



THE CHELSEA SOCIETY



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

CROSBY MORAN HALL

Chelsea's Riverside Palace



Perhaps more than anywhere in London the area of Chelsea is beloved by residents and tourist alike for its uniquely vibrant co-existence of the historical and present-day. The newly restored 15th Century palace, Crosby Moran Hall, gracing the Embankment on Cheyne Walk with its flags flying between Chelsea Old Church and Battersea Bridge, could not be a grander example. Its unique roof ceiling is the only surviving domestic roof of its kind in the United Kingdom. Its presence makes Chelsea home to 'the most important surviving secular domestic medieval building in London,' according to English Heritage.

Grade II* listed Crosby Moran Hall has an astonishing history spanning nearly six centuries: It was the home of some of England's most famous figures – Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More, Richard III when Duke of Gloucester, and Sir Walter Raleigh. It was visited by Catherine of Aragon, Anne of Cleves, Elizabeth I, Shakespeare, Ben Johnson and Sir Francis Drake. It was immortalized in Shakespeare's Richard III. It served as a Mansion House for London's Lord Mayors and a headquarters of the powerful East India Company. It was moved – brick by brick – from Bishopsgate to its current home, in Chelsea, in 1910. It was requisitioned in both World Wars and narrowly escaped being bombed. It sheltered Belgian refugees and housed the Wrens. And it has now been passionately restored to its Medieval glory by one of Chelsea's residents.

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Beginnings in Bishopsgate

Crosby Moran Hall was first erected by the wealthy merchant Sir John Crosby in 1466 in Bishopsgate in the City of London, in what is now Crosby Square. Then known as Crosby's Place, it completed in 1475, shortly before Sir John's death: "so short a space enjoyed he that sumptuous building." His widow Anne lived out her days there.

The Duke of Gloucester, Richard III (1452-1485) occupied Crosby Place and held several of his councils there during the War of the Roses, probably plotting military and political strategies in the Great Hall. Shakespeare writes in Richard III, "When you haue done repaire to Crosby Place" (Act I, Scene 3)."



The property eventually passed to another influential figure, Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), who acquired it when he was Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor. At the time, More's family lived on his Chelsea estate, which included the site on which Crosby Moran Hall now stands. It is said that More may have written portions of *Utopia* under the Great Hall roof. He sold the building to his patron, Antonio Bonvisi, who kept More clothed and fed as he awaited his fate in the Tower of London. More's son-in-law William Roper went on to live in Crosby Place for decades after More sold it to Bonvisi.

Alderman William Bond (1524-1576), a merchant adventurer, used the building as his Mansion House while he served as Lord Mayor, and he added to the building.

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Subsequent Lord Mayor Alderman Sir John Spencer further embellished the grandeur of Crosby Place as he used the palace for his Mansion House in 1594-5. 'Rich Spencer' threw lavish parties within the Great Hall and entertained important foreign delegations, including from The Vatican and France. By 1603, Crosby's Place was described by Stowe in his Survey of London as 'of stone and timber, very large and beautiful, and the highest at that time in London.'

The East India Company occupied Crosby Place from 1621 to 1638, using former palace as its headquarters during the height of its global power. Crosby Place survived the Great Fire of 1666 but, in 1672, another fire tragically destroyed two sides of the quadrangle, but, thankfully, the Great Hall and parlour wings survived. What was left became known as Crosby Hall, serving as a meeting place and a warehouse. The exterior and interior suffered increasing damage.

In 1832, an initial series of preservation meetings were led by Lord Mayor W. T. Copeland and a committee of Alderman. Although they raised awareness about the building's plight, they did not raise sufficient funds. However, Miss Maria Hackett came forward, mainly funding the preservation and restoration of the building from her own private wealth. Her role, like the occupants before and after her, serves as an inspiring example of what can be achieved by individual Londoners who set their mind to preservation for posterity.



Long Gallery

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The Great Hall

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A Palace Moves to Chelsea

In 1908, the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China bought the Bishopsgate site on which Crosby Hall then stood and intended to demolish the historic Great Hall to erect its new London headquarters. After a public outcry, Crosby Hall was saved by what was saved by an extraordinary expression of public and private conscience, as well as a considerable feat of engineering: the Great Hall was dismantled; its roof, stones and original materials were carefully numbered. The building then was entirely re-erected in 1910 in Chelsea, fittingly, at the site of Sir Thomas More's country manor. The site of the Great Hall today between Roper's Garden and the More's Garden residential block, was provided by the London County Council (LCC).

The story of Crosby Hall in Chelsea has been no less extraordinary than its life in Bishopsgate.

During the First World War, Crosby Hall was requisitioned for the war effort and housed Belgian refugees and the sick and wounded, aided by the Chelsea War Refugee Committee. British author Henry James wrote that the Great Hall's "almost incomparable roof has arched all this winter and spring [1914–1915] over a scene ... more pathetic than any that have ever drawn down its ancient far-off blessing."

The British Federation of University Women took a lease on the building from the LCC and commissioned architect Walter Godfrey to construct a brick structure at right angle to the Hall to house the women, the basis of what now forms Crosby Moran Hall's north wing (although significantly altered). In 1926 it was opened by the Duchess of York, the future Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

Crosby Hall's Great Hall narrowly escaped the bomb that in 1941 destroyed most of Chelsea Old Church and the area of what is now Roper's Garden, although its windows were shattered by the blast. Evidence of shrapnel is still visible in the Great Hall's east exterior. The building housed members of the Women's Royal Naval Service (the Wrens) during World War II, the families of whom still send letters to the present owner.

