

TWICKENHAM – RFU & Marble Hill House
THURSDAY 17 September 2009

This visit has been organised by Tony Manning and George Freeman.

RFU

It is often held that the birth of Rugby Union Football occurred when William Webb Ellis, taking part in an early form of football at Rugby School in 1823, picked up the ball and ran with it, thus creating the "hooligans' game played by gentlemen" (in contrast to the "gentlemen's game played by hooligans"). This is almost certainly an apocryphal story for which there is little evidence. It is more likely that both games evolved from the many ancient games played in the British Isles in medieval times, involving an inflated pigs bladder. Many still survive, for example the "Uppies" versus the "Downies" played in Kirkwall in the Orkneys on New Years Day, when the Uppies try to force the ball, by any possible means, out of the back of the town, while the Downies try and kick it into the harbour. The High Street shops remain boarded up all day!

Twickenham is the National Stadium for English rugby, and the home of the Rugby Football Union. The original ground was laid out in 1907 on a former market garden, and called "Billy William's Cabbage Patch", and the first international between England and Wales took place in 1910. The stands have since been rebuilt more than once, the current stadium, which is a complete bowl seating 82,000, was completed in 2006.

Our visit will include a tour of the stadium plus the Rugby Museum housed within the stadium.

Twickenham Riverside In the eighteenth century Twickenham became a place for the fashionable and wealthy to build houses. We will look at several as we walk to Marble Hill such as York House (with its statues), Orleans House Octagon (unfortunately there is no time to visit any exhibition at the Gallery) and Ham House (across the river).

Marble Hill House is the last complete survivor of the elegant villas and gardens which bordered the Thames between Richmond and Hampton Court in the 18th century. It was begun in 1724 for the remarkable Henrietta Howard, mistress of King George II when he was Prince of Wales, and friend of some of the cleverest men in England. The house and gardens were planned by a coterie of fashionable connoisseurs, including Lord Herbert and Mrs Howard's neighbour, the poet Alexander Pope.

A lovely Palladian villa still set in 66 acres of riverside parkland, Marble Hill was intended as an Arcadian retreat from crowded 18th-century London. It became renowned as a salon of literary wits, gathered round their learned hostess. The compact but carefully planned interior is focused on the first floor 'Great Room' where Mrs Howard held court. Beside it are her own columned showpiece bedchamber, with a charming long gallery above and dining and breakfast parlours below.

Marble Hill's decoration and furnishings have been exquisitely restored and recreated, and some of its original contents, dispersed in 1824, have been re-assembled from as far afield as Philadelphia and Melbourne, Australia. There is also a fine collection of early Georgian paintings, including portraits of Mrs Howard and her circle. There can be few places in England which better recall the atmosphere of Georgian fashionable life. The house was the first to use mahogany extensively which was being imported from the West Indies by companies like Gillows of Lancaster (furniture makers) as ballast.

TRAVEL and MEETING Points

Public transport. Twickenham station is on the Waterloo to Richmond/Feltham line with fast trains (Reading line). It is two (slow train) stops from Richmond underground. **Meet** on Twickenham station platform 4. Coffee and toilets. We will walk the mile to the stadium and join the car travellers in the Marriott Hotel. GHCF

Car users please use North Carpark, entrance in Rugby Road. You may leave your cars there all day but please tell security. Walk to the south side of the stadium and **assemble** in the coffee bar of the Marriott Hotel attached to the stadium. Toilets. Tony will meet you.

LUNCH We have booked tables at the Wetherspoons pub The William Web Ellis.

AFTER LUNCH we will walk the mile or so along the Twickenham Riverside (all on paved surfaces)

TEA can be taken in the stables after the house tour by those who need it.

COST £14 each for a of minimum 15. (English Heritage members with card £10.50) Refreshments at cost.

CONTACTS

Before the meeting. Reinalt Vaughan-Williams reinalt@physics.org 020 8946 3399 and 07758 085741

On the morning of visit. George Freeman 07941 916 944 or Tony Manning 07747 611 503

LATE ARRIVALS - Please phone George to find where we are. From the station turn right, fork left and walk north for one mile crossing the A316 to the RFU stadium. Use the first entrance (F) in Rugby Road and security will direct you to the museum. Say you are a member of the 11.30 tour party. (15 minutes fast walk)

CAR USERS. Go to Gate D in Rugby Road, near the north carpark, and tell security you are part of the 11.30 tour party and proceed to the museum.

- 10.30 – 11.00 Assemble at Twickenham station (Cars drivers at the hotel)
- 11.00 Walk to RFU Stadium
- 11.30 – 12.15 Tour
- 12.15 – 12.45 Museum
- 12.45 Walk back to Twickenham for lunch
- 14.00 – 14.30 Walk along Twickenham Riverside to Marble Hill House
- 14.30 – 16.00 Tour and explore
- 16.00 – 16.30 Tea in stables (if required)
- 16.30 Walk or bus to Twickenham or Richmond station

