyles and imps – round about overgrown with a fungus of rank weed and heaped in a confusion which one lady described as a 'nightmare in masonry' lay the heaps of stones and classic statues, the masses of meaningless iron and marble, ecclesiastical symbols, baths, allegorical nymphs and cupids, and church furniture which Dr Phené made it his absorbing mission in life to collect.¹³ (*fig. 36*)

Having visited the dilapidated and gloomy Cheyne House, in which the caretaker's lamp threw a 'yellow lantern light over the formless masses...starting a gleam in the glass eye of a stuffed stag's head', the reporter made his way across the garden:

Picking a path across the grounds towards the second house, avoiding a well which gaped suddenly and in the depths of which there was the bright gleam of a golden casting, it was a surprise rather, in all that decay and ruination, to encounter a fowl-run with particularly lively hens; a tabby cat, too, was familiarly rubbing itself against a stone representation of Pitt.¹⁴

In 1914, a second auction was held at which Cheyne House and Dr Phené's 'Chateau' were sold. The auctioneer's catalogue described the garden of over half an acre as being 'the chief feature and attraction of the place', with 'Ailanthus trees, Acacia, Poplar, Sycamore, Plane and Lime trees growing in wild profusion'.¹⁵ Both the buildings were subsequently demolished, the eighteenth-century Cheyne House being so riddled with damp and rot that ceilings, internal walls and the staircase had all collapsed. The site of the large

garden is now occupied by several houses built in the 1920s.

INNER TEMPLE GARDEN: 'A NEW FAIRE GARDEN, ENVOIRONED with STRONGE BRICK WALLS'

By Tia Sedley

The Temple gardens that can be glimpsed today alongside the Embankment between Fleet Street and the River Thames probably date from the time of the Knights Templar. The gardens are first mentioned in 1510 in the records of one of their present owners, the Honourable Societies of the Inner and Middle Temple (two of the four Inns of Court).¹ At that time, apart from the greatly enlarged Temple Garden still in use today, the Inner Temple also had a number of garden courts, possibly reflecting earlier monastic planting, among which were *Le Nutgardeyne* and *Fig Tree Court*. Other areas were put to garden use at a later date, such as the land which had been donated by the Inn in 1576 to Lord Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, for using his good offices with Queen Elizabeth I in a property dispute with Middle Temple. This site reverted to the Inn in 1693 after which it became a private garden for the Benchers of the Inn, each of whom had a key.²

The best known literary reference to the garden occurs in *Henry VI, Part I*, in which Shakespeare sets the start of the Wars of the Roses in 1455:

"...this brawl today,

Grown to this faction in the Temple garden,

Shall send between the red rose and the white

A thousand souls to death and deadly night."³

The gardens would have been familiar to Shakespeare, and roses were certainly grown there, for the records show regular payments to the gardener 'to naile up the Rose trees in the garden'.⁴

¹ See the *Calendar of the Inner Temple Records* (The Calendar) Vols. 1-111, (1505-1714) by F. A. Inderwick QC and published by the Inner Temple (1896-1901). The Calendar is derived from the Parliament Act Books and the Bench Table Books, fortified to some extent from the Account Books of the Inn and from the collection known as the Records of the Inner Temple.

² The garden was laid out in the Dutch style with tulips, orange trees in tubs and a fountain, the remains of which were discovered in recent excavations.

³ William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part I*, Act II Scene IV

⁴ According to the diary of John Manningham, *Twelfth Night*, or *What you Will* was first performed on Candlemas Day in Middle Temple Hall. The Globe Theatre performed the play there in January and February 2002 to celebrate the 400th anniversary.

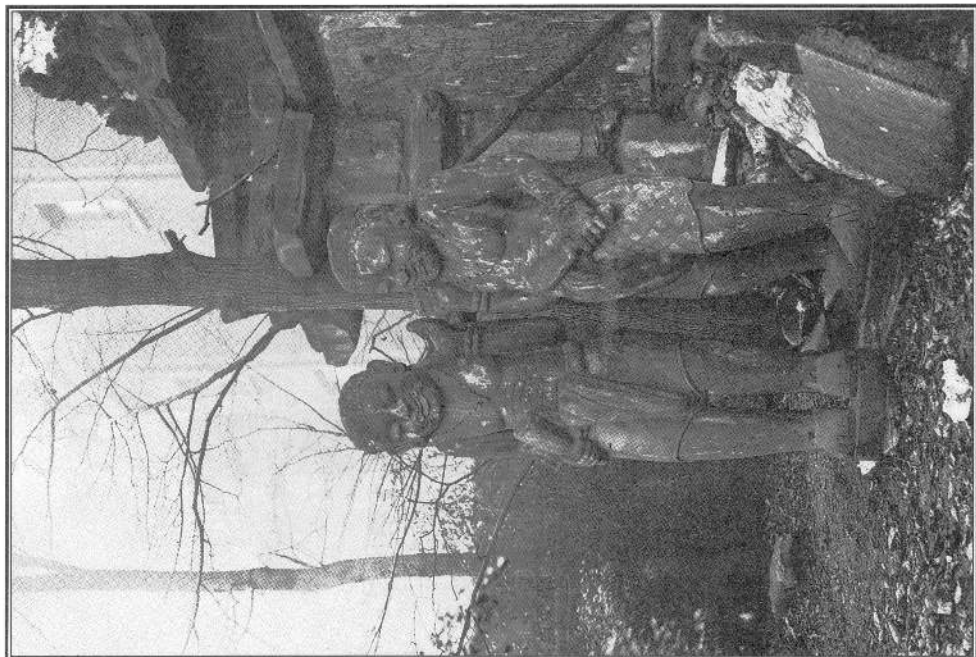
¹² Tyler & Co, *op. cit.*, pp. 1068-70.

¹³ 'Chelsea's House of Mystery', *op. cit.*

¹⁴ 'Chelsea's House of Mystery', *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Messrs Tyler & Co, 'Chelsea. Old Cheyne House, The Mystery House and King Henry VIII's Hunting Lodge, also valuable building sites. Sale by order of the Executrix of the late Dr Phené', London, 8th July 1914.

INNER TEMPLE GARDEN



35. Statues in Dr Phene's garden, photographed during the auction of his possessions, November 1912
(COPYRIGHT ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON & CHELSEA)

36. View of an avenue in Dr Phene's garden, with statues and other monuments,
during the auction in November 1912
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