For many years, the Chelsea Society held teas and Annual Meetings in the Hall. The Greater London Council maintained the building until 1986, when the Council was abolished. The London Residuary Body was charged with disposing of the GLC's assets and put by Hall up for sale.

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Restoration

In 1988, long-time Chelsea resident, Dr Christopher Moran, businessman and philanthropist who is Chairman of Co-operation Ireland, purchased what is now Crosby Moran Hall. Dr Moran's ambition, as stated on the blue plaques outside the building's front gates, was to put London's only surviving domestic medieval building back into its historical context in terms of architecture, and in addition, to show art and architecture of the Tudor, Elizabethan and Early Stuart periods in their context.



SUMMER MEETING, 1957
Tee at Crosby Hall.

From the 1957 Chelsea Society Annual Report

The re-building and restoration project represents an 'almanac' of the best of British craftsmanship of the period. The first eight years of planning and approvals processes eventually allowed the stabilisation of the Great Hall's remaining 15th Century Reigate stone, which was crumbling. The Great Hall roof and cupola were also stabilised to preserve their original 15th Century materials. Estimates are that Dr Moran has since invested more than £75 million in the architectural restoration alone.

Many of today's leading historians and architects have participated in the rebuilding and restoration project, including Dr. Mark Girouard FSA, Dr Simon Thurley CBE, John Thornycroft CBE, archaeologist Dr Warwick Rodwell OBE, Dr David Starkey CBE, John Simpson OBE, stone mason Dr Dick Reed OBE, and David Honour. World leading institutions such as Westminster Abbey, English Heritage, the National Portrait Gallery, the V&A, Royal Academy, Historic Royal Palaces, the British Museum, the City of London, and individuals have visited Crosby Moran Hall and some have at times consulted on various aspects of its art and architecture.

In 1988, Crosby Hall was purchased out of public ownership by Dr Christopher Moran who embarked on a project to put Crosby Hall back into its historical context in terms of architecture. Furthermore then to show art and architecture of the Tudor, Elizabethan and Early Stuart periods in their context. Crosby Hall has now been renamed Crosby Moran Hall.



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Crosby Moran Hall now represents an astonishing example of the Tudor, Elizabethan and early Stuart period. Each of the five floors and rooms are furnished with Dr Moran's collection of 15th, 16th, and early 17th Century high-status English furniture, British and Old Master pictures, metals, arms & armour, tapestries, etc. Works include Van Dyk, Dobson, Eworth, Gheeraerts, Hilliard, Cranach and Holbein. The collection has been formed over some 50 years.

On the west side of the courtyard is a dining hall constructed entirely of stone inspired by Kirby Hall. The dining hall has a 55-foot-long table cut from a single oak tree. The frontage of red brick facing the river along on Cheyne Walk is inspired by the disciplines of Hampton Court Palace and Hengrave.



The 16th Century Knot Garden

The frontage and north wing have been designed using bricks and stonemasonry utilizing the techniques (such as brick 'diapering') used by Sir John Crosby to build the original quadrangle. The north elevation has been altered to conform to a high building of circa 1590/1610 – Hardwick, Chastleton, and Hatfield come to mind. The Great Hall with its original, magnificent ceiling and soaring, gilded oriel window has been painted based upon precedent.

The main rooms are the Great Hall, council chamber, long gallery, dining hall, east and west libraries, chapel, prospect room and museum. The completed courtyard encloses an Elizabethan knot garden designed by the late Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury and grows only plants and trees that existed in the 16th Century.

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The Dining Hall

The central fountain is based on the design for the Lumley Fountain at Nonsuch Palace. The terrace over the garden was inspired by Rushton in a stone balustrade displaying the Moran motto: Meritum Pertinacia Fortitudo Fidelitas.

Recently created in the undercroft beneath the Great Hall is a spacious Chapel with a reredos of intricately carved Bath stone, a Lady Chapel and a mortuary

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chapel, each with fan vaulted ceilings. The Chapel is illuminated by stained glass windows. Under guidance of Westminster Abbey, both chapels are laid with very rare Cosmati pavements incorporating each of the precious stones found in the original Cosmati pavement in Westminster Abbey, which was installed in 1268.

Crosby Moran Hall remains at the heart of national life.

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The Council Chamber

The first meeting between Her Majesty the Queen and the President of Ireland Mary McAleese took place within the Great Hall in 2005, leading to the State Visit of The Queen to the Republic of Ireland in 2011: on the return State Visit in 2014, Dr Moran hosted a dinner held at the Hall.

In 2016, The Queen unveiled her portrait painted by Northern Irish artist Colin Davidson in an Anglo-Irish gathering. Her Majesty's portrait still graces the Great Hall today. The Queen, the late Duke of Edinburgh, HRH The Prince of Wales, HRH The Princess Royal, HRH The Countess of Wessex, HRH The Duke of Kent,

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HRH Princess Alexandra, Prime Ministers and Ambassadors have all attended receptions and dinners in recent years. Some of the world's leading musicians have visited or performed in Crosby Moran Hall, including José Carreras, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, and Sir Colin Davis.

The rebuilding and restoration continue. Institutions with an interest in art, history, and conservation visit. One characteristic that sets Crosby Moran Hall apart from museums is that its art, furniture, metals and tapestries, as well as arms and armour, all shown in their true historical context.

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As one visitor said, "The past comes alive here." Now in Chelsea, if this building could speak, it might say that it is enjoying a renaissance back to its original importance in its Tudor, Elizabethan, and Early Stuart days.



The Oriel Window