

## *WIS visit to Sir Martin & Lady Wedgwood's home - 2005*

On Saturday many of us were treated to a visit to what might have been the most meaningful collection of our trip, that of Sir Martin Wedgwood at Pixham Mill near Dorking in Surrey. Both buses drove the almost two hours out from London so that the first bus could return with those who needed to be back in London for early evening plans. In addition to the Staples, Safeway and McDonalds we passed, we were able to see the pub at which Lord Nelson kissed his girlfriend Emma good-bye on his way to the Battle of Trafalgar where he died. His body was shipped home in a keg of rum for burial. What a way to go....

We passed by glorious country fields and beautiful forested hills in all their fall color splendor. Another point of interest we passed was England's largest winery. Sir Martin & Lady Sandra's gorgeous home is much younger than Pixham Mill, first mentioned in 1452. This area grew when the gentry came down from London to build nice homes on the river. In the 1860s small houses were built for servants working at the larger nearby estates. Later, schools, churches and other services were added and the community continued to grow. We reached the green just by Sir Martin's home and divided into groups, the first going directly to tour the house and Wedgwood collection; the second bus took us lucky ones on a great tour through Dorking and more of the above described scenery, in addition to a glimpse of Leith Hill Place, the home of Josiah III; past Broom Hall, the home of Oliver Reed, park & farm lands, through Ockley where we could see the cricket games on the village green. Leith Hill, at 950 feet, is the highest point in Southeastern England. Sir Martin lived at Leith Hill Place as a lad. The roads were very narrow, our bus driver was a true champion, and all along the roadside one could see thick beds of ferns. We were guided by a lady who is with the local historical society and knew everyone, every place and every little factoid! A special treat for me was passing by the home of William Mullins who arrived in Plymouth in 1620 aboard the *Mayflower*. His daughter Priscilla married John Alden. They are not my Mayflower ancestors, but many of my Mayflower Society pals are their descendants, and of course, they are pictured on a Wedgwood Historic Views plate! Turns out our bus guide is working on the movement to purchase the house for a historical museum and we traded information so I can help get her some US publicity if they are successful.

The Wedgwood's home is situated on an idyllic riverside spot. There were flowers still blooming and bright red vines growing on the side of the house. The gravel drive area had been tented and we arrived to a setting of wine and cakes laid out for our enjoyment before going inside; the cake plates all by Wedgwood of course. Lady Sandra gave Sir Martin a new footbridge leading from near the back of the house across the river to the back yard for their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this summer. We were regaled by Sir Martin with the story of its arrival and crane installation. The crisp yellow buttercups and thick salmon colored begonias were blooming as if it were spring, the river bubbled and the guests mingled, our feet crunching the fine rock of the drive as we enjoyed the clear, fragrant fall air.

Inside we found three fascinating floors of English country home, adorned with fine Wedgwood in nearly every room, William Morris upholstery and wall paper, antique prints and paintings adorning the walls everywhere. Original Frog Service plates from Josiah VI, the only First Day Vase in private hands, Keith Murray, "Ivanhoe" in a previously, to us, unheard of colorway, hand-painted snake handled vases, you name it, they have it! A huge set of Queensware in "Pot Pourri" pattern, "Black Florentine" and "Napoleon Ivy" showed up in the kitchen; early creamware, clear and delicate. Eyecandy for everyone on every flat surface. Our host and hostess accompanied us around the rooms and answered questions and anticipated our questions in many cases with delightful dialogue of their own. The weather gorgeous, the refreshments delightful and the Wedgwood collection of a family member unforgettable, what a way to end a fabulous day, and a fabulous Seminar on *Collectors, Collections and Collecting!* This day had it all!