

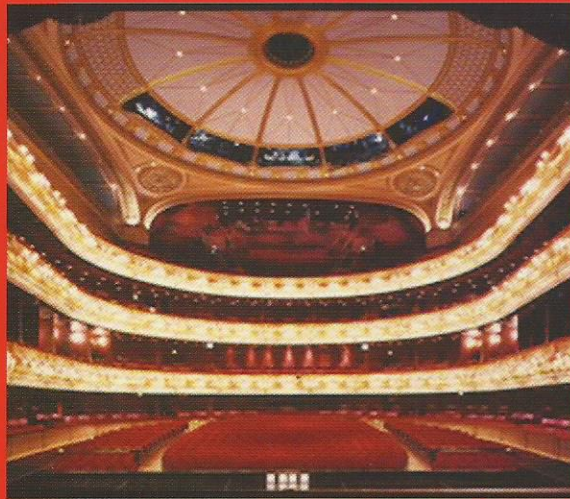
Addinsell's *Warsaw Concerto*, followed by a Czajkowski barcarolle and troika and excerpts from Greig's *Peer Gynt Suite*. To end, Anna Maria played Chopin; what a delight to hear Chopin played in Poland by a Polish pianist in such charming, if hot, gardens. The post recital reception in the cool of the house was most welcome.

On our final day we visited Zelazowska Wola, Chopin's birthplace. Our young guide, Ziggy, gave us a brief introduction to Polish history and to Chopin's family as we drove along part of the main road from Berlin to Moscow, across the flat plain from Warsaw, dotted with farmsteads, woods and "crying willows" (how Ziggy described weeping willows). When Fryderyk was born, Chopin père, as the French tutor for Count Skarbek's children, lived in an annex to his grand house. All that is left is that small annex, where Chopin spent the first seven months of his life. Even that was almost lost until Balakirev helped save it after 1945. It sits in large, beautifully kept gardens where the small lake and a venerable willow tree, which is said to have inspired Chopin on summer visits, still remain. We strolled through the delightful woodland garden, past several impressive bronzes of Chopin. The gardeners in the party were amazed at the huge displays of ferns and hostas (not a slug in sight). Several of us were delighted to see a red squirrel.

Anna Maria joined us to provide additional local knowledge. The house, with its elegant shingle roof, is being meticulously restored and we were able to see the alcove thought to have been the place of Chopin's birth. Sadly, due to the late finishing of the restoration work, a hoped-for recital was impossible. Our visit ended at a nearby hotel with a champagne toast to wish two of the group Happy Birthday before a typical four-course Polish lunch of soup, pierogi (giant ravioli), stuffed cabbage and vegetables and another special apple pie! Then it was back in the coach to the airport for the evening flight to Heathrow.

It was a wonderful three days underpinned by the very best qualities of friendship at which the Company excels. Warmest thanks to Eugenie for initiating the first overseas visit by the Livery Club and for the huge amount of work that went into making this such a success by Eugenie, Maggie and Anna Maria.

Liveryman Kathleen Duncan,
& guest Carol Stevens



Photos: Royal Opera House

BACKSTAGE AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE

A backstage visit to a concert hall or theatre is always an eye opener, and the Livery Club visit to the Royal Opera House was no exception. As ticket holders we enjoy the magic and romance of the performance but here we were given a special view of what happens behind the scenes. It was no surprise that this tour was oversubscribed, so two separate groups – one in the morning, the other after lunch – were met by Nick Havell, one of the ROH Production Managers, who was our guide for the day.

Our first view of the auditorium was from the rear stalls, where we saw much activity on the stage, which was being set up for that evening's performance. The complicated system of electrically operated wagons allows up to five different operas to be set up at one time; the scenery is simply shunted on and off, and if not required for immediate use, is then kept in a holding area far away from the stage. It is also possible to raise and lower separate sections of the stage floor, a lift and drop totalling about twenty-three feet.

Then into the orchestra pit, which can also be raised and lowered, where Eugenie Maxwell, our Livery Club President, stood on the conductor's rostrum to take us through the opening bars of the overture!

As we passed underneath the stage we saw the massive machinery which works the lifts; the original electric motors were installed at the beginning of the twentieth century, the DC voltage required to work them being obtained from mercury bath rectifiers; one of

these is kept as an exhibit. The present motors date from the 1990s.

From the auditorium it is difficult to imagine the amount of space behind the scenes never seen by the audience; the side stage area is vast and as we arrived we were lucky enough to witness the set for that evening's performance of *Così fan tutte* being driven into place: it seemed effortless. Further on we saw the area where the sets are assembled; scenery and sets not required for current productions are stored in Aberdare and are transported back and forth when needed. Through a maze of corridors and several lifts we passed through the Ballet area on level five and in to the restaurant where we joined the second group for a most delightful lunch before their tour began.

Our thanks and congratulations to Nick Havell, who was about to become a Liveryman of the Loriners' Company, for his most fascinating tour, and to Eugenie Maxwell for her meticulous arrangements for this and all Livery Club visits.

Liveryman Michael Broadway