

# The Chippendale Society

Chairperson: Pat Lofthouse



Registered Charity No. 501046

## NEWSLETTER No 82 October 1998

### **CHRISTOPHER GILBERT 1936 - 1998**

It is with great sadness that we learned of the death of Christopher Gilbert on September 29th, our Honorary Curator 1972 - 1995, and President since 1995. Our thoughts and sympathy are with his wife Mary and his family. An obituary by Dr Ingrid Roscoe is published overleaf.

*A special Christopher Gilbert Memorial Fund has been set up to mark his association with the Society. Details of its progress and how it will be used will be published in forthcoming newsletters. Please send cheques in favour of The Chippendale Society (CG Memorial Fund) to James Lomax, c/o Temple Newsam House, Leeds LS15 0AE*

### **ANNUAL DINNER**

The thirty sixth Annual Dinner was held in June and was well supported by some eighty members and guests who were extremely well entertained by our speaker Darrell Buttery, Chairman of the York Georgian Society who proposed the Toast of the Society. The Otley Golf Club was once again the venue for this annual event and it is to be hoped that we will be able to obtain the facilities once again

### **AUTUMN LECTURE**

Adam Schoon, the broadcaster, antiques consultant and expert on ceramics will speak on

### ***CHINAMANIA IN THE AGE OF CHIPPENDALE***

on Wednesday 18 November at 7.45 (doors open at 7.15)  
at Arthington Village Hall.

Free and plentiful car parking; cost £2 (at the door) to include refreshments.  
Non-members welcome.

## Christopher Gilbert (1936 - 1998)

Christopher Gilbert will be remembered internationally for his contribution to the study of English furniture and particularly the work of Thomas Chippendale, hailed by his biographer as 'the Shakespeare of English cabinet makers'. In the local community he will deserve celebration both for acquisitions made for Temple Newsam during his period as Director and for promoting interest in Otley's great son through the Chippendale Society. Among his friends he will be loved for his integrity, modesty, dry humour, incandescent enthusiasm for subjects special to him and for his arresting use of language.

The great study on Chippendale was published in 1978, the same year as a meticulously researched two volume catalogue recording the furniture at Temple Newsam and Lotherton Hall. 1986 saw another milestone in scholarship, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, compiled by Gilbert and his old friend Geoffrey Beard. Then Christopher turned from the parade room (a favourite phrase) to examine furniture in ordinary homes and institutions, previously disregarded by scholars, but given proper attention in the wake of *English Vernacular Furniture, 1750 - 1900*. Throughout the years of intensive writing, Christopher would arrive at Temple Newsam two hours before the official start of the working day and then stay on well after other staff members had left. Great credit is due to his wife Mary for her amused tolerance of these twilight activities.

He was a testament to the power of the pen in the realm of fund raising, phrasing applications for help with such felicity that sums exceeding three million pounds were raised for such spectacular acquisitions as Turner's *Book of Birds*, the Channon cabinet, the Kirkleatham silver centrepiece and Rodin's *Age of Bronze*. Since he became honorary curator of the Chippendale Society in 1972 he deployed the same energy and skill in building up almost its entire collection of furniture and documents. He relished the prospect of a campaign, seen most recently with the successful repatriation (another favourite phrase) of the Denton side tables from America with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund. And he always enjoyed the party afterwards. But Christopher's interest extended also to 1930s bakelite wireless sets and collapsible beds for servants, appreciated for their good design and interest as social documents.

In his later years Christopher's love of the natural world became more pronounced. Quite recently his interest in ornithology caused him to charter a boat destined for storm-bound St Kilda; his courageous wife went with him on a journey of unrelieved swell and nausea. The collection at his funeral, attended by many scholars and admirers, was taken for his favourite charity, the World Wildlife Fund (and realised over six hundred pounds).