

The Oakley Court – Sellers, Salmon & Ceremony



The Oakley Court is today a welcoming home steeped in a heritage that very few hotels can claim. It has of course superlative service for guests, manicured lawns, high teas, and an a la carte menu all evocative of a truly refined English Manor beside the Thames.

The Court has also enjoys great entertainment with Dracula and celebrities of past and present, which include Peter Sellers and Martin Shaw.

Indeed this needs elaborating. To do this we need to amalgamate the history and heritage along with Oakley's different owners, occupants and functions during its lifetime. We'll cover a fairly broad spectrum from its beginning in 1859 to include **History & Heritage, Film & Television** and **Being There** to the present day.

An eccentric architect's idea of roof-dressing

HISTORY & HERITAGE

In part I have the internet to thank for some of the research but this only provided us with access to existing records made and kept over 100 years ago in the form of The Gentleman's Magazine (Vol CCIII), Gazetteer (Oxon, Berks & Bucks 1863) and Census.

Sir Richard Hall-Say, originating in Swaffham of Norfolk is the attributed owner and developer of The Oakley Court (1859), and in the language of Cornish Breton the area was known as Water Oakley or *Warhta Eog Lee* meaning The Upper Salmon Place – the Chef reminds me that Salmon no longer swim this part of the Thames.

Richard married Ellen Hannah in Burnham in 1857 who was the only daughter of Edward Evans esq. of Boveney Court Buckinghamshire.

Later, on that happy day of the →



26th April of 1876, Sir Richard's eldest daughter Mary Violet married Reverend Arthur Henry Austen Leigh of Winterborne at Bray church nearby – the youngest bridesmaid at the wedding was Hilda Hall-Say.

Mary Violet was 17 when she married the Reverend, 24 years her senior. They honeymooned in Oxford and 'The Lakes' after a breakfast reception.

At the turn of the century, businessman Sir William B Avery of Avery Scales Ltd bought Oakley Court. The Birmingham based manufacturer, Avery Scales became a listed public company in 1891 and the Avery Museum has examples of the scales used in WWI that weighed wounded soldiers in military hospitals. Sir William was also known as a respected philatelist.

An eccentric character by the name of Mr Ernest Olivier bought the property in 1919 soon after WW I – along with 50 acres of Berkshire woodland for a lump sum of £27,000.00. Ernest liked to entertain foreign diplomats and when they



arrived he made sure their countries' flags were flown from a high mast. During WWII there is a connection with the French Resistance who used the Court as their English HQ which is why **President De Gaulle** probably stayed here in one of the Mansion suites.

FILM & TELEVISION

This is where the film studios stepped into the Oakley Court evolution – following the death of Mr Olivier in 1965. It remained uninhabited for a while but not vacant.

For the next 14 years it became an ideal setting for many of the films made by Southern Pictures and Bray

Reading 'matters' in the Library

Pleasure boats for 3 men or more

Candlelight goes electric for the foyer chandelier



Studios who had become a neighbour in 1955 at Down Place. During this period some 200 films were made in and around the property, most notable were the **St Trinians** series, **The Rocky Horror Show**, **Murder by Death** starring **Peter Sellers**.

Hammer House Productions filmed **Dracula** series here and the directors obtained an eerie atmosphere by lighting the entire Court using only candles.

Actor **Martin Shaw** more recently known as a Judge by the name of John Deed also came to know Oakley Court in an episode of **The Professionals** called **Blind Run** – in which he smashed the



Carte menus.
On a Sunday there is a welcoming Jazz Buffet offering roasts and seasonal produce to the 'live' sound of guitar and vocals – a soothing way to relax to lunch at the weekend. During the week there is also a new choice of a 2 or 3 course lunch. Given the Oakley Court's fascinating history it wasn't surprising that their *Bloody Mary* was one of the best I had ever tasted. I perked mine up with a few extra splashes of 'Tabasco'!

Eating at the hotel has been well thought out and the 'All Day Dining' means what it says, serving customer from 10.00 am to 10.00 pm indoors or alfresco on a warm day. To give you a taste of this menu try one of these – *an Arnold Bennett Omelette, baby Spinach and Red Onion Salad or the Char Grilled Sirloin, Hand Cut Chips, Grill Garnish and Béarnaise.*

The Oakley Court Afternoon Tea includes 'freshly made sandwiches, warm home made scones with clotted cream and preserves, pastries, desserts, homemade cakes and a choice of teas ranging from Darjeeling to Blackcurrant & Ginseng.

If you need a little exercise after this food and beverage extravaganza why not brave a couple of sets on the tennis courts, a walk in the quiet grounds or for the keep fit calorie conscious a work out in the health club?

For me it would have to be a bottle of in-room Krug 1995 champagne with my feet up and an unpublished book on easy dieting.

In the meantime I look forward to walking the dog through the autumn leaves.

stained glass windows of the reception door to fire off a few rounds.

Oakley Court also once housed a **Welte** #5 orchestrion – a type of handmade automatic musical instrument from Germany. According to renowned collector and restorer *Mr Durward R Center* "the Welte is the Rolls Royce of orchestrions" – he currently owns the original from Oakley Court that dates from 1898 which he bought in 1985 from its London owner.

"It sat in the front stair hall to the left of the entry door at Oakley Court and is one of only two surviving in the world, the other is

in the Dolmabache Palace in Istanbul.

Weltes were found in the Sultan of Deli's Palace in Sumatra, The Prince of Greece in Canea and in the early 1900's opera star Adelina Patti had one installed in her residence Craig-y-nos Castle in South Wales."

BEING THERE

The Oakleaf restaurant at the hotel overlooks the expansive gardens and the river Thames and the chef Darren Kimber works with their marketing man Nigel Brunt to produce a smorgasbord of delights with traditional and upbeat a la

Left:
The original Welte 5 orchestrion

Above:
Seen from rear riverside and gardens

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