

# REX WHISTLER MURALS AT TRENT PARK HOUSE

*The Chroma Conservation team were delighted to be commissioned to work on the conservation cleaning and retouching treatment of the Rex Whistler murals at Trent Park House. Painted between 1930-1933, in the Long Saloon (Library and Chinese Drawing Room) and the Blue Room in this most interesting of houses in Cockfosters, North London.*

At Trent Park Rex Whistler's murals were inspired by classical Roman decoration, a period very close to his heart. The large panel above the fireplace in the Blue room is a wonderful martial trophy painted in red and silver on a blue painted background with Sir Philip Sassoon's initials on the shield. In the Library, two female figures in Roman armour with plumed helmets recline on either side of a large arched bookcase, whilst at the opposite end of the enfilade he painted dolphins with gilded spumes on the spandrels of an arched Venetian window. Whistler discreetly introduced Sir Philip's gold

monogram on various walls throughout the ground floor. These designs were in perfect harmony with the calm, elegant, very English décor that Sir Philip created, both inside and outside the mansion.

Trent Park has a fascinating history and dates back to the fourteenth century when it was a part of Enfield Chase, one of Henry IV's hunting grounds.



In 1909 the estate was sold to the Sassoon family. Sir Philip Sassoon inherited the estate in 1912 and went on to entertain many notable guests at Trent Park's famously decadent parties which were frequented by celebrities including Charlie Chaplin and Winston Churchill.

Trent Park possessed a landscape designed by Humphry Repton but the existing house was Victorian and undistinguished. Sassoon had the Victorian additions demolished or altered, except for the west service wing, between 1926 and 1931. The projecting wings were added to the front entrance. These modifications led to a large mansion in early-Georgian style.

Sir Philip Sassoon died in 1939 and the house was requisitioned by the government for use during the Second World War where it was used to inter captured German officers.

The rooms at Trent Park had been equipped with hidden microphones that allowed the British to listen in to the pilots' conversations. This provided information which was of great influence on the Battle of Britain and the outcome of the war.

The hidden microphones and listening devices which were planted around the house allowed the British military to gather important information and an intimate insight into the minds of the German military elite.

In 1947 the estate became a Ministry of Education training college for male teachers, then in 1950 it became Trent Park Training College, a constituent college of the University of London.

Building of a new housing development began in late 2017, to eventually include 262 homes and flats. Some of the heritage buildings are to be re-purposed into luxury apartments and there will be a museum on the two lower



floors of the mansion which will become an important legacy to such a culturally interesting house of national significance.

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