

# Friends of Russell Square

## Newsletter No.8



### Tulips

From the time of the speculative frenzy in 1633-7 in Holland now known as ‘Tulip Mania’, the phenomenon of the ‘broken tulip’ meaning one whose solid colour breaks into spectacular streaks (see below) remained a mystery. Then in 1927 Dorothy Cayley, an English expert in fungi uncovered the cause. It was a virus infection spread by aphids. Over time, the virus weakens the bulb until it has no strength left to flower and withers away. This is why many growers today view the breaks not as a benefit but as a danger that must be purged. A few ‘broken’ originals resistant to the worst effects of the virus have been able to successfully propagate in perpetuity. But today’s tulips with broken colouring are mostly imposters bred to look that way using basic genetics.



### Snails

Snails are quietly quite remarkable. Most have two sets of stalks or tentacles – one for their eyes and the other used as a nose. Their tongues are like rasps, with thousands of tiny teeth (which explains how they can do so much damage to foliage in such a short time). They also have an inbuilt SatNav.

This discovery was made by Mrs Brooks, a retired tutor from Devon who noticed that no matter how often she collected and deposited the ones who were decimating her plants in a wasteland 90 ft away, they always seemed to come back. To test her theory she marked her snails with coloured nail varnish, then asked neighbours to do the same. The snails were swapped around and observed and her belief was proved. Most of them returned to their original gardens. Mrs Brooks concluded that, to be on the safe side, a 300 ft exclusion zone might outwit them.



Experts have been astonished by the findings which won her the title of Britain’s Amateur Scientist of the Year. A bioscientist commented: ‘I thought there was no way that these creatures would show a homing instinct in the way that homing pigeons do. And yet they do. They either have some clever mechanism that helps them get home or they are just moving around the landscape. Then when they stumble across a place they come from they just stop.’

Snails are surprisingly romantic. They do a slow dance for up to six hours before reproducing. This involves biting, rubbing and waving their eye stalks. Then before actual copulation, they shoot a ‘love dart’ into each other. Some believe it is this act that gives rise to the legend of Cupid.

### Notable Occupants of Russell Square

Charles Moss Woolf was born into the Woolf family home at 54 Russell Square in 1879 and after a stint in business then aircraft production during World War I, ventured into film distribution by importing French and German films and adding sub-titles. Having handled several films directed



by Alfred Hitchcock such as *The 39 Steps* he turned to Hollywood and secured rights to the early Tarzan films before joining forces with the Rank organisation.

His two sons John and James followed him into the film industry and set up their own production company, Romulus. In Hollywood they put up half the sum needed for a film, much against the advice of famous movie magnate Alexander Korda: “Two old people going up and down an African river, who’s going to be interested in that?!” Largely shot in the Congo and Uganda instead of the more usual studio, the cast and crew endured sickness and spartan living conditions, but the Woolf brothers gained international critical and financial success.



John Woolf went on to produce *The Day of the Jackal* (1973) and *The Odessa File* (1974) among numerous others. James died young while arranging to film *Oliver!* A great loss. It was said of him by director and actor Bryan Forbes that he was “A midwife for talent with a quick mind that panned and found the nuggets before other prospectors on the trail had even arrived at the mine.”

## In Memoriam

At the walnut tree beside the path on the north side of Russell Square garden a small group congregate



each year in October to remember György Krassó. In the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 crushed by Soviet tanks and troops during which 3,000 were killed, 20,000 were imprisoned, and over 200,000 sought refuge elsewhere, Krassó

took part in the siege of the Radio Hungary building, then in the illegal resistance of various opposition movements. He was sentenced to ten



years' imprisonment but was released in 1963 by amnesty and eventually gained permission to leave Hungary in 1985.

He lived in London for four years working as a freelance journalist for the BBC and Radio Free Europe, returning to his homeland in the last year of its Communist rule when he set up the Hungarian October Party, a fiercely anti-Communist splinter group unrepresented in Parliament. In a radio interview from Budapest he said: "When I left it was not possible to conduct politics and I felt I could help spread information from outside. But now I am only politically valid if I am in Hungary." Though he died there not long after this talk, his life is celebrated here with flowers at the tree.



## Senate House

The vast Art Deco edifice on the West side of Russell Square was created to provide a new home for the University of London. The architect chosen for the work, Charles Holden (1875-1960), was



given a challenging brief. It had to be a dignified design that would express its status as a global centre of learning, a building that was to be functional yet beautiful. Holden paid meticulous attention to quality and detail. For instance, he allowed for flexibility in the arrangement of internal partitions, and he placed grooves in the stone above first-floor level to ensure that it not only self-cleans, but weathers evenly.

Named Senate House, it took 4 years to build and on completion in 1937 the height of its tower – 64 metres (215 feet) tall – was only exceeded by that of St. Paul's Cathedral. When World War II broke out two years later, the students were exiled and it was occupied by a new government department, The Ministry of Information which was responsible for subterfuge, censorship and propaganda during the war, including the campaign for which the 'Keep Calm and Carry on' poster was designed.

In 1948 George Orwell wrote his great novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and used Senate House as the inspiration for the story's most significant landmark, the 'Ministry of Truth'. Such was Hitler's admiration for the building that he had earmarked it (after his successful invasion of Britain) as the Nazi party's headquarters.

## Jazz Event on 8 May

The early evening event on 8 May at the Caffè Tropea hosted by The Friends of Russell Square for its Members is intended to be the first of other such musical entertainments.

Jazz is the special province of Ray Rafols and his group 'Django at the Café' who play swing, classical and gypsy jazz featuring the work of Reinhardt & Grappelli.

Reinhardt, born 1910 in Belgium, spent most of his youth in Romani encampments close to Paris, where he started playing the violin, banjo and guitar and became adept at stealing chickens. A severely burned left hand required adaptations to playing that resulted in special sounds.

Grappelli (born 1908 in Paris) began playing at the age of 12 on a three-quarter-sized violin, that his father purchased by pawning a suit. At 15, while busking to support himself, he caught the attention of an elderly violinist who invited him to play in the orchestra pit to accompany silent films which he did for 6 hours daily for over two years.

The two went on to become best friends and leading lights of Le Hot Club in Paris in the 1930s, their music popularizing the gypsy jazz style that is as much enjoyed now as it was then.



Newsletters are produced by Anne Taute for the **Friends of Russell Square**. Support their work in caring for the garden, its plants and wild life by joining. E-mail: [Russellsquarefriends@gmail.com](mailto:Russellsquarefriends@gmail.com)