



## **Sitwell Society Newsletter Number Ten**

**One of my friends realised that I had an interest in the Sitwells and phoned me advising me to watch a programme about Renishaw Hall. This happen chance prompted me to contact the archivist who was featured in the programme and invite her to send me some content for our website and below is the first of what I hope will be many “letters from Renishaw”**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE RENISHAW HALL ARCHIVE JULY 2013**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The family archive located at Renishaw Hall is a private collection, very much at the heart of this fascinating house and family, which still remains in the very place in which so much of the material was created and relates to.

In 1965, Sir Reresby and Lady Sitwell inherited Renishaw Hall from Sir Osbert Sitwell and began their forty year restoration of the house and gardens. Lady Sitwell recalls discovering rooms full of papers, with family documents scattered throughout the house. She and Sir Reresby instigated the important initial organisation of the archive, inviting Joan Sinar of the Derbyshire Record Office and Mr and Mrs Howard Usher of Sheffield University to undertake this mammoth task in the late 1970s –1980s. A typed catalogue was created which provided an invaluable summary of the archive’s contents.

A specific Muniments Room was designated and Lady Sitwell designed the shelving, which was made by the estate joiner. This room is known as the Duke’s Room since it was where the Duke of Devonshire stayed during his visits to Renishaw in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Edward Lutyens is also known to have stayed in this room. It is indeed a privilege to work in such a beautiful and historic environment with a view of the beautiful gardens as an added – but often distracting- bonus!

Since Alexandra Sitwell inherited Renishaw Hall in 2009 she has taken the initiative to undertake a huge reappraisal of the contents of the house, beginning with the archives and the library.

In the archive a computer database of its contents is being created and materials are being re-located in line with this. In short, we will know what we have got and where exactly it is! Given that there are over 300 boxes to go through it is certainly a long job.

#### **2. ARCHIVE CONTENT**

The Sitwell family has owned and lived at Renishaw Hall since 1625. The archive covers the whole of this period but is greatest in detail from the late 18<sup>th</sup> C, the time of the Sitwell Sitwell 1st Baronet up to the present day.

The key themes of the Renishaw Hall archive are as follows:

- The literary trio of Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell – personal correspondence and literary material relating to many key social, literary and artistic developments and figures 1900-1970.
- Art collection – particularly mid 20<sup>th</sup> C e.g. John Piper, CRW Nevinson, Rex Whistler
- Garden History – particularly the creation of the Italianate gardens at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> C by Sir George Sitwell 4<sup>th</sup> Baronet.
- The building and contents of the house
- Social history of the family and the estate in Eckington, Scarborough, Northampton and Italy
- Small Photograph collection
- Estate management material – land management, mining, tenancies etc
- Links with royalty e.g. Queen Mother, Queen Mary

The archive's greatest untapped treasure is its correspondence collections of Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, Sir George Sitwell 4<sup>th</sup> Bt and Lady Louisa Lucy Sitwell his mother. There is a small amount of Edith's correspondence.

Over 3,000 of Osbert's letters have been entered on a database and that only accounts for 2 of the 7 boxes of his personal correspondence. The roll call of Osbert's correspondents reads like a literary and artistic 'Who's Who' and includes the likes of

Evelyn Waugh  
Somerset Maugham  
H.E. Bates  
Augustus John  
Graham Greene  
T.S. Eliot  
Walter de la Mare  
John Betjeman  
Sigfried Sassoon  
Henry Miller  
L.P. Hartley  
George Orwell  
E.M. Forster  
Cyril Connolly  
William Walton

Some of these are isolated letters and some amount to a significant collection relating to an individual correspondent e.g. L.P. Hartley

### 3. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Over the last 6 months we have been developing specialist literary tours of Renishaw focussing on the literary trio – and others. A range of archive material will be available for visitors to see during the tour, to bring the literary careers of the Sitwell family to life including original notebooks, galley proofs, letters, books etc. Each room in the house is used to focus on a different aspect of each key literary figure.

### 4. DAILY DISCOVERIES

Each day spent in the archives yields new and exciting discoveries, one of which I would like to share with you, given the Sitwell Society's interest. Even though we have only a small amount of Edith's correspondence in the archive, her letters, whether generous or irate, are a joy to read and are never dull.

Here is a recently discovered letter from Edith to Osbert outlining the reconciliation with Noel Coward:

*29 Sept 1962*

*"I have had a letter from Coward.. a letter which I must say did him the greatest of credit. He said he regretted deeply the attack, that he never meant to hurt my feelings, and that he regretted it all the more because if it hadn't happened we might have met and become friends. He said how much he admired the Queens (Edith's book), asked after you and sent his love. I replied in a friendly manner and asked him to the concert and a supper party".*

I look forward to developing future links between the Sitwell Society and Renishaw Hall Archives, sharing our knowledge and above all our enduring interests in this fascinating family.

Christine Beevers  
Renishaw Hall Archives July 2013



**Finally don't forget our next event when Karen Snowden will again organise a "hands on" exploration of the Sitwell literary output. We plan to continue to catalogue the collection but there will also be an opportunity to browse among the books. The event is free and everyone welcome Saturday September 21st 2013, at Woodend 10.30am**